

# Caribbean Queen

## AGENT Expert

**LISA MOUSLEY** is an expert in all things Caribbean. She has spent 25 years as a travel agent, visited the region nearly 20 times and earned the title of Caribbean Travel Guru – an elite status awarded by the Caribbean Tourism Organization to agents who complete specialist training, attend events and make bookings to the region. Lisa owns independent agency Caribbean & Exotic Boutique Luxury Holidays in Lancashire, and here she offers advice on how to make the most of winter-sun bookings to the Caribbean.



Winter is peak season in the Caribbean, so get back up to speed before the bookings start flooding in

**T**he Caribbean is a very diverse destination – all the islands are different so there’s something to suit everyone, whether they want to go hiking, birdwatching, sailing or diving, or just want to sit on a beach with a good book in one hand and a pina colada in the other.

There’s plenty of variety – definitely more to do than just sitting on a beach. It’s got a really interesting culture, because there are a lot of different nationalities over the years that have made the Caribbean what it is today, bringing in all kinds of different foods and, of course, rum!

That’s why it attracts such a mix of clients looking for winter sun. You

get a lot of families, particularly in the school holidays. Christmas, February half term and Easter all fall in the high season for the Caribbean. Families tend to go for the big all-inclusive hotels where there’s plenty going on, with busier resorts like Now or Dreams that are really well set up for kids. I stayed at the Now Larimar Punta Cana in February and it was just great. It has a really good standard of accommodation, you get lots of different restaurants, and activities to keep the kids happy all day.

But we also get a lot of couples and honeymooners; if people are getting married in the winter months, the Caribbean is a great destination





**ABOVE:**  
The Inn at English Harbour, Antigua



**RIGHT:** Marigot Bay, Saint Lucia

➔ for a honeymoon – there are so many romantic hotels, and brands such as Sandals are very popular with honeymooners.

Older couples are a bit more likely to go for the more boutique-style hotel, where they get personal service and a more independent feel – places such as The Inn at English Harbour in Antigua, or East Winds on Saint Lucia.

**▣ PICK AND MIX**

If clients are looking for a fly-and-flop break, personally I would suggest somewhere such as Saint Lucia or Antigua because they're such pretty islands. For families, the Dominican Republic is lovely – it's affordable, it's got gorgeous beaches, and plenty of big hotels so it's good for a relaxing family holiday.

Even somewhere like Cayo Coco in Cuba – you can do excursions from there to Trinidad, which is like Havana with its colonial buildings, but a bit smaller.

But I find that clients – and couples in particular – are looking for more to do while they're out there than just lying on a beach. This is where the Caribbean comes into its own, because there's so much you can do.

Jamaica has plenty of activities – swimming with dolphins, climbing Dunn's River Falls. And if they want nature, then Tobago is just beautiful



**Dominica is great for nature and hiking too and the scenery is unbelievable**

– you can do a rainforest tour or go birdwatching as it has such fantastic flora and fauna as well as beaches.

Dominica is great for nature and hiking too: it's got the Caribbean's first long-distance walking trail, the Waitukubuli National Trail, and the scenery is unbelievable.

**▣ STAYING ON TREND**

People are definitely more adventurous now – there are more people travelling and they want to go further afield.

Whereas a few years ago they'd have been happy with a quick trip to the Canary Islands, now they've been there, done that, and the Caribbean is a new and exciting option.

They're keen to make the most of their time as well, maybe going to New York or Miami and tagging that on before or after a holiday in the Caribbean – people don't just want to fly to the same place for two weeks.

They can also do a twin or multi-centre in the Caribbean: most people

fly into one of the main islands like Antigua, Saint Lucia or Barbados, then you can get a Liat flight to one of the smaller islands. The options for twin-centres are endless: Antigua and Grenada, Barbados and the Grenadines, or a triple-centre from Antigua to St Kitts and on to Nevis as well, so you can actually do three islands in one go.

I find a lot of people do still want to stay all-inclusive in the Caribbean – on some of the islands like Barbados, it's easy to get out and about to restaurants, but on other islands, there isn't really much outside the resort so people prefer to have all their food and drink taken care of in the hotel.

December to March are the main peak months for the Caribbean, so I always suggest people book as soon as they can – that way you get the best deal and you get what you want, you're not having to take what's left. You might get the occasional late deal here and there but it's a risk if you leave it too late – in peak season, it's best to just book it as soon as you know you want to go. That's especially true at Christmas – over the festive period, hotels get booked up well in advance, so definitely book early if you want to travel on specific dates.

And my only other advice? Remember to take a good mosquito repellent and a high-factor sun cream – it gets pretty hot out there! **TW**

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