

Wincy vibes

A new Sandals resort could see this lesser-known Caribbean archipelago shine, finds **Samantha Mayling**

my feet are throbbing and I'm as red as a tomato. I've been up since 4.30am and four hours later, I'm scrambling on all fours over steep, scree-covered slopes. We're nearing the top of La Soufrière, Saint Vincent's active volcano, where the tropical flora thins out and the landscape becomes moon-like towards the summit.

"On a clear day, you can see Saint Lucia," says our guide, Quency Lewis of Foreign Tours. Sadly, we can't even see into the crater below us because of the mist, but the sense of achievement is well worth my aching muscles.

By noon, we're at Ferdie's Footsteps restaurant in Georgetown for a buffet of Caribbean favourites such as breadfruit, curried lentils and seafood. Then, we visit Saint Vincent's Botanical Gardens, the oldest in the western hemisphere, where guide Cornelius points out the national flower, the endemic Soufrière tree, and the national bird, the yellow-and-blue Saint Vincent parrot.

BUTLER BENEFITS

I'm still grimy from my trek as I return to my suite at the new Sandals Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, but one of my three butlers has drawn a petal-strewn bubble bath for me – more what I expected from a Sandals hotel than hiking boots, but this place is full of surprises.

Sandals' first resort in Saint Vincent opened in March with 301 rooms and suites spanning 15 different categories. The island's tourism minister, Carlos James, tells me the 50-acre site is 'Sandals 2.0', as it sets the benchmark for future hotel developments and will drive more visitors to the destination, which is focusing on developing luxury rather than mass-market properties.

Rohan Louis, the hotel's general manager, says: "Wincy, as the locals call the island, is perfect for Sandals, offering unparalleled nature and rich local culture. The stunning location in Buccament Bay was handpicked for its west-facing valley, which showcases magical sunsets, plus nearby cays, cliffside caves and coves." ➤

DESTINATIONS

WINTER SUN | SAINT VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

INSIDER
insight

LEAH MARSHALL

sales director, Unique
Vacations UK (Sandals' sales
and marketing representative)



"Our late founder Butch Stewart and his son, Adam, our executive chairman, fell in love with the destination when they first visited in 2015. The resort is not a hard sell. Set in a serene valley surrounded by mountains, it's great for all clients – whether they're active or just want to fly and flop. Firsts include a Two-Bedroom Butler Villa, Two-Storey Overwater Villas, suites with their own private media or fitness room and a sharing-style restaurant. It's perfect for a couple's holiday, as well as for groups of friends or families who are over 18.

PICTURE: RT Creation

RESTAURANT RUNDOWN

Sandals' first communal dining restaurant, Buccan, is part of its approach to woo groups of friends as well as couples. Diners at tables for eight can sample traditional Vincy recipes, served in coconut shells and stone pots – and the interactive, open-air experience is a hit with guests, so reservations are recommended. There 10 other eateries that cater to every whim, including Jerk Shack for authentic Caribbean fare, Isola for pizzas and Imoro for grab-and-go salad bowls. Fine dining can be found at Butches, sushi at Gatsu Gatsu or seafood at Scrimshaw.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Paddleboarding; Buccament Bay; La Soufrière; main restaurant Buccan PICTURES: Shutterstock/Vadim_N; Sandals.com



The new resort includes Sandals' first two-storey Vincy Overwater Villas, which are aimed at groups of friends and multigenerational families (rather than just couples) as part of Sandals' strategy to attract more groups of adults.

Louis adds: "Our core UK audience is over 50, but we also see younger guests, particularly those celebrating a special occasion. UK guests love fresh experiences and new encounters, particularly where they learn a new skill, go island-hopping or hiking the volcano."

SWIM, SAIL AND SIGHTSEE

Having conquered the volcano, I spend the rest of the week trying the other activities. As well as swimming in the two infinity pools, there's the main pool stretching nearly 100 metres, complete with a swim-up bar; the chilled heart-shaped pool; and the ultra-relaxed Red Lane Spa pool. My delightful trio of butlers – Lenford, Cameka and Kellisha – reserve me a prime sunlounger each morning, with a cool box full of drinks. They also deliver cocktails without even having to ask and leave fruit platters and cakes as unexpected treats in my suite.

There are plenty of other activities – including jewellery-making, Pilates overlooking a river, sunset paddleboarding, catamaran excursions, kayaking to a bat cave, a sailing trip around the coast (spotting dolphins and filming locations from *Pirates of the Caribbean*) and snorkelling – plus evening entertainment such as fire eaters and musicians. It's a good job there are plenty of

bikes around the 50-acre site to pedal to the next activity.

There's more to enjoy beyond the resort too, including a day trip to Bequia, the nearest island of the Grenadines. If guests are prone to seasickness, tablets are recommended for the one-hour ferry ride, but the discomfort is worth it to explore this idyllic island with pastel-coloured houses on verdant hillsides. We hear about Bequia's maritime history at the tiny heritage museum and visit a workshop making intricate models of sailing yachts.

After local seafood at Coco's Place overlooking sleepy Port Elizabeth, a rib boat took us to the floating Bar One, where the motto is: 'sip, float, relax'.

Even on our boat transfer back to the airport, the upbeat Vincy vibe prevails with a farewell song from the delightful staff, who continue their impeccable service by calling us back to the jetty to return a jacket left behind by one of our group – it's almost as if we didn't want to leave. **TW**

BOOK IT

A seven-night all-inclusive stay in a Bamboo Palm Room with Balcony Tranquility Soaking Tub costs from £2,649, while a Garden Butler Suite with Patio Tranquility Soaking Tub (including butler and 24-hour room service) costs from £4,149. Both are based on two sharing and include transfers and flights from Heathrow via Barbados departing September 3, 2025. sellingsandals.co.uk