

Small Island, Big Attractions

Discover St. Lucia's Heritage, Nature & Lively Culture

By Melanie Reffes

One of the Windward Islands, St. Lucia sits halfway down the eastern Caribbean archipelago between Martinique and St. Vincent, with the Atlantic Ocean lapping its the eastern shore and the Caribbean Sea, with the finest beaches, on the west. The island is known for its five-star resorts, rum, culinary traditions and natural beauty that includes one of the world's few drive-in volcanoes, a tropical rainforest and the dramatic Piton mountains, which soar 798 metres above the sea and are the signature image of the island.

Gros Piton and Petit Piton, or the Piton Mountains, are not only among the most recognizable landmarks in the Caribbean, they are also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nearby and close to the centuries-old town of Soufrière is the unique drive-in volcano, which is a rocky lunar landscape of bubbling mud and craters reeking of sulfur. Major hotels will book tours to both natural wonders.

While the north coast is known for high-end properties and nightlife, the south coast is closer to the natural attractions. Tours to healing Sulphur Springs, the Moule-A-Chique cliffs and the Pitons are the most popular.

Adrenalin junkies head to the southeast coast for wind and kite surfing, while history buffs take a daytrip to the sleepy fishing village of Labourie with its church built of stone and cinderblock for hurricane protection.

St. Lucia's national bird, the blue-headed Jacquot parrot makes his home in the rainforest with early morning and early evening forays through the treetops for food. Tours are offered by the Forest and Lands Department – rates on weekdays are half the price of the weekend rate. The Rain Forest Sky Ride is a new attraction that takes clients through the canopy of a forest of fig trees, magnolias and giant gommiers on an aerial tram gondola.

The 100-year-old market in the capital Castries is the largest port and chock full of vendors ready to bargain. A dish of rice and peas at the outdoor café will set you back \$4 and is worth every bite. Other shopping venues include the duty-free J.Q. Mall in Rodney Bay and Caribelle batik studio near Castries. Clients should bring their passports to get the tourist discount.

Legendary for the Friday Night Jump-up, the tiny town of Gros Islet is an authentic slice of West Indian life. With a population that is

Who Knew?

St. Lucia boasts the highest number of Nobel prize winners per capita in the world – two out of 163,000. The late Sir W. Arthur Lewis, who won the Prize for Economics in 1979, and poet Derek Walcott, who was awarded the 1992 Nobel for Literature, were born here.

predominantly Catholic, St. Joseph the Worker Church welcomes tourists to Mass. Tell clients to bring their cameras, as the ladies dressed in their Sunday finest are happy to pose. Nearby, the ship in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie sits in Rodney Bay and is another popular photo opportunity.

The southernmost town of Vieux Fort is the second largest port and closest to Hewanorra International Airport. Although not much to see, the narrow streets, neighbourhood shoppes and small restaurants are worth exploring for a

Relaxation is the hallmark of a St. Lucia vacation. Float in azure waters or try the local spas that boast island-influenced treatments.



non-touristy experience, as is the Baron Spice Factory famous for the line of condiments sold throughout the island and at the airport. Also worth a visit is nearby Choiseul, a quaint fishing village and home to the Arts and Crafts Development Centre, which was established to preserve the area's unique pottery and basket-weaving techniques.

Where to Stay

Nestled along a cliff overlooking the Caribbean Sea north of Soufriere, **Ti Kaye Village** is a true St. Lucian treasure. With a name that means "small house" in Creole, the 33 airy cottages have four-poster beds, double hammocks and outdoor showers framed by tropical plants. Cottages are centred on the main pavilion which holds a restaurant and bar and freshwater pool, all with panoramic views of the sea.

Russian-Canadian architect Nick Troubetzkoy was so captivated by the magnificent Piton Mountains that he built a monument in their honour. Taking luxe to new heights, Jade Mountain is set atop the highest point of the **Anse Chastanet Resort**, Troubetzkoy's first property and is the highest hotel in St. Lucia. A long time fixture on every Best of the Caribbean list, each of the 24 suites is unique, sharing an open-plan concept seen nowhere else in the world. As you enter the living room, it feels as if you walked right into the Pitons themselves. There is no fourth wall between the room and the view leaving the room completely exposed to the elements. Super-high ceilings and half-walls made of crushed coral create a nest of total privacy.

The Total Romance package (US \$8,852) includes the fifth night free, meals, bottle of French bubbly, tours of the island, water sports, jungle biking and a half day of sailing aboard the resort's skippered yacht. An anniversary certificate of US \$500 will be issued for use on a return visit.



St. Lucia's dramatic Gros Piton and Petit Piton, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as the country's signature image.

Next to Rodney Bay Village, the adjoining four-star **Coco Kreole** and **Coco Palm** properties, perennial favourites of British tourists, are fast catching on with Canadians looking for reasonably priced accommodations. "We support village tourism which is why we are not an all-inclusive," explained Jean St. Rose, General Manager, "Guests can charge their bills from nearby restaurants to their hotel accounts in addition to enjoying our Creole restaurant Ti Bananne."

Also in Rodney Bay and reminiscent of St. Lucia's colonial history with Georgian-style architecture, the seafront **Bay Gardens Beach Resort** is the newest sister property to Bay Gardens Inn and Bay Gardens Hotel. A four-star all-suite resort with timbered balconies, the property is arranged neatly with rooms in six blocks of three-storey buildings. The



Evidence of St. Lucia's historic past can be found in towns, villages and along country roads throughout the country.

lagoon-style pool, open-air Creole restaurant and inviting sundeck are popular with families and couples.

On the northwest coast, on the property formerly known as Cap St Lucia, the all-inclusive **Almond Smugglers Cove** is the largest resort on the island.

Five room categories range from standard and deluxe to one bedroom beachfront suites. All rooms have been refurbished with a patio, air conditioning, in-room safe, satellite television, coffee machine and mini-refrigerator. St. Lucia uses European 220 volt system; however, the rooms are outfitted with 110 volt outlets for charging Canadian cell phones.

A medley of massages, scrubs and polishes using banana leaves, coconut oil and green coffee beans is offered in the spa where trained therapists knead tired muscles with the finesse of a fine French baker. The Kids' Club keeps newborns to teenagers entertained with nature walks, calypso dancing and video games.

Tucked in a cove at the northern tip of the Island, **Le Sport Body Holiday** has earned a slew of distinctions including best Destination Spa from *Condé Nast Traveler* and one of the 60 Hot Tables for its AAA Diamond Asian-fusion Tao restaurant. Moneyed baby boomers pay top dollar for clever packages like Singles Week with an exclusive block of rooms and communal tables at Tao.

On the west coast, the new five-star **Discovery at Marigot Bay** oozes opulence in

St. Lucia

suites with cherry hardwood floors, swank Kiehl amenities and free Wi-fi. Movie fans will appreciate the Pink Snail Bar not only for the potent raspberry bellini and gigantic pink glass chandeliers, but also for its cinematic history. "Dr. Dolittle was filmed here," says owner Judith Verity, "the giant pink fiberglass snail used in the movie remained here for decades but is now missing, we think folks in the hills may be living in it." More than an hour from the international airport, the eco-chic property with the only solar powered ferry in the Caribbean overlooks Marigot Bay and is part of a \$60 million project that includes a 40-slip marina and a retail village.

The first thing clients will appreciate about the all-inclusive **Coconut Bay Resort and Spa** on the southeast coast is that it takes less than 15 minutes to get there from the airport. Formerly Club Med St Lucia, the property stood empty for two years following the events of 9/11. Rooms were refurbished and enlarged although the bathrooms are still shower-only (a throwback to the Club Med days), extensive landscaping preserved the endless rows of



Watersport enthusiasts find plenty of action in St. Lucia, particularly along the southeast coast where winds whip up the surf to perfection.

soaring coconut palms that stand guard over the Atlantic Ocean and a newly constructed Water Park is the largest in St. Lucia.

More St. Lucia

For more information on St. Lucia contact the

St. Lucia Tourist Board at 1-888-4-STLUCIA, or visit www.stlucia.org.

In Canadian Traveller:
Caribbean Round-Up, December, 2007.
Caribbean Favourites, August, 2007. †

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