

The extra mile

David Whitley casts his eye over the Caribbean islands that are worth the connecting flight

The Caribbean doesn't just have to mean old favourites such as Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua. Go beyond the islands that have direct flights from the UK and there's a wealth of different experiences on offer.

► ANGUILLA

Highlights: Tiny Anguilla distils the Caribbean down to what many people heading to this part of the world want: relaxation on some of the finest beaches on Earth, with some luxury pampering thrown in for good measure. It's the sort of place where locals don't bat an eyelid at the latest famous face to drop in for a few days.

The beaches are properly stunning. Shoal Bay East is the one that gets most hype, but that also means it can fill up with day-trippers. But others – Long Bay in particular – are world-class too.

Getting there: Sint Maarten is the main hub for Anguilla, as the arrival point for KLM flights from Amsterdam, and for BB Ferries.

Book it: If Only offers seven nights at the intimate four-star Frangipani Beach Resort from £2,359 per person.

ifonly.net

► GUADELOUPE

Highlights: Largely overlooked by British tourists, Guadeloupe is where hit TV series *Death in Paradise* is filmed. It puts a



PICTURE: BV/BEN MOORE



Sainte-Anne hits that happy combination of beach town with local character, boat trips and water sports

LEFT: Shoal Bay West, Anguilla

Getting there: Flying via Paris with Air France is the best bet.

Book it: The Inspiring Travel Company offers a seven-night beach and forest twin-centre holiday, staying at La Creole Beach Hotel & Spa for four nights and Le Jardin Malanga Hotel for three. Prices start at £1,434. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk

► PUERTO RICO

Highlights: The 2017 hurricane season hit Puerto Rico brutally hard, but much of the tourism infrastructure has now recovered. There are some tremendous beaches here, but it's the variety on offer that's so appealing. Rincón on the west coast is one of the world's great surf spots, the Bioluminescent Bay in the northeast twinkles as you kayak through it, and the Arecibo Observatory is home to the world's largest radio telescope.

But Old San Juan is the highlight. Surrounded by gorgeous castles and forts, full of cocktail bars and thoroughly photogenic, it's a great place to hang out in. The Bacardi rum factory is nearby too. **Getting there:** American Airlines, Delta and United connect via several airports in the US, while flying with Iberia via Madrid is also an option.

Book it: The Caribe Hilton in San Juan – birthplace of the pina colada – reopens after a year's renovation in December. Prices are from around £1,284 for a week. hilton.com

► DOMINICA

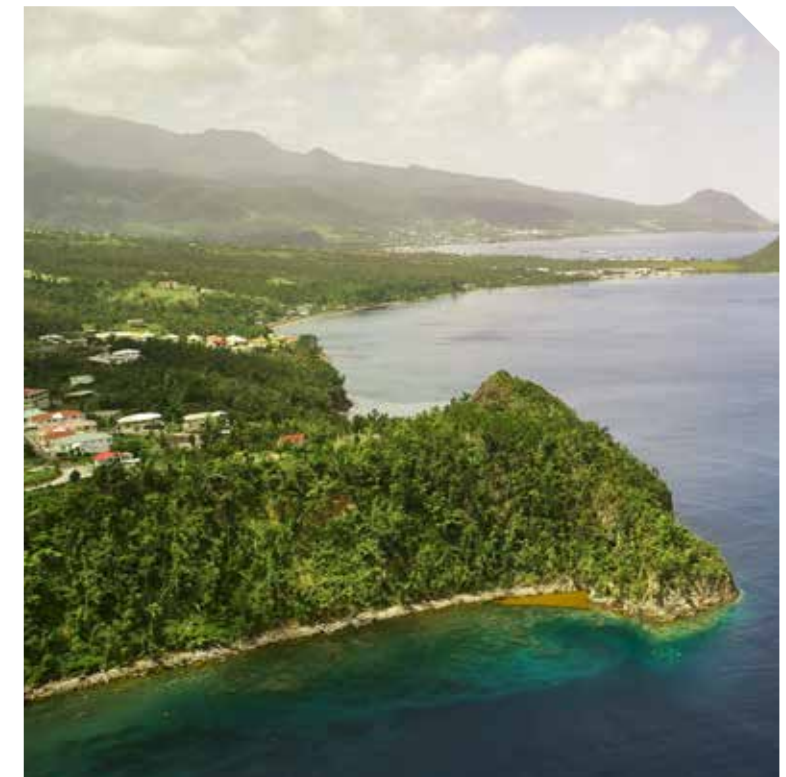
Highlights: In some ways, Dominica is the anti-Caribbean. Want big white-sand beaches? Well, you're in the wrong place. But if it's adventure you've come for, then snorkelling amid volcanic bubbles rising from sea floor vents at Champagne Beach Reef should provide it. Dominica's real 'wow' moments come inland, where several hikes – including a tough six-hour round-trip to the huge Boiling Lake – explore its forested, volcanic interior. Less taxing are tubing trips down the rivers operated by the likes of Wacky Rollers.

Dominica also has a sizeable population of indigenous

Kalinago people, and the pre-Columbian culture can be explored at recreated traditional village Kalinago Barana Aute. **Getting there:** Antigua is the gateway for most UK visitors. Regional airline Liat performs the short hop over to Dominica. **Book it:** Ramblers Walking Holidays offers a 14-night, four-island trip to Saint Lucia, Martinique, Dominica and Antigua. Prices for the Caribbean Explorer trip, including flights, start at £3,765. ramblersholidays.co.uk

► HAITI

Highlights: The Caribbean's first independent nation has often been its most troubled – but it's arguably the most culturally fascinating island. Haiti does have the spectacular Caribbean beaches – Ile-à-Vache in the south is a proper white-sand beauty – but there's much



ABOVE: Dominica



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Spotlight on... Tobago

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LEFT:
Montserrat

FAR LEFT:
The Caribe Hilton, Puerto Rico

➔ more to it than that. In the north, around Cap Haitien, the atmospheric World Heritage-listed Citadelle Laferrière mountain fortress and various rum distilleries can be found.

Bassin Bleu offers pools and waterfalls, while nearby Jacmel is home to a big arts community, where papier mâché and carving workshops can be visited.

Getting there: Delta offers connections through New York and Atlanta, while American Airlines connects via Miami.

Book it: G Adventures runs a 10-day Highlights of Haiti tour for £1,929, excluding flights. There's a strong emphasis on experiences with local people, whether learning how to make rum or preparing traditional dishes and meeting voodoo priests. gadventures.co.uk



Montserrat's charm is in its people and low-key, unsullied-by-resorts authenticity

► MONTSERRAT

Highlights: Tiny Montserrat was once one of the Caribbean's most prosperous islands, but then the Soufrière Hills volcano started erupting in 1995. It turned the southern half of the island – which is still an exclusion zone – into a giant ash field, and made capital Plymouth a modern-day Pompeii. Tourism here tends to focus on heading to the edge of the exclusion

zone to see the extraordinary results of the eruption, with building tops peeping above the ash, while the Volcano Observatory is a great place to learn about how volcanoes work. Stay a while, however, and Montserrat's charm is in its people and low-key, unsullied-by-resorts authenticity.

Getting there: Travel to Antigua with the likes of BA, Virgin Atlantic or Thomas Cook, then either take the ferry or fly across with FlyMontserrat or ABM Air.

Book it: Guesthouse-style accommodation is the norm, but Seaview Suite puts an aparthotel twist on it, with a week's stay costing from £368. seaviewsuite.com

► SAINT MARTIN/ SINT MAARTEN

Highlights: For most, this small island, split between France (Saint Martin) and the Netherlands (Sint Maarten), is visited as a cruise port of call. But stay longer, and there's a lot going for it. The northern French half is quieter and more refined, with the town of Grand Case being one of the Caribbean's great foodie hubs and Anse Marcel's white sands attracting well-heeled sun worshippers. Philipsburg, capital of the Dutch side, is more boisterous, with plenty of bars and duty-free shopping. Water sports and diving trips depart from there too.

Getting there: KLM has flights to Princess Juliana International airport from several UK airports, via Amsterdam.

Book it: Caribtours offers seven nights at the lavish Belmond La Samanna at Baie Longue, from £2,499 room-only. caribtours.co.uk

► THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Highlights: The British Virgin Islands is arguably the Caribbean's most impressive hotspot for the yachtie crowd. Well on the road to recovery from the 2017 hurricane lashing, the BVI has a strong water focus. For those without their own yacht, day cruises, snorkelling (especially around the wreck of the Rhone near Salt Island) and surfing (Josiah's Bay on Tortola is popular) are the key activities. Main island Tortola has plenty of life too, with Cane Garden Bay teeming with reggae-pumping beach bars.

Getting there: Various airlines link Tortola with other islands. Liat has connections to Antigua, Barbados and St Kitts, all of which have direct UK flights.

Book it: G Adventures shows that sailing in the BVI doesn't have to be prohibitively expensive. Its seven-day sailing adventure, hopping between secluded beaches and snorkelling spots on a catamaran, costs from £1,049, excluding flights. gadventures.co.uk



LEFT: Sint Maarten