



FAMILIES



COUPLES

SAINT LUCIA

Families & Couples

Perhaps you can please all of the people all of the time, writes Jo Cooke

Saint Lucia packs a lot into its 27 by 14 miles. This Eastern Caribbean island offers an enticing mix of beaches, historic landmarks and rainforest-cloaked mountains that could just as easily feature on a classy, romantic escape as an action-packed family adventure.

Resorts, hotels and villas are located in both the flatter north and mountainous south, so clients can opt for views from on high or stay right by the beach, and properties tend to be secluded from each other too, rather than lined up side-by-side.

With direct flights from the UK providing the icing on the cake, it all adds up to a very saleable package that appeals just as much to sun-seeking families as to couples in search of romance.

ACE BASE

Saint Lucia has one of the most diverse accommodation offerings in the West Indies, making it easy to book clients a base that ticks all of their boxes. Tucked into the hillsides or dotted along the beaches, you'll find everything from luxury retreats where they won't have to lift a finger, to apartments with kitchens, washing machines and dryers where they can take care of every practicality.

FAMILIES: Whether they like the ease of going all-inclusive or the independence of self-catering, Saint Lucia can deliver, as Caribtours product manager

Katherine Hobbs explains. She says: "Family-friendly resorts such as Coconut Bay in the south and St James's Club in the north offer comprehensive kids' clubs and activities for everyone from toddlers to teenagers, while villa resorts such as The Landings and Windjammer Landing have the added attraction of spacious suites and villas that give larger families plenty of space."

The Landings is enhancing its family appeal this year with a new kids' club and summer camp, while Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort runs a Jacquot Fun Club for four to 12-year-olds, plus a separate programme for teens. Activities include limbo and reggae dancing, cricket on the beach, coconut bowling, lessons in the local patois and the recent addition of kids' yoga and tours through the hotel's herb gardens.

For those on a budget, Bay Gardens Beach Resort gets all the basics right. It's set on lively Reduit Beach, has a sizeable pool and is a short stroll from the shops and entertainment of Rodney Bay's resort centre, making it ideal for those with teenagers. Sold by Hayes & Jarvis, prices start from £739 based on two adults and two children, and including breakfast.

At the other end of the price scale is Sugar Beach, a Viceroy Resort. Here, sumptuous villas with their own pools, butler service and views of the Piton peaks gather around Anse des

Pitons beach. Kids from four to 12 years old are catered for by the kids' club, offering treasure hunts, archery and sailing lessons. Sold by Caribtours, prices start at £1,785 for adults and £639 for children room-only.

COUPLES: "Saint Lucia is a fabulous destination for couples of all ages," says ITC Luxury Travel's senior marketing and product manager Helen Tabois, "Resorts such as luxurious Jade Mountain and romantic Rendezvous are ideal for holidays where chilling out in complete privacy is the order of the day."

Jade Mountain has even introduced a celebration package for couples who have been married for more than 20 years: if they stay at least four nights, they'll be offered a couples' massage, professional photo shoot, private dinner and a chance to renew their vows. Rendezvous, meanwhile, has just emerged from the second phase of a \$12.5 million refurbishment to extend the beach and upgrade the beachfront restaurant, main pool and swim-up bar.

Other superb properties in the upscale and romantic category include Ladera and Anse Chastanet. Both have a rustic-chic appeal: Ladera is set on a hilltop overlooking the Pitons and Anse Chastanet has open-sided rooms edged by jungle foliage, its own beach and mountain bike trails.

Saint Lucia also caters to more than just champagne-and-sunset-

style romance. Couples looking for their inner Zen can indulge in a week of all-inclusive pampering at The BodyHoliday resort, where spa treatments, yoga, and healthy-eating fine-dining are served up daily.

Those who love to party, on the other hand, should be in their element at Sandals Grande St Lucian. This 301-room all-inclusive has an idyllic location on Pigeon Island and boasts a sensational beach, 12 restaurants, six bars, four pools, casino nights and beach parties.

ADVENTURES 'R' US

Saint Lucia's extensive menu of excursions is a huge selling point. As well as Caribbean staples such as catamaran snorkelling trips and duty-free shopping at the cruise-ship port, sign visitors up for tours of its natural wonders or all-action activities.

FAMILIES: There's plenty geared towards kids, as Caribtours' Hobbs reports. "Beyond the resorts, the island itself is perfect for more adventurous families, with miles of rainforest to explore by mountain bike, hiking trails or open-top jeep safari," she says. "Families can also take to the seas for a pirate-themed day out on board the Spanish galleon Black Magic, where kids are entertained with face-painting, firing replica canons and walking the plank. Then there is Saint Lucia's newest attraction, Splash Island Water Park. Anchored



FAR LEFT:
Coconut Bay's Coco and Loco

LEFT: Anse Chastanet

BELOW:
Splash Island Water Park

→ just off the beach at Rodney Bay, this is the Caribbean's first floating water park, featuring an inflatable obstacle course, climbing wall, slides and a trampoline."

For animal fanatics, meanwhile, there's a Parrot Trail ramble available through Thomson Excursions (minimum age six,

priced from £32), and whale and dolphin-spotting trips that can be booked through Do Something Different.

COUPLES: If there's no need to factor in kids, couples can check out the island at a pace that suits them. ITC Luxury's Tabois says: "Excursions range from the gentle, perhaps a tour of the

Rabot Estate cocoa plantation, to the energetic - think zip-lining or even climbing the Pitons."

As a volcanic island edged by deep waters, Saint Lucia's geography allows for attractions that are the envy of its fellow West Indian islands. As well as excellent opportunities for scuba diving with a seascape of coral reefs, underwater cliffs and walls, deep-sea sport fishing trips can be taken through attraction providers such as Do Something Different (from £107).

Those who want to delve into the rainforest interior but don't fancy zip-lining or hiking the 2,600ft Gros Piton (both available through Sandals Resorts' excursion provider Island Routes) could instead opt for →



ITC Luxury Travel offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Rendezvous, Saint Lucia, from £1,925 based on two adults sharing a Premium Garden View Room with flights and private transfers, for travel by December 26; book by March 31. itcluxurytravel.co.uk

Caribtours offers seven nights' room-only at Windjammer Landing from £3,899 per family, based on two adults and two children sharing a two-bedroom Ocean View Room, including flights, private transfers and use of a lounge at Gatwick. caribtours.co.uk

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CARIBBEAN SAINT LUCIA DESTINATIONS



LEFT: Zip-lining



RIGHT: Pigeon Island

PICTURES: SAINT LUCIA TOURIST BOARD; CHRIS HUXLEY

→ a more tranquil bird-watching tour. Thomson Excursions has a half-day option that sets off just before sunrise to spot the elusive Saint Lucia amazon and yellow and orange Saint Lucia oriole plus other species that make their home in the Castries Waterworks Forest Reserve (from £43).

There are also botanical gardens, waterfalls and a collapsed volcanic crater with bubbling geysers to visit, all certain to give outdoor types their fix.

▶ BEST BEACHES

The shores of Saint Lucia are lapped by the calm Caribbean Sea on the west coast, making it perfect for swimming and water sports, and by the frisky Atlantic Ocean on the east coast, where rugged



Saint Lucia's geography allows for attractions that are the envy of its fellow West Indian islands

headlands offer hypnotic views. True to its volcanic origins, Saint Lucia has black, grey and orange-sand beaches as well as a few in classic white.

FAMILIES: Reduit, a mile-long, white-sand beach, has an excellent range of facilities that ensure kids can stay and play all day. Water sports

on offer include wakeboarding and tubing, plus there are beach cafes galore and sunloungers with parasols for rent.

Those travelling with thrill-seeking teens could make their way to Anse des Sables on the southern tip of Saint Lucia for a spot of kitesurfing. It's one of the best places in the Caribbean to learn the sport, as its wild stretch of virgin beach catches the trade winds, plus The Reef beach bar rents out equipment and has instructors to teach newbies.

A safe spot for children to try snorkelling for the first time is Anse des Pitons, a sheltered bay beneath the peaks of the Pitons. Swimming alongside the cliffs, they'll see a variety of species without ever straying more than a few strokes from the beach.

COUPLES: Saint

Lucia's varied coastline makes it easy to tailor beach suggestions to suit your clients' mood.

Suggest history buffs head to Pigeon Island, where they can climb to the vantage point of the 18th-century Fort Rodney, as well as stretching out on two peaceful, shady beaches.

For a dramatic backdrop to a romantic stroll, there's Anse Cochon. Set midway along the west coast, this crescent of orange sand is backed by the untamed splendour of a thicket of tropical foliage.

Or if clients seek a lazy day of sun-worshipping instead, try Anse Chastenet. This petite, volcanic black-sand cove nestles into the cliffside and offers excellent snorkelling and an equally excellent restaurant. **tw**