

Simply the best

Looking for a resort with 'wow' factor? Come to the Caribbean, writes Jo Cooke

The Caribbean is a real people-pleaser, with a mind-boggling choice of hotels to suit any occasion. But some locations, views and facilities stand out even in an already-impressive crowd, making an ideal setting for those in search of an extra-special stay.

They aren't necessarily the most expensive or the best known, but these pads can

elevate a Caribbean escape from perfectly pleasant to downright extraordinary. While this isn't a definitive list, these properties are among the cream of the crop when it comes to wow factor, so prepare to be amazed.

► BEST FOR SPA LOVERS

You sign up for a little trip to heaven when booking a newly opened Oasis Spa Villa at

Couples Tower Isle, Jamaica. Guests in these spacious, elegantly furnished hideaways are entitled to unlimited spa treatments. Just put on your robe and take the meandering path through tropical gardens to the zen-like Oasis Spa, or have the treatments in-room. Afterwards, take a dip in your private plunge pool framed by living walls bursting with greenery, sip

Couples Tower Isle, Jamaica

→ cocktails on your patio or relax on the partially submerged, curvaceous sun loungers.

Book it: Thomson offers seven nights' all-inclusive with flights and transfers from £1,390 for a Deluxe Garden Room departing September 4. Spa Villas start at £2,729.

thomson.co.uk

Or try: BodyHoliday, Saint Lucia, where a 50-minute spa treatment per full day in resort is included. Healthy dining, yoga, pilates and tai chi make this a beach holiday that feeds body and soul.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive, with flights and private transfers, costs from £2,445.

thomson.co.uk

► BEST FOR EXCLUSIVITY

Imagine enjoying all the inclusions of Sandals Royal Caribbean, Jamaica, then heading back to your glitzy, off-shore abode by swanky launch. The resort is home to the West Indies' first overwater accommodation. Twelve bungalows and five villas stand on stilts connected by a boardwalk – and they are spectacular. Secluded decks, outdoor showers, glass floors, lavish furnishings, steps down

into the ocean for snorkelling, plus butler service and 24-hour dining make these the ultimate love nests.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive in an over-the-water bungalow with flights and transfers costs from £5,599 on select dates from May 20 to June 24, 2018.

sellingsandals.co.uk

Or try: Necker Island, British Virgin Islands. An outstanding destination for weddings and celebrations with a big budget, Richard Branson's idyllic, 74-acre private isle has more than 100 staff. Its 17 rooms are usually bookable by one group, but on certain weeks can be booked individually, giving couples a taste of the millionaire lifestyle.

Book it: A seven-night all-inclusive stay with flights and transfers costs from £15,999.

itcluxurytravel.co.uk

► BEST BUDGET BUYS

You can make cash-strapped clients' Caribbean dreams come true at the low-key, 92-room, Southern Palms Beach Club & Resort, Barbados. This beauty is a bargain with a touch of class. A welcoming entrance leads to manicured lawns, and pool decks



The resort is home to the West Indies' first overwater villas and bungalows – and they are spectacular

overlook white sand. Tranquil it may be, but nightlife, shopping and dining at St Lawrence Gap are footsteps away, and ditto the bus route to the capital, Bridgetown, and Oistin's Fish Fry, the place for the best cheap eats and knees-up on the island.

Book it: Seven nights' room-only, with flights and transfers, starts at £889 with Gold Medal from September 1-24.

goldmedal.co.uk

Or try: Grand Bahia Principe El Portillo, Dominican Republic, in the charming seaside town of Las Terrenas, which boasts glorious beaches and is close to whale-watching trips and waterfalls. The property is neat, welcoming, has a ream of activities and 606 attractive rooms.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive,

plus flights and transfers, costs from £1,053 with Thomson, departing September 23.

thomson.co.uk

► BEST BOUTIQUE HOTELS

When small and characterful is what clients seek, match-make them with one of these establishments. The House, Barbados, oozes elegance with an inner courtyard garden and 34 contemporary suites that have those extra little touches, such as high thread-count sheets and gourmet coffee makers. A deck with ritzy lounge furniture edges the palm-fringed beach, and the delectable Daphne's restaurant neighbours the hotel.

Book it: A week with breakfast, flights and transfers costs from £1,995, departing July 3.

hayesandjarvis.co.uk

Or try: Pink Sands, on sleepy, hippy-chic Harbour Island, Bahamas. The 25 cottages are set on an elevated spot atop the sand dunes of Pink Sand Beach, a three-mile stretch of virgin shoreline.

Book it: Seven nights with continental breakfast, flights and ferry transfers from Nassau starts at £2,995 between June 1 and September 30.

bahamasflavour.co.uk



ABOVE: Over-the-water bungalow, Sandals Royal Caribbean, Jamaica

LEFT: The House, Barbados

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LEFT:
Calabash,
Grenada

RIGHT:
Jolly Beach,
Antigua

BELOW:
Jade
Mountain,
Saint Lucia



► BEST FOR FAMILY FUN

While mum and dad may be thrilled to lie back and tan, their kiddiewinks probably won't be. The answer is the 464-room Jolly Beach, Antigua, says Funway Holidays product destination manager Malcolm Davies. "Activities include cupcake contests, tug-of-war, movie nights and stargazing," he adds. "Plus, kids coordinate a parents' date night! It's just 20 minutes from the airport, and has two-bedroom cottages on the sand." **Book it:** Seven nights' all-inclusive, with flights and transfers, costs from £1,470 for two adults and one child sharing, departing August 4. **funway4agents.co.uk**

Or try: Renaissance Resort, Aruba. A speedboat whisks guests from the lobby to the hotel's private island where flamingos idle their days away on the beach alongside the sunbathers. **Book it:** Seven nights with breakfast, flights and transfers costs from £961 for a departure on September 29. **thomson.co.uk**

► BEST ROOMS FOR A VIEW

Few vistas encapsulate the essence of the Caribbean like those from the 29 suites at Jade Mountain, Saint Lucia. You look out over the Piton peaks, rainforest foliage and inky blue

ocean. Where other rooms might have a terrace or balcony, these are open-sided, giving you an indoor-outdoor living space. Watch the sunset from your in-room infinity pool, fall asleep to the lullaby of tree frogs and awake to birdsong. It's sensory bliss! **Book it:** Seven nights in a Star Sanctuary Suite, with breakfast, flights and transfers, starts from £5,154 in September. **kuoni.co.uk** **Or try:** Belle Mont Farm, St Kitts. Nestling at the foot of Mount Liamuiga, 91 plush accommodation units gaze at the neighbouring island of Saba, which looks like a mirage in the distance. **Book it:** Seven nights' room-only,

with flights, private transfers and UK lounge pass, costs from £1,655 for a September 9 departure. **elegantresorts.co.uk**

► BEST FOR FOODIES

If island flavours are a highlight for your clients, suggest the 30-suite Calabash in Grenada. Breakfast is cooked to order by your patio and the hotel is home to Rhodes Restaurant, overseen by Gary Rhodes. The celebrity chef is renowned for sourcing local ingredients and incorporating them into culinary classics. The wine list is equally high-calibre and, of course, your room is just a stroll away after an evening of indulgence. A secluded beach is the icing



PICTURE: MACDUFF EVERTON

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Pricing shown is per person based on two people sharing a room in a Butler Village Poolside One Bedroom Villa Suite at Sandals Ochi Beach Resort in Jamaica for 7 nights on selected dates and includes all savings, return flights with Virgin Atlantic in economy class, all meals, land and water sports, transfers, tips and taxes. Price is subject to availability and may change at time of distribution. Weekend supplements may apply.

→ on the cake at this property.
Book it: Seven nights with breakfast, flights, private transfers and UK airport lounge pass is from £2,085 between October 9 and December 18.
caribtours.co.uk
Or try: Gansevoort Playa Imbert, Dominican Republic. This uber-cool oceanfront hotel has two incredible restaurants, an Italian and an Asian-Peruvian fusion, both by the water's edge. Agents receive 10% commission on direct bookings.
Book it: Rooms typically start at £420 per night with breakfast.
gansevoorthotelgroup.com

BEST FOR OLD-WORLD CHARM

Cobbled streets, Iberian architecture, ancient city walls and castle ramparts? Puerto Rico's capital, San Juan, is not only a stunner but also a cultural paradise. Stay at the



Choose from piano recitals and sultry salsa clubs in the old town or head for San Juan's city beach

RIGHT:
 El Convento,
 Puerto Rico



sophisticated El Convento. Fashioned from a former convent, you can expect antique furnishings, beamed ceilings and excellent service. It's also at the heart of the action: choose from piano recitals and sultry salsa clubs in the old town or head for nearby Playa Escambron. This city beach has a cosmopolitan

feel and is a great place to mingle with the chatty locals.

Book it: Room-only from \$165 per night via Small Luxury Hotels, which pays commission on agent bookings.

slh.com

Or try: Montpelier Plantation, Nevis. It offers the best of both worlds: a colonial backdrop

complete with sugar mill, and rooms with cutting-edge style. Tucked away in the hills, it also has access to a white-sand beach.

Book it: Seven nights with breakfast, flights, private transfers and UK lounge pass from £1,935 for a November 11 departure.

elegantresorts.co.uk

ba.com/dominicanrepublic

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