

COUPLES



FAMILIES



CARIBBEAN IN SUMMER

Couples & families

The Caribbean might be best known for winter sun, but summer has its charms too, writes Laura French →

Think Caribbean, think winter sun? Time to refresh your ideas, because while high season clearly has its upsides, there's something to be said for a getaway outside the peak period, when crowds thin out, hotels slash their rates and flight seats sell for half the price.

We're talking about summer. June to September might not have the best rep weather-wise, but don't let clients be put off by visions of downpours and hurricanes – most showers are short and sweet, temperatures can be surprisingly pleasant, and a raft of events, from feather-shaking carnivals to sense-engaging culinary festivals, fill the streets with colour.

Read on for some of the best spots to suggest for couples and families wanting to visit in the off-season.

FAMILIES: SAINT LUCIA

Why go: A raft of outdoor adventures – zip-lining over lush canopies, hiking the soaring Pitons and diving pristine reefs, to name a few – make Saint Lucia a no-brainer for families seeking fun in the sun, and its southerly location means it avoids harsh weather.

Wildlife enthusiasts will find an extra reward too; it's turtle nesting season from March to November, with tours taking visitors on trips to see baby



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK



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leatherback, hawksbill and green turtles waddle along the shores.

August is also when the month-long Rose Festival descends, filling the streets with flowers and adding colourful, costume-strewn dance and music performances every Saturday.

Where to stay: Paul Cleary, managing director for Caribtours, recommends families with top-end budgets check in to The Landings. "It's perfect for those travelling with children, thanks to its villa suites," he says. "They have up to three bedrooms, as well as spacious living and dining areas and fully fitted kitchens, and guests get the added benefit of all the facilities you'd expect from a luxury resort."

FAMILIES: BARBADOS

Why go: Clients concerned about weather need not fear in Barbados. It's outside the hurricane belt and lays claim to more than 3,000 hours of sunshine a year, so although it gets the odd shower, sunny skies are pretty much guaranteed, and it's not unbearably hot, with temperatures moderated by cooling trade winds.

Families can get involved in some of the country's biggest festivals in the summer months – recommend heading out for Crop Over, a six-week extravaganza that brings street parties, markets and culinary events together to mark the end of the sugar cane season. This year it culminates on August 5 →



Funway Holidays offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Secrets St James Montego Bay, Jamaica, from £1,860 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes American Airlines flights from Heathrow on July 22. funway4agents.co.uk

Travel2 has seven nights' all-inclusive at Cocos Hotel, Antigua, from £1,899 per person, including British Airways flights from Gatwick and transfers, for travel from June 25 to August 18. travel2.com



ABOVE: Saint Lucia's Pitons

LEFT: The Landings, Saint Lucia



ASK THE EXPERT



Paul Cleary,
managing director,
Caribtours

"There's no wrong time of year to visit the Caribbean – it's ideal year round. People are often put off by thoughts of rain ruining their holiday during the summer, but the reality is that trips are likely to be punctuated by nothing more than short showers – and, of course, they might not get any rain. The real clincher is that prices are 40%-50% lower in summer. Same weather, same hotels, same seat on the aircraft – just up to 50% cheaper!"

➔ with Grand Kadooment Day, when sequin-bedecked dancers shimmy on down behind music-blasting trucks.
Where to stay: Suggest Sea Breeze Beach House for parents travelling with kids in tow. Summer deals offering reduced rates and kids-go-free deals give you a hook to sell the off-season, and there's plenty for families to do here, from surfing, diving and snorkelling to cave excursions and submarine tours.

▶ COUPLES: JAMAICA

Why go: Summer might be toasty in Jamaica, but fewer crowds mean couples can have its attractions – from Dunn's River Falls and its cascading waters to the Blue Hole and its aquamarine pools – all to themselves.

Those keen to get cultural will find a host of events at this time of year, including huge music festival Reggae Sumfest (Montego Bay, July 14-20) and the Montego Bay Jerk Festival (August 1). There's also a string of decent savings to be made, meaning the luxury resorts are accessible to a wider market.

Where to stay: Malcolm Davies, product destination manager for Funway Holidays, recommends Secrets St James Montego Bay for a high-end, adult-only retreat set on its own private peninsula and boasting a string of fine-dining restaurants, plus an excellent spa and pool area.



LEFT:
Dunn's
River Falls

BELOW:
Secrets
St James
Montego Bay

▶ COUPLES: ANTIGUA

Why go: "British summer time is the perfect season to visit Antigua," says Nikki Hain, Caribbean product manager at Premier Holidays. "The island attracts less rainfall than other Caribbean islands due to its geography, and rates in summer months are more than 50% lower, on average, than in winter."

There's turtle nesting here from June to October, while a string of culinary events bring foodie types flocking. Highlights include the mango festival, taking place in July with workshops, food stalls, nature trail tours, live entertainment and more, and the

Urlings Seafood Festival, which is on August 11 this year, and showcases the island's best catches.

Antigua's much-talked-about 365 beaches go nowhere in summer, either – the only difference is there are fewer people around to block the view.

Where to stay: Direct couples seeking a good-value break to the four-star Cocos Hotel, suggests Ross Sinclair, Travel 2's senior product manager for the Caribbean. "It's a perfect choice for a romantic summer escape," he says. "Love-birds can choose a private cottage and dine in style at the Old English Harbour as they watch multimillion-dollar yachts drift by." 

