

# Selling summer

Demand for off-peak Caribbean escapes is booming – but how can agents capitalise on it? Emma Blackmore asks the experts

Sun-kissed shores, sparkling waters and spicy cuisine make the Caribbean all but irresistible. With fewer crowds and lower rates during the off-peak season, summer bookings are surging: Gold Medal's package sales to the region are 25% up this summer, while comparison site TravelSupermarket has noted an 81% rise in searches for Caribbean summer holidays since the Middle East conflict began.

Airlines are responding to the growing demand with an increase in capacity to the region. British Airways will add an extra weekly flight from Gatwick to Kingston in Jamaica, taking its summer schedule to four times a week, while Virgin Atlantic will fly daily from Heathrow to Jamaica's Montego Bay between June and October. Tui will also operate a direct service from Belfast International to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic for four

weeks from June. So with more product to play with, what do you need to know to sell this summer?

#### STRESS VALUE FOR MONEY

"Agents can secure noticeably lower room rates than in peak winter," says Deborah Wadhams, head of long-haul product at Gold Medal. Key markets include couples drawn by good value, adult groups looking for a lively all-inclusive experience and families with children who need a mix of resort activities and convenience during the school holidays.

Tui is also targeting value-motivated families this summer, with free child places across Mexico and the Dominican Republic, meaning one child travels free with two full-paying adults. Jill Cunningham, the company's director of retail, omnichannel and third-party sales, says: "Free child places offer agents >

ASK THE  
**experts**



**Deborah Wadhams,**  
head of long-haul product, Gold Medal

“Position summer

as the season when clients can maximise value and add upgrades. Take advantage of lower rates and look for hotel-led incentives such as board and room upgrades that help clients get more for their budget.”



**Jill Cunningham,**  
director of retail, omnichannel and third-party sales, Tui

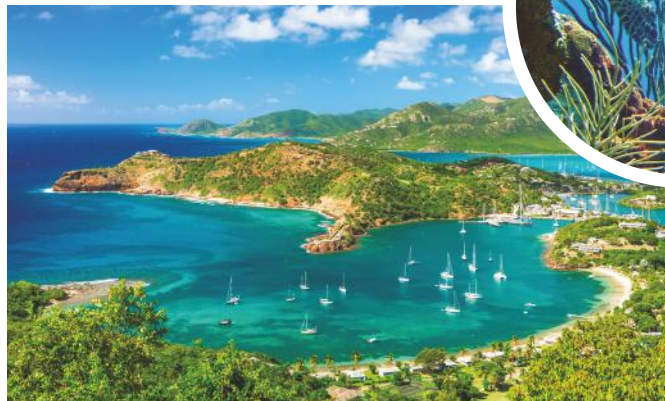
“Through dedicated Caribbean training, webinars and TradeHub resources, Tui ensures agents have the product knowledge and commercial confidence needed to convert summer Caribbean demand efficiently.”



**Leah Marshall,**  
director of sales, Unique Vacations UK

“Flexibility is key for securing

best value for clients – a good time to look is the last week of August as fares drop a little at the end of summer. Tailor recommendations depending on the client’s budget, preferences and travel dates.”



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Sandals Resort Curaçao; Fairmont Royal Pavilion, Barbados; diving with turtles; view of English Harbour from Shirley Heights, Antigua **PICTURES:** Leah Marie Photography; Shutterstock/ David Bailey, Sean Pavone; RTCREATION



a powerful, easy-to-communicate conversion tool for families at a time when affordability and value are critical.”

**BARGAIN HUNT**

To optimise a client’s budget, make the most of package deals and upgrades designed to attract visitors at this time of year. Caroline Beckett, senior product manager at Elegant Resorts, says: “Meal plan upgrades often offer the most value, with the uncertainty of food costs being paid upfront. Carlisle Bay in Antigua, for instance, offers a 30% rate reduction plus a complimentary upgrade to half-board on Ocean Suites and above from May to November, while Grenada’s Calabash Hotel offers a free upgrade from half-board to all-inclusive from March to October.”

There are other promotions to consider as well. “Premium drinks packages, daily resort activities and added-value inclusions such as catamaran cruises or spa credit increase the perceived value,” adds Gold Medal’s Wadhams. She recommends trading clients up by booking higher-tier rooms that come with a wealth of benefits, including access to premium areas such as club-only pools. Multi-bedroom suites and villas are also a strong option for groups or families wanting extra space and privacy without peak-season prices.

With so many bargains on offer, even those on limited budgets can find small ways to splurge. “Guests are frequently choosing to upgrade just one part of their trip to get the ‘wow factor’ without blowing the budget,” says Melissa Scarlett, senior product executive at Kuoni.

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“Consider curated upgrades. It could be a final night in a super deluxe suite, a villa with a private pool or a mix-and-match approach with a four-star resort and then a luxury hotel.”

**WEATHER WORRIES**

Concerns about rainy weather – ‘liquid sunshine’, as locals call it – or the start of hurricane season can deter clients looking for summer breaks, but agents can counter this by educating customers about the differences between each destination. Popular islands such as Barbados, Tobago, Aruba and Curaçao lie largely outside the hurricane belt, so enjoy more settled conditions. And if clients are worried about rain disrupting their time on the beach, point out that in the tropics, it tends to take the form of short, sharp showers, rather than lasting all day.

For Sandals and Beaches Resorts, strong summer performers include Barbados, Antigua, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as Grenada and Curaçao. “While hurricane season runs from June to ➤

## DESTINATIONS

### CARIBBEAN | SUMMER

#### BOOK IT

**Kuoni** sells a seven-night all-inclusive holiday combining Antigua and St Kitts from £2,149 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick on June 2, four nights at St James's Club & Villas, transfers to St Kitts and three nights in a Garden View room at St Kitts Marriott Beach Resort, Casino & Spa.

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

**Tui** offers a seven-night all-inclusive holiday at the Bahia Principe Explore Coba in Riviera Maya, Mexico, from £1,736 per person. The price is based on two adults and two children sharing a Junior Suite Superior, with one free child place. The holiday includes flights from Gatwick on July 17, luggage and transfers.

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

**Gold Medal** sells a seven-night all-inclusive stay at Zemi Miches Punta Cana All-Inclusive Resort, Curio Collection by Hilton, from £1,999 per person, based on two adults sharing a Tropical View Room. The price includes flights from Gatwick on June 20 and transfers.

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

**Caribtours** offers seven nights' bed and breakfast at Blue Waters (pictured), Antigua, from £2,875 per adult and £1,205 per child, based on three sharing a Deluxe Beachfront Room. The price includes a 25% discount on accommodation, \$100 resort credit, private transfers and flights from Heathrow on August 24.

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



ABOVE: Carnival parade in Castries, Saint Lucia PICTURE: Shutterstock/Angela N Perryman

November, it's important to reassure clients that serious hurricanes and tropical storms are rare," says Leah Marshall, director of sales at Unique Vacations UK. "Our teams are trained to handle inclement weather and have implemented a series of proven best practices, including backup generators if the island's power fails."

Operators with on-island staff and contingency plans can also provide further reassurance, according to David Pointer, Caribbean product manager at Inspiring Travel. He says: "We have teams on the ground and a 24/7 team in the UK who will assist with safety and making any alternative arrangements, if required."

#### UPSELL ISLAND-HOPPING

"It's tempting to see the Caribbean as a fly-and-flop destination, but lower seasonal rates and fewer crowds in summer provide opportunities for island-hopping," says Kuoni's Scarlett. "Creating a more complex Caribbean itinerary will spark a traveller's imagination. We've seen a 50% increase in multi-island Caribbean trips, year on year."

Time your clients' summer travel correctly and they could see the Caribbean come alive with events – from carnivals in Saint Lucia, Antigua, Grenada and the Bahamas to music festivals in Jamaica and Barbados.

"Summer in the Caribbean has a wonderfully relaxed, unhurried feel," says Jenny Peart, head of commercial at Caribtours. "Local festivals bring each island's culture to life and sea temperatures reach 29C, which is perfect for snorkelling and sailing."

"Summer in the Caribbean has a wonderfully relaxed feel – local festivals bring culture to life and the sea can reach 29C

#### STANDOUT DESTINATIONS

A mix of established hotspots and emerging islands is driving summer demand. Elegant Resorts' Beckett says: "Barbados continues to be our bestselling year-round destination in the Caribbean, with a combination of great airlift, fabulous hotels and a host of things to do."

Antigua is a top seller for Elegant Resorts and Inspiring Travel, with year-round all-inclusives such as Blue Waters, Curtain Bluff, Hammock Cove and Galley Bay offering good-value packages. Antigua and Saint Lucia account for a third of Kuoni's summer bookings, with St Kitts and Nevis and the Turks and Caicos Islands gaining momentum since the operator introduced packages to the destinations last year.

For a mainland alternative, Mexico's Caribbean coast is a standout for Gold Medal, which notes a 30% increase in summer sales. Cancun is also Tui's bestselling destination, thanks to its frequent flights and hotel portfolio.

One thing remains clear: with so much variety and so many savings to be found, the Caribbean just got a whole lot harder to resist. **TW**