

Kitts spirit

Forget just flying and flopping – adventure awaits in St Kitts and Nevis as the twin islands celebrate 40 years of independence, finds **David Golledge**



Taking in the view of the sparkling Caribbean Sea from Brimstone Hill Fortress, it's easy to picture St Kitts' rich history coming to life. Hefty iron cannons protrude in all directions from this hilltop citadel, which took more than 100 years to build and was once the site of fierce battles over the island's sugar and rum riches.

St Kitts was named by Christopher Columbus himself and became Britain's first Caribbean colony – yet it was the country's more recent history that prompted my visit. Along with neighbouring Nevis, the twin-island nation celebrated 40 years of independence in 2023. To mark the occasion, 40 agents were hosted on five fam trips throughout the year. The tourist board's trade sales specialist, Graham Hawkins, explained that the island's ethos is to 'explore further' rather than fly and flop – which I would soon discover for myself.

RIDING HIGH

St Kitts is the Caribbean's smallest sovereign state, so I didn't need to go far to experience its active side. In fact, it came to me in the form of Jove, my companion for a morning horse ride along the shore of Frigate Bay. As I took the reins, the instructions were simple: pull left to go left, right to go right and both to stop.

I soon found myself captivated by views of distant forested hills rolling into the ocean – and quietly impressed by my new-found riding skills, until I realised Jove was well-trained to follow the lead of his stablemate, Treasure. The pair are ➤

PICTURE: St Kitts Tourism Authority

DESTINATIONS

CARIBBEAN | ST KITTS



ST KITTS

Marriott Resort & The Royal Beach Casino

With 398 rooms, this is the largest hotel on the island and everything is generously proportioned, with a wide expanse of golden sand, large meandering pools, a sizeable casino, soaring atriums but, at times, lengthy waits at reception or for food to be served. The bars and restaurants of Frigate Bay are nearby. My spacious room was decorated in contemporary muted tones, with a balcony enjoying views of lush grounds and the Atlantic coastline.

Book it: From \$285 per room, per night, on a room-only basis, including taxes.

marriott.com/en-us/hotels/skbrb-st-kitts

Sunset Reef

This seven-suite boutique hotel has breathtaking views of the Caribbean, even better when viewed from the cliff-top infinity pool or the beach bar. It feels like being a guest at a private villa, with a relaxed, luxurious vibe and friendly staff on first-name terms. There are extensive sustainability efforts, including use of geothermal energy, water purification and ingredients grown on-site. My stylish suite was minimalist yet packed with homely comforts, including an enormous shower and high-tech touches.

Book it: B&B from \$340 per room, per night, based on a one-bedroom King Suite, including tax and service fees. sunsetreefstkitts.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A beach bar in Frigate Bay; yachts; Brimstone Hill Fortress

PICTURES: Tambourine/St Kitts Tourism Authority/Annie Wentzell



among 22 steeds that can be taken out at rainforest and beach locations around the island, with no riding experience required.

While Jove was itching to frolic in the ocean, I was less keen, so we settled on following the path of the water's edge, with the splash of the waves fading into the sand over his hooves. Shortly afterwards, Jove got his well-deserved dip while it was time for me to explore the distant hills a little more closely.

FRUITS OF THE FOREST

Arriving at the Central Forest Reserve National Park, the air was immediately cooler, shaded by the lofty forest canopy that covers about a third of the island. My guide, O'Neill Mulrairie, explained that while most of the trees surrounding us were mango, more than 400 different species can occupy a single acre. With laws banning further deforestation, we were standing amid one of the few emerging rainforests in the world.

Soon after setting off, we reached a clearing with a mighty rock that had special significance for O'Neill. "This is my personal spot where I like to sit and listen to nature," he said, as the sound of monkey calls faded into the distance. After coming here for nearly 50 years, there was little that could dampen his enthusiasm.

"It felt surreal to find myself above the treetops as I came face to face with 'The Boss', a 400m zipline across the valley

"Hold this, it feels just like boiled spaghetti," he exclaimed, picking up a handful of red liana vines draping from the forest canopy. It did feel exactly like spaghetti, but must have been far stronger as before I knew it, he was swinging Tarzan-style through the clearing. Near the end of our trek we encountered tiny mimosa plants, which recoil as you brush against them. From the tallest trees to the smallest plants, nature truly put on a show.

After admiring the forest from ground level, it felt surreal to find myself above – rather than below – the treetops as I came face to face with 'The Boss', a zipline stretching over the historic Wingfield Estate. At 75m high and spanning 400m across the valley, it was an impressive, if slightly nerve-wracking, sight. Thankfully, my harness had a reassuring heft, and accelerating up to 50mph felt like a sugar rush – which was apt as we flew over the Old Road Rum distillery. ➤

ASK THE agents



Emma Shaw, Travel Counsellors

"My favourite experience was the Liamuiga Farm plantation. Their farm-to-table brunch and tour was divine. There's also a real mix of accommodation, from simple, surprisingly affordable options to boutique-style luxury hotels."



Jessica Mumford, Tropic Breeze

"St Kitts blew me away right

from the start. I was amazed by how incredibly green the island is and how friendly all the locals were. My highlight of the trip was snorkelling off the coast in the clear, warm, blue waters, surrounded by fish."



Melisa Oliver, Kenwood Travel

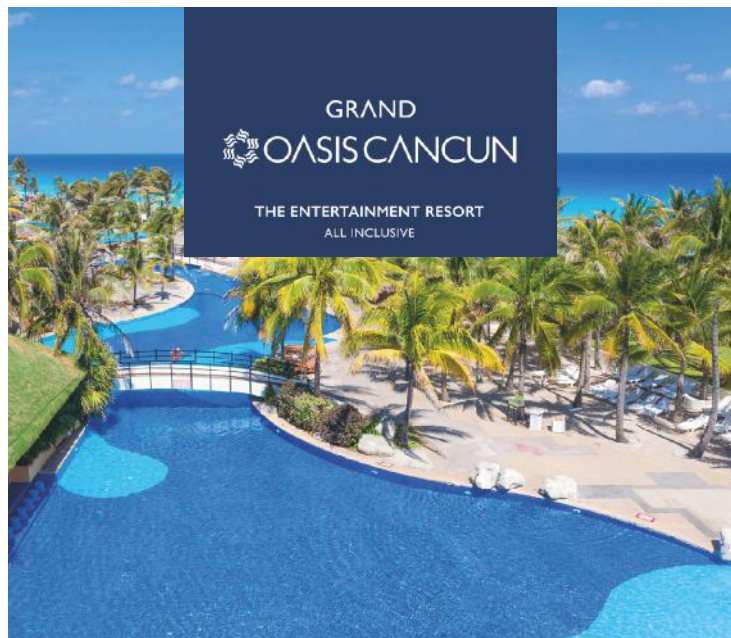
"I think St Kitts is definitely a destination for clients that have been everywhere and are looking for something new, especially those that love to explore and try local restaurants."

There was just enough time for a glimpse beyond the treetops towards the shimmering sea before the exhilaration was over. Fortunately, there were more ziplines still to try, culminating in the River Rocker run where side-by-side wires let riders race each other.

FARM TO FORK

Having worked up an appetite, I was pleased that our next stop, Liamuiga Natural Farm, offered an adventure of a culinary kind, starting with being picked up in a former military vehicle. The journey through winding rainforest trails took in views of Mount Liamuiga's cloud-tipped volcanic cone, which dominates the north of the island.

A feast greeted our arrival which, given the farm-to-table ethos, was as fresh as it was varied, including pickled turmeric and guava jelly among many other



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LEFT AND ABOVE: Palm trees on the beach; clocktower in capital Basseterre PICTURES: St Kitts Tourism Authority

tantalising tastes. Exploring the coffee and citrus farm, our guide Tiem explained that Liamuiga translates as 'fertile land' in the Indigenous language of the island, with an altitude of nearly 500m making the farm especially productive. He pointed out a coffee tree planted two years ago which was already producing pods.

Tiem proved an encyclopaedic source of knowledge about the natural properties of our surroundings, including trumpet leaves that turn to warn of coming storms and which lower blood pressure when drunk in tea. Returning to dine, we sampled the farm's speciality, yakamein noodle soup with chicken and fish dipped in fresh pumpkin hot sauce and chimichurri.

It was a rich, varied menu on an island that – for those who take the time to look – offers plenty of ways to explore further. **TW**

WHERE TO STAY

Belle Mont Farm

Nestled in Mount Liamuiga's foothills, this plantation-style collection of 42 cottages fuses vintage design with modern amenities. An atmosphere of calm and seclusion abounds, with ocean views from private pools and some cottages complete with picture-perfect outside bathrooms. bellemontfarm.com

Sugar Bay Club

Situated on the Atlantic coast, this low-rise property with 84 studio rooms, suites and cottages is set within gardens around two pools. Most rooms are equipped with a kitchenette, and there is a convenience store on site. sugarbayclub.com

Timothy Beach

Well located for the spectacular Timothy Hill viewpoint across two coastlines, this 60-room hotel sits just above Frigate Bay's beach and a lively strip of bars and restaurants. The decor harks back to a different era, including floral bedspreads and retro mauve and avocado bathrooms. timothybeach.com

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