

Get to the point: the shark's-fin profile of Petit Piton rising high over Soufrière Bay

## Why St Lucia?



**Expert Leo Bear says:** St Lucia is a seductive choice for wanton romantics with big wallets and a thirst for adventure. In the south, the scenery is the star: cinnamon-coloured volcanic beaches, dense rainforest and the Pitons, twin precipitous peaks rising from the sea like giant primeval Shards. Strong thighs will get you up, but don't set off without a clued-up guide — one visitor ventured out solo and got stuck on a ledge for 13 hours. Other natural attractions include the world's only drive-in volcano, mud-baths and bubbling sulphur springs. Lively fish-fries will liven up your Friday evenings — our favourite takes place at Anse la Raye, a sleepy fishing village just north of Soufrière. Doors of clapboard houses are flung open, sound systems are rolled out and tables overflow with fresh steamed crab and deep-fried triggerfish. With rum sloshed around like there's no tomorrow, it's impossible not to have a good time.

### Sugar Beach, Pitons Bay

**Who'll love it:** Subscribers to Gwynnie's Goop living site — and spa queens.  
**Because:** Hillside living doesn't come more *haute* than this. Sugar Beach underwent a multi-million-dollar transformation courtesy of the Viceroy group and reopened in November 2012, delivering Caribbean luxe with a dash of daring. Matt Damon and Gwyneth Paltrow are among the A-listers who have raved about it, and its audacious metamorphosis has set tongues wagging from Mayfair to Miami.

Plantation-style villas are scattered among expanses of red cedars and Flamboyant trees, rising above a perfect crescent of soft white sand (imported from Trinidad, but who cares?). Staff in safari hats are on

hand to chauffeur folk to and from the beach or the treehouse spain motorised tuk-tuks (golf buggies simply wouldn't cut it on the steep hills).

**Travel's tip:** It's expensive to hire a car or use taxis here, but Martha's Tables, a simple plastic-awning affair, is just walking distance from the hotel, and Martha makes a mean plate of jerk pork or grilled kingfish.

**Book it:** Elegant Resorts (01244 897515, elegantresorts.co.uk) has seven nights from £2,195pp, room only, with flights.

### Anse Chastanet, north Soufrière

**Who'll love it:** Those who sleep with their windows open and nature-lovers.  
**Because:** It's one of the Caribbean's best eco-retreats, set within a 242-hectare private estate. Cottage-style rooms with basket lights and tropical murals are built into the hillside and guests here have access to one of the prettiest beaches in the Caribbean. Void of technology (no TV or radio, limited air-con), this is a place where you can properly switch off. Some of the swisher rooms are open to the elements on one side. As you lie safely tucked up under a mosquito net at night, the raw energy of the rainforest is electrifying — amorous tree frogs, cicadas and birds compete for the loudest call, and the wind and ocean provide their own percussion. It will either keep you up all night or lull you into one of the deepest sleeps you've ever had.

**Travel's tip:** Because its sister hotel Jade Mountain (further up the hill) is a sexy design hotel and the two share facilities, you can take full advantage of being the poor relative.

**Book it:** Classic Hideaways (020 8339 6888, classichideaways) has a week, room only, from £1,351pp, with flights.

### Cap Maison, Gros Islet

**Who'll love it:** Newlyweds.

**Because:** Set atop an oceanfront bluff, Cap Maison has a distinctly European

feel. In rustic Spanish-Colonial-style villas you'll find some of the most sought-after rooms on the island. If you can overlook the dated decor, a cheesy dine-à-deux deck and a naff Champagne zip-wire designed for honeymooners, you're likely to have a right royal time. Some rooms come with pools and roof terraces overlooking a small, golden beach, and on a clear day, you can see all the way to Martinique.

**Travel's tip:** For a night out, it has to be Delirius, in Rodney Bay, for a cocktail made by mixologist Alva Preville.

**Book it:** Cox & Kings (020 7873 5000, coxandkings.co.uk) has seven nights' B&B from £1,645pp, including flights.

### Capella Marigot Bay

**Who'll love it:** Large, multi-generational groups.

**Because:** The hotel reopened this September with a new lease of life. A lot of dosh was thrown at the update and it has emerged looking splendid with swathes of decking, cocoon-style daybeds and splendid suites. The two- and three-bedroom ones come with their own kitchens, so are ideal for families, while the reception has the lowdown on all manner of kid-friendly day-trips. Those who like a proper tittle should hit the hotel's Rum Cave, a modern cellar lined with exposed rock, or try a Piña Colada at the sexy swim-up pool bar. The hotel may not have its own private beach, but it has mangroves ripe for exploration, and a free five-minute shuttle across the water brings you to a perfectly good swimming beach. Best of all, Capella Marina, a quaint old harbour with a backdrop of palm trees, delivers plenty of nautical eye-candy for breezy evening strolls along the boardwalk.

**Travel's tip:** Ask for a room on the second or third floor — they have the best views of the bay.

**Book it:** Caribtours (020 77510660, caribtours.co.uk) has seven nights from £1,595pp, B&B, including flights. >