

One flight further

Sun, sea and somewhere new?
Nigel Tisdall looks at ways to sell
the wealth of Caribbean islands
that don't have a direct UK flight

Clients may appear to be spoilt for choice for a holiday in the Caribbean, with non-stop flights available from the UK to 13 balmy islands. Yet that is only a fraction of the hundreds of interesting islands to discover in this endlessly diverse region.

Those prepared to add a connecting flight or a short transfer by sea will have a much wider choice, meaning the chance to explore quieter destinations, discover exceptional (and uncrowded) beaches, and enjoy scenic sailing adventures and world-class diving. They could also be among the true Caribbean connoisseurs who appreciate the authentic, less-commercialised atmosphere outside the busier tourist resorts.

And for those who can't make up their minds, twin-centre trips are another means of adding value and variety. Here are some tips for offering packages that really do go the extra mile.

FLIGHTS FROM LONDON

Routeing clients through Barbados or Antigua is a smart move as there are plentiful morning flights from Heathrow and Gatwick ➤

PICTURE: Peier Island Resort

DESTINATIONS

CARIBBEAN | CONNECTING ISLANDS

ISLANDS
to
ENJOY

Why it's worth flying farther to discover the delights of these smaller isles

Barbuda: beaches, birdlife and a Nobu restaurant are the main draws on Antigua's sleepy sister isle.

Canouan: this little Grenadine island has big ambitions with a golf course, superyacht marina, Mandarin Oriental resort and outpost of Soho House.

Eleuthera: a 20-minute hop from Nassau, this skinny, beach-lined island in the Bahamas has a revived luxury resort, The Potlatch Club, where Paul McCartney honeymooned.

Little Cayman: the smallest Cayman island has terrific diving (pictured, below) as well as a tranquil boutique resort, the Southern Cross Club.

Nevis: a quiet, old-school charmer with a magnificent central peak, easily reached via BA's link to St Kitts.

Peter Island: the largest private island resort in the British Virgin Islands reopened in December with 52 rooms, a spa and hiking trails.

St Eustatius: with a ferry connection from St Kitts and the flower-filled Golden Rock Dive and Nature Resort, this peaceful Dutch isle is the definitive in-the-know escape.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Peter Island Resort, BVI's; Scotts Head peninsula; beach at Mandarin Oriental, Canouan, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; a pilot's view PICTURES: Scott Sporleder; Shutterstock/Focused Adventures; Alejandro Amengual

that tie in with same-afternoon connections to some less-visited destinations beloved by discerning travellers. These include mountainous Dominica, which is ideal for walkers, and the British Virgin Islands, a high-end British Overseas Territory with excellent sailing.

Both Virgin Atlantic and British Airways have interline agreements with selected regional carriers, which means luggage can be checked through to the final destination, as long as local rules permit. Virgin works with Caribbean Airlines, Bahamasair and Cayman Airways, while BA has links with these plus InterCaribbean Airways, Tradewind Aviation and Winair.

When booking a local connection, check if flights are non-stop. For example, in winter, Anguilla Air Services offers a 45-minute hop from Antigua to Anguilla three times a week, while Trans Anguilla Airways has a daily flight, but this takes twice as long because it makes two stops en route. There are more services during the peak season from December to April, so expect options to be more limited outside those months.

REGIONAL FLIGHTS

For clients who are not based near London, consider booking Air France or KLM flights from UK regional airports that connect via Paris or Amsterdam to Sint Maarten's Princess Juliana airport, which completed a major upgrade in October. From here, they can continue on to party-loving St Barts, the blissful beaches of

“In some destinations there are useful connections by sea to the next island, which can be a fun way to start a holiday

Anguilla or the laid-back Dutch islands of St Eustatius and Saba, which are a good choice for divers.

It's important to look at the flying and waiting times for both outbound and inbound journeys – which can be lengthy – and to check the luggage allowance for the second flight, which will be on a smaller aircraft.

Not all clients like flying via the US, but with increasing connections available to many islands, principally through New York and Miami, this is often the most viable option. American Airlines serves 35 Caribbean destinations and JetBlue flies to 21. Aer Lingus also operates a year-round route direct from Manchester to New York, plus a winter service to Barbados.

HIT THE WATER

In some cases there are useful connections by sea to the next island, which can be a fun way to start a holiday – especially if the captain has a bar on board. Examples are the eight-minute speedboat ride from St Kitts to ➤



A-Z OF INTER-ISLAND CARRIERS

Air Antilles: based in Guadeloupe with connections to the French overseas territories of St Barts, Saint Martin and Martinique. airantilles.com

Air Caraibes: as above plus Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. aircaraibes.com

Air Adelphi: operates shared charters from Saint Lucia and Barbados to the Grenadine island of Mustique. airadelphi.com

Anguilla Air Services: direct flights between Antigua and Anguilla tying in with BA arrivals and departures. anguillaairservices.com

Aruba Airlines: connections to the neighbouring Dutch isles of Curaçao and Bonaire. arubaairlines.com

Bahamasair: national airline serving 12 domestic airports from Nassau plus Havana and Providenciales in Turks and Caicos. bahamasair.com

BMN SVG Airways: flights from Antigua to Barbuda and Montserrat. bmnsvgairways.com

Caribbean Airlines: the national carrier of Trinidad and Tobago serves 16 Caribbean airports. caribbean-airlines.com

Cayman Airways: domestic links to Little Cayman and Cayman Brac plus international flights to Kingston, Montego Bay and Havana. caymanairways.com

Divi Divi Air: Curaçao-headquartered airline flying to Aruba and Bonaire. flydivi.com

FlyMontserrat: 20-minute flights connecting Antigua and Montserrat. flymontserrat.com

InterCaribbean Airways: based in Providenciales, this leading carrier operates two Turks and Caicos routes plus flights serving 17 regional airports, including

connections from Barbados to St Kitts, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Grenada. intercaribbean.com

LIAT 20 – reborn low-cost Antiguan carrier with flights to 10 islands. flyliat20.com

Pineapple Air: Bahamas carrier connecting Nassau with three domestic airports. pineappleair.com

Silver Airways: US airline with flights to the Bahamas and a hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico, serving six islands. silverairways.com

St Barth Commuter: scheduled flights between St Barts and Saint Martin, Sint Maarten and Guadeloupe. stbarthcommuter.com

Sunrise Airways: Haiti-headquartered airline with connections from Antigua to St Kitts, Dominica and Saint Lucia. sunriseairways.net

SVG Air: Saint Vincent-based airline with a nine-island network including the gateways of Barbados, Antigua, Saint Lucia and Grenada. flysvgair.com

Tradewind Aviation: premium carrier with useful connections from Antigua to Anguilla and St Barts. Also serves the British and US Virgin Islands and San Juan. flytradewind.com

Trans Anguilla Airways: connects Anguilla with St Barts, Antigua, Nevis, St Eustatius and St Kitts. transanguilla.com

Western Air: based in Grand Bahama with services to eight islands in the Bahamas. westernairbahamas.com

Winair: Dutch airline based in Sint Maarten with flights to Antigua, Dominica, St Kitts and Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. winair.sx



ABOVE: Barbuda International airport PICTURES: WMAG R6

“Explain to customers that it’s not about the journey but what they will experience once there – an extra level of exclusivity

Nevis and the 25-minute crossing from Sint Maarten to Anguilla – the first requires a preliminary 20-minute road transfer from the airport. Makana Ferry Services, based in Philipsburg, Sint Maarten, has connections to St Kitts, Saba and St Eustatius; FRS Express des Iles links Saint Lucia with Martinique, Dominica and Guadeloupe.

HOW CLIENTS BENEFIT

Why pay more to fly to a second Caribbean island? “Because there’s an extra level of exclusivity,” says Caroline Beckett, product manager at Elegant Resorts. “Explain to customers that it’s not about the journey but what they will experience once there. In many cases this means a sense of having the place to yourself and doing activities you won’t normally find on other islands.”

Beckett recommends sending clients to the Grenadines via Barbados, which is “one of the smoothest connections”. They can fly on to Bequia in as little as 45 minutes, while links to Mustique, Canouan and Union Island, the gateway for Petit St Vincent, take a bit longer. “Layover times are generally two hours on the way out and three on the return.”

The British Virgin Islands is another standout destination where it’s worth the extra air connection on account of its unspoilt beaches, dramatic rock formations and tales of pirates, with most hotels accessed by boat. ➤

TWIN-CENTRE HOLIDAYS

"We've seen an increase in island-hopping and twin-centre holidays," reports David Pointer, senior product manager for the Caribbean at Inspiring Travel. "Barbados or Saint Lucia paired with Grenada is very popular, as is marrying the hustle and bustle of Barbados with the tranquillity of Bequia in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines."

He highlights SVG Air's new flights connecting Grenada and Bequia, which began in February, as "a wonderful combination", along with American Airlines' direct service from Miami to South Caicos, in Turks and Caicos, where the luxury Salterra resort recently opened.

PERFECT PAIRS

When creating multi-island itineraries, consider if a client would prefer to match similar destinations, such as combining lively and upmarket St Barts with some downtime on the nearby beaches of equally upscale Anguilla – or if they want a contrast that offers two different Caribbean experiences in one, perhaps matching some nights in a big-name resort on Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach with the simplicity of a boutique hotel on tiny Cayman Brac.

If time is limited, a stimulating mix is to start with some indulgent days at an all-inclusive resort on



The Beachfront BY THE FIVES HOTELS

The Beachfront by the Fives Hotels, is an intimate boutique hotel, operating on an all-inclusive basis and features a private pool, relaxing sunbeds, and spectacular ocean views with direct beach access.

Guests can take advantage of accessing all the amenities, facilities, and restaurants at the adjacent Essence at The Fives Beach. Beachfront guests can simply stroll across the beach or jump on the golf cart shuttle between hotels.

The luxurious accommodations offer a serene and elegant atmosphere with stunning ocean views.

The exclusive restaurant & bar, Santa Sirena at Beachfront by the Fives is a true gem, offering direct views across the beach, with a rustic chic ambiance and Mexican fusion cuisine. Skilled mixologist will craft exquisite cocktails, adding the perfect touch to an unforgettable dining experience.



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Essence At The Fives

- 15 speciality restaurants
- 5 pool bars and 4 signature bars
- Daily and nightly entertainment
- Luxurious accommodations
- The Spa spans over 15,000 sq.ft. 11 treatment rooms which cater for the most relaxing treatments.



The Fives Oceanfront

- 2 infinity pools
- 3 gourmet restaurants
- Prime beachfront location
- Furnished terraces and balconies
- Exclusive beach club by Bob Marley's son. The Ro Marley Beach Club.



The Fives Downtown

- Rooftop with 2 infinity pools
- 3 bars
- 2 on-site restaurants
- Prime location with local restaurants, nightlife and shops
- Spa by The Fives & fitness centre.



Antigua and then take a short flight to neighbouring Montserrat. This mighty isle has few beaches and limited accommodation but plenty to discover, with its surprising Irish heritage and a history of volcanic eruptions that has made it the 'Pompeii of the Caribbean'.

TAG FLIGHTS

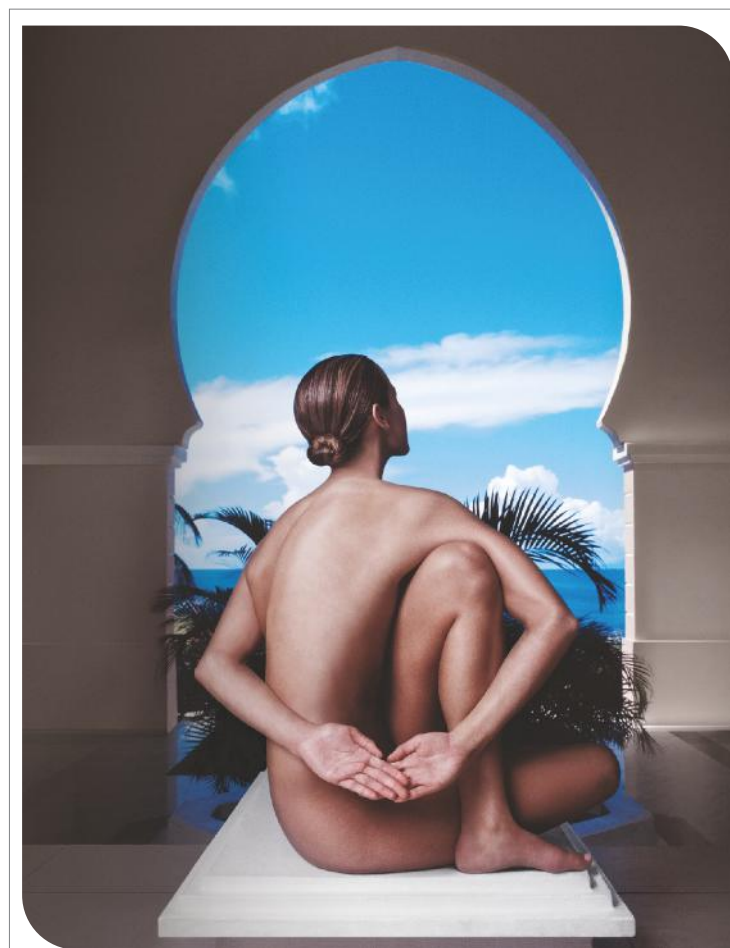
Another option for a two-stop holiday is to take advantage of the tag flights (also known as 'double dropping') available with British Airways and Virgin Atlantic. "This is when a plane touches down in two

different islands," explains Jenny Basham, product manager with Carrier. "For example, BA's flight to Saint Lucia makes an initial stop in Grenada. Using these flights to hop around the Caribbean works out cheaper than buying separate tickets and there's the bonus of a 23kg luggage allowance – on local carriers it may be only 20kg or one bag."

FROM FAR LEFT: Canouan Estate Resort & Villas, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Peter Island Resort, BVI; Soho Beach House Canouan, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

PICTURE: Patrick Biller

With Virgin Atlantic, the options are to pair Barbados with Grenada or Saint Vincent, while BA has six tag flights, including the chance to combine Antigua and St Kitts, Saint Lucia and Tobago, and Nassau and Grand Cayman. **TW**



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