

# Islands on the up

Scenic St Vincent and the Grenadines is back and better than ever almost two years after Hurricane Beryl, finds Nigel Tisdall

There's a formidable new cocktail at Sparrow's Beach Bar, on the north coast of Union Island in the Grenadines. Created by its genial staff, the drink mixes rum, gin and vodka and is called 'Never Again Beryl' – a reference to the Category 4 hurricane that stormed through the Grenadines on July 1, 2024, causing severe damage.

"We went through months of hell," owner Bertrand Saily tells me as I take a seat in his rebuilt restaurant, with its enticing menu of freshly caught tuna and wahoo. "But now we're back to paradise."

#### CANOUAN CALLING

We certainly are. I arrived on a dreamy half-day catamaran cruise via Tobago Cays Marine Park, where you can snorkel with turtles and manta rays. Next stop was Canouan, an island that's just three-and-a-half miles long with a mere 2,000 residents. Beryl passed through here too, but other than a few lingering effects – only nine holes on the Canouan Estate golf course, which can be ➤

# DESTINATIONS

## CARIBBEAN | ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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expert



**NATASHA ANDERSON**  
director of sales for UK and Europe, St Vincent and the Grenadines Tourist Office

"We currently have 3,400 rooms in the islands, and plan to add up to 1,000 more over the next three years. This includes a 360-room Beaches family resort at Mount Wynne on St Vincent. While we'll never be a mass-tourism destination, we're also building what will be the longest overwater zipline in the Caribbean. Upcoming events include the imminent SVG Sailing Week (March 29-April 6), which tours all of the islands."



### GETTING THERE

**Virgin Atlantic** flies from Heathrow to St Vincent on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, with return fares from £616. [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com)

**SVG Tourism Authority** has trade resources, a new training module and rewards programme at [discoversvgpro.expert](http://discoversvgpro.expert)



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The Rock Villa at Bequia Beach Hotel; Tobago Cays Marine Park; Soho Beach House Canouan **PICTURES:** SVG Tourism Authority; Andrew Joseph Woomer

played for free, are open at present – there is limited sign of damage. I found an optimistic mood that makes this off-radar isle a standout pick for clients seeking a safe, quiet and upmarket Caribbean getaway.

One reason to choose Canouan is that there are never more than 300 guests staying on the island, sprinkled among a trio of design-led properties: the 26-suite beachfront Mandarin Oriental Canouan, with its large pool and hillside spa; the luxury villas of the Canouan Estate, home to tennis courts and a huge kids' club; and the 40-room Soho Beach House Canouan, which lies beside the inviting sands of Grand Bay. An 'invisible key' initiative, which was introduced last year, allows guests to enjoy the facilities of all three, thanks to a complimentary daily transfer between the properties.

About half of the visitors to Canouan are from the UK or North America. While this is clearly a place to slow down – in fact, the island has long been home to thousands of red-footed tortoises – there is still plenty to do, from visiting Canouan's picturesque 17th-century Anglican church to partying with the superyacht crews at Scruffys Bar in the Sandy Lane Yacht Club.

Uncrowded beaches are a given, whether it's dining under the stars at L'Ance Guyac Beach Club, enjoying a lazy fish lunch at Shell Beach or taking a picnic to the castaway sands of Mahault Beach. For me, the crowning

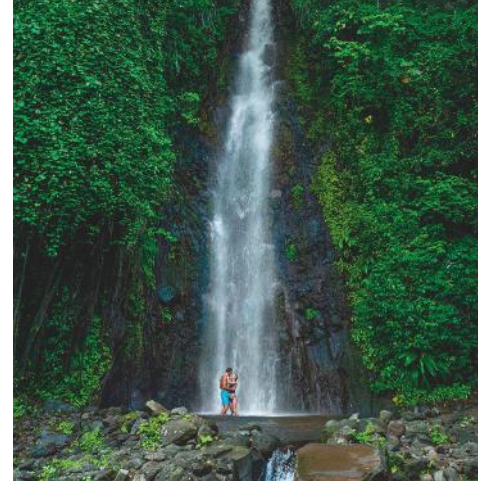
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glory is a 45-minute hike up to the 267-metre peak of Mount Royal (best completed before breakfast), from where there is a sweeping, master-of-the-universe view south over the Grenadines to Carriacou and Grenada.

### BEQUIA BOOST

While Union Island and neighbouring Mayreau are still rebuilding, Bequia, which has a laid-back and authentic vibe that has made it a favourite with British travellers, is back to full capacity. In November, Bequia Beach Hotel added The Rock Villa – the island's largest rental property. The eight adult-only suites can be booked individually or combined as a whole-villa option, with children welcome.

Other accommodation options include the 24-room Bequia Plantation Hotel, which is a short walk from Port Elizabeth, so suited to clients who like to connect with the local scene, and The Liming's nine contemporary villas and suites. ➤



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Sandals Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; the resort's Buccan restaurant  
TOP RIGHT: Dark View Falls, St Vincent

Bequia is also benefiting from a new dedicated fast ferry that offers a 40-minute connection to St Vincent, making the larger island easier to visit on a day trip. Capital Kingstown offers plenty of cultural draws, including botanical gardens established in 1765, alongside active options such as hiking up the 1,235-metre La Soufrière volcano.

Two single-resort islands, Petit St Vincent and Palm Island, remain closed, although the latter is set to reopen in early 2027 as the barefoot-luxury, 25-bungalow Voara Grenadines – the brand's second property, following its debut in Madagascar.

### TWIN PLEASURES

The best way for clients to visit the Grenadines is to fly via Barbados and connect with a regional carrier such as Grenadine Alliance. The scheduled flight time from Barbados to Canouan, for example, is 70 minutes. Agents should check the luggage allowance for these small aircraft – it's likely to be lower than for their transatlantic crossing – and whether the departure tax for the return leg is included or has to be paid in cash.

Consider proposing a twin-centre trip, perhaps pairing a few nights at the well-established Coral Reef Club on Barbados with time at the Mandarin Oriental Canouan or The Cotton House in

Mustique. The latter is a honeymooners' favourite and much loved by rock stars and royalty. It has a mere 17 rooms and recently added a spa designed in the style of English artist Oliver Messel, featuring high-end Bamford toiletries.

### RISING TIDE

With a mountainous interior surrounded by tiny coves that once hid pirates, St Vincent is finally getting the attention it deserves, offering activities ranging from waterfall swims and rainforest hikes to ATV adventures and whale and dolphin-watching trips. Much of this is down to the combination of thrice-weekly direct Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow and the 301-room Sandals Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which opened in Buccament Bay in 2024.

Dave Geer, Virgin Atlantic's chief commercial officer, says: "Virgin Atlantic carried almost 25,000 customers to and from St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2025, which translates to 5% growth year on year. About 80% of these passengers are from UK point of sale. The outlook for 2026 remains positive, with strong forward bookings aligned with our expectations."

The Sandals resort has also drawn the attention of UK travellers, offering 12 restaurants, daily excursions for certified divers and a choice of 22 island tours for customers who like to explore.

"This is our newest property," says Leah Marshall, sales director for Unique Vacations UK, which represents Sandals Resorts. "We call it 'Sandals 2.0' and I'd encourage agents to upsell to its butler suites, where clients get 24-hour room service and a complimentary speedboat transfer to the airport on departure. In November, we will add 20 Rondoal Butler Villas with Private Pools."

For somewhere smaller and more subdued, clients can also consider Young Island, an all-inclusive private island resort with 29 cottages and suites that is a mere stone's throw from the St Vincent mainland. **TW**

### BOOK IT

**Elegant Resorts** has a holiday that combines three nights' B&B at Coral Reef Club, Barbados, with four nights' room-only at Mandarin Oriental Canouan, from £8,375 per person. The price includes Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow on May 22, inter-island flights and transfers. [elegantresorts.co.uk](http://elegantresorts.co.uk)

**Sandals** offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Sandals Saint Vincent and the Grenadines from £2,479 per person, including Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow on September 11 and transfers. [sellingsandals.co.uk](http://sellingsandals.co.uk)