



# 10 OF THE Best

## FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

Get taste buds tingling with these gourmet delights, writes Jo Cooke

Some of the greatest holiday memories are made by what we nibble, sip, sniff or devour, with every mealtime another opportunity to try exotic new flavours or tuck into old-fashioned local specialities.

Clients who love this kind of culinary adventure are spoilt for choice in the West Indies, where each island offers something unique, wonderful and often unexpected, with recipes as diverse and colourful as the countries themselves, and a cocktail menu to match.

Here's our guide to a handful of the region's must-try food and drink experiences.

**1 TABLE FOR TWO** Couples will feel on top of the world when staying at Jade Mountain, a staggeringly beautiful property sculpted into a Saint Lucian hillside. But the experience will hit new heights when they dine at the Jade Mountain Club.

This indoor-outdoor restaurant gives the impression it is at eye level with the Piton peaks. Fashioned from cut stone, the tables are set around an infinity pool and the mood lighting is enhanced by candles, moonlight and starlight. The restaurant is exclusively for resort guests, and clients will definitely be made to feel that they are among the chosen few. Impeccable but friendly service is complemented by a menu that never disappoints: from lobster to steak to curries, this is the place to be

for couples who love food as much as they love each other. **BOOK IT:** ITC Luxury Travel is offering seven nights for the price of six, plus a complimentary upgrade to all-inclusive, from £3,529 between July and September. The price is based on two sharing a Sky Jacuzzi Suite, and includes flights and private transfers. [itcluxurytravel.co.uk](http://itcluxurytravel.co.uk)

**2 SPICE AS NICE** Some like it hot, and the ultimate experience in spicy Caribbean soul food is Jamaica's jerk chicken. Legs, breasts and thighs are coated in a fiery marinade before being barbecued over a wood fire.

It can be enjoyed at one of the best party spots on the island, Rick's Cafe. Set on a clifftop in Negril's West End, diners look out across the inky-blue ocean, where dolphins are often spotted. Sit back and admire the view, or watch as lithe local lads flip somersaults into the waters below. When the sun sets, live music is provided by a group of dreadlocked Rastas who pump out Bob Marley classics and other reggae standards until late.

**BOOK IT:** Kuoni offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Couples Swept Away in Negril, including flights with Virgin Atlantic from Gatwick and transfers, from £1,756 in April. The hotel offers trips to Rick's Cafe from \$15, where the jerk chicken costs \$19. [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)

**3 DRINK LIKE HEMINGWAY** As Cuba becomes more accessible and inevitably begins to leap into the 21st century, there has never been a better time to savour the retro treasures of Havana. A day trip from the beach resort of Varadero to this shabby-chic capital is a must.

Take a tour of the old town's cobbled streets and bustling squares, taking in the peaceful cathedral. Then, when you're ready for a pick-me-up, head for a mojito at La Bodeguita del Medio. This was the favourite drink and favoured haunt of bohemian American author Ernest Hemingway when he was hanging out in Havana.

Revive yourself with the refreshing mix of mint leaves, sugar syrup, white rum, soda water and lime, while checking out the bar's graffiti-etched walls, which are said to include musings by Hemingway.

**BOOK IT:** Thomson Excursions offers a Havana One Day Tour with pick-ups from several Varadero resorts, from £47. [thomson.co.uk](http://thomson.co.uk)

**4 GOING GREEN** If clients want to feel green while they tuck into their organic greens, book them in for the Farm-to-Table experience at Belle Mont Farm. St Kitts' newest upscale resort has eco-friendly principles, with a vision to create the ultimate in sustainable tourism.

The 160 hectares of undulating land around its 84 luxury guesthouses are being turned into an organic farm.

Four nights a week at sunset, join other guests at a long wooden dining table beneath the stars and watch as chefs in an open kitchen are brought baskets of crops picked from the foothills. Like magicians, they turn them into an eight-course tasting menu, combining the ingredients with local fish, meat and game. All dishes are paired with organic wines and served with home-baked pumpkin bread, plus a backdrop of St Kitts' highest peak, Mount Liamuiga, and a view of the island of Sint Eustatius.

**BOOK IT:** The Farm-to-Table experience at Belle Mont Farm costs \$146. Caribtours offers seven nights on a Farm-to-Table all-inclusive basis at Belle Mont Farm from £3,225 per person, including flights, private transfers and use of a lounge at Gatwick. [caribtours.co.uk](http://caribtours.co.uk)

**5 DO IT YOURSELF** Bahamian capital Nassau has some of the West Indies' best top-end eateries, with chefs from across the globe opening restaurants to cater for its well-heeled crowd. Eating out here is bound to have clients longing for more, so why not book them on to Island Routes' Culinary Academy Experience, so they can re-create the dishes when they get home?

They'll learn at the hands of the very best: the executive

→ chef of the renowned Graycliff Restaurant. After a champagne reception, it's time to head into the Graycliff's kitchen, roll up your sleeves, put on an apron and be schooled in the art of Bahamian cuisine. Once the hard work is done, guests dine on their creations, and are given a collection of recipes to keep.

**BOOK IT:** Island Routes' Culinary Academy Experience starts at \$218.

[islandroutes.co.uk](http://islandroutes.co.uk)

**6 FISH AND CHIPS**  
Aruba's resorts are abuzz with smart restaurants and cafes just footsteps from the hotels. But if guests like heading off the beaten track and getting their fingers (and chins) greasy with fresh-fried fish and piping-hot chips, all washed down with an ice-cold beer, then Zeerovers is the place.

This no-frills eatery in the seaside town of Savaneta is a real locals' haunt. It looks like a trailer from the roadside, but walk past the takeaway counter and there's a stilted wooden deck by the ocean. Take a seat at the picnic tables and get ready for a still-steaming basket of battered mahi-mahi or grouper, shrimp, plantain, fries and a Balashi beer. Tuck in while watching fishing boats docking periodically on the jetty to restock the kitchen.

**BOOK IT:** Zeerovers is on the southwest coast, about 15 minutes from capital Oranjestad or a half-

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hour drive from many of the most popular resorts in the northwest of the island. A basket of mixed fried fish for two and two Balashi beers costs about \$20.

[aruba.com/things-to-do/zeerover](http://aruba.com/things-to-do/zeerover)

**7 SUNDOWNERS AT SEA**  
Sipping a rum punch at sunset is a quintessential Caribbean ritual, best performed daily. Guests staying at Secrets St James and Secrets Wild Orchid resorts in Montego Bay don't have far to go for the perfect spot or, indeed, the perfect punch.

Mixologists at the hotels' circular Piano Bar serve up a potent house brew of dark and light rum thinly laced with fruit juices. The bar, set on a peninsula at the western end of the resort's waterfront, has one of the best views in the West Indies, looking out at mountains and ocean. The sun sets behind the peaks and slips into the ocean in a purple haze as the twinkling lights of luxury villas tucked into the hillside flicker into life. Add a



**LEFT:**  
Graycliff  
Restaurant,  
Bahamas

**BELOW:**  
Zeerovers,  
Aruba

steel-pan band and a glass of rum punch, and life doesn't get much better.

**BOOK IT:** Hayes & Jarvis offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,422, including flights and transfers, at Secrets Wild Orchid. [hayesandjarvis.co.uk](http://hayesandjarvis.co.uk)

**8 INSIDE SCOOP**  
The Friday night fish fry in the village of Oistins is the best-known, and possibly best-loved, foodie attraction on Barbados. Its mix of craft and food stalls, music and dancing, right at the water's edge is hard to beat.

With Turtle Beach resort's Pepperpot Culinary Tour, clients will feel as if they are going behind the scenes of this seafood extravaganza. They'll be taken to Oistins by day to learn about different species of fish and how to choose the freshest fish to buy. This is followed by a trip to Hastings Farmers' Market, where they'll be taught how to pick the best of the bunch of West Indian fruit and vegetables.

Shopping is hungry work, of course, so a pit stop to try some Bajan delicacies at a local restaurant is also on



→ the itinerary. Finally, back at Turtle Beach, a live cooking demonstration will show customers how to prepare Barbados's national dish, cou cou (made with cornmeal and okra) and flying fish.

**BOOK IT:** Funway Holidays offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Turtle Beach by Elegant Hotels from £1,489, including flights from Gatwick and transfers, departing on May 4. The Pepperpot Culinary Tour costs £75, paid locally.

[funway4agents.co.uk](http://funway4agents.co.uk)

**9 GROW YOUR OWN**  
Anguilla is justifiably famed for its sweeping stretches of undeveloped beaches and fine-dining restaurants, where chefs cook up a storm inspired by whatever imported ingredients arrive daily. The soil here is thin, and with

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**Grenada used to be one of the world's biggest producers of nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon**

no natural water sources on the island, home-grown crops are a challenge. Yet it's a challenge that has been taken up by CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa.

In a quest for ultra-fresh ingredients, a hydroponic farm was created on the property. Using desalinated water enriched with nutrients, a quarter of a hectare of hot-houses boast row upon row of carefully cultivated goodies. Take a tour of the interior and marvel at the

tomatoes, lettuces, herbs and veggies such as peppers and avocado, growing alongside fruits including limes and guavas. The produce is picked when fully ripe to ensure the optimum flavours when it is turned into breakfast, lunch or dinner at the resort's five top-notch restaurants.

**BOOK IT:** Western & Oriental offers seven nights' bed and breakfast at CuisinArt from £2,555, including British Airways flights from Gatwick, regional flights from Antigua to Anguilla with Liat, and transfers.

[westernoriental.com](http://westernoriental.com)

**10 CREAM OF THE CROPS**

The agricultural heritage of the Caribbean is best showcased by the Spice Island itself, Grenada. This island used to be one of the world's biggest producers of

nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon, which still thrive here and are sold in gift packs island-wide, making low-cost souvenirs for family and friends.

Those who like to be in the know as to how such tropical things grow will enjoy taking their interest a step further on a tour of the Belmont Estate. This former 17th-century plantation has extensive fruit orchards and vegetable gardens, and visitors with a sweet tooth can learn how cocoa is cultivated, processed and turned into chocolate. Afterwards, traditional dishes including callaloo soup (a vegetable similar to spinach), fish creole and cinnamon ice cream are served at a buffet lunch.

**BOOK IT:** Island Routes offers a Spicy Full Day Island Tour from \$105 a person.

[islandroutes.co.uk](http://islandroutes.co.uk) 



LEFT: Belmont Estate, Grenada  
BELOW: CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa, Anguilla

