



BEYOND THE BEACH

New walking trails and a celebration of heritage marks the beginning of a new season in the Caribbean

View of St Kitts from Nevis.
BELOW LEFT The pool and old sugar mill at Montpellier Plantation & Beach Resort

STEP BACK IN TIME

Dropping anchor at Nevis is like venturing into the West Indies of 200 years ago. It's a tiny island, barely seven miles long, south of St Kitts and northwest of Montserrat, that tends to be overlooked. Nevis Peak, a dormant volcano that lies at its heart, casts a fatherly eye over the green hills, dark beaches and cottages of Charlestown. This is a place of yellow bells, flamboyant trees, humming birds and Negroni-red sunsets. Once upon a time Nevis was the wealthiest island in the Caribbean thanks to its sugar plantations but when the sugar industry collapsed, mills were abandoned. Little has changed since, Nevis is like one big heritage site. Buildings sit in disrepair, wheels and cogs from sugar presses litter the landscape.

A visit to the Bath Spring House, once a playground for the rich and famous, is a must. You can still dip your toes in the hot spring water, plus there is a small museum to explore. There's also the Horatio Nelson Museum, with memorabilia



connected to the admiral who visited in the late eighteenth century and instantly fell in love.

In Charlestown, original Georgian-style two-storey buildings are preserved. The streets boast some of the best remaining examples of the colonial era in the Caribbean, with many of the grandest buildings converted into restaurants. At

Riviere House, a new non-profit restaurant-cum-art-gallery in a picturesque garden cottage, you'll be served clam chowder and saltfish cakes. Or, mingle with locals at Miss June's, who's been welcoming guests into her home for 10 years.

For somewhere to stay, look no further than Montpellier Plantation & Beach Resort (www.montpeliernevis.com). Perched on top of a hill overlooking Nevis Peak and the Caribbean Sea beyond, this little-known Relais & Châteaux hotel is the epitome of plantation chic. The site, an abandoned seventeenth-century sugar mill, is on the estate where Captain Nelson married Fanny Nisbet in 1787. Accommodation comprises 19 traditional wooden cottages with verandahs set in nine acres of rambling tropical gardens. Rooms are elegant with four-poster beds, some of which are so high, wooden steps are provided. *LB BA offers seven nights B&B from £1,269pp including return flights from Gatwick via Antigua. 0844-493 0758; ba.com/stkitts*

PHOTOGRAPH: NEVIS TOURISM AUTHORITY

LOCAL LEGENDS

Two of the Caribbean's legendary properties, Sandy Lane (www.sandylane.com) in Barbados and Curtain Bluff (www.curtainbluff.com) in Antigua, celebrate their 50th anniversaries this season. While Sandy Lane is a magnet for the rich and famous, Curtain Bluff (pictured right) leans towards the discreet. A true Antiguan stalwart, it has a classic feel: there aren't many places left in the world where couples take to the dancefloor after dinner. Owner Howard Hulford who opened the resort sadly passed away, but his wife Chelle still entertains guests in her home overlooking the bluff on a weekly basis. *BA offers seven nights all-inclusive for the price of six at Curtain Bluff from £2,359pp with flights. Valid Nov 13–Dec 18. 0844-493 0758 www.ba.com/antigua*



I SHOULD COCOA The Rabot Estate, Hotel Chocolat's plantation in St Lucia, has unveiled its new Cocoa Villas, nestled among the cocoa trees. Guests are encouraged explore the plantation, talk to the experts or even help out with the annual harvests. www.thehotelchocolat.com



MAKING TRACKS

Traversing gorges and valleys, through rainforests and past waterfalls, this December sees the unveiling of the Waitukubuli National Trail in Dominica, the only long-distance walking trail in the Caribbean. The 114-mile trail, which is divided into 14 day-long sections, will allow hikers and nature lovers to walk from north to south across the verdant island over two weeks, or take day-long marked hikes through the Morne Trois Pitons National Park (pictured), Carib villages and old French settlements. *Visit www.dominica.dm for details and accommodation along the trail.*

CULTURAL HUB

A distinctive heritage sets Barbados apart from other Caribbean destinations, and now historic Bridgetown and its Garrison have been recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The well-preserved old town is considered 'an outstanding example of British colonial architecture', with fine seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings built to a unique town plan. Explore the Garrison and other sites on the 'heritage trail', one of six new 'Barbados Trails' that crisscross the island. *Download a map at www.visitbarbados.org*

MY FAVOURITE CARIBBEAN ESCAPES

MELISSA ODABASH,
SWIMWEAR DESIGNER



“ One of my favourite places is the island of Martinique. The beach to go to is Diamant, which sits opposite a 600-foot rock whose reflections at

certain hours of the day evoke images of a precious stone, hence the name 'Diamant'. It is incredibly beautiful. Martinique is famous for its delicious Creole-influenced cuisine, but make sure you taste the island's rum which is made from 100 per cent sugar cane juice and is highly potent.

St Barths is another of my favourites. Although it tends to attract a lot of celebrities, it is very relaxed and everyone drives around in jeeps. Eden Rock is the most beautiful hotel there. It has amazing views and a great boutique. When it comes to



beaches, Saline, a long stretch of white sand and shallow turquoise water is perfect for families by day, and by night, a romantic stroll. Shopping in Gustavia is fun, you can find some cool designers there that you won't find anywhere else. When it comes to eating out, Maya's Restaurant has a warm atmosphere and serves amazing local dishes (and the best chocolate cake in the world). The best Italian restaurant is L'Isola. For more of a scene, I go to Isle de France.

My final recommendation has to be Harbour Island in the Bahamas. Pink Sands Resort is on one of the most amazing beaches I have ever been to (pictured above). The sand is pink and so, so fine. You often see horses galloping down the shore. There's a little hut that sits right on the beach which is great for long, lazy lunches. www.odabash.com ”