

# Spice of life

Eat your way around the Caribbean and get a taste of the islands' cultures, history and nature too, writes **Vivienne Dovi**



Caribbean cuisine has been shaped by the region's history as a melting pot of different cultures, layered with African, European, Asian and Indigenous influences. This has resulted in today's bold food culture, where the flavour packs a punch, every dish has a story to tell and no two islands taste the same.

Whether it's fried fish tucked into a soft and crispy flatbread or smoky jerk chicken from a roadside grill, some of the region's best bites are often found casually – and there is no shortage of local restaurants to satisfy a client's cravings or street-food tours that can be booked in-resort.

For those clients seeking to get under the skin of the Caribbean and connect with each island's culture through its culinary scene, here is our pick of the best islands across the region for a foodie experience.

## JAMAICA

Most people already know a thing or two about Jamaican culture – it's the birthplace of Bob Marley and reggae, after all. Dishes here are packed with local seasonings such as allspice, thyme and the star of the show: fiery Scotch bonnet peppers. Then there's jerk – not a dish, as many believe, but a cooking technique developed by the Maroons (communities ➤

# DESTINATIONS

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**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Preparing oil down, Grenada's one-pot stew; ackee and saltfish; Oistins Fish Fry, Barbados; grilled langoustine, Guadeloupe

**PICTURES:** Wildspirit Photography; Alex Jackson Photography; Comité du Tourisme des Iles de Guadeloupe



### BOOK IT

**Explore's** 10-day Explore Jamaica tour starts from £2,235 with ground transport, daily breakfast, lunch at a Charles Town Maroon community restaurant, plus the option to try a roadside jerk chicken lunch and a cooking class. Flights not included. [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)

**Inspiring Travel** sells a seven-night stay at Calabash Hotel, Grenada – with chef-led cooking demonstrations on the beach – from £3,159 per person, based on two sharing a Westside Suite half-board. Includes transfers and flights between November 1 and December 15. [inspiringtravel.co.uk](http://inspiringtravel.co.uk)

**Exsus** sells a seven-night stay at the Mahogany Hotel Residence & Spa in Guadeloupe from £1,655 per person, room-only, based on two sharing. Includes transfers and flights departing October 1. Foodie experiences include a cocoa workshop, cooking lessons and a 'cassava evening' at a traditional eatery. [exsus.com](http://exsus.com)

of people, mostly of African descent, who had escaped from slavery) to preserve and flavour meat, resulting in a signature smoky kick.

Fortunately for travellers, Jamaican food caters to all kinds of dietary preferences. Meat lovers can try oxtail or chicken, while pescatarians can feast on the abundance of seafood that's available in the country. Vegans can experience Ital food from the Rastafari tradition: think plant-based, unprocessed and straight from the earth.

**Try...** Jerk chicken still sizzling from a roadside grill is the most authentic experience. And don't miss ackee and saltfish, the national dish, usually served at breakfast.

### GUADALOUPE

Known as the Spice Isle, Grenada grows everything from cinnamon and cocoa to thyme and nutmeg, the last of which even appears on the national flag and can be found in both sweet and savoury dishes. Clients can try fried bread (known as bakes) served with saltfish and herbs, or cool off with a scoop of nutmeg ice cream. There are also plenty of opportunities to buy fresh spices, so they can take a hint of Grenada home with them.

If pressed for time, clients can sample several local dishes, drinks and snacks through the locally owned Spice Foodie Tours. With several stops across the island, it doubles as a great cultural tour too.

**Try...** Oil down, Grenada's national one-pot stew,

which is made with breadfruit, salted meat, dumplings and leafy greens such as callaloo, slow-cooked in coconut milk and spices.

### BARBADOS

The birthplace of rum is just as much of a winner for food as it is for drinks. Fish is king here, from hot and crispy fishcakes to cutters – a freshly baked salt bread roll usually stuffed with lettuce, tomato, pepper sauce and fried flying fish (one of the island's national symbols). The most famous spot for clients to try local seafood is Oistins Fish Fry on Friday nights, an electric event where locals and tourists eat, drink, dance and vibe together. Many hotels can arrange transfers or a guided excursion to the popular spot.

**Try...** Cou-cou and flying fish. This national delicacy consists of a fillet of steamed or fried fish, served with a savoury mash of cornmeal and okra. Also try macaroni pie, a beloved Bajan staple. A firmer version of American-style macaroni and cheese, it's made with evaporated milk, eggs, ketchup and plenty of seasoning.

### GUADALOUPE

Top Guadeloupean dishes include Colombo chicken, a curry with rice that has its origins in the waves of 19th-century Sri Lankan immigrants to the island. The star ingredient is Colombo curry powder, a potent mix of turmeric, cumin, coriander and garlic. ➤

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Guadeloupe is an overseas region of France, so as well as African, South Asian and Indigenous traditions, its cuisine features French-influenced favourites. These include sweet sorbets and tarts (though, naturally, both are infused with Caribbean coconut). French-style patisseries can also be found scattered across the island.

**Try...** *Bokit*, a Guadeloupean treasure. Think chicken, cod or ham and cheese, generously packed in a freshly deep-fried bread dough with salad – crispy on the outside, soft on the inside.

#### TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

For clients who love Indian food, Trinidad and Tobago is a no-brainer. South Asian food and culture was brought to the islands with the arrival of indentured labourers from India in the 19th century. They introduced many Indian staples to Trinidadian



**ABOVE:** Puerto Rican cuisine is influenced by Andalusian cooking techniques alongside African and Indigenous Taíno influences **PICTURE:** Discover Puerto Rico

cuisine (which already had strong African influences), making spices like cumin, garam masala and turmeric commonplace in island kitchens. However, Trinidadian dishes aren't carbon copies of their Indian counterparts, with island flair infused into each bite.

**Try...** *Doubles*. This beloved street food consists of two fried flatbreads called *baras*, topped with curried chickpeas, chutneys, pickled green mango and pepper sauce. *Doubles* can be found on nearly any street corner, making it the most popular snack on the islands.

#### PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rican cuisine is known as *cocina criolla* and is influenced by Andalusian cooking techniques as well as African and Indigenous Taíno fare. At the heart of its flavours is *sofrito* – a blend of onions, garlic and coriander – which forms the base of many dishes. Fried snacks, plantains and green bananas are also prevalent, with standouts including twice-fried *tostones* (green plantain) served alongside seafood.

The quintessential Puerto Rican dish is *mofongo*, in which green plantains are cooked and mashed with crispy pork rinds, shaped into a mound, then topped with a stewed meat or seafood.

**Try...** *Arroz con gandules*, Puerto Rico's national dish. This fragrant rice is cooked with pigeon peas (a type of legume) in a broth that's made from *sofrito*, giving it a yellow-orange colour. **TW**



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