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The Caribbean Islands

See "The Eastern Caribbean" map on the inside back cover

Frommer's®

Caribbean 2010

by Christina Paulette Colón, Alexis Lipsitz Flippin, John Marino, Darwin Porter & Danforth Prince

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HOW TO CONTACT US

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

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FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **eight feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

Finds	Special finds—those places only insiders know about
Fun Facts	Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
Kids	Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
Moments	Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
Overrated	Places or experiences not worth your time or money
Tips	Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
Value	Great values—where to get the best deals
Warning!	Warning—traveler's advisories are usually in effect

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE American Express
DC Diners Club
DISC Discover
MC MasterCard
V Visa

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What's New in the Caribbean

ANGUILLA This tiny island continues to blossom with first-rate restaurants, and it is quickly becoming one of the gourmet spots of the Caribbean. Sublime international dishes and harmonious flavors are found at the **Veya Restaurant,** Sandy Ground (✆ **264/498-8392**), where diners will enjoy a top-rated cuisine by romantic candlelight on an open-air veranda as live music fills the air. See p. 59.

ANTIGUA The best restaurant on island, **The Pavilion,** 7 Pavilion Dr., Coolidge (✆ **268/480-6800**), is surprisingly located in the dreary airport area. This is the domain of Antigua's most talented chef, Andrew Knoll, who serves an imaginative cuisine using quality ingredients. The setting is elegant and the dishes are market fresh, backed up with more than 8,000 bottles in the wine cellar. See p. 79.

ARUBA Aruba is a veritable mecca of fine dining in the Caribbean, and one of the island's best restaurateurs has opened a new venue. If the idea of fine dining while luxuriating on white beds or at intimate tables shrouded in gauzy drapes sounds romantic, make a pilgrimage to **Screaming Eagle Restaurant-Lounge** (✆ **297/587-8021**). For some late-night revelry favored by hip Dutch and Aruban locals, the newest hot spot is **Café Rembrant,** South Beach Center Palm Beach 55 (✆ **297/586-4747;** www.rembrandtaruba.com).

BARBADOS An affordable option, **Sea Foam Haciendas,** Worthing, Christ Church (✆ **246/435-7380**), has opened on a stretch of white sand on the South Coast of this island. The suites here have balconies, ocean views, and well-equipped kitchens. A maximum of six persons are permitted in each suite, which makes this a family favorite in the making. See p. 131.

BEQUIA (ST. VINCENT) **Firefly Hotel Bequia,** at Spring Bay (✆ **784/458-3414;** www.fireflybequia.com), rests on a 12-hectare (30-acre) 18th-century sugar plantation. It lies 3km (1 3/4 miles) from Port Elizabeth, the small capital, in a lush setting of fruit trees and bananas. Rooms are constructed on a hillside and are beautifully furnished in colonial-plantation style. See p. 640.

BONAIRE On the outskirts of Rincón, a large white building marks the spot of a new and not-to-be-missed highlight of any island tour: **Magazina di Rei** (✆ **599/786-2101**), or the "King's Warehouse," was once used to store provisions for slaves. It has been restored and transformed into a small museum and cultural center that preserves and depicts the culture, history, architecture, and traditions of early Bonaire.

CURAÇAO The historic Rif Fort at the mouth of the harbor in Wilemstad has long awaited the opening of the **Renaissance Curacao Resort and Casino** (✆ **800/114-8079** or 599/9-435-5000; www.renaissancecuracao.com). The rainbow-hued lobby and adjacent casino complement the host of new shops and restaurants in the fort and liven up this otherwise

sleepy part of town. The innovative infinity beach perfectly softens the urban setting and effectively creates the illusion that you could swim out into the Caribbean sea just beyond the edge of the fort.

DOMINICA About an hour's drive northeast of Roseau, **Calibishie Lodges,** Calibishie Main Road, Calibishie (✆ **767/445-8537**), is one of this lush island's latest retreats. Units are in small lodges opening onto a hillside and panoramic views, and each is well furnished and a self-contained apartment. Everyone from honeymooners to divers, even bird-watchers, will be lured to this isolated, tranquil choice. See p. 259.

GRAND CAYMAN The privately owned oceanfront condos at the **Aqua Bay Club** (✆ **800/825-8703**) lie at the far end of the fabled Seven Mile Beach and have been recently restored. Short-term rentals can be arranged, and most of the well-furnished accommodations come with two bathrooms and two bedrooms. Each unit also has a well-equipped kitchen, and guests can also cook and barbecue on grills overlooking the beach and the coconut palms. See p. 206.

GRENADA An eco-friendly retreat, **Paradise Bay Villa Resort** (✆ **473/405-8888**), has opened at Paradise Bay on 3.2 lush hectares (8 acres), with forest trails branching off in all directions. It's an all-inclusive place with fine island cooking based roughly on French recipes. Bedrooms are simply but comfortably furnished with mosquito netting draped over the beds. See p. 313.

GUADELOUPE At Anse-Bertrand, close to the northernmost point of the island, **Les Tables d'Hotel au Jardin de l'Eden,** Rue Toussain Louverture (✆ **590/22-16-66**), serves top-rate French and Caribbean cuisine on a big terrace in a landscaped garden. The catch of the day is one of the most reliable items on the ever-changing menu. The inn also rents a small number of simply furnished bedrooms that are among the least expensive on island. See p. 339.

JOST VAN DYKE (B.V.I.) More and more divers are discovering the underwater wonder world of this remote island. The big attraction is on the north coast of Little Jost Van Dyke, with its much-photographed Twin Towers, a pair of towering rock formations. A dive operator, **Jost Van Dyke Scuba & B.V.I. Eco-Tours,** Great Harbour (✆ **284/495-0271**), is now operating to meet this new demand. They have a complete selection of scuba gear for rent and also offer all sorts of watersports and fishing equipment. See p. 195.

MARTINIQUE Serious foodies are making their way to **Le Brédas,** Entrée Presqu'ile, Rivière Blanche, Saint Joseph (✆ **596/57-65-52**), on the outskirts of Fort-de-France, the capital. Some of the island's best French and Martiniquais cuisine is offered here in this somewhat remote setting, a white-walled Créole house surrounded by verdant growth. Ever had foie gras with green bananas? Unusual and market-fresh dishes await you, and the drive to reach the place is scenic as well. See p. 424.

In another development, an isolated retreat has opened at **Habitation Anse Couleuvre,** Anse Couleuvre, Prêcheur (✆ **596/52-97-74**), a small-scale manor house on the site of a former cocoa plantation. It's perfect for getting a view of what life was like in Martinique's agrarian and colonial past. See p. 440.

JAMAICA **Tower Isle,** Route A3, Ocho Rios (✆ **800/268-7537** or 876/975-4271), built in the 1950s, was Jamaica's first year-round resort. It quickly became a celebrity favorite before going into a decline. In 2008, after a $25-million renovation, it has made a spectacular comeback, with deluxe oceanfront accommodations and five gourmet restaurants. Suites and doubles at this couples-only resort are spacious and

romantically decorated. A launch takes you over to the resort's private island, where you can bask in the buff. See p. 392.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC The biggest news coming out of the entire Caribbean Basin is the development of **Cap Cana** in Punta Cana (www.capcana.com), a luxurious compound of condos, villas, a casino, polo grounds, three Jack Nicklaus–designed golf courses, and several hotels, including a Trump Organization property and a Ritz-Carlton.

Bill and Hillary Clinton—or so it is rumored—are said to have recently purchased property here. The entire community, amazingly, will cover an area the size of Manhattan, opening onto 4.8km (3 miles) of beachfront.

The first of the Cap Cana resorts to open is **Sanctuary Cap Cana Golf & Spa** (✆ **888/999-6461**), a five-star resort constructed in a Spanish-colonial style. The facilities include 176 luxurious suites, as well as Punta Espada (a Jack Nicklaus–designed golf course), a private beach, and a luxurious spa, plus 8 theme restaurants and 11 bars. See p. 280.

A new luxury resort, **Aqua Resort & Spa,** has opened at Uvero Alto (✆ **866/757-AQUA** [757-2782]; www.aquaresort.com), 24 miles from Punta Cana. Already a family favorite, it offers junior suites along with two- or three-bedroom units. Some villas, for example, can house as many as four adults and three children comfortably, or else six adults. The least expensive rental, a junior suite, has such extras as a deep soaking tub and a spacious walk-in closet, plus 24-hour room service and twice-daily maid service. See p. 279.

SABA Reached along a rough, twisting mountain road, **Rainforest Restaurant,** in the Eolodge Rendez-vous, Crispeen Track Windwardside (✆ **599/416-3888**), serves some of the freshest produce on the island, with outdoor seating in an almost junglelike setting. From the curry coconut shrimp to the almond-crusted snapper, the cook prepares imaginative West Indian–style delicacies using plenty of fresh fruit. See p. 506.

ST. BARTHÉLEMY **Le Sereno,** Grand Cul-de-Sac (✆ **888/LESERENO** [537-3736] or 590/29-83-00), has blossomed into an intimate, all-suite hotel and a celebrity favorite. The look comes from the famed Parisian designer Christian Liaigre, who has brought a super-chic taste to the place—luxurious living where style and serenity combine. See p. 517.

ST. CROIX (U.S.V.I.) On 2.8 hectares (7 acres) of beachfront, **The Palms at Pelican Cove,** 4126 La Grande Princesse (✆ **800/548-4460**), is the latest reincarnation of the various resorts that have stood at this spot 5km (3 miles) northwest of Christiansted. With its inviting Caribbean-style decor, it's a first-class retreat, with private balconies opening onto ocean views. Scuba lessons are also available. See p. 753.

ST. EUSTATIUS Ten exotic wooden bungalows now house guests at **Statia Lodge,** White Wall, Oranjestad (✆ **599/318-1900**), near the capital town of Oranjestad. The views here are among the most panoramic on island. Cottages are cozy and attractively furnished with teakwood pieces and tiles, and each comes with a patio. There's also an outdoor freshwater pool, and a scooter is included in double rentals, a car for three or four guests sharing a bungalow.

ST. JOHN (U.S.V.I.) Much of the U.S. Virgin Islands have been a bit sleepy in development because of bad economic times. However, some new eateries have opened on the smallest Virgin. These include **Rhumb Lines,** Meada's Plaza, Cruz Bay (✆ **340/776-0303**), serving a fusion of Caribbean and Pacific Rim cuisine. In the heart of Cruz Bay, the restaurant serves some of the more tantalizing dishes on the

island, including such specialties as mahi-mahi in a banana leaf with a ginger ed banana beurre blanc. See p. 741.

In another dev elopment, **Sweet Plantains Restaurant & Rum Bar** has opened at 16118 Little P lantation at Coral B ay (✆ **340/777-1653**). Its combined Caribbean and C réole cuisine is ser ved alfresco in a tr opical ambience in a sea-bor dering courtyard. F resh fr uits often go into the sauces and dishes, including sw eet mango purée or a guav a-based barbecue sauce. See p. 742.

ST. KITTS The old Jack Tar Village lives again as the **Royal St. Kitts Hotel & Casino** at Frigate Bay (✆ **866/607-6242**). Massively overhauled, this 282-r oom kid-friendly property is very sports and fitness oriented. It lies in the southeast peninsula near beaches that fr ont both the A tlantic and the Caribbean Sea. See p. 544.

ST. L UCIA Fully r estored and better than ev er, **Body Holiday at LeSPORT** has opened at Cap Estate, G ros I sleet, outside Castries (✆ **758/450-8551**). I f you want a spa holiday , there is no better address in the southern Caribbean. A first-rate beach r esort, this is an adults-only retreat in a tropical setting. Greens fees are free at an adjacent golf club . See p. 573.

TURKS & CAICOS H urricane Ike mowed through **Grand Turk** in early September 2008, destr oying or damaging 95% of the buildings on the island. (**I**t also made a mess of South Caicos.) Rebuilding efforts w ere in full swing in the winter 2009 season, with most r esorts up and running and the G rand Turk Cruise Center back in business after losing much of its landscaping and beach cabanas to the storm. One of Grand Turk's most passionate suppor ters, **Colin Brooker,** o wner of the **Island House** inn, died just days after the storm passed.

On P rovidenciales, H urricane I ke caused minimal damage to most of the island, but the legendary **Conch Farm** was hit har d and has closed until fur ther notice. O n the dev elopment side, sev eral new r esorts opened for business on or around G race B ay, among them the **Regent Grand,** the **West Bay Club, Windsong,** and **Grace Bay Suites.**

1

The Best of the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, you can hike through national parks and scuba dive along underwater mountains. But if your idea of the perfect island vacation is to plunk yourself down on the sands with a frosted drink in hand, you can do that, too. Whether you want a veranda with a view of the sea or a plantation house set in a field of sugar cane, this chapter will help you choose the vacation that best suits your needs.

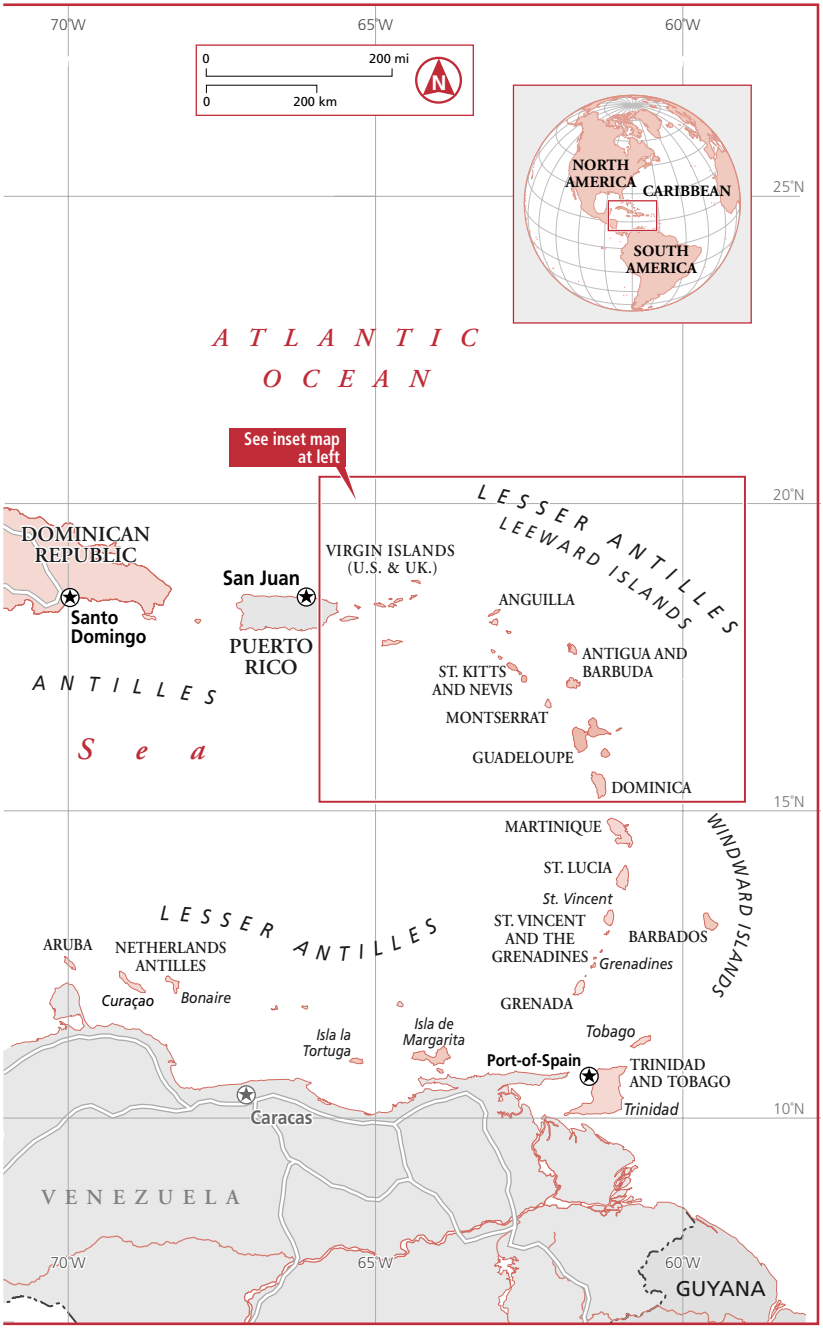
For a thumbnail portrait of each island, see "The Islands in Brief," in chapter 2.

1 THE BEST BEACHES

Good beaches with soul-warming sun, crystal-clear waters, and fragrant sea air can be found on virtually every island of the Caribbean, with the possible exceptions of Saba (which has rocky shores) and Dominica (where the few beaches have dramatically black sands that absorb the hot sun).

- **Shoal Bay** (Anguilla): This luscious stretch of silvery sand helped put Anguilla on the world-tourism map. Snorkelers are drawn to the schools of iridescent fish that dart among the coral gardens offshore. You can take the trail walk from Old Ta to little-known Katouche Beach, which provides perfect snorkeling and is also a prime site for a beach picnic under shade trees. See chapter 3.
- **Antigua:** Legend has it that there is a beach here for every day of the year. Antiguans claim, with justifiable pride, that their two best are Dickenson Bay, in the northwest corner of the island, and Half Moon Bay, which stretches for a white sandy mile along the eastern coast. Most major hotels open directly onto a good beach, so chances are good yours will be built on or near a strip of sand. See chapter 4.
- **Palm Beach** (Aruba): This superb white-sand beach put Aruba on the tourist map. Several publications, including *Condé Nast Traveler,* have hailed it as one of the 12 best beaches in the world. It's likely to be crowded in winter, but for swimming, sailing, or fishing, it's idyllic. See chapter 5.
- **The Gold Coast** (Barbados): Some of the finest beaches in the Caribbean lie along the so-called Gold Coast of Barbados (now often called the Platinum Coast), site of some of the swankiest deluxe hotels in the Northern Hemisphere. Our favorites include Paynes Bay, Brandon's Beach, Paradise Beach, and Brighton Beach—all open to the public. See chapter 6.
- **Cane Garden Bay** (Tortola, British Virgin Islands): One of the Caribbean's most spectacular stretches, Cane Garden Bay has 2km (1 1/4 miles) of white sand and is a jogger's favorite. It's a much better choice than the more

The Caribbean Islands


70°W
65°W
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0
200 mi
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N
NORTH AMERICA
CARIBBEAN
SOUTH AMERICA
25°N
ATLANTIC OCEAN
See inset map at left
LESSER ANTILLES
LEEWARD ISLANDS
20°N
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Santo Domingo
San Juan
PUERTO RICO
VIRGIN ISLANDS (U.S. & UK.)
ANGUILLA
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
MONTSERRAT
GUADELOUPE
DOMINICA
ANTILLES
Sea
15°N
MARTINIQUE
ST. LUCIA
St. Vincent
ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
Grenadines
BARBADOS
WINDWARD ISLANDS
LESSER ANTILLES
ARUBA
NETHERLANDS ANTILLES
Curaçao
Bonaire
GRENADA
Isla la Tortuga
Isla de Margarita
Tobago
Port-of-Spain
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Trinidad
Caracas
10°N
VENEZUELA
70°W
65°W
60°W
GUYANA

crowded Magens Bay beach on neighboring St. Thomas. See chapter 8.

- **Seven Mile Beach** (Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands): It's really about 9km (5½ miles) long, but who's counting? Lined with condos and plush resorts, this beach is known for its array of watersports and its translucent aquamarine waters. Australian pines dot the background, and the average winter temperature of the water is a perfect 80°F (27°C). See chapter 9.
- **The Dominican Republic:** There are two great options here: the beaches of resort-riddled Punta Cana at the easternmost tip of the island, or those at Playa Dorada along the northern coast, which fronts the Atlantic. Punta Cana is a 30km (19-mile) strip of oyster-white sand set against a backdrop of palm trees, and Playa Dorada is filled with beaches of white or beige sands. See chapter 12.
- **Grand Anse Beach** (Grenada): This 3km (1¾-mile) beach is reason enough to go to Grenada. Although the island has some 45 beaches, most with white sand, this is the fabled one, and rightly so. There's enough space and so few visitors that you'll probably find a spot just for yourself. The sugary sands of Grand Anse extend into deep waters far offshore. Most of the island's best hotels are within walking distance. See chapter 13.
- **Seven Mile Beach** (Negril, Jamaica): In the northwestern section of the island, this beach stretches for 11km (6¾ miles) along the sea and is backed by some of the most hedonistic resorts in the Caribbean. Not for the conservative, the beach also contains some nudist sections, along with bare-all Booby Cay offshore. See chapter 15.
- **Diamond Beach** (Martinique): This bright-white beach stretches for about 10km (6¼ miles), much of it developed. It faces a rocky offshore island, Diamond Rock, which has uninhabited shores. See chapter 16.
- **Luquillo Beach** (Puerto Rico): Luquillo, 48km (30 miles) east of San Juan, is a vast sandy beach opening onto a crescent-shaped bay edged by a coconut grove. Coral reefs protect the crystal-clear lagoon from the often rough Atlantic waters that can buffet the northern coast. Much photographed because of its white sands, Luquillo has a snack bar, picnic areas with changing rooms, lockers, and showers. See chapter 17.
- **St-Jean Beach** (St. Barthélemy): A somewhat narrow golden-sand beach, St-Jean is the gem of the island, reminiscent of the French Riviera (though you're supposed to keep your top on). Reefs protect the beach, making it ideal for swimming. See chapter 19.
- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** Take your pick. This island, divided about equally between France and the Netherlands, has 39 white sandy beaches. Our favorites include Dawn Beach, Mullet Bay Beach, Maho Bay Beach, and Great Bay Beach on the Dutch side. Orient Beach is another standout—not because of its sands, but because of the nudists. See chapter 23.
- **Canouan** (The Grenadines): Most of the other beaches recommended in this section may be crowded in winter. But if you're looking for an idyllic, secluded stretch of perfect white sand, head for the remote and tiny island of Canouan, one of the pearls of The Grenadines, a string of islands lying south of its parent, St. Vincent. You'll have the beaches and the crystal-clear waters to yourself, even in winter. See chapter 24.
- **Tobago:** For your Robinson Crusoe holiday in the southern Caribbean, head to the little island of Tobago. Even Trinidadians fly here on weekends to enjoy the beach life. It doesn't get any better than Pigeon Point, a long coral beach on the northwestern coast. Other good beaches on Tobago include Back

Bay (site of an old coconut plantation) and Man-O-War Bay, with a beautiful natural harbor and long stretch of sand. See chapter 25.

- **Grace Bay Beach** (Providenciales, Turks and Caicos): These 20km (12 miles) of pale sands are the pride of Provo; the beach has been named the "World's Leading Beach" at the World Travel Awards for 4 years running. It's such a spectacular setting that increasing numbers of resorts have sprung up along the shore. A couple of miles out from the northern shore, the beach is fringed by a reef with fabulous snorkeling. See chapter 26.
- **Trunk Bay** (St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands): Protected by the U.S. National Park Service, this beach is one of the Caribbean's most popular. A favorite with cruise-ship passengers, it's known for its underwater snorkeling trail, where markers guide you along the reef just off the white sands; you're sure to see a gorgeous rainbow of tropical fish. See chapter 27.

2 THE BEST SNORKELING

The Virgin Islands offer some particularly outstanding sites, but there are many other great places for snorkeling in the Caribbean.

- **Antigua:** This is a snorkeler's dream. Most of its lovely beaches open onto clear, calm waters populated by rainbow-hued tropical fish. The marine life offshore is particularly dense, including colorful sea anemones. The rich types of different elk and brain coral make snorkeling particularly rewarding. See chapter 4.
- **Bonaire Marine Park** (Bonaire): All the attributes that make Bonaire a world-class diving destination apply to its snorkeling, too. Snorkelers can wade from the shores off their hotels to the reefs and view an array of coral and colorful fish. In particular, the reefs just off Klein Bonaire receive rave reviews. See chapter 7.
- **Stingray City** (Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands): Stingray City is an easy 4m (13-ft.) diving site that can also be seen while snorkeling. It's an extraordinary experience to meet the dozens of tame, gentle stingrays that glide around you in the warm, crystal-clear waters. See chapter 9.
- **Curaçao Underwater Marine Park** (Curaçao): In contrast to Curaçao's arid terrain, the marine life that rings the island is rich and spectacular. The best-known snorkeling sites, in the Curaçao Underwater Marine Park, stretch for 20km (12 miles) along Curaçao's southern coastline, and there are many other highly desirable sites as well. Sunken ships, gardens of hard and soft coral, and millions of fish are a snorkeler's treat. See chapter 10.
- **St. Martin:** The best snorkeling on the island lies on the French side, where the government religiously protects the calm waters, which are populated with schools of brilliantly colored fish. Find a tiny cove and explore the shallow reefs along its shores, especially in the northeastern underwater nature reserve. See chapter 23.
- **The Grenadines:** Every island here offers great snorkeling possibilities right off magnificent white-sand beaches. In most places you'll have the waters to yourself. One of the best is the reef stretching for 1.5km (1 mile) along the island of Canouan, where waters are filled with beautiful brain coral and vibrant fish. The snorkeling is also good at Palm Island and Petit St. Vincent. See chapter 24.
- **Tobago:** Enormous colonies of marine life inhabit the shallow, sun-dappled

waters off the coastline facing Venezuela. Buccoo Reef on Tobago is especially noteworthy, and many local entrepreneurs offer snorkeling cruises. See chapter 25.

- **Provo** (Turks and Caicos): Although this island is known primarily as one of the world's best dive sites, it also provides a number of snorkeling possibilities. The government has established snorkel trails at Smith's Reef and Bight Reef, right off of Provo's spectacular Grace Bay Beach. These reefs provide easy access into the fragile but stunningly beautiful world of coral gardens, the most dramatic in the vast area immediately south of The Bahamas. See chapter 26.
- **Buck Island** (St. Croix, U.S.V.I.): More than 250 species of fish, as well as a variety of sponges, corals, and crustaceans, have been found at this 340-hectare (840-acre) island and reef system, 3km (1 3/4 miles) off St. Croix's north shore. The reef is strictly protected by the U.S. National Park Service. See chapter 27.
- **Cane Bay** (St. Croix): One of the best diving and snorkeling sites on St. Croix is off this breezy north-shore beach. On a clear day, you can swim out 140m (459 ft.) and see the Cane Bay Wall that drops off dramatically to deep waters below. Multicolored fish, elkhorn, and brain coral abound. See chapter 27.
- **Trunk Bay** (St. John): Trunk Bay's self-guided 205m-long (672-ft.) trail has large underwater signs that identify species of coral and other items of interest. The beach has showers, changing rooms, equipment rentals, and a lifeguard. See chapter 27.
- **Haulover Bay** (St. John): A favorite with locals, this small bay is rougher than Leinster and often deserted. The snorkeling is dramatic, with ledges, walls, nooks, and sandy areas set close together. At this spot, only about 180m (590 ft.) of land separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. See chapter 27.
- **Coki Point Beach** (St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.): On the north shore of St. Thomas, this beach offers excellent snorkeling, especially around the coral ledges near Coral World's underwater tower, a favorite with cruise-ship passengers. See chapter 27.

3 THE BEST DIVING

All the major islands offer diving trips, lessons, and equipment, but here are the top picks.

- **Bonaire:** The highly accessible reefs that surround Bonaire are pristine, and the island's environmentally conscious diving industry ensures they will remain that way. Created from volcanic eruptions, the island is an underwater mountain, with fringe reefs right off the beach of every hotel on any part of the island. See chapter 7.
- **Virgin Gorda** (B.V.I.): Many divers plan their entire vacations around exploring the famed wreck of the HMS *Rhone,* off Salt Island. This royal mail steamer, which went down in 1867, is the most celebrated diving site in the Caribbean. See chapter 8.
- **Grand Cayman:** This is a world-class diving destination. There are 34 dive operators on Grand Cayman (with 5 more on Little Cayman, plus 3 on Cayman Brac). A full range of professional diving services is available, including equipment sales, rentals, and repairs; instruction at all levels; underwater photography; and video schools. See chapter 9.
- **Puerto Rico:** With the continental shelf surrounding it on three sides,

Puerto Rico has an abundance of coral reefs, caves, sea walls, and trenches for divers of all experience levels to explore. Mona Island, 64km (40 miles) west of the city of Mayagüez in western Puerto Rico, is the Caribbean version of the Galápagos Islands. Its waters are among the cleanest in Puerto Rico, with horizontal visibility at times exceeding 61m (200 ft.). In southern Puerto Rico, the continental shelf drops off precipitously several miles off the southern coast, producing a dramatic wall 32km (20 miles) long and teeming with marine life.

- **Saba:** Islanders can't brag about its beaches, but Saba is blessed with some of the Caribbean's richest marine life. It's one of the premier diving locations in the Caribbean, with 38 official diving sites. The unusual setting includes underwater lava flows, black sand, large strands of black coral, millions of fish, and underwater mountaintops submerged under 27m (89 ft.) of water. See chapter 18.
- **Turks and Caicos:** These islands provide a rich assortment of relatively unexplored underwater sites, including sea lanes where boaters and divers often spot whales from January to March. A collection of unusual underwater wrecks includes the HMS *Endymion,* which sank during a storm in 1790. Miles of reefs house myriad kinds of colorful marine life. Right off Grand Turk, experienced divers love the many miles of "drop-off" diving, where the sea walls plunge into the unchartered depths of blue holes more than 2,100m (6,888 ft.) below sea level. As you descend, you'll see colonies of black coral, rare forms of anemone, purple sponges, stunning gorgonian, endless forms of coral, and thousands of fish. See chapter 26.
- **St. Croix:** Increasingly known as a top diving destination, St. Croix hasn't yet overtaken Grand Cayman but has a lot going for it. Beaches, reefs, wrecks, nighttime dives, wall dives—they're all here. The highlight is the underwater trails of the national park at Buck Island, off St. Croix's mainland. Other desirable sites include the drop-offs and coral canyons at Cane Bay and Salt River. Davis Bay is the location of the 3,600m-deep (11,808-ft.) Puerto Rico Trench, the fifth-deepest body of water on earth. See chapter 27.

4 THE BEST SAILING

Virtually every large-scale hotel in the Caribbean provides small sailboats (most often Sunfish, Sailfish, and small, one-masted catamarans) for its guests. For larger craft, the almost-ideal sailing conditions in the Virgin Islands and The Grenadines come instantly to mind. These two regions offer many options for dropping anchor at secluded coves surrounded by relatively calm waters. Both areas are spectacular, but whereas the Virgin Islands have more dramatic, mountainous terrain, The Grenadines offer insights into island cultures little touched by the modern world.

Other places to sail in the Caribbean include Antigua, Barbados, St. Martin, and the French-speaking islands. But if you plan on a lot of sailing, know that the strongest currents and biggest waves are usually on the northern and eastern sides of most islands—the Atlantic (as opposed to the Caribbean) side.

- **The Grenadines:** Boating is a way of life in The Grenadines, partly because access to many of the tiny remote islands is difficult or impossible by airplane. One of the most prominent local charter agents is **Nicholson Yacht**

Charters (✆ **800/662-6066** in the U.S., or 617/661-0555; www.yachtvacations.com), headquartered in nearby St. Vincent. On Bequia, Mustique, Petit St. Vincent, and Union Island, all the hotels can put you in touch with local entrepreneurs who rent sailing craft. See chapter 24 for more details.

- **The British Virgin Islands:** Perhaps because of their well-developed marina facilities (and those of the nearby U.S. Virgins), the Virgin Islands receive the lion's share of devoted yachties. The reigning capital for sailing is Tortola, the largest island of the British Virgins. On-site are about 300 well-maintained sailing craft available for bareboat rentals and perhaps 100 charter yachts. The largest of the Caribbean's yacht-chartering services is **The Moorings** (✆ **888/952-8420** or 284/494-2331; www.moorings.com). On the island of Virgin Gorda, in the British Virgin Islands, the best bet for both boat rentals and accommodations, as well as for a range of instruction, is the **Bitter End Yacht Club** (✆ **800/872-2392** in the U.S., or 284/494-2746; www.beyc.com). The outfits in this paragraph are described more fully in chapter 8.
- **The U.S. Virgin Islands:** Some of the biggest charter business in the Caribbean is conducted on St. Thomas, especially at **American Yacht Harbor,** Red Hook (✆ **340/775-6454;** www.igy-americanyachtharbor.com), which offers bareboat and fully crewed charters. Other reliable rental agents include **Charteryacht League,** at Flagship (✆ **800/524-2061** in the U.S., or 340/774-3944; www.vicl.org). On St. Croix, boating is less essential to the local economy than it is on St. Thomas or in the British Virgins, so if you're taking a Virgin Islands sailing trip, plan accordingly. The U.S. Virgin Islands are covered in chapter 27.

5 THE BEST GOLF COURSES

Some of the world's most famous golf architects, including Robert Trent Jones (both Jr. and Sr.), Pete Dye, and Gary Player, have designed challenging courses in the Caribbean.

- **Tierra del Sol Golf Course** (Aruba; ✆ **297/586-0978;** www.tierradelsol.com): Robert Trent Jones, Jr., has designed an 18-hole, par-71, 6,811-yard course that is one of the grandest in the southern Caribbean. On the northwest coast of this arid, cactus-studded island, the course takes in Aruba's indigenous flora, including the divi-divi tree. See p. 112.
- **Teeth of the Dog** and **The Links,** Casa de Campo (Dominican Republic; ✆ **809/523-8800**): Teeth of the Dog is one of designer Pete Dye's masterpieces. Seven holes are set adjacent to the sea, whereas the other 11 are confoundedly labyrinthine. The resort also has a second golf course, The Links, which some claim is even more difficult. See p. 276.
- **Golf de St-François** (Guadeloupe; ✆ **590/88-41-87**): Six of its 18 holes are ringed with water traps, the winds are devilishly unpredictable, and the par is a sweat-inducing 71. This fearsome course displays the wit and skill of its designer, Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Most of the staff is multilingual, and because the course is owned by the local municipality, it's a lot less snobby than you might expect. See p. 348.
- **The Tryall Club** (Montego Bay, Jamaica; ✆ **876/956-5660**): This is the finest golf course on an island known

for its tricky breezes. The site occupied by the Tryall Club was once the home of one of Jamaica's best-known sugar plantations, the only remnant of which is a ruined waterwheel. The promoters of Johnnie Walker Scotch, who know a lot about golfing, use this place for their most prestigious competition. In winter, the course is usually open only to guests of the Tryall Club. See p. 376.

- **Cinnamon Hill Ocean Course** (Rose Hall, Jamaica; ✆ **876/953-2650**): This is one of the top five courses in the world, even though it faces tough competition in Montego Bay. The signature hole is 8, which doglegs onto a promontory and a green that thrusts about 180m (590 ft.) into the sea. The back 9, however, are the most scenic and most challenging, rising into steep slopes and deep ravines on Mount Zion. See p. 375.
- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (Nevis; ✆ **800/332-3442** in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): We consider this our personal favorite in all of the Caribbean. It was carved out of a coconut plantation and tropical rainforest in the 1980s, and its undulating beauty is virtually unequaled. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., the course begins at sea level, rises to a point midway up the slopes of Mount Nevis, and then slants gracefully back down near the beachfront clubhouse. Electric carts carry golfers through a maze of well-groomed paths, some of which skirt steep ravines. See p. 554.

6 THE BEST TENNIS FACILITIES

- **Curtain Bluff** (Antigua; ✆ **888/289-9898** in the U.S., or 268/462-8400): Small, select, and carefully run by people who love tennis, this is also the annual site of a well-known spring tournament. The courts are set in a low-lying valley. See p. 82.
- **Casa de Campo** (Dominican Republic; ✆ **800/877-3643** or 809/523-8698): The facilities here include 13 clay courts (10 are lit, and 2 are ringed with stadium seating), 4 all-weather Laykold courts, a resident pro, ball machines, and tennis pros who are usually available to play with guests. During midwinter, residents and clients of Casa de Campo have first crack at court times. See p. 276.
- **Half Moon** (Montego Bay, Jamaica; ✆ **876/953-2211**): This resort sprawls over hundreds of acres, with about a dozen tennis courts and at least four squash and/or racquetball courts. Jamaica has a strong, British-based affinity for tennis, and Half Moon keeps the tradition alive. See p. 377.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ✆ **800/255-3881** in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Hailed as having the best tennis facilities in the Virgin Islands, this resort hosts several tournaments every year. There are eight all-weather Laykold courts, two of which are illuminated at night; there's also a pro shop. Nonguests can play here for a fee. See p. 751.
- **Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa** (St. Thomas; ✆ **877/999-3223** or 340/777-7100): This resort offers the first stadium tennis court in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with a capacity of 220 spectators. In addition, it has four Laykold courts, each of which is lit for night play. There's an on-site pro shop, and lessons are available. See p. 711.

7 THE BEST PLACES TO HONEYMOON

More and more couples are exchanging their vows in the Caribbean. Many resorts will arrange everything from the preacher to the flowers, so we've included in the following list some outfits that provide wedding services. For more information about the various options and the legal requirements for marriages on some of the more popular Caribbean islands, see chapter 2.

- **Cap Juluca** (Anguilla; ✆ **888/858-5822** in the U.S., or 264/497-6666; www.capjuluca.com): A unique postmodern design and a thrillingly beautiful beach are the highlights of this 72-hectare (178-acre) resort. It resembles a Saharan Casbah, with domed villas that seem to float against the scrubland and azure sky. It's an extremely stylish setting for romance. More than any other resort on Anguilla, Cap Juluca affords privacy: In their secluded villas, honeymooners can enjoy private pools and huge tubs for two. You can join other guests for meals and/or retreat into total seclusion. See p. 53.
- **St. James's Club** (Antigua; ✆ **800/858-4618** in the U.S., or 268/460-5000; www.eliteislandresorts.com): There are enough diversions at this very posh, British-style resort to keep a honeymooning couple up and about for weeks. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included, along with unlimited drinks. Among the perks is a private, candlelit dinner for two in a romantic setting. Honeymooners are greeted with a bottle of champagne and freshly cut bougainvillea in their rooms, which can be private villas, suites, or , for complete isolation, a hillside home. Unlike Cap Juluca, which promotes seclusion, this is for honeymooners who prefer an active lifestyle, gambling at the casino, taking in the beach, or enjoying the widest array of dining and drinking options of any hotel on the island. See p. 73.
- **Biras Creek Resort** (Virgin Gorda; ✆ **877/883-0756** in the U.S., or 284/494-3555; www.biras.com): If you're eager to escape your in-laws and bridesmaids after a wedding ceremony, this is the place. It's a quintessential mariner's hideaway that can be reached only via a several-mile boat ride across the open sea. Perched on a narrow promontory jutting into the Caribbean, it's an intensely private retreat set on 60 hectares (148 acres), with a crisscrossing network of signposted nature trails. Spacious, open-air, walled showers are provided in each bathroom. Honeymooners come here not to be pampered, but to be left alone to do their thing—don't expect a lot of activities. Entertainment and dancing enliven some evenings, but for the most part, you'll enjoy utter tranquillity. Its king-size beds are the best on the island. See p. 186.
- **Peter Island Resort** (Peter Island, B.V.I.; ✆ **800/346-4451** or 284/495-2000; www.peterisland.com): Romantics appreciate the isolation of this resort, on a 720-hectare (1,778-acre) private island south of Tortola and east of St. John. Reaching it requires a 30-minute waterborne transfer, which many urban refugees consider part of the fun. It's very laid-back—bring your new spouse and a good book, and enjoy the comings and goings of yachts at the island's private marina while you recover from the stress of your wedding. See p. 197.
- **Casa Colonial** (Dominican Republic; ✆ **809/571-9727**): On the north coast of the Dominican Republic, this boutique hotel is the most elegant in the

country, a member of S mall L uxury Hotels of the World. Your marriage will last longer if y ou check into one of the lavish oceanfr ont master suites with a private entrance. See p. 284.

- **Sandals Royal Caribbean** (Jamaica; ✆ **800/SANDALS** [726-3257] in the U.S., or 876/953-2231; www .sandals.com): There are a handful of members of this r esort chain in J amaica alone (plus thr ee others on S t. L ucia, one in Turks and Caicos, and y et another one on the island of Antigua that is far less grand). Each prides itself on pr oviding an all-inclusive (cash-free) environment where meals are provided in abundance. Enthusiastic members of the staff bring heroic amounts of community spirit to ceremonies celebrated on-site. S andals provides everything fr om a pr eacher to petunias (as well as champagne, a cake, and all the legalities) for y ou to get hitched her e. Any of these r esorts can provide a suitable setting, but one of the most appealing is **Sandals Royal Caribbean,** outside M ontego B ay, Jamaica. See p. 368.
- **Horned Dorset Primavera Hotel** (Puerto Rico; ✆ **800/633-1857** or 787/823-4030): The most r omantic place for a honeymoon on the island, this small, tranquil estate lies on the Mona Passage in western Puerto Rico, a pocket of posh wher e privacy is almost guaranteed. Spanish neocolonial accommodations are luxurious, and the property opens onto a long, secluded beach of white sand. There ar e no phones, TVs, or radios in the rooms to interfere with the soft sounds of pillow talk. This is a r etreat for adults only , with no facilities for children. See p. 495.
- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (N evis; ✆ **800/332-3442** in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): Though not as historic as some of the island's plantation-style inns, the F our Seasons r ules without peer as the most deluxe hotel on the island, with the most extensive facilities. S et in a palm grove adjacent to the island 's finest beach, it has the atmospher e of a supremely indulgent country club. The Four S easons offers a 4-day w edding package with a choice of cer emony styles (in a church or on a beach, with a judge or with a civil magistrate). The resort's pastr y chef designs each w edding cake individually, and the staff can arrange music, photographs, flo wers, legalities, and vir tually anything else you want. See p. 554.
- **Anse Chastanet** (St. Lucia; ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., or 758/459-7000; www.ansechastanet.com): O ffering panoramic vie ws of mountains and jungle, this intimate hotel is a winner with r omantics. With its small siz e, it provides a lot of priv acy and r ustic charm. Its wedding package includes all legal pr ocessing, a w edding cake, and champagne, and add-ons co ver ev erything fr om photography to a post-wedding sunset sail. See p. 573.
- **Petit St. Vincent Resort** (The G renadines; ✆ **954/963-7401**): If your idea of a honeymoon is to r un away fr om everybody except your new spouse, this is the place. I t takes about thr ee planes and a boat to r each it, but the effor t to get her e is wor th it, if y ou want total isolation and priv acy. E ven the staff doesn't bother y ou unless y ou raise a flag for r oom ser vice. I f the honeymoon's going well, you may never have to leav e y our stone cottage b y the beach. The ar tfully built clubhouses and bungalows were crafted from tropical woods and local stone; the r esults are simultaneously rustic and lavish. See p. 648.
- **Le Grand Courlan Resort & Spa** (Tobago; ✆ **868/639-9667**): This is the fav orite honeymoon r etreat on Tobago. If you want to be fussed o ver, you and your new spouse can attend the

spa for relaxing massages, or you can be left entirely alone to enjoy the bay outside your window or the sandy beach at your doorstep. From Guyanan hardwood to Italian porcelain, the decor is refined and elegant. See p. 669.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ✆ **800/255-3881** in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Posh and discreet, this resort has some of the most extensive vacation facilities on St. Croix—three beaches, eight tennis courts, a spa and fitness center, an 18-hole golf course, and 3km (1 3/4 miles) of carefully maintained jogging trails. The accommodations include beachside rooms with fieldstone terraces leading toward the sea. The resort's stone sugar mill (originally built in 1658) is one of the most popular sites for weddings and visiting honeymooners on the island. See p. 751.

8 THE BEST PLACES TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

In addition to the choices below, see the listings under "The Best Places to Honeymoon," above, for information on Peter Island Resort in the British Virgin Islands, and Petit St. Vincent Resort in The Grenadines.

- **Biras Creek Resort** (Virgin Gorda; ✆ **877/883-0756** in the U.S., or 284/494-3555; www.biras.com): The only access to this resort is by private launch. The sea air and the views over islets, cays, and deep blue waters will relax you in your charming guest room. The nautical atmosphere will quickly remove all thoughts of the 9-to-5 job you left behind. See p. 186.
- **Guana Island Club** (Guana Island, B.V.I.; ✆ **800/544-8262** in the U.S., or 284/494-2354; www.guana.com): One of the most secluded hideaways in the entire Caribbean, this resort occupies a privately owned 340-hectare (840-acre) bird sanctuary with nature trails. Head here for views of rare plant and animal life and for several excellent uncrowded beaches. See p. 197.
- **Little Cayman Beach Resort** (Little Cayman; ✆ **800/327-3835** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/948-1033; www.littlecayman.com): The only practical way to reach the 26-sq.-km (10-sq.-mile) island where this resort is located is by airplane. Snorkelers will marvel at some of the most spectacular and colorful marine life in the Caribbean. The resort has the most complete watersports facilities on the island, and bikes are available for exploring. See p. 226.
- **Rawlins Plantation Inn** (St. Kitts; ✆ **800/346-5358** in the U.S., or 869/465-6221): Surrounded by 5 hectares (12 acres) of carefully manicured lawns and tropical shrubbery, and set on a panoramic hillock about 100m (328 ft.) above sea level, this hotel, with its rugs of locally woven rushes and carved four-poster beds, evokes a 19th-century plantation. You'll be separated from the rest of the island by hundreds of acres of sugar cane, and there are few phones and no televisions. See p. 542.

9 THE BEST FAMILY VACATIONS

- **Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort & Casino** (Aruba; ✆ **800/233-1234** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-1234; www.hyatt.com): Designed like a

luxurious hacienda, with awar d-winning gar dens, this r esort is the most upscale on Ar uba. Supervised activities for children 3 to 12 include games and contests such as crab races and hula-hoop competitions. See p. 100.

- **Amaryllis Beach Resort** (B arbados; ✆ **888/790-5264** or 246/438-8000; www.amaryllisbeachresort.com): F rom its kiddie pool to its activity-filled children's club, this hotel along Palm Beach is the most family friendly on the island. The complex has an abundance of two-bedr oom suites, ideal for the family trade. The chefs also pr epare meals for families with y oung children. See p. 130.
- **The Ritz-Carlton** (G rand Cayman; ✆ **800/241-3333** or 345/943-9000; www.ritzcarlton.com): N o one coddles families with childr en as much as this plush hotel. With 58 hectar es (143 acres) of grounds to romp in, it's almost like staying in a landscaped par k. Plus, the hotel opens onto the activity-filled Seven Mile Beach. It also offers the best children's pr ogram on island and, of course, can easily arrange bab ysitting. See p. 205.
- **Breezes Curaçao** (C uraçao; ✆ **599/9-736-7888;** www .breezes.com): O ne of the most welcoming resorts for families is B reezes C uraçao, which has the best kiddie pr ograms on island in its on-site Camp B reezes. M aking it ev en more fun for childr en, the inclusiv e resort lies next to both the U ndersea National P ark and the S ea A quarium and opens onto one of C uraçao's longest beaches. See p. 233.
- **Sunset at the Palms Resort & Spa** (Negril, J amaica; ✆ **800/234-1707** in the U.S., or 876/957-5350; www . sunsetatthepalms.com): Rising on stilts, these wooden cottages with priv ate decks add a sense of adv enture to a beach vacation. Surrounded by tropical vegetation, families ar e only steps fr om the beach. F eatures for kids include a playground, computer games, ar ts-and-crafts lessons, and ev en storytelling sessions. Children 2 and under stay fr ee if they shar e a r oom with their par ent; children 3 to 12 ar e $100 extra. S ee p. 384.
- **FDR** (R unaway B ay, J amaica; ✆ **888/337-5437** in the U.S., or 876/973-4591; www.fdrholidays.com): FDR gives you a suite with its o wn kitchen, and a "vacation nanny" whose duties include babysitting. N either its beach nor its pool is the most appealing on J amaica, but the price is right, and the babysitting is part of the all-inclusive deal. Programs for childr en include dr ess-up par ties, donkey rides, basketball, tennis, and snorkeling. See p. 402.
- **El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa** (P uerto Rico; ✆ **888/543-1282** or 787/863-1000; www .elcon resort.com): Located 50km (31 miles) east of San Juan, this resort offers Camp Coquí on P alomino Island for childr en 3 to 12 y ears of age. The hotel's fr ee water taxi takes kids to the island for a half- or full day of waterspor ts and nature hikes. A ne w water par k also adds to the family appeal, boasting a 790-sq.-m (8,500-sq.-ft.) pool, sev eral slides, a r ope bridge, and a winding river attraction. This resort has some of the best facilities and r estaurants in eastern P uerto Rico and all of the Caribbean. See p. 484.
- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (N evis; ✆ **800/332-3442** in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): The staff of the Kids for All Seasons day camp ar e kindly , matr only souls who work w ell with childr en. D uring the adult cocktail hour, when parents might opt for a r omantic sundo wner, kids attend a supervised children's hour that resembles a r eally good bir thday bash. Other kid-friendly activities include

tennis lessons, watersports, and storytelling. See p. 554.

- **Beaches Turks & Caicos,** Lower Bight Road, Provo (✆ **800/232-2437**): Beaches just walked away with another World Travel Award for best family resort. And why not? It's got Sesame Street characters making appearances, camps and activities for kids of all ages, kid-specific restaurants, and a full-service nursery. See p. 686.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ✆ **800/255-3881** in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Posh, upscale, with extremely good service, this hotel is a longtime favorite that occupies a 96-hectare (237-acre) former sugar estate. Its kids' programs (ages 2–12) include a half-day sailing excursion to Buck Island Reef and guided nature walks that let kids touch, smell, and taste tropical fruit. See p. 751.

10 THE BEST INNS

- **Admiral's Inn** (Antigua; ✆ **268/460-1027;** www.admiralsantigua.com): The most historically evocative corner of Antigua is Nelson's Dockyard, which was originally built in the 1700s to repair His Majesty's ships. The brick-and-stone inn that flourishes here today was once a warehouse for turpentine and pitch. In the late 1960s, it was transformed into a well-designed and very charming hotel. ***Note:*** If you're sensitive to noise, you might be bothered by the sometimes raucous bar and restaurant. See p. 75.
- **Avila Beach Hotel** (Curaçao; ✆ **800/747-8162** or 599/9-461-4377): This hotel's historic core, built in 1780 as the "country house" of the island's governor, retains its dignity and elegance. Although it's been a hotel since the end of World War II, 150 bedrooms in outbuildings and upgraded sports and dining facilities were artfully added in recent years. Today the Avila provides a sandy beach and easy access to the shops and distractions of nearby Willemstad. See p. 235.
- **Spice Island Beach Resort** (Grenada; ✆ **473/444-4258;** www.spicebeachresort.com): Each of this hotel's 66 units is a suite (with Jacuzzi) either beside the beach (one of Grenada's best) or near a swimming pool. Friday night features live music from the island's most popular bands. See p. 310.
- **Ottley's Plantation Inn** (St. Kitts; ✆ **800/772-3039** in the U.S., or 869/465-7234): As you approach, the inn's dignified verandas appear majestically at the crest of 14 hectares (35 acres) of impeccably maintained lawns and gardens. It's one of the most charming plantation-house inns anywhere in the world, maintained with style and humor by its expatriate U.S. owners. The food is the best on the island, and the setting will soothe your tired nerves within a few hours after you arrive. See p. 542.
- **Montpelier Plantation Inn** (Nevis; ✆ **869/469-3462**): Style and grace are the hallmarks of this former 18th-century plantation, now converted to an inn and set on a 12-hectare (30-acre) estate. Guests have included the late Princess of Wales. Cottage rooms are spread across 4 hectares (10 acres) of ornamental gardens. Swimming, horseback riding, windsurfing, a private beach, and "eco-rambles" fill the agenda. See p. 555.
- **The Hermitage Plantation Inn** (Nevis; ✆ **800/682-4025** in the U.S., or 869/469-3477): Guests stay in clapboard-sided cottages separated by carefully maintained bougainvillea and

grasslands. The beach is a short drive away, but this slice of 19th-century plantation life (complete with candlelit dinners amid the antiques and polished silver of the main house) is decidedly romantic. See p. 554.

- **Gallery Inn at Galería San Juan** (Puerto Rico; ✆ **866/572-ARTE** [2783] or 787/722-1808; www.thegalleryinn.com): The most whimsically bohemian hotel in the Caribbean sits on a coastal bluff. Once the home of an aristocratic Spanish family, it is today filled with sculptures, silk screens, and original paintings by artist Jan D'esopo, who, along with husband Manuco Gandía, owns the inn. Many of the rooms have dramatic views of the coast, with two historic Spanish forts framing the view. Staying in one of the comfortable rooms here is like living in an art gallery. See p. 455.
- **The Frangipani** (Bequia, The Grenadines; ✆ **784/458-3255;** www.frangipanibequia.com): This is the century-old homestead of the Mitchell family, whose most famous scion later became prime minister of St. Vincent. Today it's a small, very relaxed inn. It's fun to watch the yachts setting out to sea from the nearby marina. See p. 640.

11 THE BEST ECO-FRIENDLY RESORTS

- **Brac Reef Beach Resort** (Cayman Brac; ✆ **800/594-0843** or 727/369-2507; www.bracreef.com): Cayman Brac is a little unspoiled island off the coast of the much larger Grand Cayman. Here at this small resort, you can take a series of nature trails that cut through lush vegetation, including sea grapes, to explore the wilderness and enjoy some of the best bird-watching in the islands. This family-friendly resort also offers some of the best snorkeling in the islands. See p. 224.
- **Papillote Wilderness Retreat** (Dominica; ✆ **767/448-2287;** www.papillote.dm): In the middle of one of the Caribbean's most lush rainforests, at the foot of a mountain, this intimate inn returns you to nature in its remote setting of exotic fruits, flowers, and herb gardens. You'll feel like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Natural hot mineral baths are offered, and you can follow a trail to a secluded waterfall for a river swim. Rooms are rustic but comfortable. See p. 257.
- **Natura Cabañas & the Attabeyra Spa** (Cabarete, Dominican Republic; ✆ **809/571-1507;** www.naturacabana.com): The most eco-sensitive hotel in the Dominican Republic lies between Cabarete and Sosúa, attracting New Age patrons drawn to its setting. Some guests are housed in mushroom-shaped organic-looking structures. During the day, guests can swim, enjoy the spa, or go horseback riding. Mountain bikes or jeeps also can be used to explore this remote part of the country. Or you can just spend the day in a hammock. See p. 292.
- **Asa Wright Nature Centre & Lodge** (Trinidad; ✆ **800/426-7781** in the U.S., or 868/667-4655; wwwasawright.org): Known to bird-watchers around the world, this is the most legendary eco-retreat in the Caribbean, standing on 74 hectares (183 acres) of protected land at an elevation of 360m (1,181 ft.) in a rainforest in a mountain range in Trinidad. Nature lovers from all over the world flock here to see the vast array of birdlife, including hummingbirds, toucans, manikins, tanagers, and even the rare oilbird. Guided tours are available along trails to a natural waterfall.

Accommodations are in a 1908 Edwardian house and various cottages. See p. 656.

- **Cinnamon Bay Campground** (St. John; ✆ **340/776-6330;** www.cinnamonbay.com): This National Park Service campground is the best in the Caribbean, and it's set directly on a sandy beach surrounded by thousands of acres of tropical vegetation. You can stay here in a cottage or a tent, or else rent a bare site. Guests take cool water showers and cook their own meals when not swimming, sailing, snorkeling, windsurfing, or hiking through trails in the national park. See p. 739.

12 THE BEST DINING

- **Blanchards** (Anguilla; ✆ **264/497-6100**): On this pricey, fashionable island, Bob and Melinda Blanchard serve a repertoire of dishes that are both sublime and inventive. For their inspiration, they turn to the kitchens of the world. Celebs such as Robert De Niro and Janet Jackson have praised their wine cellar, arguably the best in the Caribbean. Exceptional products are prepared with a finely honed technique. See p. 57.
- **The Reef Grill at Royal Palms** (Grand Cayman; ✆ **345/945-6358**): Elegant and hip, this hotshot restaurant in the Royal Palms Beach Club opens onto the fabled Seven Mile Beach. Adjacent to a beachfront bar and grill, it is a citadel of fine cuisine, specializing in seafood recently plucked from the nearby sea. The chefs treat seasonal products with care, turning out technically precise dishes that also have imagination. (Anyone for mashed potatoes garnished with chunks of lobster tail?) See p. 212.
- **La Belle Epoque** (Martinique; ✆ **596/64-41-19**): The best haute cuisine on this island is dispensed at this long-established gourmet citadel high above the capital of Fort-de-France. The restaurant is about as close as Martinique comes to duplicating the superb viands of Mother France. The cuisine shows a complete mastery of a fertile culinary imagination. See p. 423.
- **Le Sapotillier** (St. Barthélemy; ✆ **590/27-60-28**): Before upstart Anguilla stole a lot of their thunder, the chefs of St. Barts were known as the finest in the Caribbean, although that's open to argument. Competition has come and gone, and still St. Barts' chefs rank among the top, especially at this West Indian house in the capital of Gustavia. The French-inspired cuisine served here emphasizes seafood but does a number of other dishes remarkably well. Under its namesake, a sapodilla tree, you can feast on such traditional dishes as duck foie gras or veal stew in a Roquefort sauce. See p. 520.
- **The Edge** (St. Lucia; ✆ **758/450-3343**): Swedish-born Bobo Bergström is hailed as St. Lucia's finest chef—and the competition is keen. His European fusion cuisine produces thrilling gastronomic delights, and he also offers the first and only sushi bar ever set up on St. Lucia. In 2003 he was designated as Caribbean Chef of the Year. We'll let you in on a secret: He's gotten even better since then. See p. 585.

13 THE BEST DESTINATIONS FOR SHOPPERS

Because the U.S. government allows its citizens to take (or send) home more duty-free goods from the U.S. Virgins than from other ports of call, the U.S. Virgin

Islands remain the shopping bazaar of the Caribbean. U.S. citizens may carry home $1,400 worth of goods untaxed, as opposed to only $400 to $600 worth of goods from most other islands in the Caribbean. (The only exception to this rule is Puerto Rico, where any purchase, regardless of the amount, can be carried tax-free back to the U.S. mainland.) St. Maarten/St. Martin, which is ruled jointly by France and the Netherlands, gives the Virgins some serious competition. It is virtually a shopper's mall, especially on the Dutch side. Although the U.S. doesn't grant the generous Customs allowances on St. Maarten/St. Martin that it does to its own islands, the island doesn't have duty, so you can find some attractive bargains.

- **Aruba:** The wisest shoppers on Aruba are cost-conscious souls who have carefully checked the prices of comparable goods before leaving home. Duty is relatively low (only 3.3%). Much of the European china, jewelry, perfumes, and watches have a disconcerting habit of reappearing in every shopping mall and hotel boutique on the island, so after you determine exactly which brand of watch or china you want, you can comparison-shop. See chapter 5.
- **Barbados:** Local shops seem to specialize in all things English. Merchandise includes bone china from British and Irish manufacturers, watches, jewelry, and perfumes. Bridgetown's Broad Street is the shopping headquarters of the island, although some of the stores here maintain boutiques (with similar prices but a less extensive range of merchandise) at many of the island's hotels and in malls along the congested southwestern coast. Except for cigarettes and tobacco, duty-free items can be hauled off by any buyer as soon as they're paid for. Duty-free status is extended to anyone showing a passport or ID and an airline ticket with a date of departure from Barbados. See chapter 6.
- **The Cayman Islands:** Goods are sold tax-free from a daunting collection of malls and minimalls throughout Grand Cayman. Most of these are along the highway that parallels Seven Mile Beach; you'll need a car to shop around. There are also lots of stores in George Town, which you can explore on foot, poking in and out of some large emporiums in your search for bargains. See chapter 9.
- **Curaçao:** In the island's capital, tidy and prosperous Willemstad, hundreds of merchants are only too happy to cater to your needs. A handful of malls lies on Willemstad's outskirts, but most shops are clustered within a few blocks of the center of town. During seasonal sales, goods might be up to 50% less than comparable prices in the United States; most of the year, you'll find luxury items (porcelain, crystal, watches, and gemstones) priced at about 25% less than in the U.S. Technically, you'll pay import duties on virtually everything you buy, but rates are so low you may not even notice. See chapter 10.
- **The Dominican Republic:** The island's best buys include handicrafts, amber from Dominican mines, and the distinctive pale-blue semiprecious gemstone known as larimar. The amber sold by street vendors may be nothing more than orange-colored, transparent plastic; buy only from well-established shops if your investment is a large one. Other charming souvenirs might include a Dominican rocking chair (JFK used to sit in one), which is sold boxed, in ready-to-assemble pieces. Malls and souvenir stands abound in Santo Domingo, in Puerto Plata, and along the country's northern coast. See chapter 12.
- **Jamaica:** The shopping was better in the good old days, before taxes added a 10% surcharge. Despite that, Jamaica offers a wealth of desirable goods,

including flavored rums, Jamaican coffees, handicrafts (such as woodcarvings, woven baskets, and sandals), original paintings and sculpture, and cameras, watches, and DVD players. Unless you're a glutton for handmade souvenirs (which are available on virtually every beach and street corner), you'd be wise to limit most of your purchases to bona fide merchants and stores. See chapter 15.

- **Puerto Rico:** For U.S. citizens, there's no duty on anything bought in Puerto Rico, but that doesn't guarantee prices will be particularly low. You can find lots of jewelry and watches in the island's best-stocked area, Old San Juan. Also of interest are such Puerto Rican handicrafts as charming folkloric papier-mâché carnival masks and santos, carved wooden figures depicting saints.
- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** Because of the massive influx of cruise ships, shopping in Dutch St. Maarten is now about the finest in the Caribbean, though you may have to fight the crowds. Because there's no duty, prices can be 30% to 50% lower than in the U.S. Forget about local crafts and concentrate on leather goods, electronics, cameras, designer fashions, watches, and crystal, along with linens and jewelry. Philipsburg, capital of the island's Dutch side, is the best place to shop. Although it can't compete with Dutch St. Maarten, French St. Martin is becoming a more popular shopping destination, especially for goods such as fashion or perfumes imported from France. See chapter 23.
- **St. Croix:** This island doesn't have the massive shopping development of St. Thomas, but its merchandise has never been more wide-ranging than it is today Even though most cruise ships call at Frederiksted, with its urban mall, our favorite shops are in Christiansted, which has many one-of-a-kind boutiques and a lot of special finds. Prices are about the same here as on St. Thomas. See chapter 27.
- **St. Thomas:** Many of its busiest shops are in restored warehouses that were originally built in the 1700s. Charlotte Amalie, the capital, is a shopper's town, with a staggering number of stores stocked with more merchandise than anywhere else in the entire Caribbean. However, despite all the fanfare, real bargains are hard to come by. Regardless, the island attracts hordes of cruise-ship passengers on a sometimes-frantic hunt for bargains, real or imagined. Look for two local publications, *This Week* and *Best Buys;* either might steer you to the type of merchandise you're seeking. If at all possible, try to avoid shopping when more than one cruise ship is in port—the shopping district is a madhouse on those days. See chapter 27.

14 THE BEST NIGHTLIFE

Nighttime is sleep time on the British Virgins, Montserrat, Nevis, Anguilla, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Barts, Dominica, Bonaire, St. Vincent, and all of The Grenadines. The serious partier will probably want to choose one of the following destinations.

- **Aruba:** Aruba has 12 casinos, each with its own unique decor and each with a following of devoted gamblers. They offer cabarets and comedy shows, dance floors with live or recorded music, restaurants of all degrees of formality, and bars. The casinos are big, splashy, colorful, and, yes, people even occasionally win. Drinks are usually free while you play. The legal tender in most of Aruba's casinos is the U.S. dollar. See chapter 5.

- **Barbados:** Bridgetown is home to r um-and-reggae cr uises, as w ell as o versize music bars like H arbour Lights. O therwise, a host of bars, B ritish-style pubs, dozens of r estaurants, and dance clubs (both within and outside large hotels) beckon fr om S t. Lawr ence G ap or the crowded southwest coast. See chapter 6.
- **Curaçao:** Although outdistanced b y Aruba, the action spinning ar ound the island's casinos makes this one of the southern Caribbean's hot spots for gamblers. Salinja, a sector of Willemstad, has lively bars where locals and visitors drink and par ty until the w ee hours, and liv e jazz often fills the air. See chapter 10.
- **The Dominican Republic:** Large resort hotels in the Dominican Republic evoke a Latino v ersion of Las Vegas. If cabaret shows aren't your thing, there are enough dance clubs in the major to wns and resorts to keep nightclubbers busy for weeks. The tourist ar eas of P uerto Plata and S anto D omingo ar e sprinkled with casinos, and the island's ever-developing north shor e contains its shar e of jingle-jangle, too. See chapter 12.
- **Jamaica:** M any visitors ar e drawn her e by a love for the island's distinct musical forms. Foremost among these ar e reggae and soca, both of which ar e performed at hotels, r esorts, and raffish div es all over the island. H otels often stage folkloric sho ws that include enter tainers who sing, dance, swallo w tor ches, and walk on br oken glass. There ar e also plenty of indoor/outdoor bars wher e you might actually be able to talk to people. See chapter 15.
- **Puerto Rico:** P uerto Rico contains all the raw ingr edients for gr eat nightlife, including casinos, endless r ows of bars and tav erns, cabar et sho ws with girls and glitter, and dance clubs that feature everything fr om N ew York impor ts to some of the best salsa and mer engue anywhere. The countr y's gaming headquarters lies along the Condado in S an Juan, although ther e are also casinos in megaresorts scatter ed thr oughout the island. The casinos her e ar e the most fun in the Caribbean. Each contains lots of sidesho ws (r estaurants, mer engue bars, ar t galleries, piano bars, and shops) that can distract y ou fr om the roulette and slots. P uerto Ricans take pride in dressing well at their local casinos, which enhances an evening's glamour. (***Note:*** You can't drink at the tables.) If y ou're a r eally serious par tier, y ou'll have lots of company in P uerto Rico. Be pr epared to stay out v ery late; y ou can recover from your Bacardi hangover on a palm-fringed beach the next day . See chapter 17.
- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** This island has a rather cosmopolitan nightlife and contains the densest concentration of restaurants in the Caribbean, each with its o wn bar . D ance clubs ar e often indoor/outdoor affairs. Casinos abound on the Dutch side, and if you're addicted to the jingle of slot machines and r oulette wheels, y ou won't lack for company. The casinos tend to be lo w-key, which might appeal to y ou if y ou dislike high-stakes tables with lots of intensity. See chapter 23.
- **St. Thomas:** The Virgin I slands' most active nightlife is found her e. D on't expect glitzy sho ws like those in S an Juan's Condado ar ea, and don't expect any kind of casino . B ut y ou can find plenty of fun at the beach bars, r estaurants, concer ts, clubs, and folklor e and reggae shows. See chapter 27.

2

Planning Your Trip to the Caribbean

Golden beaches shaded by palm trees and crystalline waters teeming with colorful tropical fish—it's all just a few hours' flight from the East Coast of the United States. Dubbed the "Eighth Continent of the World," the Caribbean islands have an amazing variety of terrain that ranges from thick rainforests to haunting volcanoes, from white- to black-sand beaches. Spicy food, spicier music, and a gentle, leisurely lifestyle draw millions of visitors each year, all of whom are searching for that perfect place in the sun. In this chapter, we help you choose the right destination and the right time to go, and we explore the best strategies for getting a good air fare or package deal.

1 THE ISLANDS IN BRIEF

ANGUILLA Although it's developing rapidly as vacationers discover its 19km (12 miles) of arid but spectacular beaches, Anguilla (rhymes with *vanilla*) is still quiet, sleepy, and relatively free of racial tensions. A flat coral island, it maintains a maritime tradition of proud fishermen, many of whom still make a living from the sea, catching lobsters and selling them at high prices to expensive resorts and restaurants. Although the island has a handful of moderately priced accommodations, Anguilla is a very expensive destination, with small and rather exclusive resorts. It's as posh as St. Barts, but without all the snobbery. There are no casinos (and that's the way most of the locals want it). In fact, there's not much to do here except lie in the sun, bask in luxury, and enjoy fine dining.

ANTIGUA Antigua is famous for having a different beach for each day of the year, but it lacks the lushness of such islands as Dominica and Jamaica. Some British traditions (including a passion for cricket) linger, even though the nation became independent in 1981. The island's population of 80,000 is mostly descended from the African slaves of plantation owners. Antigua's resorts are isolated and conservative but very glamorous, its highways are horribly maintained, and its historic naval sites are interesting. Antigua is politically linked to the sparsely inhabited and largely undeveloped island of **Barbuda,** about 50km (31 miles) north. In spite of its small size, Barbuda has two posh, pricey resorts.

ARUBA Until its beaches were "discovered" in the late 1970s, Aruba, with its desertlike terrain and lunarlike interior landscapes, was an almost-forgotten outpost of Holland, valued mostly for its oil refineries and salt factories. Today vacationers come for the dependable sunshine (it rains less here than anywhere else in the Caribbean), the spectacular beaches, and an almost total lack of racial tensions despite an amazingly culturally diverse population. The high-rise hotels of Aruba are within walking distance of each other along a strip of fabulous beach. You don't stay in old, converted, family-run sugar mills here, and you don't come for history. You come if you're interested in gambling and splashy high-rise resorts.

BARBADOS Originally founded on a plantation economy that made its aristocracy rich on the backs of slave laborers, this Atlantic outpost was a staunchly loyal member of the British Commonwealth for generations. Barbados is the Caribbean's easternmost island, a great coral reef floating in the mid-Atlantic and ringed with glorious beige-sand beaches. Cosmopolitan Barbados has the densest population of any island in the Caribbean, with few racial tensions despite its history of slavery. A loyal group of return visitors appreciates its stylish, medium-size hotels (many of which carry a hefty price tag). Service is usually extremely good, a byproduct of the British mores that have flourished here for a century. Topography varies from rolling hills and savage waves on the eastern (Atlantic) coast to densely populated flatlands, rows of hotels and apartments, and sheltered beaches in the southwest. If you're looking for a Las Vegas–type atmosphere and fine beaches, go to Aruba. If you want history (there are lots of great houses and old churches to explore); a quiet, conservative atmosphere; and fine beaches, come here.

BONAIRE Its strongest historical and cultural links are to Holland. Although long considered a poor relation of nearby Curaçao, Bonaire has better scuba diving and better bird life than any of its larger and richer neighbors. The terrain is as dry and inhospitable as anything you'll find in the Caribbean, a sparse desert landscape offset by a wealth of marine life that thrives along miles of offshore reefs. The island isn't overly blessed with natural resources. But those coral reefs around most of the island attract divers and snorkelers from all over the world. The casino and party crowd should head for Aruba instead.

THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS (B.V.I.) Still a British Crown Colony, this lushly forested chain consists of about 50 small, mountainous islands (depending on how many rocks, cays, and uninhabited islets you want to include). Superb for sailors, the B.V.I. are less populated and less developed, and have fewer social problems than the U.S. Virgin Islands. **Tortola** is the main island, followed by **Virgin Gorda,** where you'll find some of the poshest hotels in the West Indies. **Anegada,** a coral atoll geologically different from the other members of the B.V.I., mainly attracts the yachting set. Come here for the laid-back lifestyle, the lovely sandy beaches, the friendly people, and the small, intimate inns.

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS This trio of islands is set near the southern coast of Cuba. It's a prosperous, tiny nation dependent on Britain for its economic survival and attracting millionaire expatriates from all over the world by means of some very lenient tax and banking laws. Relatively flat and unattractive, these islands are covered with scrubland and swamp, but they have more than their share of expensive private homes and condominiums. Until the millennium, **Grand Cayman** enjoyed one of the most closely knit societies in the Caribbean, although recent prosperity has created some socioeconomic divisions. The warm, crystal-clear waters and the colorful marine life in the offshore reefs surrounding the island attract scuba divers and snorkelers. Many hotels line the luscious sands of Seven Mile Beach.

CURAÇAO Because much of the island's surface is an arid desert that grows only cactus, its canny Dutch settlers ruled out farming and made Curaçao (Coo-ra-*sow*) into one of the Dutch Empire's busiest trading posts. Until the post–World War II collapse of the oil refineries, Curaçao was a thriving mercantile society with a capital (Willemstad) that somewhat resembled Amsterdam and a population with a curious mixture of bloodlines, including African, Dutch, Venezuelan, and Pakistani. The main language here is

Papiamento, a mixture of African and European dialects, though Dutch, Spanish, and English are also spoken. Tourism began to develop during the 1980s, and many hotels have been built since then. The island has a few interesting historic sights, and Willemstad is one of the most charming towns in the Caribbean. If you're choosing among the Dutch "A-B-C" islands, go to Aruba for beaches and gambling; Bonaire for scuba diving; and Curaçao for little cove beaches, shopping, history, and its distinctive "Dutch in the Caribbean" culture.

DOMINICA An English-speaking island set midway between Guadeloupe and Martinique, Dominica (Doh-mi-*nee*-kah), the largest and most mountainous island of the Windward Islands, is not to be confused with the Dominican Republic (see below). A mysterious, little-visited land of waterfalls, rushing streams, and rainforests, it has only a few beaches, most of which are lined with black volcanic sand. But if you like the offbeat and unusual, you may find this lush island the most fascinating in the Caribbean. Some 82,000 people live here, including 2,000 descendants of the Carib Indians. Roseau, one of the smallest capitals in the Caribbean, is more like an overgrown Creole village than a city. Dominica is one of the poorest islands in the Caribbean, and it has the misfortune of lying directly in the hurricane belt.

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC Occupying the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola, the island it shares with Haiti, the mountainous Dominican Republic is the second-largest country of the Caribbean. Long a victim of various military dictatorships, it now has a more favorable political climate and is one of the most affordable destinations in the Caribbean. Its crowded capital is Santo Domingo, with a population of two million. The island offers lots of Latin color, zesty merengue music, and many opportunities to dance, drink, and party. Unfortunately, the contrast between the wealth of foreign tourists and the poverty of locals is particularly conspicuous, and it's not the safest island. For fun in the sun and good beaches, head for La Romana in the southeast, Punta Cana on the easternmost shore, Puerto Plata in the northwest, or any resorts along the Amber Coast in the north.

GRENADA The southernmost nation of the Windward Islands, Grenada (Gre-*nay*-dah) is one of the lushest islands in the Caribbean. With its gentle climate and extravagantly fertile volcanic soil, it's one of the largest producers of spices in the Western Hemisphere. There's a lot of very appealing local color on Grenada, particularly since the political troubles of the 1980s seem, at least for the moment, to have ended. There are beautiful white-sand beaches, and the populace (a mixture of English expatriates and islanders of African descent) is friendly. Once a British Crown Colony but now independent, the island nation also incorporates two smaller islands: Carriacou and Petit Martinique, neither of which has many tourist facilities. Grenada's capital, St. George's, is one of the most charming towns in the Caribbean.

GUADELOUPE Although it isn't as sophisticated or cosmopolitan as the two outlying islands over which it holds administrative authority—St. Barthélemy and the French section of St. Martin—there's a lot of natural beauty in this *département* of mainland France. With a relatively low population density (only 440,000 people live here, mostly along the coast), butterfly-shaped Guadeloupe is actually two distinctly different volcanic islands separated by a narrow saltwater strait, the Rivière Salée. It's ideal for scenic drives and Creole color, offering an unusual insight into the French colonial world. The island has a lot of good beaches, each one different, and a vast national

park (a huge tropical forest with everything from wild orchids to coffee and vanilla plants). It's life *à la française* in the Tropics, but we'd give the nod to Martinique (see below) if you can visit only one French island.

JAMAICA A favorite of North American honeymooners, Jamaica is a mountainous island that rises abruptly from the sea 145km (90 miles) south of Cuba and about 160km (99 miles) west of Haiti. One of the most densely populated nations in the Caribbean, with a vivid sense of its own identity, Jamaica has a history rooted in the plantation economy and some of the most turbulent and impassioned politics in the Western Hemisphere. In spite of its economic and social problems, Jamaica is one of the most successful black democracies in the world. The island is large enough to allow the more or less peaceful coexistence of all kinds of people within its beach-lined borders—everyone from expatriate English aristocrats to dyed-in-the-wool Rastafarians. Its tourist industry has been plagued by the island's reputation for aggressive vendors and racial tension, but it is taking steps to improve the situation. Overall, and despite its long history of social unrest, increasing crime, and poverty, Jamaica is a fascinating island. It offers excellent beaches, golf, eco-tourism adventures, and fine hotels in all price brackets, making it one of the most popular destinations in the Caribbean, especially since you can find package deals galore.

MARTINIQUE One of the most exotic French-speaking destinations in the Caribbean, Martinique was the site of a settlement demolished by volcanic activity (St. Pierre, now only a pale shadow of a once-thriving city). Like Guadeloupe and St. Barts, Martinique is legally and culturally French (certainly, many islanders drive with a Gallic panache—read: very badly), although many Creole customs and traditions continue to flourish. The beaches are beautiful, the Creole cuisine is full of flavor and flair, and the island has lots of tropical charm. Even more than Guadeloupe, this is the social and cultural center of the French Antilles. If you'd like to visit a charmingly beautiful island with elegant people, the Martiniquaise will wish you *bonjour.*

PUERTO RICO Home to 3.9 million people whose primary language is Spanish (though English is widely spoken, too), the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is under the jurisdiction of the United States and has a more-or-less comfortable mix of Latin culture with imports from the U.S. mainland. It's the most urban island of the Caribbean, with lots of traffic and relatively high crime, though it compensates with great beaches, glittering casinos, hotels in all price brackets, sports and eco-tourism offerings, good hearty food, and sizzling salsa clubs. The island's interior is filled with rainforests and ancient volcanic mountains; the coastline is ringed with gorgeous sandy beaches. The commonwealth also includes a trio of small offshore islands: Culebra, Mona, and Vieques (the latter has the most tourist facilities). San Juan, the island's capital, has some of the most extensive and best-preserved Spanish colonial neighborhoods in the New World, with historic sites and much to see and do, and a steady flow of cruise ship passengers who keep the stores and casinos filled throughout much of the year. You can usually find great package deals through Puerto Rico's hotels and resorts.

SABA Saba is a cone-shaped extinct volcano that rises abruptly and steeply from the watery depths of the Caribbean. With no beaches or historic sights to speak of, the local Dutch- and English-speaking populace has traditionally made a living from fishing, trade, and needlework, rather than tourism. Hotel choices are limited. Saba's thrifty, seafaring folk can offer insights into the old-fashioned lifestyle of the Netherlands Antilles. There's only one

road on the island, and unless you opt to hike away from its edges, you'll have to follow the traffic along its narrow, winding route. Basically, you come here if you want to hang out at your hotel pool, climb up to a rainforest, go diving, and perhaps make a day trip to one of the nearby islands. Saba's a place to visit if you like to collect untouristy islands. You may want to come just for the afternoon—you can do this by plane or trimaran.

ST. BARTHÉLEMY (ALSO KNOWN AS ST. BARTS OR ST. BARTHS) Part of the French *département* of Guadeloupe, lying 24km (15 miles) from St. Martin, St. Barts is a small, hilly island with a population of 6,500 people who live on 34 sq. km (13 sq. miles) of verdant terrain ringed by pleasant white-sand beaches. A small number of African descendants live harmoniously on this chic Caribbean island with descendants of Norman and Breton mariners and a colony of more recent expatriates from Europe. An expensive and exclusive stomping ground of the rich and famous, with a distinctive seafaring tradition and a decidedly French flavor, St. Barts has a lovely "storybook" capital in Gustavia. For sophistication and luxury living, St. Barts is equaled in the Caribbean only by Anguilla, and the price tag isn't cheap. It's a place to visit if you want to wind down from a stressful life.

ST. EUSTATIUS (ALSO KNOWN AS STATIA) Statia is part of the Netherlands Antilles and the Leeward Islands, lying to the west of Dutch Sint Maarten. During the 1700s, this Dutch-controlled island ("The Golden Rock") was one of the most important trading posts in the Caribbean. During the U.S. War of Independence, a brisk arms trade helped to bolster the local economy, but the glamour ended in 1781, when British Admiral Romney sacked the port, hauled off most of the island's wealth, and propelled St. Eustatius onto a path of obscurity—where it remained for almost 200 years, until the advent of tourism. Today the island is among the poorest in the Caribbean, with 21 sq. km (8 sq. miles) of arid landscape, beaches with strong and sometimes dangerous undertows, a population of around 2,900 people, and a sleepy capital, Oranjestad. Out of desperation, the island is very committed to maintaining its political and fiscal links to the Netherlands. This is a destination for people who are interested in American Revolution–era history and who like hanging out around a pool at a friendly, informal local inn. Most people will want to make a day trip to see the historic sites, have lunch, and leave.

ST. KITTS & NEVIS The first English settlement in the Leeward Islands, St. Kitts has a rich sense of British maritime history. With 176 sq. km (69 sq. miles) of land, St. Kitts enjoyed one of the richest sugar-cane economies of the plantation age. This island lies somewhat off the beaten tourist track and has a very appealing, intimate charm. A lush, fertile mountain island with a rainforest and waterfalls, it is crowned by the 1,138m (3,733-ft.) Mount Liamuiga, a crater that, thankfully, has remained dormant (unlike the one at Montserrat). St. Kitts is home to some 38,000 people and Brimstone Hill, the Caribbean's most impressive fortress. Come here for the beaches and the history, for lush natural scenery, and to stay at a restored plantation home that's been turned into a charming inn. Lots of sporting activities, ranging from mountain climbing to horseback riding, are also available.

Many Nevisians feel strongly about eventually breaking away from St. Kitts, from which Nevis is separated by 3km (1¾ miles) of water. Nevis was spotted by Columbus in 1493 on his second voyage to the New World. He called it Nieves—Spanish for "snows"—when he saw the

cloud-crowned volcanic isle that evoked for him the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees. Known for its long beaches of both black and white sand, Nevis, more than any other island in the Caribbean, has turned its former great houses, built during the plantation era, into some of the most charming and atmospheric inns in the West Indies. It also has the Four Seasons Resort for those who want world-class elegance and service. The capital city of Charlestown looks like a real Caribbean backwater, though it is home to hundreds of worldwide businesses that are drawn to Nevis for its tax laws and bank secrecy.

ST. LUCIA St. Lucia (*Loo*-sha), 39km (24 miles) south of Martinique, is the second-largest of the Windward Islands, with a population of around 162,000. Although in 1803 Britain eventually won control of the island, French influence is still evident in the Creole dialect spoken here. A volcanic island with lots of rainfall and great natural beauty, it has white- and black-sand beaches, bubbling sulfur springs, and beautiful mountain scenery. Most tourism is concentrated on the island's northwestern tip, near the capital (Castries), but the arrival of up to 200,000 visitors a year has altered the old agrarian lifestyle throughout the island. Come here for the posh resorts and the gorgeous beaches, the rainforests, and the lush tropical foliage.

SAINT MAARTEN/ST. MARTIN Lying 232km (144 miles) east of Puerto Rico, this scrub-covered island has been divided between the Dutch (Sint Maarten) and the French (Saint Martin) since 1648. Regardless of how you spell its name, it's the same island on both sides of the unguarded border—though the two halves are quite different. The Dutch side contains the island's major airport, more shops, and more tourist facilities; and the French side has some of the poshest hotels and superior food. Both sides are modern, urbanized, and cosmopolitan. And both suffer from traffic jams, a lack of parking space in the capitals, tourist-industry burnout (especially on the Dutch side), and a disturbing increase in crime. In spite of the drawbacks, there's a lot to attract you here—great beaches, the shopping (some of the Caribbean's best), the gambling, the self-contained resorts, the nonstop flights from the U.S., the nightlife, and some of the best restaurants in the Caribbean. For a day trip from here, you can fly to St. Eustatius or Saba.

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES The natural beauty of this mini-archipelago has long been known to divers and the yachting set, who consider its north-to-south string of cays and coral islets one of the loveliest sailing regions in the world. The nation's population is only about 116,000 (of mostly African descent). **St. Vincent** (29km/18 miles long and 18km/11 miles wide) is by far the largest and most fertile island in the country. Its capital is the sleepy, somewhat dilapidated town of Kingstown (not to be confused with Kingston, Jamaica). **The Grenadines,** some 32 neighboring islands, stretch like a pearl necklace to the south of St. Vincent. These include the charming boat-building communities of **Bequia** and **Mustique,** where the late Princess Margaret had a home. Less densely populated islands in the chain include the tiny outposts of **Mayreau, Canouan, Palm Island,** and **Petit St. Vincent,** which was mostly covered with scrub until hotel owners planted much-needed groves of palm and hardwood trees and opened resorts.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO The southernmost of the West Indies, this two-island nation lies just 11km (6 3/4 miles) off the coast of Venezuela. Both islands once had sugar-plantation economies and enjoyed fantastic wealth during the 18th century. **Trinidad** is the most industrialized island in the Caribbean, with oil deposits and a polyglot population from India, Pakistan,

Venezuela, Africa, and Europe. Known for its calypso music and Carnival celebrations, it is also one of the most culturally distinctive nations in the Caribbean, with a rich artistic tradition. In its 4,662 sq. km (1,818 sq. miles), you'll find a bustling capital (Port-of-Spain), wildlife sanctuaries, and an impressive variety of exotic flora and fauna. What you won't necessarily find are beaches. While Trinidad has some excellent ones, they are far removed from the capital and hard to locate.

For beach life, head for Tobago, which is about 30km (19 miles) northeast of Trinidad. Tiny **Tobago** (14km/8¾ miles wide and 42km/26 miles long) is calmer and less heavily forested, with a rather dull capital (Scarborough) and an impressive array of white-sand beaches. While Trinidad seems to consider tourism only one of many viable industries, Tobago is absolutely dependent on it. Life is sleepy on Tobago, unlike bustling Trinidad. Tobago has coral reefs ideal for scuba diving, rainforests, powdery sands, shoreline drives, lanes of coconut palms, and a soothing get-away-from-it-all atmosphere—we hope it stays that way.

TURKS & CAICOS Although these islands are actually part of the Bahamian archipelago—they are to the east of the southernmost islands of The Bahamas, directly north of Haiti and the Dominican Republic—they are governed separately.

Home of Cockburn Town, the capital of Turks and Caicos (*Kayk*-us), **Grand Turk** nevertheless has a small-town atmosphere. The farthest island from Florida, it totals 23 sq. km (9 sq. miles). Grand Turk is ringed by abundant marine life, but most of the island's surface is flat, rocky, and dry. The diving is world-class—the main draw for most visitors. Grand Turk has a relatively undeveloped tourist infrastructure, although it offers a scattering of inns and hotels.

One of the larger islands of the Turks and Caicos, **Providenciales,** or Provo, is green but arid, with miles of scrubland and stunted trees covering the island's low, undulating hills. Whatever the Turks and Caicos have to offer in organized sports is here, including the nation's only golf course, boat tours, and diving excursions. The 19km (12-mile) beach and pristine coastline of Provo were a tourist development waiting to happen. In the late 1970s, hotel megaliths such as Club Med poured money into increasingly popular low-rise eco-conscious resorts. Now Provo's tourist infrastructure far surpasses that of Grand Turk. The island also has the best cuisine and the finest entertainment in the Turks and Caicos, but it's still much sleepier than the big developments of Aruba.

THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS Formerly Danish possessions, these islands became part of the United States in 1917. Originally based on a plantation economy, St. Croix is the largest and flattest of the U.S. Virgins, and St. Thomas and St. John are more mountainous.

All three islands offer stunning beaches, great snorkeling, sailing, and lovely scenery, but they are rather expensive destinations. If you want great shopping and lots of diversions, facilities, bars, restaurants, and modern resort hotels, go to overbuilt **St. Thomas,** sometimes referred to as the shopping mall of the Caribbean. Cruise ship passengers pass through constantly. **St. Croix** also has good facilities, though not as many as St. Thomas. It's more laid-back, a better place to escape for peace and quiet. **St. John** is most often visited on a day trip from St. Thomas. Much of this island is devoted to a national park, a gift from Laurance Rockefeller to the national park system. Petty crime is on the increase, however—an unfortunate fly in the ointment of this otherwise soothing corner of paradise.

2 WHEN TO GO

THE WEATHER

The temperature variations in the Caribbean are surprisingly slight, averaging between 75°F and 85°F (24°C–29°C) in both winter and summer. It can get really chilly, however, especially in the early morning and at night. The Caribbean winter is usually like a perpetual May. Overall, temperatures in the mid-80s (high 20s Celsius) prevail throughout most of the region, and trade winds make for comfortable days and nights, even without air-conditioning.

The humidity and bugs can be a problem here year-round. However, more mosquitoes come out during the rainy season, which usually occurs in autumn.

If you come in the summer, be prepared for really broiling sun in the mid-afternoon.

Brochures make people feel that it's always sunny in the Caribbean, and that isn't necessarily the case. Different islands get different amounts of rain. On Aruba, it hardly ever rains; on other islands, you can have overcast skies your entire vacation. Winter is generally the driest season, but even then, it can be wet in mountainous areas, and you can expect brief afternoon showers, especially in December and January, on Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, St. Lucia, on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, and in northeast Jamaica.

The curse of Caribbean weather, the **hurricane season** lasts—officially, at least—from June 1 to November 30. But there's no cause for panic: Satellite forecasts give enough warning that precautions can be taken.

THE HIGH SEASON & THE OFF SEASON

The Caribbean has become a year-round destination. The "season" runs roughly from mid-December to mid-April, which is generally the driest time of year in the Caribbean and the most miserable time of year in the U.S. Northeast and Midwest and in Canada. Hotels charge their highest prices during the peak winter period, and you'll have to make your reservations well in advance—months in advance if you want to travel over Christmas or in the depths of February, especially around U.S. President's Day weekend.

The off season in the Caribbean—roughly from mid-April to mid-December (although this varies from hotel to hotel)—is one big summer sale, though it's become more popular in recent years. In most cases, hotels, inns, and condos slash 20% to 50% off their winter rates.

Dollar for dollar, you'll spend less money by renting a summer house or self-sufficient unit in the Caribbean than you would on Cape Cod, Fire Island, or Laguna Beach. You just have to be able to tolerate strong sun if you're considering coming in the summer.

Off season, the beaches are less crowded, and you can get good deals. But restaurants close and hotels offer fewer facilities and may even use the off season for construction—make sure to ask what work is going on. If you decide to go anyway, ask for a room far away from the noise. If you're single and going off season, ask for the hotel's occupancy rate. You want crowds!

Because there's such a drastic difference in high-season and off-season rates at most hotels, we've included both on every property we review. You'll see the incredible savings you can enjoy if your schedule allows you to wait a couple of months for your fun in the sun.

3 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

PASSPORTS

All travelers arriving from the Caribbean by air, including Americans, are now required to have a passport to enter or re-enter the United States. You'll certainly need identification at some point, and a passport is the best form of ID for speeding through Customs and Immigration. Driver's licenses are not acceptable as a sole form of ID.

For up-to-date passport requirements for countries around the world, check out the **Consular Information Sheets** at the U.S. State Department website (start at http://travel.state.gov).

Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee.

VISAS

Visas are usually not required in the Caribbean, but some countries may require you to fill out a tourist card. (See the individual island chapters for details.)

CUSTOMS

Each island has specific guidelines on what you can bring in with you; these are detailed in the destination chapters that follow. Generally, you're permitted to bring in items intended for your personal use, including tobacco, cameras, film, and a limited supply of liquor—usually 40 ounces.

Just before you leave home, check with your country's Customs or Foreign Affairs department for the latest guidelines—including information on items that are not allowed to be brought into your home country—since the rules are subject to change and often contain some surprising oddities.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (www.customs.gov) allows $1,600 worth of duty-free imports every 30 days from the U.S. Virgin Islands; if you go over this amount, you're taxed at 1.5% rather than the usual 3%. The duty-free limit is $800 for other Caribbean Basin destinations. If you visit only Puerto Rico, you don't have to go through Customs at all, since the island is a U.S. commonwealth.

Joint Customs declarations are possible for family members traveling together. For example, for a husband and wife with two children, purchases in the U.S. Virgin Islands become duty-free up to $6,400. Unsolicited gifts can be sent to friends and relatives at the rate of $200 per day from the U.S. Virgin Islands and $100 a day from the other islands. U.S. citizens, or returning residents at least 21 years of age, traveling directly or indirectly from the U.S. Virgin Islands, are allowed to bring in free of duty 1,000 cigarettes, 5 liters of alcohol, and 100 cigars (but not Cuban cigars). Duty-free limitations on articles from other countries are generally 1 liter of alcohol, 200 cigarettes, and 200 cigars.

You should collect receipts for all purchases made abroad. You must also declare on your Customs form the nature and value of all gifts received during your stay abroad. It's prudent to carry proof that you purchased expensive cameras or jewelry on the U.S. mainland. If you purchased such an item during an earlier trip abroad, you should carry proof that you have previously paid Customs duty on the item.

Sometimes merchants suggest a false receipt to undervalue your purchase. ***Beware:*** You could be involved in a sting operation—the merchant might be an informer to U.S. Customs.

If you use any medication that contains controlled substances or requires injection,

carry an original prescription or note from your doctor.

For more information on what you're allowed to bring home, contact one of the following agencies:

U.S. Citizens: U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP), 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20229 (✆ **877/287-8667;** www.cbp.gov).

Canadian Citizens: Canada Border Services Agency (✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

U.K. Citizens: HM Customs & Excise at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at **www.hmce.gov.uk**.

Australian Citizens: Australian Customs Service at ✆ **1300/363-263,** or log on to **www.customs.gov.au**.

New Zealand Citizens: New Zealand Customs, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; **www.customs.govt.nz**).

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

For information on medical requirements and recommendations, see section 6, "Health," below.

4 GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND

BY PLANE

American Airlines (✆ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com) is the major carrier throughout the region. Other airlines serving the islands include **Air Canada** (✆ 888/247-2262 in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com), **Air Jamaica** (✆ 800/523-5585; www.airjamaica.com), **British Airways** (✆ 800/247-9297 in the U.S., or 0870/850-9850 in the U.K.; www.britishairways.com), **Caribbean Airlines** (✆ 800/920-4225; www.caribbean-airlines.com), **Cayman Airways** (✆ 800/422-9626; www.caymanairways.com), **Continental** (✆ 800/231-0856; www.continental.com), **Delta** (✆ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), **JetBlue Airways** (✆ 800/538-2583; www.jetblue.com), **LIAT** (✆ 888/844-LIAT [5428] in most of the Caribbean, or 268/480-5601 elsewhere; www.liatairline.com), **Northwest/KLM** (✆ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com), **United** (✆ 800/538-2929; www.united.com), and **U.S. Airways/AmericaWest** (✆ 800/622-1015; www.usairways.com), plus some smaller regional carriers. In each of the island chapters that follow, we list details on which airlines fly the various routes.

BY BOAT

For detailed information on the cruise lines serving the Caribbean, pick up a copy of *Frommer's Caribbean Ports of Call,* or see "Chartering Your Own Boat," later in this chapter.

5 MONEY & COSTS

The Value of the Eastern Caribbean Dollar vs. Other Popular Currencies

EC$	US$	UK£	Euro (€)	NAf	Aus$	NZ$	Can$
1	37¢	25p	.27€	.69NAf	A$.54	NZ$.66	C$.47

On many islands in the Caribbean, the Eastern Caribbean dollar is the legal tender. Other islands count the euro as their official currency, and the Antilles use

Tips Small Change

When you change money, ask for some small bills or loose change. Petty cash will come in handy for tipping and public transportation. Consider keeping the change separate from your larger bills so that it's readily accessible and you'll be less of a target for theft. U.S. dollars are accepted nearly everywhere, and in some countries, such as Jamaica, most locals prefer tips in U.S. dollars.

the Netherlands Antillean florin. And still others use a host of local moneys (the Barbados dollar, the Jamaican dollar, the Cayman Islands dollar, and so on) as their official currency. But most widely accepted throughout the Caribbean is the U.S. dollar. It is the legal currency of the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, and will be recognized just about anywhere you go. As such, throughout this book, prices are listed in U.S. dollars. The only exception occurs in cases where the euro is the official currency of the realm; prices in those chapters will be listed in euros.

You may find certain restaurants and shops present their prices in local currency, but they will still accept U.S. dollars—just make sure that when you inquire about a price, you know the type of dollars quoted. Also be aware that you may receive your change in local currency rather than in U.S. dollars. Finally, keep in mind that you may save some money by converting to the local currency rather than paying in U.S. dollars. For details and specific currency conversions for each island, see the "Fast Facts" sections in the individual island chapters.

The currency conversions quoted in the chart above were correct at press time. However, rates fluctuate, so before departing, consult a currency exchange website such as **www.oanda.com/convert/classic** to check up-to-the-minute rates.

ATMS

In the Caribbean, ATMs (automated teller machines), sometimes referred to as "cash machines" or "cashpoints," will most likely offer the best exchange rates. Avoid exchanging money at commercial exchange bureaus and hotels, which often have the highest transaction fees.

See the "Fast Facts" section of each island chapter for ATM locations in specific destinations.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are widely accepted at hotels and many restaurants throughout the Caribbean. They are another safe way to carry money. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, but high fees make credit-card cash advances a pricey way to get cash. Keep in mind that you'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time. Also, note that many banks now assess a 1% to 3% "transaction fee" on *all* charges you incur abroad (whether you're using the local currency or your native currency).

It's highly recommended that you travel with at least one major credit card. You must have a credit card to rent a car, and hotels and airlines usually require a credit card imprint as a deposit against expenses.

6 HEALTH

STAYING HEALTHY

For details on avoiding common ailments in the Caribbean, see "Common Ailments" below. For pre-existing conditions, make sure to pack prescription medications in your carry-on luggage. Carry written prescriptions in generic, not brand-name, form, and dispense all prescription medications from their original labeled vials. Many people try to slip drugs such as cocaine into the Caribbean (or pick them up there). Drugs are often placed into a container for prescription medication after the legal medications have been removed. Customs officials are well aware of this type of smuggling and often check medications if they suspect a passenger is bringing illegal drugs into or out of a country. If you wear contact lenses, pack an extra pair in case you lose one.

General Availability of Health Care

Most islands in the Caribbean have hospitals, and most doctors and nurses speak English. However, some smaller islands may send patients to other islands for more specialized care. See the "Fast Facts" section in each chapter for specific hospitals on each individual island.

COMMON AILMENTS

TROPICAL ILLNESSES Infectious hepatitis has been reported on islands such as Dominica and Haiti. Unless you have been immunized for both hepatitis A and B, consult your doctor about the advisability of getting a gamma-globulin shot before you leave. The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (✆ **800/232-4636;** www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on necessary vaccines and health hazards by region or country.

DIETARY RED FLAGS On some islands, it's best to drink bottled water during your trip. (See "Fast Facts" in the individual island chapters for details.) If you experience diarrhea, moderate your eating habits and drink only bottled water until you recover. If symptoms persist, consult a doctor.

BUGS & BITES One of the biggest menaces are "no-see-ums," which emerge mainly in the early evening. You can't see these gnats, but you sure can "feel-um." Window screens can't keep these critters out, so carry bug repellent. Mosquitoes are also a nuisance. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes in the Caribbean are confined largely to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. If you're visiting either, consult your doctor for preventive medicine at least 8 weeks before you leave. Dengue fever is prevalent in the islands, most prominently on Antigua, St. Kitts, Dominica, and the Dominican Republic. To date, no satisfactory treatment has been developed; visitors are advised to avoid mosquito bites—as if that were possible.

SUN & EXTREME WEATHER EXPOSURE The Caribbean sun can be brutal. Wear sunglasses and a hat and use sunscreen liberally. Limit your time on the beach the first day. If you do overexpose yourself, stay out of the sun until you recover. If your exposure is followed by fever or chills, a headache, or a feeling of nausea or dizziness, see a doctor. Many of the Caribbean islands are also inside the hurricane belt. Hurricane season officially runs from June 1 to November 30, but always check for weather advisories before you leave. See the "Fast Facts" sections in each chapter for more details.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

Finding a good doctor in the Caribbean is not a problem, and most speak English. See the "Fast Facts" section in each chapter for specific names and addresses on each individual island.

In addition to the destination-specific resources listed in the "Fast Facts" sections, please visit www.frommers.com/planning for specialized resources on receiving health care while in the Caribbean.

7 SAFETY

Each island in the Caribbean has its own safety concerns. In general, if you exercise caution when traveling and safeguard your valuables, you should be okay. For specific safety advisories, see the "Fast Facts" section of each island chapter.

8 SPECIALIZED TRAVEL RESOURCES

In addition to the destination-specific resources listed below, please visit www.frommers.com/planning for specialized travel resources.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The most gay-friendly Caribbean islands are the U.S. possessions, most notably Puerto Rico, which is hailed as the "gay capital of the Caribbean" and offers gay guesthouses, nightclubs, bars, and dance clubs. To a lesser extent, the U.S. Virgin Islands are welcoming, too.

The French islands—St. Barts, St. Martin, Guadeloupe, and Martinique—are technically an extension of mainland France, and the French have always regarded homosexuality with a certain blasé tolerance. However, don't let your guard down: Severe attacks and hate crimes against gay men have been reported.

The Dutch islands of Aruba and Bonaire are quite conservative, so discretion is suggested. But in a surprise move in 2005, their sister island of Curaçao became the first in the Caribbean to announce that it was embracing the gay and lesbian community, urging such travelers to visit their island as a gay-friendly destination, and some hotels have joined the Gay & Lesbian Travel Association. Even certain nightclubs in Willemstad highlight their gay-friendly atmosphere in an attempt to attract patrons from this community of travelers.

Gay life is fairly secretive in many of the sleepy islands of the Caribbean. Some islands even have repressive anti-homosexual laws. Homosexuality is actively discouraged in places like the Cayman Islands, but as a result of pressure from gay advocacy groups, past homophobia is slowly giving way to tolerance. In Barbados, homosexuality is illegal, and there is often a lack of tolerance in spite of the large number of gay residents and visitors on the island.

Jamaica is the most homophobic island in the Caribbean, with harsh antigay laws, even though there is a large local gay population. The famous all-inclusive **Sandals** of Jamaica had until 2004 a discriminatory policy of admitting only male-female couples. However, under pressure they were forced to rescind the ban and admit same-sex couples.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before.

However, in general, the Caribbean is not easy for persons with disabilities. Attractions and sights, for the most part, don't have elevators, ramps, or wheelchair-accessible toilets. Nor are most hotels constructed for accessibility. If you are contemplating a holiday in the sun, consider the islands of Puerto Rico or one of the U.S. Virgins—St. Thomas, St. Croix, or St. John. As U.S. territories, these islands must abide by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Even so, getting around can be difficult. Transportation is woefully inadequate and many Caribbean hotels lie in hilly or mountainous regions. However, some resorts have ground-floor bedrooms with wide doors and accessible bathrooms. We've indicated this in the amenities section of the hotel reviews.

FAMILY TRAVEL

To locate accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the "Kids" icon throughout this guide.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. Many hotels in the Caribbean still offer discounts for seniors, and in most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

The **U.S. National Park Service** offers an America the Beautiful Pass that gives seniors 62 years or older lifetime entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service—national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges—for a one-time processing fee of $10, which must be purchased in person at any NPS facility that charges an entrance fee. This includes parks in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Besides free entry, an America the Beautiful Pass offers a 50% discount on federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call ✆ **888/467-2757.**

STUDENT TRAVEL

For more information on resources for student travel, go to www.frommers.com/planning.

9 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM & ECO-TOURISM

Some of the best wildlife cruises are packaged by **Oceanic Society Expeditions** (✆ **800/326-7491;** www.oceanicsociety.org). Whale-watching jaunts and some research-oriented trips are also featured. You can swim with humpback whales in the Dominican Republic, for example.

Puerto Rico's varied and often hard-to-reach natural treasures have been conveniently packaged into a series of affordable eco-tours. **AdvenTours,** El Yunque (✆ **787/889-0251;** www.adventourspr.com), features customized private tours with activities like bird-watching, hiking, camping, visits to coffee plantations, and kayaking. **Aventuras Tierra Adentro,** 268 Piñero Ave., San Juan (✆ **787/766-0470;** http://puertoricovacation.com), specializes in rock climbing, body rafting, caving, and canyoning, among other activities. **Eco Xcursion Aquatica,** Road 191, Km 1.7, Rio Grande, Fajardo (✆ **787/888-2887**), offers some of the best rainforest hikes and mountain-bike tours.

General Resources for Green Travel

The following websites provide valuable wide-ranging information on sustainable travel. For a list of even more sustainable resources, as well as tips and explanations on how to travel greener, visit www.frommers.com/planning.

- **Responsible Travel** (www.responsibletravel.com) is a great source of sustainable travel ideas; the site is run by a spokesperson for ethical tourism in the travel industry. **Sustainable Travel International** (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) promotes ethical tourism practices and manages an extensive directory of sustainable properties and tour operators around the world.
- In the U.K., **Tourism Concern** (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) works to reduce social and environmental problems connected to tourism. The **Association of Independent Tour Operators** (**AITO;** www.aito.co.uk) is a group of specialist operators leading the field in making holidays sustainable.
- In Canada, **www.greenlivingonline.com** offers extensive content on how to travel sustainably, including a travel and transport section and profiles of the best green shops and services in Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary.
- In Australia, the national body which sets guidelines and standards for ecotourism is **Ecotourism Australia** (www.ecotourism.org.au). **The Green Directory** (www.thegreendirectory.com.au), **Green Pages** (www.thegreenpages.com.au), and **Eco Directory** (www.ecodirectory.com.au) offer sustainable travel tips and directories of green businesses.
- **Carbonfund** (www.carbonfund.org), **TerraPass** (www.terrapass.org), and **Carbon Neutral** (www.carbonneutral.org) provide info on "carbon offsetting," or offsetting the greenhouse gas emitted during flights.
- **Greenhotels** (www.greenhotels.com) recommends green-rated member hotels around the world that fulfill the company's stringent environmental requirements. **Environmentally Friendly Hotels** (www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com) offers more green accommodation ratings. The **Hotel Association of Canada** (www.hacgreenhotels.com) has a Green Key Eco-Rating Program, which audits the environmental performance of Canadian hotels, motels, and resorts.
- **Sustain Lane** (www.sustainlane.com) lists sustainable eating and drinking choices around the U.S.; also visit **www.eatwellguide.org** for tips on eating sustainably in the U.S. and Canada.
- For information on animal-friendly issues throughout the world, visit **Tread Lightly** (www.treadlightly.org). For information about the ethics of swimming with dolphins, visit the **Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society** (www.wdcs.org).
- **Volunteer International** (www.volunteerinternational.org) has a list of questions to help you determine the intentions and the nature of a volunteer program. For general info on volunteer travel, visit **www.volunteerabroad.org** and **www.idealist.org**.

Machias Adventures (✆ **888/427-3497** or 203/227-7337; www.machiasadventures.com) arranges adventure tours to St. Vincent, including hiking up a volcano, a day sailing with a crew, seeking out the huge variety of bird life, and hiking up a river canyon to a dramatic water pool—a perfect pool for swimming. The cost of these 7-day jaunts is $2,500 per person, based on double occupancy.

Although one could argue that any vacation that includes an airplane flight can't be truly "green," you can go on holiday and still contribute positively to the environment. You can offset carbon emissions from your flight in other ways. Choose forward-looking companies that embrace responsible development practices, helping preserve destinations for the future by working alongside local people. An increasing number of sustainable tourism initiatives can help you plan a family trip and leave as small a "footprint" as possible on the places you visit. See "General Resources for Green Travel," above, for more information on how to travel green.

10 SPECIAL-INTEREST TRIPS

BIKING The Dominican Republic is the best mountain-bike destination in the Caribbean. *Bicycling* magazine said the island defies all stereotype with its "towering mountains and miles of single track." The best-organized trips are offered by **Iguana Mama Mountain Bike,** Cabarete (✆ **809/571-0908;** www.iguanamama.com).

BIRD-WATCHING **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours** (✆ **800/328-8368** or 512/328-5221; www.ventbird.com) offers 6-day bird-watching trips led by a biologist in Trinidad and Tobago. Each trip costs approximately $2,295 per person, and trips are based at the **Asa Wright Nature Centre** (✆ **800/426-7781;** www.asawright.org), where you can see 150 of the more than 400 species of birds found in Trinidad. Field trips and discussions on the symbiosis between plant and bird life are available.

HIKING Unlike many of its neighboring islands, Jamaica's mountain peaks climb to 2,220m (7,282 ft.). The flora, fauna, waterfalls, and panoramas of those peaks have attracted increasing numbers of hikers determined to experience the natural beauty of the island firsthand. Because of the dangers involved, it's often best to go on an organized tour. Good ones are offered by **Sunventure Tours,** 30 Balmoral Ave., Kingston 10, Jamaica, W.I. (✆ **876/960-6685;** www.sunventuretours.com). For more information, refer to "The Blue Mountains," in chapter 15.

SCUBA TRIPS A number of outfitters offer scuba packages and cruises. **Aqua Hut** (✆ **610/642-3483;** www.aquahut.net) specializes in diving trips throughout the Caribbean for individuals, couples, and families. Its destinations range from the British Virgin Islands to Bonaire. **Island Dreams Tours & Travel** (✆ **800/346-6116;** www.divetrip.com) also offers trips, including itineraries in the Cayman Islands, Bonaire, and Turks and Caicos.

Explorer Ventures (✆ **800/322-3577** or 903/887-8521; www.explorerventures.com) takes divers on its ***Caribbean Explorer II*** to excursions in the waters of St. Kitts, St. Maarten, Turks and Caicos, and Saba. Trips usually last a week.

Another specialist in this field is **Caradonna Caribbean Tours** (✆ **800/328-2288** or 407/774-9000; www.caradonna.com), which offers adventurous scuba-cruise packages to Bonaire, St. Croix, and St. Kitts, among other islands.

SEA KAYAKING The only outfitter in the Virgin Islands that offers sea-kayaking/island-camping excursions is **Arawak**

Tips Websites for Divers

For useful information on scuba diving in the Caribbean, check out the website of the **Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI)** at **www.padi.com**. This site provides descriptions of dive destinations throughout the Caribbean and a directory of PADI-certified dive operators. *Scuba Diving Magazine* also has a helpful website at **www.scubadiving.com**. Both sites list dive package specials and display gorgeous color photos of some of the most beautiful dive spots in the world.

Expeditions, based in Cruz Bay, St. John (✆ **800/238-8687** in the U.S., or 340/693-8312; www.arawakexp.com). It provides kayaking gear, healthy meals, camping equipment, and two experienced guides. Multiday excursions range from $1,095 to $2,495.

11 STAYING CONNECTED

TELEPHONES

Generally, hotel surcharges on long-distance and local calls are astronomical, so you're better off using your **cellphone** whenever you can.

See "Fast Facts" under the individual island chapters about calling the destination from your home or calling your home country once you're there.

CELLPHONES

The three letters that define much of the world's wireless capabilities are **GSM** (Global System for Mobile Communications), a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use. In the U.S., T-Mobile and AT&T Wireless use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM. GSM phones function with a removable plastic SIM card, encoded with your phone number and account information. If your cellphone is on a GSM system and you have a world-capable multiband phone such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, and Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas around much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. While you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, we suggest renting the phone before you leave home. **Buying a phone** can be economically attractive, as many nations have cheap prepaid phone systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than $100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

For more information on cellphone use in the Caribbean, see the individual "Fast Facts" sections of each chapter, or see www.frommers.com/planning.

VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL (VOIP)

If you have Web access while traveling, you might consider a broadband-based

telephone service (in technical terms, **Voice over Internet Protocol,** or **VoIP**) such as Skype (www.skype.com) or Vonage (www.vonage.com), which allows you to make free international calls if you use their services from your laptop or in a cybercafe. The people you're calling must also use the service for it to work; check the sites for details.

12 TIPS ON ACCOMMODATIONS

SAVING ON YOUR HOTEL ROOM

WATCH OUT FOR THOSE EXTRAS!

Nearly all islands charge a government tax on hotel rooms, usually 7½% to 9%, but those rates vary from island to island. When booking a room, make sure you understand whether the price you've been quoted includes the tax. That will avoid an unpleasant surprise when it comes time to pay the bill. Sometimes the room tax depends on the quality of the hotel—it might be relatively low for a guesthouse but steeper for a first-class resort.

Furthermore, most hotels routinely add 10% to 12% for "service," even if you didn't see much evidence of it. That means that with tax and service, some bills are 17% or even 25% higher than the price that was originally quoted to you! Naturally, you need to determine just how much the hotel, guesthouse, or inn plans to add to your bill at the end of your stay, and whether it's included in the initial price.

That's not all. Some hotels slip in little hidden extras that mount quickly. For example, it's common for many places to quote rates that include a continental breakfast. Should you prefer ham and eggs, you will pay extra charges. If you request special privileges, like extra towels for the beach or laundry done in a hurry, surcharges may mount. It pays to watch those extras and to ask questions before you commit.

WHAT THE ABBREVIATIONS MEAN

Rate sheets often have these classifications:

- **MAP (Modified American Plan)** usually means room, breakfast, and dinner, unless the room rate has been quoted separately, and then it means only breakfast and dinner.
- **CP (Continental Plan)** includes room and a light breakfast.
- **EP (European Plan)** means room only.
- **AP (American Plan)** includes your room plus three meals a day.

HOTELS & RESORTS

Many budget travelers assume they can't afford the big hotels and resorts. But there are so many packages out there and so many frequent sales, even in winter, that you might be pleasantly surprised.

Some hotels are often quite flexible about their rates, and many offer discounts and upgrades whenever they have a big block of rooms to fill and few reservations. The smaller hotels and inns are not as likely to be generous with discounts, much less upgrades.

ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORTS

The promises are persuasive: "Forget your cash, put your plastic away." Presumably, everything's all paid for in advance at an "all-inclusive" resort. But is it?

The all-inclusives have a reputation for being expensive, and many of them are, especially the giant **SuperClubs** of Jamaica or even the **Sandals** properties (unless you book in a slow period or off season).

In the 1990s, so many competitors entered the all-inclusive game that the term now means different things to the various resorts that use this marketing strategy. The ideal all-inclusive is just that—a place where everything, even

drinks and watersports, is included. But in the narrowest sense, it means a room and three meals a day, with extra charges for drinks, sports, whatever. When you book, it's important to ask and to understand exactly what's included in your so-called all-inclusive. Watersports programs vary greatly at the various resorts. Extras might include horseback riding or sightseeing.

The all-inclusive market is geared to the active traveler who likes organized entertainment, a lot of sports and workouts at fitness centers, and a lot of food and drink.

If you have children, stay away from Hedonism II in Negril, Jamaica, which lives up to its name. Some Club Meds are targeted more for singles and couples; others aggressively pursue the family market. Some Club Meds have Mini Clubs, Baby Clubs, and Teen Clubs at some of their properties, at least during holiday and summer seasons.

The trick is to look for that special deal and to travel in off-peak periods, which doesn't always mean just from mid-April to mid-December. Discounts are often granted for hotels during certain slow periods, called "windows," most often after the New Year's holiday. If you want a winter vacation at an all-inclusive, choose the month of January—not February or the Christmas holidays, when prices are at their all-year high.

One good deal might be **Club Med's "Wild Card,"** geared to singles and couples. You must be 18 or over, and reservations must be made 2 or more weeks before departure. One week before departure, Club Med tells you which "village" on which island you're going to visit. If this uncertainty doesn't bother you, you can save $150 to $300 per weekly package. Deals like this can change constantly, so check to see exactly how "wild" this card is to play. Each package includes round-trip air transportation from New York, double-occupancy accommodations, all meals with complimentary wine and beer, use of all sports facilities except scuba gear (extra charges), nightly entertainment, and other recreational activities such as boat rides, snorkeling expeditions, and picnics. For more information, call ✆ **888/932-2582.**

GUESTHOUSES An entirely different type of accommodations is the guesthouse, where most of the Antilleans themselves stay when they travel. In the Caribbean, the term *guesthouse* can mean anything. Sometimes so-called guesthouses are really like simple motels built around swimming pools. Others are small individual cottages, with their own kitchenettes, constructed around a main building in which you'll often find a bar and a restaurant that serves local food. Some are surprisingly comfortable, often with private baths and swimming pools. You may or may not have air-conditioning.

For value, the guesthouse can't be topped. You can always journey over to a big beach resort and use its seaside facilities for only a small charge, perhaps no more than $5. Although they don't have any frills, the guesthouses we've recommended are clean and safe for families or single women. The cheapest ones are not places where you'd want to spend a lot of time, because of their simple, modest furnishings.

RENTING A CONDO, VILLA, OR COTTAGE Particularly if you're a family or a group of friends, a "housekeeping holiday" can be one of the least expensive ways to vacation in the Caribbean, and if you like privacy and independence, it's a good way to go. Accommodations with kitchens are now available on nearly all the islands. Some are individual cottages, others are condo complexes with swimming pools, and some are private homes that owners rent out while they're away. Many (though not all) places include maid service, and you're given fresh linens as well.

In the simpler rentals, doing your own cooking and laundry or even your

own maid service may not be your idea of a good time in the sun, but it saves money—a lot of money. The savings, especially for a family of three to six people, or two or three couples, can range from 50% to 60% of what a hotel would cost. Groceries are sometimes priced 35% to 60% higher than on the U.S. mainland, as nearly all foodstuffs have to be imported, but even so, preparing your own food will be a lot cheaper than dining at restaurants.

There are also quite lavish homes for rent, where you can spend a lot and stay in the lap of luxury in a prime beachfront setting.

Many villas have a staff, or at least a maid who comes in a few days a week, and they also provide the essentials for home life, including linens and housewares. Condos usually come with a reception desk and are often comparable to a suite in a big resort hotel. Nearly all condo complexes have pools (some more than one). Like condos, villas range widely in price and may begin at $700 per week for a modest one and go over $50,000 a week for a luxurious one. More likely, the prices will be somewhere in between.

You'll have to approach these rental properties with a certain sense of independence. There may or may not be a front desk to answer your questions, and you'll have to plan your own watersports.

For a list of agencies that arrange rentals, refer to the accommodations sections of the individual island chapters. You can also ask each island's tourist office for good suggestions. Make your reservations well in advance.

Here are a few agencies renting throughout the Caribbean:

- **Villas of Distinction** (✆ **800/289-0900** in the U.S.; www.villasofdistinction.com) offers upscale private villas with one to six bedrooms and a pool. Domestic help is often included. They have offerings on St. Martin, Anguilla, Mustique, Barbados, the U.S. and British Virgins, the Cayman Islands, St. Lucia, Nevis, Turks and Caicos, St. Barts, and Jamaica. Descriptions, rates, and photos are available online.
- **At Home Abroad** (✆ **212/421-9165;** fax 212/228-4860; www.athomeabroadinc.com) has private upscale homes for rent on Barbados, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mustique, St. John, St. Croix, St. Thomas, Tortola, and Virgin Gorda, most with maid service included.
- **Hideaways Aficionado** (✆ **800/843-4433** in the U.S., or 603/430-4433; www.hideaways.com) publishes *Hideaways Guide,* a pictorial directory of home rentals throughout the world, including the Caribbean, especially the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, and St. Lucia, with full descriptions so you know what you're renting. Rentals range from cottages to staffed villas to whole islands! Other services include yacht charters, cruises, airline ticketing, car rentals, and hotel reservations. Annual membership is $185. Membership information, listings, and photos are available online.
- **Heart of the Caribbean Ltd.** (✆ **800/231-5303** or 262/783-5303; www.hotcarib.com) is a villa wholesale company offering travelers a wide range of private villas and condos on several islands, including St. Maarten/St. Martin, Barbados, U.S.V.I., B.V.I., and St. Lucia. Accommodations range from one to six bedrooms, and from modest villas and condos to palatial estates. Homes have complete kitchens and maid service. Catering and car rentals can also be provided. Rates, listings, and photos are available online.

LANDING THE BEST ROOM

Somebody has to get the best room in the house. It might as well be you. You can start by joining the hotel's frequent-guest

program, which may make you eligible for upgrades. A hotel-branded credit card usually gives its owner "silver" or "gold" status in frequent-guest programs for free. Always ask about a corner room. They're often larger and quieter, with more windows and light, and they often cost the same as standard rooms. When you make your reservation, ask if the hotel is renovating; if it is, request a room away from the construction. Ask about nonsmoking rooms and rooms with views. Be sure to request your choice of twin, queen-, or king-size beds. If you're a light sleeper, ask for a quiet room away from vending or ice machines, elevators, restaurants, bars, and discos. Ask for a room that has been recently renovated or refurbished.

If you aren't happy with your room when you arrive, ask for another one. Most lodgings will be willing to accommodate you.

In resort areas, particularly in warm climates, ask the following questions before you book a room:

- What's the view like? Cost-conscious travelers may be willing to pay less for a back room facing the parking lot, especially if they don't plan to spend much time in their room.
- Does the room have air-conditioning or ceiling fans? Do the windows open? If they do, and the nighttime entertainment takes place alfresco, you may want to find out when show time is over.
- What's included in the price? Your room may be moderately priced, but if you're charged for beach chairs, towels, sports equipment, and other amenities, you could end up spending more than you bargained for.
- How far is the room from the beach and other amenities? If it's far, is there transportation to and from the beach, and is it free?

13 GETTING MARRIED IN THE CARIBBEAN

See also "The Best Places to Honeymoon," in chapter 1, for information on specific resorts that offer wedding and honeymoon packages. **Club Med** (✆ **888/932-2582;** www.clubmed.com), **Sandals** (✆ **888/726-3257;** www.sandals.com), and **SuperClubs** (✆ **877/467-8737;** www.superclubs.com) are three chains that have married many couples.

If you yearn to take the plunge in the Caribbean, you need to know the requirements on the different islands.

ANGUILLA Couples need to file a license application on Anguilla, which takes approximately 48 hours to process. You'll need to present a passport and, if applicable, proof of divorce or the death certificate of a deceased spouse. The fee for the license is $284 and stamp duty is $37. For further information, contact the **Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages,** Judicial Department, The Valley, Anguilla, B.W.I. (✆ **264/497-2377**).

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA There's a 24-hour waiting period for marriages on Antigua. The registration fee of $40 must be paid at the courthouse located in the government buildings on Queen Elizabeth Highway. A couple appears at the Ministry of Justice in the capital of St. John to complete and sign a declaration before a marriage coordinator and pays a $150 license fee. The coordinator will arrange for a marriage officer to perform a civil ceremony at any of Antigua's hotels or another place the couple selects. The fee for the marriage officer is $50. Several hotels and resorts offer wedding/honeymoon packages. For more information on civil or religious wedding ceremonies, contact the **Antigua and Barbuda Department of Tourism,** 305 E. 47th St., Ste. 6A, New

York, NY 10017 (✆ **888/268-4227** or 212/541-4117; www.antigua-barbuda.org).

ARUBA Nonresidents must pr ovide a number of items, including bir th cer tificates with a raised seal, photo ID, and proof that one is indeed both single and eligible to marry. It's best to review requirements with the O ffice of Civil R egistry, Schoolstraat 2 in Oranjestad (✆ **297/583-4400**).

BARBADOS Couples can no w marr y the same day they arrive on Barbados, but they must first obtain a marriage license from the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (✆ **246/228-8950**). B ring either a passport or a bir th cer tificate and photo ID, $100 cash, and $28 for the revenue stamp, which y ou can obtain at the local post office; a letter fr om the authoriz ed officiant who will per form the ser vice; plus proof, if applicable, of per tinent deaths or divorces fr om any former spouse(s). A Roman Catholic wedding on Barbados has additional r equirements. F or mor e information, contact the **Barbados Tourism Authority,** 800 S econd A ve., N ew York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/221-9831** in the U.S., or 212/986-6516; www.barbados.org).

BONAIRE The bride and/or gr oom must hav e a temporar y r esidency permit, obtained by writing a letter to the go vernor of the **Island Territory of Bonaire,** Kaya G randi na 2, Kralendijk, Bonair e, N.A. (✆ **599/717-5330**). The letter, submitted at least 4 w eeks in adv ance of departure for Bonaire, should request permission to marry on Bonaire and to apply for temporar y r esidency. You'll also need to inform the governor of your arrival and departure dates and the date y ou wish to marry. The par tner who applies for r esidency must be on the island for 7 days before the wedding. A special dispensation must be issued b y the go vernor if ther e is less than a 10-day time period between the announcement of the marriage and the ceremony. In addition, send two passpor t photos, copies of the bride 's and gr oom's passports, bir th cer tificates, and, if applicable, proof of divorce or the death certificate of a deceased spouse.

If you desire, you can arrange your wedding on Bonair e thr ough **Multro Travel and Tours,** M uller Light H ouse B each Resort no . 22 (P .O. Bo x 237), Bonair e, N.A. (✆ **599/717-8834;** fax 599/717-8334; www .infobonaire.com), or check with the hotel wher e y ou're planning to stay. S ome hotels arrange w eddings on special r equest. F or fur ther information, contact the **Bonaire Government Tourist Office,** 80 B road S t., S te. 3202, N ew York, NY 10020 (✆ **800/266-2473** or 212/956-5912; www.infobonaire.com).

THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISL ANDS I sland residency is not r equired, but a couple must apply for a marriage license at the attorney general's office and must stay in the B.V.I. for 3 days while the application is processed. Present a passport or original birth cer tificate and photo identification, plus cer tified pr oof of y our marital status and, if applicable, pr oof of div orce or the death certificate of a deceased spouse. Two witnesses must be pr esent. The fee is $35 if the cer emony is in office or $100 for a ceremony performed elsewhere. Marriages can be per formed by the local r egistrar or by the officiant of y our choice. You ar e also required to buy $110 worth of stamps if you are in the territory less than 15 days or $50 if y ou are in the B.V.I. mor e than 15 days. Contact the **Registrar's Office,** P.O. Box 418, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. (✆ **212/696-0400** in the U.S. or 284/494-3134 in B.V.I.; www.bvitourism.com).

THE C AYMAN ISL ANDS V isitors have to call ahead and arrange for an authorized person to marr y them. The name of the marriage officer has to appear on the application for a marriage license. The application for a marriage license costs $200 and can be obtained fr om the **Deputy Chief Secretary's Office,** 3r d F loor,

Government Administration Building, George Town (✆ **345/949-7900**). There is no waiting period. Present a birth certificate, the embarkation/disembarkation cards issued by the island's immigration authorities, and, if applicable, divorce decrees or proof of a spouse's death. A brochure, *Getting Married in the Cayman Islands,* is available from **Government Information Services,** Cricket Square, Grand Cayman (✆ **345/949-8092;** fax 345/949-5936).

CURAÇAO Couples must be on island 3 days before applying for a marriage license, for which there is a 14-day waiting period. Passport, birth certificate, return ticket, and, if applicable, proof of divorce or the death certificate of a deceased spouse are required. The $225 fee is subject to change, so check in advance. For further information, call the **Curaçao Tourist Board,** One Gateway Center, Ste. 2600, Newark, NJ 07102 (✆ **973/353-6200** or 800/328-7222; www.curacao.com).

JAMAICA In high season, some Jamaican resorts witness several weddings a day. Many of the larger resorts have wedding coordinators on staff who can arrange for an officiant, a photographer, and even the wedding cake and champagne. Some resorts even throw in your wedding with the cost of your honeymoon at the hotel. Both the Jamaican Tourist Board and your hotel will assist you with the paperwork. Participants must reside on Jamaica for 24 hours before the ceremony. Bring birth certificates and affidavits saying you've never been married before. If you've been divorced or widowed, bring copies of your divorce papers or a copy of the deceased spouse's death certificate. The license and stamp duty cost $60 to $65. Or you can apply in person at the **Ministry of National Security & Justice,** 111 Harbor St., Kingston, Jamaica (✆ **876/906-4923**).

PUERTO RICO There are no residency requirements for getting married in Puerto Rico. For U.S. citizens, blood tests are required, although a test conducted on the U.S. mainland within 10 days of the ceremony will suffice. A doctor in Puerto Rico must sign the license after conducting an examination of the bride and groom. For complete details, contact the **Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Health Department,** Demographic Registry, P.O. Box 11854, Fernandez, Juncos Station, San Juan, PR 00910 (✆ **787/767-9120**).

ST. LUCIA On island, you have the option of getting married on the day of arrival; you are required to pay $200 if you can produce the necessary documents such as a birth certificate and a Decree Absolute (if one of the parties is divorced). You can also opt to stay 2 days or more on St. Lucia; you are required to pay $125. Some resorts also offer wedding packages that include all the necessary arrangements for a single fee. For more information, contact the **St. Lucia Tourist Board,** 800 Second Ave., Ste. 910, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/456-3984** or 212/867-2950; fax 212/867-2795; www.stlucia.org).

TURKS & CAICOS You need the usual documents here, including passport, original birth certificate, proof of status (if single, a sworn affidavit), and a divorce decree, plus a $100 license fee. You must be on island for 24 hours to establish residency. For more details, contact the **Registrars of Marriages** on Front Street at ✆ **649/946-2800** in Provo.

THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS No blood tests or physical examinations are necessary, but there is a $50 notarized application and a $50 license fee, and an 8-day waiting period, which is sometimes waived depending on circumstances. Civil ceremonies before a judge of the territorial court cost $200 each; religious ceremonies performed by clergy are equally valid. Fees and schedules for church weddings must be negotiated directly with the officiant. More information is available from the

U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Tourism, 1270 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 (✆ **800/372-8784;** www .usvitourism.vi).

The U.S. Virgin Islands tourism offices distribute the guide *Getting Married in the U.S. Virgin Islands,* which gives information on all three islands, including wedding planners, places of worship, florists, and limousine services. The guide also provides a listing of island accommodations that offer in-house wedding services.

Couples can apply for a marriage license for **St. Thomas** or **St. John** by contacting the **Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands,** P.O. Box 70, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00804 (✆ **340/774-6680**). You can apply for weddings on **St. Croix** by contacting the **Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands,** Family Division, P.O. Box 929, Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00821 (✆ **340/778-9750**).

14 CHARTERING YOUR OWN BOAT

For detailed information on the cruise lines serving the Caribbean, pick up a copy of *Frommer's Caribbean Ports of Call.*

Experienced sailors and navigators can charter "bareboat," a fully equipped rental boat with no captain or crew. You're on your own, and you'll have to prove your qualifications before you're allowed to rent one. Even an experienced skipper may want to take along someone familiar with local waters, which may be tricky in some places.

You can also charter a boat with a skipper and crew. Charter yachts, ranging from 15 to 30m (50–100 ft.), can accommodate 4 to 12 people.

Most yachts are rented on a weekly basis, with a fully stocked bar and equipment for fishing and watersports. The average charter carries four to six passengers and usually is reserved for 1 week.

The Moorings (✆ **888/952-8420** in the U.S. and Canada; www .moorings.com) operates the largest charter yacht fleet in the Caribbean. Its main branch is located in the British Virgin Islands, but it has outposts in St. Martin, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, and Grenada, to name a few. Each location has a regatta of yachts available for chartering. Depending on their size, yachts are rented to as many as four couples at a time. You can arrange to rent bareboat (for qualified sailors only) or rent yachts with a full crew and cook. Depending on circumstances, the vessels come equipped with a barbecue, snorkeling gear, a dinghy, and linens. The boats are serviced by an experienced staff of mechanics, electricians, riggers, and cleaners. If you're going out on your own, you'll get a thorough briefing on Caribbean waters, reefs, and anchorages.

Nicholson Yacht Charters (✆ **800/662-6066** in the U.S., or 617/661-0555; fax 617/661-0554; www .yachtvacations.com) is one of the best in the business, handling charter yachts for use throughout the Caribbean basin, particularly the route between St. Maarten and Grenada and the routes around the U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Featuring boats of all sizes, the company rents motorized vessels or sailing yachts up to 88m (292 ft.) long. Sometimes groups of friends rent two or more yachts (each sleeping eight guests in four double cabins) to race each other from island to island during the day and anchor near each other in secluded coves at night. The price for renting a yacht or motor yacht depends on the number in your party, the size of the vessel, and the time of the year.

Sunsail (✆ **888/350-3568** in the U.S.; www.sunsail.com) specializes in yacht chartering from its bases in the British Virgin Islands, Antigua, St. Vincent, St. Martin, and Martinique. More than 150 bareboat and crewed yachts, between 9 and 16m (30–52 ft.), are available for cruising these waters. Programs include Caribbean racing and regattas, flotilla sailing, skippered sailing, and one-way or stay-and-sail bareboat cruises. The company usually requires a deposit of 25% of the total rental fee; arrangements should be made months in advance. Sunsail also offers charter flights from the United States to the Virgin Islands.

Anguilla

In the Caribbean there are two real pockets of posh—the French island of St. Barts and the British island of Anguilla. Both accommodate those with a Bill Gates–size purse and are, in fact, the most expensive islands in the Caribbean.

Which to choose? St. Barts is more for French *fashionistas* and the old-money crowd, including the Rothschilds. It is for those who want to sample the Caribbean with a French *savoir vivre.*

On the other hand, Anguilla attracts a younger but still very affluent chic and sybaritic crowd. St. Barts offers old-world charm, Anguilla plush modern comfort.

Anguilla (rhymes with *vanilla*) used to tout itself as the Caribbean's best-kept secret. Small, serene, and secluded, visitors could enjoy the privacy of small-island life and still be close to St. Maarten/St. Martin, with its gambling, shopping, and nightlife. However, the island's secret was let out in the 1990s when the opening of some super deluxe (and super expensive) hotels attracted a sophisticated jet set. Elegant restaurants followed: The island now has as many or even more stylish temples of haute cuisine than St. Barts.

Now one of the Caribbean's most chic destinations, Anguilla has nonetheless remained tranquil. If you're looking to rest, unwind, and be pampered, this is the place for you.

The post-millennium opening of some moderately priced hotels means that even more visitors can enjoy Anguilla's standards of tropical luxury. However, note that except for a handful of large-scale hotels, operations on Anguilla tend to be small and informal, as the island has tried to control development and conserve natural beauty and resources. And with good reason: The coastline has some of the finest white-sand beaches in the Caribbean. More than 30 beaches dot the island, shaded by sea-grape trees.

The northernmost of the British Leeward Islands in the eastern Caribbean, 8km (5 miles) north of St. Maarten, Anguilla is only 26km (16 miles) long, with 91 sq. km (35 sq. miles) in land area. The little island has a population of approximately 9,000 people. Most are of African descent, though many are European, predominantly Irish. Anguilla's scant rainfall makes for unproductive soil that supports mainly low foliage and sparse scrub vegetation. The locals work primarily in the tourist industry or fish for lobster.

Once part of the federation with St. Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla gained its independence in 1980 and has since been a self-governing British possession.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Dream Beach, Shoal Bay:** A superb strip of silvery beach stretching for 3km (1 3/4 miles) on the northeastern tip of the island. Iridescent fish dart among astonishing coral gardens.
- **Scilly Cay:** Just a 2-minute boat ride from "mainland" Anguilla, "Silly Key" is an acre or so of coral, sand, and exotic plants, one of the most perfect places in the Caribbean for swimming, snorkeling, and soaking up the sun.
- **Scuba diving:** The 18 dive sites here are some of the best in the Caribbean, featuring seven shipwrecks and dramatic coral reefs both shallow and deep. Favorite sites include Prickly Pear Cays, Anguillita, Scrub Island, and Dog Island.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Anguilla Tourist Board,** Coronation Avenue, The Valley, Anguilla, B.W.I. (✆ **800/553-4939** or 264/497-2759; fax 264/497-2710), is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm.

In the United States, contact Marie Walker, 246 Central Ave., White Plains, NY 10606 (✆ **914/287-2400;** fax 914/287-2404), or log onto **www.anguilla-vacation.com**.

In the United Kingdom, contact the **Anguilla Tourist Board,** 7A Crealock St., London SW182BS (✆ **208/871-0012**).

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE There are no nonstop flights to Anguilla from North America. Most passengers fly to San Juan and take a connecting flight into Anguilla. Flights land at Wallblake Airport near the center of the island. Taxis meet arriving flights, charging from $14 to $24 to the West End resorts, or from $7 to $15 to places around Sandy Ground.

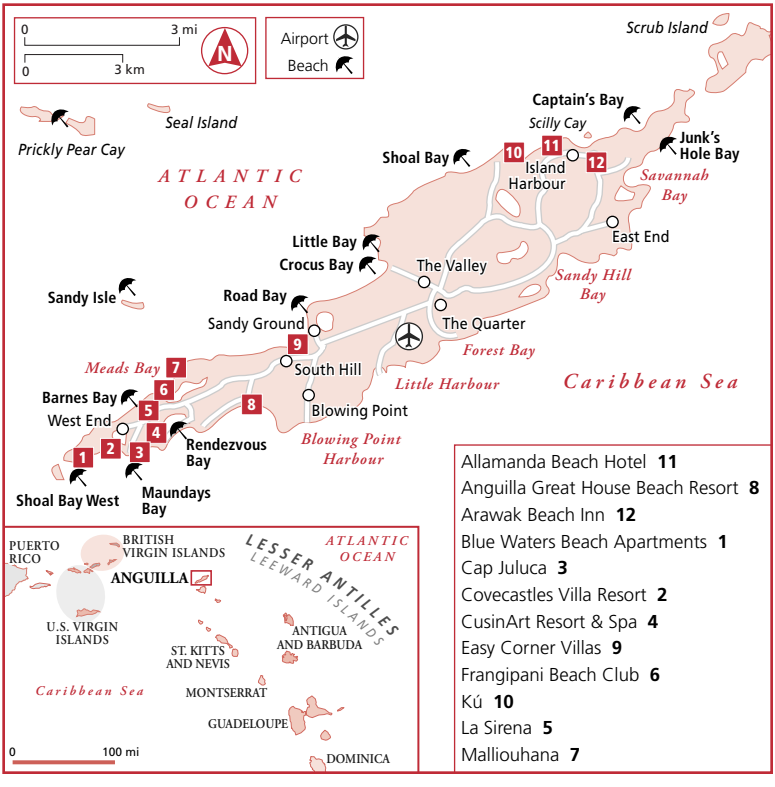
Anguilla's most reliable carrier, **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com), the commuter partner of American Airlines, has two nonstop daily flights to Anguilla from American's hub in San Juan. In the off season, flights are reduced to one each day during the week and two on weekends. Flights leave at different times based on the seasons and carry 44 to 46 passengers. Schedules are subject to change, so check with the airline or your travel agent.

From Dutch St. Maarten, **Winair** (Windward Islands Airways International; ✆ **866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada; www.fly-winair.com) has daily flights to Anguilla. It also maintains air links with St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. One of the most unreliable airlines in the Caribbean, **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428] or 264/497-5001; www.liatairline.com), offers flights into Anguilla from St. Maarten, St. Thomas, and Tortola in the British Virgin Islands.

BY FERRY Ferries run between the ports of Marigot Bay, French St. Martin, and Blowing Point, Anguilla, every 30 to 45 minutes. The trip takes 20 to 25 minutes, making it easy for visitors on one island to do a day trip to the other. The first ferry leaves St. Martin at 8am and the last at 7pm; from Blowing Point, the first ferry leaves at 7:30am and the last at 6:15pm. The one-way fare is $12 to $15 plus a $3 departure tax. No reservations are necessary. Departures are daily 7:30am to 7pm, leaving every 30 minutes. Ferries vary in size, and none takes passenger vehicles.

Fun Facts A Special Celebration

Anguilla's most colorful annual festival is **Carnival,** held jointly under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture and Tourism. Boat races are Anguilla's national sport, and they make up much of the Carnival celebration. The festival begins on Thursday before the first Monday in August and lasts a week. Carnival harks back to Emancipation Day, or "August Monday," in 1834, when all enslaved Africans were freed.



GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR To explore the island in any depth, it's best to rent a car, though be prepared for badly pav ed r oads. F our-wheel-drive v ehicles ar en't necessar y, ho wever. Several rental agencies on the island can issue the mandator y Anguillian driver's license, which is v alid for 3 months. You can also get a license at police headquar ters in the island's administrative center, The Valley, and at por ts of entr y. You'll need to pr esent a valid driver's license from your home country and pay a one-time fee of $20. ***Remember:*** Drive on the left side of the r oad.

Most visitors take a taxi from the airport to their hotel and arrange, at no extra charge, for a r ental agency to deliv er a car ther e the follo wing day. All r ental companies offer small discounts for rentals of 7 days or mor e.

There's a branch of **Avis** at The Quarter (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 264/497-2642; www.avis.com), which offers r egular cars and some four-wheel-driv e vehicles. Local car-r ental companies include **Triple K Car Rental,** Airpor t R oad (✆ **264/497-5934**), and **Island Car Rentals,** Airpor t R oad (✆ **264/497-2723**). Rates vary with the season and go up and do wn, but average around $50 a day for most r entals.

BY TAXI Typical taxi fares are $17 to $20 from the airport to Cap Juluca, $16 to the Fountain Beach Hotel, and $14 to $16 to the Malliouhana Hotel, with most rides taking 15 to 20 minutes. For a taxi, call **Airport Taxi Stand** at ✆ **264/497-5054.**

Fast Facts Anguilla

Banks Banks with ATMs are open Monday to Thursday 8am to 3pm, Friday 8am to 5pm. The most reliable is **Scotiabank,** The Valley, Fairplay Commercial Complex (✆ **264/497-3333;** www.scotiabank.com).

Currency The **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$)** is the official currency of Anguilla, although U.S. dollars are the actual "coin of the realm." Some restaurants and small establishments may present prices in EC$. When you inquire about a price, make sure you know the type of dollars quoted. The exchange rate is permanently fixed at EC$2.70 to each US$1 (EC$1 = US37¢). *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars ($).*

Customs Even for tourists, duties are levied on imported goods at varying rates, from 5% on foodstuffs to 30% on luxury goods, wines, and liquors.

Documents All visitors must have an onward or return ticket. U.S., British, and Canadian citizens must have a valid passport.

Electricity The electricity is 110-volt AC (60 cycles), so no transformers or adapters are necessary to use U.S. appliances.

Hospitals For medical services, consult the **Princess Alexandra Hospital,** Stoney Ground (✆ **264/497-2551** or -2552), or one of several district clinics.

Language English is spoken here.

Liquor Laws Beer, wine, and liquor are sold 7 days a week during regular business hours. It's legal to have an open container on the beach.

Pharmacies Go to the **Health Authority** at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Stoney Ground (✆ **264/497-2551** or -2552), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm and Saturday from 10am to noon.

Police You can reach the police at their headquarters in The Valley (✆ **264/497-2333**) or the substation at Sandy Ground (✆ **264/497-2354**). In an emergency, dial ✆ **911.**

Post Office The main post office is on Wallblake Road, The Valley (✆ **264/497-2528**). Collectors consider Anguilla's stamps valuable, and the post office also operates a philatelic bureau, open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 3:30pm, Friday 8am to 5pm. Airmail post cards and letters cost $1.50 to the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Safety Although crime is rare here, secure your valuables; never leave them in a parked car or unguarded on the beach. Anguilla is one of the safest destinations in the Caribbean, but you should still take standard precautions.

Taxes The government collects a 10% tax on rooms and a departure tax of $20 if you leave the island by air, $3 if you leave by boat.

Telephone Telephone, cable, and Telex services are offered by **Cable & Wireless Ltd.,** Wallblake Road, The Valley (✆ **264/497-3100**), open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm. To call the United States from Anguilla, dial **1,** the area code, and the seven-digit number.

Time Anguilla is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, which means it's usually 1 hour ahead of the U.S. East Coast—except when the U.S. is on daylight saving time, when the clocks are the same.

Weather The hottest months in Anguilla are July to October; the coolest, December to February. The mean monthly temperature is about 80°F (27°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

VERY EXPENSIVE

Cap Juluca ★★★ This is one of the most boldly conceived, luxurious oases in the Caribbean, fronting one of the island's best white-sand beaches. Overlooking Maundays Bay on a rolling 72-hectare (178-acre) site, Cap Juluca caters to Hollywood stars and financial barons and offers serious pampering. You're welcomed with a bottle of chilled champagne, and sorbet is served on the beach. This is the only resort on the island to match the classy Malliouhana (see below). Malliouhana has superior dining and service, but Cap Juluca fronts a better beach and its accommodations are plusher. Most of the villa-style accommodations have soaring domes, walled courtyards, labyrinthine staircases, and concealed swimming pools ringed with thick walls so that you can take it all off. Inside, a mixture of elegantly comfortable wicker furniture is offset with Moroccan accessories. Rooms are spacious, with luxurious beds and Italian-tile floors. If money is no object, opt for the extravagant suites with their own plunge pools.

Maundays Bay (P.O. Box 240), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **888/858-5822** in the U.S., or 264/497-6666. Fax 264/497-6617. www.capjuluca.com. 98 units, 18 villas. Winter/spring $595–$1,395 double, from $1,695 suite; off season $425–$695 double, from $695 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs (in summer only); fitness center; driving range; outdoor pool; room service; spa; 3 tennis courts; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Covecastles Villa Resort ★★ Across between a collection of private homes and a monumental yet minimalist resort on a white-sand beach, this is a wonderful (if shockingly expensive) small resort, with an attentive staff. Covecastles combines elements from North Africa, the Caribbean, and the futuristic theories of Le Corbusier. The units include an interconnected row of town house–style beach structures that accommodate two to four persons, and a handful of larger, fully detached villas that house up to six. Each building has views of the sea, amid the dunes and scrublands of the southwestern coast. The most spectacular place to stay is the five-bedroom grand villa that opens directly on the beach—one of the most fabulous accommodations in the Caribbean.This place offers even more privacy than Cap Juluca. Large bedrooms have twin or king-size beds with hand-embroidered linens and louvered doors and windows crafted from Brazilian walnut; terra-cotta tiles; comfortably oversize rattan furniture; and a fully equipped, state-of-the-art kitchen.

Shoal Bay West (P.O. Box 248), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., or 264/497-6801. Fax 264/497-6051. www.covecastles.com. 15 units. Winter $895–$1,800 beach house, $895–$6,395 villa; off season $595–$895 beach house, $895–$3,595 villa. AE, MC, V. Closed mid-Aug to mid-Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; bikes; aerobics; room service; tennis court; deep-sea fishing; glass-bottom boats; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, full kitchen, Wi-Fi.

CuisinArt Resort & Spa ★★★ Yes, it's owned by CuisinArt. Still, this is one of Anguilla's finest words in luxury. It fronts a powdery beach of white sand and evokes the architecture of nearby Cap Juluca. For privacy and seclusion, CuisinArt challenges Covecastles. A complex of whitewashed villas crowned by blue domes and surrounded by lush tropical foliage, it seems straight out of Mykonos. The resort offers the first-ever hydroponic farm and the only full-service resort spa in Anguilla. (Their milk-and-honey-almond scrub is the most fantastic we've experienced.) It also features an herb garden, an orchid solarium, and a rare plant house. The **Hydroponic Café**'s daily lunch features the farm's fresh vegetables in salads and other light fare.

Rendezvous Bay (P.O. Box 2000), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **800/943-3210** or 264/498-2000. Fax 264/498-2010. www.cuisinartresort.com. 93 units. Winter/spring $485–$1,095 double, $676–$1,345 junior suite, $825–$2,085 1-bedroom suite; off season $400–$705 double, $550–$975 junior suite, $750–$1,425 1-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; mountain bikes; horseback riding; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; spa; smoke-free rooms; 3 tennis courts; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility; deep-sea fishing; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Frangipani Beach Club ★ Set on 1.5km (1 mile) of luscious white sand, this flamingo-pink condo complex feels like a villa along the Spanish Mediterranean, with wrought-iron railings and red-tile roofs. Its major competition is La Sirena (see below), but La Sirena is more of a resort, with better facilities, including dining, whereas Frangipani attracts self-catering types who want to have their own condos in Anguilla. Accommodations are light and airy, done in soft pastels with natural rattan furnishings; they're very comfortable, with king-size beds. All units also have private terraces or balconies. Many of the more expensive rooms have full kitchens, and two- or three-bedroom units work for families or friends traveling together.

Meads Bay (P.O. Box 1378), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **866/780-5165** in the U.S., or 264/497-6442. Fax 264/497-6440. www.frangipaniresort.com. 17 units. Winter $350–$475 double, from $675 suite; off season $250–$350 double, from $450 suite. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Nov. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court; fishing; kayaks; snorkeling. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Malliouhana ★★★ Kids The Caribbean's ultrachic hotel, this cliff-side retreat conjures up images of Positano in the Tropics. It's even more spectacular than Cap Juluca—opulent and lavishly decorated, and situated on a rocky bluff between two white-sand beaches. Malliouhana's 10 hectares (25 acres) are lushly landscaped with terraces, pools, and fountains. A 224-member staff attends to 53 units. Haitian art and decorations are so splendid that you might not spot Gwyneth Paltrow sitting among the palms. Spacious bedrooms and suites are distributed among the main buildings and outlying villas. Each room has tropical furnishings and wide private verandas; the villas can be rented as a single unit or subdivided into three. Some accommodations open onto garden views, and others front Meads Bay Beach or Turtle Cove.

Meads Bay (P.O. Box 173), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **800/835-0796** in the U.S., or 264/497-6111. Fax 264/497-6011. www.malliouhana.com. 53 units. Winter $545–$1,005 double, $800–$3,520 suite; off season

$415–$475 double, $635–$1,655 suite. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's play area; gym; Jacuzzi; library; TV room; 3 outdoor pools; room service; spa; 4 tennis courts; boat trips; fishing; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar.

EXPENSIVE

Kú ★ (Value) Is it Anguilla or the minimalist cool of South Beach? This all-suite hotel opens onto lovely Shoal Bay East fronting 3.2km (2 miles) of white sands, among the finest in the world. The folks at the swanky Cap Juluca run this sensuous enclave, named for what the Arawaks called a sacred place. It's casual yet chic, a sort of dine-barefoot-under-the-stars hedonistic retreat designed to attract well-heeled young professionals. The 23m-long (75-ft.) bar and hip French/Caribbean restaurant, where a DJ spins the tunes, set the tone for this ultraplush enclave. The 72-sq.-m (775-sq.-ft.), white-on-white suites are among the island's finest, each with a fully equipped kitchen. The suites lie in five one- to three-story buildings, and each unit features an oceanfront or oceanview balcony. A small spa offers massages, facials, and other treatments.

Shoal Bay East, B.W.I. ✆ **800/869-5827** or 264/497-2011. Fax 264/497-3355. www.kuanguilla.com. 27 units. Winter $315–$475 double; off season $180–$220 double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; outdoor pool; spa; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

La Sirena ★ Built in 1989 on 1 hectare (2 1/2 acres) of sandy soil, a 4-minute walk from a clean white beach, this Swiss-owned resort is inviting, intimate, and low key. At least 80% of its clientele comes from Switzerland or Germany. Accommodations, arranged in two-story bougainvillea-draped wings, are large and airy, with fine rattan and wicker furnishings. Some have air-conditioning; all have ceiling fans. Rooms have large double, queen-, or king-size beds with fine linens. To reach the beach, guests walk down through the garden and a sandy footpath. Beach hats, umbrellas, and lounge chairs await on the sand. If possible, request rooms away from the second-floor Top of the Palms restaurant, to avoid the kitchen's noise and fumes.

Meads Bay (P.O. Box 200), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **877/OH-SIRENA** [647-4736] or 264/497-6827. Fax 264/497-6829. www.sirenaresort.com. 29 units. Winter $295–$320 double, from $400 suite; off season $150–$240 double, from $230 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $55 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; 2 outdoor pools; room service; tennis court (nearby); dive center; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar.

MODERATE

Anguilla Great House Beach Resort On Rendezvous Bay, with its 4km (2 1/2 miles) of white sand, this bungalow colony features cottages of gingerbread trim that sit in landscaped gardens. Each bungalow contains a number of well-furnished bedrooms, which can be rented in various configurations depending on your needs. You also get an offering of different beds here, including both king and queen size, or else two double beds. We particularly like the private porches opening onto water views. Rooms can be opened to capture trade winds, though they are also equipped with air-conditioning and ceiling fans. The beachside amenities are good and include lounge chairs, umbrellas, kayaks, Sunfish sailboats, windsurfers, and both snorkeling and fishing gear.

Rendezvous Bay, Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **264/497-6061.** Fax 264/497-6019. www.anguillagreathouse.com. 35 units. Winter $310–$340 double; off season $210–$240 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; fishing; kayaks; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer.

Arawak Beach Inn ★ (Value) Built on the site of an ancient Arawak village and only minutes from Shoal Bay Beach, this comfortable and inviting family-run hotel is a good value (for pricey Anguilla, anyway), especially during the summer months. The studios and one-bedroom suites in octagonal-shaped buildings open onto views of Scilly Cay and Captains Ridge. Beachfront units are built in the style of a re-created Amerindian village and are equipped with wet bars and beverage makers, plus large balconies or terraces. Furnishings are comfortable and include king-size beds.

Island Harbour (P.O. Box 1403, The Valley), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **877/427-2925** or 264/497-4888. Fax 264/497-4889. www.arawakbeach.com. 17 units. Winter $245–$345 double; off season $145–$205 double. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; beach bar; babysitting; bikes; outdoor pool; room service; kayaks; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV (in some), fridge, hair dryer (in some), no phone.

Blue Waters Beach Apartments (Kids) Fronting a little less than a kilometer (½ mile) of white-sand beachfront, this tranquil resort has a vaguely Moorish look. It offers well-designed and immaculately kept one-bedroom units and two-bedroom apartments, each opening directly onto the beach and cooled by ceiling fans. The family-friendly apartments attract the self-sufficient traveler: Each unit has a complete kitchen, ample closets, and comfortable furnishings such as king-size beds. Bathrooms are immaculately white, very Calvin Klein, each with a shower stall, and rooms have terraces or balconies.

Shoal Bay West (P.O. Box 69), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **264/497-6292.** Fax 264/497-6982. www.bluewatersbeach.com. 9 units. Winter $275 1-bedroom apt, $390 2-bedroom apt; off season $125 1-bedroom apt, $175 2-bedroom apt. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, kitchen.

INEXPENSIVE

Allamanda Beach Hotel (Value) The rates at this beach club lying just a 2-minute walk from Shoal Bay Beach would buy luxury in many other parts of the world, but on Anguilla it's an affordable alternative to the deluxe resorts. It attracts primarily a youth-oriented crowd, plus a lot of families. The top-floor units open onto the best views of the water, and all units are well maintained and comfortable, but furnished in a standard motel way. In addition to standard doubles, you have a choice of small apartments, efficiencies, and studios, the latter with a fully equipped kitchen.

Upper Shoal Bay Beach, The Valley, Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **264/497-5217.** Fax 264/497-5216. www.allamanda.ai. 16 units. Winter $195–$230 double; $160–$240 apt, efficiency, studio. Off season $135–$165 double; $110–$175 apt, efficiency, studio. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; gym; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

Easy Corner Villas On a bluff overlooking Road Bay, this modest villa complex is a 5-minute drive from a good beach. On the main road west of the airport, Easy Corner Villas is owned by Maurice E. Connor, the same entrepreneur who rents many of the cars on the island. His one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments are simply furnished and set on landscaped grounds with beach views from their private porches. Each comes equipped with a kitchen, combination living and dining room, a ceiling fan and air-conditioning, good beds, and large, airy living areas, plus small bathrooms with shower stalls. Maid service is available for an extra charge, except on Sunday.

South Hill (P.O. Box 65), Anguilla, B.W.I. ✆ **800/633-7411** or 264/497-6433. Fax 264/497-6410. www.caribbeaninns.com. 12 units. Winter $210 suite, $190 1-bedroom villa, $230 2-bedroom villa, $295 3-bedroom villa; off season $175 suite, $155 1-bedroom villa, $195 2-bedroom villa, $255 3-bedroom villa. AE, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchen.

3 WHERE TO DINE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Malliouhana Restaurant ★★★ FRENCH/CARIBBEAN Malliouhana Restaurant offers fluidly choreographed service, the Caribbean's most ambitious French menu, a 25,000-bottle wine cellar, and a glamorous clientele. You'll dine in an open-sided pavilion on a rocky promontory over the sea. At night your candlelit table is set with French crystal, Limoges china, and Christofle silver. The hors d'oeuvres selection is the finest on island, including delectable concoctions of fresh Anguillian lobster prepared in various ways. You are likely to savor such main courses as baked filet of mahimahi with roasted tomatoes and a green-onion sauce, or else golden crisp cooked duck with mango chutney and a Jamaican peppercorn sauce. Dessert might be an old-fashioned slice of French-style apple tart.

Meads Bay. ✆ **264/497-6111.** Reservations required. Main courses $38–$96. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10am, 12:30–3pm, and 7:30–10:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

Blanchards ★★★ INTERNATIONAL Bob and Melinda Blanchard are the masterminds behind this elegantly casual, intensely fashionable restaurant on a garden-swathed pavilion beside the sea, next to the Malliouhana's beach. The cuisine is the most creative on island, and Blanchards has attracted a sprinkling of celebs (say hi to Robert De Niro or Janet Jackson if you see them). Blanchards' 3,000-bottle wine cellar is one of the finest in the Caribbean. Behind tall teal shutters (which can be opened to the sea breezes), you can savor sophisticated food with a Caribbean flair, enhanced with spices from Spain, Asia, California, and the American Southwest. Dishes change according to the inspiration of Chef Melinda but are likely to include such delights as lobster cakes with mixed greens and a tomato-flavored tar tar sauce, or famous Anguillian lobster grilled with a honey glaze or a Cajun spicy sauce. Prepared with faultless technique is the tuna, seared on the outside and served rare inside along with Israeli couscous. For a real island dessert, opt for the cracked coconut with coconut ice cream accompanied by a rum-custard sauce in a chocolate-crusted shell.

Meads Bay. ✆ **264/497-6100.** www.blanchardsrestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses $38–$58. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm. Closed Sept 1–Nov 1.

Hibernia ★★ Finds FRENCH/INDOCHINESE Following Blanchards' lead closely, this is another little stunner of creativity. Chef Raoul Rodriguez and his wife, hostess Mary Pat O'Hanlon, have converted a lovely West Indian cottage into a charming restaurant with a French- and Indonesian-inspired decor that's a nice change of pace. When you taste Chef Raoul's creative dishes, you'll know why he was voted chef of the year in 1997. He's as good now as he was then—maybe better. Start with Asian mushroom soup or a selection of finely sliced, smoked West Indian fish. Main courses are likely to include Caribbean fish filets in a spicy Thai broth or crayfish sautéed with shiitake mushrooms and flavored with a tangy ginger sauce. French duck magret is a stunning choice, its light honey glaze the perfect touch.

Island Harbour. ✆ **264/497-4290.** www.hiberniarestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $30–$41. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–9pm; Sun 7–9pm. Closed Aug–Sept and Mon–Tues during low season.

Koal Keel ★★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN This romantic French/Caribbean restaurant is housed in one of the island's most historic homes, a former sugar plantation Great House from the 1790s. (Across the road you can see the oldest dwelling on the island, originally a building sheltering slaves.) Koal Keel has a type of 18th-century oven slaves built for their Dutch masters. Two French chefs (one of whom worked with the legendary Joël Robuchon in Paris), along with another chef from Punjab, turn out first-rate international dishes. Launch your meal with such delights as pan-seared foie gras with cinnamon-poached pears, going on to such mains as snapper tandoori with coconut rice or grilled chicken breast with lemon grass in an orange sauce. Most of the dishes are reasonably priced except for the fresh lobster, which is always expensive and depends on the market quotations of the day.

The Valley. ✆ **264/497-2930.** www.koalkeel.com. Reservations required. Main courses $28–$75. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–8:30pm.

Mango's ★ AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN In a pavilion a few steps from the edge of the sea, on the northwestern part of the island, Mango's serves healthier cuisine than the island's other top restaurants. The fresh fish, meat, and produce are grilled with a minimum of added fats or calories. All the breads and desserts, including ice cream and sorbet, are made fresh daily on the premises. You might start with delectable lobster cakes and homemade tar tar sauce, or creamy conch chowder. Grilled local lobster and spicy whole snapper are featured main courses, but the best main dish is the simple grilled fish with lemon-and-herb butter.

Seaside Grill, Barnes Bay. ✆ **264/497-6479.** www.mangos.ai. Reservations required. Main courses $28–$46. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 7–9:30pm. Closed Aug–Oct.

Overlook ★★ CARIBBEAN Perched on a cliff overlooking Sandy Ground Bay, you get fine dining and a panoramic view at chef Deon Thomas's laid-back place. Each dish seems imbued with the chef's creative Caribbean flair. Island art adorns the walls of the dining room here, or else you can eat on the veranda. The restaurant serves only in winter; in summer the staff decamps for Martha's Vineyard. Start with such delights as a chilled gazpacho with roasted coconut shavings or else a fish sampler with a tamarind aioli and fruit salsa. Main courses are prepared with skill and a solid technique, ranging from a roasted whole trigger fish to the garlic-crusted snapper with a champagne *buerre blanc* and pink pepper corns. For dessert, try the "decadent" chocolate rum cake with Grand Marnier chocolate soup. When you're also presented with a mango Key lime pie or a rum raisin rice pudding, the choice becomes difficult.

South Hill. ✆ **264/497-4488.** Reservations required. Main courses $26–$38. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 1–3pm and 7–10pm. Closed May–Oct.

Straw Hat ★ ASIAN/CARIBBEAN The panoramic setting by the sea and the distant vistas of French St. Martin more than match the superb cuisine. A plain wooden structure, the restaurant stands on pilings overlooking a virtual aquarium of fish below. On a hot day, the cold cucumber-and-dill soup is refreshing, as is the cilantro-infused ceviche of local red snapper with plantain chips. Some dishes, like the jerk pork tenderloin, are traditional favorites; others are more eclectic, like the seared Anguillian red snapper with a lime, ginger, and saffron sauce or the grilled loin of tuna with Asian noodles and a compote of carameliz ed onions. A cilantro, lime, and pecan pesto pasta can be served with your choice of grilled chicken, tuna, or red snapper. For dessert, order the chocolate indulgence—three types of chocolate in one cake.

Forest Bay. ✆ **264/497-8300.** www.strawhat.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$48. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–9:30pm. Closed Sept–Oct.

Veya Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL The cooks here believe in adding harmonious flavors to all their dishes, and many of their plates are quite sublime. The fashionable atmosphere is stylish as well, including romantic candlelight on the open-air veranda. Live music often fills the nights as diners enjoy mojitos worthy of being served to Papa Hemingway in Old Havana. Recipes are "stolen" from all over the world to create such dishes as seared Moroccan spiced New York strip with tomato red jam and a pumpkin couscous, or else grilled jerk spiced tuna with a rum-coffee glaze and caramelized pineapple. One of our favorite dishes is grilled crayfish with a ginger beurre blanc and chayote flan. The desserts are among the island's best.

Sandy Ground. ✆ **264/498-8392.** Reservations required. Main courses $28–$42. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10pm.

MODERATE

Trattoria Tramonto ★ (Finds) NORTHERN ITALIAN One of the island's best, this breeze-swept restaurant lies between Blue Waters Beach Apartments and Covecastles. The chef, Valter Belli, hails from Emilia-Romagna in northern Italy. The tables lie near the water, with distant views of St. Martin. The "sundowners" here are the best on island, including a peachy Bellini as good as that served at Harry's Bar in Venice. Other champagne drinks are mixed with fruits like mango, passion fruit, or guava. The chef takes special care with his appetizers, including a *zuppa di pesce* (fish soup with porcini mushrooms) and spicy-hot penne with a garlic, tomato, and red-pepper sauce. All the entrees are superb and prepared with care, including a delectable red snapper with a caper-laced fresh tomato sauce or , our favorite and the house specialty , lobster-filled ravioli in a truffle-cream sauce.

Shoal Bay West. ✆ **264/497-8819.** www.trattoriatramonto.com. Reservations required. Main courses $16–$22 lunch, $24–$38 dinner. MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 6:30–9pm. Closed Aug–Oct.

Zara's Restaurant ★ ITALIAN/CARIBBEAN Award-winning master chef Shamash Brooks presides at this casually elegant place, which has many fans who visit every time they return to Anguilla. The chef—known islandwide for his pasta dishes—uses excellent ingredients, which are prepared to order. His fish dishes, especially the crusted snapper, are delightful, and he does veal, chicken, and steak equally well. Try his Bahamian cracked conch, and look for various daily specials. A few items are costly, but most dishes are in the moderate range.

Allamanda Beach Club, Upper Shoal Bay East. ✆ **264/497-3229.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$35. DISC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–9pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Good, affordable food is served in a festive atmosphere at **Johnno's Beach Bar,** Road Bay, Sandy Ground (✆ **264/497-2728**), and at **Pumphouse Bar & Grill,** Sandy Ground (✆ **264/497-5154**). See "Anguilla After Dark," below, for details. Johnno's is open for lunch and dinner; the Pumphouse is open only for dinner.

Ferryboat Inn (Value) CARIBBEAN/FRENCH Established by English-born John McClean and his Anguillian wife, Marjorie, this place is one of the best deals on the island. On the beach, a short walk from the Blowing Point ferry pier, it features French

Gwen, Reggae & Barbecue

Want to spend a lazy day on Upper Shoal Bay, which arguably has the whitest sand in the Caribbean? Drop in to **Gwen's Reggae Grill** (✆ **264/497-2120**) for the full bar and Gwen Webster's barbecue. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm and until 7pm Sunday, it is best on a Sunday when it showcases live reggae performances. Gwen's piña coladas are the best on Anguilla, as is her special slaw, and you should try her shrimp salad or fish sandwiches. Off the beach is easy snorkeling. The palm grove here is about the only naturally shady spot on island, and it comes with a fleet of hammocks.

onion soup, black-bean soup, some of the best lobster thermidor on the island, and scallop of veal Savoyard. Unless you order the shellfish, most dishes are reasonably priced.

The McCleans also rent six one-bedroom apartments and a two-bedroom beach house. In winter, apartments cost $176 to $198, and the beach house is $308. Off season, an apartment is $99 to $115, and the beach house is $195.

Cul de Sac Rd., Blowing Point. ✆ **264/497-6613.** www.ferryboatinn.ai. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$37. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm; daily 7–10pm. Turn right just before the Blowing Point Ferry Terminal and travel 140m (459 ft.) before making a left turn.

Ripples CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is earthier and more British than most others in Sandy Ground, which has the biggest cluster of bars and restaurants on Anguilla. Its friendly staff and long, busy bar will make you feel as though you're on the set of *Cheers*. Set in a restored clapboard house, it has a raised deck, a casual West Indian decor, and a crowd of regulars. Local fish—mahimahi, snapper, tuna, and grouper—are prepared any way you like. The coconut-shrimp house special, puffy brie in beer batter, and Creole-style conch are the reasons we keep coming back. Only a few dishes are at the high end of the price scale.

Sandy Ground. ✆ **264/497-3380.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$34. MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

4 ANGUILLA'S BEACHES

Anguilla's interior may be barren, but there's no denying the beauty of its shores—the superb beaches have put Anguilla on the tourist map. There are dozens of them, plus another handful on the outer cays. Miles and miles of pristine, powdery-soft sands open onto crystal-clear waters. Many of the beaches are reached via bone-jarring dirt paths that ultimately give way to sand and sea. All the beaches are open to the public, but you may have to walk through the lobby of a deluxe hotel to reach one.

The best beaches are on the west end of the island, site of the most expensive hotels. **Rendezvous Bay** is the island's most famous, a long curving ribbon of pale gold sand that stretches along the bay for 4km (2½ miles). It's calmer, warmer, and shallower than Shoal Bay, which is on the Atlantic side. With an alfresco beach bar, it attracts all kinds, from families to romantic couples.

Our favorite is the 3km (1 3/4-mile) **Shoal Bay** ★★ in the northeast, one of the best beaches in the Caribbean. With silver-white, powder-soft sands, it also has some of Anguilla's best coral gardens, home to hundreds of tiny iridescent fish, making it great for snorkeling. Umbrellas, beach chairs, and other equipment are available here so you can enjoy the backdrop of coconut palms and sea-grape trees. This beach is often called Shoal Bay East to distinguish it from Shoal Bay West (see below). The waters are usually luminous, transparent, and brilliantly blue. At noon the sands are blindingly white, but at sunrise and sunset they turn a pink to rival any beach in Bermuda. You'll hear music from the terraces of the Hardbroke Cafe and Uncle Ernie's. The Upper Shoal Bar serves first-rate tropical drinks, and souvenir shops hawk T-shirts and suntan lotion on the beach. For a little more tranquillity, you can also take the trail walk from Old Ta to little-known **Katouche Beach,** which offers perfect snorkeling and is also a prime site for a beach picnic under shade trees.

Shoal Bay West, next to Maundays Bay, has pristine white sands opening onto the southwest coast. You'll find deluxe accommodations, including Covecastles, on these shores.

Adjoining Shoal Bay West is 1.5km-long (1-mile), white-sand **Maundays Bay Beach,** justifiably one of the island's most popular shorelines, with good snorkeling and swimming. Though the waters are luminescent and usually calm, sometimes the wind blows enough to attract windsurfers and sailboats. On a clear day you can see St. Martin across the way.

Sandy Isle, on the northwest coast, is a tiny islet with a few palms surrounded by a coral reef. It lies offshore from Road Bay. Once here, you'll find a beach bar and restaurant, and a place to rent snorkeling gear and buy underwater cameras. During the day, a small ferry heads here every hour from Sandy Ground.

The northwest coast has a number of other beaches worth seeking out, notably **Barnes Bay Beach,** filled with powdery white sand opening onto clear blue waters. You can relax in the shade of the chalky hillside or a beach umbrella, or join the windsurfers and snorkelers. It's usually less crowded after lunch.

Almost never crowded, **Little Bay Beach** is one of the most dramatic in Anguilla, set against steep cliffs. Here the sands are grayish, but snorkelers and scuba divers don't seem to mind. The beach also attracts bird-watchers and picnickers. Local weddings are sometimes performed here.

Moments Grilled Lobster on a Remote Cay

At Island Harbor, just wave your arms and a boatman will pick you up and transport you across the water to **Scilly Cay,** pronounced "silly key." You wouldn't really call this place an island; it's more like a spit of sand 150m (492 ft.) off the coast of the main island's northeastern shoreline. At a little cafe and bar here, you can select a fabulous fresh lobster. Grilled while you wait, the lobster is marinated in a sauce of honey-laced orange juice, orange marmalade, roasted peanuts, virgin olive oil, curry, and tarragon. Chicken is prepared the same way. Lunch is served Tuesday to Sunday from noon to 3pm.

Road Bay Beach, also on the northwest coast, is known for spectacular sunsets and clear blue waters, often filled with yachts coming from St. Martin. A watersports center here on the beach will set you up with gear. You can also watch lobstermen set out in their boats.

The beaches along the northeast coast are the stuff of fantasies—especially if you've got a four-wheel-drive. Calm and tranquil, the incredibly blue waters of **Island Harbour Beach** attract both locals and the odd visitor or two. For centuries Anguillians have set out from these shores to haul in Anguillian lobster. There are a few beach bars and alfresco dining rooms here, so you can make a day of it—or take a 3-minute boat ride over to Scilly Cay.

Chances are, you'll have **Captain's Bay's Beach** all to yourself. Near Junk's Hole, it's better for enjoying the sun and sand than it is for swimming.The undertow is dangerous, though the setting is dramatic and appealing.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CRUISES & BOATING A great way to have fun on Anguilla is to cruise to a secluded beach on an offshore cay for a picnic and some snorkeling, whether on your own or with a group. Several outfitters on the island rent vessels, including **Anguillian Divers** (✆ **264/497-4750;** www.anguilliandivers.com), which offers a 9.3m (31-ft.) motorboat.

FISHING Your hotel can arrange for you to cast your line with a local guide, but you should bring your own tackle. Agree on the cost before setting out, however, to avoid the "misunderstandings" that are commonly reported.

Malliouhana, Meads Bay (✆ **264/497-6111**), has a 12m (40-ft.) fishing cruiser, *Dakota,* which holds up to 12 passengers. You can charter it for fishing parties for $500 for up to 4 hours. All fishing gear is included, along with a snack basket. In addition, **Garfield Richardson** (✆ **264/497-2956**) rents boats that will cost four fishermen from $110 to $200 per hour, including snacks and equipment.

GOLF Anguilla's first golf course, created by golf legend Greg Norman, opened in 2006. The **Temenos Golf Club** ★★★, Anguilla Merrywing West End (✆ **264/222-8200;** www.temenosgolfclub.com), is an 18-hole, par-72, 7,100-yard course, featuring 14 oceanview holes. Greens fees are $150 to $500 per person, including cart, caddies, and locker-room access, one of the highest such fees in the Caribbean. Club rental costs an additional $70. Bob and Melinda Blanchard, owners of the famous Blanchards restaurant (p. 57), have opened Zurra, a restaurant on the grounds next to the clubhouse.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING Most of the coastline of Anguilla is fringed by coral reefs, and the island's waters are rich in marine life, with sunken coral gardens, brilliantly colored fish, caves, and stingrays offshore. Conditions for scuba diving and snorkeling on the island are ideal. In addition, the government of Anguilla has artificially enlarged the existing reef system, a first for the Caribbean. Battered and outmoded ships, deliberately sunk in carefully designated places, act as nurseries for fish and lobster populations and provide dive sites. At **Stoney Bay Marine Park** off the northeast coast, you can explore the ruins of a Spanish ship that sank in the 1700s.

Anguillian Divers, Meads Bay (✆ **264/497-4750**), is a one-stop dive shop that answers most diving needs. PADI instructors are on hand, with a two-tank dive costing $85, plus another $10 for equipment. Another good choice is **Shoal Bay Scuba & Water**

Sports (✆ **264/497-4371;** http://shoalbayscuba.ai), with one of the best-designed dive boats in the area. (It was custom built.) A two-tank dive costs $80, plus $10 for equipment.

It's easy to find places to rent snorkeling gear on the island's most popular beaches, if your hotel doesn't provide it. The snorkeling's great at Shoal Bay, Maundays Bay, Barnes Bay, Little Bay, and Road Bay.

TENNIS Most of the resorts have their own tennis courts. (See "Where to Stay," earlier in this chapter.) **Malliouhana,** Meads Bay (✆ **264/497-6111**), has a pro shop and four championship Laykold tennis courts. All courts are lit for night games.

6 EXPLORING ANGUILLA

The best way to get an overview of the island is on a **taxi tour.** In about 2 1/2 hours, a local driver (all of them are guides) will show you everything for about $50. The driver will also arrange to let you off at your favorite beach after a look around, and then pick you up and return you to your hotel or the airport. Call **Airport Taxi Stand** at ✆ **264/497-5054** or **Blowing Point Ferry Taxi Stand** at ✆ **264/497-6089.** If you want more organized sightseeing, call **Bennie's Tours** at Blowing Point (✆ **264/497-2788**). This is the island's most reliable tour operator.

Boat trips can sometimes be arranged to **Sombrero Island,** 61km (38 miles) northwest of Anguilla. This mysterious island, with its lone lighthouse, is 360m (1,182 ft.) wide at its broadest point and 1.2km (3/4 mile) in length. Phosphate miners abandoned it in 1890, and limestone rocks, now eroded, rise in cliffs around the island. The treeless, waterless terrain evokes a moonscape. Ask at your hotel desk if you can be hooked up with a vessel sailing over to the island.

For that rare rainy day, there is the **Heritage Museum Collection,** East End at Pond Ground (✆ **264/235-7440**), open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, charging $5 admission. Artifacts on display range from the golden age of the Arawak Indians to the British "invasion" of the island in 1969. In addition to artifacts, photographs tell the story, including those documenting a visit from Queen Elizabeth II in 1964.

One of Anguilla's most festive, and certainly most colorful, annual festivals is **Carnival,** held jointly under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture and of Tourism. Boat races are Anguilla's national sport, and during Carnival they form 60% of the celebration, in which the island's people display their culture, drama, creativity, and love of their land. The festival begins on the Thursday before the first Monday in August and continues for 1 week. Carnival harks back to Emancipation Day, or "August Monday," as it's called, when all enslaved Africans were freed.

7 SHOPPING

For serious shopping, it's best to take the ferry (see "Getting There," earlier in this chapter) and visit the big stores in Marigot on French St. Martin. Little branch shops of some of the bigger stores are also found on Anguilla, but the better merchandise and the larger selection can be found just a ferryboat ride away.

On Anguilla itself, the most fun shopping is at **World Art & Antiques Gallery,** West End Road, The Valley (✆ **264/497-5950;** www.worldartandantiques.com), where

Nik and Christie Douglas have assembled a fascinating array of collectibles from around the world. Treasures include Chinese bronzes and jades, exotic jewelry, tribal and pre-Columbian sculptures and masks, and antiques and paintings.

What you can't get in St. Martin is local arts and crafts from Anguilla. The best of these are on display at the **Savannah Gallery,** Coronation Street, Lower Valley (✆ **264/497-2263;** www.savannahgallery.com), on the road to Crocus Bay, and the **Devonish Art Gallery,** West End Road (✆ **264/497-2949**). Courtney Devonish is a well-known potter and sculptor. You can also preview original paintings by local artists at **Loblolly Gallery,** in Rose Cottage, Crocus Hill Road (✆ **264/497-6006;** www.loblollygallery.com).

8 ANGUILLA AFTER DARK

Nightlife on Anguilla centers mainly on the various hotels, especially in winter, when they host barbecues, West Indian parties, and singers and other musicians. The hotels hire calypso combo groups and other bands, both local and imported.

Funky is the word to describe **Dune Preserve** at Rendezvous Bay (✆ **264/497-6219**), which is the driftwood beach bar of Bankie Banx, the island's reigning reggae performer. On the south coast, Banx croons at night, singing melodies of freedom, justice, and his childhood dreams. The classic beach bar has a "sexy, Swiss family Reggae-son vibe." There's a dance floor and bar that butts up to the water, where patrons can feast on conch and snapper salad. On some nights a beach barbecue is staged.

Open-air **Johnno's Beach Bar,** Road Bay, Sandy Ground (✆ **264/497-2728**), is a favorite of Hollywood types when they visit Anguilla. The club serves Beck's beer on the beach, along with barbecued spareribs, grilled chicken, and fresh fish for lunch and dinner. Live entertainment takes place Wednesday 7pm to 1am and Friday 10pm to 2am. A weekly Sunday barbecue begins at noon, with live light jazz music starting mid-afternoon in winter. Try the Johnno Special (similar to a piña colada, but made with rum and guavaberries).

A restaurant-cum-beach-bar, **Palm Grove Bar & Grill,** Junk's Hole Bay (✆ **264/497-4224**), sits along a long stretch of uncrowded white sand near offshore reefs full of eels, squid, and manta rays. Nat Richardson, the owner, is waiting to boil or grill fresh-caught lobster, crayfish, or shrimp for you. *Bon Appétit* liked his johnny cakes so much it stole the recipe and published it. Hours are usually 11am to around 6:30pm daily, but they can vary greatly depending on when the owner feels like getting there, and whenever clients decide to show up.

Pumphouse Bar & Grill, Sandy Ground (✆ **264/497-5154**), is the island's latest hot spot, featuring 30 different rums. The food is good, too, served in a funky dining room with an uneven concrete slab floor that was originally designed as a repair station for heavy trucks. Standard but satisfying menu items include platters of fish or chicken, steaks, and a Caesar salad with slices of jerk chicken. Go any time from 6pm to 2am, except Sunday, when it's closed. Reggae lovers should show up on Wednesday and Saturday nights; Thursday nights are often devoted to merengue.

There are some other little nighttime joints that flourish on the weekend, including one hot spot, **The Red Dragon Disco,** The Valley (✆ **264/497-2687**), where dancers gyrate to the latest record music.

Cigar aficionados flock to **Elio's** in The Valley at Bedney's Plaza, off West and Main roads (✆ **264/497-7822**). Elio's features a walk-in humidor with some 200 exotic brands of cigars, including the fabled Cuban Cohiba Robustos (illegal in the U.S.). The best rum on island is also sold here, including 15-year-old bottles of Ron Varadero, also from Cuba. While you smoke and drink, you can listen to an array of tapes, including Cubano and general Latino recordings. The bar is small but choice, with only six stools at the counter and five tables outside.

4

Antigua & Barbuda

Antigua is hardly the most beautiful island in the Caribbean, but its beaches—365 of them, one for every day of the year—have put the island on the tourist map. Protected for the most part by coral reefs, the sands are often sugar white.

The inland scenery of Antigua (An-*tee*-gah) isn't as dramatic as what you'll find on St. Kitts, and if you want high-rises and glittering gambling and nightlife, you'll have to head to Puerto Rico. (Antigua does have some casinos, but they're hardly a reason to visit, and most of its hotels are intimate one- or two-story inns rather than glitzy, sprawling resorts.) In general, the dining and shopping of Antigua are comparable to those of St. Kitts but don't hold up to St. Maarten/St. Martin or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Still, Antigua is a modern-day vacation haven—one that has been economically transformed from the poverty-stricken island it used to be. The rolling, rustic landscape is dotted with stone towers that were once sugar mills. It's now a retreat for some celebrities you might not have automatically thought of—Giorgio Armani, Oprah Winfrey, and Eric Clapton each maintain homes here—and the island's bankers are gaining a name for themselves as cooperative and indulgent advisors and enablers for offshore billionaires in search of flexible solutions to thorny problems.

Antigua may be an independent nation, but it is still British in many of its traditions. The locals will treat you with respect if you show them respect, though Antigua is not the friendliest of islands in the Caribbean, thanks to its history—too much unemployment, too great a gap between rich and poor.

Most hotels, restaurants, beach bars, and watersports facilities lie north of the capital of **St. John's,** in the northwest. St. John's is a large, neatly laid-out town 10km (6¼ miles) from the airport and less than a mile from Deep Water Harbour Terminal. This port city is the focal point of commerce and industry and the seat of government and shopping. Protected within a narrow bay, St. John's is riddled with cobblestone side walks and weather-beaten wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs and louvered Caribbean verandas. Trade winds keep the wide streets cool. Since all the major resorts are on good beaches, most visitors tend to stay put, going into St. John's for a day's shopping jaunt or to English Harbour for some history.

Before volcanic ash covered much of Antigua's neighbor, **Montserrat,** that little island was a discreet, out-of-the-way destination in its own right. It was once a haven for many American expatriates, mostly retired couples looking for a tight-knit society with small-town values and low crime, and at one time was the Caribbean island of choice for music stars such as Paul McCartney, who came here to write and record songs.

Despite the crippling effect of the volcanic explosions in the mid-1990s, Montserrat may or may not be bouncing back, depending on whom you talk to. Until the volcanic dust settles (the eruption continues today), however, it is most often visited as a day trip from Antigua, mainly by the curious or adventure

seekers. Regrettably for thrill seekers and amateur volcanologists, the regions showing the most dramatic effects of the destruction cannot be observed firsthand, since the access roads are closed except to government vehicles. That, coupled with the fact that there is no regularly scheduled cheap and easy ferryboat service to Montserrat from Antigua (everyone has to fly) and the fact that there is only one bona-fide hotel still functioning, plus a deep-seated sense of depression among the few Montserratians who remain on island, makes the tourist future of Montserrat, at least for the moment, bleak.

Barbuda, which lies 42km (26 miles) to the north of Antigua, is covered at the end of this chapter. Antigua and Barbuda, along with **Redonda,** an uninhabited rocky islet of less than 2.5 sq. km (less than 1 sq. mile), located 32km (20 miles) southwest of Antigua, form the independent nation of Antigua and Barbuda, within the Commonwealth of Nations.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Barbuda,** the sister island of Antigua, called the "last frontier of the Caribbean." Picture 27km (17 miles) of pink-and-white sandy beaches, often without a beach bum in sight.
- **Nelson's Dockyard National Park** is one of the eastern Caribbean's biggest attractions and the major symbol of England's former power in the West Indies. Think Admiral Nelson and 18th-century *Pirates of the Caribbean.*
- **The beaches of Antigua,** 365 of them, one for every day of the year. Our favorite is Dickenson Bay in the northwest, a wide strip of powder-soft sand and tranquil blue-green waters.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

You can contact the **Antigua and Barbuda Department of Tourism** at 305 E. 47th St., 6A, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **212/541-4117;** fax 212/541-4789; www.antigua-barbuda.org); or 25 SE Second Ave., Ste. 300, Miami, FL 33131 (✆ **305/381-6762;** fax 305/381-7908). A toll-free number also gives information: ✆ **888/268-4227.** Operators are available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm Eastern Standard Time.

In Canada, contact the **Antigua and Barbuda Department of Tourism and Trade,** 60 St. Clair e Ave. E., Ste. 304, Toronto, ON M4T 1N5 (✆ **416/961-3085;** fax 416/961-7218). In England the tourist office is at 45 Crawford Place, London W1H 4LP (✆ **020/7258-0700**).

On the island, the **Antigua and Barbuda Ministry of Tourism,** Queen Elizabeth Highway (✆ **268/462-0480;** fax 268/462-2483), is open Monday to Thursday 8am to 4:30pm and Friday 8am to 3pm.

GETTING THERE

The major airline that flies to Antigua's V. C. Bird Airport is **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com), which offers four daily

nonstop flights to Antigua from its hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico. A flight takes about 1½ hours, and each departs late enough in the day to allow easy transfers.

Continental (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) has flights 3 days a week out of Newark, New Jersey. **Delta** (✆ **800/221-1212**) flies twice weekly from Atlanta in winter.

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) flies daily from London's Gatwick Airport. **Virgin Atlantic Airways** (✆ **800/821-5438** in the U.S. or Canada, 077/0574-7747 in the U.K.; www.virgin-atlantic.com) also offers nonstop flights from London.

Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/462-1147; www.aircanada.ca) has regularly scheduled flights from Toronto to Antigua on Saturdays.

US Airways (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/480-5700; www.usairways.com) offers nonstop flights from Philadelphia and Baltimore.

The not-always-reliable **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liatairline.com) flies from several Caribbean islands into Antigua, notably from San Juan and St. Thomas.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Taxis meet every airplane, and drivers wait outside the major hotels. If you're going to spend a few days here, a particular driver may try to "adopt" you. The typical one-way fare from the airport to St. John's is $11, but to English Harbour it's $31 and up. The government of Antigua fixes rates, and taxis are meterless.

Taxis aren't cheap, but they're the best way to see Antigua, as the drivers also act as guides. Most taxi tours go from the St. John's area to English Harbour. Drivers generally charge a flat rate of $24 for three or four passengers and often wait 30 minutes or more while you sightsee around English Harbour. If you split the cost with another couple, these tours become more affordable.

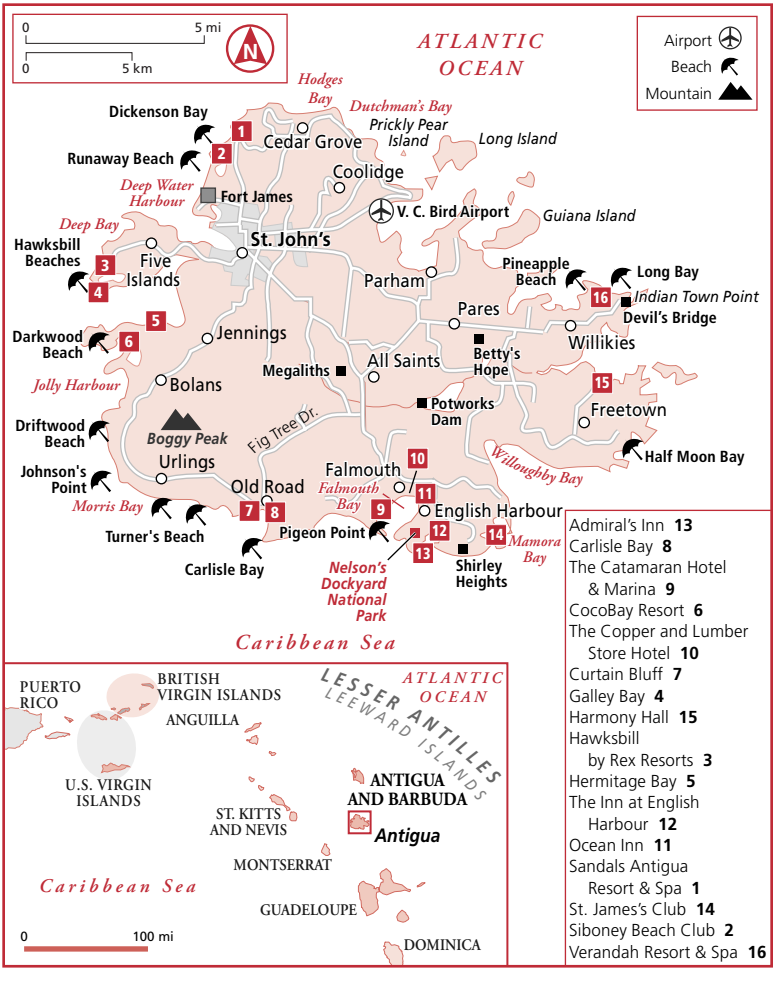
To call a taxi in St. John's, dial ✆ **268/460-8300.**

BY RENTAL CAR To drive on island, you must obtain an Antiguan license, which costs $12 and requires a valid driver's license from home. Most car-rental firms can issue you an Antiguan license, which they usually do without a surcharge. ***Remember:*** Drive on the left.

It's best to stick with the major U.S. rental companies rather than using a local agency. Try **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/462-2840; www.avis.com) or **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/481-4440; www.hertz.com) for service at the airport. Another agency to try is **Dollar** on Factory Road, St. John's (✆ **800/800-4000** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/462-0362; www.dollarcar.com).

Fun Facts Special Events

The week before the first Tuesday in August, summer **Carnival** brings exotic costumes that recall Antiguans' African heritage. Festivities include a beauty competition and calypso- and steel-band competitions. The big event in spring is **Sailing Week** in late April or early May.



Admiral's Inn **13**
Carlisle Bay **8**
The Catamaran Hotel & Marina **9**
CocoBay Resort **6**
The Copper and Lumber Store Hotel **10**
Curtain Bluff **7**
Galley Bay **4**
Harmony Hall **15**
Hawksbill by Rex Resorts **3**
Hermitage Bay **5**
The Inn at English Harbour **12**
Ocean Inn **11**
Sandals Antigua Resort & Spa **1**
St. James's Club **14**
Siboney Beach Club **2**
Verandah Resort & Spa **16**

BY BUS Although buses are a cheap option, we don't recommend them for the average visitor. Service is erratic and undependable, and roads are impossibly bumpy. In theory, buses operate between St. John's and the villages daily from 5:30am to 6pm, and on a relatively limited number of runs between St. John's and far-flung regions of the island till as late as 10pm, but don't count on it. In St. John's, buses leave from two different "stations"—on Market Street near the Central Market, and on Independence Avenue adjacent to the Botanical Gardens. Most fares are $1. There is no central information bureau to call for schedules.

Fast Facts Antigua

Banks Banks are usually open Monday to Thursday 8am to 2pm and on Friday 8am to 4pm. Try **Royal Bank** (✆ **268/480-1150**) and Scotiabank (✆ **268/480-1514**), both of them across the street from each other at the corner of High and Market streets in St. John's. You'll find several ATMs here, each of them dispensing EC dollars but not U.S. dollars.

Currency These islands use the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$).** Nearly all hotels bill in U.S. dollars, however, and only certain tiny restaurants present their prices in EC dollars. When you inquire about a price, make sure you know the type of dollars quoted. The EC dollar is worth about 37¢ in U.S. currency (EC$2.70 = US$1). *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars ($).*

Customs Arriving visitors are allowed to bring in 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, 1 quart of liquor, and 6 ounces of perfume.

Documents A valid passport is required from U.S., British, and Canadian nationals. All arriving visitors must have a departing ticket.

Electricity Most of the island's electricity is 220-volt AC (60 cycles), which means that U.S. appliances require transformers. The Hodges Bay area and some hotels, however, are supplied with 110-volt AC (60 cycles).

Emergencies In an emergency, contact the police (✆ **268/462-0125**), the fire department (✆ **268/462-0044**), or an ambulance (✆ **268/462-0251**). You can also call ✆ **911** or ✆ **999** for any type of emergency.

Hospital The principal medical facility on Antigua is **Holberton Hospital,** on Queen Elizabeth Highway, St. John's (✆ **268/462-0251**). A respected private hospital is **Adelin Medical Centre,** Fort Road, St. John's (✆ **268/462-0866**).

Language The official language is English.

Liquor Laws Beer and liquor are sold in many stores 7 days a week. It's legal to have an open container on the beach.

Safety Antigua is generally safe, but that doesn't mean you should wander alone at night on St. John's near-deserted streets. Don't leave valuables unguarded on the beach, either.

Taxes & Service Charges Visitors must pay a departure tax of $20 and an 8.5% government tax on hotel bills. Most hotels also add a service charge of between 10% and 15%. Most goods sold on island come with a "built-in" sales tax of around 15%, but since prices quoted on island invariably include the sales tax, it's likely that you'll never even know you're paying it.

Telephone Telephone calls can be made from hotels or the office of **Cable & Wireless,** at the corner of Long and Thames streets in St. John's (✆ **268/462-0840**). Whereas Cable & Wireless is responsible for international calls to and from Antigua, local on-island telephone service is provided by a local, quasi-governmental entity known as APUA, which competes with several on-island cellphone carriers. To call Antigua from the United States, dial **1268** and then the number.

To call the United States from Antigua, dial **1,** the area code, and then the number. You might want to purchase a phone card, which you can use to connect with an American long-distance company. You can reach **MCI** at ✆ **800/888-8000** and **Sprint** at ✆ **800/829-0965.**

Time Antigua is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, so it's 1 hour ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (EST). When daylight saving time takes over in the U.S., then Antigua's time is the same as the eastern United States.

Water Tap water is generally safe to drink here, but many visitors prefer to drink only bottled water.

Weather The average year-round temperature ranges from 75°F to 85°F (24°C–29°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY ON ANTIGUA

Antigua's hotels are generally small, and many are closed during the summer. Owners may decide to shut down early if business isn't good. There is a high percentage of upscale boutique hotels on Antigua, and competition among them is fierce.

An 8.5% government tax and a service charge of between 10% and 15%, depending on your hotel, are added to your hotel bill, which makes quite a difference in your final tab.

Antigua has lots of shockingly expensive hotels and resorts, but there are ways you can bring down the prices. Consider booking a package if you're interested in one of those pricey places.

Because getting around the island is difficult, your choice of where to stay is crucial. (The hotels are all plotted on the island map on p. 69.) Those who prefer high winds, breaking waves, and dramatic scenery should stay on the northwest side, north of the capital of St. John's. This is an area of middle-bracket resorts such as Sandals. If you want to spend most of your vacation at one resort, venturing out only occasionally, and can afford it, try one of the super exclusive places such as Curtain Bluff, Carlisle Bay, or St. James's Club on the remote southern coast. History buffs interested in atmospheric B&Bs should try either Admiral's Inn or the Inn at English Harbour, unless a good beach is crucial. If it is, then head for any of the big, mass-market resorts, all of which are on sandy beaches.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Carlisle Bay ★★★ Kids Giving every first-class resort in the Caribbean a serious run for its money is this stunner. It's the most opulent, most luxurious, and best-accessorized hotel in Antigua, with a European flair that fits into what's left of the island's English colonial overlay. Set on a picture-perfect bay, the resort offers every luxe amenity, from a world-class spa and a movie theater, to tennis pros, to serious cuisine. The Beach Suites are steps away from the water. Best of all, there's a sense of whimsical fun associated with a stay at this resort. The Carlisle Suites are the biggest units, with three bedrooms, a sitting room, and a kitchen. The resort's entire collection of furniture, all dark Indonesian

teak and creamy Italian upholstery, is custom made, all of it supremely comfortable, stylish, and with lots of pizzazz.

Old Rd., St. Mary's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **866/502-2855** or 268/484-0002. Fax 268/484-0003. www.carlisle-bay.com. 80 suites. Winter $805–$3,700 double; off season $555–$2,300 double . Special packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; children's programs; state-of-the-art fitness center; library; movie theater; outdoor pool; room service; full-service spa; 9 tennis courts (4 lit for night play); boat excursions; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Curtain Bluff ★★★ Kids This serene oasis, which is rivaled in its glamour only by Carlisle Bay and Jumby Bay, is one of the island's premier resorts, with a price tag to match and enough ambience and class to make St. James's Club (see below) look like a glorified Holiday Inn. Residing 24km (15 miles) from the airport on the southwest shore, the hotel occupies the most lushly tropical section of the island, in the village of Old Road, and sits on two beautiful beaches (one turbulent, the other calm). This place is for a mature America-based, old-money crowd that likes the clubby feel. The beautifully furnished accommodations include deluxe units with king-size beds; a terrace room with a king-size, four-poster bed; and spacious suites with two balconies. Accommodations in the newer units are more spacious, with upgraded furnishings and two double beds. The two-story suites are among the most luxurious in the Caribbean.

P.O. Box 288, Morris Bay, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **888/289-9898** in the U.S., or 268/462-8400. Fax 268/462-8409. www.curtainbluff.com. 72 units . Winter $995–$1,425 double , $1,325–$3,400 suite; off season $645–$825 double , $775–$1,750 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; aerobics; bocce court; croquet; squash court; yoga; putting green; access to computer facilities; TV room; outdoor pool; room service; 4 tennis courts; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, sauna (in suites), Wi-Fi.

Galley Bay ★★ Laid-back and luxurious, this upscale all-inclusive has none of that toga-party hysteria associated with such lesser all-inclusives as Sandals. Though movie stars are no longer photographed topless on the hotel beach (as Greta Garbo once was), the resort still has an aura of exclusivity. The Gauguin-inspired Tahitian-style rentals are classically elegant. These intimate rooms open onto 16 secluded hectares (40 acres) of beachfront gardens, a bird sanctuary, and a lagoon, with the biggest draw , of course, being 1.2km (¾ mile) of white-sand beach. Choose among beachfront bungalows, the more romantic Gauguin rondavels (tikilike huts) with thatch roofs, or deluxe accommodations and suites in the two-story wings.

Five Islands (P.O. Box 305), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **800/858-4618** or 268/462-0302. Fax 268/462-4551. www.eliteislandresorts.com. 69 units . Winter $845–$1,140 double , $1,120–$1,200 suite; off season $800–$980 double, $1,050–$1,275 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children 15 and under not allowed except during holiday season. 5-night minimum stay required in winter except Feb (7-night minimum); 8-night minimum during holiday season. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; bikes; fitness center; gym; walking trails; game room; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minifridge, Wi-Fi.

Hawksbill by Rex Resorts ★ Kids Named after an offshore rock that resembles a hawksbill turtle, this 15-hectare (37-acre) all-inclusive resort is about 15km (9¼ miles) west of the airport and 6km (3¾ miles) southwest of St. John's. Set on four beaches (one reserved for those who want to go home sans tan lines), it caters to active types and is popular for weddings and honeymoons. This resort draws families and happy couples who like its informality and might feel uncomfortable in the atmosphere of pretension and social climbing that you get at Curtain Bluff. The hotel revolves around an open-air,

breezy central core. Bedrooms are small and comfortably furnished, and the least expensive accommodations open onto a garden. The beach club rooms are the only units with air-conditioning and phone.

Five Islands Village (P.O. Box 108), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/462-0301,** or 305/471-6170 for reservations. Fax 268/462-1515. www.rexresorts.com. 111 units. Winter $445–$585 double, $590–$720 triple; off season $330–$465 double, $450–$590 triple. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; wellness center; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge.

Hermitage Bay ★ This small-scale cottage colony is set on a grassy, sloping hillside above a sandy beach in a remote and isolated part of southwestern Antigua down a potholed access road. It sits on 8 hectares (20 acres) of windswept coastline. Lodgings are stylish and upscale, each a freestanding wood-sheathed cottage with views of panoramic beauty. Your biggest choice involves your selection of a hillside villa high up on the slope (with a private plunge pool of its own and a sweeping view of the sea), or a beachfront unit within earshot of the waves (with a beach but no pool of its own).

Hermitage Bay, P.O. Box 60, St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/562-5500.** Fax 268/562-5505. www.hermitagebay.com. 25 units. Winter $890–$1,800 suites; off season $750–$1,260 suites. AE, DC, MC, V. No children 11 or under allowed Sept–June. **Amenities:** Restaurant; room service; spa; free use of Sunfish and Hobie Cats. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

St. James's Club ★★ Kids This remote, 40-hectare (99-acre) resort on Mamora Bay on two sand beaches tries for glamour, but it falls far behind Carlisle Bay, Curtain Bluff, and Jumby Bay, and it doesn't have the state-of-the-art maintenance of those properties, either. Midrange package tours from Britain and America continue to fill many of the rooms on occasions. But the sports facilities are among the Caribbean's best. Some of the rooms are standard and medium-size, but others are spacious. The resort has never been able to escape the architectural curse of its former existence as a somewhat banal-looking Holiday Inn. Despite that, all units have sliding-glass doors that open onto private balconies or patios. Pricey two-bedroom villas and hillside homes are also available. If you're looking into a package all-inclusive deal, be aware that the cuisine here is merely average. Many enjoy gambling in the glamorous but small European-style casino.

Mamora Bay (P.O. Box 63), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **800/858-4618** in the U.S., or 268/460-5000. Fax 268/460-3015. www.eliteislandresorts.com. 257 units, including 73 villas. Winter $499–$695 double, $855 suite; off season $269–$590 double, $750 suite. Children age 2 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 5 bars; babysitting; kids' playground; fitness center; casino; dance club; Jacuzzi; room service; 4 outdoor pools; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa facilities; 6 tennis courts; watersports; deep-sea fishing; marina. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Sandals Grande Antigua Resort & Spa ★ If you like sprawling megaresorts where everything's paid in advance and you live in a virtual walled compound with lots of organized activities, this might be for you. The older wings are low-rise, comfortable, and serviceable affairs, costing a bit less than accommodations in the newer wings, which are grandly Mediterranean in their aura. Public areas have trompe-l'oeil ceilings, tile work, and wrought-iron and masonry details. In the center of the newer section is one of the largest pools in the eastern Caribbean, whose free-form, serpentine edges encase an "island" with an oversized gazebo. If you opt for a holiday here, you'll find lots to do and a wide variety of comfortable accommodations in different price ranges.

Dickenson Bay (P.O. Box 147), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **888/726-3257** or 268/462-0267. Fax 268/462-4135. www.sandals.com. 374 units. Winter $433–$1,538 per person; off season $411–$1,538 per person.

Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; 10 bars; fitness center; 7 outdoor pools; 6 whirlpools; full-service spa; 2 tennis courts; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

EXPENSIVE

CocoBay Resort ★ Set on a soaring headland which rises above a trio of sandy beaches, this hillside compound of colorful wood-sided, tin-roofed cottages lies on 4 steeply inclined hectares (10 acres) of land that's crisscrossed and traversed with boardwalks, staircases, and tropical landscaping. When this all-inclusive opened, it gave Sandals some real competition. Understated elegance and a touch or two of funky West Indian charm combine in this cliff-side setting on the "sunset side" of the island. Accommodations are comfortable but unpretentious, often within clapboard-sided buildings modeled on traditional vernacular houses, many of which are raised on stilts, with hand-carved furnishings and island art. Guests stay in cottages or in one of four "plantation houses," suitable for up to four occupants, on the hill. Each cottage has a four-poster king-size bed and a private porch.

Valley Church (P.O. Box 431), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **866/692-6094** in the U.S., or 268/562-2400. Fax 268/562-2424. www.cocobayresort.com. 53 units. Winter $350–$420 double, $830 plantation house for up to 4; off season $260–$360 double, $670 plantation house for up to 4. Rates include all meals and watersports. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; gym; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; spa; watersports. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, no phone.

The Copper and Lumber Store Hotel ★ Forget a pool. Forget a beach. This is the 18th-century "museum hotel" of English Harbour. It was originally a warehouse that stored wood and copper for the repair of British sailing ships. The hotel and its adjacent harborfront structures were built of brick that once was used as ships' ballast. Each unit evokes the British colonial era of Antigua's 19th-century history, with exposed bricks and heavy timbers, and with fine Chippendale and Queen Anne reproductions, antiques, brass chandeliers, hardwood paneling, and hand-stenciled floors. Each suite has a kitchen with aging equipment. The downside to a sojourn here involves a stream of visitors who view the place as a museum rather than an inn.

Nelson's Dockyard, English Harbour (P.O. Box 1283), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/460-1160.** Fax 268/460-1529. www.copperandlumberhotel.com. 14 units. Winter $195–$275 double, $215–$325 suite; off season $135–$195 double, $145–$275 suite. AE, MC, V. From St. John's, follow the signs southeast to English Harbour. **Amenities:** Restaurant (which opens only erratically, if at all, June–Oct); pub; babysitting; ferry service to Galleon Beach. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, kitchen (in suites).

The Inn at English Harbour ★ This small inn occupies one of the finest sites on Antigua, 4 hectares (10 acres) that directly flank a beach, with views over Nelson's Dockyard and English Harbour. This inn is tranquil, informal, and unpretentious. Its old-fashioned, historic charm continues to appeal, despite the availability of more glamorous places on the island. Many of the main guest rooms are showing their age these days. You can take a free water taxi to finer beaches along English Harbour. White-tile floors, screened plantation shutters, and balconies invite you to linger. The least expensive units are farthest from the beach, on a hillside. Six suites are decorated with a scattering of British and Caribbean antiques.

English Harbour (P.O. Box 187), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **800/970-2123** in the U.S., or 268/460-1014. Fax 268/460-1603. www.theinn.ag. 28 units. Year-round $600 double; $940–$1,100 suite. AE, MC, V. From St. John's, head south, through All Saints and Liberta, until you reach the south coast. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; bikes; horseback riding; health club; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free

rooms; 2 tennis courts; day sailing; deep-sea fishing; scuba diving; water-skiing; water taxi to Nelson's Dockyard. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Siboney Beach Club ★ The inn is named for the Amerindian tribe who predated the Arawaks. Set north of St. John's on .4 hectares (1 acre) of thickly foliated land fronting the 1.5km-long (1-mile) white-sand beach of Dickenson Bay, the resort is shielded on the inland side by a tall, verdant hedge. The club's social center is the Coconut Grove restaurant (p. 78.). The comfortable suites are in a three-story balconied building draped with bougainvillea. The suites have louvered windows for natural ventilation. All units have separate bedrooms, living rooms, and balconies or patios, plus tiny kitchens. There's also a tree house: a single room with a king-size bed and jungle decor perched high in a *Ficus benjamina* tree.

Dickenson Bay (P.O. Box 222), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **800/533-0234** in the U.S., or 268/462-0806. Fax 268/462-3356. http://Caribbean-resort-antigua-hotel-siboney-beach.com. 12 suites. Winter $190–$325 double; off season $150–$205 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV (on request), hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Verandah Resort & Spa ★★★ Kids For those tired of the dreary Sandals format, this government-rated five-star all-inclusive has opened at Dian Bay on the east coast. Walking trails are cut across a 12-hectare (30-acre) site, and the chic resort borders Devil's Bridge, a natural park where the sea has carved an arch into the limestone coast. The Verandah combines luxurious amenities with an eco-friendly plant. The accommodations are in charming cottages—each with a private veranda—constructed on pillars rising above lush foliage. Fronting two beaches, the resort has its own desalination plant and an array of facilities that make it a somewhat self-sufficient unit.

Dian Bay, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **800/858-4618** in the U.S. or Canada. www.eliteislandresorts.com. 200 suites. Winter $315–$700 double; off season $250–$592 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; kids' club; outdoor pool; room service; spa. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

MODERATE

Admiral's Inn ★★ This place is full of character and atmosphere. Designed in 1785, the year Nelson sailed into the harbor as captain of the HMS *Boreas,* and completed in 1788, the building here once housed British officers stationed at the dockyards, with a ground floor devoted to the storage of tar and boat-repair supplies. Loaded with West Indian charm, this place in the heart of Nelson's Dockyard is constructed of weathered brick that was brought from England to be used as ships' ballast. There are three types of accommodations. The most expensive are the ground-floor rooms in a tiny brick building across the courtyard from the main structure. The front rooms on the first floor of the main building, with views of the lawn and harbor, are also more expensive. The back rooms on this floor are less pricey. With dormer-window views over the yacht-filled harbor, the least expensive rooms on the top floor are smaller and quiet, but they can get warm on summer afternoons.

English Harbour (P.O. Box 713), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/460-1027.** Fax 268/460-1154. www.admiralsantigua.com. 14 units. Year-round $150–$185 double; $400 apt for 4. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept to mid-Oct. Take the road southeast from St. John's, following the signs to English Harbour. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; snorkeling; free transport to beaches. *In room:* A/C (in most), ceiling fan, no phone (in some).

The Catamaran Hotel & Marina A favorite since the 1970s, the Catamaran opens onto a palm-lined beach at Falmouth Harbour, a 3km (1 3/4-mile) drive from English

Harbour. Peace, tranquillity, and lots of bougainvillea plants prevail. On the second floor, each of eight self-contained, motel-style rooms has a comfortable bed (in many cases, a four-poster) and a balcony overlooking the water. The Captain's Cabin is the most luxurious. The ground-floor rooms are small but comfortable, and additional units are within a waterside annex.

Falmouth Harbour (P.O. Box 958), St. John's, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/460-1036.** Fax 268/460-1339. www.catamaran-antigua.com. 14 units. Winter $170–$250 double, Captain's Cabin $240; off season $145–$210 double, Captain's Cabin $210. Children 9 and under stay free in parent's room. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Internet cafe; outdoor pool; sport-fishing. *In room:* A/C (in 2 units), ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in most), no phone (prepaid cellphones can be rented).

Harmony Hall ★ (Finds) This art gallery and restaurant-cum-hotel was constructed around a former sugar mill. Standing on 2.5 hectares (6¼ acres) of land, secluded and tranquil Harmony Hall opens onto Brown's Bay, part of the greater body of water, Nonsuch Bay. Its Neapolitan owners have restored two separate villas, carving each into six large bedrooms with high ceilings. It's not on the beach, but some good sands are just down the hill. Complimentary boat trips are arranged to the uninhabited Green Island, with its lovely beaches and idyllic snorkeling conditions.

Brown's Bay Mill (P.O. Box 1558, St. John's), near Freetown, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/460-4120.** Fax 268/460-4406. www.harmonyhall.com. 12 units. Winter $352 double; off season $290 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. Closed mid-May to Nov. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, minibar.

Ocean Inn ★ (Finds) This is Antigua's premier B&B, just a 10-minute walk from some golden sandy beaches. It's a special place, with the coziest and most homelike decor on the island. Accommodations are either in the main building or in one of the cottages on the grounds; each comes with a little deck opening onto the marina. The garden of the hotel overlooks the historic dockyard. Guests share the communal swimming pool or meet for drinks in the Tree Trunk Bar. The most popular night here is Thursday, when there's an open-air barbecue.

P.O. Box 838, English Harbour, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/463-7950.** Fax 268/460-1263. www.theoceaninn.com. 12 units. Winter $110–$170 double, $170 double room in cottage; off season $95–$120 double, $120 double room in cottage. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (breakfast only); bar; babysitting; exercise room; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV (in most), hair dryer, no phone.

3 WHERE TO DINE ON ANTIGUA

Although the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$) is used on these islands, only certain tiny restaurants present their prices in the local currency. When you inquire about a price, make sure you know which type of dollar is being quoted.

IN ST. JOHN'S

The Commissioner's Grill ANTIGUAN/INTERNATIONAL Convenient to the cruise ship docks, this restaurant was established by Conroy White, a busy entrepreneur known by virtually everyone on Antigua. His premises occupy a 200-year-old white-painted clapboard-covered house that functioned 40 years ago as a bottle factory. Today its cool, thick-walled interior is an inviting and restful place for drinks and for menu items that include lobster club sandwiches, fish soup, Caesar salads, grilled mahimahi,

mixed seafood grills, baked snapper, marinated conch, and burgers. The food never rises to greatness but is always reliable and satisfying.

Redcliffe St. ✆ **268/462-1883.** Reservations not necessary. Salads, sandwiches, and burgers $10–$30; main courses $16–$44. MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

East ★★★ PAN ASIAN This is the most gastronomically sophisticated restaurant on Antigua, the kind of upscale Asian-restaurant-cum-celebrity-hangout you might expect from London's West End. You'll push through a pair of antique, intricately carved Thai doors and enter a decor that's dark with tones of crimson. Choose from four different Asian soups; starters inspired by Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam; salads garnished with Thai-style beef, cucumber, and mint; or four different preparations of curry, including an unusual version from Java made with lamb, cinnamon, and cardamom. Main courses include Chinese-lacquered pork with hoisin and chili sauce, or grilled filet of mahimahi with tamarind and lemon grass sauce. The best dessert is a chocolate-and-ginger version of "molten lava," wherein deliberately undercooked chocolate cake is lightened with orange sauce and lemon grass ice cream.

In the Carlisle Bay Resort, Old Rd., St. Mary's. ✆ **268/484-0002.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–10pm.

Papa Zouk ★ Finds SEAFOOD If you like seafood, zouk (French Creole music with strong African influences), and rum, you've come to the right place. To the strains of zouk music, you can have a New Orleans–type Creole party in the Caribbean. This dive is known for its extensive collection of rums. Its signature tropical fruit drink is called Ti-punch and is well worth a try. After cocktails, try the stuffed clams baked with cheese or a selection of tapas for a starter. For dinner, you might order the savory bouillabaisse or a delectable pan-fried red snapper. The house special is the Carnival Platter, a medley of seafood such as mussels, scallops, and shrimp. The service is among the friendliest in town.

Hilda Davis Dr., St. John's. ✆ **268/464-6044.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$28. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 7–10pm.

ELSEWHERE AROUND THE ISLAND

Admiral's Inn ★ AMERICAN/CREOLE Enjoy lobster, seafood, and steaks in this 17th-century hotel (p. 75.), and make sure to try your favorite appetizer, the pumpkin soup. The chefs use quality ingredients to create four or five main courses daily. Though the atmosphere is sometimes more exciting than the cuisine, the service is agreeable. Before dinner, order a drink in the bar and read the names of sailors carved into the wood 100 years ago.

In Nelson's Dockyard, English Harbour. ✆ **268/460-1027.** Reservations recommended, especially for dinner in high season. Main courses $13–$21 lunch, $21–$31 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm. Closed Sept to mid-Oct.

Bay House INTERNATIONAL This is an intimate dining room linked with a family-owned hotel set in a garden on a hillside, a 10-minute walk uphill from the beach at Dickenson Bay. Surrounded by lattices and potted plants, it is an open-sided room with sweeping views of the jagged coastline. Lunch consists of freshly made salads, stuffed baguette sandwiches, and grills. The kitchen's culinary flair is more obvious at nighttime, when meals might begin with a salad of baby shrimp with grapefruit segments and truffle oil, or fresh chicken livers flambéed with brandy. Main dinner courses feature grilled fish, and fresh local lobster that's either grilled and served with lime-and-garlic sauce or prepared thermidor style. Steaks are served in a light soy sauce with braised

Chinese cabbage. For vegetarians, there's a platter piled high with grilled Provençal-style vegetables.

In the Tradewinds Hotel, Dickenson Bay. ✆ **268/462-1223.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$36 lunch, $24–$36 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 6am–10:30pm.

Coconut Grove ★★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD North of St. John's in a coconut grove right on the beach, simple tables on a flagstone floor beneath a thatch roof are cooled by sea breezes. This is most visitors' dream of what a Caribbean restaurant should be—and it's one of the island's best. Soup is prepared fresh daily from local ingredients like ginger, carrot, and pumpkin. Lobster and shrimp dishes figure prominently, along with a catch of the day and a daily vegetarian special. Lunch fare is lighter. During happy hour at the bar (4–7pm), all drinks are half price.

In the Siboney Beach Club, Dickenson Bay. ✆ **268/462-1538.** Reservations required. Main courses $13–$32 lunch, $19–$39 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11:30pm.

Coco's CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is built on pilings sunk into the beachfront, granting diners an unimpeded view over the Caribbean and Antigua's westward-facing headlands, including Indian Mountain. Because it's within an all-inclusive resort, management urges diners who aren't hotel guests to phone in advance of arrival. Diners eat at tables sheathed in azure-colored tiles. Lunches focus on salads, burgers, sandwiches, and pastas. The best dinner items are usually the grilled catch of the day, marinated and covered with butter. Also recommended is grilled mahimahi prepared in puff pastry like a beef Wellington and served with a slow-simmered Creole sauce of fresh tomatoes, sweet garden peppers, and onions.

Mount Prospect, Jolly Bay. ✆ **268/462-9700.** Reservations required. Main courses $19–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10am, noon–2:30pm, and 7–9pm.

The Cove ★ Finds INTERNATIONAL This gastronomic hideaway is one of the most romantic evening spots on Antigua. It occupies a gracefully proportioned pavilion adjacent to the sea. It's the kind of place where concierges at upscale resorts send their clients when they ask for an independent restaurant that's a change from a hotel dining room. Some of the best-tasting menu items include a carpaccio of marlin, sautéed calamari, pan-fried loin of yellowfin tuna with lemon grass, and loin of black-faced lamb with red grape and apple chutney. Unusual desserts include a trio of summer sorbets or a golden apple tart flambéed with Calvados.

At the Blue Waters Resort, Soldiers' Bay. ✆ **268/562-2683.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $27–$36. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Sat and Mon–Tues 7–10pm.

Le Bistro ★ FRENCH Less than a kilometer (½ mile) inland from the coast of Hodges Bay, this restaurant occupies a stone-sided structure built as a clubhouse for a now-defunct golf course. Sporting informal charm, it's Antigua's oldest continuously operated restaurant (since 1981). The owners are English-born Philippa Esposito and her husband, Raffaele, from Capri. As the first authentic French restaurant on island, Le Bistro changes its menus twice a year, but each one is highly creative and innovative, a kind of fusion of West Indian and French recipes. Start with such appetizers as a homemade onion soup or a duet of fresh salmon and tuna sashimi. Prepared with flair are such mains as fresh grilled filet of snapper or a whole grilled fresh local lobster. Crispy Long Island duck is flamed in Grand Marnier and served with a caramelized orange sauce.

Hodges Bay. ✆ **268/462-3881.** www.antigualebistro.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $24–$52. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 7–10:30pm.

The Pavilion ★★★ CONTINENTAL Although it's located in the dreary area of the airport, this restaurant of a talented chef, Andrew Knoll, serves the most imaginative cuisine not only on Antigua, but also in this part of the Caribbean. The building that houses the restaurant evokes a plantation Great House. The setting is one of elegance, with a skilled staff offering silver service. The chef knows how to balance textures, colors, and flavors, and he creates happy marriages of market-fresh ingredients from caviar to delectable desserts. The wine cellar contains more than 8,000 of the world's finest vintages. For a memorable main course, sample rack of lamb with a goat cheese potato custard or pan-roasted red snapper with black mussels, Maine lobster, Gulf shrimp, and Spanish chorizo. You can even order a for k-tender, 12-ounce Japanese kobe rib-eye. Nothing quite tops the chef's specialty, a pan-fried blue crab cake with ham-hock black bean ragout accompanied by roasted chili lime butter sauce and crispy plantain chips. Another one of his classics is a foie gras pan roast with Antiguan black pineapple marmalade and macadamia nut–buttered crêpes.

7 Pavilion Dr., Coolidge. ✆ **268/480-6800.** Reservations essential. Main courses $30–$36. AE, DC, MC, V. Jacket required for men. Mon–Sat 7–11pm.

The Restaurant at Shirley Heights Lookout AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN To reach this place requires an uphill (vehicular) trek through the arid landscapes and ruined 18th-century military fortifications of what used to be one of England's mightiest naval bases. At the top, you'll find a stone house that once housed sailors. Today the site houses a bar and a restaurant. We consider this place a charming venue for lunch, dinner, or a series of cocktails timed to coincide with sundown. It's far from gastronomic, though—food mostly consists of simple island fare, and there's the distinct sense that this is a working, sometimes raucous bar for locals. Sundays from around 4 to 9:30pm, the hilltop becomes the biggest outdoor party and "be-in" in Antigua. Menu items include pumpkin soup, Creole-style fresh fish, grilled lobster with garlic butter, goat stew or curried goat, and, occasionally, tapas.

At the Shirley Heights Lookout, above English Harbour. ✆ **268/728-0636.** Reservations not necessary except Sun afternoon and evening. Main courses $4.50–$13 lunch, $5.60–$20 dinner. No credit cards. Tues–Sun 9am–9:30pm (last order); Mon 9am–6:30pm (last order).

Sheer ★★ INTERNATIONAL This restaurant at the Cocobay Resort consists of six private, open-air pavilions linked by wooden deck walkways, overlooking Little Freyes Beach. On the sunset side of Antigua, this dinner-only restaurant is open to the general public, although it's part of an all-inclusive resort. Built on the westernmost point of the bluff at Cocobay, the menu roams the world for inspiration—Asia, South America, India, whatever. Some of the food flavorings are a bit quirky but taste divine. Even popcorn or ice cream is used in certain dishes. An appetizer might be foie gras with hot smoked salmon and wasabi. Main courses might feature such specialties as beef tenderloin tournedos with honey truffled beets and pumpkin croquettes, or venison carpaccio with a sausage potato salad with grapefruit chili. The chef rightly claims, "I like to push the barriers of culinary expectation."

Cocobay Resort, Valley Church. ✆ **268/562-2400.** Reservations required. Main courses $30–$36. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 7–9pm.

Sticky Wicket ★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN Lying next to the Stanford Cricket Grounds, close to the island's international airport, this restaurant allows you to watch a match while you eat. Known for serving large portions of earthy, rib-sticking food, it's one of the island's most popular sports-oriented gathering spots, but its lounge

decorated with cricket memorabilia and the courtyard overlooking the sports arena are posh. The food is far better than at most sports bars, as exemplified by the West Indian pork rib plate or the grilled lamb souvlakia. You might launch your meal with a chile-flavored tomato dipping sauce or tasty shrimp and seafood fritters with a rémoulade. The soups and salads are always fresh and homemade, including Antiguan lobster bisque or an East Indian curried chicken salad mixed with toasted coconut and fresh fruit. Nothing quite tops the Key lime cheesecake for dessert.

Pavilion Dr., Coolidge. ✆ **268/481-7000.** www.thestickywicket.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$41. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight.

4 ANTIGUA'S BEACHES

There's a lovely white-sand beach on **Pigeon Point** at Falmouth Harbour, about a 4-minute drive from Admiral's Inn (p. 75.). With calm waters and pristine sands, this is the best beach near English Harbour, but it's often crowded, especially when a cruise ship is in port. It's ideal for snorkelers and swimmers of most ages and abilities.

Dickenson Bay ★★, in the northwest, directly north of St. John's, is one of the island's finest beaches, with its wide strip of powder-soft sand and blissfully calm turquoise waters. This safe beach attracts families with small children. You can rent watersports equipment at the **Rex Halcyon Cove Beach Resort** (✆ **268/462-9256**). Refreshments are available at the hotel, or mosey over to the casual bars and restaurants nearby.

On the north side of Dickenson Bay, you'll find more secluded beaches and some ideal snorkeling areas along the fan-shaped northern crown of Antigua. For a fee, locals will sometimes take beachcombers to one of the uninhabited offshore islets, such as **Prickly Pear Island,** surrounded by beautiful coral gardens. One of the island's best snorkeling spots is **Paradise Reef,** a 1.5km-long (1-mile) coral garden of stunning beauty north of Dickenson Bay (see "Scuba Diving, Snorkeling & Other Watersports," in "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits," below).

If you're seeking solitude, flee to **Johnson's Point.** Between the hamlets of Johnson's Point and Urlings at Antigua's southwestern tip below Jolly Harbour, this beach opens onto the tranquil Caribbean Sea. There are no facilities, but the sand is dazzling white, and the waters, usually clear and calm, are populated with schools of rainbow-hued tropical fish.

Near Johnson's Point on the southwest coast, **Turner's Beach** is idyllic. This is one of the best places to lie out in the tropical sun, cooled by trade winds. The beach has fine white sand and gin-clear waters. If the day is clear (as it usually is), you can see the volcanic island of Montserrat.

If you head east of Urlings and go past the hamlet of Old Road, you'll reach **Carlisle Bay,** site of one of the island's most celebrated shores. Against a backdrop of coconut groves, two long beaches extend from the spot where Curtain Bluff, the island's most deluxe hotel, sits atop a bluff. Here, where the calm Caribbean meets the more turbulent Atlantic, the water is impossibly blue.

South of Jolly Harbour, **Driftwood Beach** is directly north of Johnson's Point, in the southwest. The white sands and calm, clear waters are delightful. It is close to all the villas at Jolly Harbour Beach Resort Marina, however, and can be overcrowded.

In the same vicinity is **Darkwood Beach,** a 5-minute drive south of Jolly Harbour Marina and the Jolly Harbour Golf Club. Here the shimmering waters are almost crystal

blue. The snorkeling is great, and you can bet that gentle trade winds will keep you cool. Located in a tourist zone, it is likely to be crowded—almost unbearably so when cruise ships are in port.

If you continue north toward St. John's and cut west at the turnoff for Five Islands, you'll reach the four secluded **Hawksbill Beaches** on the Five Islands peninsula. The beaches here have white sands, dazzling blue-and-green waters, and coral reefs ideal for snorkeling. On one of them, you can sunbathe and swim in the buff. The Five Islands peninsula is the site of major hotel developments. Though it's secluded, the beaches are sometimes crowded.

Perhaps Antigua's most beautiful beach, **Half Moon Bay** ★★ stretches for nearly 1.5km (1 mile) on the southeastern coast, a 5-minute drive from Freetown village. The Atlantic surf is liable to be rough, but that doesn't stop a never-ending stream of windsurfers, who head out beyond the reef, which shelters protected waters for snorkeling. The beach is now a public park and ideal for a family outing. Half Moon Bay lies east of English Harbour near Mill Reef.

Directly north of Half Moon Bay, east of the village of Willikies, **Long Bay** fronts the Atlantic on the far eastern coast of Antigua. Guests of the Long Bay Hotel and the Pineapple Beach Club usually populate this sandy strip. The shallow waters are home to stunning coral reefs and offer great snorkeling.

In the same vicinity, **Pineapple Beach** is a 5-minute drive heading northeast from Willikies. It opens onto **Long Bay** and the west coast (Atlantic side) of Antigua. Crystal-blue waters make it ideal for snorkeling. Most beach buffs come here just to sun on nearly perfect white sands.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

ADVENTURE TOURS Eco-tourism is all the rage. The best and most thrilling eco-adventure in Antigua is the **Rainforest Canopy Tour** ★★, headquartered at Fig Tree Drive in Wallings (✆ **268/562-6363;** www.antiguarainforest.com). Think Tarzan in a harness in a high-altitude, vertigo-challenged transit on an interconnected series of twin cables high above the island's treetops. The tour is recommended only for the physically fit and those with no undue fear of heights. The shortest of the nine cables stretches for 91m (298 ft.), the longest 107m (351 ft.) above a gorge. Four options range in price from $30 to $110, timed at 30 minutes to 2 hours. The most popular costs $80, lasting 90 minutes. At the end, you have to climb 170 steps to your original point of departure. Daily departures are at 9am, 11am, 1pm, and 3pm; call for a reservation.

In a less daunting adventure, you can take an **Antigua Adventures** tour (✆ **268/726-6355**). The cost is $90 per person. The tour takes you around the lush island in air-conditioned comfort, visiting a sugar mill, national parks, Nelson's Dockyard, Falmouth Harbour, and Shirley Heights, among other attractions.

BOATING & YACHT CHARTERS If you're contemplating serious yachting around Antigua, as many well-heeled visitors do, make arrangements through **Nicholson Yacht Charters** (✆ **800/662-6066** in the U.S. and Canada, or 268/460-1530) well in advance of your trip. It offers boats of all sizes. Once on Antigua, if you plan only minor sailing such as in a Sunfish or small catamaran like Hobie Waves, or windsurfing, contact **Sea Sports,** on the beach in front of the Rex Halcyon Cove Beach Resort at Dickenson Bay (✆ **268/462-9256;** www.seasportsantigua.com).

CRUISES All the major hotel desks can book boat cruises, the most popular and most frequently patronized of which is **Pirates of Antigua** (✆ **268/562-7946;** www.piratesofantigua.com). Departing daily at 9:30am and 2:30pm aboard a romanticized replica of a pirate ship (the fact that it's motorized isn't immediately obvious), it simultaneously sails the water and plies its participants with rum-based drinks so strong that after two or three of them, you'll be hallucinating. The cost is $95 for adults, $50 for ages 5 to 12, and free for those 4 and under. There are Friday night sails from 8pm to midnight at a cost of $60 per passenger. You can also call **Tropical Adventures** (✆ **268/480-1225;** www.tropicalad.com), which offers day trips to neighboring Barbuda aboard a motorized catamaran, the ***Excellence,*** that's suitable for up to 70 passengers at a time. Departures are every Friday and Sunday at 9:30am, returning the same day around 4:30pm. The price is $140 per person (no children 7 or under allowed), which includes lunch, use of snorkeling equipment, and a visit to Barbuda's bird sanctuary. **Barbuda-bound cruises** depart from **Tony's Water Sports** at Dickenson Bay (✆ **268/462-6326;** fax 268/462-2065).

FISHING Many anglers visit Antigua just for the big-game fishing offshore, where wahoo, tuna, and marlin abound. The best deep-sea fishing charter is ***Overdraft*** (✆ **268/464-4954;** www.antiguafishing.com), a large 12m (40-ft.) fiberglass boat that goes in hunt of dolphin (the fish), shark, barracuda, wahoo, and other creatures of the deep. Captain Frank Hart knows his fishing grounds. Up to six fishermen are accommodated at one time; a 4-hour charter costs $495, and an 8-hour charter goes for $790.

GOLF Antigua's golf facilities are not on par with some of the other islands', but its foremost and most popular course, the 18-hole, par-70 **Cedar Valley Golf Club,** Friar's Hill Road (✆ **268/462-0161;** www.cedarvalleygolf.ag), is good. This course was designed by the late Richard Aldridge and is 5km (3 miles) east of St. John's, near the airport. It has panoramic views of Antigua's northern coast. Daily greens fees are $49 for 18 holes, with cart rentals going for $42.

Another course worth playing is the **Jolly Harbour Golf Course** at Jolly Harbour (✆ **268/462-3085**), though we prefer this less than Cedar Valley. Jolly Harbour is a par-71, 6,000-yard, 18-hole course plotted by golf designer Karl Litten on a hilly, tropically landscaped setting. The maintenance of the course is not always the best, however. Greens fees are $46, or $95 with cart included.

PARASAILING Parasailing is gaining popularity on Antigua. Facilities are available during the day, Monday to Saturday, on the beach at Dickenson Bay.

SCUBA DIVING, SNORKELING & OTHER WATERSPORTS The reefs that fringe Antigua are home to beautiful, brilliantly colored fish. Many of the island's beaches (see "Beaches," above) have clear, pure, calm waters that make for great snorkeling. The most popular, such as Dickenson Bay, have concessions where you can rent snorkel gear and other equipment if it isn't available from your hotel.

Scuba diving is best arranged through **Dive Antigua,** at the Rex Halcyon Cove, Dickenson Bay (✆ **268/462-3483;** www.diveantigua.com). A resort course is $85, which includes a shallow dive; a two-tank dive costs $79. A five-dive package goes for $360, and open-water certification costs $493. Prices do not include equipment, an additional $21.

Splish Splash (✆ **268/462-3483**) regularly conducts 2-hour snorkeling jaunts over to Paradise Reef for $40 per person. Departures are daily at 11am and again at 1pm.

TENNIS Well-off tennis buffs check into **Curtain Bluff.** Its courts, rivaled by the nine courts at **Carlisle Bay** (for information on both hotels, see p. 72 and 71), are the

finest on the island. Most of the major hotels have courts as well, and some are lit for night games. (We don't recommend playing tennis at midday—it's just too hot!) Hotel guests usually play for free; if you're not a guest, you'll have to book a court and pay charges that vary from place to place.

WINDSURFING Most of the major resorts along the beach rent windsurfing equipment. The best outfitters are **Sea Sports** (✆ **268/462-3355;** www.seasportsantigua.com) at Dickenson Bay, charging $50 per hour, or **Sunsail Club Colonna** (✆ **268/462-6263;** www.sunsail.com; Hodges Bay), which rents equipment for $100 per day.

6 EXPLORING ANTIGUA

IN ST. JOHN'S

The most colorful sight of St. John's is the **Saturday morning market,** when many islanders come into the capital to hawk everything from birds and luscious fruits to beautiful flowers and handicrafts. The sights, sounds, and smells of Antigua are at their photographic best here from 8am to noon. However, don't snap a picture of any market person without asking permission first. Most of them will want you to tip them for the privilege of photographing them. The public market lies on Market Street at the southern end of St. John's, at the point where it intersects with All Saints and Valley roads.

St. John's Cathedral, the Anglican church between Long and Newgate streets at Church Lane (✆ **268/462-4686**), has resurrected itself time and again—it's been destroyed by earthquakes and rebuilt on the same site at least three times since it was first constructed in 1683. The present structure dates from 1845. In 2005 the clock on its facade was restored and made workable again. Exhibits at the **Museum of Antigua & Barbuda,** at Market and Long streets (✆ **268/462-1469**), are within one of Antigua's oldest buildings, built by English colonials in 1750 as a courthouse. The museum covers the island's history, from prehistoric days up to its independence from Britain in 1981. Exhibitions include examples of each of the semiprecious stones (especially jade) you can find on Antigua, as well as models of sugar plantations, steam engines, paintings, and historical prints. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4pm and on Saturday from 10am to 2pm. The entrance fee is $3 for adults; students and children 11 and under enter free.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Eighteen kilometers (11 miles) southeast of St. John's is **Nelson's Dockyard National Park** ★★★ (✆ **268/460-1379** or 268/481-5022), one of the eastern Caribbean's biggest attractions and the world's most visible symbol of the once-formidable power of England's navy within the West Indies. Because of its almost constant state of archeological restoration, it's defined by its curators as "a continuing cultural landscape," with many aspects of "a living park" that's permanently associated in a major way with the expansion and protection of Britain's once-formidable empire. English ships took refuge from the hurricanes in this harbor as early as 1671. The park's centerpiece is the restored Georgian naval dockyard, which was used by admirals Nelson, Rodney, and Hood, and was the home of the British fleet during the Napoleonic Wars. From 1784 to 1787, Nelson commanded the British navy in the Leeward Islands and made his headquarters at English Harbour. The dockyard museum, the gem within a landscape that's almost constantly in a state of restoration, recaptures the 18th-century era of privateers, pirates, and battles at sea. Its colonial naval

buildings remain as they were when Nelson was here. Although Nelson never lived at **Admiral House** (✆ **268/463-1058**)—it was built in 1855—his telescope and tea caddy are on display, along with other nautical memorabilia.

The park itself has sandy beaches and tropical vegetation, with various species of cactus and mangroves. A migrating colony of African cattle egrets shelters in the mangroves. Archaeological sites here predate Christ. Nature trails, with coastal views, lead you through the flora. Tours of the dockyard last 15 to 20 minutes; nature walks along the trails can last anywhere from 30 minutes to 5 hours. The dockyard and all the buildings noted in this section are open daily from 9am to 5pm. Children 12 and under are admitted free. The admission price of $5 includes the Admiral House and the Shirley Heights Lookout.

The best **nature trail** on Antigua, a well-tended footpath, goes up the hill from English Harbour to **Shirley Heights** ★, beginning at the Galleon Beach Hotel. Follow the sign that points to the lookout. The trail is marked with yellow and/or green tape tied to the branches of trees and shrubs surviving in the blinding sunlight of these arid altitudes. Eventually you reach a summit of nearly 150m (492 ft.), where you're rewarded with a panoramic view. If you'd like to get more information about the walk, you can pick up a free brochure at the dockyard at the office of the National Parks Authority. This walk is easy; it takes less than an hour to reach the peak.

On the way back, take **Fig Tree Drive** ★, a 32km (20-mile) circular drive across the main mountain range. It passes through lush tropical hills and fishing villages along the southern coast. You can pick up the road just outside Liberta, north of Falmouth. Winding through a rainforest, it passes thatched villages, every one with a church and lots of goats and children running about. But don't expect fig trees: *Fig* is an Antiguan name for bananas.

Betty's Hope (✆ **268/462-1469**), a picturesque ruin just outside the village of Pares on the eastbound route to Long Bay, was Antigua's first sugar plantation (from 1650). You can tour it Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 4pm ($1.90 for adults, free for children). Exhibits in the visitor's center trace the sugar era, and you can also see the full restoration of one of the original plantation's two windmills. If you visit, you may see the local masons, who are sporadically involved in the restoration of the curing and boiling plant, where sugar cane used to be processed into sugar, rum, and molasses.

Tips Forts & Photo Ops

In the 1700s, Antigua's coastline was ringed with British forts. Although they're in ruins today, the views from these former military strongholds are among the most panoramic in the Caribbean—and you can visit them for free. You can begin at St. John's harbor (the capital), which was once guarded by **Fort Barrington** on the south and **Fort James** on the north. Later you can head down to **Fort James Bay,** where you'll find a couple of bars right on the sand, The most evocative of these is **Russell's Beach Bar.** Positioned directly within the ruins of the 18th-century Fort of St. Johns, it's at its most active on Sunday afternoon. Its funky West Indian setting, smack in the center of a ruined English colonial fort, makes it an appealing place to unwind with a beer and perhaps a platter of grilled fish. In the south, near English Harbour, check out the view from **Shirley Heights.**

Indian Town is one of Antigua's national parks, on the island's northeastern point. Over the centuries, Atlantic breakers have lashed the rocks and carved a natural bridge known as **Devil's Bridge.** It's surrounded by numerous blowholes spouting surf, a dramatic sight. An environmentally protected area, Indian Town Point lies at the tip of a deep cove, Indian Town Creek. The park fronts the Atlantic at Long Bay, just west of Indian Town Creek at the eastern side of Antigua. Birders flock here to see some 36 different species. The park is blanketed mainly by the acacia tree, a dry shrub locally known as "cassie." A large, meadowed headland around Devil's Bridge makes a great spot for a **picnic.** Arm yourself with directions and a good map before you start out. The main highway ends at Long Bay, but several **hiking trails** lead to the coastline. Our favorite hike is to Indian Town Point at a distance of 2km (1 1/2 miles). This is the most scenic walk in the park, passing through a protected area of exceptional natural beauty. Long Bay is great for snorkeling, but you'll need to bring your gear.

7 ANTIGUA SHOPPING

Most of Antigua's shops are clustered on **St. Mary's Street** or **High Street** in St. John's. Some stores are open Monday to Saturday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 4pm, but this varies greatly from place to place—Antiguan shopkeepers are an independent lot. Many of them close at noon on Thursday.

Duty-free items include English woolens and linens. You can also purchase Antiguan goods: local pottery, straw work, rum, floppy foldable hats, shell curios, and hand-printed fabrics.

If you're in St. John's on a Saturday morning, visit the **fruit and vegetable market** at the south end of Market Street. The juicy Antiguan black pineapple alone is worth the trip.

One prime hunting ground in St. John's is the **Redcliffe Quay** ★ waterfront on the southern edge of town, where nearly three-dozen boutiques are housed in former warehouses set around tree-shaded, landscaped courtyards. Our favorite is **A Thousand Flowers** (✆ **268/462-4264**), which sells linens, all-natural fiber, rayon, and other fabrics.

At the **Gazebo** (✆ **268/460-2776**), expect a little bit of everything, from a mass of south-of-the-border pottery to Indonesian wood items, and (our favorite) stunning blue-glaze plates. Additional Redcliffe Quay shops include **Isis** (✆ **268/462-4602**) for unique Egyptian jewelry, cotton gowns, handicrafts, inlaid marquetry work, and Afghan jewelry. It's often worth checking out **The Goldsmitty** (✆ **268/462-4601;** www.goldsmitty.com), where precious stones are set in unique, exquisite creations of 14- and 18-karat gold.

Noreen Phillips, Redcliffe Quay (✆ **268/462-3127;** www.noreenphillips.com), an entity entirely based in Antigua, is one of the island's major fashion outlets. Cruise-ship passengers beeline here for both casual wear and beaded glitzy dress clothes. **Exotic Antigua,** Radcliffe Quay, St. Mary's Street (✆ **268/562-1288**), specializes in Caribbean-made gifts and clothing, including T-shirts and casual wear, and handicrafts.

At **Lipstick,** Heritage Quay (✆ **268/562-1130**), you can browse a daunting array of cosmetics and perfumes, some of them locally made, many of the others imported from the U.S., Britain, and France. **Shoul's Chief Store,** St. Mary's Street at Market Street (✆ **268/462-1140**), is an all-purpose department store selling fabric, appliances, souvenirs (more than 300 kinds), and general merchandise.

Heritage Quay ★★, Antigua's premier shopping-and-entertainment complex, is a well-maintained neighborhood close to the cruise ship piers which features some 40

duty-free shops and an arcade for local artists and craftspeople. Its restaurants and food court offer a range of cuisines and views of St. John's Harbour. Many shops are open all day, at least from 9am to 5:30pm Monday to Saturday, and later, including on Sunday, if there's a cruise ship in port.

Tucked away within the shops of Heritage Quay are shops which include the **Camera Shop** (✆ 268/462-3619), a Kodak distributor and photofinisher selling sunglasses, film, and brand-name cameras. **Fashiondock** (✆ 268/462-9672) is known for its duty-free Prada, Moschino, and Gucci accessories, plus other Italian styles. **Sunseekers** (✆ 268/462-4523) carries the largest collection of duty-free swimwear in the Caribbean. **Colombian Emeralds** (✆ 268/462-2342) is the world's biggest retailer of these gemstones. **Abbott's Jewelry** (✆ 268/462-3108) sells the best selection of watches on Antigua, plus china and crystal. Nick Maley, a makeup artist who worked on *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back,* founded **Island Arts,** upstairs at Heritage Quay (✆ 268/462-2787). You can purchase his own fine-art reproductions or browse through everything from low-cost prints to works by artists exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Rain Boutique, Lower St. Mary's (✆ **268/462-0118**), sells casual clothes, formal wear, hats, scarves, shoes, jewelry, and handbags.

At Falmouth Harbour, **Seahorse Studios & Gift Shop** (✆ **268/469-1457**) specializes in batiks, T-shirts, signs, and table linens. Their affiliated branch at English Harbour, **Seahorse Art Gallery** (✆ **268/469-1457**), sells paintings, engravings, and water colors, with lots of emphasis on seascapes.

The best for last: Head for **Harmony Hall** ★, in Brown's Bay Mill, near Freetown (✆ **268/460-4120**), following the signs along the road to Freetown and Half Moon Bay. This restored 1843 plantation house and sugar mill overlooking Nonsuch Bay is ideal for a lunch stopover, a shopping expedition, even an overnight (p. 76). It displays an excellent selection of Caribbean arts and crafts. Lunch is served daily from noon to 3:30pm, featuring Green Island lobster, flying fish, and other specialties. Sunday is barbecue day.

8 ANTIGUA AFTER DARK

Antigua has some of the best steel bands in the Caribbean. Most nightlife revolves around the hotels. If you want to roam Antigua at night looking for that hot local club, arrange to have a taxi pick you up so you're not stranded in the wilds somewhere.

The best and most elaborate gambling joint on island is **Grand Princess Casino,** Jolly Harbour (✆ **268/562-9900**), spread across three floors, offering a lot more than gambling. You can dine in the first-class Bellagio Restaurant, patronize an Internet cafe, get down in a dance club, enjoy flashy Las Vegas entertainment in a lounge, or even work out at the rooftop fitness center. A small but flamboyant alternative is the **St. James's Club** at Mamora Bay (✆ **268/460-5000**). Other action is found at **King's Casino** on Heritage Quay (✆ **268/462-1727**), the only casino in St. John's proper. Entrance is free and no ID is required. You must be 18 to play.

Steel bands, limbo dancers, calypso singers, folkloric groups—there's always something happening by night on Antigua. Your hotel can probably tell you where to go on any given night. The following clubs are reliable hot spots.

The best place to be on island on Sunday afternoon is the bar and restaurant at the previously recommended **Shirley Heights Lookout** at Shirley Heights (p. 79; ✆ **268/728-0636**). Beginning at 4pm, a barbecue is offered here, followed by a reggae and steelpan band for dancing later in the evening. Celebrities such as Chuck Norris, R&B singer

Bobbie Brown, Sting, Whitney Houston, and even Michael Jackson have joined in a weekly be-in that sometimes evolves into the island's largest and most free-form social event. Many locals arrive on any late afternoon, grab a sundowner, and head for the patio in the rear for a sweeping view over the arid landscapes surrounding English Harbour and Antigua's most spectacular sunset. Sunday's $5.60 cover charge includes the first drink.

Antigua's hippest nighttime venue is **The Coast** ★, Heritage Quay, St. John's (✆ **268/562-2678**), drawing both islanders and visitors to its precincts where they are entertained by Antiguan live bands, especially techno music, in a raucous setting of good times with plenty of drink and local specialties. No admission is charged.

Another venue is **Rush Nightclub & Connors Sports Bar,** Runaway Bay (✆ **268/562-7874**), open Thursday to Saturday. Doors open nightly and the cover is $3.70 on Thursday and Saturday, rising to $9.30 on Friday. Resident DJs entertain the mostly young crowd with hip hop, soca, reggae, and R&B music.

At English Harbour, the joint is always rocking at **Abracadabra Restaurant & Disco-Bar** ★, Nelson's Dockyard (✆ **268/460-2701;** www.theabracadabra.com). Trattoria such as homemade pastas and fresh seafood, even lobster from an aquarium, launch the night, which becomes a dance party as the evening progresses. There's always something happening here: live jazz, reggae performances, even costume parties. Check it out.

Admiral's Inn (✆ **268/460-1027**) is a barefoot-friendly kind of place. You can always play a game of darts and there's live music Thursday and Saturday nights, usually a local 14-piece steel band. Try one of Norman's daiquiris (the island's best), and ask the bartender about the famous guests he's served, from Richard Burton to Prince Charles. Another much-frequented English Harbour watering hole is **The Life Bar,** Nelson's Dockyard, VHF #68 (✆ **268/562-2353**), the most popular spot for visitors arriving aboard yachts. We like its nautical atmosphere and the wooden pier that the action centers on. On occasion, it's West Indian party time, with live groups performing. The most authentic British pub at Nelson's Dockyard is **Mainbrace** (✆ **268/460-1058**), with darts, of course, and fish and chips, and on some nights live jazz. The pub is part of The Copper and Lumber Store Hotel (p. 74).

18 Carat, Lower Church Street, St. John's (✆ **268/562-1858**), is the most popular and sought-after dance club and night bar on the island. Expect a cover charge, ranging from $3.70 to $7.40 per person, an indoor-outdoor format that's open to a view of the night air of downtown St. John's, and a barrage of music that includes lots of reggae and soca. It's open Friday to Sunday 8pm to 1am.

Sand Haven, Runaway Bay (✆ **268/771-6803;** www.sandhavenantiqua.com), is the hangout of local cricketers and always attracts a fun-loving bevy of patrons who dance the night away after ordering Tex-Mex fare. The beach bar associated with this place is especially busy on weekends.

Live nightly entertainment takes place right on the beach at **Millers by the Sea,** at Runaway Beach (✆ **268/462-9414**). Its happy hour is the best in town.

9 BARBUDA

Barbuda is part of the independent nation of Antigua and Barbuda. It's the Caribbean's last frontier, even though it is home to two of the region's most expensive and exclusive resorts: the K-Club, which is reviewed below, and the Coco Point Beach Resort, which

we don't recommend because we think it has an exclusive, snobby atmosphere. Charted by Columbus in 1493, the island is 42km (26 miles) north of Antigua. Twenty-four kilometers (15 miles) long by 8km (5 miles) wide, it has a population of only 1,200 hardy souls, most of whom live around the unattractive village of Codrington. There's no lush tropical scenery, no paved roads, few hotels, and only a handful of restaurants.

So what's the attraction? The island's 27km (17 miles) of pink- and white-sand beaches—almost like those of Bermuda. (We prefer the sands north of Palmetto Point.) Barrier reefs protect the island and keep most of the waters tranquil. Beaches on the southwestern shore stretch uninterrupted for 15km (9 1/4 miles); these are the best for swimming. The beaches on the island's eastern shore fronting the Atlantic are somewhat rougher, but they're good for beachcombing and shell collecting. The water temperature seldom falls below the average of 75°F (24°C).

Visitors gravitate to Barbuda to see fallow deer, guinea fowl, pigeons, and wild pigs. Anglers can also negotiate with small-boat owners to fish for bonefish and tarpon.

Day visitors usually head for **Wa'Omoni Beach Park** ★ to visit the frigate bird sanctuary, snorkel for lobster, and eat barbecue. The frigate bird sanctuary is one of the world's largest and a very impressive sight. You can see the birds, *Fregata magnificens,* sitting on their eggs in the mangrove bushes, which stretch for miles in a long lagoon accessible only by small motorboat. Various hotels and resorts on Antigua arrange tours to the sanctuary. The island attracts about 150 other species of birds, including pelicans, herons, and tropical mockingbirds.

While you're here, look into the **Dividing Wall,** which once separated the imperial Codrington family from the African islanders. Also visit the **Martello Tower,** which predates the known history of the island. Purportedly the Spanish erected it before the British occupied the island. Several tours explore interesting **underground caves** on Barbuda. Stamp collectors might want to stop in at the **Philatelic Bureau** in Codrington (no phone).

ESSENTIALS

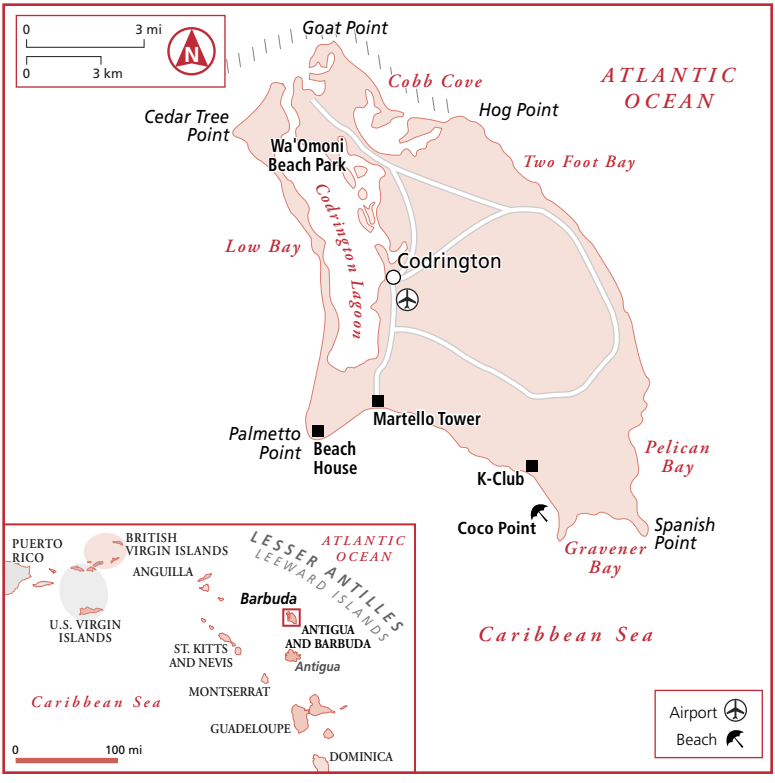
GETTING THERE The island is a 15-minute flight from Antigua's Byrd Airport. Barbuda has two airfields: one at Codrington and the other a private facility, the Coco Point Airstrip, which is some 13km (8 miles) from Codrington at the Coco Point Lodge.

To reach Barbuda from Antigua, you can contact **Winair** (✆ **866/466-0410;** www.fly-winair.com), a carrier which offers two daily flights from Antigua's Bird Airport to Barbuda's Codrington Airport. The ride takes between 15 and 20 minutes one-way. Round-trip passage costs around $90 per person, depending on restrictions.

GETTING AROUND Many locals rent small four-wheel-drive Suzukis, which are the best way to get around the island. They meet incoming flights at Codrington Airport, and prices are negotiable. You'll need an Antiguan driver's license (see "Essentials," at the beginning of the chapter) if you plan to drive.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

K-Club ★★ The beachfront K-Club brings a chic Italian panache to one of the most far-flung backwaters of the Antilles. The resort is the "temple in the desert" of Italy's Krizia Mariuccia Mandelli, empress of a sports and evening wear empire. The resort is set on more than 80 hectares (198 acres), adjacent to the Beach House (see above). Conceived by Italian architect Gianni Gamondi, the cottages and main clubhouse have roofs



supported by a forest of white columns. Accommodations come in a huge range of styles and shapes, with Caribbean rattan furnishings.

Barbuda, Antigua, W.I. ✆ **268/460-0304.** Fax 268/460-0305. w ww.kclubbarbuda.com. 29 units . Winter $1,400 golf lodge for 2, $2,000 suite for 2; off season $950 golf lodge for 2, $1,400 suite for 2. Rates include all meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed S ept to mid-Nov. No childr en 11 or under . **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar ; airport transfers; wellness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; 2 tennis courts; watersports; deep-sea fishing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

10 MONTSERRAT

Adventurous, eccentric, or eco-minded visitors ar e returning to the par tially destr oyed island of M ontserrat. F ormerly kno wn as the "E merald I sle of the Caribbean, " par tly because of its v erdant v egetation and par tly because of its historic links to I reland, Montserrat is 19km (12 miles) long and 11km (6 3/4 miles) wide, about the size of Manhattan. In the aftermath of one of the worst natural disasters to hit the Caribbean during

recorded history, two-thirds of the population of 12,000 had to be evacuated in 1995 and 1996 after the island's volcano, Chance's Peak, blew its top, smothering the southern portion of the island with pyroclastic flows of hot gases and boiling hot ash, sometimes traveling downhill at hurricane velocity. In the aftermath, much of the island's southern tier—including the island's only airport—was burned, buried, or rendered uninhabitable.

Although the first and most destructive blast occurred on June 25, 1997, Mount Chance and other peaks in the Soufrière Hills had been rumbling for generations. Since the explosions, only about a third of the original population has stayed on island, the others having been evacuated, or emigrating of their own volition, to the U.K. or, less frequently, to such neighboring islands as Antigua. Today, thanks to enormous investment of time and energy from local and international geologists, the path of future pyroclastic flows can more or less be predicted. That has allowed tourism to return to the island, albeit in very small volumes. In fact, the volcanic eruptions have defined Montserrat as one of the most haunting and upsetting natural and geological spectacles in the Caribbean.

The volcano's last major eruption occurred on July 12, 2003, when almost two-thirds of the Soufrière Hills volcanic dome collapsed, sending ash and rocky debris as much as 15,240m (49,987 ft.) into the sky over Montserrat. In the aftermath, some islanders found themselves shoveling 1.5m (5-ft.) "drifts" of volcanic debris off their verandas and out from the bottom of their swimming pools. Today a visit to Montserrat can solicit hundreds of stories about heroism, endurance, disappointment, sacrifice, and backbreaking labor. About half the island is earmarked as an "exclusion zone," which you're supposed to avoid. In contrast, the other half is luxuriant and tropical.

Since the destruction of Plymouth, the island's historic and once-charming capital, Montserrat's commercial center and gerrymandered capital is a rapidly growing strip of land between Brades and Little Bay, on the island's north coast. Overall, you'll get the sense of a small community galvanized into new forms of self-reliance and cooperation, with lots of emphasis on somewhat gritty business-related visits from construction crews and British and international relief agencies.

Pear-shaped and mountainous, and most definitely volcanic in origin, Montserrat lies 43km (27 miles) southwest of Antigua, about midway between Nevis and Guadeloupe. Before the volcanic eruptions, Montserrat was known as the place where such musicians as Elton John, Paul McCartney, Sting, and Stevie Wonder had studios. They, along with much of the rest of Montserrat's glitterati, moved long ago to safer, and more convenient, sites.

English is the island's official language, although it's spoken with a faint Irish brogue, a holdover from the island's early Irish settlers. The Eastern Caribbean dollar is the official unit of currency, although U.S. dollars are widely accepted. The island's biggest and most comprehensive travel agency is **Runaway Travel,** P.O. Box 54, Sweeneys, Montserrat, B.W.I. (✆ **664/491-2800**). They'll arrange access to Federal Express shipments, sell a limited roster of airline tickets, and perform a limited array of financial services, including foreign exchange. A valid passport is required for everyone.

ESSENTIALS

INFORMATION Contact the **Montserrat Tourist Board,** 7 Farara Plaza, Brades, Montserrat, B.W.I. (✆ **664/491-2230;** www.visitmontserrat.com). For up-to-the-minute information specifically related to the island's volcanic activity, check out www.mvo.ms.

GETTING THERE Montserrat is most easily reached from Antigua. **Gerald's Airport,** a latter-day, post-millennium replacement for the one that was rendered unusable during

the searing pyroclastic flows, opened in 2005 near a hamlet on the north side of the island. **Winair** (✆ **866/466-0410;** www.fly-winair.com) wings in several times daily on the 20-minute flight from Antigua, using 19-seat Twin Otters. Regrettably, there are no regularly scheduled ferryboats plying the waters to Montserrat. Many Montserratians bitterly resented that, interpreting it as a lack of support for Montserrat's plight from government officials on Antigua.

There is a departure tax of $21 per person leaving Montserrat.

GETTING AROUND **By Taxi & Bus** Although the island has about 25km (16 miles) of surfaced roads, most of the island's vehicular traffic is limited to the route between Jack Boy Hill, on the island's northeasterly tip, and the village of Fleming, incorporating the island's airport and most points within the designated "northern safety zone" en route. The typical taxi fare from the airport to any of the hotels in the northern tier is from $7.40 to $22.

The only regular **buses** are those running from Salem near the island's southernmost tip to Lookout on the island's northern end, passing through hamlets that include Brades, Sweeney's, and St. John's en route. Sweeney's is the site of a government-funded residential community on the island's northern tip. The fare is 75¢ between any two points along this route. Don't expect the conventional buses you find in large North American cities. These are usually 15-seater minivans, each individually painted. If you want the bus to make a reasonable detour from the designated route, the driver will usually do it for an additional, negotiable fee, pending the approval of the other passengers.

By Rental Car None of the major U.S.-based car-rental companies operates on Montserrat, although you can find a handful of privately owned agencies. You are required to buy a local Montserrat driver's license for $19, which should accompany your own valid license. Rarely are these available directly from the rental agency. More often you'll need to purchase a license from the immigration office at either the heliport or the ferryboat terminal, or from the island's **Police Traffic Department** in Salem (✆ **664/491-2555**), which is open 24 hours a day.

Most island car-rental agencies stock a battered roster of Toyota Corollas, Toyota RAV4s, Suzuki jeeps, or Mazdas, which rent for $48 and up a day, or from $213 per week, depending on their make and model, and the duration of your rental. A collision-damage waiver costs from $8.90 to $19 per day. Even if you buy it, you'll still be liable for the cost of some of the repairs to your vehicle if you damage it, for any reason, during your tenure.

Be-Beeps Car Rentals (✆ **664/491-3787**) is in the hamlet of Olveston, near Salem, close to the Vue Pointe Hotel, recommended below. **M.S. Osborne,** Brades (✆ **664/491-2494**), has a virtual monopoly on supplying most of the Nissans and Suzukis, including some SUVs, on the island.

Warning: Before you begin driving here, be aware that you must drive on the left and you should be careful of the steep, winding roads, which can be treacherous. In addition, volcanic ash on the roads, sometimes identified as "grey snow," can make for slippery driving conditions.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodations are extremely limited—so limited, in fact, that it leaves us wondering what lodgers would do in the event of a sudden and unexpected influx of new business. The island's finest accommodations are within the **Tropical Mansions Suites** (✆ **664/491-8767;** fax 664/491-8275; www.tropicalmansion.com), in the hamlet of Sweeney's

and with its own outdoor pool and an airy, somewhat sterile and decent-looking restaurant (the Tropical Mansion Restaurant, open daily 7:30am–9:30pm). Built in 1999 as a kind of 18-unit neo-Palladian motel, it's identified by a soaring front portico, a modern no-nonsense kind of efficiency, and by a series of breezeways and arcades that surround an ornamental pool. A double room with breakfast costs $119 to $200 per night. MasterCard and Visa are accepted. In the restaurant, lunch main courses cost from $10 to $20 each, and dinner main courses cost from $20 to $35 each. Creole-style fried fish, especially snapper, is a specialty.

Grand View Bed & Breakfast, Baker Hill (✆ **664/491-2284;** fax 664/491-6876), is for those who'd rather have a homelike place to stay. One of the island's best hosts, Theresa Silcott, will also prepare you a great dinner if you make a reservation. Overlooking Little Bay, the B&B has six units (including three suites), which are simple but well maintained and comfortable. In lieu of air-conditioning, you get fresh mountain air. Each of these spacious rooms comes with TV and phone. Double rooms with private bath cost $90, with suites going for $95.

Gingerbread Hill, P.O. Box 246, St. Peter's (✆ **664/491-5812;** www.volcano-island.com), is a four-room, tranquil mountainside retreat that evokes a hippie compound of the late 1960s. Each member of the Lea family pitches in, doing his or her own thing, from conducting tours to making fresh bread. On the grounds are hydroponic gardens, and you can enjoy the luxuriant growth of bananas, oranges, papaya, and mangoes. Even fresh eggs come from the family's chickens. This is the most eco-friendly lodgings on island. You can live here most comfortably in one of the villas, each imaginatively decorated, or else in two comfortable units. Some of the accommodations have a fridge and kitchenette. Double rates are $45 in a one-room apartment, $65 in the cottage, or $125 in a suite or villa, each with Wi-Fi. No credit cards are accepted, and bikes and laundry facilities are available.

Renting a House on Montserrat

Montserrat real estate, thanks to the recent volcanic explosions, has disappointed more real estate investors than virtually any other island in the Caribbean. But what that means for you is now you can select from a pool of affordable buildings (at least 100) of all sizes, shapes, and degrees of comfort and maintenance that can be rented for anywhere from a few days to a season or more. We firmly believe that if you're tempted to rent a house for a Caribbean holiday, you should stay for the first time on island within a conventional hotel, and then—for a second- or third-time holiday—consider renting from a reputable agent. Two of the best agencies are **Trade Winds Real Estate,** P.O. Box 365, Olveston (✆ **664/491-2004;** fax 664/491-6229; www.tradewindsmontserrat.com); and **Montserrat Enterprises, Ltd.,** P.O. Box 58, Old Towne (✆ **664/491-2431;** fax 664/491-4660; www.montserratenterprises.com).

WHERE TO DINE

ANFA Restaurant & Bar CHINESE On virtually any other island, this restaurant would be viewed as a minor, not particularly noticeable hideaway, favored by locals and forgotten in the mainstream tourist crush. On Montserrat, however, where restaurants aren't very common, it's a major player on the local dining scene. About 80% of the food sold within its basic, cement-and-Formica interior is takeaway. But for clients who want to eat in, there's a bar, a blaring TV set, and a menu listing all the staples of Canton and China's South.

St. John's Main Rd. ✆ **664/491-2200.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $6.70–$24. No credit cards. Daily 11am–10pm.

JJ's Cuisine CARIBBEAN Dominica-born Zephrina Jnofinn owns and operates this popular restaurant, in a low-slung roadside building that's within a 5-minute drive from the airport. Inside the Formica-clad dining room, you can order lobster, a worthy version of mountain chicken (frogs' legs) sautéed in garlic and butter, sandwiches, and excellent burgers that Zephrina concocts herself with a few secret ingredients. Zephrina's signature cocktail is an "energy punch," ingredients for which include grated sweet potato, tannia root and arrowroot, Frangelica liqueur, and rum.

St. John's Main Rd., Sweeney's Center. ✆ **664/491-9024.** Reservations recommended. Burgers and sandwiches $3.70–$7.40; platters $9.30–$24. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 8am–midnight.

Tina's Restaurant CARIBBEAN Set within a green-and-white Antillean house, this place is less than a 5-minute drive uphill from the ferryboat terminal. Tina Farrell established it in 1998 after she was evacuated from her home on Montserrat's southern tier. Expect a clean, decent, cozy, down-home Caribbean feel, with savory portions of chicken or beef, as well as burgers, grilled-chicken salads or lobster salads, and whatever fresh fish was hauled in by local fishermen that day.

Brades Main Rd. ✆ **664/491-3538.** Reservations recommended only on national holidays. Lunch main courses $7.40–$10; set lunch menu $17; pizzas $9.30–$24; set dinner menu and dinner main courses $17–$24. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–midnight.

Ziggy's ★ Finds MONTSERRATIAN Ziggy's is the island's most elegant, upscale, and elaborate restaurant, though hard to find. Accessible after a drive along some of the most winding and shadowy roads on Montserrat, it lies within a traditionally designed house in the high and isolated altitudes above Mount Pleasant Woodlands. Menu items emerge in an idiosyncratic rhythm all their own, including green banana soup, butterfly shrimp, Scottish smoked salmon, sirloin steak, rack of lamb, and grilled sea bass.

Mount Pleasant Woodlands. ✆ **664/491-8282.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10pm.

EXPLORING MONTSERRAT

SCUBA DIVING Montserrat offers 30 excellent dive sites, each with a rich assortment of marine life, including spotted drums and copper sweepers, and perhaps a large sea turtle. At the rim of the island's marine shelf, where relatively shallow waters suddenly drop off to great depths, divers can plunge into 21m-deep (69-ft.) waters to see mammoth sponges along with large star and brain coral reefs.

A particularly well-managed dive and watersports operation is **The Green Monkey,** which operates from a wood-sided shack adjacent to Festival Village at Little Bay (✆ **664/496-2628;** www.divemontserrat.com). From its premises, Midwest-born Troy Deppermann and his wife, Melanie, conduct PADI-approved snorkeling and dive trips with a conscious eye toward safety and the transfer of information about life below sea level. On their premises is a cubbyhole-size bar, which maintains a thriving business completely independent from anything to do with underwater explorations. On island, their most visible competitors are Emmy and Andrew, who operate the well-respected **SeaWolf Diving School** (✆ **664/496-7807;** www.seawolfdivingschool.com). Prices at both outfits are roughly comparable: One-tank dives cost $75, two-tank dives cost $88, and one-tank night dives go for $70. Snorkeling equipment can be rented for $35, but it's a lot more fun and informative to participate in a supervised snorkeling trip, by boat, to nearby Rendezvous Bay, site of a teeming offshore reef, for $35 per person.

Tips Beaches

Montserrat isn't known for its white-sand beaches. Most of its beaches have black volcanic sand, and they lie on the northern rim of the island, the part not threatened by volcanic activity. Many observers have noted that the beaches have actually improved, becoming bigger, sandier, and wider since the volcano deposited millions of tons of sand, ash, and debris upon them. The best beach on the island—and the only one with white sand—is **Rendezvous Bay,** which is accessible only via water taxis that depart from both Little Bay and the nearly adjacent Carr's Bay, or after a half-hour's hike. If you want to walk, the routes to Rendezvous Bay are especially convenient either from Little Bay or from the hamlet of Drummond's, adjacent to the airport. More readily accessible but less popular and hotter on bare feet are the dark-sand (a slate-gray color) beaches at **Carr's Bay, Woodlands Beach, Lime Kiln Bay, Little Bay** (near the arrival of the ferryboats from Antigua), and **Bunkum Bay.** The staff at **Tropical Mansions Suites** (✆ **664/491-8767**) or the **Vue Pointe Hotel** (✆ **664/491-5210**) can arrange day sails to these beaches.

SIGHTS An active volcano can itself be a point of interest. The **Soufrière Hills Volcano** in the still-restricted southern part of the island is eerily fascinating, but by no means should any novice visitor to Montserrat venture into this region. The only deaths suffered during the island's volcanic explosions occurred on June 25, 1997, when 19 people were farming in an area that had been declared an exclusion zone.

Nevertheless, much to the regret of amateur volcano-watchers, the government is very strict about discouraging anyone from visiting, under virtually any circumstances, the southern two-thirds of the island, which includes, regrettably, the once-bustling capital of Plymouth. Not only does the southern zone lack electricity and running water, but the government also wishes to prevent squatters from settling on land abandoned by the many homeowners who evacuated the island. The exclusion zone has also been deemed unsafe for transit on foot and, in multiple instances, in conventional vehicles or even all-terrain vehicles equipped with four-wheel drive.

A good place to learn about the volcanic catastrophe is the **Montserrat Volcano Observatory** ★ (✆ **664/491-5647;** www.mvo.ms), which is in Flemings, above the village of Salem, on the island's north coast. The observatory is accessible via a winding, rutted road, about a 25-minute drive from the ferry terminal and about a 30-minute jaunt from the airport. Some of the staff here are busy recording and analyzing the seismic information emanating from the volcano, and aren't usually available for conversations and dialogue. But on-site are a series of exhibitions including videos that document life on Montserrat before and after the seismic explosions, and close-up video views of the almost unimaginable geologic forces that spewed mud and debris many thousands of feet into the air. Unfortunately, because of the instability of the terrain affected by the explosions, no tours, either by jeep or on foot, are allowed onto the regions of Montserrat that were ruined by the explosions.

Aruba

The most popular island in the Dutch Caribbean, Aruba draws droves of visitors, from honeymooners and sun worshippers to snorkelers, sailors, and weekend gamblers. When you lie back along the 11km (6 3/4-mile) stretch of white-sand beach, you can enjoy an average 82°F (28°C) daytime temperature, trade winds, and very low humidity. Moreover, peddlers won't harass you, and the island is relatively safe and free of racial tensions.

Don't come for local culture and history—you're here to enjoy sandy Palm Beach, one of the best beaches in the world, and evenings of dining and drinking, moonlit strolls, and gambling in the glittery casinos. The main resort area is a row of comfortable but familiar high-rise hotels along a gorgeous shoreline, like a beach strip in Florida.

The smallest of the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao), Aruba is 32km (20 miles) long and 10km (6 1/4 miles) wide. Its coastline on the leeward side is smooth and serene, with white-sand beaches; on the eastern coast, the windward Atlantic side, it looks rugged and wild. Aruba has clean, exhilarating air, like the desert of Palm Springs, California—forget lush vegetation. It also lies outside the hurricane belt and gets less rain than virtually any other popular island in the Caribbean.

Though it is still a Dutch protectorate, Aruba became a nation unto itself in 1986. Some visitors have called Oranjestad, Aruba's capital, "Holland meets Disney Fantasia" because of its step-gabled Dutch architecture painted with a Caribbean palette of bright pastels. With more than a dozen resort hotels populating its once-uninhabited beaches, it is now one of the Caribbean's most popular destinations. A post-millennium moratorium on hotel construction, however, has halted the building of new resorts—so for now, Aruba remains safe from rampant overdeveloping.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Palm Beach:** Several publications, including *Condé Nast Traveler,* have hailed this superb white-sand beach as one of the 12 best beaches in the world. It's likely to be crowded in winter, but for swimming, sailing, or fishing, it's idyllic.
- **Arikok National Park:** This ecological preserve sprawls across roughly 20% of the island. Here you'll find animal species unique to Aruba, including the Aruban rattlesnake, Aruban cat-eyed snake, Aruban whiptail lizard, Aruban burrowing owl, and Aruban parakeet, as well as iguanas, many species of migratory birds, goats, and donkeys.
- **The Aruban nightlife:** Lavish casinos and Vegas-style revues are the highlight of the island's nighttime activities. Most of the casinos in the big hotels along Palm Beach stay open into the wee hours, where you'll also find most of the extravagant stage shows, generally with Latin and Caribbean themes.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you leave home, contact the **Aruba Tourism Authority** at the following locations: 100 Plaza Dr., 1st floor, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (✆ **201/558-1110;** fax 201/558-4768; ata.newjersey@aruba.com); and in the U.K., The Copperfields, 25 Copperfield St., London SE1 0EN (✆ **020/7928-1600;** fax 020/7928-1700; aruba@saltmarshpr.co.uk).

Information is available on the Web at **www.aruba.com** or by calling ✆ **800/TO-ARUBA** (862-7822).

Once on the island, you can go to the **Aruba Tourism Authority** at L. G. Smith Blvd. 172, Oranjestad (✆ **297/582-3777** or ata.aruba@aruba.com), for information. They're open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.

GETTING THERE

American Airlines (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has a nonstop 4½-hour flight from New York's JFK Airport Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. American also flies nonstop from Miami.

US Airways (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) flies nonstop from Charlotte, North Carolina, and Philadelphia several days a week. **Continental Airlines** (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies to Aruba via nonstop flights daily from Newark, New Jersey, and also from Houston on Saturdays. **United Airlines** (✆ **800/538-2929** in the U.S. and Canada; www.united.com) has weekend service from Chicago O'Hare and Washington Dulles. **Delta** (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies daily to Aruba from its hub in Atlanta, taking 4¾ hours. The airline also offers Saturday flights from New York's JFK Airport. **JetBlue** (✆ **800-JETBLUE** [538-2583]; www.jetblue.com) has direct flights from Boston and from New York's JFK Airport every day.

Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com) has connections from Toronto to Aruba on Saturdays which take 5½ hours.

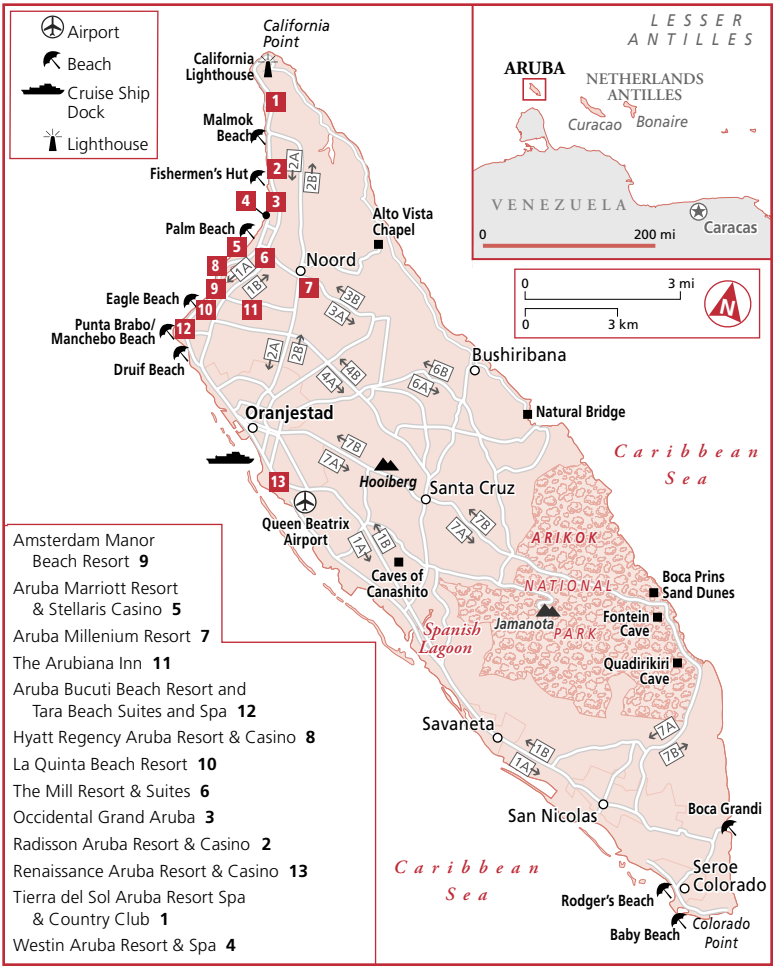
From Europe, the carrier **Martinair** (www.martinair.com) has taken over the routes previously serviced by KLM, flying nonstop from Amsterdam to Aruba.

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR It's easy to rent a car in Aruba. Excellent roads connect major tourist attractions, and all the major rental companies accept valid U.S. or Canadian driver's licenses. Major U.S. car-rental companies maintain offices on Aruba at the airport and at major hotels. No taxes are imposed on car rentals on Aruba, but insurance can be tricky.

Fun Facts Carnival

Many visitors come here for the annual pre-Lenten Carnival, a 2-month-long festival held in January and February, with events day and night. The music, dancing, parades, costumes, and "jump-ups" (Caribbean hoedowns) make Carnival the highlight of Aruba's winter season. For more information, contact the tourist office.



Even when you purchase a collision-damage waiver, you are still responsible for the first $300 to $500 worth of damage. Rental rates range between $40 and $90 per day.

Try **Budget Rent-a-Car,** at Queen Beatrix Airport (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/582-8600; www.budget.com); **Hertz,** Sabana Blanca 35 (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/582-1845; www.hertz.com); **Thrifty Car Rental,** L. G. Smith Blvd. 9 (✆ **800/THRIFTY** [847-4389] in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/583-5600; www.thrifty.com); **Avis,** Queen Beatrix Airport (✆ **800/331-1212** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/582-5496; www.avis.com); **Dollar Rent-a-Car,** Queen Beatrix Airport (✆ **800/800-3665** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/583-0101;

www.dollar.com); and **National** (✆ **800/227-3876** in the U.S. and Canada; www.nationalcar.com), with branches at the Oranjestad Holiday Inn (✆ 297/586-3768) and at the Queen Beatrix Airport (✆ 297/582-5451).

BY BUS Aruba has excellent bus service, with regular daily service from 6am to midnight. Round-trip fare between the beach hotels and Oranjestad is around $2.50. Bus schedules are available at the **Arubus Office** at the central bus station on Zoutmanstraat. Your hotel reception desk will know when the buses pass by. They run about every 15 minutes during the day or every 30 minutes in the evenings, with limited service on Sundays. Try to have exact change. For schedules and information, call Arubus Co. (✆ **297/588-2300** or 297-588-0617 after 4 pm; www.arubus.com).

BY TAXI Taxis are unmetered but rates are fixed, so tell the driver your destination and ask the fare before you get in. The main office is near Palm Beach; a dispatch office is located at the Bosabao (✆ **297/582-2116**). A ride from the airport to most of the hotels, including those at Palm Beach, costs about $20 per car, with a five-passenger maximum. Some locals don't tip, but we suggest you do, especially if the driver has helped you with luggage. On some parts of the island, it's next to impossible to locate a taxi and you'll have to call. If you're going to a remote location, it's a good idea to ask the driver to return for you at a certain time.

The English-speaking drivers are usually willing tour guides. Most seem well informed and eager to share their knowledge with you. A 1-hour tour (you don't need much more than that) costs from $40 for a maximum of five passengers.

BY MOTORCYCLE & MOPED Because Aruba's roads are good and the terrain is flat, many visitors like to rent mopeds and motorcycles. At **George's Cycle Rental,** L. G. Smith Blvd. 124 (✆ **297/593-2202**), rental scooters begin at $40 per day. If you're a fan of the Fatboy or like to be king of the road, **Big Twin Harley Davidson Motor Cycle** (✆ **297/582-8660;** www.harleydavidson-aruba.com) offers half-day tours for $130 and full day tours for $163.

Fast Facts Aruba

Banks Banks are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm. The most centrally located bank is **Aruba Bank** at Caya Betico Croes 41 (✆ **297/527-7777**). It's not hard to find an ATM (since there are over 50 on the island and they dispense money in either Florins or U.S. dollars, depending on your preference).

Currency The currency is the **Aruba florin (AFl),** which is divided into 100 cents. Silver coins are in denominations of 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, and 50¢, and 1 and 2 ½ florins. The 50-cent piece, the square *yotin,* is Aruba's best-known coin. At press time, the exchange rate, fairly consistent over the years, was 1.76 AFl to US$1 (1 AFl is worth about 56¢). U.S. dollars, euros, traveler's checks, and major credit cards are widely accepted on the island. *Unless otherwise specified, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents To enter Aruba, U.S. and Canadian citizens and British subjects must submit a valid passport. Citizens of a member country of the European Union need a passport and an E.U. Travel Card.

Electricity The electricity is 110–120 volts AC (60 cycles), the same as in the United States.

Emergencies For the police or fire department, or a medical emergency, dial ✆ **911.**

Hospital For medical care, go to the **Horacio Oduber Hospital** on L. G. Smith Boulevard (✆ **587-4300;** this is also the number to call in case of a medical emergency). This modern building near Eagle Beach has excellent medical facilities. Hotels also have medical doctors on call, and there are good dental facilities as well (appointments can be made through your hotel).

Language The official languages are Dutch and the local dialect Papiamento, but nearly everybody speaks English. Spanish is also widely spoken.

Liquor Laws The minimum legal drinking and gambling age is 18. Liquor is sold on any day of the week throughout the island in most stores, including grocery stores and delis. By law (which doesn't seem to be strictly enforced), you can have an open container on the beach only if the liquor is purchased at one of the bars of the resort hotels lining the beachfront.

Safety Aruba is one of the Caribbean's safest destinations, in spite of its numerous hotels and casinos. Pickpockets and purse snatchers are around, of course, but they're rare. Still, it's wise to guard your valuables. Never leave them unattended on the beach or even in a locked car. Also, never hitchhike, and ladies out on the town should use the buddy system.

Taxes & Service Charges Hotels tack on a variety of additional charges that include a 6% government tax on rooms, and another 10% to 15% for "service" which may also include an energy surcharge of $4 to $8 per unit per night.

Telephone To call Aruba from the United States, dial ✆ **011** (the international access code), then **297** (the country code for Aruba), then **58** (the area code), and the five-digit local number. If you're in Aruba, you have to dial **58** followed by the five-digit local number. If you want to really keep in touch while on island, rent a local cellphone or get a local SIM card if you have a GSM phone. Visit the **SETAR** (✆ **297/583-4000;** www.setar.aw) or **Digicell** (✆ **297/522-2200;** www.digicellaruba.com) kiosks at the airport or in town. Another option is to dial **188** at any SETAR pay phone to make a credit card call home.

Time Aruba is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round; when all time zones are on standard time, Aruba is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (when it's 10am in Aruba, it's 9am in New York). When daylight saving time is in effect in the United States, clocks in New York and Aruba show the same time.

Water The water, which comes from the world's second-largest desalination plant, is not only pure, but among the best in the world.

Weather The island lies outside the hurricane belt, so there is no threat of tropical storms. The average annual temperature is 82°F (28°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

Most of Aruba's hotels are bustling, self-contained resorts. There's a dearth of family or budget hotels. Guesthouses are also rare and tend to fill up early in winter with faithful return visitors.

Tips Freebies for Kids

The **One Cool Family Vacation** (OCFV) program entices families to visit Aruba during the summer (June–Sept). Here's the deal: If you bring kids under age 13, you'll get an assortment of freebies: breakfast, daily activities, sightseeing tours, cruises, snorkeling, and scuba lessons. In addition, discounts may be offered for submarine rides, horseback riding, car rentals, and even film developing. The program covers two children for every paying adult. Contact Aruba Tourism (✆ **800/TO-ARUBA** [862-7822]; www.aruba.com) for a list of participating resorts.

In season, it's imperative to make reservations well in advance. Don't ever arrive expecting to find a room on the spot. You must give Immigration the address where you'll be staying when you arrive.

Don't forget to ask if the room tax and service charge (see above) are included in the rates quoted when you make your reservation. Also, lots of the big resorts in Aruba are frequently featured in packages, which can bring their rates down dramatically.

In lieu of renting an actual house or villa, which you can do on some islands, your best bet here is to rent an apartment or condo. Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort (p. 103) is a good place for such rentals.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino ★★ Kids The Marriott's airy, tastefully subdued rooms are the largest in any of Aruba's luxury high-rise hotels. Its 9-sq.-m (97-sq.-ft.) balconies are also the most commodious in the area. As the last resort along Palm Beach, the Marriott boasts a beach that's ideal for sunbathers craving space. Built in 1995 and constantly upgraded, the hotel has a quiet and discerning tone; guests run the gamut from honeymooners to retirees, to corporate-incentive rewardees. There are plenty of families, too, but children here are well behaved. The eight-story complex forms a *U* that overlooks a large free-form pool, a waterfall, and lush palm, banana, and jacaranda trees. The Mandara Spa offers Aruba's most spiritually transformative indoor experience.

L. G. Smith Blvd. 101, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **800/223-6388** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-9000. Fax 297/586-0649. www.marriott.com. 413 units. Christmas/New Year's $679–$1,189 double, from $1,189 suite; Jan–Apr $454–$699 double, from $699 suite; May to mid-Dec $249–$564 double, from $614 suite. Packages available. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants (including a Ruth's Chris Steak House); 3 bars; babysitting; children's center; concierge; 18-hole championship golf course nearby; well-equipped health club and spa; large outdoor pool w/waterfall; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts lit for night play; extensive watersports equipment/rentals; ADA-compliant rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, hair dryer.

Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort & Casino ★★★ Kids This elegant nine-story beachfront resort has stunning spaces and a stellar reputation. It offers first-rate amenities and some of the most elaborate guest programs on the island. The elaborate water feature was completed in 2006 and allows guests to gently meander through interconnected pools and water slides. Although attractively furnished with Deco-inspired furniture and modern carnival colors, the rooms are significantly smaller than the Marriott's. And the "Parisian" balconies offer just enough room for one person to stand. Overlooking the pool area, standard rooms have no balconies. Other rooms provide vistas of the pool and

ocean, while garden units boast views of the lush tropical foliage. The 18 suites vary in size, but all are spacious, with good balconies, and some feature such extras as stereo systems and in-room fitness equipment.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 85, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **800/233-1234** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-1234. Fax 297/586-1682. www.aruba.hyatt.com. 360 units. Winter $525–$725 double, $825–$2,230 suite; off season $335–$485 double, $575–$1,825 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $90 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; children's center and programs; health club; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool/lagoon complex; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 lit tennis courts; canoes; dive shop; scuba diving; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Occidental Grand Aruba ★ Kids This resort reinvented itself as an Occidental in 2006. The lobby combines Moroccan- and European-style furnishing and fixtures. Guest rooms have tile and marble floors, and private balconies or terraces. The pool has retained its bustling feel, so if you're looking for a casual house-party atmosphere with lots of action and organized activities, this good-times place is for you. The resort is popular with almost everybody: families with kids, young couples, middle-aged folks, and some elderly guests; most people choose an all-inclusive package. The hotel also has a wide range of restaurants—Mexican, Pan-Asian, Caribbean fusion, and, our favorite, **L'Olio,** with a finely tuned Italian cuisine and an impressive wine list.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 83 (P.O. Box 218), Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **800/858-2258** in the U.S., or 297/586-4500. Fax 297/586-3191. www.occidentalhotels.com. 391 units. Winter $583–$875 double, $875–$1,035 suite; off season $444–$714 double, $714–$816 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; deli; 6 bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; children's club; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 lit tennis courts; watersports; boating; dive shop; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar.

Radisson Aruba Resort & Casino ★★★ Kids One of the 10 most luxurious resorts in the southern Caribbean, this eight-story hotel has the most stylish and beautiful rooms in Aruba. Integrating Caribbean plantation and South Beach Art Deco elements, the complex is both sophisticated and personal. Because the lush gardens, lagoons, and waterfalls ramble over more than 14 acres, the tone is tranquil and the feel is spacious. The guest rooms aren't large, but they're remarkable: West Indian colonial louvered doors, rather than drapes, cover the terrace doors, and intricately carved finials crown the mahogany four-poster beds. The reading chairs' retractable ottomans and floor lamps mix Bauhaus and plantation influences. Elegance stretches out to the balconies, too, where mahogany slatted chairs and flagstone floors enhance the view over the gardens or sea. To create the warmth of a private home, the Radisson adds such touches as frosted drinking glasses, silver ice buckets, and earth-toned pottery. Originally built in 1959 as Aruba's first high-rise hotel, it's now Radisson's flagship.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 81, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **800/333-3333** in the U.S., or 297/586-6555. Fax 297/586-3260. www.radisson.com/aruba. 353 units. Winter $449–$629 double, $649–$899 suite; off season $275–$399 double, from $649 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's center; golf privileges; fitness center; 2 outdoor pools; casino; room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, free Wi-Fi.

Tierra del Sol Aruba Resort Spa & Country Club ★★ If you think more about sand traps than sand castles, Tierra del Sol tops the board. This resort, with its championship 18-hole golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., combines the sun and golf of Scottsdale with the waves and dunes of Aruba's north coast. The Mediterranean-style condominiums, villas, and homes clustered in intimate neighborhoods, spread over acres

Moments Spa Retreats

Diamonds may be a girl's best friend, but corporeal indulgence is a close second. The **Mandara Spa** at Marriott's Aruba Ocean Club, L. G. Smith Blvd. 99, Palm Beach (✆ **297/586-9000**), re-creates the tranquillity of a Japanese rainforest with Thai silk wall hangings, soft Balinese gamelan music, and the scents of clove and cinnamon. Personal attention is the hallmark of this meditative retreat, which offers state-of-the-art massages, body wraps, and facials. Programs cater to couples and men, who make up a hefty portion of the clientele. Other upscale spas can be found at **Tierra del Sol** (✆ **297/586-4861**), the **Hyatt** (✆ **297/586-1234**), and the **Larimar Spa at the Renaissance** (✆ **297/583-6000**). For a more rustic pampering experience, try **Spa del Sol at the Manchebo Beach Resort and Spa,** J. E. Irasquin Blvd. 55 (✆ **297/582-6145**), a garden sanctuary by the sea featuring massages, yoga, reflexology, and other treatments in beachside cabanas. The training of masseurs and masseuses on the island varies greatly. Be sure to ask for the most experienced person available.

of desert landscaping, have golf-course or ocean views, living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, master suites with full bathrooms, guest rooms with another bathroom, covered terraces, and washers and dryers. Some also feature walk-in closets, saunas, balconies, outdoor Jacuzzis, private pools, and garages. You can arrive to a fully stocked kitchen by ordering items online beforehand.

Malmokweg, Noord, Aruba. ✆ **800/992-2015** or 297/586-7800. Fax 297/586-4970. www.tierradelsol.com. 112 units. Winter $350–$425 2-bedroom condo, $500–$785 2-bedroom villa, $500–$750 3-bedroom condo, $495–$875 3-bedroom villa; off season $300–$375 2-bedroom condo, $400–$475 2-bedroom villa, $400 3-bedroom condo, $525 3-bedroom villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; golf; fitness center; outdoor pool; spa; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, washer/dryer.

Westin Aruba Resort & Spa ★★★ Built in 1975, this hotel was renovated in 2006. Today olive, beige, and mustard fabrics accent the cherry-wood furniture, while subtle carpeting, flatscreen TVs, and modern rectangular lamps add more Miami style. And the trademark Westin "heavenly" beds are a fluffy retreat from the world. The terraces on the top floors mean superb ocean views—with 18 floors, this is Aruba's tallest building. Guests include the usual suspects—couples, honeymooners, a fair number of business groups, and families. The kids' program includes scuba lessons in the pool, and the iguanas that patrol the pool area are adorable. But you'll have to wait in line in the morning to reserve a beach hut, and one never gets used to the sad sight of parrots, toucans, and cockatoos squawking in their cages.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 77, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **877/822-2222** in the U.S. or 297/586-4466. Fax 297/586-0928. www.westinaruba.com. 481 units. Winter $469–$779 double; off season $259–$359 double; year-round $749–$1,029 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's program; health club; outdoor pool; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

EXPENSIVE

Aruba Bucuti Beach Resort and Tara Beach Suites and Spa ★★ Finds This elegant oasis provides Aruba's most adult ambience. Set on one of the Caribbean's best

beaches, a serene 5.6-hectare (14-acre) expanse of sand, it's a favored retreat for sophisticated couples of all ages, especially honeymooners. About half are from Europe, and most are well traveled. And though most guests are straight, the Bucuti is both appealing and welcoming to gay couples. Contemporary minimalist design with walnut and linen tones warm the spacious rooms, and the large balconies overlook gardens or the beach. Penthouses and the junior suites have kitchenettes. Because the owner is the driving force behind many environmental initiatives, the hotel is one of Aruba's greenest: Recycling bins, water-conservation measures, and beachwide clean-ups are part of the effort. Beach lovers appreciate the Bucuti's *palapa*-to-guest ratio—it's the highest on the island. At the breezy, open-air fitness area, nature and exercise go hand in hand.

L. G. Smith Blvd. 55B, Eagle Beach, Aruba. ✆ **888/4BUCUTI** [428-2884] or 297/583-1100. Fax 297/582-5272. www.bucuti.com. 104 units. Winter $364–$459 double, $535 bungalow or junior suite; off season $250–$336 double, $416 bungalow or junior suite. All rooms include a full American breakfast buffet daily. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; open-air health club; outdoor pool; spa. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino ★★★ The anchor of a second mall, the six-story Marina Tower hotel at the Renaissance Resort in the thick of the capital is popular with business travelers and vacationing couples. This facility limits access for children younger than 18 from the lobby, pool, fitness center, spa, lounge, and casinos. The compact rooms feature thick carpeting, modern colors, stylish furniture, and step-out balconies. The bathrooms are small but have separate sink and bath areas. Overlooking the mall, atrium rooms are quiet but lack an ocean view. Get a corner room on the sixth floor if you like high ceilings.

On the waterfront and favored by groups, the Ocean Suites feel more like a resort and are family-friendly. This part of the complex features a small man-made beach, pool with slides, and 258 one-bedroom suites with living rooms, large bathrooms, balconies or patios, and stocked wet bars. Carpeted floors, solid pastels, and glass bricks brighten the rooms. Hop the free water taxi to Renaissance Island (a 10-min. ride) for a relaxing day on the beach. Also on the premises are two casinos (including the island's only 24-hr. facility) and a theater that presents a flashy Vegas-style show.

L. G. Smith Blvd. 82, Oranjestad, Aruba. ✆ **800/421-8188** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/583-6000. Fax 297/5825-317. www.marriott.com. 558 units in 2 resorts. Winter $350–$450 double, from $517 suite; off season $196–$306 double, from $310 suite. Extra person $50. Children 16 and under stay free in parent's suite. Meal plans and packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; children's programs; exercise room; 2 outdoor pools; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; fishing; scuba diving; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet ($10/day), minibar.

MODERATE

Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort ★★ Kids This cheerful gem is a refreshing alternative to cookie-cutter uniformity. With a strong European accent and couples-friendly slant, the Amsterdam Manor features a quiet atmosphere and boutique size that's perfect for independent travelers. The last low-rise resort across the street from Eagle Beach, it's near the bus stop for easy access to town. Bird lovers enjoy the proximity to the Bubali Pond bird sanctuary. The architecture of the three-floor complex is Dutch-gingerbread with quaint gabled roofs and whimsical turrets. Scattered around a series of intimate courtyards, the studios and one- and two-bedroom suites feature oak furniture and stylish wicker sofa sets. All units feature a balcony or terrace and kitchen or kitchenette. Standard studios have shower-only bathrooms, while superior units have a Jacuzzi

and an ocean view. Suites on the top floor boast high barn ceilings. An environmental leader, the resort is Green Globe certified.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 252 (P.O. Box 1302), Oranjestad, Aruba. ✆ **800/969-2310** in the U.S., or 297/52-71100. Fax 297/52-71112. www.amsterdammanor.com. 72 units. Winter $249–$279 studio, $329–$400 suite; off season $159–$189 studio, $239–$289 suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; concierge; free Internet and Wi-Fi in lobby; outdoor pool; kiddie pool; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, free Wi-Fi.

The Mill Resort & Suites ★ (Finds) The only low-rise in a high-rise area, this resort combines Dutch efficiency and Aruban warmth. Opened in 1990, the two-story complex lies opposite Palm Beach and the Westin. Its strengths include personal service, easy access to amenities, and reasonable prices. Guests vary from honeymooning couples to singles looking to have a good time. The sunny units feature bamboo furniture and tile floors. Junior rooms have king-size beds, full bathrooms, sitting areas with sofa beds, good-size porches or balconies, and kitchenettes. Studios have one king-size bed, a pull-out sofa, a shower-only bathroom, a dining/sitting area, and a kitchen. A Jacuzzi is steps away from a king-size bed in the Royal rooms, which also boast a sitting area, and a porch or balcony. Garden- and pool-view rooms cost the same; the pool's party atmosphere wanes later in the day, but garden rooms are quieter around the clock. Beach access is directly across the street.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 330, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **800/992-2015** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-7700. Fax 297/586-7271. www.millresort.com. 200 units. Dec–Mar $274 royal room, $287 studio, $314 junior suite, $481 1-bedroom suite, $676 2-bedroom suite; Apr–Nov $140 royal room $150 studio, $188 junior suite, $295 1-bedroom suite, $436 2-bedroom suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. No children in the Royal Room. Packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; exercise room; 2 pools (1 for children); smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts lit for night play; Wi-Fi around pool and lobby areas for $7 per day; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

Aruba Millennium Resort (Value) This two-story bright-yellow motel is a 10-minute walk inland from Palm Beach. The studios and one-bedroom units, each with a kitchenette, face either a small pool or one of two cozy courtyards. Each of the courtyards features two miniscule Jacuzzis with rickety wooden decks. All rooms boast either a balcony or a raised rustic-wood terrace with patio furniture and blue-and-white-striped awning. Inside, well-worn blue and yellow floral prints accent the white wicker and bamboo furniture. Ask for a smoke-free room to avoid the smell, which has permeated the drapes, and ask to face the pool. The motel's quiet ambience makes it popular with budget-conscious families, locals, and couples looking to zone out by the pool. Restaurants and other shops are also within easy walking distance.

Palm Beach 33, Palm Beach, Aruba. ✆ **297/586-3700.** Fax 297/586-2506. www.arubamillenniumresort.com. 20 units. Dec–Apr $130 studio, $175 1-bedroom; May–Nov $60 studio, $95 1-bedroom. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette.

The Arubiana Inn (Value) A 15-minute walk inland from Eagle Beach, this quiet, tidy motel lies in wild, cactus-covered terrain a few hundred feet from a main road. The single-story structure of coral stucco and terra cotta tile encloses a central pool area that boasts plenty of chairs and tables. Each of the squeaky-clean studio units opens to this palm-lined courtyard. The cozy rooms feature white tile floors, white wicker furniture, and pastel floral prints. The small bathrooms are blindingly white with salmon accents.

A minimart supplies food and other items. Restaurants, a supermarket, and miniature golf are a few minutes away by foot.

Bubali 74, Noord, Aruba. ✆ **297/587-7700.** Fax 297/587-1770. www.arubianainn.com. 18 units. Winter $98 double; off season $75 double. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; minimarket; babysitting; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

La Quinta Beach Resort Built in 1991, this small timeshare next to Le Dôme restaurant is across the road from Eagle Beach. Most owners are older couples, but there are a fair number of families as well. The atmosphere at the two five-floor buildings is sedate. All units boast large balconies, but the closets are small. The furnishings are tropical and modular—lots of bamboo, pink tile, and nondescript floral prints. The wooden louvered windows and paned windows and doors are a nice touch, though. All units have a kitchenette, and two-bedroom deluxe units have a loft bedroom. The deluxe building's suites are smaller and have pinched corners, but they're closer to the beach. A small parking lot separates the deluxe units from the more expensive executive building, where suites have nicer kitchens. The pool in the executive complex is also much larger than the one in front. For those looking for a touch of luxury, some of the one-bedroom executive suites have balcony Jacuzzis.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 228, Eagle Beach, Aruba. ✆ **297/587-5010.** Fax 297/587-6263. www.webnova.com/laquinta. 54 units. Winter $191 double, $227–$262 1-bedroom suite, $309–$400 2-bedroom suite, $575 3-bedroom suite; summer $121 double, $162–$138 1-bedroom suite, $191 2-bedroom suite, $321 3-bedroom suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Jacuzzis; 2 pools; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, video rentals, hair dryer, kitchen or kitchenette.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Sometimes—at least on off-season package deals—visitors on the Modified American Plan (breakfast and dinner) are allowed to dine around on an exchange plan with other hotels. Ask your hotel for details.

IN ORANJESTAD

Expensive

Driftwood ★ (Finds) SEAFOOD/ARUBAN The married partners who run this restaurant have an unusual setup: Herbert Merryweather spends the day on the high seas catching the fish served that night in the restaurant, while Francine Merryweather stays on-site, directing the sometimes busy traffic in the dining room. The setting is an Aruban-style antique house in the center of Oranjestad, with interior walls covered with (guess what) pieces of driftwood. The menu items that are always available include Argentine filet mignon served with a bacon-flavored mushroom sauce; boneless breast of chicken with Parmesan and linguine; stewed conch; and shrimp in Creole sauce. But the composition of the fish menu varies according to the day's catch. It might include mahimahi, wahoo, king fish, grouper, or lobster. These will be prepared after a consultation with a staff member, usually Francine, who will propose any of several methods of preparation, either blackened, meunière, fried, or baked, along with appropriate garnishes and sauces.

Klipstraat 12. ✆ **297/583-2515.** www.driftwoodaruba.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 5–10:30pm (last order).

Gasparito Restaurant and Art Gallery ★ Finds ARUBAN/SEAFOOD Here's a favorite with people in love. Located in a restored *cunucu* (farmhouse), Gasparito features intimate dining rooms inside and a breezy outdoor patio and bar. The tinkling of a fountain, comfor table patio chairs, and candlelight enhance the courtyard's warmth. Inside, vaulted ceilings embrace cozy rooms. Local art, much of it for sale, graces the interior walls. The *keri keri* ravioli, a favorite appetizer, features shredded fish (dry like *bacalão*) in a creamy tomato and basil sauce. Main courses focus on seafood and Aruban dishes, but the menu makes a special nod to vegetarians, and the filet mignon has vocal fans. For dessert you can't go wrong with *banana na forno,* a whole banana baked with cinnamon.

Gasparito 3. ✆ **297/586-7044.** www.gasparito.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$38. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–11pm.

Le Dôme ★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This well-known restaurant remains a favorite despite several changes of hands. The newish building boasts four dining areas: One feels like a rustic, bourgeois home in Provence; another features antiques; reproductions of Dalí lithographs grace the walls of a third; and diners on the outdoor terrace enjoy cool breezes. Start with vanilla-marinated tuna, served thinly sliced with asparagus, or soft goat cheese with apple honey and pine nuts served with Belgian endives. As a main course, try the scampi Le Dôme in a dark cream sauce with a hint of curry. Finally, the crepe suzette, swimming in Grand Marnier, is not too heavy or too sweet. The wine, cocktail, and liqueur menus are also voluminous.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 224. ✆ **297/587-1517.** www.ledome-aruba.com. Reservations recommended. Dress code for indoor seating. Main courses $29–$57. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm; Sunday brunch 11am–3pm.

L. G. Smith's ★★ STEAK/SEAFOOD The dining choices at the Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino are vast, but nothing quite tops this hip and sophisticated venue, with its wood paneling, waterfall wall, quartzite-stone columns, black furniture with white-leatherette cushions, and panoramic view of the Oranjestad marina. Located next to the upper level of the casino entrance, the restaurant doesn't survive on its trendy decor alone, but serves one of the best selections of meat in Aruba, ranging from porterhouse to New York strip. Naturally, you expect surf and turf on the menu, but the chef goes far beyond the routine, offering such dishes as locally caught mahimahi with a mango salsa or free-range chicken with a red-pepper-laced cranberry juice. If you passed on the thick chocolate cake, you might opt for the signature mascarpone tart. The early bird special at $79 is a bargain, as is the dinner-and-a-show option for $89.

In the Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino, L. G. Smith Blvd. 82, Oranjestad. ✆ **297/583-115.** www.lgsmiths.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$36. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm.

Mathilde ★★★ FRENCH FUSION Opulence and first-rate French cuisine make Mathilde a superb choice for special occasions. The restaurant was transformed in 2007 from classically elegant to sleek, modern, and artistic. Two things that have not changed are the outstanding array of wines in the perfectly cooled wine cellar and the quality of the food. A classic French fusion menu is served, complete with tableside preparation of salads and crepes. Appetizers include caviar, escargot, and frogs' legs. Dover sole, sautéed in butter with lemon, baby carrots, grilled zucchini, and almond potatoes, is filleted at your table. You can also feast on Chateaubriand, Moroccan lamb, veal, or ostrich. For the socially conscious palate, there is a selection of vegetarian options. For dessert, the crème brûlée or soufflé are bested only by the crepes.

Havenstraat 23, do wntown Oranjestad. ✆ **297/583-9200.** w ww.matildearuba.com. Reser vations rec-ommended. Proper attire required (no shor ts). Main courses $26–$65. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 6–11pm.

Moderate

Cuba's Cookin' ★ (Finds) CUBAN This fun, informal spot in an old farmhouse is plenty hip. Original art captures whimsical scenes of C uban street life, while up-tempo live Cuban music nightly keeps the warm staff smiling. S ip a mojito and star t with the plantain chips. Earthier than tortilla chips, they're great with the *muy picante* salsa. Your conga cocktail appetizer should arrive just in time to extinguish the fir e in your mouth. Served in a half-shell, it featur es cold lobster , crab , r ed onions, and carr ots in a light vinaigrette. The seafood boat is a winning main course: Lightly grilled shrimp , calamari, conch, and mussels rise fr om a flavorful ragout of green and red peppers, onions, garlic, tomatoes, and cucumbers. O ther C uban specialties include *ropa vieja* (shr edded skir t steak sautéed in tomatoes, onions, and gr een peppers) and *picadillo de r es* (ground beef with raisins and olives). For dessert, try the *tres leches* pound cake, then light up a Cuban cigar with your *café con leche.*

Wilhelminastraat 27 (acr oss from the polic e station). ✆ **297/588-0627.** w ww.cubascookin.com. Reser-vations recommended. Main courses $18–$38. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 5:30–11pm.

Pinchos Grill and Bar ★ GRILL Hovering over the water at the end of a short pier at the S urfside M arina, this open-air r estaurant is little mor e than a cir cular bar sur-rounded by a ring of dining tables and lo w-profile sofas nestled dangerously close to the calm water belo w. Yet two things make this family-r un v enue r emarkable. O ne is the spectacular setting, with a SoBe feel and unrestricted views of nearby Oranjestad, passing cruise ships, and incoming flights. The other is the fact that they dish up a full menu from the small grill behind the bar—they prep much of the food off-site but always grill the crab cakes or marinated, tender steak and shrimp *pinchos* (skewers) to or der. While the salads are uninspiring and the por tions are a bit small, the desser ts more than make up for it, and the atmosphere is as r omantic as it gets.

L. G. Smith Blv d. 7 at Aruba Sur fside M arina Hot el. ✆ **297/583-2666.** w ww.interreps.nl/pinchos.htm. Reservations r ecommended. M ain c ourses $19–$44. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Bar open till mid-night (Fri–Sat until 1am).

Inexpensive

The Paddock INTERNATIONAL In the hear t of O ranjestad, this cafe and bistr o overlooks the harbor, a shor t walk fr om virtually every shop in tow n. Much of the staff is hip and European. No one will mind whether you opt for a drink, a cup of tea or cof-fee, a snack, or a full-fledged meal. The menu is dizzying in its international offerings, ranging fr om pasta to stir fr y, salads to *shawarma* (pita-bread sandwiches stuffed with chicken and a garlic sauce with plenty of tang). F or dinner, tr y the fr esh poached or sautéed fish, or glazed tenderloin of pork.

L. G. Smith Blv d. 13. ✆ **297/583-2334.** w ww.paddock-aruba.com. Main c ourses $12–$23. MC, V. Daily 9am–11pm.

NEAR PALM BEACH

Expensive

Chalet Suisse ★ SWISS/INTERNA TIONAL This alpine-chalet r estaurant feels like an old-fashioned S wiss dining r oom. I n deliberate contrast to the arid scr ublands that surr ound it, the r estaurant is an air-conditioned r efuge of pine wood panels and

gemutlichkeit (comfort). Tempting menu items include Dutch pea soup, beef stroganoff, a pasta of the day, wiener schnitzel, roast duckling with orange sauce, red snapper with Creole sauce, and an array of high-calorie desserts. The chefs claim they serve the best rack of lamb in the Southern Hemisphere. We can't vouch for that, but it's really good. The Swiss fare is hearty, if a bit heavy for the Tropics. Finish off with a smooth chocolate fondue or the eternal favorite, Swiss apple strudel. Most dishes are at the lower end of the price scale.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 246, Eagle Beach. ✆ **297/587-5054.** www.chaletsuisse-aruba.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$65. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm.

Screaming Eagle ★ FRENCH FUSION If the idea of fine dining while luxuriating on white beds and at intimate tables shrouded in gauzy drapes sounds romantic, make a pilgrimage to this sleek new restaurant. Start with a drink at the bar, where the award-winning bartender will whip you up something from his list of 110 cocktails, or just order from their selection of 150 wines. Appetizers that stand out are the carpaccio of artichoke with goat cheese and the ahi tuna tartare with soft-shell crab and spicy papaya mayonnaise. As a main course, the chef recommends the fresh local wahoo with shrimp ginger risotto, asparagus, and creamy cayun sauce, or the black angus tenderloin with shitake pine-nut sauce. For a dessert almost too beautiful to eat, try *la tazza famosa:* a cup and saucer made of chocolate filled with tia maria, orange sherbet, and chocolate mousse.

J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 228, Eagle Beach. ✆ **297/587-8021.** www.screaming-eagle.net. Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$45. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm.

Moderate

Madame Janette ★★ Finds ARUBAN/CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL In a low-slung Aruban-style house a short ride from Palm Beach, this elegant restaurant exudes island atmosphere, attracting a laid-back crowd to its tables set in a desert courtyard. The European chef has created a buzz among local foodies with his imaginative menu and clever blending of ingredients; we recommend Madame's Hot Shrimps, succulent prawns baked in a well-flavored marinara sauce topped with gouda and gorgonzola. Even though the delicate texture of the seafood is overpowered by the gouda, the taste is still delightful. The rack of lamb is the chef's masterpiece, with a family-secret marinade. Finish off with such desserts as the Austrian Kaiserschmarren, which is a thick pancake covered with plum sauce, or Mama Jamaica: fresh pineapple marinated in old Appleton rum and served with vanilla ice cream topped with roasted coconut flakes.

Cunuco Abao 37 (next to the Blue Village Villas). ✆ **297/587-0184.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$68. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–10pm.

Papiamento ★★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN/SEAFOOD Originally from Holland, the Ellis family has served award-winning Caribbean food in their 200-year-old *cunucu* home for almost 2 decades. Over the years, tables have spilled out from the thick-walled, antiques-filled interiors to the large fairy-lit palm garden. At twilight, birds serenade outdoor diners around the luminescent pool. Diaphanous cotton swathes the rattan chairs, and white eyelet tablecloths add to the tropical elegance. When Beatrix, queen of the Netherlands, is in Aruba, she sups inside on the former veranda, now dubbed the Queen's Room.

You might start with the smoked salmon appetizer, garnished with capers, caviar, basil, passion fruit, and radicchio. The crudités platter features prosciutto, aged Gouda, and

marinated peppers and onions. If you're lucky enough to be around during the season, order Brazil fish, a luscious, snapperlike delicacy that's caught only in March and April. Lightly seasoned with pepper and garlic, it's cooked and served on a stone that's heated in a 600°F (316°C) oven. Mango, onion, and chile-pepper chutney accompanies *pisca arubiana* (fish Aruban style). Best bets for dessert are *cocobana,* an ephemeral coconut mousse, and flaky-crusted Dutch apple pie. Coffee snobs, take note: Papiamento's espresso may be the island's best.

Washington 61, Noord. ✆ **297/586-4544.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10:30pm.

IN OR NEAR NOORD

Buccaneer ★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL In a rustic building near the hamlet of Noord, close to many of the island's biggest high-rise hotels, the Buccaneer is one of Aruba's most popular seafood restaurants. Inside you'll find a nautical decor and a dozen bubbling aquariums. There are a number of tempting appetizers, such as crabmeat cocktail or a savory plate of escargots with an infusion of Pernod. Seafood thermidor appears on the menu, or you can try the land-and-sea platter with fresh fish, shrimp, and tender beef tenderloin. The food is hearty and delicious. A spacious bar shaped like a sailing ship is a good place to linger over drinks.

Gasparito 11-C, Noord. ✆ **297/586-6172.** www.buccaneeraruba.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $18–$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm.

The Old Cunucu House ★ ARUBAN/INTERNATIONAL When originally constructed as a private house in the 1920s, this was the only building in the neighborhood. Today it retains a warm, traditional feeling, with original decor of very thick plaster-coated walls, ultrasimple furniture, and tile floors. Many visitors start with a cocktail under a shed-style roof in front, where chairs and tables overlook a well-kept garden studded with desert plants. The skilled chef knows how to embellish a traditional repertoire with first-class ingredients; the kitchen focuses on local and international recipes, including fish soup, fried squid, and coconut fried shrimp. Several dishes are also served with *funchi* (Caribbean polenta) and *pan bati* (a local pancake).

Palm Beach 150, Noord. ✆ **297/586-1666.** www.theoldcunucuhouse.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5–11pm.

AT TIERRA DEL SOL/NORTH ARUBA

La Trattoria "El Faro Blanco" ★ ITALIAN Charming and authentically Italian, this restaurant, built in 1914, was originally the local lighthouse keeper's home. The staff is mostly European, and the head chef studied in Italy. Views sweep out over the sea, the island's northern coastline, and the island's largest golf course. The menu covers a full range of Italian cuisine, with a heavy dose of aromatic Neapolitan specialties. The best examples include heaping platters of fish and vegetable antipasti; linguine with shrimp, octopus, scallops, clams, and tomatoes (our vote for the island's best pasta); red snapper cooked in a potato crust with olive oil and rosemary; and *osso buco* (veal shank) served with Parmesan-laced risotto Milanese. The desserts are excellent; we recommend tiramisu or pears poached in red wine served with ice cream.

At the California Lighthouse, North Aruba. ✆ **297/586-0787.** www.aruba-latrattoria.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$48. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–11pm; pizza served until 5:30pm.

Charlie's Bar and Restaurant SEAFOOD/ARUBAN Charlie's is the best reason to visit San Nicolas—but come for the good times and the brew, not the food. The bar dates from 1941 and is the most overly decorated joint in the West Indies, sporting an array of memorabilia and local souvenirs. Where roustabouts and roughnecks once brawled, you'll now find tables filled with visitors admiring thousands of pennants, banners, and trophies dangling from the high ceiling. Two-fisted drinks are still served, but the menu has improved since the good old days, when San Nicolas was one of the toughest towns in the Caribbean. You can enjoy freshly made soup, grilled scampi, Creole-style squid, and churrasco. Sirloin steak and red snapper are usually featured.

Main St., San Nicolas (25-min. drive east of Oranjestad). ✆ **297/584-5086.** www.charliesbararuba.com. Main courses $23–$52. MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–9:30pm. Bar to 10pm or later.

4 ARUBA'S BEACHES

The western and southern shores of Aruba are called the Turquoise Coast. Along this stretch, Palm Beach and Eagle Beach (the latter closer to Oranjestad) are the best. No hotel along the strip owns these beaches, all of which are open to the public. (If you use any of the hotel's facilities, however, you'll be charged.) The major resort hotels are built on the southwestern and more tranquil strip of Aruba. These beaches open onto calm waters that are ideal for swimming. The beaches on the northern side of Aruba, although quite beautiful, face choppy waters with stronger waves.

Palm Beach ★★★ is a superb stretch of wide white sand. It's great for swimming, sunbathing, sailing, fishing, and snorkeling. It's crowded in the winter, but there's plenty of room for all. The waters off this beach are incredibly blue. Along Palm Beach, all the resorts are set away from the beach by flowering gardens, which take on a special beauty because the island is so dry. As you walk along the beach, you can wander past a rainbow of red, yellow, and pink bushes, which attract some colorful native bird life. If you stop to have a drink at one of the open-air bars, chances are, you'll be joined by a yellow bananaquit hoping to steal some sugar from you.

Also worth seeking out is **Fisherman's Huts,** where billowing rainbow-colored kite and windsurf sails abound. Conditions for windsurfing and kitesurfing are excellent here. For this reason, the strip is dominated by both, making swimming unadvisable. This beach is known for some of the finest windsurfing on island and is a great place to watch the local talent leap, flip, and sail through the air at breakneck speed. Its the site of the annual **Hi-Winds Pro-Am Windsurfing Competition** and is a great place for beginners to take a lesson or get in some practice.

Quite similar to Palm Beach, **Eagle Beach** ★ is next door on the west coast, fronting a number of timeshare units. With gentle surf along miles of white-powder sand, swimming conditions here are excellent. Hotels along the strip organize nonmotorized watersports and beach activities, but it's more low-key than Palm Beach.

The white-powder sands of **Punta Brabo,** also called **Manchebo Beach,** are a favorite among topless sunbathers. Actually, Manchebo is part of the greater Eagle Beach, and the Manchebo Beach Resort is a good place to stop, as it offers a dive shop and rents snorkeling gear. It's also set amid 40 hectares (99 acres) of gardens, filled with everything from cacti to bougainvillea.

Moments **Sunset at Bubali Pond**

The **Bubali Pond** bird sanctuary lies on the north side of Eagle Beach at Post Chikito, south of De Olde Molen (a 19th-c. windmill, now Aruba's most famous landmark). Flocks of birds cluster at this freshwater pond, particularly at sunset, which makes for a memorable sight. You can see pelicans galore; black olivaceous cormorants; black-crowned night herons; great egrets with long, black legs and yellow bills; and spotted sandpipers. The large wood stork and the glossy scarlet ibis sometimes fly in from Venezuela. While tempting to climb, the rickety viewing tower is in dire need of repair and should not be scaled.

Practically every visitor winds up on Eagle Beach for an uncrowded quiet escape or Palm Beach for a livelier bar and boating scene. If you'd like something more private, head for **Baby Beach** ★ on the eastern end of Aruba. The beach has white-powder sand and tranquil, shallow waters, making it ideal for swimming, and it's the best place on the island for beach-based snorkeling. There are no facilities other than restrooms, a refreshment stand, and shaded areas. You'll spot the Arubans themselves here on weekends. Baby Beach opens onto a vast lagoon shielded by coral rocks that rise from the water. Bring your own towels and snorkeling gear, or rent the latter from the small stand where they also sell you bread to lure in the sizeable fish.

Next to Baby Beach on the eastern tip of the island, **Rodger's Beach** also has white-powder sand and excellent swimming conditions. The backdrop, however, is an oil refinery at the far side of the bay. But the waters remain unpolluted (so they say), and you can admire both large and small multicolored fish and strange coral formations. The trade winds will keep you cool.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CRUISES For a boat ride and a few hours of snorkeling, contact **De Palm Tours,** which has offices in eight of the island's hotels. Its main office is at L. G. Smith Blvd. 142, in Oranjestad (✆ **800/766-6016** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/582-4400 or 297/582-4545; www.depalm.com). De Palm Tours offers a 4-hour cruise that visits two coral reefs and the German shipwreck *Antilla* daily. The cost is $69 per person, half-price for children 12 and under. **Red Sail Sports** (✆ **877/RED-SAIL** [733-7245] in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-1603; www.redsailaruba.com) boasts three catamarans and several sailing options. The 4-hour luncheon snorkel sail visits three snorkeling sites and includes a deli lunch and an open bar (daily at 9:15am; $69 adults, $39 children 3–11). The 2½-hour snorkel sail includes snacks and beverages (daily at 2:30pm; $49 adults, $29 children 3–11). **Pelican Adventures** (✆ **297/587-2302;** www.pelican-aruba.com) offers morning, afternoon, and sunset cruises on four different catamarans. The 2½-hour snorkel cruise departs daily at 2:30pm and includes snacks and open bar ($48 adults, $28 children). The 3½-hour brunch cruise features continental breakfast, champagne lunch, snorkeling, and open bar (Wed, Fri, and Sun 9:30am; $75 adults, $50 children). The sunset booze cruise lasts 2 hours and includes snacks and drinks (Tues–Mon 5pm; $45 adults, $25 children).

Jolly Pirates ★ (✆ **297/586-8107;** www.jolly-pirates.com) features unique 4½-hour sail, snorkel, lunch, and rope-swing excursions. Friendly and athletic deckhands will astound you with their mast-climbing antics followed by an acrobatic swing into the sea—think Tarzan meets Aquaman. Morning cruises embark daily ($55, including tasty, full-service barbecue lunch), as do 2-hour sunset trips (Mon and Fri; $27) and 3-hour afternoon sail and snorkel tours (Tues–Thurs and Sat; $33).

Mi Dushi Sailing Adventures (✆ **297/586-2010;** www.arubaadventures.com) offers three cruises on a 23m (75-ft.) sailing vessel built in 1925. The 5-hour morning cruise combines sailing, snorkeling, swimming, and a rope swing with continental breakfast, barbecue lunch, and open bar. The boat departs from the De Palm Pier daily at 9:30am. The price is $59 for adults, $20 for children 6 to 12, and free for children 5 and under (though they get no lunch, and parents are strongly discouraged from bringing children 3 and under). The afternoon snorkel sail is only $35 ($20 for children 6–12).

DEEP-SEA FISHING In the deep waters off the coast of Aruba, you can test your skill and wits against the big ones—wahoo, marlin, tuna, bonito, and sailfish. **De Palm Tours** (see above) takes a maximum of six people (four can fish at the same time) on one of its five boats, which range in length from 10 to 12m (33–39 ft.). Half-day tours, with all equipment included, begin at $300 for up to four people. The price for a full-day trip is $600. Boats leave from the docks in Oranjestad. De Palm maintains 13 branches, most of which are located in Aruba's major hotels.

GOLF Aruba's **Tierra del Sol Golf Course** (✆ **866/978-5158** or 297/586-0978; www.tierradelsol.com), designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., is on the northwest coast near the California Lighthouse. The 18-hole, par-71, 6,811-yard course combines lush greens with the island's indigenous flora, such as the swaying divi-divi tree. Facilities include a restaurant and lounge in the clubhouse and a swimming pool. In winter, greens fees are a whopping $159, including golf cart, or $124 after noon. Off-season greens fees are $124, or $105 after noon. The course is open daily from 7am to 7pm.

Opened in 2005, **Divi Links,** near Druif Beach, across the street from the Divi Aruba Resort (✆ **297/581-4653;** www.divigolf.com), offers a less pricey yet elegant alternative. Although it has only 9 holes, the course allows a second pass to simulate an 18-hole round. The course has two par-5 holes, two par-3 holes, and five par-4 holes. Six holes play either over or alongside the numerous man-made lagoons, and each hole has three tees for different level players. Fees are $124 for 18 holes, $85 for 9 holes. The course is open daily from 6:30am to 5:30pm. Start before 1pm to complete 18 holes. Golf carts can be rented at the on-site pro shop, and clubs are included with the green fees; however, caddies are not available.

HORSEBACK RIDING You can ride at **Rancho Notorious** (✆ **297/586-0383;** www.ranchonotorious.com). The price is $40 for a 1-hour tour and $70 for a 2-hour tour. The minimum age is 6 for children to ride their own horses. **The Gold Mine Ranch** (✆ **297/594-1317;** www.thegoldmineranch.com) offers 2-hour tours starting at $55 and offers free transportation.

TENNIS Most of the island's beachfront hotels have tennis courts, often cooled by trade winds, and some have top pros on hand to give instruction. Many of the courts can also be lit for night games. (We don't advise playing in Aruba's hot noonday sun.) Some hotels allow only guests on their courts.

Tips Volunteer Vacations

If you want to have fun while doing good, you can log on to **www.aruba.com/SpecializedVacations/volunteervacations.aspx** and find out about volunteer opportunities that you can participate in while on vacation to help protect the wildlife and habitat of Aruba. There's everything from beach cleanups to help in caring for those adorable donkeys at the donkey sanctuary.

The best tennis is at the **Aruba Racquet Club** (✆ **297/586-0215**), the island's first world-class tennis facility, with eight courts, an exhibition center court, a swimming pool, a bar, a small restaurant, an aerobics center, and a fitness center. The club is open Monday through Friday 6am to 9pm, and Saturday 1 to 5pm. Rates are $10 per hour per court if they are busy, but a $20 day pass can be purchased during the off season, and lessons are available by appointment only. The location is Rooi Santo 21 on Aruba's northwest coast, near the California Lighthouse.

OFF-ROADING If a Jeep tour is too slow and an ATV is too fast, then a TomCar is *juuuust* right. These dune-buggies drive like a car, have four-point seatbelts, and are so stable, you can't flip them if you try (yes, we tried). Feel free to play Mad Max as your convoy snakes along gravel slopes, dirt roads, and sand dunes on one of two routes. **Aruba Off-Road** (✆ **297/585-0027**) is based at the Aruba Ostrich Farm and offers two daily tours. The morning drive costs $109 and takes you to Seroe Colorado, Baby Beach, and Quadrikiri Caves, and includes a tasty lunch at Boca Prins. The afternoon expedition is $89 and wends its way through Ayo Rock Formation, Bushiribana Gold Mine, Baby Natural Bridge, Alto Vista Chappel, California Lighthouse, and Boca Catalina Beach.

WATERSPORTS You can snorkel in the shallow waters here, and scuba divers find stunning marine life with endless varieties of coral and tropical fish in myriad hues; at some points, visibility extends up to 30m (98 ft.). Most divers set out for the German freighter ***Antilla*** ★★, which was scuttled in the early years of World War II off the northwestern tip of Aruba, not too far from Palm Beach. It's a spectacular sight to see and should not be missed. In December, it shifted due to strong tides and is now showing signs of collapsing further, an inevitable process of aging and exposure.

Red Sail Sports, Palm Beach (✆ **877/RED-SAIL** [733-7245] in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-1603; www.redsailaruba.com), is the island's biggest watersports center. The activities offered here include sailing and scuba diving. Red Sail dive packages include shipwreck dives and marine-reef explorations. Their dive prices are competitive: two-tank morning boat dives are $79, one-tank morning or afternoon boat dives are $49, and one-tank night dives are $55. Packages include 5-, 8-, and 10-tank dives. Nondiving boat passengers pay $20, space permitting. Snorkelers are charged $30, including equipment, but Red Sail Sports offers an array of snorkeling-only excursions that visit multiple sites. They also offer a half-day "Discover Scuba Resort" course and refresher courses that include instructions and a pool session for $89. Pool-only introductory courses are available for children for $49. The PADI open-water certification course is $425 and now is offered with an online component, so you can spend less time in the classroom once on island and less money, since it's only $325.

6 SEEING THE SIGHTS

IN ORANJESTAD ★

Aruba's capital, Oranjestad, attracts more shoppers than sightseers. The bustling city has a very Caribbean flavor, with part-Spanish, part-Dutch architecture. The main thoroughfare, **L. G. Smith Boulevard,** runs along the waterfront and on to Palm Beach, changing its name along the way to **J. E. Irausquin Boulevard.** Most visitors stroll along it, then head for **Caya G. F. Betico Croes** and the best duty-free shopping.

After a shopping trip, you might return to the **harbor,** where fishing boats, many from Venezuela, and some high-end yachts are moored. Most newcomers to Aruba photograph the colorful gingerbread architecture that looks out over the scenic harbor. Colorful boats dock along the quay, and local merchants display their wares in open stalls. A little farther along, fresh fish is hauled in from small boats. **Wilhelmina Park,** named after Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, is on the sea side of Oranjestad, next to the helipad used to take tourists on a whirlwind tour of the island. The park features a tropical garden along the water and a sculpture of the queen mother. The area also attracts an unnatural number of iguanas, who rest nonchalantly on the rocks.

AN UNDERWATER JOURNEY

One of the island's most fun activities is an underwater journey on one of the world's few passenger submarines, operated by **Atlantis Adventures** ★, located at the Seaport Marina (opposite the Renaissance Hotel), Oranjestad (✆ **866/546-7820** in the U.S. and Canada, or 297/588-6881; www.atlantisadventures.com). Even nondivers can witness a coral reef firsthand without risking the obstacles and dangers of a scuba expedition. Carrying 46 passengers to a depth of up to 45m (148 ft.), the ride provides all the thrills of an underwater dive—but keeps you dry. In 1995, an old Danish fishing vessel was sunk to create a fascinating view for divers and submariners.

There are two departures daily from the Oranjestad harborfront. Each tour includes a 30-minute catamaran ride to Barcadera Reef, 3km (1¾ miles) southeast of Aruba—a site chosen for the huge variety of its underwater flora and fauna. At the reef, participants are transferred to the submarine for a 50-minute underwater lecture and tour. Allow 2 hours for the complete experience. The cost is $99 for adults, $79 for teens 12 to 16, and $49 for children 11 and under (children under 1m/36 in. tall are not admitted). Advance reservations are essential. A staff member will ask for a credit card number (and give you a confirmation number) to hold the booking for you.

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

If you can lift yourself from the sands for an afternoon, you might enjoy driving into the country. Here Arubans live in modest, colorful, pastel-washed houses, decorated with tropical plants that require expensive desalinated water. Visitors who venture into the center of Aruba will want to see the strange **divi-divi trees,** with their trade wind–blown coiffure.

You probably will want to visit Aruba's best-known peak, **Hooiberg,** affectionately known as the "Haystack." From Oranjestad, take Caya G. F. Croes (7A) toward Santa Cruz. Anybody with the stamina can climb steps to the top of this 160m-high (525-ft.) hill. On a clear day, you can see Venezuela from here.

The island's best-known natural landmark was the **Natural Bridge,** but it collapsed, so its smaller cousin, **Baby Bridge** ★★, now holds that title. While it lacks the dramatic arch of its predecessor, it's pretty cool and is sturdy enough (so far) to stand on and view the rugged sea below. The nearby "thirst-aid" station supplies refreshments and souvenirs.

Aruba is studded with massive boulders. You can see the most impressive ones at **Ayo** and **Casibari,** northeast of Hooiberg. Diorite boulders stack up as high as urban buildings. The rocks weigh several thousand tons and their peculiar shapes puzzle geologists. Ancient Amerindian drawings appear on the rocks at Ayo. At Casibari, you can climb to the top for a panoramic view of the island or a close look at rocks that nature has carved into seats. Pay special attention to the island's unusual species of lizards and cacti. Casibari is open daily from 9am to 5pm, with no admission charge. There's a lodge at Casibari where you can buy souvenirs, snacks, soft drinks, and beer.

Guides can also point out drawings on the walls and ceiling of the **Caves of Canashito,** south of Hooiberg. You may see some giant green parakeets here, too.

Arikok National Park ★★★ (✆ **297/585-1234;** www.arubanationalpark.org), Aruba's showcase ecological preserve, sprawls across roughly 20% of the island. Rock outcrops, boulders, and crevices create microclimates that support animal species found only in Aruba, including the Aruban rattlesnake, Aruban cat-eyed snake, Aruban whiptail lizard, Aruban burrowing owl, and Aruban parakeet. Iguanas and many species of migratory birds live in the park as well, and goats and donkeys graze on the hills. Examples of early Amerindian art, abandoned mines from Aruba's gold-rush past, and remains of early farms dot the park. Sand dunes and limestone cliffs ornament the coast. It's easy to explore the preserve, but bring water, sunscreen, and food, and wear a hat and comfortable walking shoes. Birds and animals are most active in the morning, so go as early in the day as you can.

NEAR SAN NICOLAS

As you drive along the highway toward the island's southernmost section, you may want to stop at the **Spanish Lagoon,** where pirates hid and waited to plunder rich cargo ships in the Caribbean. Today it's an ideal place for snorkeling, and you can picnic at tables under the mangrove trees.

Boca Grandi, on the windward side of the island, is a favorite windsurfing location; if you prefer quieter waters, try Baby Beach and Rodgers Beach, on Aruba's leeward side. **Seroe Colorado** (Colorado Point) overlooks the two beaches. From here, you can see the Venezuelan coastline and the pounding surf on the windward side. If you climb down the cliffs, you're likely to spot an iguana; protected by law, the once-endangered saurians now proliferate in peace.

You can see cave-wall drawings at the **Quadarikiri Cave** and **Fontein Cave.** At the **Huliba** and **Tunnel of Love** caves, guides and refreshment stands await visitors. The Tunnel of Love cave requires some physical stamina to explore. It is filled with steep climbs, and its steps are illuminated by lamps. Luckily, there are rangers from Arikok National Park on duty who will be happy to show you the way, light the path, and point out the Amerindian cave art, for a small fee. Wear sturdy shoes and watch your step.

7 SHOPPING

Aruba manages to offer goods from six continents along L. G. Smith Boulevard, starting at Renaissance Marina and ending at the Arubus Depot. The .8km-long (1/2-mile) **Caya**

G. F. Betico Croes is Oranjestad's main shopping street for locals, but the shops here are less Gucci and more PayLess. Technically, this is not a free port, but the duty is so low (3.3%) that prices are attractive. The main shopping zones in town are the very high-end **Renaissance Mall** and the less pricey **Royal Plaza Mall** and **Renaissance Marketplace** (next to the Marina). The former features such shops as **Gucci**, **Carolina Hererra**, **Ralph Lauren, Salvatore Ferregamo,** and **Lacoste.** The **Port of Call Marketplace,** at the cruise ship pier, is rather run down, while the new mall next door was, at press time, entirely bereft of shops due to legal and financial delays that have dragged on for years. At the dozens of jewelry and gift shops that line the main strip, you can find the usual array of Swiss watches; German and Japanese cameras; jewelry; liquor; English bone china and porcelain; Dutch, Swedish, and Danish silver and pewter; French perfume; British woolens; Indonesian specialties; and Madeira embroidery. Delft blue pottery is an especially good buy. Other good buys include Dutch cheese (edam and gouda), Dutch chocolate, and English cigarettes in the airport departure area.

Paseo Herencia (Aruba's Pride), on the High-Rise District's main street, contains a plethora of shops on two levels, a multiplex cinema, and a jazz restaurant and club on the upper level. The center contains a small swimming pool and a fountain, which offers a mini dancing water show once a night and several times on weekends.

Another new shopping mall called **The Village** just opened at press time and was still filling its rafters with stores. In place at the time was a large **Red Sail Sport** (see "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits," earlier) and a restaurant called **Papillon.**

8 ARUBA AFTER DARK

CASINOS: LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL ★★

The casinos in the big hotels along Palm Beach are the liveliest nighttime destinations. Most stay open into the wee hours. In plush gaming parlors, guests try their luck at roulette, craps, blackjack, and, of course, slots. Limits and odds are about the same as in the United States. The newest casino at press time is **Cool Casino** (✆ **297/528-0993**) at the Riu Palace. Slot machines open at 10am, and table games start at 2pm.

Casablanca Casino, at the Westin Aruba Resort, J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 77, Palm Beach (✆ **297/586-2283;** www.westinaruba.com), offers a design theme inspired by the cult classic of the '40s *Casablanca,* with Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. In honor of that classic, there's even a Moroccan-style Rick's Café. Blackjack, poker, craps, roulette—all the games of chance are here. Specialty drinks are a feature at the Casablanca Casino Bar, along with sports broadcasts on multiple TV screens.

Excelsior Casino, J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 230 (✆ **866/358-6518** or 297/586-7777; www.excelsiorcasino.com), wins the prize for all-around action. Its casino doors are open daily from 8am to 4am. The poker room may stay open later if there's action.

Another of the island's best is the **Crystal Casino** at the Renaissance Aruba Beach Resort & Casino (✆ **297/583-6000**), open daily 24 hours.The 1,260-sq.-m (13,563-sq.-ft.) casino has luxurious furnishings, ornate moldings, marble, and crystal chandeliers.

One of the largest and splashiest casinos is the **Copacabana,** found at the **Hyatt Regency Aruba,** J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 85 (✆ **297/586-1234;** www.hyattcasinoaruba.com).

The **Occidental Grand Aruba Casino,** J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 83 (✆ **297/586-4500**), is known for its Caribbean stud poker, blackjack, roulette, baccarat, and craps. Its slot machines open for action at noon, and tables and other games open at 5pm.

Another choice, the **Stellaris Casino,** at Marriott's Aruba Ocean Club, L. G. Smith Blvd. 1012, Palm Beach (✆ **297/586-9000**), is a large casino that starts to get busy daily at 2pm, when gamblers arrive to play roulette, craps, and Caribbean stud poker.

BIG STAGE REVUES

Aruba once staged more Las Vegas–type spectacles than any other island in the Caribbean. But those days are gone, and now there are only a few shows worth checking out. While past its prime, your best bet is still at the **Crystal Theatre,** in the Renaissance Aruba Beach Resort & Casino, L. G. Smith Blvd. 82, in Oranjestad (✆ **297/583-6000**). *Let's Go Latin* was a lavish long-running revue that attracted audiences from around the world, with nearly 200 costumes and some two dozen performers. The new show, ***Havana Dance,*** is more of a Broadway-style production with a heavier Cuban flavor—apropos, as the talent comes from Cuba. Tickets for just the show cost $49. A dinner-show package costs $89. Showtimes are Monday through Saturday at 9pm.

THE CLUB & BAR SCENE

We like to begin our Aruban nights at **Salt and Pepper,** J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 368A (✆ **297/586-3280;** www.saltandpepperaruba.com), where we can order the island's best tapas. Three or four of these appetizers are large enough to make a meal. If you bring in a set of original salt and pepper shakers for the owners to keep, you get your first glass of sangria free with your dinner. ***Note:*** Sets can't be "borrowed" from local restaurants and hotels. Sangria, consumed in an alfresco courtyard, is the usual drink of choice, and the bar stays open until 1am. From here you can wander around the corner to **Soprano's Piano Bar** to see if there is any piano music left.

Mambo Jambo, in the Royal Plaza Mall, L. G. Smith Boulevard (✆ **297/583-3632;** www.mambojamboaruba.com), is sultry and relaxing. Expect a blend of Dutch and Latino visitors, and lots of Latin rhythms. The volume is kept at a tolerable level for anyone who wants to have a conversation. There's an array of specialty drinks, though none are particularly noteworthy; imagine coconut shells, very colorful straws, and large fruit. Open daily 11am to 4am.

Iguana Joe's, Royal Plaza Mall, L. G. Smith Boulevard (✆ **297/583-9373;** www.iguanajoesaruba.com), enjoys an equal vogue among visitors and islanders. It's known for its huge array of specialty drinks, including the Pink Iguana, Grandma Joe's Pink Lemonade, and the aptly named Lethal Lizard, packing four shots of liquor in a half-liter carafe. Line your stomach with fresh salads, pastas, fresh mahimahi, sizzling fajitas, and rich homemade desserts. Hours are Monday to Thursday 10:30am to 10:30pm, Friday and Saturday 10:30 am to 11pm, and Sunday 5:30 to 10pm.

Aruba's most-talked-about attraction is **Kukoo Kunuku** (✆ **297/586-2010;** www.kukookunuku.com), a psychedelically painted 1957 Chevy party bus that hits half a dozen of the island's hottest bars. The carousing begins at "sundowner" time at 6pm and goes on until around midnight, Monday to Saturday. Every reveler gets maracas for this pub-crawl on wheels. The cost of $59 per person includes dinner, a champagne toast on the beach, a free drink at the three bars, and a pickup at your hotel.

Señor Frogs, Westraat 1, Oranjestad (✆ **297/582-0390;** www.srfrogsaruba.com), is, like its predecessor, Carlos 'n' Charlie's, a great place to party if you are eager to relive your college years. It offers such cornpone antics as dancing in the conga line with the crazy waiters. Part of a chain, the bar/restaurant appeals mostly to singles, young couples, and vacation revelers. Hours are daily 11am to 11pm, with the bar staying open till 2am, and a $6 cover is imposed on Friday and Saturday nights. As if this weren't enough, the

 place next door is called **Tequila's** and promises similarly sophomoric opportunities for merriment.

For some late-night revelry favored by Dutch locals and frequented by a broad range of ages, the new hip place in town is **Café Rembrant,** South Beach Center, Palm Beach 55 (✆ **297/586-4747;** www.rembrandtaruba.com).

For a rock-'n'-roll scene and to check out the game, head over to **Buster's Garage Sports Bar and Grill,** Palm Beach 55 (✆ **297/586-0104**).

If a beach party is your scene, then there is nothing to do but go to **Moomba Beach Bar,** J. E. Irasquin Blvd. #230 at De Palm Pier in front of the Marriott (✆ **297/586-5365;** www.moombabeach.com). They have live music around 5 or 6pm most nights, but Mondays are their big night to party.

If Latin jazz is your thing, **Mr. Jazz** at Paseo Herencia is a restaurant and lounge with a 12-piece Latin orchestra that plays mellow jazz during dinner hours, then Latin dance music later. While clearly catering to an older clientele, it has a sizeable dance floor, so if you go, be ready to show off a few moves.

6

Barbados

Independent since 1966, Barbados still has traces of traditions formed when it was a colony of the British Empire, going back to 1627. That's Lord Nelson himself in statue form standing on Bridgetown's Trafalgar Square. Afternoon tea remains a tradition, cricket is the national sport, and many Bajans speak with a British accent. The historical past is everywhere, including 18th- and 19th-century homes scattered around the island. Barbados is not called "Little England" in the Caribbean without some reason.

Jamaica, too, has its British traditions and lingering colonial overtones, but Barbados is a safer destination with far less crime and violence than you find in Jamaica. The difference between the haves and the have-nots didn't result in the social protest Jamaica witnessed.

It's not British tradition today that keeps the visitors returning. It's those seemingly endless pink-and-white sand beaches. Easily reached on flights from North America, Barbados has a grand array of resort hotels (but no casinos), many of them super expensive, although neighboring St. Lucia seems to be catching up. Barbados has more natural and man-made attractions combined than any other island in the southern Caribbean.

Unlike its neighbors, lonely Barbados stands on its own in the Atlantic Ocean, 160km (99 miles) east of St. Lucia. Bridgetown is its capital and commercial center, where most of the 280,000 Bajans live and work. But few visitors lodge here.

The south coast is known for its nightlife and more moderately priced hotels, whereas the north coast is filled with the gold-plated resort properties. The east coast, facing the more turbulent Atlantic, is far less built up and is more for escapists who don't want to be part of the west coast scene. The east coast is also home to some of the island's major attractions, including Andromeda Botanical Garden, Farley Hill National Park, Barbados Wildlife Reserve, and Harrison's Cave.

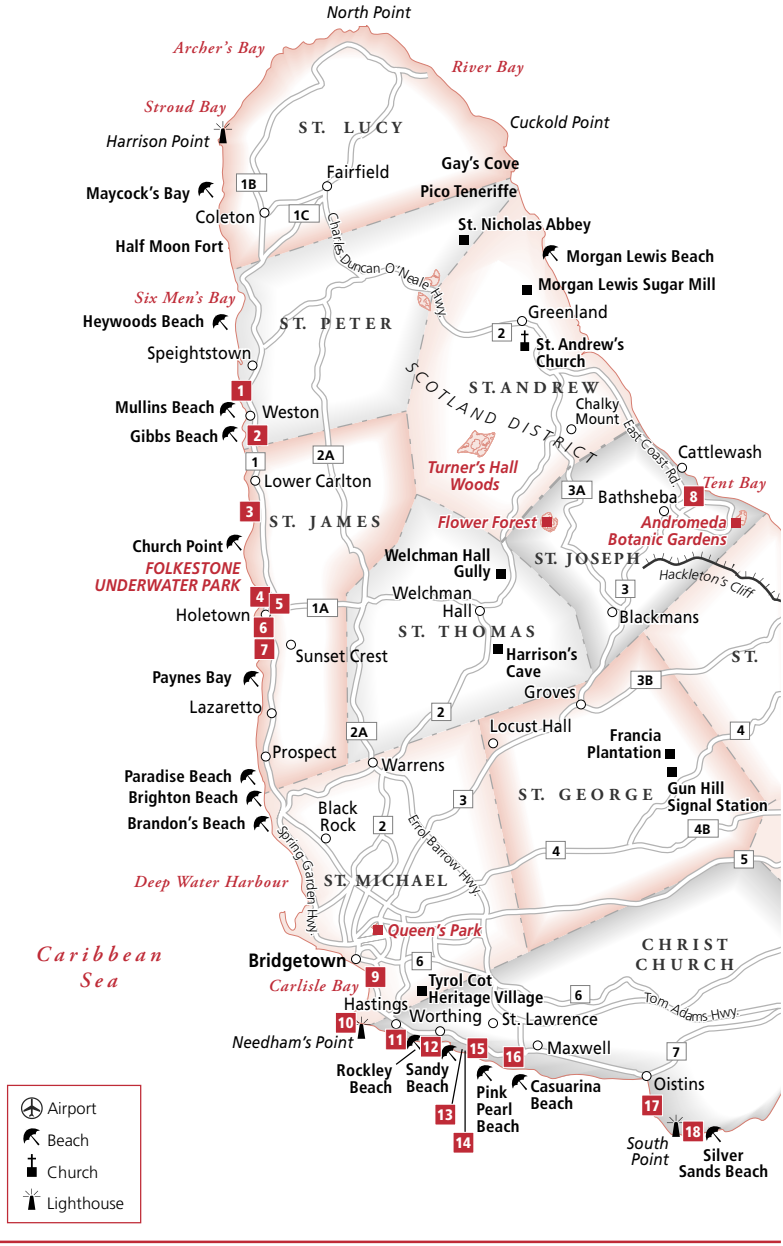
DON'T MISS . . .

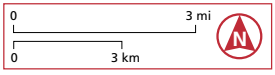
- **Flower Forest,** preserved as a living legacy for future generations, a 20-hectare (50-acre) park and botanical garden filled with exotic flowers and spice trees.
- **Harrison's Cave,** spectacular caverns with stunning crystal rooms, waterfalls, underground pools (filled with blind crayfish), and subterranean streams. An electric tram carries you through.
- **Welchman Hall Gully,** the home of the wild monkey. The lush tropical gardens are filled with tropical specimens—here before the British arrived in 1627—set amid natural caves.

1 ESSENTIALS

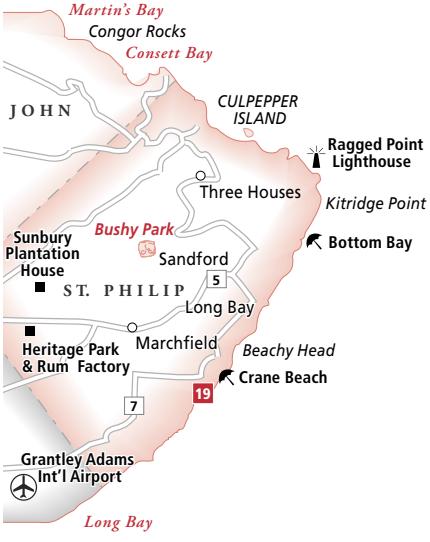
VISITOR INFORMATION

In the United States, you can contact the following offices of the **Barbados Tourism Authority:** 800 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/221-9831**); 3440 Wilshire


North Point
Archer's Bay
River Bay
Stroud Bay
Harrison Point
ST. LUCY
Cuckold Point
Fairfield
Gay's Cove
Pico Teneriffe
Maycock's Bay
1B
Coleton
1C
Charles Duncan O'Neale Hwy
St. Nicholas Abbey
Half Moon Fort
Morgan Lewis Beach
Morgan Lewis Sugar Mill
Six Men's Bay
Heywoods Beach
ST. PETER
Greenland
2
St. Andrew's Church
Speightstown
1
ST. ANDREW
SCOTLAND DISTRICT
Mullins Beach
Weston
Chalky Mount
Gibbs Beach
2
East Coast Rd
Cattlewash
1
2A
Turner's Hall Woods
Tent Bay
Lower Carlton
3A
Bathsheba
8
3
ST. JAMES
Flower Forest
Andromeda Botanic Gardens
Church Point
FOLKESTONE UNDERWATER PARK
Welchman Hall Gully
ST. JOSEPH
Hackleton's Cliff
4
5
1A
Welchman Hall
3
Holetown
6
ST. THOMAS
Blackmans
7
Sunset Crest
Harrison's Cave
ST.
Paynes Bay
Groves
3B
Lazaretto
2
Locust Hall
4
2A
Francia Plantation
Prospect
Warrens
Paradise Beach
Brighton Beach
ST. GEORGE
Gun Hill Signal Station
3
Black Rock
2
Errol Barrow Hwy
4B
Brandon's Beach
4
5
Spring Garden Hwy
Deep Water Harbour
ST. MICHAEL
Queen's Park
CHRIST CHURCH
Caribbean Sea
Bridgetown
6
9
Carlisle Bay
Tyrol Cot Heritage Village
6
Tom Adams Hwy
Hastings
Worthing
St. Lawrence
10
11
12
15
16
Needham's Point
Maxwell
7
Rockley Beach
Sandy Beach
Pink Pearl Beach
Casuarina Beach
Oistins
13
17
14
18
South Point
Silver Sands Beach
Airport
Beach
Church
Lighthouse



ATLANTIC
OCEAN



Accra Beach Hotel & Resort **12**
Allamanda Beach Hotel **11**
Amaryllis Beach Resort **11**
Cobblers Cove Hotel **1**
Coral Reef Club **3**
The Crane **19**
Divi Southwinds Beach Resort **15**
Fairholme **16**
Hilton Barbados **10**
The House **6**
Little Arches **17**
Lone Star Hotel **2**
Peach & Quiet **18**
Sandpiper **4**
The Savannah **9**
Sea Foam Haciendas **12**
Sea-U Guest House **8**
Southern Palms **13**
Tamarind Cove **7**
Traveller's Palm **5**
Turtle Beach Resort **14**

 Blvd., Ste. 1215, Los Angeles, CA 90010 (✆ **213/380-2198**); or 150 Alhambra Circle, Ste. 1000, Miami, FL 33134 (✆ **305/442-7471**).

The Canadian office is at 105 Adelaide St. West, Ste. 1010, Toronto, Ontario M5H 1P9 (✆ **800/268-9122** in the U.S. and Canada, or 416/214-9880). In the United Kingdom, contact the Barbados Tourism Authority at 263 Tottenham Court Rd., London W1T 7LA (✆ **020/7636-9448**).

On the Internet, go to **www.barbados.org**. The tourism office may be able to help you track down condo and villa rentals.

On the island, the local **Barbados Tourism Authority** office is on Harbour Road (P.O. Box 242), Bridgetown (✆ **246/427-2623**).

GETTING THERE

More than 20 flights arrive on Barbados from all over the world every day. **Grantley Adams International Airport** (✆ **246/418-4242;** www.gaiainc.bb) is on Highway 7, on the southern tip of the island at Long Bay, between Oistins and a village called The Crane. From North America, the four major gateways to Barbados are New York, Miami, Toronto, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Flying time to Barbados is 4 1/2 hours from New York, 3 1/2 hours from Miami, 5 hours from Toronto, and 1 1/2 hours from San Juan.

Virgin Atlantic Airways (✆ **800/821-5438** in the U.S. and Canada; www.virgin-atlantic.com) flies daily from London's Gatwick Airport to Barbados.

American Airlines (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has dozens of connections passing through San Juan, plus daily nonstop flights to Barbados from Miami. **US Airways** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) flies daily from New York's LaGuardia to Philadelphia, Washington, or Baltimore, then on to Barbados. There are no nonstop flights on US Airways from New York to Barbados.

All flights are nonstop from Toronto to Barbados. **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com) has daily flights from Toronto in winter. From Montréal, connections are made through Toronto.

Barbados is a major hub of the Caribbean-based airline **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428] within the Caribbean, or 268/480-5601 for reservations, or 246/428-0986 at the Barbados airport; www.liatairline.com), which flies to most points within the Caribbean but provides generally poor service to Barbados from a handful of neighboring islands, including St. Vincent and The Grenadines, St. Lucia, Antigua, and Dominica.

Air Jamaica (✆ **800/523-5585** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airjamaica.com) offers daily flights that link Barbados to Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, and Miami through the airline's Montego Bay hub. Air Jamaica also flies between Los Angeles and Barbados on Monday and Wednesday (but it requires an overnight stay in Montego Bay). Nonstop flights from New York to Barbados are available at least 4 days a week (Mon, Wed, Fri, and Sun).

Cayman Airways and **Air Jamaica** have joined forces to provide an air link from Grand Cayman to Barbados and Trinidad, via Kingston in Jamaica. Flights wing out of Grand Cayman Sunday, Monday, Thursday, and Friday, linking up in Kingston with continuing flights to Barbados and Port-of-Spain, with daily return flights. For reservations and information, call Air Jamaica at ✆ **800/523-5585.**

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) flies nonstop daily to Barbados from London's Gatwick Airport.

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR If you don't mind **driving on the left,** you may find a rental car ideal on Barbados. You'll need a temporary permit if you don't have an international driver's license. The rental agencies listed below can all issue this visitor's permit, or you can go to the police desk upon your arrival at the airport. You must have a license from home and pay a registration fee of $5. Within a city or town, the speed limit is 20kmph (12 mph), going up to 60kmph (37 mph) on secondary roads, and rising to 80kmph (50 mph) on major highways. Because of frequent delays at airport counters, we suggest taking a taxi from the airport to your hotel and then calling to have your rental car delivered. A 15% tax is levied upon all car rentals in Barbados.

None of the major U.S.-based car-rental agencies operates on Barbados, but a host of local companies rent vehicles. Except in the peak midwinter season, cars are usually readily available without prior reservations. Be forewarned that many local companies continue to draw serious complaints from readers, both for overcharging and for the poor conditions of their vehicles. Proceed very carefully with rentals on this island. Check the insurance and liability issues carefully when you rent.

The island's most frequently recommended agency is **National Car Rentals,** Lower Carlton, St. James (✆ **246/426-0603**), which has a wide selection of Japanese cars. (Note that it's *not* affiliated with the U.S. chain of the same name.) National is 15km (9¼ miles) north of Bridgetown, near the main highway (Hwy. 1); it delivers cars to almost any location on the island, and the driver who delivers it will carry the necessary forms for the Bajan driver's license, priced at $5 per registered driver, and valid for a year.

Finds Special Events

One of the hottest jazz festivals in the Caribbean is the **Barbados Jazz Festival.** Also known as "Paint It Jazz," it takes place in mid-January. International artists appear along with the best in local jazz talent. For tickets and further details, contact festival organizers at **www.barbadosjazzfestival.com/schedule.html**.

In mid-February, the **Holetown Festival** at St. James is a weeklong event commemorating the landing of the first European settlers at Holetown in 1627. Highlights include street fairs, police band concerts, a music festival in the parish church, and a road race.

During the first week of April, the **Oistins Fish Festival** commemorates the signing of the charter of Barbados with fishing, boat racing, fish-boning competitions, a Coast Guard exhibition, food stalls, arts and crafts, dancing, singing, and road races.

Beginning in mid-July and lasting until the first week of August, the **Crop Over Festival** is the island's major national festival, celebrating the completion of the sugar-cane harvest and recognizing the hardworking men and women in the sugar industry. Communities all over the island participate in fairs, concerts, calypso competitions, car parades, and other cultural events. The climax of the festival occurs at **Kadooment Day,** a national holiday on the first Monday in August, which becomes the biggest party of the year in Barbados.

Another comparable company is **Sunny Isle Motors,** Dayton, Worthing Main Road, Christ Church (✆ **246/435-7979**).

BY TAXI Taxis aren't metered, but rates are fixed by the government; one cab can carry up to four passengers for the same fare. Taxis are plentiful and easily identifiable by the letter *Z* on their license plates. Drivers will produce a list of standard rates ($25–$30 per hour). To call a taxi, contact one of the following services: **Paramount Taxi Service** (✆ **246/429-3718**), Tamarind Cove Taxi Service (✆ **246/432-1701**), **Royal Pavilion Taxi Service** (✆ **246/432-0857**), or **Lyndhurst Taxi Service** (✆ **246/436-2639**). A typical taxi ride from the airport to Bridgetown costs $23; to Holetown, along the western Gold Coast, $30; and to St. Lawrence Gap, site of many of the less expensive hotels, $15.

BY BUS Take a bus only as a last resort, as the service is unreliable, in spite of the fact that many Bajans depend on this service to get to and from work. The nationally owned buses of Barbados are blue with yellow stripes. They're not numbered, but their destinations are marked on the front. On most major routes, buses run every 30 minutes or so. Wherever you go, the fare is BD$1.50, exact Barbados change required. Departures are from Bridgetown, leaving from Fairchild Street for the south and east, and from Lower Green and the Princess Alice Highway for the north going along the west coast. Call the **Barbados Tourism Authority** (✆ **246/427-2623**) for schedules and information.

Privately operated **minibuses,** usually painted yellow, run shorter distances and travel more frequently. They are bright yellow with blue stripes, with their destinations displayed on the bottom-left corner of the windshield. Minibuses in Bridgetown are boarded at River Road, Temple Yard, and Probyn Street. The fare is BD$1.50, and unlike the larger, blue-sided government-operated buses, exact change is appreciated but not required.

Fast Facts Barbados

American Express There is no officially designated exclusive Amex representative on Barbados, but a reputable travel agency that can fulfill most travel-related services is St. James Travel, West Plaza, Sunset Crest, St. James (✆ **246/432-6725**).

Banks Most banks are open Monday to Thursday 8am to 5pm, and Friday 8am to 3pm. The major banks of Barbados, **all with ATMs,** are found along Broad Street in Bridgetown, including branches of First Caribbean Bank, the Barbados National Bank, Scotia Bank, and the Butterfield Bank. These banks also have branch offices in Holetown, Speightstown, and along the St. Lawrence Gap south of Bridgetown. There are ATMs at the airport as well, plus at bank branches throughout the island.

Consulates & High Commissions The **Embassy of the United States** is in the Wildey Business Park, Wildey, St. Michael (✆ **246/436-4950**), and the **Canadian High Commission** at Bishop's Court Hill Street, St. Michael (✆ **246/429-3550**). The **British High Commission** is found at Lower Collymore Rock, St. Michael (✆ **246/430-7800**).

Currency The **Barbados dollar (BD$)** is the official currency, available in $5, $10, $20, and $100 notes, as well as 10¢, 25¢, and $1 silver coins, plus 1¢ and 5¢ copper coins. The Barbados dollar is permanently fixed because of an international agreement at the rate of approximately 50¢ in U.S. currency. In contrast, the value

of the British pound is not permanently fixed, and as such, it floats freely, going up or down in relation to a wide range of political and economic factors that change from day to day. At press time for this edition, £1 equaled approximately BD$4. Most stores take traveler's checks or U.S. dollars. However, it may be best to convert your money at banks and pay in Barbados dollars, since you could save over U.S. dollars. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs Most items for personal use (within reason, of course) are allowed into Barbados, except agricultural products and firearms. You can bring in perfume for your use if it's not for sale. You're also allowed a carton of cigarettes and a liter of liquor.

Documents Citizens of all countries need a passport to enter Barbados, including those from the United States and Canada. Cruise ship passengers need only the ship's magnetic identification card. However, if a cruise begins and ends in Barbados, a passport is required.

Electricity Most electrical outlets are wired with 110-volt AC (50 cycles) current, same as within the U.S., so you can use your U.S.-made appliances. The very few electrical outlets that follow the British and European systems (220-volt AC) are rare, and when they do appear, they're clearly marked and designated with a plug configuration that makes it virtually impossible to plug a U.S.-made appliance into it without a special adapter and/or converter.

Emergencies In an emergency, dial the police at ✆ **211,** the fire department at ✆ **311,** and an ambulance at ✆ **511.**

Hospitals The **Queen Elizabeth Hospital** is located on Martinsdale Road in St. Michael (✆ **246/436-6450**). Of the several private clinics, one of the most expensive and best recommended is the **Bayview Hospital,** St. Paul's Avenue, Bayville, St. Michael (✆ **246/436-5446**).

Language The Bajans speak English, but with their own island lilt.

Liquor Laws Liquor, beer, and wine are sold throughout the island at every outlet, from grocery stores to convenience stores, on any day the stores are open. Open containers are illegal on the beach.

Safety Crimes against visitors used to be rare, but there are today reports of pick-pocketing, armed robbery, and even sexual assault. Avoid leaving cash or valuables in your hotel room, beware of purse snatchers when walking, exercise caution on the beach or at attractions, and be wary of driving in isolated areas.

Taxes A 7½% government sales tax is tacked onto hotel bills. A 15% VAT (value-added tax) is levied on all meals. (For example, if your hotel costs $200 per night and you are charged $50 per person for a MAP, you'll have to pay a 7½% government tax plus the 10% additional service charge for the $200 room rate, and then an additional 15% VAT on the MAP rate.) Some visitors view these additional charges as "larcenous." They certainly won't make you happy when you go to pay your final bill. There's a departure tax of BD$25 or $13, payable in either U.S. dollars or Barbadian currency.

Telephone To call Barbados from the United States, dial **1,** then **246** (the area code for Barbados) and the local number. Once on Barbados, to call another number on the island, only the seven-digit local number is necessary.

Time Barbados is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, so it's 1 hour ahead of New York except during daylight saving time, when Barbados's time is the same as the eastern United States.

Tipping Most hotels and restaurants add at least a 10% service charge to your bill. If service is extremely good, you may want to supplement that. If it has not been included, you may want to tip your waiter 10% to 15%. Taxi drivers expect a 10% tip.

Water Barbados has a pure water supply. It's pumped from underground sources in the coral rock that covers most of the island, and it's safe to drink.

Weather Daytime temperatures are in the 75°F to 85°F (24°C–29°C) range throughout the year.

2 WHERE TO STAY

Barbados has some of the best hotels in the Caribbean, many of which are small and personally run.

Most of our recommendations are on fashionable St. James Beach, which is the entire strip of beachfront bordering the parish of St. James. Although hotels are scattered around Barbados, most of them lie on the tranquil west coast as opposed to opening onto the turbulent Atlantic in the east. If you're in Barbados on business, you may want a hotel in Bridgetown, the capital. If you're into the grand life, head for one of the fashionable resorts north of Bridgetown, all of which open onto sandy beaches. Otherwise, if you want something more informal and less expensive, go to the lower south coast, especially around the busy strip of St. Lawrence Gap, where you can find the most reasonably priced nightlife, restaurants, and local bars. This area also has beaches, although they're not as fabulous as those claimed by the pricey resorts north of Bridgetown. The prices of many of Barbados' hotels are among the most celestial in the Caribbean, rivaled only by Anguilla and St. Barts. Just when you think a hotelier won't dare raise prices any more than they already are, he adds another $200 or so to your daily room cost.

If you want a holiday in the southern Caribbean but haven't come into your inheritance, consider such neighboring islands as St. Vincent or Grenada.

To rent your own villa, cottage, or house on Barbados, contact **Jennifer Alleyne Ltd.,** Molyneux Plantation, St. James, Barbados, W.I. (✆ **246/432-1159;** www.jalbarbados.com), which represents about two dozen rental properties scattered throughout the island in a wide range of prices.

ON THE WEST COAST

Very Expensive

Cobblers Cove Hotel ★★★ This former mansion on a white-sand beach is built in a mock-medieval style on the site of a former British fort. A member of Relais & Châteaux, and originally built by members of the Jock Haines family, the hotel is a favorite honeymoon retreat. Elegant suites are housed in 10 Iberian-style villas, situated throughout lush gardens. Each unit is fully renovated, and each has a spacious living room and bathroom, a private balcony or patio, and a wet bar. To keep the property in

top-notch condition, nine bedrooms are completely redecorated each year. Two of the most exclusive accommodations on the entire island are the Camelot and Colleton suites, on the rooftop of the original mansion; they're beautifully decorated and offer panoramic views of both the beach and the garden. Both have their own pool.

Road View, Speightstown, St. Peter, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/890-6060** in the U.S., 020/8350-1001 in London, or 246/422-2291. Fax 246/422-1460. www.cobblerscove.com. 40 suites. Winter $770–$1,105 double, $2,205–$2,575 Camelot or Colleton suite; off season $465–$615 double, $1,025–$1,135 Camelot or Colleton suite. Rates include American breakfast. MAP costs $82 extra per person per day. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept to mid-Oct. No children 11 or under allowed Jan–Mar. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; gym; outdoor pool; room service; lit tennis court; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Coral Reef Club ★★★ This family-owned and -managed luxury hotel is one of the best and most luxurious on the island, set on elegantly landscaped grounds beside a white-sand beach for swimming. A collection of verandа-fronted private units, most of them renovated in 2007 and 2008, is scattered about the main building and clubhouse on 5 hectares (12 acres), fronting the ocean. Rental units, housed in cottages, in the main building, or in small coral-stone wings in the gardens, can vary greatly, but each has a luxurious bed (a king size, twins, or a four-poster) and a tiled bathroom. All units have private patios, and some have separate dressing rooms.

Hwy. 1, Porter's, St. James, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., or 246/422-2372. Fax 246/422-1776. www.coralreefbarbados.com. 88 units. Winter $865 double, $915–$2,600 suite; off season $420 double, $475–$1,410 suite. AE, MC, V. Closed June to mid-July. Drive 5 min. north of Holetown on Hwy. 1. No children 11 or under allowed between late Jan and Mar. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; fitness room; Internet; 2 outdoor pools; room service; 2 tennis courts; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV (in most), hair dryer, minibar.

The House ★★★ Finds This exclusive retreat, a sophisticated sanctuary of tranquillity and privacy strictly reserved for adults, calls itself not a hotel, but "a concept." That manages to combine the best of posh upscale Britain with überhip Miami Beach. At the moment you arrive, a cheerful and attractive "ambassador," clad in white linen, materializes to serve you during your stay. It boasts the most exotic-looking facade in Barbados, a plan that was activated by previous owners who transformed a then-somewhat-banal waterfront hotel into a mock-medieval fortress, replete with stone archways, dozens of flickering torches, and a trussed wooden drawbridge spanning a "defensive" moat studded with water lilies. Living units manage to be both plush and high-tech at the same time, each configured as a luxuriously furnished suite with granite surfaces and lots of teak.

Hwy. 1, Paynes Bay, St. James, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/467-4519** or 246/432-5525. Fax 246/432-5255. www.thehousebarbados.com. 34 units. Winter $525–$1,781 suite; off season $520–$1,390. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No one under 18 allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; airport transfers; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Lone Star Hotel ★ Finds It's the most retro-chic spot on Barbados. It originated in the 1940s as a concrete-sided gas station and auto repair shop, and despite thousands of dollars' worth of improvements since then, the original look of the place was carefully (even defiantly) preserved. The gas jockeys and grease monkeys are long gone, replaced by, say, Monaco's Prince Albert or perhaps Mariah Carey. Within a much-battered concrete annex, which one British critic defined as "rock-industry chic, as opposed to the *Tatler*-toting crowd at the Coral Reef Club," the Lone Star offers suites, two opening directly onto a narrow beachfront, the others set upstairs. Each is whimsically outfitted

in a combination of four-poster beds, white muslin, and a mixture of antique and modern. Upper suites open onto large furnished balconies.

Hwy. 1, Mount Standfast, St. James, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/419-0599.** Fax 246/419-0597. www.thelonestar.com. 4 suites. Winter $800–$900 double; off season $500 double. Extra person $80. Rates include full breakfast. Children 13 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. Closed June and Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Sandpiper ★ The Coral Reef Club (see above) does it better, but if it's full, this South Seas resort on a white-sand beach evokes an earlier Barbados. Completely overhauled, it's a self-contained, intimate resort, set in a small grove of coconut palms and flowering trees. A cluster of rustic-chic units surrounds the pool; some have fine sea views. The rooms open onto little terraces that stretch along the second story. Accommodations are large, consisting of superior rooms and one- or two-bedroom suites beautifully furnished with tropical pieces, each with a private terrace.

Holetown (a 3-min. walk north of town), St. James, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., 800/567-5327 in Canada, or 246/422-2251. Fax 246/422-0900. www.sandpiperbarbados.com. 47 units. Winter $760–$975 double, from $1,070 suite; off season $420–$550 double, from $550–$1,140 suite. AE, MC, V. No children 11 or under allowed Jan–Mar. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, fridge, hair dryer.

Tamarind Cove ★ On 240m (787 ft.) of prime beachfront, this flagship of a British-based hotel chain (the Elegant Hotels Group) is a major challenger to the Coral Reef Club and Sandpiper properties (see above), attracting the same upscale clientele. The Coral Reef still has a slight edge in luxury, but Tamarind is the equal of the Sandpiper in comfort. Designed in an Iberian style, with pastel-colored walls and red terra-cotta roofs, the hotel occupies a desirable location on St. James Beach, 2km (1 1/4 miles) south of Holetown. The chic and comfortable rooms are in a series of hacienda-style buildings interconnected in a labyrinth of covered walkways, each interspersed with vegetation and fountains. Each of the units was renovated in 2006, and many of them have a patio or balcony overlooking the gardens or ocean. Nearly a dozen oceanfront suites come with four-poster beds, evoking a plantation house atmosphere. Families with one or two kids often book one of the smaller suites.

Hwy. 1, Paynes Bay, St. James Beach (P.O. Box 429), Bridgetown, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/467-4519** in the U.S. or Canada, or 246/432-1332. Fax 246/432-6317. www.tamarindcovehotel.com. 110 units. Winter $405–$512 double, $602–$820 suite; off season $334–$375 double, $445–$693 suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; nearby horseback riding; children's programs; golf privileges; exercise room; 3 outdoor pools; room service; 2 nearby tennis courts; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Inexpensive

Traveller's Palm Value Within a 10-minute walk of a good beach, this is for self-sufficient types who are not too demanding and want to save money. There's a choice of simply furnished one-bedroom apartments with fully equipped kitchens and well-maintained bathrooms. Apartments are almost aggressively unpretentious, but each was renovated in 2006, and each represents good value within this high-rent district. The apartments have living and dining areas, as well as patios where you can have breakfast or a candlelit dinner you've prepared yourself. No meals are served here, but there are many restaurants within this densely populated district.

265 Palm Ave., Sunset Crest, St. James, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/432-6750** or 246/432-0719. Fax 246/432-7229. www.sunsetcrestresort.com. 16 units. Winter $165 apt for 2; off season $125 apt for 2. MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; babysitting. *In room:* Token-operated A/C, kitchenette.

Very Expensive

Little Arches ★★ (Finds) A real discovery, this family-owned boutique hotel overlooks white-sand Enterprise Beach on the south coast. It's a charmer for those who seek out personalized hotels. The oceanview bedrooms are individually styled with four-poster king-size beds, along with such extras as private Jacuzzi sun decks. Italian fabrics and well-chosen furnishings grace the bedrooms. The extras make this place really thrive: a roof-deck swimming pool, a holistic massage therapist, an alfresco restaurant run by an international chef, and free use of mountain bikes. The location is a short walk from the village of Oistins at a point 6.5km (4 miles) from St. Lawrence Gap and 13km (8 miles) from the airport. Children 15 and under are not welcome.

Enterprise Coast Rd., Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **888/271-1584** in the U.S., or 246/420-4689. Fax 246/418-0207. www.littlearches.com. 10 units. Winter $275–$399 double; off season $192–$257 double. AE, MC, V. No children 15 or under allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; mountain bikes; outdoor pool; room service; yacht. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in 3 units).

The Savannah ★ (Finds) Blending traditional with the contemporary, this hotel, whose accommodations rise on land that seems to ripple uphill from its beachfront, is a 10-minute drive from Bridgetown. Sections of this complex, like the much-rebuilt plantation house (location of nine of the accommodations) that functions as its core, for example, have been standing here for 2 centuries. Today two modern extensions reach toward the sea on the well-landscaped grounds of tropical foliage. The waterfalls cascading into the lagoon-style pool are particularly lovely. Some historians cite this as the most historic hotel in Barbados, with roots extending back to the days when it functioned as a barracks for the 18th-century military garrison next door. Opening onto views of the pool, garden, or ocean, bedrooms are elegantly furnished with mahogany four-poster beds and modern amenities. Rooms also have spacious patios or balconies.

Garrison Main Rd., Hastings, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/868-9429** in the U.S., or 246/435-9473. Fax 246/435-8822. www.gemsbarbados.com. 90 units. Winter $795–$1,590 double; off season $350–$845 double. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 1 restaurant; 2 bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; spa services; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Turtle Beach Resort ★★ (Kids) Opening onto 450m (1,476 ft.) of white-sand beach, this posh south-coast resort opened in 1998 and was named after the turtles that sometimes nest on the nearby sands. It's an all-inclusive property, drawing families, couples, and honeymooners. An open-air lobby opens onto the beach. All midsize rooms have ocean views, wicker furniture, ceiling fans, and voice mail. For diversity, Turtle Beach offers a dine-around program with its other tony properties, including Crystal Cove and Coconut Creek. There's also nightly entertainment—calypso, jazz, cabaret, and more.

Dover, near St. Lawrence Gap, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/467-4519** in the U.S., or 246/428-7131. Fax 246/428-6089. www.turtlebeachresortbarbados.com. 164 units. Winter $491–$725 suite for 2; off season $440–$724 suite for 2. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; children's club and playground; golf privileges; gym; Jacuzzi; 3 outdoor pools; room service; 2 lit tennis courts; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Expensive

Accra Beach Hotel & Resort ★ This hotel, totally rebuilt in 1996, lies on the prettiest beach on the south coast, only 10 minutes from the airport, with Bridgetown about 3km (1¾ miles) to the west. The three-story property is tastefully laid out in a West Indian

style and offers spacious rooms opening onto a view of the pool or ocean. The units have large balconies and wooden shutters. The look is a bit sterile, more corporate hotel than island escape. Steer clear of units marked "island view," as the panorama is of the parking lot. A barbecue and floor show on every Thursday is a highlight. ***Note:*** Much of the hotel is open air (including a dance floor), and the mosquitoes appreciate that fact.

Hwy. 7, Accra Beach, Rockley, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/435-8920.** Fax 246/435-6794. www.accrabeachhotel.com. 146 units. Winter $214–$268 double, $280 junior suite, from $428 suite; off season $175–$247 double, $235 junior suite, from $312 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; nearby golf; fitness center; squash court; outdoor pool; open-air dance floor; room service; smoke-free rooms; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer.

Amaryllis Beach Resort Kids Recycled from an older resort, this complex on the south coast is a more affordable option than some of the gold-plated properties farther north. Right on the beach in the historic Garrison area, the Amaryllis Beach Resort has very appealing tropical gardens and a deluxe pool. Bedrooms are midsize to spacious and furnished in a tasteful Caribbean motif. You have various accommodation options, ranging from regular hotel rooms to studios, or even one- or two-bedroom suites for families or groups. Bedrooms open onto balconies or patios, with views of the landscaped grounds or the ocean.

Palm Beach, Hastings, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** or 246/438-8000. Fax 246/426-9566. www.amaryllisbeachresort.com. 150 units. Winter $187–$373 double, $463–$612 suite; off season $187–$259 double, $296–$456 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; beach bar; children's club; fitness center; Internet cafe, outdoor pool; children's pool; tennis court; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Divi Southwinds Beach Resort ★ Kids Midway between Bridgetown and Oistins on a .8km-long (1/2 mile) sandy beach, this resort was created when two distinctly different complexes were combined. The present resort consists of buildings scattered over 20 hectares (49 acres) of sandy flatlands. The showpiece is the newer (inland) complex, housing one- and two-bedroom suites with full kitchens—perfect for small families. These units look like a connected series of townhouses, with wooden balconies and views of a large L-shaped pool. The beach is through two groves of palm trees and across a narrow lane. The more modestly furnished older units lie directly on the beachfront, ringed with palm trees, near an oval pool.

St. Lawrence Gap, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/367-3484** in the U.S., or 246/428-7181. Fax 246/428-4674. www.diviresorts.com. 160 units. Winter $340–$420 double, $496–$824 suite; off season $219–$234 double, $325 suite. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; beach snack bar; fitness room; 3 outdoor pools; poolside activities for kids; 2 tennis courts; sailboat rentals; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

Hilton Barbados ★★ Kids The Hilton Barbados lies on a rocky peninsula near the island's only airport, at the site of one of the most important 17th-century British military installations in the Caribbean, Fort Charles. Flanked with more than 5.7 hectares (14 acres) of land at the southern edge of Bridgetown, the hotel boasts direct access to a very good white sandy beach, as well as the much-reconstructed site of the 1650 fort. The Hilton's architecture incorporates jutting balconies and wide expanses of glass; bedrooms are arranged around a central atrium filled with tropical gardens. Each of the well-furnished units has a view of Carlisle Bay on the north side or the Atlantic on the south. Guests staying on the Executive Floor enjoy access to a luxurious lounge overlooking the bay. An ocean-view spa has been installed on the sixth floor, opening onto panoramic views.

Needham's Point, Aquatic Gap, St. Michael, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **877/GO-HILTON** (464-4586) in the U.S., or 246/426-0200. Fax 246/434-5770. www.hiltoncaribbean.com. 350 units. Winter $469–$499 double, from $585 suite; off season $249–$299 double, $319–$355 suite. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; children's programs; health club; spa; 3 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Southern Palms A seafront club on 300m (984 ft.) of sand, with a distinct personality, Southern Palms lies on the Pink Pearl Beach of Barbados, midway between the airport and Bridgetown. The core of the resort is a pink-and-white manor house built in the Dutch style, with a garden-level colonnade of arches. Spread along the sands are arched two- and three-story buildings, with Italian fountains and statues creating a Mediterranean feel. In its more modern block, an eclectic mixture of rooms includes some with kitchenettes, some facing the ocean, others opening onto the garden, and some with penthouse luxury. A cluster of straw-roofed buildings, housing the drinking and dining facilities, links the accommodations. A local band often entertains with merengue, calypso, and steel-band music.

St. Lawrence, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** in the U.S., or 246/428-7171. Fax 246/428-7175. www.southernpalms.net. 92 units. Winter $280–$330 double, $420–$470 suite; off season $160–$199 double, $275–$300 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; exercise room; 2 outdoor pools; room service; 2 tennis courts; scuba lessons; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in suites).

Moderate

Sea Foam Haciendas (Value) At this compound on the south coast, wide balconies open onto ocean views and white sands from suites that come with well-equipped kitchens and maid service. Many guests purchase food at the nearby markets and cook in their accommodations. A maximum of six persons per suite is permitted. Most apartments are furnished in a tropical rattan decor, with floors in Italian ceramic tile. If you don't want to cook, the hotel can arrange for you to have a cook for the half-day or even a full day. A bus stops in front, carrying passengers along the beach-lined western coast into Bridgetown.

Worthing, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/435-7380.** Fax 246/435-7384. www.seafoamhaciendas.com. 12 units. Winter $240 for 1–4 persons; off season $170 for up to 4 persons. MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

Allamanda Beach Hotel (Kids) This complex, while not particularly imaginative or exciting in its design, offers some of the best hotel-room bargains on Barbados, and as such, it's ideal for families. Directly on a rocky shoreline 4km (2½ miles) southeast of Bridgetown, the hotel is in the heart of the village of Hastings. The *U*-shaped complex is built around a pool terrace overlooking the sea. Functional and minimalist in decor, the accommodations are comfortable, each with a compact but fully equipped kitchenette. You face a choice of either a regular hotel room or a one-bedroom suite. All have balconies or decks. Although some athletic guests attempt to swim off the nearby rocks, most walk 5 minutes to the white sands of nearby Rockley (Accra) Beach. For even softer and wider sands, the hotel offers free shuttle-van service to and from the beach that fronts the Amaryllis Beach Resort.

Hastings, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/438-1000.** Fax 246/435-9211. www.allamandabeach.com. 50 units. Winter $218 double, $278 suite; off season $218 double, $189 suite. Extra person $45. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Fairholme Lying a 5-minute walk from a good beach, this converted plantation house has been enlarged over the past 20 years or so with a handful of connected annexes. The main house and its original gardens are just off a major road, 10km (6 1/4 miles) southeast of Bridgetown. The older section has 10 double rooms, each with a living-room area and a patio overlooking an orchard and a pool. The best units are the 20 Spanish-style studio apartments, which have cathedral ceilings, dark beams, traditional furnishings, and balconies or patios. Air-conditioning is available only in the studios, while the older doubles have ceiling fans.

Maxwell, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/428-9425.** Fax 246/420-2389. www.fairholmebarbados.com. 30 units. Winter $228 double, $243 studio apt; off season $200 double, $215 studio apt. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; breakfast-only room service. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, fridge (in some), kitchenettes (in some).

Peach & Quiet ★ (Finds) The name alone attracted us to this little hideaway, an oceanfront property lying in 1.5 hectares (3 3/4 acres) of gardens at the southern tip of Barbados. Peach and Quiet is about a 15-minute drive from the restaurants and bars at St. Lawrence Gap. Guests can walk to the beaches in about 5 minutes, and they are also drawn to a rock pool which attracts some 100 species of rainbow-hued fish. All the spacious units are suites, each furnished in a style evocative of a Greek island. Your fan-cooled bedroom comes with a king-size bed, a double, or else two doubles, along with a minimum of furnishings (although it's very comfortable). Each room opens onto a terrace or private balcony.

Inch Marlow Main Rd., Inch Marlow, Christ Church, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/428-5682.** Fax 246/428-2467. www.peachandquiet.com. 22 units. Year-round $99–$109 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge.

ON THE EAST COAST

Very Expensive

The Crane ★ It's so old it's new again. Opened in 1887, this is arguably the Caribbean's first resort hotel. Near the easternmost end of the island, 23km (14 miles) east of Bridgetown, the hotel has bounced back for a new lease on life. What hasn't changed is Crane Beach—called by many the most beautiful spot on Earth, its spectacular powder-soft white sand can look pink in certain lights. In the main house are 18 rooms with hardwood floors, resting under 3.5m (11-ft.) ceilings. These are graced with antiques and four-poster beds. Some of these accommodations offer wraparound balconies. We prefer these units, but you can also book into one of the three modern buildings with a series of one-, two-, and three-bedroom rooms. These, too, have such lovely features as Jacuzzis, Asian carpets, plunge pools, and handcrafted furnishings.

Crane Bay, St. Philip, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **800/223-9815** in the U.S., or 246/423-6220. Fax 246/423-5343. www.thecrane.com. 98 units. Winter $230–$370 double, $350–$550 suite; off season $160–$270 double, $240–$330 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; exercise room; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in 1 suite), minibar.

Inexpensive

Sea-U Guest House Far from the so-called Platinum Coast, this guesthouse is a retreat from the world. It's the lazy life here. Your biggest challenge will be to lie in a hammock strung between palms, taking in the view of the nearby waves or checking out the monkeys scampering about. This east-coast hideaway looks much older but is built in the traditional two-story Bajan plantation style. In lieu of air-conditioning, the comfortably furnished and

rather traditional bedrooms are cooled by sea breezes. The spacious accommodations are either studio apartments or guest cottages.

Tent Bay, Bathsheba, St. Joseph, Barbados, W.I. ✆ **246/433-9450.** Fax 246/433-9210. www.seaubarbados.com. 7 units. Winter $149–$189 double; off season $105–$176 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; natural dipping pools; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C (in cottages), ceiling fan, kitchenettes.

3 WHERE TO DINE

ON THE WEST COAST

Very Expensive

The Cliff ★★ INTERNATIONAL/THAI Built atop a 3m (10-ft.) coral cliff, this open-air restaurant features a three-level dining room crafted with terra-cotta tiles and coral stone. It is the snobbiest restaurant on Barbados, but it also enjoys the most dramatic setting. The culinary technique is impeccably sharp, and the chefs select only the finest cuts of beef, the freshest seafood, and the choicest vegetables. The best items are grilled snapper drizzled with three types of coriander sauce (cream based, oil based, and vinaigrette style), accompanied with garlic mashed potatoes and Thai-style curried shrimp. For sheer innovation, dishes such as this put The Cliff near the top. Also try the fresh sushi, when available. As you dine, watch for stingrays, which glide through the illuminated waters below; a sighting is considered good luck.

Hwy. 1, Derrick, St. James. ✆ **246/432-1922.** www.thecliffbarbados.com. Reservations required in winter. Prix-fixe menu $130. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30pm–midnight.

Expensive

Daphne's ★★ MODERN ITALIAN The owners of The House hotel (recommended earlier in this chapter) operate this sexy, intimate outpost of the fabled London eatery. The service is flawless, and the setting on the beach idyllic. The coconut-shell lampshades and Indonesian batiks evoke Bali. For greater privacy, muslin curtains surround the tables. The chef is a whiz, turning out memorable dishes based on fresh ingredients, either local or imported. The pasta dishes get raves, especially the linguine with seafood and the *pappardelle* (wide-ribbon noodles) with rabbit ragout and black olives. The chef's most successful main dishes are grilled mahimahi with Marsala, *peperonata,* and zucchini; or the sesame-seed-encrusted tuna with arugula and tomatoes. We've also enjoyed the grilled tiger shrimp with Mediterranean salsa and couscous.

Paynes Bay, St. James. ✆ **246/432-2731.** www.daphnesbarbados.com. Reservations required. Main courses $30–$53 lunch, $35–$70 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 12:30–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm. Closed Mon off season.

The Fish Pot ★ Finds SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL Just minutes north of the port of St. Charles, this restaurant lies in a little fishing community called Shermans. The restaurant is in a family-run oceanfront hotel but is so special that even nonguests should visit. The complex was constructed on the site of a 17th-century fort that later was used to store sugar. The food is intensely flavored and produced with finesse. The appetizers are among the most imaginative on the coast, everything from Canadian scallops seared with chutney spices and cilantro oil to baked king prawns with a garnish of tomato. Other delights include cracker-crusted tuna, grilled swordfish, a seafood platter for two, and braised lamb shanks.

You may fall in love with the place and want to stay in its one-, two-, or three-bedroom chattel-styled cottages, each furnished to a high standard with a living room and a spacious covered dining terrace off a fully equipped kitchen. Winter rates begin at $492 for a double but are lowered to $292 in the off season.

In Little Good Harbour, Shermans, St. Peter. ✆ **246/439-3000.** Fax 246/439-2020. www.littlegoodharbourbarbados.com. Main courses $25–$45. MC, V. Daily 8:30–10am, noon–3pm, and 6:30–9pm.

Lone Star Restaurant ★ (Finds) INTERNATIONAL This theatrical roofed-over deck fronting the beach has a casual atmosphere during the day, which becomes more elegant in the evening. This space, within the Lone Star Hotel (p. 127), is one of the most-sought-after hipster dining spots on Barbados, more hip than The Cliff and a lot more fun. Top chefs cooking for a discerning international clientele turn out tuna tartare with vegetarian spring rolls, Caesar salad with tempura shrimp, blackened mahimahi or dorado or dolphinfish, chicken tikka masala, Caribbean fish pie (especially delectable with its cheesy mashed potatoes), and such fusion dishes as a Thai green king-prawn curry. For the überchic and über-rich, there's a dizzyingly expensive platter that features five kinds of caviar, as well as one with several species of fresh oysters—though the prices aren't particularly daunting for the rock-'n'-roll, media, and entertainment-industry types and the upscale Europeans that mingle here.

Hwy. 1, Mount Standfast, St. James. ✆ **246/419-0599.** Reservations required. Main courses $45–$90. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3:30pm and 6:30–10:30pm. Closed lunch June and Sept.

Mango's by the Sea ★★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD This restaurant and bar is set on the second story of a clapboard-sided building overlooking the water in the downtown center of Speightstown. Its exterior is painted a shade of mango pink. The owners, Montréal natives Gail and Pierre Spenard, buy the catch of the day directly from the fishermen's boats. The venue is whimsical and airy, and the food is exceedingly good. The seasonings aren't as overpowering as they are at many other Bajan restaurants. Appetizers might include French-style chicken liver pâté, ocean crêpes with dill sauce, smoked salmon, and pumpkin soup. As a main course, you might opt for the 8-ounce U.S. tenderloin steak cooked to perfection or the fall-off-the-bone barbecued baby back ribs, or any of several kinds of local fish prepared the way you want it. Top off your meal with passion fruit cheesecake or star-fruit torte. There's live entertainment on some nights.

2 West End, Queen St., Speightstown, St. Peter. ✆ **246/422-0704.** www.mangosbythesea.com. Reservations required. Main courses $25–$79. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–9:30pm.

The Tides ★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN This former beachfront villa is now occupied by a graceful restaurant that serves fine food. The chef and owner, Guy Beasley, fine-tuned his culinary skills with the Roux brothers in England—arguably a couple of the top chefs there. Nearly 100 people can dine here at any given time, each enjoying a sea view from the restaurant's lush, candlelit gardens. The chef specializes in seafood but also offers finely honed meat, poultry, and vegetarian dishes. When not appreciating the art collection displayed, you can enjoy crab cakes with a Thai sauce or the homemade Caribbean seafood chowder for starters. Follow with the fresh catch of the day—grilled, blackened, pan fried, or poached. Other dishes to which we'd award a star include honey-and-mustard-coated roast of lamb with bacon-scented scalloped potatoes, and the char-grilled filet of pork with Mexican rice, citrus juice, and a tangy orange salsa.

Holetown, St. James. ✆ **246/432-8356.** www.tidesbarbados.com. Reservations required. 2-course lunch $40; 3-course dinner $85. MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm.

Moderate

Angry Annie's Restaurant & Bar ★ (Value) INTERNATIONAL Annie may be angry, but the atmosphere here is friendly, cozy, uninhibited, and whimsical. Originally built about a century ago as a simple wooden cabin, Annie's now rests amid one of the densest concentrations of restaurants in Barbados. It's outfitted in almost violently tropical colors, with a bar that features a playlist of rock-'n'-roll classics. The dishes are uncomplicated, tasty, and permeated with local flavor. The place is especially known for its "famous" ribs, the most savory on the island, and roasted Bajan chicken. We like the garlic-cream potatoes and the fresh local vegetables. Annie also turns out fresh fish and excellent pasta dishes.

First St., Holetown, St. James. ✆ **246/432-2119.** Main courses $23–$34. MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

Brown Sugar ★ BAJAN Brown Sugar serves the tastiest Bajan specialties on the island. The alfresco restaurant is hidden behind lush foliage in a turn-of-the-century coral limestone bungalow. The ceiling is latticed, with slow-turning fans, and there's an open veranda for dining by candlelight beneath hanging plants. We suggest starting with gungo-peak soup (pigeon peas cooked in chicken broth and zested with fresh coconut milk, herbs, and a touch of white wine). Among the main dishes we like, Creole orange chicken is the best, or you might like the stuffed crab backs. A selection of locally grown vegetables is also offered. Only the lobster is expensive; most of the other dishes are reasonably priced. For dessert, we recommend walnut-rum pie with rum sauce. The restaurant is known for its buffet-style lunches, popular with local businesspeople for their value.

Aquatic Gap, St. Michael. ✆ **246/426-7684.** www.brownsugarbarbados.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$45; fixed-price buffet lunch $25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6–9:30pm.

Calabaza ★ CARIBBEAN In vibrant colors in a Moroccan-style building, this restaurant lies on a cliff overlooking the water. East meets West in their menu, which the owner and chef label a "Caribblend" style of cuisine. Calabaza is a family favorite, and there is a special menu for children. The appetizers are indeed appetizing, including a pumpkin soup with crystallized ginger. Among the more tempting main courses, red snapper is baked and flavored with a lime-and-jalapeño syrup, or else you can order crispy Bajan pork belly with tiger prawns and apple purée. A tantalizing choice is a vegetarian risotto with wild mushrooms and truffles.

Prospect, St. James. ✆ **246/424-4557.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$20. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30-9:30pm.

The Mews INTERNATIONAL Known as a hideaway among the eateries of First and Second streets, this intimate restaurant occupies a small and somewhat cramped wood-and-masonry house. Behind a violet-colored doorway, it offers good-tasting menu items such as Thai-style green curry shrimp; chicken breast stuffed with cream cheese, smoked salmon, and herb-flavored pâté; and seafood chowder in puff pastry. In a separate dining area, with somewhat easier access to a bar, is the bistro, where "pub grub" dishes include chicken and mushroom pie, or pork tenderloin stuffed with plantain and spinach.

Second St., Holetown. ✆ **246/432-1122.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $30–$45 in restaurant, $17–$28 in bistro area. MC, V. Daily 6:30–10:30pm.

Olives Bar & Bistro ★ MEDITERRANEAN/CARIBBEAN Olive oil is used to prepare almost all the dishes here, and olives are the only snack served in the bar, where there's a welcome rowdiness. The street-level, air-conditioned dining room (where no smoking is permitted) spills out from its original coral-stone walls and scrubbed-pine

Finds The Island's Most Convivial Outdoor Fish Fry

Savvy locals can guide you to the historic **Oistins Fish Market,** southeast of Bridgetown and past the settlements of Hastings and Worthing. This is where Bajan fishermen unload their daily catch and sell it directly to the customer—ideal if you have accommodations with a kitchen. If not, you can find nearly a dozen cottages selling fresh-cooked fish: Flying fish is in the fryer and fish steaks such as wahoo are on the grill. On Friday night, when it seems that about a third of the island shows up to meet and greet one another, the local vendors sponsor live bands and a medley of food stalls from 6 to 10:30pm.

floorboards into a pleasant garden. The cuisine celebrates the warm climates of southern Europe and the Antilles, and does so exceedingly well. Even some local chefs like to dine here on their nights off. The best items include yellowfin tuna, marinated and seared rare and served on a bed of roasted-garlic mashed potatoes with grilled ratatouille. You can also order roast lamb, flavored with honey, garlic, and fresh herbs; or, for something more Caribbean, jerk tenderloin of pork. The pizza oven is kept busy at night.

Second St. at the corner of Hwy. 1, Holetown. ✆ **246/432-2112.** Reservations required in winter. Main courses $21–$33; pizza $11–$13. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10pm.

Ragamuffin's ★ Value CARIBBEAN This is a real discovery: an affordable, lively place that serves authentic island cuisine. With an exterior that's painted a bright shade of blue, and jammed between two more substantial neighbors, it's one of the few restaurants in Barbados occupying a traditional chattel house (a rectangular clapboard-sided cabin that's small enough and light enough that in the old days could be easily moved atop rolling logs from one location to another). The broiled T-bones are juicy and perfectly flavored, there's always an offering of fresh fish, and vegetarians can enjoy stir-fried vegetables with noodles. Other highlights include blackened fish, the local version of a spicy West Indian curry, and a zesty jerk chicken salad.

First St., Holetown, St. James. ✆ **246/432-1295.** www.ragamuffins.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$36. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10pm (sometimes until midnight).

BRIDGETOWN

Waterfront Café INTERNATIONAL/BAJAN This is a good bet if you're in Bridgetown shopping or sightseeing. In a historic warehouse originally built to store bananas and freeze fish, this cafe serves international fare with a strong emphasis on Bajan specialties, as well as Creole. Try the fresh catch of the day prepared Creole style, or pan-seared steak. For vegetarians, the menu features three-mushroom pasta, vegetable soup, and usually a special of the day. Tuesday nights bring live steel-band music and a Bajan buffet. There's jazz on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Cavans Lane, The Carenage, Bridgetown. ✆ **246/427-0093.** www.waterfrontcafe.com.bb. Reservations required. Main courses $16–$40 lunch, $20–$46 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm.

ON THE SOUTH COAST

Expensive

Aqua ★ BARBADIAN FUSION The designers of this ultratrendy restaurant combined the best of London's hip West End with a tropical climate. Once inside the (you

guessed it) aqua-colored and artfully lit interior, two tiers of tables descend to a view off the deck of crashing waves. The cuisine is trendy, market fresh whenever possible, and imaginative in concept, and there is always a selection of fresh fish. Some of the best dishes include Thai-style yellow curry coconut soup with seafood and enoki, pan-seared "dived" sea scallops with fava bean purée, New Zealand lamb with whipped polenta and toasted pine nuts, and a wide selection (at lunch, Mon–Fri) of sushi.

Hastings Main Rd., Christ Church. ✆ **246/420-2995.** www.aquabarbados.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $31–$49. AE, DC, MC, V. Restaurant daily 6–10:30pm; Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm. Cocktail lounge open nightly till 1am.

Champers Wine Bar and Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL This is one of our favorite restaurants on Barbados's south shore, with good food, relatively moderate prices, and an unpretentious venue. You enter through a cocktail bar that invites you to linger, past a collection of paintings by local artists that are for sale. A sprawling deck stretches toward the sea with both indoor (a la air conditioning) and outdoor (a la trade winds) dining areas. Menu items change often but may include spiced deep-fried calamari with ginger-teriyaki sauce, parmesan-crusted barracuda with mashed potatoes and seasonal vegetables, oven-roasted rack of lamb, veal chops with Stilton blue cheese garnish, and penne pasta with cream sauce and grilled shrimp.

Skeetes Hill, Christ Church. ✆ **246/434-3463.** www.champersbarbados.com. Reservations recommended. Sandwiches $14–$19; main courses $20–$27 lunch, $27–$45 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm.

The Restaurant at Southsea ★★ INTERNATIONAL This is the most upscale restaurant on the south coast. The food is well prepared, and the ambience is romantic—waves lap nearly at your feet from the blue-and-white terrace. Tuesday to Saturday, a pianist tickles the ivories from 8 to 11pm. The place has won many local culinary awards for dishes that include tartare of yellowfin tuna, carpaccio of ostrich tenderloin, white Peking duck with garlic risotto and port reduction, New Bedford scallops, and grilled barracuda filets with black truffles.

St. Lawrence Gap, Christ Church. ✆ **246/420-7423.** www.therestaurantatsouthsea.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $30–$50. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Moments Plantation Dining the Way It Used to Be

For a unique dining adventure, phone **Fisher Pond Great House** ★★★, St. Thomas (✆ **246/433-1754**), an early-17th-century plantation house, where John Chandler and his charming wife, Rain, invite, for a fee, anyone who's interested for lunch every Sunday. Some of the art and antiques are derived from silver-screen legend Claudette Colbert, who retired from Hollywood to Barbados and died in an ocean-fronting villa in 1996. The Sheraton-style dining table here, built of mahogany in 1705, has since hosted formal dinners for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. Expect a lavish array of between 25 and 30 mostly West Indian dishes laid out like a five-course buffet, and floral "eye candy" gathered from more than 300 species of hibiscus and bougainvillea. The cost, per person, is $60. No credit cards are accepted, and since the event can host a maximum of only about 80 participants, advance reservations are essential. Everything begins at 12:30pm Sundays, winding up at around 4pm.

Moderate

The Cove ★ Finds CARIBBEAN/BAJAN LaurelAnn Morley, author of *Caribbean Recipes: Old and New,* is one of the great characters of the island—a Bajan-style grande dame. Expect home-spun dialogue and lots of passion for time-tested Bajan cuisine at her restaurant. Only a tiny sign points uphill to the modest premises—actually her home, above a hillside over the coastal highway. For clients who phone in advance, LaurelAnn will prepare a lunch of stuffed crab backs, calaloo soup, fried filets of flying fish, three different preparations of shrimp, and fresh fish of the day hauled in from the Oistins fish market, often served with her signature orange-and-ginger glaze.

27 Atlantic Park, Cattlewash-on-Sea, St. Joseph. ✆ **246/433-9495.** Reservations required. Main courses $17–$30; fixed-price Sun buffet $33. MC, V. Nov to Easter Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun noon–3pm; Easter to Oct Wed–Thurs and Sat–Sun noon–3pm.

Round House Inn Restaurant & Bar INTERNATIONAL/BAJAN Built in 1832, this restaurant lies on sloping, grass-covered lawns punctuated with solid, coral-stone retaining walls. The owners, Robert and Gail Manley, usher you to a table perched atop a rocky ledge opening onto the Bathsheba "Soup Bowl," the best surfing beach, only a half-hour drive from Bridgetown. The freshest of ingredients go into the wholesome food, which is made all the more delightful by a reggae band on Saturday nights or a guitarist on Sundays. Tuck into such appetizers as flying fish pâté or brie baked in a light-rum-and-walnut sauce. For your main course, try either the oven-baked dolphin steak or the blackened catch of the day.

Bathsheba, St. Joseph. ✆ **246/433-9678.** Reservations required on Sun, recommended at all other times. Main courses $20–$26. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8–10am, 11:30am–3:30pm, and 6:30–9:30pm; Sun 8–10am and 11:30am–5pm.

4 THE BEACHES

The island's beaches are all open to the public—even those in front of the big resort hotels and private homes—and the government requires that there be access to all beaches via roads along the property line or through hotel entrances. The beaches on the west coast—also known as the **Gold Coast,** or in recent years, **Platinum Coast** ★★—are the most popular.

ON THE WEST (PLATINUM) COAST The waters are calm here. Major beaches include **Paynes Bay,** which is accessed from the Coach House, south of Holetown, and has a parking area. This is a good choice for watersports, especially snorkeling. The beach can get rather crowded, but the beautiful bay is worth the effort. Directly south of Payne's Bay, at Fresh Water Bay, are three of the best west-coast beaches: **Brighton Beach, Brandon's Beach,** and **Paradise Beach.**

We also recommend **Mullins Beach,** where the glassy-blue waters attract snorkelers. There's parking on the main road and some shady areas. At the Mullins Beach Bar, you can order that rum drink you've been craving.

ON THE SOUTH COAST **Almond Beach** (also known as **Casuarina Beach**) is accessed from Maxwell Coast Road, behind the Casuarina Beach Hotel. This is one of Barbados's wider beaches, and it's cooled by trade winds even on the hottest August days. Windsurfers are especially fond of this one. Food and drink can be ordered at the hotel.

Silver Sands Beach, to the east of Oistins, is near the southernmost point of Barbados, directly east of South Point Lighthouse and near the Silver Rock Hotel. This white-sand beach is a favorite with many Bajans (who would probably like to keep it a secret from tourists). The Silver Rock Bar sells drinks.

Sandy Beach, accessible via the parking lot on the Worthing main road, has tranquil waters opening onto a lagoon. It's a family favorite, and especially boisterous on weekends. Food and drinks are available.

ON THE SOUTHEAST COAST The southeast coast is the site of big waves, especially at **Crane Beach,** the white-sand strip set against a backdrop of palms that you may have seen in travel magazines. The beach is spectacular, and Prince Andrew, who has a house overlooking it, might agree. It offers excellent bodysurfing, but at times the waters may be too rough for all but the strongest swimmers; take appropriate precautions. The beach is set against cliffs, and Crane Beach Hotel towers above.

Bottom Bay ★★, north of Sam Lord's Castle Resort, is one of our Bajan favorites. Park on top of a cliff, then walk down the steps to this much-photographed tropical beach with its grove of coconut palms; there's even a cave. The sand is brilliantly white against the aquamarine sea, a picture-postcard-perfect beach paradise.

ON THE EAST (ATLANTIC) COAST The miles and miles of uncrowded beaches on the rougher Atlantic side are ideal for strolling, but swimming can be dangerous. Waves are extremely high, and the bottom tends to be rocky. The currents are also unpredictable. Many travelers enjoy the rugged grandeur of these beaches, especially those in the **Bathsheba/Cattlewash** areas.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

GOLF Open to all is the Tom Fazio 18-hole championship golf course of **Sandy Lane Hotel,** ★★ St. James (✆ **246/444-2000**), on the west coast. Greens fees for 18 holes are $235 for nonguests and $200 for guests in winter, and $185 for nonguests and $160 for guests in summer. For its famed "Old Nine" holes, which wind through the estate grounds, cost is $95 for nonguests and $85 for guests year-round.

The **Royal Westmoreland Golf and Country Club** ★★★, Westmoreland, St. James (✆ **246/422-4653**), is the island's premier golf course. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., this 18-hole course is spread across 200 hectares (494 acres) overlooking the Gold Coast. It is part of a private residential community, but it's open for use by any nonmember who agrees to pay the requisite fees and who agrees to tee off any day between 10:20 and 11am. With rental of a golf cart included, the fee for 18 holes in winter is $250 and $150 in off season.

Barbados Golf Club, Durants, Christ Church (✆ **246/428-8463;** fax 256/420-8205; www.barbadosgolfclub.com), on the south coast, opened as Barbados's first public championship golf course in 2000. The 6,800-yard, par-72 course, designed by Ron Kirby, hosted the PGA Seniors Tournament in 2003. Greens fees for 18 holes are $135 in winter and $104 off season. A 3-day unlimited golf pass during winter is $300 and $270 off season.

HIKING The **Barbados National Trust** (✆ **246/426-2421**) gives Sunday-morning hikes throughout the year. Led by young Bajans and members of the National Trust, the popular hikes cover a different area of the island each week. The guides give brief talks

on subjects such as geography, history, geology, and agriculture. The hikes, free and open to all ages, are divided into fast, medium, and slow categories, with groups of no more than 10. Hikes leave promptly at 6am and take about 3 hours to complete.There are also hikes at 3:30 and 5:30pm, the latter conducted only on moonlit nights. For more information, contact the Barbados National Trust.

The **Arbib Nature & Heritage Trail** explores the natural history and heritage of Speightstown, once a major sugar port and even today a fishing town with old houses and a bustling waterfront. The trail takes you through town, the mysterious gully known as "the Whim," and the surrounding districts. The first marked trail is an 8km (5-mile) trek, which begins outside St. Peter's Church in Speightstown, traverses the Whim, crosses one of the last working plantations in Barbados (Warleight), and leads to historic 18th-century Dover Fort, following along white-sand beaches at Heywoods before ending up back in town. For information and reservations, call the Barbados National Trust, and ask for a trail map at the tourist office.

The rugged, dramatic **east coast** stretches about 25km (16 miles) from the lighthouse at Ragged Point, the easternmost point of Barbados, north along the Atlantic coast to Bathsheba and Pico Teneriffe. This is the island's most panoramic hiking area. Some hardy souls do the entire coast; if your time is limited, try the 6km (3 3/4-mile) stretch from Ragged Point to Consett Bay, along a rough, stony trail that requires only moderate endurance. Allow at least 2 1/2 hours. A small picnic facility just north of Bathsheba is a popular spot for Bajan families, especially on Sundays. As for information, you're on your own, but if you stick to the coastline, you won't get lost.

HORSEBACK RIDING A different view of Barbados is provided by **Caribbean International Riding Centre,** St. Andrew, Sarely Hill (✆ **246/422-7433**). With nearly 40 horses, it offers a variety of trail rides for all levels of experience, ranging from a 1 1/2-hour jaunt for $80 to a 2 1/2-hour trek for $100. You'll ride through the hilly terrain of the Scotland district; along the way, you can see wild ducks and water lilies, with the rhythm of the Atlantic as background music.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING The clear waters off Barbados have a visibility of more than 30m (98 ft.) most of the year. More than 50 varieties of fish are found on the shallow inside reefs, and there's an unusually high concentration of hawksbill turtles. On night dives, you can spot sleeping fish, night anemones, lobsters, moray eels, and octopuses. Diving is concentrated on the leeward west and south coasts, where hard corals grow thick along the crest of the reef, and orange elephant ear, barrel sponge, and rope sponge cascade down the drop-off of the outer reef.

On a 2km-long (1 1/4-mile) coral reef 2 minutes by boat from **Sandy Beach,** sea fans, corals, gorgonians, and reef fish are plentiful. *J.R.,* a dredge barge sunk as an artificial reef in 1983, is popular with beginners for its coral, fish life, and 6m (20-ft.) depth. The *Berwyn,* a coral-encrusted tugboat that sank in Carlisle Bay in 1916, attracts photographers for its variety of reef fish, shallow depth, good light, and visibility.

Asta Reef, made from another wreck that was sunk in 1986, has a drop of 24m (79 ft.), as well as coral, sea fans, and reef fish in abundance. **Dottins,** the most beautiful reef on the west coast, stretches 8km (5 miles) from Holetown to Bridgetown and has numerous dive sites at an average depth of 12m (39 ft.), with drop-offs of 30m (98 ft.). The SS *Stavronikita,* a Greek freighter, is a popular site for advanced divers. Crippled by fire in 1976, the 106m (354-ft.) freighter was sunk .4km (1/4 mile) off the west coast to become an artificial reef in **Folkestone Underwater Park,** north of Holetown. The mast is 12m high (39 ft.), the deck 24m (79 ft.), and the keel 36m (118 ft.). You might spot barracuda,

moray eels, and a vibrant coat of bright yellow tube sponge, delicate pink rope sponge, and crimson encrusting sponge there. The park offers an underwater snorkel trail, plus glass-bottom boat rides, making it a family favorite.

The **Dive Shop,** Pebbles Beach, Aquatic Gap, St. Michael (✆ **246/426-9947;** www.divebds.com), offers some of the best scuba diving on Barbados, charging $55 for a one-tank dive and $90 for a two-tank dive, including equipment. Every day, three dive trips go out to the nearby reefs and wrecks; snorkeling trips and equipment rentals are also available. Visitors with reasonable swimming skills who have never dived before can sign up for a resort course. Priced at $80, these include pool training, safety instructions, and a one-tank open-water dive. The establishment is NAUI- and PADI-certified and is open Sunday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. Other dive shops in Barbados that rent or sell snorkeling equipment include **Hazel's Water World,** Bridgetown, St. Michael (✆ **246/426-4043**).

Several companies also operate snorkeling cruises that take you to particularly picturesque areas; see "Tours & Cruises" under "Seeing the Sights," below.

TENNIS The big hotels have tennis courts that can be reserved even if you're not a guest. In Barbados, most tennis players still wear traditional whites. **Folkestone Park,** Holetown (✆ **246/422-2314**), is a free public tennis court. Courts at the **Barbados Squash Club,** Marine Gardens, Hastings, St. Michael (✆ **246/427-7913**), can be reserved for $20 for 45 minutes.

WINDSURFING Experts say the windsurfing off Barbados is as good as any this side of Hawaii, and has turned into a very big business between November and April, attracting windsurfers from as far away as Finland, Argentina, and Japan. The shifting of the trade winds between November and May and the shallow offshore reef of **Silver Sands** create unique conditions of wind and wave swells. This allows windsurfers to reach speeds of up to 50 knots and do complete loops off the waves. Silver Sands is rated the best spot in the Caribbean for advanced windsurfing (skill rating of 5–6).

Club Mistral Windsurfing Club, immediately adjacent to the Silver Sands Hotel, in Christ Church (✆ **246/428-6001**), is Barbados's best bet for anyone with even a day or two's prior experience on a windboard. (Frankly, if you've absolutely never tried the sport before, you might find the winds at this place too strong.) Vigorous but relatively constant winds and medium-size waves allow fit and in-shape surfers to combine aspects of windsurfing and conventional Hawaiian-style surfing. Boards and equipment are provided by the Germany-based Club Mistral. Equipment rents for $60 per half-day or $80 for a full day.

6 SEEING THE SIGHTS

TOURS & CRUISES

Barbados is worth exploring, either in a rental car or with a taxi-driver guide. Unlike many Caribbean islands, Barbados has fair roads. They are, however, poorly signposted, and newcomers invariably get lost—not only once, but several times. If you lose your way, you can generally find people in the countryside helpful.

CRUISES Luxury catamaran cruises are offered on five spacious and custom-built vessels owned by the Tiami Catamaran Fleet and operated by **Tall Ships** (✆ **246/430-0900**), located at Shallow Draught near Bridgetown Harbour. A wide range of options is available, including both lunch and dinner cruises, sunset cocktail cruises, and even

turtle snorkel cruises. The lunch cruises are the most popular, operated daily from 10am to 3pm, costing $80 per person. A starlight dinner cruise from 7 to 11pm is even cheaper, at $75 per person.

Part cruise ship, part nightclub, the **MV *Harbour Master Blockbuster*** (✆ **246/430-0900**) is a 30m (100-ft.), three-story vessel with theme decks, a modern galley, and two bars. It has a dance floor and also offers formal buffets on its Calypso Deck. On the Harbour Master Deck, there's a bank of TVs for sports buffs. The showpiece of the vessel is an onboard semi-submersible, which is lowered hydraulically to 2m (6½ ft.) beneath the ship. This is, in effect, a "boat in a boat," with 30 seats. Lunch and dinner cruises cost $75 and $83 per person; the semi-submersible experience costs another $15. This cruise is offered on Wednesday 11am to 4pm.

SUBMERGED SIGHTSEEING You no longer have to be an experienced diver to see what lives 45m (148 ft.) below the surface of the sea; you can simply sail aboard one of the vessels operated by **Atlantis Submarines,** Shallow Draught, Bridgetown (✆ **246/436-8929**). The air-conditioned sightseeing submarines seat 28 to 48 passengers and make several dives daily from 9am to 1pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; and 9am to 4pm on Wednesday. Passengers are transported aboard a ferryboat from the Carenage in downtown Bridgetown to the submarine site, about 2km (1¼ miles) from the west coast of Barbados. The ride offers a view of the west coast of the island. The submarine, *Atlantic III,* features viewing ports that allow you to see a rainbow of colors, tropical fish, plants, and even a ship wreck that lies upright and intact below the surface. The cost is $85 for adults, $52 for children 13 to 17, and $41 for children 12 and under.

HELICOPTER TOURS There is now a new and fascinating way to sightsee Barbados. **Bajan Helicopters,** Bridgetown heliport, St. Michaels (✆ **246/431-0069;** fax 246/431-0086; www.bajanhelicopters.com), offers a tour that involves soaring in an air-conditioned craft 50km (30 miles) over either saw-toothed cliffs and animal-shaped rocks or ultramarine boats floating on serene beaches, depending on which coast you are touring. The helicopter seats up to five people and tours last 20 to 30 minutes. We recommend bringing cameras and camcorders so you can share this experience with friends. Prices start at $125 per person.

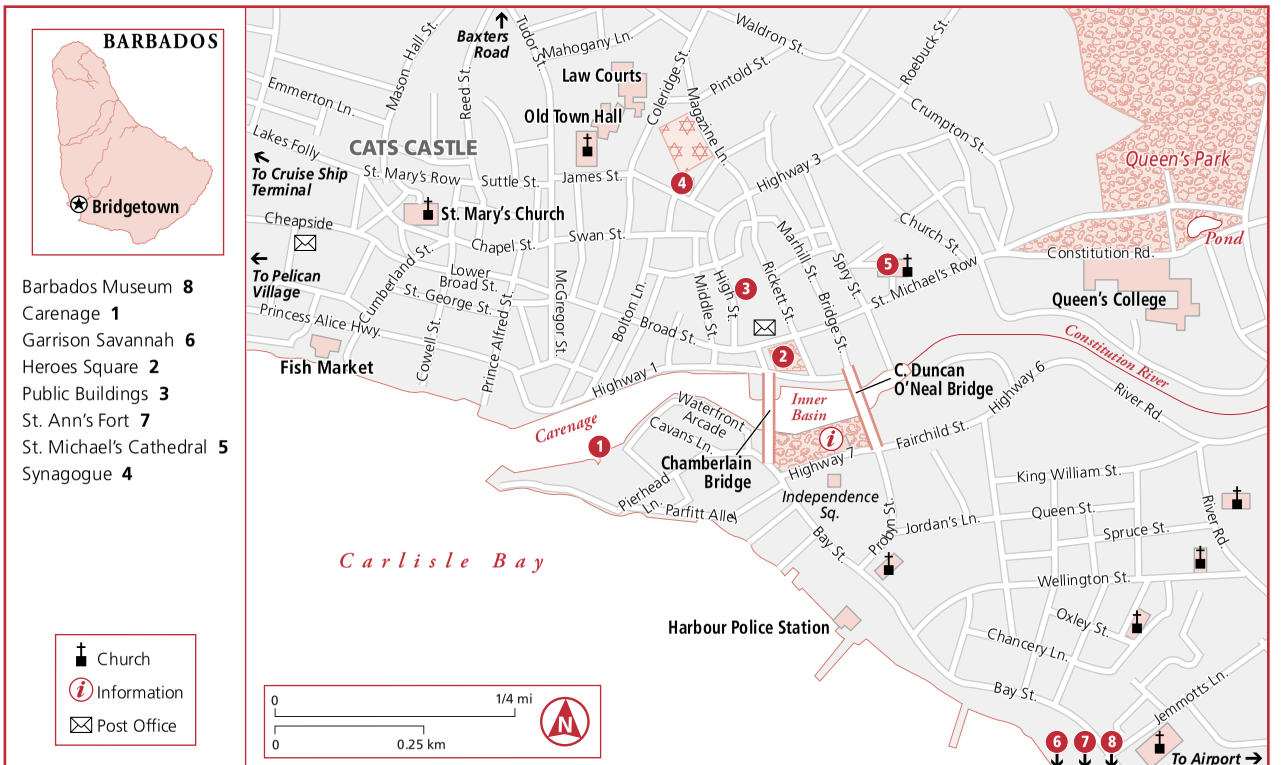
EXPLORING BRIDGETOWN

Often hot and clogged with traffic, the capital, Bridgetown, merits a morning's shopping jaunt (see "Shopping," below), plus a visit to some of its major sights.

Since about half a million visitors arrive on Barbados by cruise ship each year, the government has opened a $6-million **cruise ship terminal** with about 30 duty-free shops, 13 local retail stores, and scads of vendors. Cruise passengers can choose from a range of products, including the arts and crafts of Barbados, jewelry, liquor, china, crystal, electronics, perfume, and leather goods. The interior was designed to re-create an island street scene; some storefronts appear as traditional chattel houses in brilliant island colors, complete with streetlights, tropical landscaping, benches, and pushcarts.

Begin your tour at the waterfront, called the **Carenage** (French for "turning vessels on their side for cleaning"). This was a haven for clipper ships, and even though today it doesn't have the color of yesteryear, it's still worth exploring.

At **Heroes Square** (formerly known as **Trafalgar Square**), the long tradition of British colonization is immortalized. The monument here honoring Lord Nelson was created by Sir Richard Westmacott and erected in 1813. The great gray Victorian/Gothic **Public**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Spruce St.
Jordan's Ln.
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Bay St.
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Princess Alice Hwy.
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Lower Broad St.
St. George St.
Cowell St.
Prince Alfred St.
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Chapel St.
Swan St.
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Buildings on the square look like ones you might find in London. The east wing contains the meeting halls of the Senate and the House of Assembly, with some stained-glass windows representing the sovereigns of England. Look for the "Great Protector" himself, Oliver Cromwell.

Behind the Financial Building, **St. Michael's Cathedral,** east of Heroes Square, is the symbol of the Church of England. This Anglican church was built in 1655 but was completely destroyed in a 1780 hurricane. Reconstructed in 1789, it was again damaged by a hurricane in 1831. George Washington supposedly worshipped here during his visit to Barbados.

The **Synagogue,** Synagogue Lane (✆ **246/426-5792**), is one of the oldest synagogues in the Western Hemisphere and is surrounded by a burial ground of early Jewish settlers. The present building dates from 1833. It was constructed on the site of an even older synagogue, erected by Jews from Brazil in 1654. It's now part of the National Trust of Barbados—and a synagogue once again. It's open Monday to Friday from 9am to 3pm; a donation is appreciated.

First made popular in 1870, **cricket** is the national pastime on Barbados. Matches can last from 1 to 5 days. If you'd like to see one, watch for announcements in the newspapers or ask at the **Barbados Cricket Association,** at the nation's state-of-the-art and futuristic-looking stadium, Kensington Oval, St. Michael (✆ **246/436-1397**).

From Bridgetown you can take a taxi to **Garrison Savannah,** just south of the capital, a venue for horse races.

Barbados Museum, St. Ann's Garrison, St. Michael (✆ **246/427-0201**), is in a former military prison. Extensive collections show the island's development from prehistoric to modern times and give fascinating glimpses into the natural environment and fine examples of West Indian maps. The museum sells a variety of quality publications, reproductions, and handicrafts. Hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, Sunday from 2 to 6pm. Admission is $6 for adults, $3 for children.

Nearby, the russet-red **St. Ann's Fort,** on the fringe of the savanna, garrisoned British soldiers in 1694. The fort wasn't completed until 1703. The **Clock House** survived the hurricane of 1831.

SEEING THE INLAND SIGHTS

In the Center of the Island ★★

Many visitors stay on those fabulous west-coast beaches, but the island's true beauty is its lush interior. If you have time, we highly recommend a hike, drive, or tour through such rarely visited parishes as St. Thomas and St. George (both are landlocked) and the wild Atlantic coast parishes of St. Andrews, St. Joseph, and St. John.

Flower Forest ★ This former sugar plantation stands 255m (836 ft.) above sea level near the western edge of the Scotland district, 2km (1¼ miles) from Harrison's Cave. Set in one of the most scenic parts of Barbados, it's more than just a botanical garden; it's where people and nature unite to create something beautiful. After viewing the grounds, visitors can purchase handicrafts at Best of Barbados.

Richmond Plantation, St. Joseph. ✆ **246/433-8152.** Admission $7 adults, $3.50 children 6–14, free for children 5 and under. Daily 9am–5pm.

Harrison's Cave ★★ (Kids) The underground world here, the number-one tourist attraction of Barbados, is viewed from aboard an electric tram and trailer. You'll see bubbling streams, tumbling cascades, and subtly lit deep pools, while all around stalactites

Tips The Great Tour

From mid-January through the first week of April, you can tour a different great house every Wednesday afternoon from 2:30 to 5:30pm, many rarely seen by the public. You'll see a great array of plantation antiques and get a feeling for the elegant colonial lifestyle once commonplace on Barbados. For more information, call ✆ **246/426-2421.**

hang overhead like icicles, and stalagmites rise from the floor. Visitors may disembark and get a closer look at this natural phenomenon at the Rotunda Room and the Cascade Pool. Although it's interesting, it may not impress those who have been to the far more spectacular Carlsbad or Luray Caverns.

Welchman Hall, St. Thomas. ✆ **246/438-6640.** http://harrisonscave.com. Admission $20. Daily 9am–4pm. Closed Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas.

Orchid World ★ Set on 2.6 landscaped hectares (6½ acres) of highland, this is a botanical garden with the largest collection of orchids in the West Indies, with a diversity that's rivaled only by one or two equivalent organizations in Trinidad. The site was selected for its relatively cool temperatures and abundant rainfall. Although it originated as a place for strolls through tropical wetlands, past an astonishing variety of orchids, it has evolved into one of the most popular places in Barbados for weddings and anniversary parties. We recommend that you devote at least an hour to wandering through this site's labyrinth of paths and glens. Both it and the above-recommended Flower Forest, with which it is associated, are wheelchair accessible.

Groves, St. George. ✆ **246/433-0306.** Admission $7 adults, $3.50 children 5–13, children 4 and under free. Daily 9am–5pm.

Welchman Hall Gully ★ The Barbados National Trust owns this lush tropical garden, which contains specimens of plants—many of them labeled—that were here before the English settlers landed in 1627 and later imports that include cocoa bushes, and trees from which both cloves and nutmeg are produced. Occasionally, you'll spot a wild monkey amid the flora. You can also see breadfruit trees that are supposedly descendants of the seedlings brought ashore by Captain Bligh, of *Bounty* fame.

Welchman Hall, St. Thomas. ✆ **246/438-6671.** www.welchmangullybarbados.com. Admission $7.50 adults, $3.50 children 5–12, free for children 4 and under. Daily 9am–5pm. Take Hwy. 2 from Bridgetown.

Sights Along the West Coast

Folkestone Marine Park & Visitor Centre (Kids) Set beside a shimmering stretch of coral sand beach, this is a "water park" lying just north of Holetown. It combines a museum and aquarium to illustrate the rich marine life of Barbados. An underwater snorkeling trail goes around a reef, and you can see the same sights in a glass-bottom boat. A number of beachfront restaurants and bars are nearby, and there is an on-site gift shop open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Church Point, Holetown, St. James. ✆ **246/422-2314.** Free admission. Snorkeling with equipment $10. Museum $1.15 adults, 50¢ children. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.

The Malibu Beach Club & Visitor Centre Lying to the north of Bridgetown, this manufacturer of white rum has been going strong since 1897. The distillery is known for producing a very popular island drink, coconut rum. To make this tour even more enticing, the center is constructed on an idyllic stretch of white-sand beach set against a backdrop of sea-grape and almond trees. Also on-site is a beachside grill where lunch and rum punches are served. The price of the tour includes a rum drink and the use of a beach chair. In contrast to the sunny beach, the distillery is dark with a lot of old equipment, including a century-old copper-pot still.

Black Rock, Brighton, St. Michael. ✆ **246/425-9393.** Admission $10, or $33 with lunch and transportation from your hotel. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.

The Mount Gay Rum Tour & Gift Shop On the northern edge of Bridgetown, you can learn the story of island rum, produced here virtually since the British first settled on the island in 1627. By 1655, Barbados was producing some 900,000 gallons of rum annually. The actual distillery is in St. Lucy Parish to the north, but at this center you can see both old and contemporary equipment used in rum making, along with rows and rows of barrels. First you view a video about Mount Gay's history, followed by a 15-minute crash course in rum making. The tour concludes with a rum tasting. Rum, along with gift items, is for sale in the on-site shop You can make a reservation for an admission-free tour of the actual Mount Gay refinery, which is located in the northern part of St. Lucy Parish, by calling ✆ **246/439-8812.**

Spring Garden Hwy., Brandons, St. Michael. ✆ **246/425-8757.** Admission $7, or $40 including lunch and transportation from your hotel; free for children 11 and under. Mon–Fri 9:30am–3:30pm.

In the Southeast (St. Philip)

Heritage Park & Rum Factory After driving through cane fields, you'll arrive at the first rum distillery to be launched on the island since the 19th century. Inaugurated in 1996, this factory is located on a former molasses and sugar plantation dating back some 350 years. Produced on-site is ESA Field, a white rum praised by connoisseurs. Adjacent is an admission-free park where Barbadian handicrafts are displayed. You'll also find an array of shops and carts selling food, handicrafts, and products.

Foursquare Plantation, St. Philip. ✆ **246/420-1977.** www.barbadosgreathouse.com. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm.

Sunbury Plantation House ★ This mid-17th-century plantation house is steeped in history, featuring mahogany antiques, old prints, and a unique collection of horse-drawn carriages. Take the informative tour, then stop in the Courtyard Restaurant and Bar for a meal or drinks; there's also a gift shop. A candlelight dinner is offered at least once a week, usually on either Tuesday or Thursday nights. Served atop an impressive antique mahogany table, this five-course meal costs $75 per person.

Sunbury, off no. 6 Cross Rd., St. Philip. ✆ **246/423-6270.** Admission $7.50 adults, $3.75 children 5–12. Daily 9am–4:30pm (last tour).

In the Northeast

Andromeda Botanic Gardens ★ On a cliff overlooking the town of Bathsheba on the rugged east coast, limestone boulders make for a natural 3-hectare (7½-acre) rock-garden setting. Thousands of orchids, hundreds of hibiscus and heliconia, and many varieties of ferns, begonias, palms, and other species grow here in splendid profusion. You'll occasionally see toads, frogs, herons, lizards, hummingbirds, and sometimes a mongoose or a monkey.

Moments A Beautiful Picnic Spot

Farley Hill National Park surrounds what used to be one of the great houses of Barbados, Farley Hill, a mansion now in ruins. The park is north of the parish of St. Peter, directly across the road leading into the Barbados Wildlife Reserve. You can bring in a picnic and wander in the park, overlooking the turbulent waters of the Atlantic. You can enter the park for free if you're walking, but it costs $2 to enter by car. Hours are daily 8:30am to 5pm.

Bathsheba, St. Joseph. ✆ **246/433-9384.** Admission $10 adults, $5 children 6–12, free for children 5 and under. Daily 9am–5pm.

St. Nicholas Abbey (also known as "The Abbey") ★★ Surrounded by sugarcane fields, this Jacobean plantation great house has been around since about 1650. It was never actually an abbey—around 1820, a socially ambitious owner simply christened it as such. More than 80 hectares (198 acres) are still cultivated each year. The house, characterized by its curved gables, is believed to be one of three authentically Jacobean houses in the Western Hemisphere. Recent restorations have transformed this spectacularly historic site into one of the Caribbean's genuine architectural treasures. On some days, you're likely to see smoke billowing from the chimneys of the reconstructed on-site sugar refinery. It's wise to phone in advance, as the place sometimes closes unexpectedly because of inclement weather or the absence of the hard-working owners.

On Cherry Tree Hill, Hwy. 1, St. Peter. ✆ **246/422-8725.** www.stnicholasabbey.com. Admission $13 adults, $7.50 children 11 and under. Sun–Fri 10am–3:30pm.

7 SHOPPING

You may find duty-free merchandise here at prices 20% to 40% lower than in the United States and Canada—but you've got to be a smart shopper to spot bargains, and you should be familiar with prices back in your hometown. Duty-free shops have two prices listed on items of merchandise: the local retail price and the local retail price less the government-imposed tax.

Some of the best duty-free buys include cameras, watches, crystal, gold jewelry, bone china, cosmetics and perfumes, and liquor (including locally produced Barbados rum and liqueurs), along with tobacco products and cashmere sweaters, tweeds, and sportswear from Britain. Items made on Barbados are duty free.

The quintessential Barbados handicrafts are black-coral jewelry and clay pottery. The latter originates at **Highland Pottery, Inc.** ★ (✆ **246/422-9818**), which is worth a visit. Potters turn out different products, some based on designs that are centuries old. The potteries (which are signposted) are north of Bathsheba on the east coast, most of them within or immediately adjacent to the hamlet of Chalky Mountain, in St. Andrew's Parish. In shops across the island, you'll also find a selection of locally made vases, pots, pottery mugs, glazed plates, and ornaments.

Island artisans weave wall hangings from local grasses and dried flowers, and also turn out straw mats, baskets, and bags with raffia embroidery. Leather work—particularly handbags, belts, and sandals—is also found on Barbados.

IN BRIDGETOWN Cruise passengers generally head for the **cruise ship terminal** at Bridgetown Harbour, which has some 20 duty-free shops, 13 local shops, and many vendors (see "Exploring Bridgetown" under "Seeing the Sights," earlier).

At **Articrafts** ★, Norman Center Mall, Broad Street (✆ **246/427-5767**), John and Roslyn Watson have assembled an impressive display of Bajan arts and crafts. Roslyn's distinctive wall hangings are decorated with objects from the island, including sea fans and coral.

Cave Shepherd ★, Broad Street (✆ **246/227-2121;** www.caveshepherd.com), is the largest department store on the island and the best place for duty-free merchandise. There are branches at Sunset Crest in Holetown, Da Costas Mall, Grantley Adams Airport, and the Bridgetown cruise ship terminal, but if your time is limited, try this outlet, as it has the widest selection. The store sells perfumes, cosmetics, fine crystal and bone china, cameras, jewelry, swimwear, leather goods, men's designer clothing, handicrafts, liquor, and souvenirs. Take a break in the cool comfort of the **Balcony,** overlooking Broad Street, which serves vegetarian dishes and has a salad bar and beer garden.

Harrison's, 10–14 Broad St. (✆ **246/431-5500**), has six branch stores, all selling a wide variety of duty-free merchandise, including china, crystal, jewelry, watches, liquor, and perfumes—all at fair prices. Also for sale are some fine leather products handcrafted in Colombia.

Little Switzerland, in the Da Costas Mall, Broad Street (✆ **246/430-4843**), offers a wide selection of watches, fine jewelry, and an array of goodies from Waterford, Lalique, Swarovski, Baccarat, and others.

Pelican Crafts Centre, Harbour Road (✆ **246/426-0765**), consists of about 20 somewhat disorganized crafts boutiques, each of them clustered tightly into a folkloric/ethnic blend of thatch roofs, dust, and commercial hubbub. It's been accused of being somewhat overpriced and something of a tourist trap, but there are occasional moments of charm among the handcrafted items on display. Most of the shops here are gimmicky, but a few intriguing items can be found if you search hard enough. Sometimes you can see craftspeople at work. In Bridgetown, go down Princess Alice Highway to the city's Deep Water Harbour, where you'll find this tiny colony of thatch-roofed shops.

ELSEWHERE ON THE ISLAND **The Watering Hole,** Highway 7, St. Lawrence Main Road, close to the entrance to St. Lawrence's Gap (✆ **246/435-6375**), is not only the best place to purchase bottles of Bajan rum at duty-free prices, but is also a great dive for hanging out. A small bottle of rum (about 6 oz.) sells for around $8. Some locals as well as savvy visitors come here and make an evening of it, sampling the various rum drinks. Of course, you may need someone to carry you back to your hotel, as these punches are lethal. Opening times vary—call to be sure—but we've seen this place going strong at 3am. One of the more interesting shopping jaunts in Barbados involves a visit to the very-laid-back vendors at **Tyrol Cot Heritage Village,** Codrington Hill, St. Michael (✆ **246/424-2074**), the former home of the Bajan national hero, Sir Grantley Adams. On the grounds of the former prime minister's estate is a colony of artisans, who turn out an array of articles for sale ranging from paintings to pottery, from baskets to handmade figurines.

Earthworks Pottery/On the Wall Gallery ★, Edgehill Heights 2, St. Thomas (✆ **246/425-0223;** www.earthworks-pottery.com), is one of the artistic highlights of Barbados. Deep in the island's central highlands, Canadian-born Goldie Spieler and her son, David, in business at this site since 1978, create whimsical ceramics in the colors of

the sea and sky, with touches of watermelon pink. Many are decorated with Antillean-inspired swirls and zigzags. On the premises are a studio and a showroom that sells the output of at least half a dozen other island potters. Purchases can be shipped. Immediately next door is the **Ins and Outs Emporium** (✆ **246/438-3438**), where jars of locally made condiments—jams, jellies, sauces, and spices—are sold along with a small selection of island-inspired reading materials.

The **Shell Gallery "Contentment,"** Gibbes Hill, St. Peter (✆ **246/422-2593**), has the best collection of shells in the West Indies. Also offered are shell jewelry, and local pottery and ceramics.

Greenwich House Antiques, Greenwich Village, Trents Hill, St. James (✆ **246/432-1169**), a 25-minute drive from Bridgetown, feels like a genteel private home where the objects for sale seem to have come from the attic of your slightly dotty great aunt. The building that contains the shop is at least a century old, the historic centerpiece of what used to be a sugar plantation. Dozens of objects, both utilitarian and decorative, including some good examples of Barbados-made mahogany furniture, fill every available inch of display space.

8 BARBADOS AFTER DARK

ON THE WEST COAST A lot of the evening entertainment around here revolves around the big resorts, many of which have lovely bars, some of which host bands and beach parties in the evening. See "Accommodations," earlier in this chapter.

Some say the green-and-yellow **Coach House,** Paynes Bay, St. James (on the main Bridgetown–Holetown road, just south of Sandy Lane, about 10km (6¼ miles) north of Bridgetown (✆ **246/432-1163**), is 200 years old. Attracting mostly visitors, this is a Bajan version of an English pub, with an outdoor garden bar. Every day from noon to 10pm you can order bar meals, including flying-fish burgers, priced at $5 to $14 and up. A lunchtime buffet is offered Monday to Friday for $19 to $21, which includes a cocktail. On-site, there's also a well-attended Saturday night buffet costing $30.

Scarlett's is a wine bar and bistro-style restaurant that's positioned in a scarlet-colored old-fashioned house across the coastal road from The House and Tamarind Bay resorts. Frankly, we prefer it as a drinking hangout and wine emporium instead of as a full-fledged restaurant, ordering a glass or two from the comprehensive wine list or perhaps any of the staggeringly potent cocktails. Try, for example, an "elderflower Collins" or a passion-fruit Caipirhumba (they call it "a caipirinha revisited"). At the bar, you'll find Warhol portraits of the women who got intimate with JFK, including Jackie O. and Marilyn Monroe. Know in advance that you don't "sit" here, you "perch" somewhat uncomfortably, on a high bar stool overlooking the crowds of urbanized 30-somethings that make the place their hangout. Cocktails cost from $6 to $13. Small *amuse-bouche* platters of decidedly stylish food (flying-fish lollipops, smoked salmon sushi with wasabi) cost from $8 to $11. It's open Tuesday to Sunday 5 to 10:30pm as a restaurant, till around midnight as a bar.

John Moore Bar ★, on the waterfront, Weston, St. James (✆ **246/422-2258**), is the most atmospheric and least pretentious bar on Barbados. Open to the sea breezes, and much weather beaten, it's the nerve center of this waterfront town, filled day and night with a congenial group of neighborhood residents and a scattering of tourists. You might

even find Barbados's prime minister hanging out here—the bar is a stronghold of his island constituency, and since he won his office, things around this bar became a lot more interesting. Most visitors opt for a rum punch or beer, but you can order up a plate of local fish if you don't mind waiting.

Another worthy drinking spot is the previously recommended **Olives Bar & Bistro** ★, Second Street at the corner of Highway 1, in Holetown (✆ **246/432-2112**). Not only is it a fine restaurant, but it's also a good place to spend an hour before or after dinner—maybe both. Within a *Casablanca*-like setting of potted palms, coral stone walls, and whirling ceiling fans, it draws a convivial international crowd, mostly expats, Americans, and English visitors in their 30s and 40s. Unfortunately, it's open as a restaurant only during relatively limited hours of 6:30 to 9:30pm daily, and as a bar daily from 6:30 till around 11:30pm. The kitchen is known for its roasted mutton derived from the local blackbelly sheep, a variety for which Barbados is well known.

What's our ultimate fave in the "raffish bars on the waterfront" category? It's **Fisherman's Pub & Beach Bar,** Queen Street, Speightstown, St. Peter (✆ **246/422-2703**). Set within a dilapidated wood-and-corrugated-steel building directly on the waterfront, it's a local hangout for Bajan residents and the politicians who serve them, as well as an occasional rock, soccer, and cricket bigwig. There has been a bar here since the 1940s, with chairs and battered tables set on a covered wooden deck built over the water. Beer costs $2.25, rum punch costs $3.50, and full meals, served by an employee, cafeteria style, from a steam tray in a corner, cost from $5 to $15 each. Expect boiled chicken, shepherd's pie, flying-fish filets, and various preparations of beef. It's open Monday to Saturday 11am to 9pm as a restaurant and till around midnight as a bar. A steel band plays here on Wednesday nights.

IN BRIDGETOWN For the most authentic Bajan evening possible, head for **Baxters Road** ★ in Bridgetown, where there's always something cooking Friday and Saturday nights after 11pm. In fact, if you stick around until dawn, you'll find the party's still going strong. Some old-time visitors have compared Baxters Road to the back streets of New Orleans in the 1930s. If you fall in love with the place, you can "caf crawl" up and down the street, where nearly every bar is run by a Bajan mama.

The most popular "caf" on Baxters Road is **Patsy's** (she has a phone, "but it doesn't work"), a little ramshackle establishment where Bajans come for fried chicken throughout the evening between around 5pm till as late as 2am, depending on business. Even if you're not particularly hungry, consider stopping in for a Banks beer.

Boatyard Bar & South Deck Grill, Bay Street in Bridgetown (✆ **246/436-2622**), is one of the busiest and most hard-drinking of the youth-oriented bars in Bridgetown. Occupying the beachfront, the interior is lavishly decorated in bright Creole colors of yellow, blue, and pink. If you want food, the menu features simple platters of fish, chicken, or burgers. If you want to go swimming, the beach lies almost directly adjacent to the foundations of this place. Expect a 5-minute trek from central Bridgetown, hordes of dancers jiving to the DJ every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and lots of local gossip. It's open daily 9am to sometimes as late as 3am, depending on business.

Harbour Lights, Marine's Villa, Lower Bay Street, 2km (1 1/4 miles) southeast of Bridgetown (✆ **246/436-7225;** www.harbourlightsbarbados.com), is the island's most popular weekend spot for dancing, drinking, and flirting. In a modern seafront building with an oceanfront patio (which gives dancers a chance to cool off), the place plays recorded versions of reggae, soca, and whatever else is popular until the wee hours nightly. Monday is Beach Party Night; the $73 charge includes transportation to and

from your hotel, a barbecue buffet, drinks, a live band, and lots of theme-derived entertainment that includes limbo contests and fire-eaters. On Wednesday and Friday, the cover is $25.

ON THE SOUTH COAST The bustling activity at **Cafe Sol,** St. Lawrence Gap, Christ Church (✆ **246/435-9531;** www.cafesolbarbados.com), attracts a very convivial crowd. As a specialty of the house, the bartender rubs the margarita glasses with Bajan sugar instead of the usual salt. There's an on-site local restaurant as well.

Plantation Theatre Restaurant, Main Road (Hwy. 7), St. Lawrence, Christ Church (✆ **246/428-5048**), is the island's main showcase for evening dinner theater and Caribbean cabaret. It's completely touristy, but enjoyable nonetheless. Every Wednesday and Friday, dinner is served at 7:15pm, followed at 8:15pm by a show, *Bajan Roots and Rhythm.* Expect elaborate costumes and reggae, calypso, and limbo. For $98, you get dinner, the show, and transportation to and from your hotel; the show alone costs $58. Reserve in advance.

The Ship Inn, St. Lawrence Gap, Christ Church, near Oistins (✆ **246/435-6961**), is among the leading drinking, dining, and entertainment centers on the south coast. The pub is the hot spot: Top local bands perform three nights a week, offering reggae, calypso, and pop music. Otherwise, there's a live DJ. The entrance fee ranges from free (if you're eating dinner) to between $5 and $10. The place draws an equal number of visitors and locals.

The biggest and best sports bar in Barbados, without equal, is **Bubba's Sports Bar,** Rockley Main Road, Christ Church (✆ **246/435-6217;** http://bubbassportsbar.net), which offers a couple of satellite dishes, a 3m (9 3/4-ft.) video screen, and a dozen TVs. Wash a Bubba burger down with a Banks beer.

7

Bonaire

Unspoiled Bonaire has been only gently touched by development. Bonaire is foremost a scuba diver's delight and also offers some of the Caribbean's best snorkeling. This sleepy island doesn't attract crowds and has none of Aruba's glitzy diversions. Instead, turquoise waters beckon travelers to discover colorful clouds of tropical fish. Come here for the diving, not the beaches.

Bonaire is also a bird-watcher's haven, where flamingos nearly outnumber the sparse human population. There are about 200 different species of birds—not only the flamingo, but also the big-billed pelican, parrots, snipes, terns, parakeets, herons, and hummingbirds. A pair of binoculars is an absolute necessity.

Bonaireans zealously protect their precious environment. Even though they eagerly seek tourism, they aren't interested in creating another Aruba, with its high-rise hotel blocks. Spearfishing isn't allowed in its waters, nor is the taking or destruction of any coral or other living animal from the sea. Unlike some islands, Bonaire isn't just surrounded by coral reefs—it *is* the reef, sitting on the dry, sunny top of an underwater mountain.

The boomerang-shaped island is close to the coast of Latin America, just 81km (50 miles) north of Venezuela. Part of the Netherlands Antilles (an autonomous part of the Netherlands), Bonaire has a population of about 15,000 and an area of about 290 sq. km (113 sq. miles). The capital is **Kralendijk** (*Kroll*-en-dike). It's most often reached from its neighbor island of Curaçao, 48km (30 miles) to the west; like Curaçao, Bonaire is desertlike, with a dry and brilliant atmosphere. Often it's visited by day-trippers, who rush through in pursuit of the shy, elusive flamingo. Its northern sector is hilly, tapering up to Mount Brandaris, all of 241m (790 ft.). However, the southern half, flat as a pancake, is given over to bays, reefs, beaches, and a salt lake that attracts the birds.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Diving in Bonaire's waters:** The highly accessible reefs that surround Bonaire have suffered far less from poaching or pollution than elsewhere, and the island's environmentally conscious diving industry ensures they will remain protected. Created from volcanic eruptions, the island is an underwater mountain, with fringe reefs right off the beach of every hotel on any part of the island.
- **Bonaire Marine Park:** All the attributes that make Bonaire a world-class diving destination apply to its snorkeling, too. Snorkelers can wade from the shores off their hotels to the reefs and view an array of coral and colorful fish. In particular, the reefs just off Klein Bonaire and Washington Slagbaai National Park receive rave reviews.
- **Washington Slagbaai National Park:** The park's varied terrain includes desertlike areas, secluded beaches, caverns, cliffs, and lakes dotted with wading, diving, and swimming birds. The wildlife preserve was once plantation land, producing divi-divi, aloe, and charcoal.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you go, contact the **Bonaire Government Tourist Office** (✆ **800/BONAIRE** [266-2473] in the U.S.), or go online to **www.tourismbonaire.com** for information.

On the island, the **Bonaire Government Tourist Bureau,** Kaya Grandid 2 (✆ **599/717-8322**), is open Monday to Friday from 7:30am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm.

Pick up a copy of ***Bonaire Affair, Bonaire Nights,*** the ***Bonaire Dining Guide,*** and ***Bonaire Update*** for information on where to shop, play, eat, and stay. The ***Bonaire Dive Guide*** provides up-to-date information on the best dive and snorkel sites.

GETTING THERE

Continental Airlines (✆ **800/231-0856;** www.continental.com) flies nonstop to and from Newark, New Jersey, and Houston, Texas, to Bonaire on weekends during the high season. Through its American Eagle subsidiary, **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) offers three weekly round-trip flights between San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Bonaire. It also provides one-stop service to Bonaire from many U.S. gateway cities.

An airline based in Bonaire, **Dutch Antilles Express** (✆ **599/717-0808;** www.flydae.com) has numerous flights per day between Bonaire and Curaçao and between Bonaire and Aruba. Two other local carriers serving the ABC islands are **Tiara Air** (✆ **599/717-3008;** www.tiara-air.com) and **Insel Air** (✆ **599/717-2004;** www.fly-inselair.com), so check rates and itineraries with them.

GETTING AROUND

Even though most of the island is flat and renting a moped or motor scooter is fun, be prepared for some unpaved, pitted, and rocky roads.

BY RENTAL CAR Consider renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle, especially from October to January, when it can be muddy.

Budget (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/717-4700; www.budget.com) and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/717-7221; www.hertz.com) have desks at Flamingo Airport. Weekly arrangements are cheaper, but daily rates range from $40 to $50, with unlimited mileage. Also at the airport, **Total Car Rental** (✆ **599/717-7424;** www.totalcarrentalbonaire.com) rents cars and pickup trucks. Some automatic, air-conditioned four-door sedans are available. **Island Car Rentals,** Flamingo Airport #12 (✆ **599/717-2100;** www.islandcarrentalbonaire.com), rents soft-top jeeps for $24 a day. It pays to shop around: Sometimes—but not always—you can make a better deal with a local agency.

Your valid U.S., British (you must have had it for 2 years), or Canadian driver's license is acceptable for driving on Bonaire. Drive on the right and keep an eye out for goats, chickens, lizards, and donkeys that frequently dart out in front of cars.

BY TAXI Taxis are unmetered, but the government has established rates. All taxis carry a license plate with the letters **tx.** Each driver must produce a price list upon request. As many as four passengers can go along for the ride, unless there's too much luggage. A trip from the airport to your hotel should cost about $9 to $20. From midnight to 6am, fares go up by 50%.

Most taxi drivers can take you on a tour of the island, but you'll have to negotiate a price according to how long a trip you want and what you want to see. For more information, call **Taxi Central Dispatch** (✆ **599/717-8100**).

BY BICYCLE If you're in good shape, you might consider renting a bike, although you'll have to contend with the hot sun and powerful trade winds. Nevertheless, much of the island is flat, and if you follow the main road, you'll go along the water's edge. The best deals are at **Cycle Bonaire,** next to the S and D Dollar Condominium (✆ **599/717-7558**), where you can rent a mountain bike for $20 per day. Rental includes a water bottle, lock, helmet, repair kit, and first-aid kits. A map is provided for free.

Fast Facts Bonaire

Banks Banks are usually open Monday to Friday from 8am to 3:30 or 4pm. **RBTT Bank,** Kaya Korona 15 (✆ **599/717-4500**), is the most convenient facility for visitors, and it has an ATM. There's also an ATM at the airport and several along Kaya Grandi.

Currency Bonaire's coin of the realm is the **Netherlands Antillean florin (NAf),** sometimes called a **guilder.** The official rate is 1.77 NAf to US$1 (1 NAf = 56¢). However, U.S. dollars are widely accepted. *As such, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs Besides articles for personal use, visitors over 15 are allowed 400 cigarettes, 50 cigars, 250 grams of tobacco, 2 liters of distilled beverages, and 2 liters of wine.

Documents U.S. and Canadian citizens need a passport. A return or continuing ticket is also required along with sufficient means to support yourself during your stay. (Maximum stay is 14 days, with the possibility of extending the visit to 90 days.)

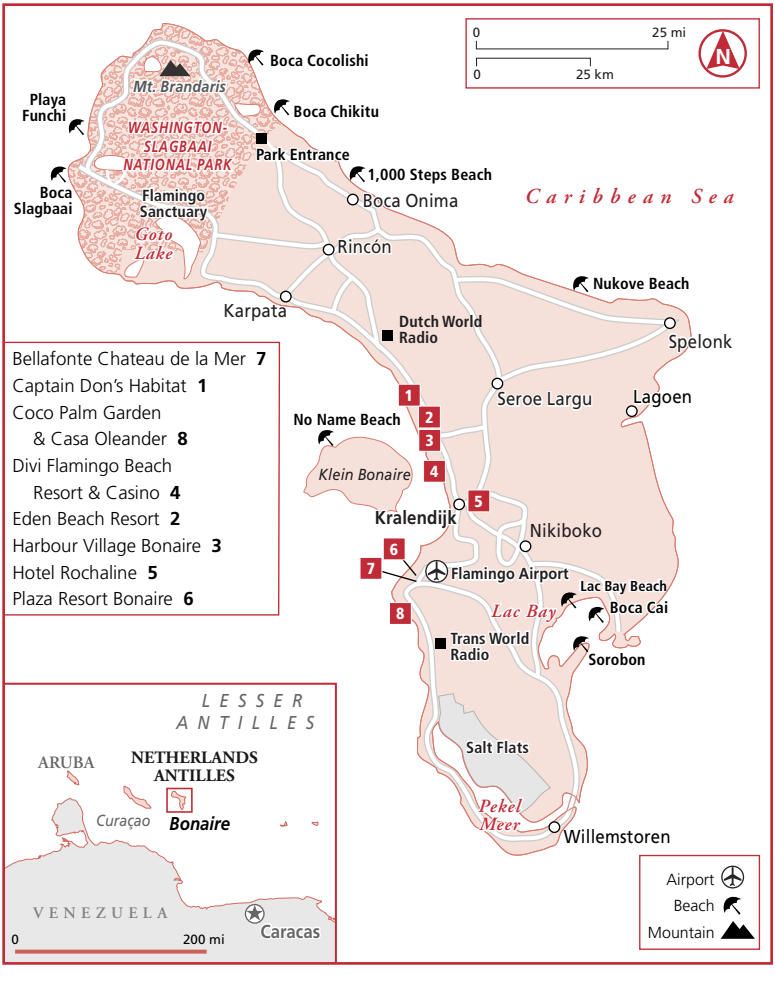
Electricity The electricity on Bonaire is slightly different from that used in North America—110–130 volts/50 cycles, as opposed to U.S. and Canadian voltages of 110 volts/60 cycles. Adapters and transformers are not necessary for North American appliances, but because of the erratic current, you should still proceed with caution and be aware plug-in clocks may run slow. ***Warning:*** Electrical current used to feed or recharge finely calibrated diving equipment should be stabilized with a specially engineered electrical stabilizer. Every diving operation on the island has one of these as part of its standard equipment for visiting divers.

Emergencies Call ✆ **911** in case of fire or for the police, and **912** for an ambulance.

Hospital The **St. Franciscus Hospital** is located at Kaya Soeur Barbara 2 in Kralendijk (✆ **599/717-8900**). A recompression chamber is on-site. A plane on standby at the airport takes seriously ill patients to Curaçao for treatment.

Language English is widely spoken, but you'll hear Dutch, Spanish, and Papiamento, the local dialect, as well.

Liquor Laws The minimum drinking age is 18. Beer, wine, and liquor are sold in all kinds of stores 7 days a week. It's legal to have an open container on the beach. The minimum age for gambling is 21.



Safety Bonaire is quite a safe haven in this crime-infested world. But remember, any place that attracts tourists also attracts people who prey on them. Safeguard your valuables.

Taxes The government requires a $5.50-per-person daily room tax on all hotel rooms, but some hotels charge $6.50 as members of a local hotel organization. Upon leaving Bonaire, you'll be charged an airport departure tax of $35, so don't spend every penny. There's also an interisland departure tax of $5.75 if you are flying to Curaçao.

Telephone To call Bonaire from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **599** (the area code for Bonaire), and then **717** (the exchange) and the four-digit local number. Once on Bonaire, to call another number on the island, only the four-digit local number is necessary. There are three cellphone providers on island: TELBO is the central phone company servicing land lines; Chippie and Digicell are cellphone competitors. While you can purchase a SIM card for your existing phone, its easier to rent a cellphone from a local agency such as **Chat 'n' Browse** (✆ **599/717-2281;** www.chatnbrowse.com) to make local calls.

Time Bonaire is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time. (When it's noon on Bonaire, it's 11am in Miami.) When daylight saving time is in effect in the United States, clocks in Miami and Bonaire show the same time.

Tipping Most hotels and guesthouses add a 10% service charge in lieu of tipping. Restaurants generally add a service charge of 15% to the bill. Taxi drivers expect a 10% tip.

Water Drinking water comes from desalinated seawater and is perfectly safe.

Weather Bonaire is known for its warm climate, with temperatures hovering around 82°F (28°C). The water temperature averages 80°F (27°C). It's warmest in August and September, coolest in January and February. The average rainfall is 22 inches, and December to March are the rainiest months. Like all the Dutch ABC (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) islands, Bonaire lies outside the hurricane belt, which comes as a relief to many visitors planning to visit the Caribbean during the hurricane season.

2 WHERE TO STAY

Hotels, all facing the sea, and in many cases opening onto the waterfront, are low-key, personally run operations where everybody gets to know everybody else in no time. They are concentrated on the west coast of the island immediately north or immediately south of the capital of Kralendijk.

Remember that taxes and service charges are seldom included in the prices you're quoted, so ask about them when making your reservations.

Your best deal at one of the dive resorts, such as Captain Don's Habitat, is to book a package deal, often for a week. Depending on the house count, more limited bookings can be accommodated if rooms are available.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Harbour Village Bonaire ★★★ Conceived by one of the largest land developers in Venezuela, this exclusive complex, the most stylish on the island, is designed like an Iberian village, opening onto a sandy beach. It's upscale and well managed, offering services and resort amenities to well-heeled divers who don't want the more laid-back atmosphere of Captain Don's Habitat (see below). Accommodations are in a cluster of Spanish-style villas painted in pastels, with red-tile roofs and terraced balconies. Guest

rooms have tropical decor, four-poster beds, white-tile floors, natural-wood furniture, island-style ceiling fans as well as air-conditioning, and marble bathrooms, with deluxe toiletries, shower stalls, and robes.

A wide array of very good food awaits you. Our favorite restaurant is La Balandra Beach Bar and Restaurant, a gazebo-like structure set beside a massive pier; an octagonal bar area flanked by an open grill and salad bar is open to the sea view and breezes.

Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 17, Playa Lechi (P.O. Box 312), Bonaire, N.A. ✆ **800/424-0004** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/717-7500. Fax 599/717-7507. www.harbourvillage.com. 42 units. Winter $330–$395 double, $590 1-bedroom suite, $805 2-bedroom suite; off season $275–$295 double, $460 1-bedroom suite, $645 2-bedroom suite. Children 16 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; airport transfers; babysitting; bikes; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; spa; 4 tennis courts; dive shop; marina. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, flatscreen TV, MP3 docks, hair dryer, kitchenette (in suites), free Wi-Fi.

EXPENSIVE

Captain Don's Habitat ★ Built on a coral bluff overlooking the sea and a tiny beach about 5 minutes north of Kralendijk, this divers' resort, with an air of congenial informality, is for those whose souls belong to the sea. Habitat and its accompanying dive shop are the creation of Capt. Don Stewart, Caribbean pioneer and "caretaker of the reefs," a former Californian who sailed his schooner from San Francisco through the Panama Canal, arriving on a reef in Bonaire in 1962—he's been here ever since. Known on the island as the "godfather of diving," Captain Don was instrumental in the formation of the Bonaire Marine Park, whereby the entire island became a protected reef.

More than 90% of the guests here opt for a package, which incorporates a variable number of dives, with accommodations ranging from standard doubles to villas with full kitchens and oceanview verandas. Each unit has a bathroom with tub/shower combinations. The most popular is the 8-day/7-night package. This resort has an oceanfront restaurant, a day spa, and two seaside bars. A casual, laid-back crowd gathers for meals at Rum Runners, the social hub. Theme nights are staged weekly, along with live entertainment and occasional reef ecology slide shows by local experts and enthusiasts.

Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 103, Pier 7, Bonaire, N.A. ✆ **800/327-6709** or 599/717-8290. Fax 599/717-8240. www.habitatbonaire.com. 63 units. Winter $190–$259 double, off season $149–$216 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; outdoor pool; dive program; rooms for those w/ limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchenette (in some), free Wi-Fi, no phone (in some).

Plaza Resort Bonaire ★ This luxury resort lies a short drive from the airport, on a strip of land midway between a saltwater lagoon and a sandy stretch of Caribbean beachfront. Designed in 1995 by a team of Italian architects, it resembles a white-sided village along the coast of southern Portugal, thanks to terra-cotta roofs and a pair of bridges that traverse the lagoon for easy access to the 5 hectares (12 acres) of grounds. It's an extremely large property for Bonaire, where most hotels are more intimate. Some units are privately owned. Rooms are quite large, though be aware that what management here refers to as suites are actually very large bedrooms, without interior dividers. The one- and two-bedroom villas contain kitchenettes, ceiling fans, and simple, spartan summery furnishings. Most units are large and airy, with private balconies and queen-size beds. Bathrooms are roomy and luxurious, with showers and deep tubs and a separate "water closet" that contains the toilet.

J. A. Abraham Blvd. 80, Bonaire, N.A. ✆ **800/766-6016** in the U.S., or 599/717-2500. Fax 599/717-7133. www.plazaresortbonaire.com. 174 units. Winter $230–$260 suite, $290 1-bedroom villa, $370 2-bedroom villa; off season $180–$210 suite, $210–$220 1-bedroom villa, $290 2-bedroom villa. Extra person $30. AE,

MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; bikes; children's programs; health club; free Wi-Fi in lobby; outdoor pool; room service; spa; 4 tennis courts; boats; dive shop; marina; sailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

MODERATE

Bellafonte Chateau de la Mer ★ (Finds) As you enter the courtyard, you are greeted by a *bella fonte* (beautiful fountain) surrounded by three-story buildings that replicate a small Mediterranean villa. Though it is on the waterfront, the hotel has no beach—only a pool and a long pier over the water good for sunbathing and swimming in the sea below. Except for its pool, it lacks the amenities of the larger resorts, but it is a bastion of comfort, style, and grace in all other respects. The rooms are decorated not only with taste, but also with a sense of glamour; the trendy decor includes teak wood and stainless steel. The limited space and lack of guardrails indicate that the destination is more suited to couples than families. The richly appointed units with balconies or terraces seem intended to lure honeymooners whose desire is to relax and escape from the crowds.

E. E. G. Blvd. 10, Belnem, N.A. ✆ **599/717-3333.** Fax 599/717-8581. www.bellafontebonaire.com. 20 units. Winter $145–$275 double, $325–$495 2-bedroom suite; off season $125–$235 double, $275–$425 2-bedroom suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bikes; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; dive shop; 2 private piers; grocery service. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchens (in some), free Wi-Fi.

Divi Flamingo Beach Resort & Casino ★ (Kids) Divi is the comeback kid, having reinvented itself after a massive restoration that began at the beginning of the millennium. Modern furnishings, paint, tiles, and rejuvenated air-conditioning have made this once-tired waterfront hostelry more comfortable than it's been in years. Originally a cluster of flimsy wooden bungalows used to intern German prisoners in World War II, today the resort consists of individual cottages and seafront rooms with private balconies. These accommodations rest on piers above the surf so you can stand on your balcony and watch rainbow-hued tropical fish in the waters below. The resort's original rooms are supplemented timeshare units, forming Club Flamingo. These are the best accommodations, and each can be rented by the day or week. The timeshare units are clustered in a neo-Victorian pavilion facing a curving pool, and each comes with a kitchenette. Chibi-Chibi and Calabas provide satisfying, straightforward meals featuring fresh local seafood and Continental specialties.

J. A. Abraham Blvd., 40 Bonaire, N.A. ✆ **800/367-3484** in the U.S., or 599/717-8285. Fax 599/717-8238. www.diviflamingo.com. 129 units. Winter $165–$199 double, from $219 studio; off season $125–$149 double, from $165 studio. Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; Internet access in lobby; 2 outdoor pools; casino; room service; spa services; dive shop; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV.

INEXPENSIVE

Coco Palm Garden & Casa Oleander ★ (Value) In the tranquil residential area of Belnem, south of the airport and Kralendijk, these vacation homes are a real discovery. Two friendly neighbors, Brigitte and Marin, combined their two properties into a cohesive whole and opened their affordable guesthouses to the world, drawing divers and windsurfers or anyone wanting to get away from the bigger resort hotels. Their accommodations consist of a series of little houses, studios, and apartments. A typical studio comes with one queen-size bed, a kitchen, a porch with tables and chairs, and a small garden with hammock and sun bed. Rooms are well furnished and have small bathrooms with showers. Even

though each of the accommodations is self-sufficient, there are public areas, including a terrace for sunning, a pool, and a bar for guests only. The only TV is at the bar.

Kaya Statius van Eps 9, Belnem, Bonaire, N.A. ✆ **599/717-2108.** Fax 599/717-8193. www.cocopalmgarden.com. 23 units. $66–$76 studio; $76–$86 1-bedroom; $96 2-bedroom house; $116 4-bedroom house year-round. Extra person $16. Children 11 and under $10 extra in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Buffet restaurant (Mon and Thurs only); bar; babysitting; free Wi-Fi; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, kitchen, no phone.

Eden Beach Resort ★ (Kids) Located directly on one of Bonaire's nicer beaches, this tiny resort provides all the essentials and more at a price that's right. The clean and spacious rooms, studios, and apartments feature simple decor; tile floors; a functional, well-equipped kitchen; and plenty of comfort. Most units have their own private porch or terrace and are only steps away from the beach, pool, patio, restaurant, and bar. A dive shop is located on the premises, and an activity center offers bike, kayak, and windsurf rentals.

Kaya Gobernador Nicolaas Debrot 73. ✆ **599/717-6720.** Fax 599/717-6710. www.edenbeach.com. 46 units. Apr 16–Dec 14 $130 studio, $140 1-bedroom, $220 2-bedroom; Dec 15–Apr 15 $140 studio, $150 1-bedroom, $220 2-bedroom. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; fitness center; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

Hotel Rochaline Located in the heart of town and attached to the popular City Café, the Rochaline is Bonaire's take on an urban backpacker/youth hostel. (The name is a merging of the names of the owners' four children.) The rooms upstairs are sparse but clean. Noise from festivities below can be an issue, so bring earplugs if you are a light sleeper.

Kaya Grandi 7. ✆ **599/717-8286** or 599/717-8286. Fax 599/717-6060. www.hotelrochaline.com. 17 units. Year-round $60 single; $69 double. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV.

3 WHERE TO DINE

EXPENSIVE

La Guernica Fish and Tapas ★ TAPAS In a 150-year-old building, this chic corner restaurant and lounge bar serves the island's finest tapas. The interior is decorated like a hacienda in Mexico, with tiles and artifacts, and outdoor seating overlooks the harbor. La Guernica specializes in seafood, so the best bets are the fried calamari—which makes for a good appetizer or main course—the coconut shrimp with ginger sauce, or the fresh tuna sashimi. There's also a selection of appetizers with an Italian flair.

Kaya Bonaire 4C. ✆ **599/717-5022.** www.laguernica.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–5pm and 6–11pm.

Tips Eating Responsibly in Bonaire

Due to the decline of local species, many restaurants have made a choice to stop serving Caribbean lobster and conch. It's also recommended that reef fish (such as grouper, snapper, and grunt) be avoided, even if the server tells you it's okay. Tasty, fresh, and eco-friendly alternatives are pelagic species that live out in open water, such as dorado, wahoo, and barracuda. If seafood isn't your game, don't be afraid to try some local goat cheese or goat stew; while cute, goats are abundant!

Mona Lisa ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL A local favorite on the main street of town, this is one of the best places for food that tastes homemade. The prices are more than reasonable, considering the quality of the food and the generous portions. Although many regulars come just to patronize the Dutch bar and catch up on the latest gossip, the old-fashioned dining room deserves serious attention. Guests enjoy the fresh fish of the day (often wahoo) or such meat dishes as a rack of lamb and sirloin steak. The most popular appetizers are onion soup and the shrimp cocktail. Mona Lisa is known for serving fresh vegetables on an island where nearly everything is imported.

Kaya Grandi 15. ✆ **599/717-8718.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$32. AE, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Fri 6–10pm. Bar Mon–Fri 4pm–2am.

Sunset Bar and Grill SEAFOOD Located next to the Sand Dollar Condominium Resort, the tables are set on a breezy terrace where you can watch the waves hit the small beach or watch the ethereal underwater glow as night divers emerge from the sea with their powerful lamps. The restaurant is relatively new, but its owner is a veteran restaurateur on island and makes it his goal to serve some of the freshest seafood in Bonaire. In addition to seafood and meat, there are vegetarian options. The local goat-cheese fritters will make you thank those pesky critters, and the beef carpaccio is top notch. Follow with a trio of seafood brochette in smoked tomato and crab butter sauce, or fresh tuna steak prepared to order (try it blackened for a spicy option). Select from their extensive wine list that includes bottles from almost every continent. Cheesecake topped with passion fruit coulis ends the meal on a tangy note.

Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 77, Kralendijk. ✆ **599/788-2698.** Main courses $17–$31. DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–3pm and 5–10pm.

MODERATE

The Lion's Den Beach Bar and Restaurant INTERNATIONAL This outdoor restaurant has cornered the market in great views. Radiating out from a central bar, and one story up, you can enjoy both the sea and the stars as you dine. The grilled shrimp and asparagus in lemon butter sauce is a rich yet tasty starter, while the Bombay duo of shrimp and scallops is served in a sweet and very creamy curry sauce over a heaping bowl of pasta. The grilled fish with delicious homemade pesto is served with roasted root vegetables that are surprisingly light and flavorful. The Key lime pie is creamier than most and not too tart.

Kaya Gobnador Debrot 77 at Buddy Dive Resort ✆ **599/788-2698.** Main courses $9–$31. DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–10pm.

Rum Runners ★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD This casual waterfront restaurant has a breezy yet intimate feel and sits above the water, which happens to be inhabited by a pack of skulking tarpon. Their pizza is said to be the best on the island. As a starter, try the calamari or beef yakitori. Seafood lovers should sample the shrimp and scallop skewers served with beurre blanc. The filet mignon with a red wine sauce with strong nutmeg overtones gets rave reviews from carnivores. Save room for the heavenly *fiesta de fruitas:* Bavaros crème topped with strawberry coulis, bathed in a melon soup and garnished with a fresh fruit kebab.

At Captain Don's Habitat. ✆ **599/717-8290** or 599/717-7303. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10am, 11:30am–2pm, and 5:30–10pm.

Zeezicht Restaurant INTERNATIONAL This is the best place in the capital to see the sunset. Join the old salts to watch the sun go down, and look out for the "green flash"

just after the sun sets that Hemingway wrote about. Zeezicht (pronounced *Zay*-zict, meaning "sea view") has long been popular for its local cooking. It has an extensive menu that includes fresh fish from the nearby market, plus burgers and steak. The restaurant runs an adjacent bistro that serves Asian and Mexican food.

Kaya J. N. E. Craane 12. ✆ **599/717-8434.** Main courses $10–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Bistro De Paris FRENCH This tiny roadside restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating has a casual European feel. The main courses add a healthy twist to traditional French recipes, with plenty of vegetarian options. Try the fish with artichoke and roasted tomatoes, or the rib-eye steak with sun-dried tomatoes. The apple tarte tatin, with caramelized sugar and served a la mode, is exquisite.

Kaya Gob N. Debrot 46. ✆ **599/717-7070.** www.bistrodeparis.com. Main courses $16–$22. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm and 6–10pm; Sat 6–10pm.

Le Flamboyant INTERNATIONAL After an arduous afternoon of shopping, duck into this eclectic storefront boutique in an old house to uncover the hidden gem of a restaurant at the back. The airy outdoor patio with casual tables is the perfect spot for a tasty bite or a full-on meal, while flamboyant reds and oranges adorn the interior. The chef has a flair for originality and likes to keep the menu fresh, both literally and figuratively. A number of well-prepared international dishes, including meat and chicken, are also on the menu, depending on what's best in any season and the shopping at the market that day. The sumptuous desserts, sometimes including sorbets and ices, are made fresh daily.

Kaya Grand 12. ✆ **599/717-3919.** www.flamboyantbonaire.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$23. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 6–10pm.

4 BONAIRE'S BEACHES

For the most part, the beaches in Bonaire are full of coral and feel gritty to bare feet. Those on the leeward side (the more tranquil side of the island) are often narrow strips. To compensate, some hotels have shipped in extra sand for their guests.

Bonaire's offshore island, tiny, uninhabited **Klein Bonaire** ★★, just 1.5km (1 mile) offshore, has some pristine beaches. Popular for snorkeling, scuba diving, and picnicking, **No Name Beach,** on the north side of Klein Bonaire, features a 273m (895-ft.) white-sand beach. Snorkelers can see a rainbow of colorful fish darting through stunning formations of elkhorn coral. Accessible only by boat, Klein Bonaire is home to sea turtles and other spectacular marine life. Ask at your hotel if arrangements can be made for a trip to the island.

Playa Funchi, within Washington Slagbaai National Park, is good for snorkeling. Regrettably, it has almost no sand and no facilities, and the area surrounding the beach is a bit smelly. On one side of the beach, there's a lagoon where flamingos nest; the other side is good for snorkeling. Also within the park, the more appealing **Boca Slagbaai** ★ is picturesque and draws swimmers, snorkelers, and picnickers. You can spot flamingos nearby. A 19th-century building has decent toilets and a small bar and restaurant. Don't venture into the waters barefoot, as the coral beach can be quite rough. A final beach at the national park is **Boca Cocolishi,** a black-sand strip on the northern coast. This is the

windiest beach on Bonaire; you'll certainly stay cool as the trade winds whip the surf up. The waters are too rough for swimming, but it's a good picnic spot.

Many of Bonaire's beaches are along the east coast. The best spot for windsurfers and a favorite for locals and for families with children is **Lac Bay Beach,** on the southern shore of Lac Bay and adjacent **Sourbon.** There are mangroves at the north end of the bay. A couple of windsurfing concessions usually operate here, and food and drink are readily available. One unusual spot is **Nukove Beach,** a minicave in a limestone cliff with a small white-sand channel, which cuts through the dense wall of elkhorn coral near the shore, giving divers and snorkelers easy access to the water. Farther north is **1,000 Steps Beach,** where 67 steps (although it can feel like 1,000 on the way back up) carved out of the limestone cliff lead to a white-sand beach. This beach offers good snorkeling and diving, a unique location and view, and nearly perfect solitude.

5 DIVING & SNORKELING ★★★

Much of Bonaire's allure is based on its teeming offshore reefs and dive sites. Its true beauty is under the sea, where visibility is 30m (98 ft.) 365 days of the year, and the water temperatures range from 78°F to 82°F (26°C–28°C). One of the richest reef communities in the entire West Indies, Bonaire has plunging walls that descend to a sand bottom at 40m (131 ft.) or so. The reefs are home to various coral formations that grow at different depths, ranging from the knobby brain coral at .9m (3 ft.), to staghorn and elkhorn up to about 3m (10 ft.) deeper, and gorgonians, giant brain, and others. Swarms of rainbow-hued tropical fish inhabit the reefs, and the deep reef slope is home to a range of basket sponges, groupers, and moray eels. Most of the diving is done on the leeward side, where the ocean is calm and usually flat. There are more than 40 dive sites on sharply sloping reefs. Divers from around the world leave with a sense of awe about how good the diving really is.

Bonaire Marine Park ★★ was created to protect the coral-reef ecosystem off Bonaire. The park incorporates the entire coastline of Bonaire and neighboring **Klein Bonaire.** The park is policed, and services and facilities include a visitor information center at the **Karpata Ecological Center,** lectures, slide presentations, films, and permanent dive-site moorings.

Visitors are asked to respect the marine environment and to refrain from activities that may damage it, including sitting or walking on the coral. Even a thin layer of silt can prove fatal to these delicate colonial marine animals that make up the fragile living

Fun Facts The Hooker

The waters off the coast of Bonaire received an additional attraction in 1984: A rust-bottomed 24m-long (79-ft.) general cargo ship was confiscated by the police, along with its contraband cargo, about 25,000 pounds of marijuana. Known as the ***Hilma Hooker*** (familiarly dubbed The *Hooker* by everyone on the island), it sank unclaimed (obviously) and without fanfare one calm day, in 27m (89 ft.) of water. Lying just off the southern shore near the capital, its wreck is now a popular dive site.

surface of the coral formations. Because these ecosystems are so fragile, all marine life in and around Bonaire is completely protected. This means no fishing or collecting fish, shells, or corals—dead or alive. Feeding the fish is also illegal, not to mention unhealthy for the fish. Spearfishing is forbidden, as is anchoring; all craft must use permanent moorings, except for emergency stops. (Boats shorter than 3.9m/13 ft. may use a stone anchor.) Most recreational activity in the marine park takes place on the island's leeward side and among the reefs surrounding Klein Bonaire. Due to safety regulations in a post–September 11 era, diving or snorkeling near any commercial piers requires an additional permit from the harbor master. (In other words, you really should go elsewhere, or hire a guide.)

Because protecting nature is taken seriously, all divers, snorkelers, windsurfers, and swimmers are required to pay a **nature fee** of $10 to $25. Tags are good for 1 calendar year and also permit admission into Washington Slagbaai National Park. A 1-day pass can also be purchased for $10 for divers and $2 for nondivers. Nondivers under 12 and residents of the Netherlands are exempt. Tags can be purchased at all dive shops, as well as the Tourism Office at Kaya Grandi 2. An orientation dive is required for all divers. For more information, contact **STINAPA Bonaire** (✆ **599/717-8444;** www.stinapa.org).

The major hotels offer personalized, close-up encounters with the island's fish and other marine life under the expertise of Bonaire's dive guides. **Divi Dive Bonaire,** on the beachfront of the Divi Flamingo Beach Resort & Casino, J. A. Abraham Boulevard, north of Kralendijk (✆ **800/367-3484** in the U.S., or 599/717-8285; www.diviflamingo.com), is among the island's most complete scuba facilities. It's open daily from 8am to 5pm. It operates out of a well-stocked beachfront building, renting diving equipment and offering expeditions. A resort course for first-time divers costs $80; for experienced divers, a one-tank dive goes for $42, a two-tank dive for $62.

Captain Don's Habitat Dive Shop, Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 103 (✆ **599/717-8290;** www.habitatdiveresorts.com), is a PADI five-star training facility. The open-air, full-service dive shop includes a classroom, photo/video lab, camera-rental facility, equipment repair, and compressor rooms. Habitat's slogan is "Diving Freedom": Divers can take their tanks and dive anywhere, day or night. Most head for The Pike, .8km (1/2 mile) of protected reef right in front of the property. The highly qualified staff is here to assist and advise, but not to police or dictate dive plans. Diving packages include boat dives, unlimited offshore diving (24-hr. a day), unlimited air tanks, weights, and belts. Some dive packages also include accommodations and meals (p. 157). If you're not staying at the hotel as part of a dive package, you can visit for a beach dive, costing $26. A boat dive, not including equipment, goes for $49.

Bonaire Dive and Adventure, adjacent to the Sand Dollar Condominium Retreat, Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot (✆ **599/717-2229;** www.bonairediveandadventure.com), is open daily from 8:30am to 4:30pm. It offers dive packages, PADI and SSI instruction, and equipment rental and repairs; boat and shore trips with an instructor are available by appointment. A beginning course, including two dives, costs $105 per person. The photo shop offers underwater photo and video shoots, PADI specialty courses by appointment, E-6 slide processing, print developing, and equipment rental and repair.

If you are an experienced diver and have training doing reef clean-ups, you can participate in a clean-up dive through **Bonaire Marine Park** (✆ **599/717-8444;** www.bmp.org). You must send an email to **marinepark@stinapa.org** to make special arrangements. Additionally, every few months, **Dive Friends Bonaire** (✆ **599/717-2929;** www.dive-friends-bonaire.com), together with NetTech NV, organizes clean-up dives. If the

timing is wrong and you still want to "do your part" for the reef, check out **REEF,** the **Reef Environmental Education Foundation** (www.reef.org), a volunteer monitoring program where divers can log in and add their fish sightings to a global database used by scientists to monitor populations.

Bonaire's coral reefs are also an underwater paradise for snorkelers. They start in just inches of water and, therefore, have dense coral formations in very shallow surf. Most snorkeling on the island is conducted in 5m (16 ft.) of water or less, and there's plenty to see even at this depth. As you travel around the island, particularly in the northern area, you'll see evidence of prehistoric reefs now 12 to 30m (39–98 ft.) above sea level, having lived submerged for hundreds of thousands of years and then uplifted as the island slowly rose.

Snorkeling equipment can be rented at the **Bonaire Dive and Adventure,** Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot (✆ **599/717-2229;** www.bonairediveandadventure.com); and **Captain Don's Habitat Dive Shop,** Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 103 (✆ **599/717-8290**). A full day's rental of mask, fins, and snorkel costs $10. Most snorkelers swim out to reefs from points directly offshore, but most of the dive operators will also allow snorkelers to ride out to dive sites with scuba divers for $12, plus the equipment rental cost. For those who want to try something different, **Outdoor Bonaire** ★ (✆ **599/791-6272** or 599/785-6272; www.outdoorbonaire.com) offers cave snorkeling, which combines rock climbing and spelunking with exploration of small subterranean pools.

For a relaxing morning or afternoon sail and snorkel trip, board the ***Woodwind*** (✆ **599/786-7055;** www.woodwindbonaire.com). For $40 per person, the 3-hour trip includes snorkel gear and nonalcoholic beverages. Or try **Pirate Cruises** (✆ **599/780-9933**) with Captain Mike, aboard a 17m (56-ft.) privateer ship that offers half-day sail and snorkel trips, as well as sunset or dinner cruises daily. If you are eager to finally see a wild turtle, he offers a turtle lover's snorkel trip aboard an 11m (36-ft.) dive boat to some of the best sites for turtle encounters. All trips leave from Karel's Beach Bar Pier downtown on the waterfront, and reservations can be made at Zeezicht Restaurant across the street.

Tips Sea Turtle Etiquette

Sea turtles are some of the most highly endangered species in the oceans, and catching even a passing glimpse is a magical experience, so some basics apply if or when you encounter a sea turtle. When you first spot one, resist the urge to move in and get a closer look; you will only scare it off and ruin the opportunity for others to see it. Instead, stay still and watch at a respectful distance as it goes about its business or glides along gracefully. Keep an eye out for identification tags on their flippers or shells, a sure sign these creatures are being closely studied and well protected. It goes without saying, but never approach a turtle or its nest, and never touch or try to touch one—for your safety and theirs. While it seems harmless, it is, in fact, quite stressful for the turtles. (How'd you like to be chased around by strangers all day?) And of course, if someone offers you sea turtle shell or meat products, just say no; then immediately contact the number below to file a report.

To learn more about the sea turtles or to learn about current conservation action and how you can participate, contact **Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire** (✆ **599/717-2225;** www.bonaireturtles.org).

6 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Bonaire is most striking underwater, but the sailing and birding are great, too.

BIRD-WATCHING Bonaire is home to about 200 species of birds, 80 of which are indigenous to the island. Most famous are its flamingos, which can number 15,000 during the mating season. For great places to bring your binoculars, see "Exploring the Island," below. **Bonaire Dive & Adventure,** Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 77 (✆ **599/717-2227**), offers expertly guided trips to Washington Slagbaai National Park's bird havens for $45.

FISHING Bonaire's offshore fishing grounds have some of the best fishing in the Caribbean, and the Bonaire Marine Park allows line fishing. A good day's catch might include mackerel, tuna, wahoo, dolphin (mahimahi), blue marlin, amberjack, grouper, sailfish, or snapper. Bonaire is also one of the best-kept secrets of bonefishing enthusiasts, a challenging style of fishing that is strictly catch and release—given global decline of fishing stocks, a far preferable option for fish and humans alike.

Your best bet is Chris Morkos of **Piscatur Fishing Supplies,** Kaya Herman 4, Playa Pabao (✆ **599/717-8774;** www.piscatur.com). A native Bonairean, he has been fishing all his life. A half-day deep-sea or reef charter (up to 5 hr.) with up to six people runs $400, a three-quarter day (6 ½ hr.) is $475, and a full day (8 hr.) is $550. A half-day wading trip is $250 for one or two people up to 4 hours, and $300 for a half-day shore trip up to 5 hours with three people. If your group has more than six people, they can be added for $25 each. Strict regulations on fishing and size limits, as well as high levels of concern about the reef fish, mean that catch-and-release may be the best way to go, even if your guide says otherwise.

HIKING **Washington Slagbaai National Park** (see "Exploring the Island," below) has a varied terrain; those ambitious enough to climb some of its steep hills are rewarded with panoramic views. The hiking possibilities are seemingly endless. Small hidden beaches with crashing waters by the cliffs provide ideal spots for picnics. After going on patrol with a ranger, we could see that this is a big park, and it's surprisingly easy to get lost, injured, or dehydrated, so it may be best for beginners to go with a guide. **Outdoor Bonaire** (✆ **599/791-6272;** www.outdoorbonaire.com) can arrange hiking, free climbing, and overnight camping adventures in the National Park.

KITEBOARDING This relatively extreme sport combines windsurfing with kite flying and allows boarders to sail, leap, and flip along the water's surface. On Atlantis Beach, at the southern end of the island, **Kiteboarding Bonaire** (✆ **599/701-5483;** www.kiteboardingbonaire.com) helps beginners get started with 3-hour intro lessons or multiday packages. Those who've already taken an intro course and received a certification are allowed to rent equipment and go it alone.

LANDSAILING ★ With less than 5 minutes of instruction and even less experience, you can be cruising at top speed around the largest landsailing track in the world. This fun sport requires little knowledge of sailing and just a rudimentary understanding of physics. Let the natural trade winds speed you along an .8m (½-mile) oval track. **Landsailing Bonaire** (✆ **599/786-8122** or 599/717-8122; www.landsailingbonaire.com) can be found on the road to Rincón. An hour rental plus a 15-minute lesson will cost $50, or $35 for a half-hour.

MOUNTAIN BIKING Biking is an ideal way to see Bonaire's hidden beauty; you can explore more than 300km (186 miles) of trails and dirt roads, venturing off the beaten path to enjoy the scenery. Ask at the tourist office for a trail map that outlines the most scenic routes. You can check with your hotel about arranging a trip, or call **Bonaire Wellness Connexions** (✆ **599/785-0767;** www.bonairewellness.com), which offers guided bike excursions for every skill and endurance level, from the leisurely pedal-pusher to the grit-in-your-teeth, mud-splattered enthusiast. **Outdoor Bonaire** (✆ **599/791-6272** or 599/785-6272; www.outdoorbonaire.com) also offers cross-island bike excursions for $65. Mountain bikes can also be rented from a number of other locations, including **The Bike Shop** (✆ **599/560-7000**) and **Buddy Dive Resort** (✆ **599/717-5080;** www.buddydive.com), which has mountain-bike rentals for $15 and mountain-bike tours for $40. Mountain bikes can also be rented at the entrance of Washington Slagbaai National Park, though you must arrive before noon, place a $100 retainer on your credit card, and return before 5pm. The bikes rent for $20 per day.

KAYAKING Paddle the protected waters of Lac Bay, or head for the miles of flats and mangroves in the south (the island's nursery), where you can see baby fish and wildlife. Kayak rentals are available at **Jibe City,** Lac Bay (✆ **599/717-5233;** www.jibecity.com), for $45 per half-day or $65 for a full day. One-man kayaks rent by the hour for $10, double kayaks are $15 per hour, and stand-up paddle boards are $15 per hour. A half-day guided tour through the mangroves can be arranged through **Mangrove Info and Kayak Center** (✆ **599/780-5353;** www.mangrovecenter.com). A 1-hour tour is $25, and a 2-hour tour costs $45. For those who are not able to kayak but still want to see the ecosystem, they give tours on a solar-powered boat for $23 per hour. They're closed on Sundays. **Outdoor Bonaire** (✆ **599/791-6272;** www.outdoorbonaire.com) runs guided kayak tours through the mangroves or out to Klein Bonaire for $50 per person. They can even do a night kayak or custom-build a tour for your specific interests. The owner, Hans, will even take you kayaking out to Klein Bonaire, but it's farther than it looks, so be prepared for a workout if you go.

WINDSURFING Lac Bay's consistent conditions and shallow, calm waters are suitable for windsurfers with a wide range of skill levels. **Jibe City** (✆ **599/717-5233;** www.jibecity.com) and **Bonaire Windsurf Place** (✆ **599/717-2288;** www.bonairewindsurfplace.com) rent equipment; boards and sails are $45 for a half-day, $60 for a full day. Beginner lessons at 9:30 and 11am, and 2 and 3:30pm, are $50 each, including equipment. Packages are available.

7 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Bonaire Tours and Vacations (✆ **599/717-8778;** www.bonairetours.com) will show you the island, both north and south, taking in the flamingos, slave huts, conch shells, Goto Lake, the Amerindian inscriptions, and other sights. You can take a half-day City and Country Tour, lasting 3 hours and costing from $28 per person, which allows you to see the entire northern section and the southern part as far as the slave huts.

KRALENDIJK

Because Bonaire has always been off the beaten track, highlights are modest and few. You can walk the length of sleepy Kralendijk—the name translates literally into "dyke made

Fun Facts Name That Street Theme

As you meander along, read the street signs and try to figure out their theme. Each town will designate a certain theme (musical instruments, women's names, gemstones, fish, and so on). This makes it easy to figure out someone's location if you know only their street address!

of coral"—in less than half an hour. Stroll along the seafront, with its views and restaurants, and along Kaya Grandi, the major shopping district. Just south of the town square, tiny Fort Oranje boasts a cannon dating from the time of Napoleon. The town has some charming Dutch Caribbean architecture—gabled roofs painted ochre and terra cotta. If you've got a yen for fruit, visit the waterfront food market.

Bonaire's miniscule **Fort Oranje** takes more time to find than to explore, but provides a pleasant diversion. The tiny fort—Bonaire's oldest building—is quaint and makes for a pleasant walking destination.

A 10-minute walk away, the **Museo Boneriano (Bonaire Museum),** at Kaya J. v/d Ree 7 (✆ **599/717-8868**), displays a haphazard collection of shells from local species, excavated human remains from a Caicetto burial site, and various antiques and artifacts of European settlement that offer clues into the island's colonial history. With few signs to make sense of the collection, a guided tour is recommended. It's open weekdays 8am to noon and 2 to 4:30 or 5pm. Admission is $1.50 for adults and $1 for children.

THE TOUR NORTH

The road north is one of the most beautiful stretches in the Antilles, with turquoise waters on your left and coral cliffs on your right. You can stop at several points along this road, where there are paved paths for strolling or bicycling.

Starting in 2010, there are plans to erect giant white windmills to harness the abundant wind power and reduce dependency on oil, which is currently imported via massive oil tankers from Venezuela. The long-term goal is to reduce dependence on fossil fuels by as much as 80%, which may impact some of the island's scenic vistas but will be a net gain for this eco-friendly island.

After leaving Kralendijk and passing the Sunset Beach Hotel and the desalination plant, you'll come to **Radio Nederland Wereld Omroep (Dutch World Radio).** It's a 13-tower 300,000-watter. Opposite the transmitting station is a lovers' promenade. Built by nature, it's an ideal spot for a picnic.

Continuing, you'll pass the storage tanks of the Bonaire Petroleum Corporation and the road heading to **Goto Meer,** the island's inland sector with a saltwater lake. Several flamingos prefer this spot to the salt flats in the south.

Just north of Kralendijk, **Barcadera** is an old cave once used to trap goats. Take the stone steps down to the cave and examine the stalactites. Farther north, just past the Radio Nederland towers, **1,000 Steps Beach** offers picturesque coves, a craggy coastline, and tropical waters of changing hues.

Bonaire's oldest village is **Rincón.** Slaves who used to work in the salt flats in the south once lived here. Today the quiet village is home to Bonaire's oldest church, the **Rincón Ice Cream Parlour** (which makes homemade ice cream in a variety of interesting flavors), and a couple of very local bars. Above the bright roofs of the village is the crest of

a hill called **Para Mira,** which means "stop and look." If you're hungry, stop for a traditional lunch of *stoba* (stew) and *funchi* (polenta), or slimy but tasty cactus soup at the famous **Rose Inn,** Kaya Buyaba 4 (✆ **599/717-6420**). It's open from Thursday to Monday noon till 6pm.

A side path outside Rincón takes you to some **Arawak inscriptions** supposedly 500 years old. The petroglyph designs are in pink-red dye. At nearby **Boca Onima,** you'll find craggy grottoes of coral. You can also take a short bypass to **Seroe Largu,** which has a good view of Kralendijk and the sea. Lovers frequent this spot at night. Stop at the home of **Sherman Gibbs,** Kaminda Tras di Montaña. Sherman combines plastic bottles, boat motors, buoys, car seats, and just about everything to create an "outsider's" art exhibit worth a brief gander. How exactly did he get that motorcycle onto the top of that enormous cactus anyway?

On the outskirts of Rincón, a large white building marks the spot of a new and not-to-be-missed highlight of any island tour. **Magazina di Rei** (✆ **599/786-2101**) translates as the "King's Warehouse" and is the second-oldest building on the island (the first is Fort Oranje back in town). Once used to store provisions for slaves, it has been restored and transformed into a small museum and cultural center that preserves and depicts the culture, history, architecture, and traditions of early Bonaire. Drop by for a tour guided by their friendly staff, then have a wander through the gardens, where re-creations of houses from different eras are on display. Local children learn traditional crafts, dances, and recipes from elders, so don't be surprised if you're offered some homemade tamarind juice or ice cold limeade and invited to try a few local dance steps. The center is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm.

WASHINGTON SLAGBAAI NATIONAL PARK ★★

Washington Slagbaai National Park (✆ **599/785-0017;** www.washingtonparkbonaire.org) has varied terrain that includes desertlike areas, secluded beaches, caverns, a visitor center, and a bird sanctuary. It's easy to find—just look for the yellow and green lizards painted on telephone polls along the road. They lead you to the park entrance. Occupying about 6,000 hectares (14,820 acres) of Bonaire's northwesternmost territory, the park was once plantation land, producing divi-divi, aloe, and charcoal; today it functions as a wildlife preserve. The reserve showcases Bonaire's geology, animals, and vegetation. Residents include 203 bird species, thousands of organ-pipe and prickly-pear cacti, endemic parrots, parakeets, flamingos, iguanas, and blue lizards. Feral goats and donkeys, left over from the colonial period, continue to roam the hills browsing voraciously on native and declining plant species, though the park is attempting to remove these invasive species over time.

You can see the park in a few hours, although it takes days to appreciate it fully. If you want to drive through the park, you must use a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Even so, you may want to reconsider going if it has rained recently, as the roads quickly become deeply mired in mud and difficult to navigate—even in a four-wheel-drive. There are two routes: a 24km (15-mile) "short" route, marked by green arrows, and a 35km (22-mile) "long" route, marked by yellow arrows. The roads are well marked and safe, but somewhat rugged, although improvements are ongoing. For those wanting a closer look, the hiking possibilities are nearly endless. The entrance fee is $10 for adults and $5 for children age 12 and under. Purchase of a **nature tag** (the mandatory pass costs $10 for all swimmers and $25 for divers) gets you complimentary entry into the park. The park is open daily except holidays from 8am to 5pm. You must enter before 2:45pm. Guide booklets, maps, and a small museum are at the gate. For those looking to leave the island just a tad tidier than it

was when they arrived, volunteer opportunities to paint, prune, and mend fences can be arranged by sending an email to **washingtonpark@stinapa.org**.

Whichever route you take, there are a few important stops you shouldn't miss. Just past the gate is **Salina Matijs,** a salt flat that's home to flamingos during the rainy season. Beyond the salt flat on the road to the right is **Boka Chikitu,** a white-sand beach and bay. A few miles up the beach lies **Boka Cocolishi,** a two-part black-sand beach. Many a couple has raved about their romantic memories of this beach, perfect for a secluded picnic. A ridge of calcareous algae separates its deep, rough seaward side and calm, shallow basin. The basin and the beach were formed by small pieces of coral and mollusk shells (*cocolishi* means "shells"), thus the black sand. The basin itself has no current, so it's perfect for snorkeling close to shore. **Boka Slagbaai** has a picturesque beach and positively charming restaurant where you can cool off with a bite, a beer, and a view of the ocean on one side and serene lake teeming with shore birds such as flamingos, egrets, and herons on the other.

The main road leads to **Boka Bartol,** a bay full of living and dead elkhorn coral, sea fans, and reef fish. A popular watering hole good for bird-watching is **Poos Mangel. Wajaca** is a remote reef, perfect for divers and home to the island's most exciting sea creatures, including turtles, octopus, and triggerfish. Immediately inland is **Mount Brandaris;** at 235m (771 ft.), it's Bonaire's highest peak. At its foot is **Bronswinkel Well,** a watering spot for pigeons and parakeets. About 200 species of birds live in the park, many with such exotic names as bananaquit and black-faced grassquit. Bonaire has few mammals, but you'll likely see a few goats and donkeys. If you encounter donkeys outside of the sanctuary or inside the park, remember that it's illegal to feed them and advisable to not approach or touch them, as they can be quite dangerous if frightened. Not touching is particularly important when encountering a colt whose mother is probably nearby watching, and who may abandon her young if your smell masks its natural odor, used to help mom recognize her baby.

THE TOUR SOUTH

Just south of Kralendijk, next to the airport down a dirt road, the **Donkey Sanctuary** ★ (✆ **599/560-7607;** www.bonairenature.com/donkey) is a sure bet for donkey spotting, and provides a safe haven for many of the island's 300 to 400 wild donkeys that previously roamed the entire island and fell victim to car accidents with increasing frequency. The park is open daily from 10am to 5pm. Drive-through closes at 4pm. Entrance fee is $6 for adults and $3 for children, but additional donations are welcomed, as are a volunteered hour or two helping to clean out a few stalls, or feed or brush these adorable orphans.

Heading south, you then come to the **salt flats** ★, where the brilliantly colored Caribbean pink flamingos live. Bonaire shelters the largest accessible nesting and breeding grounds in the world. The flamingos build high mud mounds to hold their eggs. The best time to see the birds is in spring, when they're nesting and tending their young. Slaves once worked the salt flats, and you can still see the pinkish pools where the salt is slowly extracted from the water, then piled in huge glistening white **salt pyramids** ready for export. The government has rebuilt some primitive **slave huts,** bare shelters little more than waist high. The slaves slept in these huts, and returned to their homes in Rincón in the north on weekends. The centuries-old salt pans have been reactivated by the International Salt Company. Near the salt pans, you'll see some 9m (30-ft.) obelisks in white, blue, and orange, built in 1838 to help mariners locate their proper anchorages.

Farther down the coast is the island's oldest lighthouse, **Willemstoren,** built in 1837. Still farther along, **Sorobon Beach, Lac Bay Beach,** and **Boka Cai** come into view. They're at landlocked Lac Bay, which is ideal for swimming and snorkeling. Conch shells are stacked up on the beach. The water here is so vivid and clear, you can see coral 20m to 36m (66–118 ft.) down in the reef-protected waters.

Hungry after your drive? Follow the signs heading back to town to **Maiky Snack** (✆ **599/786-0086** or 599/700-6785) for a local lunch under the shade of a divi-divi tree. The papaya and cucumber *stobas* (stews) with goat meat are served with rice or *funchi* (polenta), and the fresh fish of the day is topped with a sweet Creole sauce. It's open Friday to Wednesday for lunch from noon to 3pm.

8 SHOPPING

Aruba has more stores and better prices than Bonaire, but dive-related items such as dive watches, underwater cameras, and marine-themed jewelry are abundant. Most shops are in the Harborside Mall and on Kaya Grandi in Kralendijk. Most shops are open 9am to noon and 2 to 6pm. ***Tip:*** When a cruise ship is in harbor, shops stay open longer, and small stands selling local wares and affordable jewelry appear in the town square.

Benetton, Kaya Grandi 29 (✆ **599/717-5107**), claims to offer its brightly colored merchandise at prices about a quarter less than at most U.S. outlets.

Littman Jewelers, Kaya Grandi 33 (✆ **599/717-8160;** www.bonairelittmanstores.com), sells Tag Heuer dive watches and also carries exquisite jewelry. **Atlantis,** down the street at Kaya Grandi 32B (✆ **599/717-7730;** www.atlantisbonaire.com), has a similar selection of jewelry and watches.

Next door is **Littman's Anything Artistique,** selling standard and hand-painted T-shirts, plus sandals, hats, Gottex swimsuits, gift items, costume jewelry, and toys, as well as original glass and metal sculptures and plenty of casual jewelry.

Other stores you might want to visit include **Jewel of Bonaire,** 38 Kaya Grandi (✆ **599/717-8890**), which sells handmade marine-themed jewelry; and **Best Pearls Bonaire,** Kaya Grandi 32 (✆ **599/796-7451;** www.bestpearlsbonaire.com), which carries pearls, casual wear, and gifts. **Bamali,** Kaya Grandi 26A (✆ **599/717-4833**), sells men's and women's clothing, silver jewelry, and accessories imported from Indonesia, as well as buttery leather handbags and belts from South America.

9 BONAIRE AFTER DARK

Bonaire's nightlife is, for the most part, subdued and relaxed. Head out along the waterfront in Kralendijk and follow the small crowd to find the fun; then order the island's signature beer, Heineken Bright, or try a Polar, brewed in Venezuela.

To learn more about Bonaire's spectacular marine life, or just to meet fellow nature lovers and dive enthusiasts, ask about the slide and video shows given by local experts. They usually take place around 6:30pm about once a week, are commonly held at either **Captain Don's Habitat** or **Buddy Dive** (see above), and are free and open to the public. Look in the back of *Bonaire Nights* for dates, times, and locations.

Divi Flamingo Beach Resort & Casino, J. A. Abraham Boulevard (✆ 599/717-8285; www.divibonaire.com), has blackjack tables, roulette, poker, wheel of fortune,

Finds Boogie with Moogie

Local musician Moogie plays bongos while serenading the crowd with familiar favorites and original tunes. His sound is distinctive and he lends a fun, relaxed vibe to every venue. He plays during dinner on Wednesdays at **Cactus Blue** restaurant (✆ **599/717-4564;** www.cactusbluesbonaire.com) and Thursdays at **Rum Runners** (✆ 599/717-8290).

video games, and slot machines. Hours are Monday to Saturday from 8pm to 4am, and Sunday 7pm to 3am. If the slots don't inspire you, or you're overwhelmed by the smell of smoke, walk over to their beach bar and indulge in a glass of house wine.

Karel's Beach Bar and Cappuccino Bar, on the waterfront (✆ **599/717-8434**), perches above the sea on stilts. At press time, the cappuccino bar had been blown away by tropical storm Omar but was in the process of being rebuilt. Zeezicht's full menu (p. 160) is also available to patrons of Karel's, as Johan Visser owns both restaurants. You can sit at the long rectangular bar with many of the island's dive and boating professionals, or select a table near the balustrades overlooking the illuminated surf. Local bands entertain on Fridays, and a flat-screen TV is tuned to ESPN.

Down the road, **City Cafe,** Kaya Isla Riba 3 (no phone), remains the island's most popular casual hangout and is the place to see and be seen, whether you're a tourist, a local, or a resident American med student taking a well-earned study break.

Little Havana, Kaya Bonaire 4 (✆ **599/786-0717**), with its dark-wood furniture and Cuban feel, is another hotspot on the island's tiny nightlife scene. Live jazz on weekends and mellow jazz vinyl spun by a DJ during the week attract people to the indoor and outdoor tables just steps away from the waterfront.

To really get away from it all, try some romance on the high seas aboard the ***Samur*** (✆ **599/786-5592;** www.samursailing.com), an authentic Siamese junk that offers starlight evening sails with champagne, appetizers, or a full seven-course homemade Thai dinner. Charters leave from the pier in between the Sand Dollar Condominiums and Den Laman Restaurant at Kaya Gobernador N. Debrot 77.

8

The British Virgin Islands

Except for St. John, the U.S. Virgin Islands—notably S t. Thomas and, to a lesser extent, St. Croix—have lost their virginity. B ut the neighboring B ritish Virgin Islands (B.V.I.), with their small bays and hidden coves, remain relatively pristine.

Strung o ver the nor theastern corner of the Caribbean, about 100km (60 miles) east of Puerto Rico, the B.V.I. include some 50 islands (although that figur e includes small, uninhabited cays or spits of land). Only three are of any significant siz e: Tortola (which means "Dove of Peace"), Virgin Gorda ("Fat Virgin"), and Jost Van Dyke.

Don't worry about being crowded off the best beaches, as y ou might in S t. Thomas: The population of the B.V.I. is estimated to be ar ound 18,000, so ther e's plenty of room. There are predictions that mass tourism is on the way , but island planners suggest that may not happen until 2025.

Except for a few deluxe hotels on Virgin Gorda, the inns of the B.V.I. represent life the way the Caribbean used to be, befor e the adv ent of high-rise condos, M cDonald's, and fleets of cruise ships. If you want an array of shops, r estaurants, hotels, and nightlife, head for the U.S.V .I. But if you want an unhurried way of life, wher e you often pr ovide your own amusement, seek the peace and tranquillity of the B.V.I.

The v egetation is v aried and depends on the rainfall. I n some par ts, palms and mangos grow in pr ofusion, whereas other places are arid and studded with cactus.

Columbus came this way in 1493, but the B ritish Virgins appar ently made little impression on him. The English officially annexed Tortola in 1672, and today these islands remain a B ritish colony, with their own elected government.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Cane Garden Bay,** on the island of Tortola, the finest beach in the B.V.I., with white sands and sheltering palm tr ees, a cliché of Caribbean charm opening onto a yacht-filled bay.
- **The Baths of Virgin Gorda,** called the "S tonehenge of the B.V .I.," a fabled spot with massiv e boulders, cr eated fr om pr ehistoric v olcanic explosions that pushed these "giants" to the sur face of the Ear th. I t's also a gr eat spot for swimming and snorkeling.
- **Sailing the B.V.I.** Tortola is the charter-boat center of the Caribbean. From here you can set out on a sailing adv enture, following in the waters of S ir Francis Drake, to uninhabited islands once fr equented by "pirates of the Caribbean." Remote Norman Island, for example, is said to hav e been the inspiration for R obert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*: On Deadman's Bay, a rocky cay, Blackbeard marooned 15 pirates and a bottle of rum, which gave rise to the ditty.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you go, contact the **British Virgin Islands Tourist Board,** 1 W. 34th St., Ste. 303, New York, NY 10001 (✆ **800/835-8530** or 212/696-0400). O ther branches of the **British Virgin Islands Information Office** ar e located at 3450 Wilshire B lvd., S te. 1202, Los Angeles, CA 90010 (✆ **213/736-8931**); and at 1275 S hiloh Rd., Ste. 2930, Kennesaw, GA 30144 (✆ **770/874-5951**). In the United Kingdom, contact the **B.V.I. Information Office,** 15 Upper Grosvenor St., London W1K 7PJ (✆ **207/355-9585**).

The tourist board's official website is **www.bvitourism.com**.

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE **Beef Island,** the site of the major airpor t serving the B ritish Virgins, the Terrence B. Lettsome Terminal, is connected to Tortola by the one-lane **Queen Elizabeth Bridge.**

There are no nonstop flights fr om the U.S. to the B ritish Virgin Islands, but you can make connections fr om San Juan, Puerto Rico, and S t. Thomas to B eef Island/Tortola. (See chapters 17 and 27 for information on flying to these islands.)

Your best bet to r each Beef Island/Tortola is **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada or 284/495-2559; www.aa.com), which has dozens of flights to its hub in San Juan, and at least four daily trips fr om San Juan to Beef Island/Tortola.

Another choice, if you're on one of Tortola's neighboring islands, is the much less reliable **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www .liatairline.com). This Caribbean carrier makes the short hop to Tortola from Antigua and St. Maarten in small planes not known for their frequency or careful scheduling. Reservations are made through travel agents or through the larger U.S.-based airlines that connect with LIA T hubs.

Air Sunshine (✆ **800/327-8900** in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/495-8900; www . airsunshine.com) flies between San Juan or St. Thomas to Beef Island/Tortola and Virgin Gorda.

BY FERRY You can travel from Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, by public ferry to West End and Road Town on Tortola, a 45-minute voyage along Drake's Channel through the islands. O ne-way crossings range fr om $25 to $28, with r ound-trips costing fr om $49. Boats making this r un include **Native Son** (✆ **284/495-4617**) and **Smith's Ferry Service** (✆ **284/495-4495**). **In-Island Boat Services** (✆ **284/495-4166**) has routes from St. John to the West End on Tortola.

Fast Facts The British Virgin Islands

Banks Banks ar e generally open M onday t o Thursday 8am t o 3pm, F riday fr om 9am t o 5pm. M ost banks ha ve ATMs.

Currency The U.S. dollar is the legal curr ency in the B .V.I., much t o the surprise of British tra velers. *Prices in this chapter ar e quoted in U.S. dollars .*

Customs You can bring it ems int ended f or y our personal use int o the British Virgin Islands , but only in discr eet amounts . I n other w ords, y es t o a bottle of

perfume or ev en t wo, but no t o t wo suit cases filled with unopened frag rances. For r eturning U.S. r esidents, the dut y-free allo wance is only $800, pr oviding y ou have been out of the c ountry for 48 hours . You can send unsolicit ed g ifts home if they t otal less than $100 per da y to any single addr ess. You don't have to pay duty on it ems classified as handicraf ts, ar t, or antiques .

Electricity The elec trical curr ent is 110-v olt AC (60 c ycles), as in the Unit ed State s.

Emergencies Dial ✆ **999** in the ev ent of an emer gency.

Entry Requirements U.S. citiz ens and C anadians, plus others , need a valid pass- port.

Language The official language is English.

Liquor Laws Alcoholic bev erages can be sold an y da y of the w eek, including Sunday. You can ha ve an open c ontainer on the beach, but be car eful not t o litter, or y ou will be fined .

Mail Postal rates in the British Virgin Islands are 50¢ for either an airmail post card or a first- class airmail lett er (1/2 o z.) t o the Unit ed Stat es or C anada. The post office is in Road Town (✆ **284/495-2593**).

Maps The best map of the British Virgin Islands is published b y Vigilate and is sold at most bookst ores in Road Town.

Medical Assistanc e The B .V.I.'s major hospital is **Peebles Hospital** in Road Town (✆ **284/494-3497**) on Tortola; the island has mor e than a do zen doc tors. I f y ou need medical help , y our hot el will put y ou in t ouch with the islands 'medical staff.

Newspapers & Magazines The B.V.I. has no daily new spaper, but the *Island Sun,* published Wednesday and F riday, is a good sour ce of inf ormation on local ent er- tainment, as is the *BVI Beac on,* published on Thursday. *Standpoint* is another helpful publication that c omes out on M onday and Satur day.

Safety Crime is rar e here; in fac t, the British Virgin Islands ar e among the saf est places in the Caribbean. Still, you should take all the usual pr ecautions you would anywhere, and don 't lea ve it ems unatt ended on the beach.

Taxes There is no sales tax. A go vernment tax of 7% is imposed on all hot el rooms. A $20 depar ture tax is collected from everyone leaving by air, $5 for those departing by ferry, or $7 if depar ting by cruise ship .

Telephone You can call the British Virgins from the Unit ed State s by just dialing **1,** the area code **284,** and the number. From all public phones and from some hotels, you can ac cess **MCI** by dialing ✆ **800/888-8000.** You can r each **Sprint** at ✆ **800/877-4646** and **AT&T** at ✆ **800/225-5288.**

Time The islands operat e on A tlantic Standar d Time y ear-round. I n the peak winter season, when it 's 10am in the British Virgins, it's 9am on the U .S. East C oast (EST). Ho wever, when the U .S. goes on da ylight sa ving time , EST is the same as B.V.I. time .

Tipping & S ervice Charges Most hotels add on a 5% t o 15% ser vice charge; ask if it 's alr eady included when y ou're initially quot ed a pric e. A 10% ser vice charge is of ten (but not alwa ys) added on t o restaurant bills; y ou can lea ve another 5% if you thought the ser vice was unusually good . You usually don 't need t o tip taxi

Anegada
West End Point
Flamingo Pond Bird Sanctuary
Table Bay
Anegada Reef Hotel
The Settlement
Anegada is 16 miles north of Virgin Gorda
Airport
Beach
Ferry Route
Mountain
Shipwreck
0 3 mi
0 3 km
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Seal Dogs
Mosquito Island
Prickly Pear Island
Necker Island
North Sound
Eustatia Island
George Dog
Long Bay
Virgin Gorda
West Dog
Great Dog
Virgin Gorda Peak National Park
South Sound
Savannah Bay
The Valley (Spanish Town)
Virgin Gorda Airport
Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour
Trunk Bay
Spring Bay
The Baths
Devil's Bay National Park
Copper Mine Pt.
Fallen Jerusalem
Caribbean Sea
Ginger Island
Round Rock
Guana Island
Guana Island Club
Great Camanoe
Pusser's Marina Cay Resort
Scrub Island
Marina Cay
Long Bay
Beef Island
Little Camanoe
Long Bay East
Tortola
East End
Beef Island International Airport
Jost Van Dyke
Great Harbour
Sandy Ground
Little Jost Van Dyke
Little Harbour
Sandcastle Hotel
White Bay
Great Harbour
Brewers Bay
Trunk Bay
Cane Garden Bay
Apple Bay
Road Town
Long Bay West
Sage Mountain National Park
Smugglers Cove
Great Thatch Island
Little Thatch Island
West End
Frenchman's Cay
Channel
Drake
Sir Francis
Salt Island Passage
Deadman's Bay
Salt Island
Cooper Island
Peter Island
Peter Island Resort
The Rhone
US VIRGIN ISLANDS BORDER
To St. Thomas
St. John (U.S. Virgin Islands)
Flanagan Passage
Norman Island
PUERTO RICO
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
ATLANTIC OCEAN
LESSER ANTILLES
LEEWARD ISLANDS
ANGUILLA
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
MONTSERRAT
GUADELOUPE
DOMINICA
Caribbean Sea
0 100 mi

drivers, since most own their own cabs, but you can tip 10% if they've been unusually helpful.

Water The tap water in the British Virgin Islands is safe to drink.

Weather During the winter, temperatures in the British Virgin Islands range between 72°F and 82°F (22°C–28°C). September is the warmest month, with temperatures averaging 90°F (32°C). Temperatures rarely drop below 77°F (25°C) in winter or rise above 90°F (32°C) in summer.

2 TORTOLA ★★

Most visitors head to Virgin Gorda if they want to check into one of the posh, secluded inns and stay there, barely leaving the grounds. On Tortola, however, you have more shopping, restaurants, attractions, nightlife, and other diversions to occupy your time. Here you can sample more of the local life, ranging from visiting colorful markets to sailing. Tortola has one of the great beaches of the Caribbean, **Cane Garden Bay.** Here you also have a larger selection of accommodations from which to choose, with many at more moderate prices.

On the southern shore of this 62-sq.-km (24-sq.-mile) island is **Road Town,** the capital of the British Virgin Islands. It has the seat of Government House and other administrative buildings, but it feels more like a small village than a town. The landfill at Wickham's Cay, a 28-hectare (69-acre) town center development and marina in the harbor, has lured a massive yacht-chartering business here and has transformed the sleepy capital into more of a bustling center.

Rugged mountain peaks characterize the entire southern coast, including Road Town. On the northern coast are white-sand beaches, banana trees, mangos, and clusters of palms.

Close to Tortola's eastern end, **Beef Island** is the site of the main airport for passengers arriving in the British Virgins. The tiny island is connected to Tortola by the one-lane Queen Elizabeth Bridge, which the queen dedicated in 1966. On the north shore of Beef Island is Long Bay Beach.

ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION At **B.V.I. Tourist Board Office,** at the center of Road Town near the ferry dock (✆ **284/494-3134**), has information about hotels, restaurants, tours, and more. Pick up a copy of *The Welcome Tourist Guide,* which has a useful map of the island.

GETTING THERE Because Tortola is the gateway to the British Virgin Islands, the information on how to get here is covered in the above "Essentials" section.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** meet every arriving flight. Government regulations prohibit renting a car at the airport, so you'll have to take a taxi to your hotel. Fares are set by the government, and taxis are unmetered. The fare from the Beef Island airport to Road Town is $26 each for one to three passengers. A **taxi tour** lasting 2½ hours costs $65 to $85 for one to three people. To call a taxi in Road Town, dial ✆ **284/494-2322;** on Beef Island, call ✆ **284/495-1982.**

Cooper Island Beach Club 1
Lambert Beach Resort 4
Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas 2
Sebastian's on the Beach 3
The Sugar Mill 3
Airport
Beach
Mountain
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Caribbean Sea
Elizabeth Beach
Rough Point
Shark Bay
Larimers Bay
Cooper Bay
Trunk Bay
Rogue Bay Point
Josiah's Bay
Long Bay East
Trellis Bay
Brewers Bay
Mount Healthy National Park
Wesley Will
Parham Town
East End 4
Lambert Rd.
Beef Island Rd.
Beef Island
Beef Island Int'l Airport
Bluff Bay
Fat Hogs Bay
Fahia Hill
Skyworld
Belle Vue Rd.
Cane Garden Bay Rd.
Cane Garden Bay
Wickham's Cay
Buck Island
The Bluff
To Virgin Gorda
Joe's Hill Rd.
Baugher's Bay
Ridge Rd.
Road Town
Road Harbour
Blackburn Hwy.
Whelk Point
Paraquita Bay
Brandy Wine Bay
Carrot Bay
Apple Bay
Sage Mountain National Park
Hannah
Sea Cow Bay
Long Bay West
Belmont Point
Smugglers Cove
Long Bay 2
3
Sage Mountain 1,780 ft.
Nanny Cay
Zion Hill Rd
Steele Point
Soper's Holeo
Belmont Pond
1
West End
Freshwater Pond
Drake's Highway
To Jost Van Dyke
Little Thatch Island
Frenchman's Cay
Fort Recovery
To St. Thomas
To Peter Island
0
2 mi
0
2 km
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
Jost Van Dyke
Anegada
Virgin Gorda
Tortola
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO
ANGUILLA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
Caribbean Sea
0
100 mi

A handful of local companies and U.S.-based chains rent cars. **Itgo** (✆ **284/494-2639**) is located at 1 Wickham's Cay, Road Town; **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/494-3322; www.avis.com) maintains offices opposite police headquarters in Road Town; and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/495-4405; www.hertz.com) has offices outside Road Town, on the island's West End, near the ferryboat landing dock. Rental companies will usually deliver your car to your hotel. All three companies require a valid driver's license and a temporary B.V.I. driver's license, which the car-rental agency can sell you for $10; it's valid for 3 months. Because of the volume of tourism to Tortola, you should reserve a car in advance, especially in winter.

Remember: Drive on the left. Roads are pretty well paved, but they're often narrow, windy, and poorly lit, and they have few, if any, lines, so driving at night can be tricky. It's a good idea to take a taxi to that difficult-to-find beach, restaurant, or bar.

FAST FACTS The local **American Express** representative is Travel Plan, Waterfront Drive (✆ **284/494-4000**).

Local bank branches include the **Bank of Nova Scotia** (Scotia Bank), Wickham's Cay (✆ **284/494-2526**), or **First Caribbean National Bank,** Wickham's Cay (✆ **284/494-2171**), both near Road Town. There's also a branch of **First Bank** at Road Town on Wickham's Cay I (✆ **284/494-2662**). Each has its own ATM.

The best place for camera supplies on Tortola is **Bolos Department Store,** Wickham's Cay (✆ **284/494-2867**).

For dental emergencies, contact **Dental Surgery,** Stevens Corner in Road Town (✆ **284/494-3274**), behind the Skeleton Building and next to the *BVI Beacon,* the local newspaper.

Peebles Hospital, Porter Road, Road Town (✆ **284/494-3497**), has X-ray, emergency, and laboratory facilities. The best pharmacy is **Medicure Pharmacy,** Road Town (✆ **284/494-6189**).

The main **police headquarters** is on Waterfront Drive near the ferry docks on Sir Olva Georges Plaza, with a branch office in Road Town in the town center (✆ **284/494-3822**).

WHERE TO STAY

None of the island's hotels is as big or splashy as the hotels in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and that's just fine with most of Tortola's repeat visitors. All rates are subject to between a 10% and 16% service charge, depending on the hotel, and a 7% government tax on the room.

Very Expensive

Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas ★ This resort lies on a 2km-long (1 1/4-mile) sandy beach. In a setting on the north shore, about 10 minutes from West End, it's the only full-service resort on the island, a low-rise complex set in a 21-hectare (52-acre) estate. Unfortunately, complaints about service and maintenance have marred its once-stellar reputation. The accommodations include hillside rooms and studios; the smallest and most basic have simple furnishings, while the deluxe beachfront rooms and cabanas are tastefully elegant. All rooms have either balconies or patios overlooking the ocean. The resort also offers two- and three-bedroom villas complete with a kitchen, living area, and large deck with a gas grill.

P.O. Box 433, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **866/237-3491** in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/495-4252. Fax 284/495-4677. www.longbay.com. 156 units. Winter $250–$350 double, $395 junior suite, $610–$900 2-bedroom villa; off season $195–$265 double, $345 junior suite, $475–$730 2-bedroom villa. AE, DISC,

MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; health club; outdoor pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen (in villas), Wi-Fi (in some).

The Sugar Mill ★ Set in a lush tropical garden on the site of a 300-year-old sugar mill on the north side of Tortola, this secluded cottage colony sweeps down the hillside to its own little beach, with vibrant flowers and fruits brightening the grounds. The accommodations are contemporary and well designed, ranging from suites and cottages to studios, all self-contained with kitchenettes and private terraces with views. Rooms have twin or king-size beds. Four units are suitable for families of four. The latest addition, the Plantation House suites, evokes traditional Caribbean architecture, with fine stonework, breezy porches, and lacy gingerbread. Just steps from the beach, a pair of two-bedroom air-conditioned suites has tropical decor and sea views.

Apple Bay (P.O. Box 425), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **800/462-8834** in the U.S., or 284/495-4355. Fax 284/495-4696. www.sugarmillhotel.com. 23 units. Winter $340 double, $380 triple, $395 quad, $695 2-bedroom villa; off season $255–$275 double, $305 triple, $330–$350 quad, $535–$585 2-bedroom villa. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $70 per person extra. AE, MC, V. Closed Aug–Sept. From Road Town, drive west 11km (6¾ miles), turn right (north) over Zion Hill, and turn right at the T-junction opposite Sebastian's; Sugar Mill is .8km (½ mile) down the road. Children 11 and under not accepted in winter. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; concierge; outdoor pool; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV (in villa and master suite), fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Lambert Beach Resort ★ Finds On the remote northeastern section of the island, this is the place for escapists who want isolation. Perched in an amphitheater sloping to the water, the resort opens onto a .8km (½-mile) beach of white sand set against a backdrop of palm trees. To reach the resort, you'll need to rent a car or take a taxi; it's about a 15-minute car ride from Road Town. Once here, you'll find some of the B.V.I.'s best white-sand cove beaches, along with a large swimming pool. Playground facilities for children make this a family favorite. The Mediterranean-style cottage cluster spreads across eight one-floor structures, each containing a combination of suites with a living room, veranda, and bedrooms. Bedrooms are spacious and feature sand-hued walls, stained wood, ceramic-tiled floors, and tropical motifs.

Lambert Bay, East End, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-2877.** Fax 284/495-2876. www.lambertresort.com. 38 units. Winter $176–$270 double, $270–$484 suite; off season $127–$170 double, $215–$330 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court; watersports equipment; reef fishing. *In room:* A/C.

Moderate

Cooper Island Beach Club ★ Finds This ultimate escapist's retreat is far from luxurious, but is the perfect place for those who want to experience simplicity. This one-of-a-kind hotel lies on a hilly island on the southern tier of the Sir Francis Drake Channel, about 8km (5 miles) south of Tortola. There are no roads, shopping centers, nightclubs, or other diversions on the island. The midsize units come with a bedroom and a kitchen, plus a balcony. The property is powered by a generator. Thus, lighting and ceiling fans are powered by 12-volt DC, and there is one 110-volt outlet in each room. The freshwater supply comes from rain and is stored in a cistern under each room. Each building uses a solar heater, and all toilets are flushed with sea water.

Manchioneel Bay, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **800/542-4624** or 413/863-3162 in the U.S., or 284/495-9084. Fax 413/863-3662. www.cooper-island.com. 11 units. Winter $220 double; off season $125–$155

 double. Extra person $25. No credit cards. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; watersports equipment/rental; dive shop. *In room:* Kitchenette, no phone.

Sebastian's on the Beach This hotel is at Little Apple Bay, about a 15-minute drive from Road Town, on a long beach that has some of the best surfing in the British Virgin Islands. The rooms are housed in three buildings, with only one on the beach. All come with Indonesian furniture and balconies or porches. Most sought after are the beachfront rooms, only steps from the surf; they have an airy tropical vibe, with tile floors, balconies, patios, and screened jalousies. The rear accommodations on the beach side are less desirable—not only do they lack views, but they're also subject to traffic noise. The dozen spartan rooms in the back of the main building lack views.

Little Apple Bay (P.O. Box 441), West End, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **800/336-4870** in the U.S., or 284/495-4212. Fax 284/495-4466. www.sebastiansbvi.com. 26 units. Winter $110–$275 double; off season $85–$145 double. Breakfast and dinner $45 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some), no phone (in some).

WHERE TO DINE

Lobster is becoming scarce in the B.V.I., and restaurants will serve it only during lobster "season"—November 1 to July 31.

Expensive

Brandywine Bay Restaurant ★★ ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL Set on a cobblestone garden terrace along the south shore overlooking Sir Francis Drake Channel, this is one of Tortola's most elegant, romantic restaurants. Davide Pugliese, the chef, and his wife, Cele, have earned a reputation for their outstanding Florentine fare. Davide changes his menu daily, based on the availability of fresh produce. The best dishes include beef carpaccio, roast duck, homemade pasta, his own special calf-liver dish (the recipe is a secret), and homemade mozzarella with fresh basil and tomatoes. The skillful cooking ranges from classic to inspired.

Brandywine Estate, Sir Francis Drake Hwy. ✆ **284/495-2301.** www.brandywinebay.com. Reservations required. Appropriate dress required. Main courses $25–$29. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–9:30pm. Closed Aug–Oct. Drive 5km (3 miles) east of Road Town (toward the airport) on South Shore Rd.

Le Cabanon FRENCH Islanders and visitors gather at this restaurant and bar to enjoy good French food on the outdoor patio. Delicious appetizers include Mediterranean fish soup with rouille, herring and potato salad, and Camembert flambé with Calvados. Much of the menu is classically inclined, including dishes such as snapper meunière. Especially tasty options include the almond-curried Madras chicken, the Chilean sea bass with wasabi sauce, and the yellowfin tuna in a soy and basil sauce. For dessert, finish off with a crème brûlée or the chocolate mousse, accurately billed as "heavenly" on the menu.

Waterfront Dr. ✆ **284/494-8660.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$34. MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 7–10pm.

Sugar Mill Restaurant ★ CALIFORNIA/CARIBBEAN Transformed from a 3-century-old sugar mill (p. 179), this is a romantic spot for dining. Colorful works by Haitian painters hang on the old stone walls, and big copper basins have been planted with tropical flowers. Before going to the dining room, once part of the old boiling house, visit the open-air bar on a deck that overlooks the sea. Your hosts, the Morgans, know a lot about food and wine. One of their most popular creations, published in *Bon Appétit,* is curried banana soup. You might also begin with the roasted-pepper salad or

the especially tasty wild-mushroom soup. For a main course, we recommend such dishes as pan-roasted duck breast served with Asian coleslaw and soba noodles, or grilled fresh fish with a pineapple-pepper salsa.

Apple Bay. ✆ **284/495-4355.** Reservations required. Main courses $26–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 8–10am, noon–2pm, and 7–9pm. Closed Aug–Sept. From Road Town, drive west 11k m (6¾ miles), turn right (north) over Zion Hill, and turn right at the T-junction opposite Sebastian's; Sugar Mill is .8k m (½ mile) down the road.

Moderate

Gourmet picnic, anyone? **Gourmet Chandler,** Nanny Cay (✆ **284/494-2894**), offers fabulous fixings, including cheeses, snacks, groceries, wines, beer, breads, and fine chocolates. It's open Monday to Saturday 7am to 8pm, Sunday 7am to 6pm.

Capriccio di Mare ★ ITALIAN Created in a moment of whimsy by the more upscale Brandywine Bay Restaurant (see above), this place is small, casual, laid back, and a local favorite. It's the most authentic-looking Italian cafe in the Virgin Islands. At breakfast time, many locals stop in for a refreshing Italian pastry and a cup of cappuccino, or else a full breakfast. If it's evening, you might try the mango Bellini, a variation of the famous cocktail served at Harry's Bar in Venice. Begin with such appetizers as *piedini* (flour tortillas with various toppings), then move on to fresh pastas with succulent sauces, the best pizza on the island (our favorite is the one topped with grilled eggplant), or even well-stuffed sandwiches. If you arrive on the right night, you might even be treated to stuffed Cornish hen with scalloped potatoes.

Waterfront Dr., Road Town. ✆ **284/494-5369.** Main courses $8–$18. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–9pm.

The Pub INTERNATIONAL This establishment is housed in a low-slung timbered building on a narrow strip of land between the coastal road and the southern edge of Road Town's harbor. It has a barnlike interior and a rambling veranda built on piers over the water. The pub attracts many of the island's yachties, as well as the local sports teams, who celebrate here after their games. More than 25 different kinds of beer are available. If you're here for a meal, some of the best options include Bahamian fritters, Caesar or Greek salads, pastas, four kinds of steaks, and burgers. Locals who frequent this place are especially fond of the chef's jerk chicken and his combo platter of spareribs, chicken, and fried shrimp. The chef also prepares a catch of the day. Happy hour brings discounted drinks daily from 5 to 7pm, and on Friday hot wings and raw vegetable platters are offered.

Fort Burt Marina, Harbour Rd. ✆ **284/494-2608.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$35. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6am–10pm.

Pusser's Landing CARIBBEAN This location in West End, which opens onto the water, is nicer than the original location on the waterfront across from the ferry dock. In this nautical setting, you can enjoy fresh grilled fish of the day cooked to your requirements. Begin with a hearty soup, perhaps pumpkin or freshly made seafood chowder. Many of the main courses, most of which are moderate in price, have real island flavor, the most justifiably popular being jerk chicken Jamaican style, or the grilled chicken breast with fresh pineapple salsa. A classic is the curried shrimp over rice. Mud pie remains the choice dessert here, but the Key lime pie and mango soufflé are also appealing. Happy hour is daily from 5 to 7pm.

Frenchman's Cay, West End. ✆ **284/495-4554.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

HITTING THE BEACH

Beaches are rarely crowded on Tortola unless a cruise ship is in port. You can rent a car or a jeep to reach them, or take a taxi (but arrange for a time to be picked up).

Tortola's finest beach is **Cane Garden Bay** ★★★, on Cane Garden Bay Road directly west of Road Town. You'll have to navigate some roller-coaster hills to get there, but these fine white sands with sheltering palm trees are among the most popular in the B.V.I., and the lovely bay is beloved by yachties. Outfitters here rent Hobie Cats, kayaks, and sailboards. Windsurfing is possible as well. This is one beach that may get crowded, especially during high season. There are several places to eat, along with a handful of bars. **Rhymer's** (✆ **284/495-4639**) is our favorite, dispensing cold beer and refreshing rum drinks. If you're hungry, try the conch or lobster, black-bean gazpacho, or barbecued spareribs. The beach bar and restaurant is open daily from 8am to 9pm. Ice and freshwater showers are available and you can rent towels. Ask about renting Sunfish sailboats and windsurfers next door.

Surfers like **Apple Bay,** west of Cane Garden Bay, along North Shore Road. The beach isn't very big, but that doesn't diminish activity when the surf's up. Conditions are best in January and February. After enjoying the white sands here, stop for a drink at Bomba's Surfside Shack, a classic dive of a beach bar at the water's edge (see "Tortola After Dark," below).

Smugglers Cove, known for its tranquillity and beautiful sands, lies at the extreme western end of Tortola, opposite the offshore island of Great Thatch and just north of St. John. It's a lovely crescent of white sand, with calm turquoise waters. A favorite local beach, it's at the end of bumpy Belmont Road. Once you get here, a little worse for wear, we think you'll agree that the crystal-clear water and the beautiful palm trees are worth the effort. Snorkelers like this beach, which is sometimes called Lower Belmont Bay. It's especially good for beginners, since the reef is close to shore and easily reached. You'll see parrotfish, sea fans, sponges, and elkhorn and brain corals.

East of Cane Garden Bay and site of a campground, **Brewers Bay,** accessed from long, steep Brewers Bay Road, is ideal for snorkelers and surfers. This clean white-sand beach is a great place to enjoy walks in the early morning or at sunset. Sip a rum punch from the beach bar, and watch the world go by.

The 2km-long (1 1/4-mile) white-sand beach at **Long Bay West,** reached along Long Bay Road, is one of the most beautiful in the B.V.I. Joggers run along the water's edge, and spectacular sunsets make it perfect for romantic strolls. The Long Bay Beach Resort stands on the northeast side of the beach; many visitors like to book a table at the resort's restaurant overlooking the water.

At the very east end of the island, **Long Bay East,** reached along Beef Island Road, is a great spot for swimming. Cross Queen Elizabeth Bridge to reach this 2km-long (1 1/4-mile) beach with great views and white sands.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Travel Plan Tours, Romasco Place, Harbour House (P.O. Box 437), Road Town (✆ **284/494-4000;** www.aroundthebvi.com), offers two islandwide tours, the first taking 3 hours, the second 3 1/2 hours, costing $32 to $45 per person. The company also runs 3-hour **snorkeling tours** for $64 per person (with snacks included). A full-day **sailing tour** aboard a catamaran that goes from Tortola to either Peter Island or Norman Island costs $165 per person; a full-day tour, which goes as far afield as The Baths at Virgin Gorda and includes lunch, costs $125 per person. And if **deep-sea fishing** appeals to

you, you can go for a half-day excursion, with equipment, for four fishermen and up to two "nonfishing observers" for $900 or the full day for $1,260.

A **taxi tour** costs $65 to $85 for two passengers. To call a taxi in Road Town, dial ✆ **284/494-2322;** on Beef Island, call ✆ **284/495-1982.**

J. R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens ★, Botanic Station, Road Town (no phone), fills up a 1.6-hectare (4-acre) site of lush tropical growth. Wander at leisure, taking in the pergola walk, a waterfall, a lily pond, tropical birdhouses, and miniature rainforests. Of course, you can also enjoy the rich plant life that ranges here, from exotic orchids to gardens of medicinal herbs. Admission is free; the gardens are open Monday to Saturday 9am to 4:30pm.

No visit to Tortola is complete without a trip to **Sage Mountain National Park** ★, rising to an elevation of 534m (1,752 ft.). Here you'll find traces of a primeval rainforest, and you can enjoy a picnic while overlooking neighboring islets and cays. Go west from Road Town to reach the mountain. Before you head out, stop by the tourist office and pick up the brochure *Sage Mountain National Park.* It has a location map, directions to the forest and parking, and an outline of the main trails through the park. Covering 37 hectares (91 acres), the park protects the remnants of Tortola's original forests not burned or cleared during the island's plantation era. From the parking lot, a trail leads to the main park entrance. The two main trails are the Rainforest Trail and the Mahogany Forest Trail.

Shadow's Ranch, Todman's Estate (✆ **284/494-2262**), gives horseback rides through the national park or down to the shores of Brewers Bay. Call for details, daily from 9am to 4pm. The cost is from $100 per hour.

THE WRECK OF THE RHONE & OTHER TOP DIVE SITES

The one site in the British Virgin Islands that lures divers from St. Thomas is the wreck of the **HMS *Rhone*** ★★, which sank in 1867 near the western point of Salt Island. *Skin Diver* magazine called it "the world's most fantastic shipwreck dive." It teems with marine life and coral formations, and was featured in the 1977 movie *The Deep.*

Although it's no *Rhone,* ***Chikuzen*** is another intriguing dive site off Tortola. This 80m (266-ft.) steel-hulled refrigerator ship sank off the island's east end in 1981. The hull, still intact under about 24m (79 ft.) of water, is now home to a vast array of tropical fish, including yellowtail, barracuda, black-tip sharks, octopus, and drum fish.

South of Ginger Island, **Alice's Wonderland** is a deep-dive site with a wall that begins at around 3.6m (12 ft.) and slopes gently to 30m (98 ft.). It abounds with marine life such as lobsters, crabs, rainbow-hued fan coral, and mammoth mushroom-shaped coral. **Spyglass Wall** is another offshore dive site dropping to a sandy bottom and filled with sea fans and large coral heads. The drop is from 3 to 18m (9¾–59 ft.). Divers here seek out tarpon, eagle rays, and stingrays.

Blue Waters Divers, Nanny Call Marina, Road Town (✆ **284/494-2847;** www.bluewaterdiversbvi.com), is a PADI outfitter, offering various dive packages, including to the wreck of the *Rhone.* A resort course costs $115, a PADI open-water certification $410.

YACHT CHARTERS

Tortola boasts the largest fleet of bareboat sailing charters in the world. The best place to get outfitted is the **Moorings,** Wickham's Cay (✆ **888/952-8420** in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/494-2331; www.moorings.com). This outfit, along with a handful of

others, makes the British Virgins the cruising capital of the world. You can choose from a fleet of sailing yachts, which can accommodate up to six couples in comfort and style. Depending on your nautical knowledge and skills, you can arrange a bareboat rental (with no crew) or a fully crewed rental with a skipper, a staff, and a cook. Boats come equipped with a portable barbecue, snorkeling gear, dinghy, linens, and galley equipment. The Moorings has an experienced staff of mechanics, electricians, riggers, and cleaners. If you're going out on your own, you'll get a thorough briefing session on Virgin Island waters and anchorages.

If you'd like sailing lessons, consider **Steve Colgate's Offshore Sailing School** (✆ **800/221-4326** in the U.S.; www.offshore-sailing.com), which offers courses in seamanship year-round.

SHOPPING

Most of Tortola's shops are on Road Town's Main Street. Unfortunately, the British Virgins have no duty-free shopping. British goods are imported, and you can find some good buys among these imported items, especially in English china. In general, store hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm.

You might start your shopping expedition at **Crafts Alive,** an open-air market lying in the center of Road Town and impossible to miss. It consists of a series of old-fashioned West Indian–style buildings that are stocked with crafts, ranging from Caribbean dolls to straw hats, from crocheted doilies to pottery, plus, of course, the inevitable B.V.I. T-shirts. Very few of these items, however, are made on island; we noted that some, in fact, come from Panama.

Sunny Caribbee Herb and Spice Company, Main Street, Road Town (✆ **284/494-2178;** www.sunnycaribbee.com), in an old West Indian building, was the first hotel on Tortola. It's now a shop specializing in Caribbean spices, seasonings, teas, condiments, and handicrafts. With an aroma of spices permeating the air, this factory is an attraction in itself. You can buy two famous specialties here: the West Indian hangover cure and the Arawak love potion. A Caribbean cosmetics collection, Sunsations, includes herbal bath gels, island perfume, and sunscreens. There's a daily sampling of island products—perhaps tea, coffee, sauces, or dips.

Samarkand Jewelers, 94 Main St., Road Town (✆ **284/494-6415**), evokes an exotic land but is actually an unusually good bet for jewelry and other items. Look for an intriguing selection of bracelets, pins, pendants in both silver and gold, and pierced earrings. Caribbean motifs such as palms and sea birds often appear in the designs of the jewelry.

Pusser's Company Store, Main Street and Waterfront Road, Road Town (✆ **284/494-2467**), sells gourmet food items, including meats, spices, fish, and a nice selection of wines. Pusser's Rum is one of the best-selling items here.

Arawak Boutique & Gift Shop, Nanny Cay Marina (✆ **284/494-5240**), is known for its household furnishings such as placemats and candleholders, but it also sells sporty clothing for adults and kids, along with a selection of gifts and souvenirs.

Flamboyance, Waterfront Drive (✆ **284/494-4099**), is the best place to shop for perfume and upscale cosmetics.

If you've rented a villa or condo, or even if your accommodations have a kitchenette, consider a visit to **Ample Hamper,** Inner Harbour Marina, Wickham's Cay I, Road Town (✆ **284/494-2494;** www.amplehamper.com). This outlet stocks some of the best-packaged food and bottled wines on the island. It also has fresh fruit and a tasty selection of cheeses.

Philatelists from all over the world flock to the **British Virgin Islands Post Office,** Main Street, Road Town (✆ **284/494-3701,** ext. 4996), for its exquisite, unusual stamps in beautiful designs. Even though the stamps carry U.S. monetary designations, they can be only used in the B.V.I. Most stamp collectors, however, collect the stamps rather than actually using them.

TORTOLA AFTER DARK

Ask around to find out which hotel might have entertainment on any given evening. Steel bands and fungi or scratch bands (African Caribbean musicians who improvise on locally available instruments) appear regularly, and nonresidents are usually welcome. Pick up a copy of *Limin' Times,* an entertainment magazine listing what's happening locally; it's usually available at hotels.

Bomba's Surfside Shack, Cappoon's Bay (✆ **284/495-4148;** www.bombasurfside shack.com), is the oldest, most memorable, and most uninhibited hangout on the island. Sitting on the beach near the West End, it's covered with Day-Glo graffiti and odds and ends of plywood, driftwood, and abandoned rubber tires. Despite its makeshift appearance, the shack has the sound system to create a really great party. Every month (dates vary), Bomba's stages a full-moon party, with free house tea spiked with hallucinogenic mushrooms. (The tea is free because it's illegal to sell it.) The place is also wild on Wednesday and Sunday nights, when there's live music and a $10 all-you-can-eat barbecue. It's open daily from 10am to midnight (or later, depending on business).

The bar at **The Moorings/Mariner Inn,** Wickham's Cay (✆ **284/494-2333**), is the preferred watering hole for upscale yacht owners, but drink prices are low. Open to a view of its own marina, and bathed in a dim and flattering light, the place is relaxed.

Other places worth a stop on a bar-hopping jaunt include **The Jolly Roger Inn,** West End (✆ **284/495-4559;** www.jollyrogerbvi.com), where you can hear local or sometimes American bands playing everything from reggae to blues. In the same area, visit **Stanley's Welcome Bar,** Cane Garden Bay (✆ **284/495-9424**), where a rowdy frat-boy crowd gathers to drink, talk, and drink some more. Finally, check out **Sebastian's,** Apple Bay (✆ **284/495-4212**), especially on Sunday, when you can dance to live music under the stars, at least in winter.

Rhymer's, on the popular stretch of beach at Cane Garden Bay (✆ **284/495-4639**), serves cold beer or tropical rum concoctions, along with a casual menu of ribs, conch chowder, and more. It's open daily from 8am to 9pm.

3 VIRGIN GORDA ★★★

Virgin Gorda is where you come to relax and escape, at some of the poshest and most self-contained inns in the Caribbean, if you can afford them. Life here is much slower paced than on Tortola, without much shopping or nightlife. The island gets far less rain, making some sections of it quite arid. Goats wander among a landscape of cactus and scrub brush.

In 1493, on his second voyage to the New World, Columbus named this island Virgin Gorda, or "fat virgin" (from a distance, the island looks like a reclining woman with a protruding stomach). The second-largest island in the cluster of British Virgin Islands, Virgin Gorda is about 15km (9¼ miles) long and 3km (1¾ miles) wide, with a population of some 1,400. It's 19km (12 miles) east of Road Town and 42km (26 miles) from St. Thomas.

The island was a fairly desolate agricultural community until Laurance S. Rockefeller established the Little Dix Bay Hotel here in the early 1960s, following his success with the Caneel Bay resort on St. John in the 1950s. He envisioned a "wilderness beach," where privacy and solitude would reign. In 1971, the Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour opened, turning the island into a world-class destination for yachties. Operated by the Little Dix Bay Hotel, it accommodates 120 yachts today.

Try to visit Virgin Gorda, if only for the day, to see **The Baths,** gigantic rocks and boulders shaped by volcanic pressures millions of years ago. The beach at The Baths is simply spectacular. Virgin Gorda is also quite mountainous; if you're tired of flat Caribbean islands, you'll love the gorgeous, dramatic scenery here.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Speedy's Fantasy** (✆ **284/495-5240;** www.speedysbvi.com) runs a ferry service between Road Town and Virgin Gorda. Monday to Saturday, at least five ferries a day leave from Road Town (three per day on Sun). The cost is $20 one-way or $30 round-trip. From St. Thomas to Virgin Gorda, it offers service Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, costing $40 one-way or $70 round-trip.

Most of the luxurious resorts have their own boats to take you from the airport on Beef Island to Virgin Gorda.

GETTING AROUND Independently operated open-sided **safari buses** run along the main road. Holding up to 22 passengers, these buses charge upward of $3 to $5 per person to transport a passenger from, say, The Valley to The Baths. Additional taxi service is provided by **African Pride Taxi Service** in The Valley (✆ **284/541-3127**), and by **Mahogany Rentals & Taxi Service** in The Valley (✆ **284/495-6091**).

If you'd like to rent a car, try one of the local firms, including **Mahogany Rentals,** The Valley, Spanish Town (✆ **284/495-5469**), across from the yacht harbor. This company is the least expensive on the island, beginning at $55 daily for a Suzuki Sidekick. Road conditions on Virgin Gorda range from good to extremely poor; you're probably better off renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle. ***Remember:*** Drive on the left.

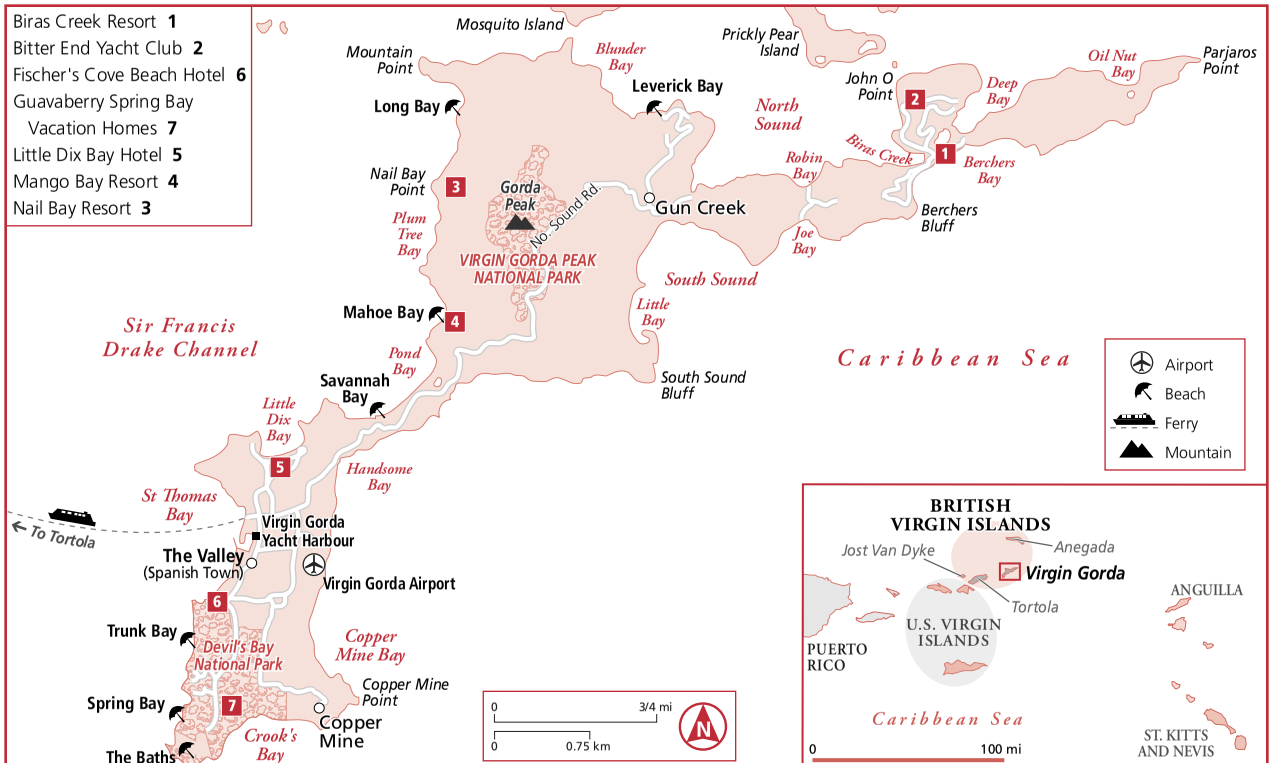
FAST FACTS You can reach the **police station** by calling ✆ **284/495-7584. First Caribbean International Bank** (✆ **284/495-5217**) is located in Spanish Town at the Virgin Gorda Shopping Centre. It has an ATM.

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

Biras Creek Resort ★★★ This private, romantic resort is the classiest place on the island—Bitter End is more family oriented, and Little Dix Bay more conventional. It stands at the northern end of Virgin Gorda like a hilltop fortress. On a 60-hectare (148-acre) estate with its own marina, it occupies a narrow neck of land flanked by the sea on three sides. All the tropically decorated units are well-furnished bedrooms with private patios. There are no TVs in the rooms, but you get such luxuries as oceanview verandas. You get your own bikes while you're there, plus you have lots of hiking trails near the property to explore.

North Sound (P.O. Box 54), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **877/883-0756** or 284/494-3555. Fax 284/494-3557. www.biras.com. 33 units. Winter $850–$2,500 suite; off season $700–$1,950 suite. Rates include all meals (no drinks). Ask about packages. AE, MC, V. Take the private motor launch from the Beef Island airport, $160 per person round-trip. No children 7 or under. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bikes; fitness center; outdoor pool;


Biras Creek Resort 1
Bitter End Yacht Club 2
Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel 6
Guavaberry Spring Bay Vacation Homes 7
Little Dix Bay Hotel 5
Mango Bay Resort 4
Nail Bay Resort 3
Mosquito Island
Mountain Point
Blunder Bay
Prickly Pear Island
Leverick Bay
Long Bay
North Sound
John O Point
Deep Bay
Oil Nut Bay
Parjaros Point
Biras Creek
Robin Bay
Berchers Bay
Berchers Bluff
Nail Bay Point
Gorda Peak
No. Sound Rd.
Gun Creek
Plum Tree Bay
VIRGIN GORDA PEAK NATIONAL PARK
Joe Bay
South Sound
Little Bay
Mahoe Bay
Sir Francis Drake Channel
Pond Bay
Caribbean Sea
Savannah Bay
South Sound Bluff
Little Dix Bay
Handsome Bay
St Thomas Bay
To Tortola
Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour
The Valley (Spanish Town)
Virgin Gorda Airport
Trunk Bay
Devil's Bay National Park
Copper Mine Bay
Copper Mine Point
Spring Bay
Copper Mine
Crook's Bay
The Baths
0 3/4 mi
0 0.75 km
N
Airport
Beach
Ferry
Mountain
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
Jost Van Dyke
Anegada
Virgin Gorda
Tortola
ANGUILLA
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO
Caribbean Sea
0 100 mi
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

smoke-free rooms; 2 lit tennis courts; Hobie Cats; kayaks; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; free beach trips; taxi service to launch. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, beverage maker, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Bitter End Yacht Club ★★★ This is the liveliest of the B.V.I. resorts and even better equipped than the more exclusive Biras Creek. It's the best sailing and diving complex in the British chain. It opens onto one of the most unspoiled and secluded deep-water harbors in the Caribbean. Guests have unlimited use of the resort's million-dollar fleet and a complimentary introductory course at the Nick Trotter Sailing and Windsurfing School. The Bitter End offers an informal yet elegant experience in either a hillside chalet or a well-appointed beachfront overlooking the sound. Most units have varnished hardwood floors, sliding-glass doors, and wicker furnishings.

John O Point, North Sound (P.O. Box 46), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **800/872-2392** in the U.S. for reservations, or 284/494-2746. Fax 284/494-4756. www.beyc.com. 85 units. Winter $860–$1,840 double; summer $630–$1,560 double. Rates include all meals. AE, MC, V. Take the private ferry from the Beef Island airport, $30 per person one-way. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; pub; babysitting; fitness center; outdoor pool; boat trips to nearby cays; Boston whalers; scuba diving; snorkeling; sport-fishing; Sunfish sailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan (in some), TV (available upon request), fridge, Wi-Fi.

Little Dix Bay Hotel ★★ Full of low-key luxury, along a curving white-sand beach, Little Dix Bay Hotel is a resort scattered along a .8km (1/2-mile) crescent-shaped private bay on a 200-hectare (494-acre) preserve. Many guests find this resort too pricey and stuffy; we prefer the more casual elegance of Biras Creek and the Bitter End Yacht Club, though Little Dix Bay does have an undeniably lovely setting, fine service, and a quiet elegance. All rooms, built in the woods, have private terraces with views of the sea or gardens. Units come with ceiling fans and air-conditioning, and louvers and screens let in sea breezes. Some units are two-story rondavels (like Tiki huts) raised on stilts to form their own breezeways. Accommodations are roomy, airy, and decorated with tropical flair. Furnishings and fabrics evoke a Southeast Asian style with wicker or reed furniture, bamboo beds, and ceramic objets d'art.

1km (1/2 mile) north of Spanish Town (P.O. Box 70), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **888/767-3966** in the U.S., or 284/495-5555. Fax 284/495-5661. www.littledixbay.com. 100 units. Winter $595–$950 double, from $1,200 suite; off season $395–$775 double, from $875 suite. Extra person $75. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $110 per person extra; AP (full board) $140 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. Take the private ferry from the Beef Island airport, $90 per person round-trip. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; limited room service; sauna; 7 tennis courts; deep-sea fishing; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; island tours. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Guavaberry Spring Bay Vacation Homes ★ Staying in one of these hexagonal, white-roofed redwood houses built on stilts is like living in a tree house. Screened and louvered walls let in sea breezes, and The Baths, with its excellent sandy beach, is nearby. Each unique home, available for daily or weekly rental, has one or two bedrooms; all have private bathrooms with showers, full kitchens, and dining areas. And each has an elevated sun deck overlooking Sir Francis Drake Passage. The cottage colony is close to both the beach at Spring Bay and the Yacht Harbour Shopping Centre.

Spring Bay (P.O. Box 20), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-5227.** Fax 284/495-5283. www.guavaberryspringbay.com. 19 units. Winter $230 1-bedroom house, $295 2-bedroom house, $415 3-bedroom house; off season $140 1-bedroom house, $190 2-bedroom house, $300 3-bedroom house. Extra person $25. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Babysitting; boats; fishing; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, kitchen, no phone.

Nail Bay Resort ★ Near Gorda Peak National Park, and a short walk from a trio of usually deserted beaches, this resort enjoys an idyllic position. From its 60-hectare (148-acre) site, you can take in some of the best sunset views of Sir Francis Drake Channel and the Dog Islands. The well-furnished units are comfortable and tasteful. Accommodations include deluxe bedrooms, suites, apartments, and villas. This villa community has a core of a dozen units in two structures on a hillside, with sitting areas amid old sugar-mill ruins. The most modest units are hotel-style bedrooms in the main building. The best accommodations are the five estate villas.

Nail Bay (P.O. Box 69), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **800/871-3551** in the U.S., 800/487-1839 in Canada, or 284/494-8000. Fax 284/495-5875. www.nailbay.com. 45 units. Winter $260–$495 double; summer $180–$395 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; swim-up bar; babysitting; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; lit tennis court; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen.

Moderate

Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel Swim from your doorstep in this group of units nestled near the sandy beach of St. Thomas Bay. Erected of native stone, each of the eight cottages is self-contained, with one or two bedrooms and a combination living/dining room with a kitchenette. You can stock up on provisions at a food store near the grounds. There are also 12 pleasant but simple rooms with views of Drake Channel. Each has its own private shower-only bathroom and private porch.

The Valley (P.O. Box 60), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-5252.** Fax 284/495-5820. www.fischerscove.com. 20 units. Winter $160–$165 double, $190–$315 studio cottage; off season $100 double, $125–$205 studio cottage. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $40 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; scooter rental; babysitting; children's playground; smoke-free rooms; watersports. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fans (in some), TV, fridge, kitchenettes (in cottages), no phone (in cottages).

Mango Bay Resort ★ (Value) This well-designed compound of eight white-sided villas is set on lushly landscaped grounds overlooking the scattered islets of Drake's Channel on the island's western shore. It's a good value for your money. The accommodations are the most adaptable on the island—doors can be locked or unlocked to divide each villa into as many as four independent units. Costs vary with the proximity of your unit to the nearby beach. Interiors are stylish yet simple, often dominated by the same turquoise as that of the seascape in front of you.

Mahoe Bay (P.O. Box 1062), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-5672.** Fax 284/495-5674. www.mangobayresort.com. 26 units. Winter $195–$1,150 villa or suite; off season $150–$695 villa or suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, kitchen.

WHERE TO DINE

Expensive

Biras Creek Resort ★★ INTERNATIONAL With even better cuisine than that of Little Dix Bay Pavilion (see below), this hilltop restaurant is our longtime island favorite, and for good reason. The resort hires the island's finest chefs, who turn out superb cuisine based on quality ingredients. The menu changes every night, but the panoramic view of North Sound doesn't. A recent sampling of the appetizers turned up such delights as five-spice duck salad for starters, followed by such well-prepared main courses as pan-seared salmon wrapped in Parma ham in a lentil-cream sauce, or grilled grouper with an herby couscous. The chef's special grilled lobster is featured Sunday and Wednesday nights. Desserts are likely to range from a chilled green-apple parfait to a choice of sorbets served with a chilled cantaloupe soup.

In Biras Creek, North Sound. ✆ **284/494-3555.** Reservations required. Fixed-price dinner $85–$125. AE, MC, V. Seatings daily 7–8:45pm.

Chez Bamboo ★ INTERNATIONAL Set within an antique Creole house which its owner, Rose Giacinto, painted in vibrant tones of lime, peach, and turquoise, this likable eatery defines itself as an upscale Caribbean bistro with a view not of the sea, but of a verdant garden and a coconut grove. Positioned within a 5-minute walk south of the marina, it offers a bar where career mixologist Leonard makes award-winning martinis and sangria, the best on island. Savory menu items include conch gumbo, lobster bisque, wahoo cakes with tartar sauce, shrimp-stuffed ravioli, and steaks. There's live music every Friday.

Main Rd., Spanish Town. ✆ **284/495-5752.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $28–$45. AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm. Closed Aug–Oct.

Little Dix Bay Pavilion ★ INTERNATIONAL The most romantic of the dining spots on Virgin Gorda, this pavilion is our preferred choice at this deluxe resort, which also operates Sugar Mill Restaurant. At the pavilion, the guests (most middle-aged and well heeled) sit under a large thatched roof with the doors open to the trade winds. The chefs change the menu daily. Although many of the ingredients are shipped in frozen, especially meats and some seafood, there is much that is fresh and good. The most expensive items on the menu are the rack of lamb and grilled salmon. Many vegetables evoke the Pacific Rim, and the seafood keeps us returning again and again.

In the Little Dix Bay Hotel, 1k m (½ mile) north of Spanish Town. ✆ **284/495-5555.** Reservations required. Main courses $36–$42. AE, MC, V. Daily 8–10:30am, noon–2:30pm, and 7–9:30pm.

Moderate

The Flying Iguana MEDITERRANEAN/FRENCH/WEST INDIAN The owner of this place, Puck (also known as Orlington Baptiste), studied his craft in Kansas City with the Hilton Group before setting up this amiable restaurant overlooking the airport's landing strip and the sea. Potted hibiscus and many stuffed and carved iguanas ornament a room that's a celebration of West Indian mystique. The house drink is the Iguana Sunset, a concoction whose secret ingredients change according to the whim of the bartender. Whatever the recipe, it usually produces a lightheaded effect that goes well with the carefully conceived cuisine. The finest examples include fresh fish and all kinds of shellfish, including shrimp, scallops, and conch, often served in combination. Steak, chicken, and lamb are seasoned in a way that evokes both the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Happy hour is from 4 to 6pm daily.

The Valley, at the airport. ✆ **284/495-5277.** www.flyingiguanabvi.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $6.50–$15 breakfast, $8.50–$20 lunch, $9–$36 dinner. MC, V. Daily 6:30am–9pm (last order).

Giorgio's Table ★ (Finds) ITALIAN This is the only authentic Italian restaurant on the island. The chefs are flown in for the season from Venice, Milan, and Florence. A 15-minute drive north of Spanish Town, the restaurant opens onto a big covered terrace, although its varnished interior evokes a yacht. We like to sit out here at night, "star-struck," gazing up at the heavens with the sounds of the surf nearby. The chef says he cooks Italian instead of "American Italian," and the food is good, despite its reliance on a lot of imported ingredients. Fresh locally caught fish is generally the best bet, although you can order an array of succulent pastas and standard Italian staples like veal

scaloppine. Pizzas and sandwiches will fill you at lunch. Looking at this place, we decided its owner, Giorgio, has an appropriate last name—Paradisio.

Mahoe Bay. ✆ **284/495-5684.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$42 lunch, $18–$42 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 12:30–2:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

Rock Café CARIBBEAN/ITALIAN Although the name suggests otherwise, this is not some island clone of the ubiquitous Hard Rock Cafe. You can stop for a drink in the special tequila bar upstairs before heading for a table later. The setting is amid boulders like the ones at The Baths, the number-one sightseeing attraction on Virgin Gorda. The recessed lighting and boardwalks add to the theatrical allure at night. Fortunately, the chefs don't depend just on the setting. The menu is wisely balanced, the dishes well prepared and consumed with affordable wine from a respectable list whose vintages range from Italy to California. Freshly caught red snapper comes in a tangy marinade, and we're especially fond of the chicken piccata. Live entertainment, usually a local band, is featured on Friday night.

The Valley. ✆ **284/495-5482.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$32. AE, MC, V. Daily 5–10:30pm.

Inexpensive

The Bath & Turtle INTERNATIONAL At the end of the waterfront shopping plaza in Spanish Town sits the most popular pub on Virgin Gorda; it's packed with locals during the 4:30-to-6:30pm happy hour. Even if you don't care about food, you can join the regulars over midmorning mango coladas or peach daiquiris. There's live music every Wednesday night. From its handful of indoor and courtyard tables, you can order fried fish fingers, tamarind-ginger wings, very spicy chili, pizzas, fresh pasta, barbecue chicken, steak, lobster, and daily seafood specials such as conch fritters from the simple menu here.

Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour, Spanish Town. ✆ **284/495-5239.** Reservations required. Breakfast $7–$12; main courses $10–$19 lunch, $11–$25 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

The Restaurant at Leverick Bay Kids CONTINENTAL A combined restaurant and beach bar, this is today's version of the old Pusser's, which now operates only a store here. During the day, you can enjoy all sorts of light meals, including croissant sandwiches, burgers, fried snapper, and pizza. There's also a children's menu. At night, the menu is more ambitious, featuring such intriguing appetizers as roasted pumpkin soup made with island-grown pumpkins and a splash of truffle oil. The chicken satay served with a spicy peanut dipping sauce is also enticing. The chef's main-dish specialty is a tender and slow-roasted prime rib of beef with mashed potatoes and fresh vegetables. The fresh ahi tuna with a tangy wasabi and sweet soy sauce is full of aromatic flavor. If it's featured, you might also opt for the grilled wahoo, caught in local waters, marinated in lime, and served with West Indian rice and fresh vegetables.

Leverick Bay, North Sound. ✆ **284/495-7154.** www.therestaurantatleverickbay.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $28–$45; lunch $9–$19; pizzas from $16. MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Top of The Baths CARIBBEAN This aptly named green-and-white restaurant has a patio with a swimming pool. Locals gather here to enjoy the food they grew up on. At lunch, you can order an array of appetizers, sandwiches, and salad plates. You're invited to swim in the pool either before or after dining. At night, the kitchen turns out good home-style cookery, including fresh fish, lobster, chicken, and steaks. Look for one of the daily specials. And save room for a piece of that rum cake! Live steel bands perform on Sunday.

The Valley. ✆ **284/495-5497.** Dinner $15–$28; sandwiches and salads $9–$16. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The northern side of Virgin Gorda is mountainous, with Gorda Peak, at 411m (1,348 ft.), the highest spot on the island. However, the southern half of the island is flat, with large boulders at every turn.

The best way to see the island if you're over for a day trip is to call **Andy Flax** at the Fischers Cove Beach Hotel. He runs the **Virgin Gorda Tours Association** (✆ **284/495-5252**), which will give you a tour for $45 per person. You can get picked up at the ferry dock if you give 24-hour notice.

HITTING THE BEACH The best beaches are at **The Baths** ★★, where giant boulders form a series of tranquil pools and grottoes flooded with seawater. (Nearby snorkeling is excellent, and you can rent gear on the beach.) Scientists think volcanic activity brought these boulders to the surface eons ago.

Devil's Bay National Park can be reached by a trail from The Baths. The walk to the secluded coral-sand beach takes about 15 minutes through boulders and dry coastal vegetation. The Baths and surrounding areas are part of a proposed system of parks and protected areas in the B.V.I. The protected area encompasses 273 hectares (677 acres) of land and includes sites at Little Fort, Spring Bay, The Baths, and Devil's Bay on the east coast.

Neighboring The Baths is **Spring Bay,** one of the best of the island's beaches, with white sand, clear water, and good snorkeling. **Trunk Bay** is a wide sandy beach reachable by boat or along a rough path from Spring Bay.

Savannah Bay is a sandy beach north of the yacht harbor, and **Mahoe Bay,** at the Mango Bay Resort, has a gently curving beach with neon-blue water.

DIVING **Kilbrides Sunchaser Scuba** is located at the Bitter End Yacht Club North Sound (✆ **800/932-4286** in the U.S., or 284/495-9638). Kilbrides offers the best diving in the British Virgin Islands, at 40 dive sites, including the wreck of the ill-fated HMS *Rhone.* Prices range from $95 to $105 for a two-tank dive on one of the coral reefs. A one-tank dive in the afternoon costs $75. Equipment, except wet suits, is supplied free. It's open daily 7:45am to 5:30pm.

HIKING Consider a trek up the stairs and hiking paths that crisscross Virgin Gorda's largest stretch of undeveloped land, **Virgin Gorda Peak National Park.** To reach the best departure point for your uphill trek, drive north of The Valley on the only road leading to North Sound for about 15 very hilly minutes. (Using a 4WD vehicle is a good idea.) Stop at the base of the stairway leading steeply uphill. There's a sign pointing to Virgin Gorda Peak National Park.

It takes between 25 and 40 minutes to reach the summit of Gorda Peak, the highest point on the island. You'll be rewarded with sweeping views of the many scattered islets of the Virgin archipelago. There's a tower at the summit, which you can climb for enhanced views. Admire the flora and the fauna (birds, lizards, nonpoisonous snakes) that you're likely to run across en route. Be sure to bring sunscreen, and consider taking a picnic, as tables are scattered along the hiking trails.

VIRGIN GORDA AFTER DARK

There isn't a lot of action at night, unless you want to make some of your own. **The Bath & Turtle** pub, at Yacht Harbour (✆ **284/495-5239**), brings in local bands for dancing in the summer on Wednesday and Friday at 8:30pm. The **Bitter End Yacht Club** (✆ **284/494-2745**) has live music on Fridays. Reached only by boat, this is the best bar

on the island. With its dark wood, it evokes an English pub and even serves British brews. Call to see what's happening at the time of your visit.

Andy's Chateau de Pirate, at the Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel, The Valley (✆ **284/495-5252**), is a sprawling, sparsely furnished local hangout. It has a simple stage, a very long bar, and huge oceanfront windows that almost never close.

4 JOST VAN DYKE

About 150 people live on the 10 sq. km (4 sq. miles) of this mountainous island, off the west side of Tortola. On the south shore, **White Bay** and **Great Harbour** are good beaches. Although there are only a handful of places to stay, there are several dining choices, as the island is a popular stop for the yachting set and many cruise ships, including Cunard (and often some all-gay cruises). The peace and tranquillity often disappear unless you're here when the cruise ships aren't.

In the 1700s, a Quaker colony settled here to develop sugar-cane plantations. One colonist, William Thornton, won the worldwide competition to design the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Smaller islands surround the place, including Little Jost Van Dyke, the birthplace of Dr. John Lettsome, founder of the London Medical Society.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Take the ferry to White Bay on Jost Van Dyke from either St. Thomas or Tortola. (***Be warned:*** Departure times can vary widely throughout the year and often don't adhere very closely to the printed timetables.) Ferries from St. Thomas depart from Red Hook 3 days a week (Fri, Sat, and Sun), usually twice daily. More convenient (and more frequent) are the daily ferryboat shuttles from Tortola's isolated West End. The latter departs five times a day for the 25-minute trip and costs $20 for adults round-trip, $10 for children 12 and under round-trip. Call the **Paradise New Horizons Ferry Service** (✆ **284/495-9278;** www.jostvandykeferry.com) for information about departures from any of the above-mentioned points. If all else fails, carefully negotiate a transportation fee with one of the handful of privately operated water taxis.

EMERGENCIES In the unlikely event that you need the police, call ✆ **284/495-9345.**

WHERE TO STAY

Sandcastle Hotel A retreat for escapists who want few neighbors and absolutely nothing to do, these six cottages are surrounded by flowering shrubbery and bougainvillea, have panoramic views, and open onto a white-sand beach. Bedrooms are spacious, light, and airy, furnished in a tropical motif, with tile floors, local art, rattan furnishings, day beds, and king-size beds. Some units have enclosed showers, outside off the bathroom. At the beachside bar, the Soggy Dollar, you mix your own drinks and keep your own tab. Visiting boaters often drop in to enjoy the beachside informality and order a drink called The Painkiller. A line in the guest book sums it up: "I thought places like this only existed in the movies."

White Bay, Jost Van Dyke, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-9888.** Fax 284/495-9999. www.soggydollar.com. 6 units. Winter $265–$295 double; off season $190–$230 double. Extra person $35–$45. 3-night minimum. MC, V. Children 15 and under not permitted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; diving; fishing trips; sailing. *In room:* A/C (in 2 rooms), ceiling fan, no phone.

Sandy Ground These self-sufficient apartments are along the edge of a beach on a 7-hectare (17-acre) hill site on the eastern part of Jost Van Dyke. The complex rents two- and three-bedroom villas. One of our favorites was built on a cliff that seems to hang about 25m (82 ft.) over the beach. The airy villas, each privately owned, are fully equipped with refrigerators and stoves. The interiors vary widely, from rather fashionable to bare bones. The living space is generous, and extras include private balconies or terraces. Most rooms have showers only.

The managers help guests with boat rentals and watersports. Diving, day sails, and other activities can also be arranged, and there are dinghies available. Snorkeling and hiking are among the more popular activities.

P.O. Box 594, West End, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **284/494-3391.** Fax 284/495-9379. www.sandyground.com. 6 units. Weekly rates: winter $1,950 villa for 2; off season $1,400 villa for 2. Extra person $500 per week in winter, $350 off season. MC, V. Take a private water taxi from Tortola or St. Thomas. **Amenities:** Day sails; dinghies; diving; snorkeling. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Abe's by the Sea WEST INDIAN In this local bar and restaurant, sailors are satisfied with a menu of fish, lobster, conch, ribs, and chicken. Prices are low, too, and it's money well spent. With each main course, you also get peas, rice, and coleslaw.

Little Harbour. ✆ **284/495-9392.** Reservations required for groups of 5 or more. Dinner $20–$45; nightly barbecue $24. MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Foxy's Tamarind Bar ★★ WEST INDIAN Arguably the most famous bar in the B.V.I., this mecca of yachties and other boat people is built entirely around sixth-generation Jost Van Dyke native Philicianno "Foxy" Callwood. He opened the place in the late 1960s, and guests have been coming back ever since. A songwriter and entertainer, Foxy is part of the draw. He creates impromptu calypso—almost in the Jamaican tradition—around his guests. If you're singled out, he'll embarrass you, but it's all in good fun. He also plays the guitar and takes a profound interest in preserving the environment of his native island.

Thursday through Saturday nights, a live band entertains. On other evenings, it's rock 'n' roll, reggae, or soca. The food and drink aren't neglected, either—try Foxy's Painkiller Punch. During the day, flying-fish sandwiches, *rotis* (Caribbean burritos), and the usual burgers are served, but evenings might bring freshly caught lobster, spicy steamed shrimp, or even grilled fish, depending on the catch of the day.

Great Harbour. ✆ **284/495-9258.** www.foxysbar.com. Reservations recommended. Lunch $10–$15; dinner $18–$45. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

Sandcastle INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN This hotel restaurant often serves food that has been frozen, but, even so, the flavors remain consistently good. Lunch is served in the open-air dining room, while lighter fare and snacks are available at the Soggy Dollar Bar. Dinner is by candlelight, featuring four courses, including such dishes as mahimahi Martinique (marinated in orange-lemon-lime juice and cooked with fennel, onions, and dill). Sandcastle hen is another specialty likely to appear on the menu: It's a grilled Cornish hen that's been marinated in rum, honey, lime, and garlic. But we'd skip all that for the sesame snapper, if available. Meals are served with seasonal vegetables and fresh pasta, along with a variety of salads and homemade desserts. Those desserts are luscious and include Key lime pie, Irish whiskey cheesecake, and mango mousse.

At the Sandcastle Hotel, White Bay. ✆ **284/495-9888.** Reservations required for dinner by 4pm. Lunch main courses $6–$12; fixed-price dinner $40–$45. MC, V. Daily 9am–3pm and 1 seating at 7pm.

DIVE SITES

Increasingly, Jost Van Dyke has been attracting divers. They are drawn, in particular, to the north coast of Little Jost Van Dyke, with its Twin Towers, a pair of rock formations jutting up some 27m (90 ft.). The best dive operator is **JVD Scuba and BVI Eco-Tours,** Great Harbour (✆ **284/495-0271;** www.bvi-ecotours.com). A one-tank dive goes for $70, a two-tank dive for $110. You can also arrange rentals here for snorkel gear, scuba equipment, kayaks, surfboards, windsurfers, small boats, or fishing equipment. You can also arrange boat excursions to nearby islands, costing $750 for 1 day for four persons, including the services of a captain; half-day tours can also be taken for $375.

5 ANEGADA

The most northerly and isolated of the British Virgins, 48km (30 miles) east of Tortola, Anegada has a population of about 250, none of whom has found the legendary treasure from the more than 500 wrecks lying off its notorious Horseshoe Reef. It's different from the other British Virgins, in that it's a coral-and-limestone atoll, flat, with a 750m (2,460-ft.) airstrip. Its highest point reaches 8m (26 ft.), and it hardly appears on the horizon if you're sailing to it.

At the northern and western ends of the island are some good white-sand beaches, which might be your only reason for coming here. This is a remote little corner of the Caribbean: Don't expect a single frill, and be prepared to put up with some hardships, such as mosquitoes. Most of the island has been declared off-limits to settlement and reserved for birds and other wildlife. The B.V.I. National Parks Trust has established a flamingo colony in a bird sanctuary, which is also the protected home of several different varieties of heron, as well as ospreys and terns. It has also designated much of the interior of the island as a preserved habitat for Anegada's animal population of some 2,000 wild goats, donkeys, and cattle. Among the endangered species being given a new lease on life here is the rock iguana, a fierce-looking but quite harmless reptile that can grow to a length of 2m (6½ ft.). Although rarely seen, these creatures have called Anegada home for thousands of years.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Fly BVI** (✆ **284/495-1747;** www.fly-bvi.com) operates a charter/sightseeing service between Anegada and Beef Island off Tortola. The one-way passage costs $375 for four passengers.

GETTING AROUND Limited taxi service is available on the island—not that you'll have many places to go. **Tony's Taxis,** which you'll easily spot when you arrive, will take you around the island. It's also possible to rent **bicycles;** ask around.

WHERE TO STAY

The Anegada Reef Hotel offers the only major accommodations on the island. Neptune's Treasure (see below) rents tents and basic rooms.

Anegada Reef Hotel ★ The only major hotel on the island is 5km (3 miles) west of the airport, right on the beachfront. It's one of the most remote places covered in this guide—guests who stay here are, in effect, hiding out. It's a favorite of the yachting set, who enjoy the hospitality. The hotel offers motel-like, basic rooms with private porches,

with either a garden or ocean view. You can arrange to go inshore fishing, deep-sea fishing, or bonefishing (there's also a tackle shop); you can also set up snorkeling excursions and secure taxi service and jeep rentals.

There's a beach barbecue nightly; the house specialty is lobster, and many attendees arrive by boat. Reservations for the 7:30pm dinner must be made by 4pm.

Setting Point, Anegada, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-8002.** Fax 284/495-9362. www.anegadareef.com. 14 units. Winter $265–$400 double; off season $240–$365 double. Rates include all meals. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Cow Wreck Beach Bar & Grill ★ (Finds) WEST INDIAN This laid-back, family-run, and definitely funky joint is a coveted address among yachties anchoring at Anegada. Ice-cold beer and the best lobster in the B.V.I. keep the patrons coming back. The crustaceans are kept in a cage under the water, waiting their "death summons" to the grill. Under a straw roof, diners sit at rough-hewn wooden tables placed outside on a terrace with a view of the water. If you go for lunch, you can tie in a visit with a snorkel trip. At night this is the most popular place on the island for a sundowner. Other standard dishes appear on the menu, but we've never known a guest to order anything but lobster for a main course.

Lower Cow Wreck Beach. ✆ **284/495-8047.** Reservations required for dinner by 4pm. Main courses $18–$48. MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight, dinner seatings 6pm. Closing time for bar "when the last customer departs."

Neptune's Treasure (Finds) INTERNATIONAL Set near its own 24-slip marina, near the southern tip of the island in the same cluster of buildings that includes the more high-priced Anegada Reef Hotel, this funky bar and restaurant usually hosts a mix of yacht owners and local residents. Dining is in a spacious indoor area whose focal point is a bar and lots of nautical memorabilia. The drink of choice is a Dark and Stormy, composed of ginger beer and rum. The Soares family and their staff serve platters of swordfish, lobster, fish fingers, chicken, steaks, and ribs; dispense information about local snorkeling sites; and generally maintain order and something approaching a (low-key) party atmosphere.

They also offer nine simple bedrooms with air-conditioning. Depending on the season, rooms with a private bathroom rent for $110 to $275 double. Discounts are offered for stays of a week or more.

Between Pomato and Saltheap points, Anegada, B.V.I. ✆ **284/495-9439,** or shortwave channel 16. Fax 284/495-8060. www.neptunestreasure.com. Reservations for dinner must be made by 4pm. Breakfast $8–$12; main courses $6–$12 lunch, $18–$45 dinner. MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

6 PETER ISLAND ★

Half of this island, which has a good marina and docking facilities, is devoted to the yacht club. The other part is deserted. Beach facilities are found at palm-fringed Deadman's Bay, which faces the Atlantic but is protected by a reef. All goods and services are at the one resort (see below). The island is so private that, except for an occasional mason at work, about the only company you'll encounter will be an iguana or a feral cat whose ancestors were abandoned generations ago by shippers. (The cats are said to have virtually eliminated the island's rodent population.)

A complimentary, hotel-operated ferry, **Peter Island Ferry** (✆ **284/495-2000**), departs Tortola from the pier at Trellis Bay, near the airport. Other boats depart six or seven times a day from Baugher's Bay in Road Town. Passengers must notify the hotel 2 weeks before their arrival so transportation can be arranged.

WHERE TO STAY

Peter Island Resort ★★★ This 720-hectare (1,778-acre) tropical island is solely dedicated to Peter Island Resort guests and yacht owners who moor their crafts here. The island's tropical gardens and hillside are bordered by five gorgeous private beaches, including Deadman's Beach. (In spite of its name, it's often voted one of the world's most romantic beaches in travel-magazine reader polls.)

The resort contains 32 rooms facing Sprat Bay and Sir Francis Drake Channel (ocean-view rooms), and 20 larger rooms on Deadman's Bay Beach (beachfront). Designed with a casual elegance, each has a balcony or terrace. The least-desirable rooms are also the smallest and housed in two-story, A-frame structures next to the harbor. The Crow's Nest, a luxurious four-bedroom villa, overlooks the harbor and Deadman's Bay, and features a private swimming pool. The Hawk's Nest villas are three-bedroom villas set on a tropical hillside.

Peter Island (P.O. Box 211), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **800/346-4451** in the U.S., or 284/495-2000. Fax 284/495-2500. www.peterisland.com. 55 units. Winter $660–$1,335 double, $910–$1,585 3-bedroom villa, $1,495–$1,835 4-bedroom villa; off season $575–$875 double, $825–$1,245 3-bedroom villa, $1,375–$1,495 4-bedroom villa. Rates include all meals and transportation from the Tortola airport. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; bikes; fitness center; gym; outdoor pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 tennis courts; deep-sea fishing; scuba diving; sea kayaks; snorkeling gear; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, minibar, hair dryer.

7 GUANA ISLAND ★

This 340-hectare (840-acre) island, a nature preserve and wildlife sanctuary, is one of the most private hideaways in the Caribbean. Don't come here looking for action; rather, vacationing here is to retreat from the world. This small island right off the coast of Tortola offers seven virgin beaches and nature trails ideal for hiking; it abounds in unusual species of plant and animal life. Arawak relics have been found here. You can climb 242m (794-ft.) Sugarloaf Mountain for a panoramic view. It's said that the name of the island came from a jutting rock that resembled the head of an iguana.

The Guana Island Club will send a boat to meet arriving guests at the Beef Island airport (trip time is 10 min.).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Guana Island Club ★★ The sixth- or seventh-largest of the British Virgin Islands, Guana Island was bought in 1974 by Henry and Gloria Jarecki, dedicated conservationists who run this resort as a nature preserve and wildlife sanctuary. The cluster of white cottages was built as a private club in the 1930s on the foundations of a Quaker homestead. The stone cottages have only two phones. Because the dwellings are staggered along a flower-dotted ridge overlooking the Caribbean and the Atlantic, the sense of privacy is almost absolute. Groups of up to 36 can rent the entire island. Although water is scarce, each of the airy accommodations has a shower. The decor is rattan and wicker.

Renting North Beach cottage, the most luxurious of the accommodations, is like renting a private home. There are seven beaches, some of which require a boat to reach.

P.O. Box 32, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ✆ **800/544-8262** in the U.S. or 284/494-2354. Fax 284/495-2900. (For reservations, write or call the Guana Island Club Reservations Office, 10 Timber Trail, Rye, NY 10580; ✆ **800/544-8262** in the U.S., or 914/967-6050; fax 914/967-8048.) www.guana.com. 15 units. Winter $1,250–$1,450 double, $2,325–$2,650 cottage, $3,350–$8,100 villa; off season $695–$1,025 double, $1,650–$2,325 cottage, $2,345–$3,350 villa. Rent the island for $21,050–$37,750 per day. Rates include all meals and drinks served with meals. MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. Call ahead to see if children are being accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; self-service bar; complimentary transport; babysitting; nature trails; 2 tennis courts; fishing; kayaks; sailboats; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, Wi-Fi, no phone.

9

The Cayman Islands

You are likely to find a lot of millionaires running around the Cayman Islands, a British Overseas Dependent Territory lying 773km (479 miles) due south of Miami. It's an offshore banking mecca, and Grand Cayman is a haven for some shady dough.

For that reason, and because virtually everything has to be imported, the cost of living here is about 20% higher than in the United States. The Cayman dollar is even more valuable than the U.S. dollar.

Seven Mile Beach and several dive spots have put Grand Cayman on the tourist map. Ringed by glorious coral reefs, Grand Cayman is teeming with marine life and is a world-class diving destination. But don't expect fast-paced excitement of the type you'd find in nearby Jamaica, Havana, or Puerto Rico. Grand Cayman is more for R&R, and party-hungry travelers in search of urban thrills might be disappointed.

Most tourism centers around the major island of Grand Cayman, which, in spite of its name, is only 35km (22 miles) long and 13km (8 miles) across at its widest point. The other islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, are considerably smaller and contain very limited tourist facilities in contrast to the well-developed Grand Cayman. George Town on Grand Cayman is the capital and is, therefore, the hub of government, banking, and shopping.

English is the official language of the islands, although it's often spoken with an English slur mixed with an American Southern drawl and a lilting Welsh accent.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Seven Mile Beach,** one of the Caribbean's grandest beaches, beginning north of George Town. So it's actually only 9km (5 1/2 miles), but who's counting? Sparkling white sands are set against a backdrop of swaying palms and casuarinas pines.
- **Scuba diving:** Aficionados rate the Cayman Islands as one of the worlds top dive sites, with its coral reefs and famous vertical coral walls teeming with marine life and surrounding the island. There are shipwrecks galore.
- **Stingray City,** on the island's northwestern tip. In 4m (13ft.) of deep waters on North Sound, you'll have close encounters with dozens of graceful stingrays looking for squid treats and other delicacies.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Cayman Islands Department of Tourism** (✆ **800/263-5805**) has the following offices in the United States: Doral Centre, 8300 NW 53rd St., Ste. 103, Miami, FL 33166 (✆ **305/599-9033;** fax 305/599-3766); 30 North LaSalle St., Ste. 1650, Chicago, IL 60602 (✆ **312/263-1750;** fax 312/263-1753); Two Memorial City Plaza, 820 Gessner, Ste. 1335, Houston, TX 77024 (✆ **713/461-1317;** fax 713/461-7409); and Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Ave., Ste. 1801, New York, NY 10118 (✆ **212/889-9009**).

Fun Facts A hoy, Matey!

Cayman Islands Pirates' Week is held during a 10-day period every year during early November. It's a national festival in which cutlass-bearing pirates and sassy wenches storm George Town, capture the governor, throng the streets, and stage a costume parade. The celebration, which is held throughout the Caymans, pays tribute to the nation's past and its cultural heritage. For exact dates and other information, contact the **Pirates Week Festival Office** (✆ **345/949-5859;** www.piratesweekfestival.com).

In Canada, contact 2 Bloor St. West, Ste. 700, Toronto, ON M4W 3R1 (✆ **416/485-1550** or 800/263-5805; fax 416/972-5071).

In the United Kingdom, the contact is **Cayman Islands Department of Tourism,** 6 Arlington St., London SW1 1RE (✆ **020/7491-7771;** fax 020/7409-7773).

Two websites that describe the Cayman Islands include **www.caymanislands.ky** and **www.divecayman.ky**.

GETTING THERE

The Cayman Islands are easily accessible. Flying time from Miami is 1 hour, 10 minutes; from Houston, 2 hours, 45 minutes; from Tampa, 1 hour, 40 minutes; and from Atlanta, 3 hours, 35 minutes. Only a handful of nonstop flights are available from the U.S. Midwest, so most visitors use Miami as their gateway.

Cayman Airways (✆ **800/422-9626** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/949-2311; www.caymanairways.com) has the most frequent service to Grand Cayman, with three daily flights from Miami, four flights a week from Tampa, and occasional nonstop flights from Houston. Depending on bookings and the season, they also fly to Boston, Kingston (Jamaica), and Havana (Cuba). Since 2008, Cayman Airways has also been flying nonstop from Chicago to Grand Cayman, with twice-weekly flights departing and arriving on Wednesday and Sunday. It's also the only airline with regularly scheduled service between Grand Cayman and the sister islands of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

Many visitors also fly to Grand Cayman on **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com), which flies once a day from Miami. **Northwest Airlines** (✆ **800/225-2525** in the U.S. and Canada; www.nwa.com) flies, during winter only, several times a week from Detroit to Grand Cayman. **US Airways** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) flies nonstop daily from Charlotte. **Delta** (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies daily into Grand Cayman from its hub in Atlanta. **Continental Airlines** (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) offers service between Houston and Grand Cayman on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com) flies nonstop from Toronto on Sunday (in winter only) and Wednesday (year-round). **British Airways** (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada, or 0870/850-9850 in the U.K.; www.britishairways.com) offers between three and four weekly flights, depending on the season, from London's Gatwick Airport, with a stopover in Nassau.

Fast Facts The Cayman Islands

Business Hours Normally, banks are open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 4pm, and Friday 9am to 4:30pm. Shops are usually open Monday to Saturday 9am to 5pm.

Currency The legal tender is the Cayman Islands dollar **(CI$)**. Whereas the U.S. dollar and the Cayman Island dollar are more or less permanently fixed at a ratio of 1 to 1.25, the British pound and the Cayman dollar float freely, according to a complicated set of international economic factors. At press time for this edition, CI$1 equaled approximately 80p. Canadian, U.S., and British currencies are accepted throughout the Cayman Islands, but you'll save money if you exchange your U.S. dollars for Cayman Islands dollars. The Cayman dollar breaks down into 100 cents. Coins come in 1¢, 5¢, 10¢, and 25¢ denominations. Bills come in denominations of CI$1, CI$5, CI$10, CI$25, CI$50, and CI$100 (there is no CI$20 bill). Most hotels quote rates in U.S. dollars. However, many restaurants quote prices in Cayman Islands dollars, which might lead you to think that food is much cheaper than it is. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents Citizens of the United States should carry a valid passport, both for the purposes of entering the Cayman Islands and also for ease in returning to the U.S. at the end of their trip. Citizens of the United Kingdom and Canada should have at least a certified birth certificate with a raised seal and a photo ID, although a passport is preferred. All visitors need a return or ongoing ticket.

Electricity It's 110-volt AC (60 cycles), so U.S. and Canadian appliances will not need adapters or transformers.

Emergencies For medical, police, or fire-related emergencies, dial ✆ **911.**

Hospital There's a hospital on Grand Cayman and another small one on Cayman Brac. Seriously ill cases, or cases associated with a genuinely serious accident on Little Cayman, are usually transported by plane or helicopter to Grand Cayman. On Grand Cayman, the **Cayman Islands Hospital** is at 1 Hospital Rd. (✆ **345/949-8600**); on Cayman Brac, the **Faith Hospital** is at Stake Bay (✆ **345/948-2243**); and on Little Cay, the **Little Cayman Clinic** (✆ **345/948-0072**) lies adjacent to the airport. You can summon emergency help on all three of the islands by dialing 911.

Language English is the official language of the islands.

Liquor Laws Beer, wine, and liquor are sold at most grocery and convenience stores Monday to Saturday. It is legal to have an open container on the beach.

Taxes A government tourist tax of 10% is added to your hotel bill. A departure tax of $13 is collected when you leave the Caymans, usually in the form of a fee that's automatically included in the price of your airplane ticket. There are no taxes on goods and services.

Telephone To call the Cayman Islands from the United States, dial **1,** then the **345** area code, and the local number. Once you're on the island, to charge a long-distance call to a calling card, here are some access numbers: **AT&T** at ✆ **800/872-2881, Sprint** at ✆ **888/366-4663,** and **MCI** at ✆ **800/624-1000.** In lieu of

any of these three carriers (some smaller hotels might not accept them), the access code for a local telephone carrier (Blue Skies) is **800/534-9718.**

Time U.S. Eastern Standard Time is in effect year-round; daylight saving time is not observed.

Tipping Virtually every restaurant in the Cayman Islands adds a 10% to 15% service charge in lieu of tipping, so check your bill carefully. Hotels also often add a 10% service charge to your bill. Taxi drivers expect a 10% to 15% tip.

Water According to most official statements, the water in the Cayman Islands is safe to drink directly from the tap, but we've found that many local residents opt, instead, for bottled water whenever possible, using tap water only for cooking and cleaning.

Weather The temperature in the Cayman Islands seldom goes lower than 70°F (21°C) or higher than 90°F (32°C). The daily average is between 77°F (25°C) and 84°F (29°C).

2 GRAND CAYMAN ★★

The largest of the three islands and a real diving mecca, Grand Cayman survives and flourishes thanks to a unique blend of tourism, financial services, low crime, conservatism, and political stability. Home to the branch offices of more than 500 banks and dozens of insurance companies, its capital, George Town, is the offshore banking center of the Caribbean. (No problems finding an ATM here!) Retirees are drawn to the peace and tranquillity of this British Crown Colony, site of many large-scale real estate and condominium developments. The overwhelming majority of the Cayman Islands' population lives on Grand Cayman. The manners and presuppositions of the locals reflect their British heritage.

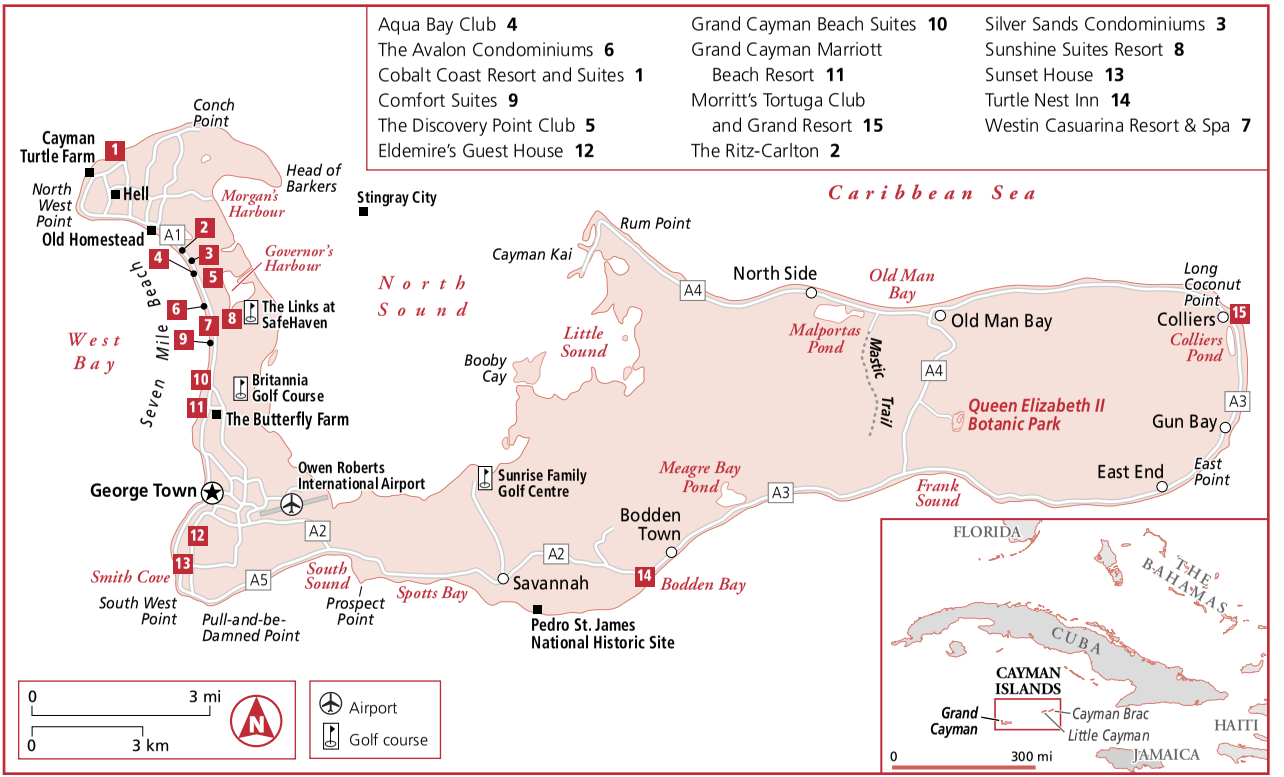
ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE See "Getting There," above.

GETTING AROUND All arriving flights are met by taxis. The fares are fixed by the director of civil aviation (✆ **345/949-7811**); typical one-way taxi fares from the airport to Seven Mile Beach for between one and three passengers and their luggage range from $15 to $20. Cabs are legally required to carry a printed version of the official rates established by the Caymanian government, usually inside the cab drivers' notebooks.

Taxis (which can hold a maximum of five people) can also take visitors on around-the-island tours. **Cayman Cab Team** (✆ **345/947-1173**) offers 24-hour service. You can also call **A.A. Transportation** at ✆ **345/949-7222.**

The island has limited **bus service,** with approximately 38 minibuses operated by 24 licensed operators, serving eight routes daily from 6am to midnight. The bus terminal lies adjacent to the public library on Edward Street in George Town. The one-way per-person fare from George Town to points within George Town and along most of Seven Mile Beach is $2.50. Fares from George Town to far-distance points of Grand Cayman—say, to the most distant tip of the East End—can go as high as $4.40 each way.


Aqua Bay Club 4
The Avalon Condominiums 6
Cobalt Coast Resort and Suites 1
Comfort Suites 9
The Discovery Point Club 5
Eldemire's Guest House 12
Grand Cayman Beach Suites 10
Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort 11
Morritt's Tortuga Club and Grand Resort 15
The Ritz-Carlton 2
Silver Sands Condominiums 3
Sunshine Suites Resort 8
Sunset House 13
Turtle Nest Inn 14
Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa 7
Caribbean Sea
Conch Point
Cayman Turtle Farm
Head of Barkers
North West Point
Hell
Morgan's Harbour
Stingray City
Old Homestead
Governor's Harbour
Seven Mile Beach
West Bay
The Links at SafeHaven
Britannia Golf Course
The Butterfly Farm
North Sound
Rum Point
Cayman Kai
North Side
Old Man Bay
Long Coconut Point
Colliers
Colliers Pond
Little Sound
Booby Cay
Malportas Pond
Mastic Trail
Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park
Gun Bay
East End
East Point
Meagre Bay Pond
Frank Sound
Owen Roberts International Airport
George Town
Sunrise Family Golf Centre
Bodden Town
Savannah
Bodden Bay
Smith Cove
South West Point
Pull-and-be-Damned Point
South Sound
Prospect Point
Spotts Bay
Pedro St. James National Historic Site
A1
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Airport
Golf course
FLORIDA
THE BAHAMAS
CUBA
CAYMAN ISLANDS
Grand Cayman
Cayman Brac
Little Cayman
HAITI
JAMAICA
0 300 mi

If you can safely and responsibly drive on the left, consider renting a car. Several car-rental companies operate on the island, including **Avis,** through Avis Cisco (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/949-2468; www.aviscayman.com); **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/949-5605; www.budgetcayman.com); **Hertz,** through a local franchise, Ace Rent-a-Car (✆ **800/654-3001** or 345/949-2280; www.hertzcaribbean.com); or **Andy's Rent-a-Car,** a well-respected local car-rental company (✆ **345/949-8111;** www.andys.ky). Each will issue the mandatory Cayman Islands driving permit for an additional $7.50. All four require that you make reservations between 6 and 36 hours before pickup. Government regulations demand that drivers be at least 21 years old to rent a car, and some require that drivers be at least 25. Each of the outfits maintains rental kiosks and inventories of available cars within walking distance of the airport, although most visitors find it easier to take a taxi to their hotels and then arrange for the cars to be brought to them.

Remember to drive on the left and to reserve your car as far in advance as possible, especially in midwinter.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Department of Tourism** is temporarily housed in the Regatta Office Park, Windward 3, West Bay Road, P.O. Box 67, Grand Cayman KY1-1102 (✆ **345/949-0623;** fax 345/949-4053). Hours are Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm.

FAST FACTS The only full-service hospital is the **Cayman Islands Hospital** (also known as the George Town Hospital), 1 Hospital Rd. (✆ **345/949-8600**). The most central pharmacy is **Cayman Drug,** at Kirk Freeport Centre, George Town (✆ **345/949-2597**).

In George Town, the main branch of the **post office** and Philatelic Bureau is located on Edward Street (✆ **345/949-2474**). It's open Monday to Friday from 8:15am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 12:30pm. There are branch offices on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, and a total of at least nine additional branch post offices on Grand Cayman as well, including branches at the airport, along Seven Mile Beach, and in the barren-looking, rock-studded neighborhood known as Hell, each maintaining the same hours as the main branch.

WHERE TO STAY

Nearly all the hotels are lined up along Seven Mile Beach. Hotels, unlike many Caymanian restaurants, generally quote prices in U.S. dollars. When choosing a hotel, keep in mind that the quoted rates do not include the 10% government tax or the hotel service tax, which varies between 6% and 10%, depending on the hotel.

Very Expensive

The Avalon Condominiums ★★ One of Grand Cayman's best condo complexes is The Avalon, which occupies prime real estate on a stretch of Seven Mile Beach. Painted a distinctive shade of blue-violet (the staff refers to it as "orchid"), it consists of 27 ocean-front three-bedroom/three-bathroom units, 19 of which can be rented. About a 10-minute drive from George Town, it's well maintained, pleasant, and stylish. Children 11 and under are allowed on-site, but overall, they're rather carefully "policed" for misbehavior and loud noises. The well-appointed, spacious units have an English colonial motif, durable flowered or pastel-colored upholsteries, plus king-size or twin beds. Each condo has a fully equipped open-sided kitchen and a large screened lanai that overlooks a stretch of the beach.

West Bay Rd. (P.O. Box 31236), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **345/945-4171.** Fax 345/945-4189. www.avalon cayman.com. 27 units. Winter $975 apt for 4, $1,175 apt for 6; off season $695 apt for 4–6. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen, washer/dryer, Wi-Fi.

Grand Cayman Beach Suites ★ (Kids) It's stylish and an all-suite resort set directly on the sands of Seven Mile Beach. This property originated in the 1980s as a part of the 36-hectare (89-acre) resort development. The beach suites—originally conceived as an afterthought to a larger resort—are some of the most sought-after accommodations on Grand Cayman. And although the land on which the tr uncated resort sits is relatively compact, the owners have placed lots of distractions and div ersions on-site, including two restaurants, and direct access to the beach. Rooms, each configured as a compact but artfully designed suite, are well upholstered and have private verandas with views of the sea. Restaurants lie nearby; there are also some convenient markets if you want to cook inside your suite.

George Town, Seven Mile Beach (P.O. Box 1588), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/233-1234** in the U.S., or 345/949-1234. Fax 345/949-8528. www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com. 53 suites. Winter $550–$650 1-bedroom suite, $950–$1,150 2-bedroom suite; off season $275–$375 1-bedroom suite, $600–$700 2-bedroom suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's programs (3–12); 9-hole golf course; health club; Jacuzzi; 2 pools (1 with swim-up bar); room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

The Ritz-Carlton ★★★ (Kids) With amenities and a service level that's rivaled only by the Westin, the Ritz-Carlton is the largest, plushest, most prestigious, most spectacular, and most awe-inspiring resort in the Cayman Islands. Straddling both sides of the boulevard that parallels Seven Mile Beach, the hotel is divided into two regal and distinctly separate buildings. Binding the components together is a soundproofed, climate-controlled catwalk that stretches above the sometimes congested rush-hour traffic of West Bay Street. Everything is climate controlled, meticulously manicured, and covered with marble, stone, expensive hardwoods, or ultraplush wall-to-wall carpeting. The Ritz covers 58 hectares (143 acres), the entire width of the island, from Seven Mile Beach to North Sands, including a Greg Norman–designed golf course, and the world's first spa inspired by La Prairie's Silver Rain. All the rooms are blissful, but the especially luxurious ones are available at The Reserve, a collection of two dozen oceanfront condos with large living and dining areas and wide terraces.

West Bay Rd., Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/241-3333** or 345/943-9000. Fax 345/943-9001. www.ritzcarlton.com. 365 units. Winter $459–$959 double, from $1,100 suite; off season $299–$499 double, from $599 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; golf course; 2 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Silver Sands Condominiums ★ (Kids) A good choice for families, this modern eight-building complex is arranged horseshoe fashion on a low-density stretch of sandy beachfront, 11km (6¾ miles) north of George Town. The well-maintained apartments are grouped around a rectangular freshwater pool. The eight three-story apartment blocks were solidly built to high standards in the late 1970s. Each is configured as either a two-bedroom/two-bathroom or three-bedroom/three-bathroom unit. The two-bedroom units can hold up to six people, and the three-bedroom units can house up to eight. Each apartment has a balcony and a fully equipped kitchen.

West Bay Rd., Seven Mile Beach (P.O. Box 752WB), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **345/949-3343.** Fax 345/949-1223. www.silversandscondos.com. 42 units. Winter $500–$570 2-bedroom apt, $610–$740 3-bedroom

apt; off season $320–$340 2-bedroom apt, $410–$480 3-bedroom apt. Additional person $25 extra. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. Minimum stay 7 nights in winter, 3 nights in off season. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, cable TV, kitchen.

Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa ★★ After the Ritz-Carlton, this is the best accessorized, most elegant, and plushest resort in the Cayman Islands. Set directly astride the sands of Seven Mile Beach, it has artfully landscaped gardens and grounds, plenty of facilities, and an oval-shaped, large pool. Most of the bedrooms have French doors that open onto private balconies and conservative, comfortable furnishings. Units are a bit small for such a luxury hotel but are well equipped and comfortable. Thanks to the building's layout in the form of a giant *U,* about two-thirds of the accommodations have sea views, a higher percentage than at the Ritz-Carlton; the others look out on the parking lot and West Bay Road, so ask when you reserve.

West Bay Rd., Seven Mile Beach (P.O. Box 30620), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/937-8461** in the U.S., or 345/945-3800. Fax 345/949-5825. www.westincasuarina.com. 343 units. Winter $390–$635 double, $1,050 1-bedroom suite, from $1,655 2-bedroom suite; off season $247–$410 double, $735 1-bedroom suite, from $995 2-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; children's programs; golf; exercise room; outdoor pool; 24-hour room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Aqua Bay Club ★ These privately owned oceanfront condos are located on the western end of Seven Mile Beach, about a 20-minute run from the airport. On well-kept grounds with coconut palms, the compound dates from 1989. Short-term rentals are arranged here while the owners are away. Each accommodation offers the same layout, and most of the units come with two bedrooms and two full bathrooms. In most cases, the master bedroom opens onto a terrace with a view of the water. Each accommodation comes with a well-equipped kitchen, including a dishwasher. Special features are machines for laundry, as well as grills for barbecuing near the beach. As an added bonus, a cellphone is provided for each rental. The location is a bit remote, so you'll probably have to rely on taxi service unless you rent a car.

Seven Mile Beach, Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/825-8703.** Fax 345/945-5681. www.aquabayclub.com. 21 units. Winter $325–$425 1-bedroom suite, $395–$625 for 2-bedroom suite; off season $275 1-bedroom suite, $325–$375 2-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Barbecue grill; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

The Discovery Point Club ★ (Kids) Located at the far end of the northern stretch of Seven Mile Beach, in West Bay (10km/6¼ miles from George Town), this tranquil and relatively isolated group of condos is entirely composed of ocean-bordering suites. The venue here is local, West Indian, and rural—if you're looking for big-city ways, forget it. Some of the best snorkeling along the beach is found just off the shores here. You can also retreat to the club's freshwater pool or heated Jacuzzi. The accommodations here are comfortable and well maintained, and, in some cases, better than those offered by some nearby competitors. Condos feature tasteful furnishings and a screened-in patio. Each renovated unit is decorated by the individual owner, and all come with fully equipped kitchens. Children 5 and under stay free, and cribs and rollaways are available. Each condo receives daily maid service.

West Bay Rd., West Bay (P.O. Box 439), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **345/945-4724.** Fax 345/945-5051. http://discoverypointclub.com. 45 units. Winter $235–$495 double, $540 quad; off season $235–$495 double, $540 quad. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort ★ (Kids) Way down in the pecking order from the Ritz-Carlton and the Westin Casuarina, this five-story choice on Seven Mile Beach is still among the top-ranked hotels on the island. A favorite with large package-tour groups and conventions, it's a 5-minute drive north of George Town. The resort has watersports facilities, and there's good snorkeling 15m (49ft.) offshore. Its Hispanic design contains roofed-over loggias that open onto views of the sea and a landscaped interior courtyard. Regrettably, it sits astride a relatively narrow portion of Seven Mile Beach. The accommodations were all remodeled and are among the most spacious on the island. Each contains modern art, dark-grained wood furniture that includes an armoire, pastel walls, tropical-patterned fabrics, large closets, and private balconies.

389 West Bay Rd., Seven Mile Beach (P.O. Box 30371), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/223-6388** in the U.S. or Canada, or 345/949-0088. Fax 345/949-0288. www.marriott.com/gcmgc. 297 units. Winter $324–$504 double, $840 junior suite, $1,299 suite; off season $190–$375 double, $670 junior suite, $1,150 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; supervised children's programs (Camp Coconuts); health club; Internet; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Moderate

Cobalt Coast Resort and Suites ★★ (Finds) Fans of this resort liken it to a contemporary European bed-and-breakfast where most of the clients are deeply involved with diving. It's one of the best resorts for divers on Grand Cayman, thanks to the on-site presence of a full-service dive operation (Divetech) and the presence, a short distance offshore, of a deep drop-off (the North Wall) that's loaded with many different types of marine life. Don't expect a sand beach: The coastline is entirely composed of jagged rocks, with ladders and metal steps by which you'll lower yourself into the surf. Units include both oceanfront suites and standard rooms, which are roomy, modern, cozy, and soothing, with Marimekko fabrics from Finland and European plumbing fixtures.

18 Seafan Dr., West Bay, Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **888/946-5656** in the U.S., or 345/946-5656 for hotel or 345/946-5658 for Divetech dive center. Fax 345/946-5657 for hotel or 345/946-5659 for dive center. www.cobaltcoast.com or www.divetech.com. 18 units. Winter $270 double, $330 1-bedroom suite for 2, $530 2-bedroom suite or villa for 4; off-season $240 double, $280 1-bedroom suite for 2, $455 2-bedroom suite or villa for 4. Many dive packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; watersports equipment/rentals. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Comfort Suites Streamlined, efficient, and relatively cost effective, this hotel is often cited as one of the less expensive accommodations along Seven Mile Beach. Rising five sand-colored stories above the southern end of the beach, it follows a familiar layout that has proven successful in hundreds of other locations. The comfortable bedrooms each have a large writing table and are comfortably but predictably outfitted. Unfortunately, none of the rooms has a balcony or veranda, and only some have worthwhile views. One- and two-bedroom suites also contain stoves and dishwashers. There's a small pool and sandy footpath.

West Bay Rd., Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/517-4000** in the U.S., or 345/945-7300. Fax 345/945-7400. www.caymancomfort.com. 108 units. Winter $225–$385 double; off season $165–$305 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; exercise room; Jacuzzi; pool; watersports equipment/rentals. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in studios), kitchen (in suites), Wi-Fi.

Morritt's Tortuga Club and Grand Resort ★ On 3 beachfront hectares (7 1/2 acres) on the east end of the island, this resort offers some of the island's best windsurfing and some of its best diving. Tortuga Divers (p. 218), which runs a branch on the premises, focuses on the dive trade and, to a lesser extent, the windsurfing trade that has

developed offshore. About a 40km (25-mile) drive from the airport, the club is composed of clusters of three-story beachfront condos opening onto the water. Each accommodation was built in the Antillean plantation style from the wreckage of a former hotel. And each is part of either the Tortuga Club or the Grand Resort. There's a bit more space within units at the Grand Resort, whose rooms are between 10% and 15% more from the rates noted below, and kitchens are a bit upgraded from those within the Tortuga Club. Many are rented as timeshare units. Each of the comfortably furnished apartments has a fully equipped kitchen, although many guests opt for meals in the complex's simple restaurant.

East End (P.O. Box 496GT), Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/447-0309** in the U.S., or 345/947-7449. Fax 345/947-7669. www.morritts.com. 160 units. Winter $330 studio, $425 1-bedroom suite, from $460 2-bedroom suite; off season $245 studio, $290 1-bedroom suite, from $340 2-bedroom suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 4 bars; babysitting; 3 outdoor pools; exercise room; smoke-free rooms; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, kitchenette.

Sunset House Set on a coastal road about 1.2km (¾ mile) south of George Town, this is a well-recommended middle-bracket hotel whose rooms are divided among a quartet of two-story pink-sided outbuildings. Accommodations are no-nonsense and relatively comfortable. This place is favored by divers and snorkelers, who appreciate the jagged, mostly rock shoreline (site of excellent snorkeling possibilities) and the diving programs. You're given a number of options for accommodations here, ranging from the cheapest (a unit opening onto the courtyard;) to the most expensive (a roomy suite that contains extras such as private balconies, two double beds, a full kitchen, and a living room). The midrange standard bedrooms open onto views of the sea and contain more space than the courtyard units. Don't expect to swim here: off sand: You must lower yourself via ladders directly into the sea.

390 S. Church St., P.O. Box 479, George Town, Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **800/854-4767** or 345/949-7111. Fax 345/949-7101. www.sunsethouse.com. 59 units. Winter $218–$270 double, $315 suite, $365 apt; off season $196–$242 double, $259 suite, $282 apt. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; on-site dive shop (Sunset Divers) offering watersports equipment/rentals. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in suites), kitchen (in apts), Wi-Fi.

Sunshine Suites Resort A 5-minute trek across the traffic of West Bay Street is required before reaching the sands of Seven Mile Beach, but this is a well-designed resort compound. Resembling a decent but somewhat anonymous and uncluttered apartment complex, it includes a relatively small pool. Both inside and out, the design reflects British colonial architecture. Each of the units has its own kitchen, so many guests prepare their meals on-site. Nestled in the compound's center are a handful of gazebos and the resort's simple restaurant.

112 West Bay Rd., Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **877/786-1110** in the U.S., or 345/949-3000. Fax 345/949-1200. www.sunshinesuites.com. 132 units. Winter $224–$288 studio, $254–$298 suite; off season $173–$219 studio, $203–$229 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; free use of nearby fitness center; outdoor pool; watersports equipment/rentals. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Turtle Nest Inn Value This cluster of fully furnished studios and apartments opening onto a beach is an attractive and affordable alternative to the pricey condos and chain hotels such as the Marriott. The beach out front is a bit narrow but always has good snorkeling, and guests usually find it uncrowded. Otherwise, guests relax on the terrace. The architecture is vaguely Spanish, with arches and a red-tiled roof, along with whitewashed walls and

cooling terra-cotta tiles in the private, well-furnished units. Lying a 10-minute drive from George Town and the airport, the location is a bit obscure in the village of Bodden Town, the first capital of the island.

Red Bay Rd., Bodden Town, Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **345/947-8665.** Fax 345/947-6379. www.turtlenestinn.com. 8 units. Winter $149 double, $199–$299 apt; off season $99–$119 double, $159–$219 apt. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Gas barbecue; bikes and mopeds; pool; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchen (in some), Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

Eldemire's Guest House Set within an unpretentious neighborhood on the landward side of South Church Road, this B&B lies 1.5km (1 mile) south of downtown George Town. Basic and completely free of glitter, it's run by Carol "Tootie" Eldemire Huddleston, a no-nonsense Jamaica-born entrepreneur ("a helluva matriarch") who lives just across the street. Accommodations are within either the main house or a handful of outbuildings. Each room is a sparsely furnished affair, with well-worn furniture and few frills. Smith Cove Beach lies within a 5-minute walk. Residents of the double rooms have access to the house's communal kitchen, and each of the suites and apartments contains a simple kitchenette.

18 Pebbles Way, George Town, Grand Cayman, B.W.I. ✆ **345/916-8369.** Fax 345/949-4595. www.eldemire.com. 13 units. Winter $119 double, $159 1-bedroom apt, $259 2-bedroom apt; off season $85 double, $115 1-bedroom apt, $175 2-bedroom apt. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bikes; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenettes (in suites and apts).

WHERE TO DINE

Make sure you understand which currency the menu is printed in. If it's not written on the menu, ask the waiter if the prices are in U.S. dollars or Cayman Island dollars. It will make a big difference when you get your final bill.

Because virtually everything is shipped in, Cayman Islands restaurants are among the most expensive in the Caribbean. For the best value, opt for West Indian fare such as conch and grouper, which are invariably less expensive. Fewer and fewer restaurants offer turtle these days, although traditionally it's been a culinary star in the Caymans. Today it appears most often as turtle steak, but sometimes in soups or stews.

Expensive

The Brasserie ★★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL Elegant and stylish, and favored by members of Grand Cayman's investment community, this restaurant seems very far removed from the tourist hubbub of Seven Mile Beach and other tourist-geared areas. Expect a Caribbean colonial decor with high ceilings, artfully carved teakwood and mahogany furniture, spinning ceiling fans, and a cool, breezy layout that might evoke an upscale private club in a long-gone British colonial empire. Lunches focus on upscale and upbeat salads such as a fresh yellowfin tuna tataki with pine nuts, feta cheese, and sweet basil vinaigrette, and pastas or the fresh catch of the day. Dinners are more elaborate, featuring such appetizers as a slab of Hudson Valley foie gras with chocolate foam, or else warm white asparagus with prosciutto and a lemon veloute. Main courses are a Luccullan treat, especially the pan-seared scallops with a celeriac mouselline or else braised lamb shank with roasted garlic mashed potatoes and red wine cabbage.

Cricket Sq., Elgin Ave. ✆ **345/945-1815.** www.brasseriecayman.com. Reservations recommended, especially at lunch. Lunch salads and platters $11–$31; dinner main courses $28–$50. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; tapas menu daily 4:30–7pm; dinner daily 6–10pm.

Calypso Grill ★★ (Finds) SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL At first glance, you might think this is little more than a waterfront shack. But when you enter, you'll find a charming, funky, and slightly psychedelic bar and restaurant that absolutely drips with Creole colors, a sense of whimsy, and even a bold and creative sense of elegance. If the wind isn't too brisk, you can sit on a wooden deck directly above the water, watching wor kaday fishing craft depositing their loads at West Bay's busiest fishing port. The venue is very authentic, with a clientele that derives from many walks of Caymanian life, from the monied to the bohemian—all of it a far cry from the congestion and glitter of Seven Mile Beach. Perch at the rectangular bar here for a cocktail or any of about a dozen kinds of wine by the glass, or, if a table isn't likely to become available, opt for a full meal. The best menu items include marinated conch; a creamy version of lobster bisque; Cuban-style shrimp with sherry-flavored cream sauce; fresh fish (ask the waiter what's available) that can be blackened, grilled, or sautéed; veal chops with chanterelles; and a garlic-laced version of shrimp linguine. Favorite desserts include mango crêpes and sticky toffee pudding.

Morgan's Harbour, West Bay. ✆ **345/949-3948.** www.calypsogrillcayman.com. Reservations required for dinner. Main courses $20–$40. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm; Tues–Sun 6–10pm.

Casanova's ★ ITALIAN/SEAFOOD In the heart of George Town, this local favorite is owned and run by the Crescente family. Here the cooks rely heavily on the catch of the day, and they have also mastered the heart of Italian cooking. The lunch menu is enticing, with its salads and the homemade soup of the day. You can also order conch fritters with jerk mayonnaise and marinated chicken breast. Dinner grows more enticing, with a choice of both hot and cold appetizers, ranging from tuna sashimi style to sautéed mussels. Pastas include a penne with fresh lobster or fresh center-cut yellowfin tuna in a light oregano sauce on a bed of orange seaweed salad.

2828 Old Fort Bldg., George Town. ✆ **345/949-7633.** www.casanova.ky. Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$35. MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; daily 6–10pm.

The Cracked Conch/MacaBuca Oceanside Tiki Bar & Grill ★★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL This place reopened with fanfare in 2006 and immediately became the focus of recommendations across Grand Cayman. Nestled into the jagged rocks of West Bay, on the seacoast near the northern terminus of Seven Mile Beach, across the road from the Turtle Farm, it serves some of the island's freshest seafood. It's also a dining and drinking destination in its own right, a magnet for young, attractive residents of Grand Cayman. The best way to appreciate this place involves drinks and perhaps a focus on the big-screen TVs at the MacaBuca Tiki Bar, and then a migration to a table on the open-sided veranda at the Cracked Conch. As a whole, the experience involves views of flickering torches and the sound of surf crashing against the jagged rocks nearby, hallucinatory rum punches and martinis, and very good food.

Informal menu items available throughout the day and evening at MacaBuca and at lunch at the Cracked Conch include salads, fried calamari, breaded and fried conch steaks, and beef, chicken, or conch burgers. More formal and elaborate dishes, available for dinner at the Cracked Conch, feature steamed conch and snapper coconut casserole, and a skillfully prepared roulade of conch and turtle steak. Sunday brunches here are festive, with buffet stations set up within the establishment's gleaming stainless-steel kitchen. There's also an elegant indoor bar here.

West Bay Rd., near Turtle Bay Farm. ✆ **345/945-5217.** www.crackedconch.com.ky. Reservations required. MacaBuca platters, sandwiches, and salads $7.50–$23; Cracked Conch dinner main courses

$18–$48; all-you-can-eat buffet-style Sun brunch $35. AE, MC, V. Cracked Conch daily 11am–3pm and 5:30–10pm. MacaBuca Tiki Bar daily 10am–midnight (or later).

Grand Old House ★★ AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN/PACIFIC RIM The Grand Old House is the island's premier caterer and hosts everything from lavish weddings and political functions to informal family celebrations. This former plantation house lies amid venerable trees 2km (1 1/4 miles) south of George Town, past Jackson Point. Built on bedrock near the edge of the sea, it stands on 129 ironwood posts that support the main house and a bevy of gazebos.

For appetizers, we recommend the roasted lobster Napoleon or the marinated conch Cayman Island–style with tomato, cilantro, and Key lime flavorings. Also worthwhile is the tequila-infused snow crab and lobster laid on a mango gazpacho with spicy cucumber noodles. A signature main course is a platter of baked shrimp and scallops gratin in white wine, or the Cayman-style turtle steak in a tomato-and-white-wine sauce. Among fish dishes, we like the fire-roasted Chilean sea bass in balsamic syrup on a sweet-potato mash with a candied lemon-and-mango beurre blanc.

Petra Plantation, 648 S. Church St. ✆ **345/949-9333.** www.grandoldhouse.com. Reservations required. Main courses $28–$61. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm (Nov–Apr only) and year-round 5:30–10pm.

Hemingway's ★★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL Some of the best seafood on the island is at the premier restaurant of the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, 3km (1 3/4 miles) north of George Town. It occupies a rambling, single-story annex of the hotel, in a spot shoehorned between the beach and two swimming pools. There's a rather plush bar inside, a favorite after-work hangout that's favored by managers of competing, nonaffiliated restaurants nearby; a big-windowed, air-conditioned dining room; and tables set outside, on a shaded colonnade near trails of bougainvillea and spinning overhead fans. The menu is among the most imaginative on the island and has won acclaim from *Gourmet* magazine. Appetizers include a tasty coconut shrimp with a mango marmalade accent; Cuban-style barbecued turtle steak; well-spiced crab cakes; paella; and an absolutely fantastic deep-fried version of a whole red snapper that's deboned and artfully presented like a piece of sculpture, with pickled onions, bell peppers, and garlic-laced mashed potatoes. There's also catch of the day, prepared any way you want it, including blackened, and citrus-and-cumin-marinated tenderloin of pork.

In the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, West Bay Rd. ✆ **345/949-1234.** Reservations required. Main courses $15–$23 lunch, $26–$53 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 6–10pm.

Lighthouse at Breakers ★ CARIBBEAN/ITALIAN/SEAFOOD On the south shore of the island, this cozy, elegant, and nautically decorated landmark lies about a 30-minute drive east from George Town. Its creative menu mainly features fresh local seafood. A well-trained chef, backed up by a skilled staff, offers well-prepared meals, attracting both locals and visitors. Put yourself in the hands of the mostly European staff, and sit back to enjoy such tempting appetizers as penne pasta with shrimp, asparagus, tomatoes, and pesto; or tuna sushi rolled in sesame seeds. For your main course, opt for the mixed grill of Caribbean seafood, lobster with gnocchi and shrimp filet mignon with brandy-flavored cream sauce, or a veal chop topped with Gorgonzola and pancetta ham. The restaurant has one of the best wine cellars on the island. Immediately adjacent to the restaurant is a towering life-size replica of a lighthouse, its trademark and signature, that's visible for many miles out to sea.

Breakers. ✆ **345/947-2047.** www.lighthouse.ky. Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$19 lunch, $21–$59 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3:30pm and 5:30–10pm.

Lobster Pot ★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL Folksy and charming, but not quite as good or as polished as Hemingway's, Lobster Pot is still an island favorite. It overlooks the water from its second-floor perch at the northern perimeter of George Town, directly beside the road that funnels traffic into the capital from Seven Mile Beach. As its name suggests, it serves lobster prepared in many different ways: Cayman style, broiled in its shell, as lobster bisque, and as a mouth-watering salad. Braised jerk chicken, turtle steak, and stuffed Chilean salmon are also on the menu. Most dishes are right on the mark. A house specialty is the "Cayman Trio," with portions of broiled lobster tail, garlic-sautéed shrimp, and grilled fresh local fish piled onto the same platter. For lunch, you might opt for English-style fish and chips or perhaps lobster quesadillas or lobster-studded pasta.

245 N. Church St. ✆ **345/949-2736.** Reservations recommended in winter. Main courses $15–$38 lunch, $25–$56 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; daily 5–10pm.

Portofino Wreckview Restaurant ★ ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN In 1962, an American cargo ship, the *Liberty,* sank during a storm on a reef close to Grand Cayman's eastern shore. Today, split into three thoroughly rusted separate sections that rest in shallow water, it provides a focal point for the panoramas that open before you from the terrace of this restaurant. The most popular independent restaurant on Grand Cayman's East End, it draws clients from the hotel and resort complexes nearby. You might begin a meal here with a satay of beef or chicken, served with a cucumber-and-peanut sauce, then follow with a savory version of *zuppa di pesce* (fish soup); breaded conch steak served in traditional East End style; turtle steak; any of several kinds of pasta; and the house specialty, baked seafood Portofino, which delectably combines lobster, tiger shrimp, scallops, and mousseline potatoes au gratin. Lunches are simpler than dinners, focusing on salads, sandwiches, pastas, and grilled fish.

In Colliers, East End. ✆ **345/947-2700.** Reservations recommended. Lunch platters $13–$21; dinner main courses $20–$38. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm.

The Reef Grill at Royal Palms ★★★ SEAFOOD This is one of the island's finest, and one of our favorite, restaurants on Grand Cayman, a site that manages to be chic, savvy, elegant, hip, and fun all at the same time. It's positioned on a strategic plot of land in the heart of the Seven Mile Beach "golden strip." The savvy entrepreneurs who rent the space maintain a compound of one- and two-story buildings that include a beachfront bar and grill, a nightclub, and a classy citadel of gourmet cuisine. To fully appreciate the place, we recommend a brisk walk-through as a means of determining which corner of the place you'd most like to occupy. The inland, "landlocked" bar and dining area is elegant, red, and evocative of an upscale corner of Europe, but the seafront bar offers dance-floor views of Grand Cayman's most nubile and flirtatious chatterboxes.

Favorites here include Maytag blue cheese salad with chopped Granny Smith apples and spiced pecans; conch fritters with jerk-flavored mayonnaise; a melt-in-your-mouth honey and soy-glazed sea bass with Thai-style curried vinaigrette; and lobster risotto with coconut reduction. At lunch you can order well-stuffed sandwiches, freshly made salads, and from-the-oven pizzas. If you opt to dine under the stars, and if it's a Friday or Saturday, you'll hear some of the most talented local musicians playing soca and calypso in the bar pavilion about a hundred paces away.

In the Royal Palms Beach Club, Seven Mile Beach. ✆ **345/945-6358.** www.reefgrill.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$23 lunch, $29–$43 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5:30–10pm. Closed Sun night May–Dec.

Ristorante P appagallo ★ NOR THERN IT ALIAN/SEAFOOD One of the island's most memorable restaurants lies on a 6-hectare (15-acre) bird sanctuary overlooking a natural lagoon, 15 minutes nor th of G eorge Town. I ts designers incorporated Caymanian and Aztec weaving techniques in its thatched roof. Glass doors, black marble, and polished brass mix a kind of Edwardian opulence with a Tahitian decor. Inside, you'll see some of the most beautiful (caged) parr ots on the island, separated fr om the dining and drinking area (for sanitary reasons) by plate-glass windows. The lobster-and-scallop bisque in coconut cream and the carpaccio of raw beef with ar ugula are appealing appetizers. Pastas are full of flav or, especially the fettuccine with lemon-grilled chicken and sun-dried tomatoes, and the penne with homemade sausage. F ish and shellfish ar e well prepared, or y ou can opt for either the pepper ed West I ndian por k tenderloin in an apple-bourbon sauce, or a combination of lobster and shrimp , prepared in the style of the chef, with pepper , garlic, diced tomatoes, mushr ooms, and a flaming brandy-and-tarragon-flavored cream sauce.

Close to the Villas Pappagallo, Conch Point Rd., Barkers, in West Bay (near the northern terminus of West Bay Rd., 13k m/8 miles nor th of Geor ge Town). ✆ **345/946-3139.** Reser vations r ecommended. M ain courses $18–$40. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

The Wharf ★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL On the nor thern fringe of G eorge Town, at the southernmost edge of Seven Mile Beach, this dining, drinking, and nightlife emporium is fun, tr opical, ar tfully illuminated, and occasionally hip . More than half of the place is built on wharves and piers that jut seaward, allowing fish to swim under your dining table as you eat, and even to make appearances in an open area that's the target of a plethora of spotlights that catch their ev ery silv ery mo vement. (The feeding of the tarpon, something appr oaching an under water frenzy, occurs ev ery night at 9pm.) The restaurant is decorated in tones of tur quoise and blue, and offers dining within an air-conditioned interior, or outside on either an elevated veranda or a waterside terrace. The sound of the sur f mingles with chatter fr om the P orts of Call B ar and music fr om the strolling Paraguayan harpist, Eugenio Leon.

Many diners begin with the blue-crab-and-shrimp salad with cucumber and mango, or the golden-fried Caribbean lobster cake with a r oasted-corn relish. Main dishes are a delight, especially the basil-and-pistachio-cr usted sea bass in a cr eamy champagne sauce or the grilled tur tle-and-lobster pie with rice and v egetables. A local fav orite is the por k tenderloin Tortuga, baked betw een sugar cane and ser ved with a dar k-rum sauce. F resh fish can be pr epared any way y ou want: blackened, almondine, grilled, or "island style." The kitchen makes a laudable effor t to br eak away fr om typical, dull menu items, and for the most part, they succeed.

43 West Bay Rd., Seven Mile Beach. ✆ **345/949-2231.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $30–$48. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

Moderate

Chicken! Chicken! Kids Value AMERICAN This v enue completely lacks glamour , but within its cheer ful and unpr etentious premises (it looks like the interior of a brightly painted C reole cottage), y ou can feed a family for less money than at vir tually any other restaurant on the island. The specialty, and the only available main course, is tender, richly seasoned, perfectly cooked chicken. As many as 32 chickens at a time r otate enticingly in the glare of the island's biggest and most theatrical r otisserie, prominently positioned near the restaurant's entrance. Each chicken is flav ored with herbs and a touch of garlic. After placing your order at the stand-up counter , you can opt to dine in the r estaurant, or y ou

can haul your chicken away for consumption some where else. The chicken (breast, thigh, or whole roasted birds, depending on your order) is accompanied by corn bread and your choice of cole slaw, rice, or beans.

In the West Shore Shopping Plaza, West Bay Rd. ✆ **345/945-2290.** Lunch $9–$10; dinner $11–$14. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

KaiboBar & Grill INTERNATIONAL Isolated on Grand Cayman's northern coast, in a location that's adjacent to a busy marina, this place offers good food and an irreverent and gregarious atmosphere. Some aspects of the place evoke a beach compound in Polynesia, thanks to flaming torches, multilevel terraces, and cabanas roofed in palm thatch. Menu items focus on juicy burgers, fresh salads, seafood prepared any way you want, steaks, and pastas, any of which can be accompanied by sunset-colored drinks that tend to get the party roaring.

In the Kaibo Yacht Club, Cayman Kai, North Side. ✆ **345/947-9975.** Reservations not necessary. Lunchtime platters, salads, and sandwiches $10–$13; dinner main courses $23–$48. AE, MC, V. Grill daily 11am–11pm. Bar 11am–1am.

Mezza's INTERNATIONAL Hip, breezy, Europeanized, and urban, this restaurant sits one floor above a landmark liquor store (Big Daddy's), immediately adjacent to the Treasure Island Hotel. This is a venue that you might expect to find in South Beach, Miami. Lunches are simple, featuring steak sandwiches, burgers, Caesar salads, and seafood pasta. The dinner menu is more artful, with dishes that include bacon-wrapped mahimahi, basil-encrusted salmon steaks, sautéed shrimp with wine sauce and asparagus, steak au poivre with pommes frites, and fettuccine with jerk chicken. Caramel pecan fudge cake or crème brûlée make for enticing desserts.

233 West Bay Rd. ✆ **345/946-3992.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$40. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5–10pm.

Rackham's Pub & Restaurant AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN If you're interested in an extensive menu and open-air dining with a beautiful view, then you should try this place. In the morning you can watch boats coming to port, and in the evening you can see their lights as they head back out to sea. Your best bets here are the Caribbean shrimp, fish and chips, grilled mahimahi marinated in jerk sauce, Caesar salad, pan-fried grouper with rice and beans, and a wide array of curries and pastas.

93 N. Church St., George Town. ✆ **345/945-3860.** Reservations recommended for parties of 6 or more. Main courses $11–$38. AE, MC, V. Kitchen daily 10:30am–11pm. Bar Mon–Fri 9am–1am; Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 10:30am–midnight.

HITTING THE BEACH

One of the finest beaches in the Caribbean, Grand Cayman's **Seven Mile Beach** ★★★, which begins north of George Town, has sparkling white sands rimmed with Australian pines and palms. (Technically, it's called West Bay Beach, but everybody just says Seven Mile Beach.) Although it's not actually as long as its name claims, it is still a honey: 9km (5½ miles) of white, white sands stretching all the way to George Town. It tends to be crowded near the big resorts, but the beach is so big you can always find some room to spread out your towel. There are no peddlers to hassle you, and the beach is, for the most part, kelp free and beautifully maintained.

Because the beach is on a relatively tranquil side of Grand Cayman, there is no great tide and the water is generally placid and inviting, ideal for families, even those with small children. A sandy bottom slopes gently to deep water. The water's so clear that you

can usually see what's swimming in it. It's great for snorkelers and swimmers of most ages and abilities.

From one end of the beach to the other, most immediately adjacent to their neighbors, there are hotels and condos, many with beachside bars that you can visit. Originally, only buildings with three stories or less were allowed on the beach, but that changed in the 1990s with the construction of several six- and even seven-story towers. The increased "population density" has added greater numbers of people to the sands during periods of high occupancy, which you may or may not like, depending on your values, your aesthetics, and your lifestyle. All sorts of watersports concessions can be found along this beach, including kiosks that rent snorkel gear, boats, windsurfers, WaveRunners, paddlecats, and aqua trikes. Parasailing and water-skiing are also available. Even if you're staying in a relatively obscure guesthouse or condominium, most watersports outfits, including members of the well-respected Red Sail group, will shuttle you from any point along Seven Mile Beach to the departure point for your particular excursion.

Grand Cayman also has a number of minor beaches, although their allures pale in comparison to Seven Mile Beach. Visit these if you want to escape the crowds. Many beaches on the east and north coasts of Grand Cayman are relatively desirable, layered in many cases with pale sand and protected in some cases by offshore barrier reefs, so waters are generally tranquil. The best windsurfing on Grand Cayman is off the eastern shore, with particularly good conditions on the beaches adjacent to the separately recommended Morritt's resorts.

One of our favorites is on the north coast, bordering **Cayman Kai.** This beach is a Caribbean cliché of charm, with palm trees and beautiful sands, along with changing facilities. You can snorkel along the reef to Rum Point. The beach is also ideal as a Sunday-afternoon picnic spot. **Red Sail Sports,** at Rum Point, offers windsurfers, WaveRunners, sailboats, water-skiing, and even glass-bottom boat tours to see the stingrays offshore. It also offers scuba diving.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

What they lack in nightlife, the Caymans make up for in watersports—the fishing, swimming, water-skiing, snorkeling, and especially diving are among the finest in the Caribbean. Coral reefs and coral formations encircle the islands and are filled with lots of marine life (which scuba divers and snorkelers are forbidden to disturb, by the way).

It's easy to dive close to shore, so boats aren't necessary, but there are plenty of boats and scuba facilities available. On certain excursions, we recommend a trip with a qualified dive master. There are many dive rental shops, but they won't rent you scuba gear or supply air unless you have a card from one of the national diving schools, such as NAUI or PADI. Hotels also rent diving equipment to their guests, as well as arrange snorkeling and scuba-diving trips.

Universally regarded as the most up-to-date and best-equipped watersports facility in the Cayman Islands, **Red Sail Sports** maintains its administrative headquarters at Coconut Place P.O. Box # 31473, Grand Cayman KY1-1206; (✆ **877/REDSAIL** [733-7245] in the U.S., or 345/945-5965; www.redsailcayman.com) and its largest, best-accessorized branch at the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, West Bay Road (✆ **345/949-8745**). Other locations are at the Westin Casuarina (✆ **345/949-8732**), at Rum Point (✆ **345/947-9203**), at the Marriott Beach Resort (✆ **345/949-6343**), at the Courtyard by Marriott (✆ **345/946-5481**), and at Morritt's Tortuga Club (✆ **345/947-2097**). Red Sail has a wide range of offerings, from deep-sea fishing to sailing, windsurfing, diving, and more.

Red Sail can also arrange water-skiing for $75 per half-hour (the cost can be divided among several people), and parasailing is offered at $120 per person.

The following are the best options for a gamut of outdoor activities.

CRUISES **Red Sail Sports** (see above) has a number of inexpensive ways you can go sailing in Cayman waters, including a glass-bottom boat ride costing $30 without snorkeling equipment or $40 with snorkeling equipment. It also offers sunset cruises costing $35, as well as a 9am-to-1:15pm sail to Stingray City, with snorkeling equipment and lunch included in the price of $80 per person. Children 11 and under pay half-price.

FISHING Grouper and snapper are most plentiful for those who bottom-fish along the reef. Deeper waters turn up barracuda and bonito. Sport-fishers from all over the world come to the Caymans for the big ones: tuna, wahoo, and marlin. Most hotels can make arrangements for charter boats; experienced guides are also available. **Bayside Water Sports,** from a base at the Morgan's Harbour Marina (✆ **345/949-3200;** www.baysidewatersports.com), offers deep-sea-fishing excursions in search of tuna, marlin, and wahoo on a variety of air-conditioned vessels with an experienced crew. Tours depart at 7am and noon, last half a day, and cost around $500 to $1,000; a full day costs $900 to $1,800. The fee can be split among four to six people.

GOLF Your best bet is **Britannia Golf Club** (✆ **345/745-4653**), a 9-hole course that's positioned across the avenue from Grand Cayman Beach Suites on West Bay Road. This is actually a three-in-one course, including a 9-hole, par-70 course; an 18-hole, par-57 course; and a special course played with a Cayman ball that goes half the distance of a regular golf ball. Greens fees are $65 to $150 for 18 holes. The course was designed by the famous Jack Nicklaus.

Yet another course, **North Sound Golf Club,** off West Bay Road (✆ **345/947-4653**), designed by Roy Case, is an 18-hole, par-71 course charging greens fees of $160. Expect lots of sand traps here.

Tips Into the Deep: Submarine Dives

So scuba diving's not enough for you? You want to see the real undiscovered depths of the ocean? On Grand Cayman, you can take the *Atlantis* reef dive. It's expensive and, in some participants, can induce severe feelings of claustrophobia, but it's a unique way to go under water—and one of the island's most popular attractions.

The ***Atlantis XI,*** Harbour Avenue (✆ **345/949-7700**), is a submersible that's 20m (66 ft.) long, weighs 80 tons, and was built to carry 48 passengers. You can view the reefs and colorful tropical fish through the 26 large viewpoints .6m (2 ft.) in diameter, as it cruises at a depth of 30m (98 ft.) through the maze of coral gardens at a speed of 1½ knots; a guide keeps you informed.

On the *Atlantis* Expedition dive, operated both day and night, you'll experience the reef and see the famous Cayman Wall; the dive lasts 55 minutes and costs $84. Children 4 to 12 are charged $49. *Atlantis XI* dives between five and nine times a day, depending on the number of cruise ships moored offshore on any particular day. Reservations are recommended at least 2 days in advance.

A final course, the 9-hole **Blue Tip,** West Bay Road (✆ **345/815-6500**), is reserved for guests of the Ritz-Carlton, charging greens fees of $200 per player. Designed by Greg Norman, Blue Tip also has the best pro shop on island.

HIKING The **Mastic Trail** is a restored 200-year-old footpath through a 2-million-year-old woodland area in the heart of the island. The trail lies west of Frank Sound Road, about a 45-minute drive from the heart of George Town, and showcases the reserve's natural attractions, including a native mangrove swamp, traditional agriculture, and an ancient woodland area—home to the largest variety of native plant and animal life found in the Cayman Islands.

Although the trail is supervised and maintained, during periods of heavy rain, the southern end is likely to be flooded. The government therefore recommends hikers approach the trail from the northern end, off Further Road, as opposed to via the southern end, off Frank Sound Road.

Guided tours of the trail, organized by the **Cayman Islands National Trust,** are scheduled every Wednesday and every fourth Saturday at 9am. Tours last 2 to 3 hours each and are limited to a maximum of 15 participants. Reservations are strongly recommended, and the cost is $25 per person.The hike is not recommended for children 5 and under, seniors, or persons with physical disabilities. Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes and carry water and insect repellent. For reservations, call The National Trust (✆ **345/949-0121**). If the scheduled departure time for these organized tours isn't practical or convenient, you can stop into the headquarters of the National Trust, on South Church Street, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm for a self-guided walking tour/map of the trail. The guidebook, which describes the botanical and geological features you're likely to see en route, costs $6.30.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING Divers rate Grand Cayman as one of the world's top dive sites, and the island has some of the best scuba-diving outfitters in the Caribbean. Its coral reefs and nearly vertical coral walls teeming with marine life are justifiably famous.

These natural attractions surround not only Grand Cayman, but Little Cayman and Cayman Brac as well. In some cases, experienced divers who are familiar with local waters shun boats altogether and begin their dives from the shore, but we recommend guided expeditions as an enhancement to your pleasure, convenience, and safety. You can call the dive shops recommended in this chapter, or you can ask your hotel to make the arrangements for you.

The waters off Grand Cayman also abound in ship wrecks, many of them so close to the surface that they can even be viewed from the water's surface by snorkelers.

To avoid subpar outfitters, stick to our list of recommendations, and avoid concessions that spring up every year along Seven Mile Beach. Since scuba diving, of course, is a potentially dangerous sport, it is best to patronize well-established dive outfitters with an established record of diver satisfaction and a good safety record.

The nation's reefs and marine life are justifiably considered one of the Cayman Island's most valuable resources and, as such, are rigidly—even fanatically—protected by the government; violators are often prosecuted. If you're unclear about any of the rules, you can contact the **Department of Environment** (✆ **345/949-8469**), an agency that also regulates fishing offshore. If you see violators vandalizing or destroying the reefs or taking coral (which is prohibited), you are asked to report them to **Marine Enforcement** by calling ✆ **345/948-6002.**

The basic rule is that the reefs and coral are here for your enjoyment—you're to look but not touch. Obviously, the "theft" of a reserve that took thousands of years to produce is prohibited.

The offshore waters of Grand Cayman are home to one of the most unusual underwater attractions in the world, **Stingray City** ★★. Set in the sun-flooded, 4m-deep (13-ft.) waters of North Sound, about 3km (1¾ miles) east of the island's northwestern tip, the site originated in the mid-1980s when local fishers cleaned their catch and dumped the offal overboard. They quickly noticed scores of stingrays (which usually eat marine crabs) feeding on the debris, a phenomenon that quickly attracted local divers and marine zoologists. Today between 30 and 50 relatively tame stingrays hover in the waters around the site for daily handouts of squid and ballyhoo from increasing hordes of snorkelers and divers. To capitalize on the phenomenon, about half a dozen entrepreneurs lead expeditions from points along Seven Mile Beach, traveling around the landmass of Conch Point to the feeding grounds. The previously recommended **Red Sail Sports** offers one-tank scuba dives to Stingray City, priced at $80, plus equipment, and snorkeling excursions to the site as well. Snorkel excursions cost between $30 and $80, depending on the time you intend to spend there, the distance the shuttle bus will have to travel to retrieve you at your hotel, and whether lunch is included as part of the experience. ***Warning:*** Stingrays possess deeply penetrating and viciously barbed stingers capable of inflicting painful damage to any one who mistreats them. If you encounter one, be alert, and don't make any fast moves. (The rays can panic, we're told.) And above all, as the divers say, never try to grab one by the tail and never, ever, when you're wading in shallow waters of Stingray City, step on one.)

Despite the potential dangers, divers and snorkelers seem amazingly adept at feeding, petting, and stroking the velvet surfaces of these batlike creatures while avoiding unpleasant incidents.

You'll find plenty of concessions offering snorkel gear for rent along Seven Mile Beach. The snorkeling is great in the clear, warm waters here. Other popular sites are Parrot's Reef and Smith's Cove, south of George Town. Lush reefs abound with parrotfish, coral, sea fans, and sponges. Also great for snorkelers is Turtle Farm Reef, a short swim from shore, with a miniwall rising from a sandy bottom.

Red Sail Sports (see above) offers beginners' scuba diving, as well as excursions for the experienced. A two-tank morning dive includes exploration of two different dive sites at depths ranging from 15 to 30m (49–98 ft.), and costs $110. Beginners can take a daily course that costs $150 per person. See also "Cruises," above, for information on Red Sail Sports snorkel cruises.

Another good dive outfit, **Tortuga Divers** (✆ **345/947-2097**), operates out of Morritt's Tortuga Club and Resort at East End, site of what's described as the best windsurfing conditions in the Cayman Islands, with easy access to the rich marine life. This outfitter caters to both experienced and novice divers, offering dives whenever business justifies it, at 9am and 2pm. Half-day or full-day snorkeling adventures can also be arranged at the same time, and all types of gear are available for rent. The morning two-tank scuba dive costs $110; the afternoon one-tank dive goes for $75. A half-day's snorkeling costs $50, going up to $75 for a full day, including lunch.

Reef Resort, Austin Connelly Drive, East End (✆ **345/916-1064;** www.ambassadordivers.com), is a small dive operation that usually takes out no more than eight passengers at a time. Trips feature the North and South Wall diving areas. PADI certification courses are offered, and dive packages are available; a 2-day deal goes for $160 per person.

Cayman Aggressor IV (✆ **800/348-2628** or 985/385-2628; www .aggressor.com) was designed by divers for divers. Participants are taken out for week-long cruises aboard a 33m (110-ft.) boat. The living is simple, and the cho w is basic. The boat has priv ate cabins and an on-board cook. An inclusive package ranges from $2,495 to $2,895.

Divetech, Cobalt Coast R esort & S uites, 18A S ea Fan Dr., West Bay (✆ **888/946-5656** or 345/946-5658; www .divetech.com), offers daily two-tank boat trips priced at $110 per person. The highlight of most adventures here involves diving down along the side of Grand Cayman's vertiginous North Wall. We especially like this outfitter because of its association with a r esort (Cobalt Coast) which caters almost ex clusively to div ers, and its personalized, hands-on approach. One-tank trips to S tingray City cost $60, and snorkeling trips are also featured. There's also a series of pr ograms designed for kids.

Don Foster's Dive, 218 S. Church St., George Town (✆ **800/833-4837** or 345/949-5679; www.donfosters.com), operates from the waterfront at Casuarina Point in George Town. At its headquarters, there is also a pool with a sho wer. Boat dives are featured, as well as offshore snorkeling. A two-tank dive costs $95, with night div es going for $55.

Eden Rock Diving Center, 124 S. Church St., in George Town (✆ **345/949-7243;** www.edenrockdive.com), specializes in div es to E den Rock and D evil's Grotto, both of them hailed as two of the best div e sites in the Caribbean. A full line of scuba and snorkeling equipment is av ailable for r ent, with a two-tank div e going for $95. S norkeling trips cost $30.

Ocean Frontiers Reef Resort, Austin Connelly D rive, East E nd (✆ **800/348-6096** or 345/947-7500; www.oceanfrontiers.com), is a w ell-run outfitter highlighting underwater attractions in the East E nd, offshore from which are pristine reefs and easy access to wall diving. This tends to be a less crowded dive center than around the West End. Its specialty is P ADI-certified open water div e instruction priced at $399. A half-day pr ogram, which includes classroom instruction and pool practice, followed by a shallow reef dive, goes for $139.

Red Baron Divers, Cayman Islands Beach Club, Seven Mile Beach (✆ **345/916-1293;** www.redbarondivers.com), is one of our favorites because of its small size and personalized staff. It offers a two-tank dive for $90. Its trips to the dramatic drop-offs of Grand Cayman's North Wall and its excursions to the rainbow-hued canyons of the West Wall are highlights, as is a scuba excursion to Stingray City, the latter priced at $65 for a one-tank dive. For $35, it offers a visit to S tingray City configured as a snorkeling adventure instead.

TENNIS A total of nine tennis courts are available to the public at the **Cayman Islands Tennis Club,** Ann Bonney C rescent, South Sound (✆ **345/949-9464**). The fee for up to 2 hours' use of either asphalt or "classic clay" surfaced courts is $13 per person. Hours can vary, according to the season and the w eather, so call ahead before coming here.

WINDSURFING The best place for windsurfing on the island is the beachfront resort of **Morritt's Tortuga Club & Resort** at the East E nd (✆ **345/947-7449**). There, Tortuga Divers, an outfit that's associated with R ed Sail Sports, charges $35 for 1 hour , $85 for 3 hours, and $135 for 5 hours. A 1-hour lesson can be arranged for $55, which is follo wed by a 1-hour practice session that's included in the price. The favorable windsurfing conditions here result from nearly constant winds blowing in from offshore, and an offshore reef that protects the waters of the lagoon in most cases fr om unpredictable waves.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The capital, **George Town,** can easily be explored in an afternoon; stop by for its restaurants and shops (and banks!)—not sights. The town does hav e a clock monument to

King George V, and the post office on Edward Street is the oldest government building in use in the Caymans. Stamps sold here are collected avidly.

The island's premier museum, the **Cayman Islands National Museum,** Harbor Drive (✆ **345/949-8368**), occupies an antique building directly on the water. The veranda-fronted building once served as the island's courthouse. Today the formal exhibits include a collection of Caymanian artifacts collected by Ira Thompson beginning in the 1930s, and the museum incorporates a gift shop, theater, cafe, and more than 2,000 items portraying the natural, social, and cultural history of the Caymans. Hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday 10am to 2pm, costing an admission of $5.

You might also go to **Hell!** At the north end of West Bay Beach is a jagged piece of rock named Hell by a former commissioner. There the postmistress will stamp "Hell, Grand Cayman" on your postcard to send back to the U.S.

Cayman Turtle Farm ★, at Boatswain's Beach, 825 Northwest Point Rd., West Bay (✆ **345/949-3894;** www.turtle.ky), in the heart of the West Bay district, about a 25-minute drive north of George Town, is the only green sea turtle farm of its kind in the world. Once the islands had a multitude of turtles in the surrounding waters (which is why Columbus called the islands Las Tortugas), but, sadly, today these creatures are few in number, and the green sea turtle has been designated an endangered species. (You cannot bring turtle products into the United States.) Its main function involves providing the local market with edible turtle meat (preventing the need to hunt turtles in the wild) and replenishing the waters with hatchling and yearling turtles. Visitors today can observe about a hundred circular concrete tanks in which these sea creatures exist in every stage of development; the hope is that one day their population in the sea will regain its former status. Turtles here range in size from 170g (6 oz.) to 272 kg (600 lb.).

At Touch Tanks, you can hold yearling turtles in your hands; they are about the size of a mature cat. The compound also has a walk-through aviary with birds native to the Caymans. Adjoining it is an Iguana Exhibit, with indigenous blue and gray rock iguanas. Yet another exhibit is the Butterfly Farm, where you can mingle with these fluttery creatures.

More attractions include the Breaker's Lagoon, the largest swimming pool in the Caymans, with two waterfalls. Swimmers can jump in and cool off Snorkeling is possible at Boatswain's Lagoon, where a synthetic reef system supports rainbow-hued marine life. Close encounters via underwater viewing panels are possible at Predator Reef. At a snack bar and restaurant, you can sample turtle dishes. There's a well-stocked gift shop on-site. The turtle farm is open daily from 8am to 5:30pm (last admission is at 4:30pm). A tour of the turtle farm costs $18 for adults and $9 for kids 4 to 12; use of the entire park, including lagoons, pools, and other animal exhibits, is $55 for adults or $25 for ages 4 to 12.

If you're driving, you might want to go along **South Sound Road,** which is lined with pines and, in places, old wooden Caymanian houses. After leaving the houses behind, you'll find good spots for a picnic.

Pedro St. James National Historic Site, Savannah (✆ **345/947-3329**), is a restored great house dating from 1780, when only 400 people lived on the island. It lasted until 1970, when it was destroyed by fire. Now rebuilt, it is the centerpiece of a new heritage park, with a visitor center and an audiovisual theater with a laser light show. Because of its size, the great house was called "the Castle" by generations of Caymanians. Its primary historic importance dates from December 5, 1831, when residents met here to elect Cayman's first legislative assembly. The great house sits atop a limestone bluff with a panoramic

view of the sea. Guests enter via a visitor center with a landscaped courtyard, gift shop, and cafe. Self-guided tours are possible. You can explore the house's wide verandas, rough-hewn timber beams, gabled framework, mahogany floors and staircases, and wide-beam wooden ceilings. Guides in 18th-century costumes are on hand to answer questions. Admission is $10 for adults and free for those 12 and under. Hours are daily from 9am to 5pm. A video, which describes the site's role within the history of the nation and the labor expended to restore it, is screened every hour on the hour, daily from 10am to 4pm.

On the road again, you reach **Bodden Town,** once the largest settlement on the island. At Gun Square, two cannons commanded the channel through the reef. They are now stuck muzzle first into the ground.

On the way to **East End,** just before Old Isaac Village, you'll see the onshore sprays of water shooting up like geysers. These are called blowholes, and they sound like the roar of a lion.

Later you'll spot the fluke of an anchor sticking up from the ocean floor. As the story goes, this is a relic of the famous "Wreck of the Ten Sails" in 1788. A more recent wreck can also be seen—the *Ridgefield,* a 7,500-ton Liberty ship from New England, which struck the reef in 1943.

Old Man Bay is reached by a road that opened in 1983. From here you can travel along the north shore of the island to **Rum Point,** which has a good beach and is a fine place to end your island tour. Rum Point got its name from barrels of rum that once washed ashore here after a shipwreck. Today it is dreamy and quaint, surrounded by towering casuarina trees blowing in the trade winds. Most of these trees have hammocks hanging from their trunks, inviting you to partake of the leisurely life. With its cays, reefs, mangroves, and shallows, Rum Point is a refuge that extends west and south for 11km (6¾ miles). It divides the two "arms" of Grand Cayman. The sound's many spits of land and its plentiful lagoons are ideal for snorkeling, swimming, wading, and birding. It you get hungry, drop in to the Wreck Bar for a juicy burger. After visiting Rum Point, you can head back toward **Old Man Village,** where you can go south along a cross-island road through savanna country that will eventually lead you west to George Town.

On 24 hectares (59 acres) of rugged wooded land off Frank Sound Road, North Side, a 45-minute drive east from Georgetown, the **Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park** ★ (✆ **345/947-9462**) offers visitors a short walk through a tract that includes wetland, swamp, dry thicket, mahogany trees, orchids, and bromeliads. The walking trail is 1km (½ mile) long. You'll probably see chickatees, which are freshwater turtles found only on the Caymans and in Cuba. Occasionally, you'll spot the rare Grand Cayman parrot, or perhaps the anole lizard, with its cobalt-blue throat pouch. Even rarer is the endangered blue iguana. The park is open daily April to September 9am to 6:30pm, October to March 9am to 5:30pm. The last ticket is sold an hour before closing. Admission is $10 for adults, $5 for children, and free for children 5 and under. There's a visitor center with changing exhibitions, plus a canteen for food and refreshments. It's set adjacent to the woodland trail and includes a heritage garden with a re-creation of a traditional Cayman home, garden, and farm; a floral garden with .6 hectares (1½ acres) of flowering plants; and a .8-hectare (2-acre) lake with three islands, home to many native birds.

GRAND CAYMAN AFTER DARK

Lone Star Bar & Grill, West Bay Road (✆ **345/945-5175**), across the road from the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, is a transplanted corner of the Texas Panhandle. You can enjoy burgers in the dining room or head immediately for the bar in back. Here, beneath

murals of Lone Star beauties, lime and strawberry margaritas and the 14 different TV screens are the top sellers. Monday and Thursday are all-you-can-eat fajita nights, costing $19, and Tuesday is all-you-can-eat spicy tacos, for $15; Wednesday is all-you-can-eat surf and turf, priced at $48. Classier and, in its own way, more intriguing is the Reef Grill and the **Royal Palms Beach Club,** West Bay Road (✆ **345/945-6358**), with a beachfront bar that's open to the trade winds, where you can dance the night away in the moonlight. Local bands play here every Friday night beginning at 9pm, and every Thursday and Saturday night beginning at 8pm.

My Bar, on the grounds of the Sunset House Hotel, 390 S. Church St., on the southern periphery of George Town (✆ **345/949-7111**), is a place that's very far removed from Seven Mile Beach. It attracts the local dive-shop staff and lots of lawyers, especially on Fridays. It has the highest Polynesian-style thatch roof on Grand Cayman and some of the stiffest drinks. It's open Monday to Thursday and Saturday from 9am to midnight, Friday 9am to 1am.

Fidel Murphy's, in the Queen's Court Shopping Center, West Bay Road (✆ **345/949-5189**), is the unofficial Irish capital on Grand Cayman, with a wood-paneled premises that would have made James Joyce feel at home and foaming mugs full of every imaginable kind of beer. Hours are Monday to Friday from 10:30am to 1am, Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am to midnight.

The Bamboo Lounge, on the ground floor of the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, West Bay Road (✆ **345/947-8744**), is about as urban and trendy a venue as you'll find on island, with a red-and-black, high-octane decor that's as pan-Asian and fusion as its cuisine.

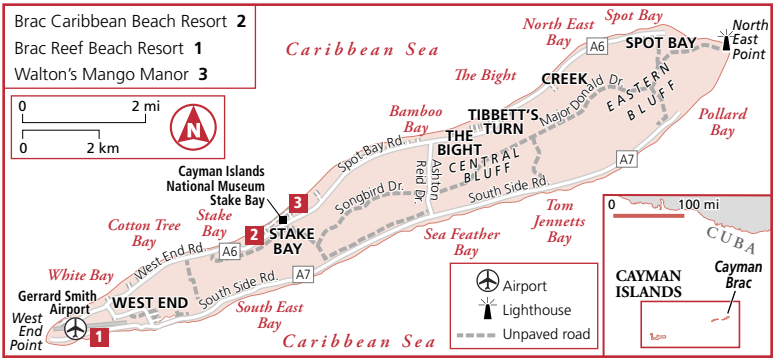
An earthier and more do wn-to-earth alternative is the bar at **Morgan's Harbour Marina,** Morgan's Harbour (✆ **345/949-3948**). Thanks to the raffish charm of its Austrian-born owner, Richard Schweiger, it's developed a fast reputation for throwing into the same workaday setting millionaires from New York with local roustabouts and marina crew members in ways that can lead to unexpectedly surreal dialogues. Shoehorned between gas pumps at the nearby marina and stocks of provisions for outfitting boats, there's a battered bar area serving stiff drinks, fresh lobster, and unassuming platters of burgers, salads, and steaks, priced at $24 to $40. It's open daily from 7am to 1am.

3 CAYMAN BRAC ★

The "middle" island of the Caymans was given the name Brac (Gaelic for "bluff") by 17th-century Scottish fishermen who settled here. The bluff for which the 19km-long (12-mile) island was named is a towering limestone plateau rising 42m (138 ft.) above the sea, covering the eastern half of Cayman Brac. Caymanians refer to the island simply as Brac, and its 1,400 inhabitants, a hospitable bunch, are known as Brackers. In the early 18th century the Caymans were occupied by pirates, and Edward Teach, the infamous Blackbeard, is supposed to have spent quite a bit of time around Cayman Brac. The island is about 145km (90 miles) east of Grand Cayman.

There are more than 170 caves honeycombing the limestone heights of the island. Some of the caves are at the bluff's foot; others can be reached only by climbing over jagged limestone rock. One of the biggest is Great Cave, which has a number of chambers. Harmless fruit bats cling to the roofs of the caverns.

On the south side of the bluff, you won't see many people, and the only sounds are the sea crashing against the lavalike shore. The island's herons, wild green parrots, and a



wide diversity of other bird species can be seen here. Most of the Brackers live on the north side, many in traditional wooden seaside cottages, some built by the island's pioneers. Given the variety of flowers, shrubs, and fruit trees in many of the yards, the islanders must all have green thumbs. You'll see poinciana trees, bougainvillea, Cayman orchids, croton, hibiscus, aloe, sea grapes, cactus, and coconut and cabbage palms. Gardeners grow cassava, pumpkins, breadfruit, yams, and sweet potatoes.

There are no actual towns, only settlements, such as Stake Bay (the "capital"), Spot Bay, the Creek, Tibbitts Turn, the Bight, and West End, where the airport is.

Note: A hurricane in the autumn of 2008 knocked out every hotel on Cayman Brac. But all the hotels should be open and running by the summer of 2009 and certainly by 2010. Nonetheless, it's a good idea to check before booking.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Flights from Grand Cayman to Cayman Brac are operated by **Cayman Airways** and its affiliate, **Cayman Express** (✆ **800/422-9626** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/949-8200; www.caymanairways.com). Between the two companies, there are between four and seven flights a day, depending on the day of the week, between Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac. The cost of a round-trip ticket ranges from $132 to $157 per person. Note in advance that the larger planes (such as the 737s, with 122 seats) flying this route allow twice the luggage allotment per passenger, without payment of additional supplements of the 18-seaters, so if you have a lot of luggage, it's wise to opt for a flight on one of the 737s.

VISITOR INFORMATION A little office, the **Cayman Brac Tourist Office,** has opened at West End Community Park (✆ **345/948-1649**). If you're stopping in, call first to see if anybody's going to be there.

EMERGENCIES There's a small hospital, the 18-bed **Faith Hospital** at Stake Bay (✆ **345/948-2243**). For emergencies of any kind on Cayman Brac, dial ✆ **911.**

WHERE TO STAY

Brac Caribbean Beach Resort ★ The largest condo structure on the island offers 16 bright, spacious two-bedroom/two-bathroom or two-bedroom/three-bathroom

condos on a white-sandy beach, along with a pool and scuba-diving program. Each unit has a full-size refrigerator with an icemaker and a microwave, and 12 units open onto private balconies. A variety of items, including breakfast food, are stocked before your arrival. The master bedroom is furnished with a queen-size bed, the guest bedrooms with twin beds. The units are rather simply furnished in a Caribbean tropical motif. The hotel offers some of the best dining on the island, at the Captain's Table (see below).

Stake Bay (P.O. Box 4), Cayman Brac, B.W.I. ✆ **866/843-2722** or 345/948-2265. Fax 345/948-1111. www.866thebrac.com. 16 units. Winter $185 apt for 2, $245 apt for 4 and weekly $1,100 apt for 2, $1,600 apt for 4; off season $139 apt for 2, $184 apt for 4 and weekly $825 apt for 2, $1,200 apt for 4. Dive packages from $888 per person double occupancy, including 7 nights' stay and 5 days of 2-tank dives. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, TV, kitchen.

Brac Reef Beach Resort ★ On a sandy plot of land on the south shore 3km (1¾ miles) east of the airport, near some of the best snorkeling in the region, this family-friendly, family-run resort contains motel-style units comfortably furnished with carpeting and ceiling fans. Durable and resilient, it's the most visible hotel on Cayman Brac. Once the location was little more than a maze of sea grapes, a few of whose venerable trunks still rise amid the picnic tables, hammocks, and boardwalks. There are still lots of nature trails surrounding the resort, good for bird-watching. Don't expect grandeur or anything approaching urban style or posh: It simply isn't part of the equation here.

P.O. Box 56, KY2-2001 Cayman Brac, B.W.I. ✆ **800/594-0843** or 727/369-2507 for reservations in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/948-1323. www.bracreef.com. 40 units. $470 for diver, $274 for nondiver. Rates include 3-night stay; diver rates include 3 1-tank dives per day. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Jacuzzi; pool; smoke-free rooms; day spa; tennis court; dive shop; reef fishing; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, hair dryer.

Walton's Mango Manor ★★ Unique on Cayman Brac, this is a personalized, intimate B&B that's more richly decorated, more elegant, and more appealing than you might have thought possible in such a remote place. Originally the home of a sea captain, it was moved to a less exposed location and rebuilt from salvaged materials shortly after the disastrous hurricane of 1932. Set on 1.6 hectares (4 acres) on the island's north shore, within a lush garden, it contains intriguing touches such as a banister salvaged from the mast of a 19th-century schooner. The best accommodations are on the upper floor and have narrow balconies with sea views. There is also a two-bedroom, two-bathroom luxury villa, the perfect getaway for two to four guests. The villa contains a kitchen, washer/dryer, phone, TV, and both air-conditioning and ceiling fans. Your hosts are Brooklyn-born Lynne Walton and her husband, George, a former USAF major who retired to his native Cayman Brac.

Stake Bay (P.O. Box 56), Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands, B.W.I. ✆/fax **345/948-0518.** www.waltonsmangomanor.com. 6 units. Winter $120–$130 double; off season $105–$115 double; year-round villa $185 daily or $1,200 weekly for 1–2 people, $210 per night or $1,400 per week for 3–4 people. Rates for doubles include full breakfast. MC, V. *In room:* A/C, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Biggie's AMERICAN/CONTINENTAL It's the newest restaurant on the island, the kind of place that generated a lot of buzz when it first opened, and a place whose staff and owner (Kent Rankin) work hard to keep clients happy. It faces a traffic roundabout on the island's West End, occupying a peachy-white dining room with clean white napery and glass-topped tables. Lunches focus on an all-you-can-eat American-style buffet of salads

and hot foods; dinners are more elaborate, more formal, and permeated with continental flair, with lots of emphasis on seafood, chicken, beef , and pastas, some of them all vegetarian.

West End. ✆ **345/948-2449.** Reservations recommended. Lunch buffet $20; dinner main courses $19–$56. MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm.

Captain's Table AMERICAN The decor here is vaguely nautical, with oars over and around the bar and pieces of boats forming the restaurant's entryway. The restaurant offers both indoor, air-conditioned seating and outdoor, poolside dining. Every Saturday night, its karaoke party draws in more business than any other bar on the island. Begin a meal here with shrimp and lobster cocktail or a conch fritter , and then try one of the soups, such as black bean or a tomato-based conch chowder. Main dishes include everything from the catch of the day, often served pan-fried, to barbecue ribs. Lunch features burgers, salads, and sandwiches.

In Brac Caribbean Beach Village, Stake Bay. ✆ **345/948-1418.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$15 lunch, $20–$38 dinner . AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 6–9:30pm. Bar daily 11:30am–midnight.

FUN ON & OFF THE BEACH

The biggest lure on Cayman Brac is the variety of **watersports**—swimming, fishing, snorkeling, and some of the world 's best diving. There are undersea walls on both the north and south sides of the island, with stunning specimens lining their sides. The big attraction for divers is the **MV *Tibbetts,*** a 98m-long (325-ft.) Russian frigate resting in 30m (98 ft.) of water, a relic of the Cold War sunk in September 1996. Hatches into the ship have been barred off to promote diver safety. Over the years, marine life has become more and more pronounced on this relic. For information on diving in Cayman Brac, click on **www.divecayman.ky**.

History buffs might check out the **Cayman Brac Museum,** in the former Government Administration Building, Stake Bay (✆ **345/948-2622**), which has an interesting collection of Caymanian antiques, including pieces rescued from shipwrecks and items from the 18th century. Hours are Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 1 to 4pm, Saturday from 9am to noon. Admission is free, but donations are accepted.

4 LITTLE CAYMAN ★

The smallest of the Cayman Islands, cigar-shaped Little Cayman has only about 170 permanent inhabitants. About 15km (9 1/4 miles) long and 2km (1 1/4 miles) across at its widest point, it lies about 120km (74 miles) northeast of Grand Cayman and some 8km (5 miles) from Cayman Brac. The entire island is coral and sand.

The islands of the Caymans are mountaintops of the long-submerged Sierra Maestra Range, which runs north and into Cuba. Coral formed layers over the underwater peaks, eventually creating the islands. Beneath Little Cayman's Bloody Bay is one of the mountain's walls—a stunning sight for snorkelers and divers.

This is a near-perfect place for diving and fishing. The late Jacques Cousteau hailed the waters around the little island as one of the three finest diving spots in the world. The flats on Little Cayman are said to offer the best bonefishing in the world, and a brackish inland pool can be fished for tarpon. Even if you don't dive or fish, you can row 182m

 (597 ft.) off Little Cayman to isolated and uninhabited Owen Island, where you can swim at the sandy beach and picnic by a blue lagoon.

There may still be pirate treasure buried on the island, but it's thought to be in the dense interior of what is now the largest bird sanctuary in the Caribbean. In addition to having the largest population of rock iguanas in the entire Caribbean, which are easy to spot, Little Cayman is home to one of the oldest species of reptiles in the New World—the tree-climbing *Anulis maynardi* (which is known by no other name). This rare lizard is difficult to spot because the females are green, the males brown, and both blend into local vegetation.

Blossom Village, the island's "capital," is on the southwest coast.

Most visitors fly from Grand Cayman to Little Cayman aboard any of the several daily flights operated by Cayman Express, a subdivision of **Cayman Airways** (✆ **800/422-9626** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/949-8200; www.caymanairways.com), the national carrier. The cost of round-trip passage aboard any of its 18-seater planes is $132 to $157. Since luggage is limited (without payment of an additional surcharge) to two suitcases per person, totaling no more than 55 pounds for both bags, it's wise to pack lightly. Airplanes land and take off on Little Cayman only during daylight hours.

WHERE TO STAY

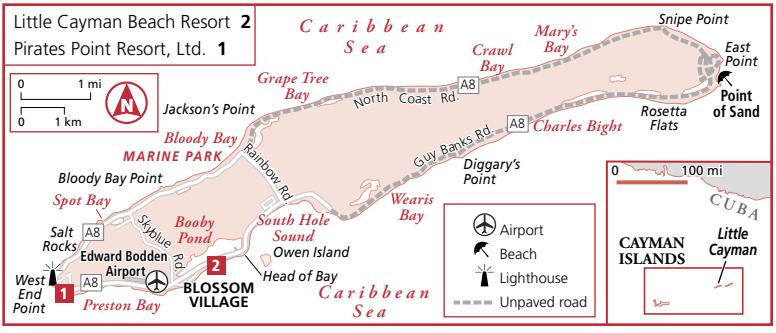
Little Cayman Beach Resort ★★ Lying on the south coast, this resort was built in 1991 and enlarged and renovated in 2008. It's close to many of the island's diving and sporting attractions, including the South Hole Sound Lagoon's bonefishing. It's popular with anglers, divers, bird-watchers, and adventurous types. The hotel, owned by Michael Tibbetts, lies only 1.5km (1 mile) from the Edward Bodden Airport, and it has a white-sand beach fringing a shallow, reef-protected bay. It is divided into three pastel, coral-colored two-story buildings with gingerbread trim. The most desirable units are the 12 oceanfront rooms. Each unit has a ceiling fan, a harmonious color scheme, and an inviting, airy atmosphere. Each unit has one king-size or two double beds.

Blossom Village, Little Cayman, Cayman Islands, B.W.I. ✆ **800/327-3835** in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/948-1033. Fax 345/948-1040. www.littlecayman.com. 40 units. Winter $523–$661 for nondiver, $723–$861 for diver; off season $450–$497 for nondiver, $650–$697 for diver. Rates are per person and include a stay of 3 nights with breakfast and dinner; diver rates include 3 1-tank dives per day. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; health club; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; tennis court; watersports. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, no phone.

Pirates Point Resort, Ltd. ★ For watersports or just relaxing, this resort near West End Point offers a family environment with gourmet cuisine, although it's a notch down from Little Cayman Beach Resort. The place has remodeled rooms and a non-air-conditioned family cottage with two large rooms. In addition, it has four seaside cottages, with balconies overlooking Preston Bay. The resort's packages include a room, three excellent meals per day with appropriate wines and all alcoholic beverages, and two-tank boat dives daily, featuring tours of the Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson Reef. Other activities include snorkeling, bird-watching, and exploring.

The food is excellent. The owner and manager, Texas-born Gladys Howard, is an award-winning cookbook author and a graduate of Cordon Bleu in Paris. She has studied with such stars as Julia Child, Jacques Pepin, and James Beard. She uses fresh fruits and vegetables grown locally, as well as local seafood.

Preston Bay, Little Cayman, Cayman Islands, B.W.I. ✆ **345/948-1010.** Fax 345/948-1011. www.piratespointresort.com. 11 units. Winter $1,995 per person 7-day dive package, $1,595 per person 7-day nondiver



package; off season $1,795 per person 7-day dive package, $1,495 7-day nondiver package. Children 5–12 free in parent's room. MC, V. No children 4 or under. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna; bonefishing; diving; snorkeling; tarpon fishing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Birds of Paradise AMERICAN/CONTINENTAL This spot caters primarily to Little Cayman Beach Resort guests but welcomes anyone. The specialty is buffet-style dinners—the kind your parents might have enjoyed back in the 1950s or 1960s. Saturday night features the island's most generous barbecue spread—all the ribs, fish, and Jamaican-style jerk chicken you'd want. On other nights, try the prime rib, fresh fish Caribbean style (your best bet), or chicken (either Kiev or *cordon bleu*). There's a freshly made salad bar, and homemade desserts are yummy, especially the Key lime pie. At night, opt for an outdoor table under the stars.

At Little Cayman Beach Resort. ✆ **345/948-1033.** Reservations recommended for dinner for nonguests. Breakfast $15; lunch $21; dinner $44. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–8:30am, 12:30–1:30pm, and 6:30–8pm.

The Hungry Iguana AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN At the beach, you'll spot the mammoth iguana mural that marks this place immediately. The island's tastiest dishes are served here, a winning combination of standard American fare and some zesty flavors from islands to the south. It's the rowdiest place on Little Cayman, especially the sports bar, with its satellite TV in the corner, a sort of T.G.I. Friday's atmosphere. Lunch is the usual burgers and fries, along with some well-stuffed sandwiches. We prefer the grilled chicken salad. Dinner gets a little more elaborate—there's usually a special meat dish of the day, depending on the market (supplies are shipped in once a week by barge). The chef always seems willing to prepare a steak as you like it. Marinated conch with homemade chips is another tasty choice.

Paradise Resort. ✆ **345/948-0007.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8.80–$20 lunch, $19–$44 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm. Bar Mon–Fri noon–1am; Sat–Sun noon–midnight.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

The **Governor Gore Bird Sanctuary** ★ is home to some 5,000 pairs of red-footed boobies. As far as it is known, this is the largest colony of such birds in the Western Hemisphere. The sanctuary, which is near the small airport, is also home to dramatic colonies of snowy

egrets and black frigates. Many bird-watchers from the U.S. fly into Little Cayman just to see these bird colonies.

The best **fishing** is at Bloody Bay, lying off the island's north coast. It is especially noted for its bonefishing and tarpon catches. For fishing, contact **Sam McCoy's Diving and Fishing Lodge** (✆ **345/926-0104;** www.mccoyslodge.com.ky).

The **Bloody Bay Wall** ★★, the best dive site on island and one of the great dive spots in the Caymans, lies just 20 minutes offshore by boat. The drop here begins at only 6m (20 ft.) but plunges to more than 360m (1,181 ft.). For more information about how to enjoy it, click on www.divecayman.ky or call **Paradise Divers** (✆ **877/322-9626** in the U.S., or 345/948-0001; fax 345/948-0002; www.paradise-divers.com).

10

Curaçao

Curaçao (Coo-ra-*sow*), together with Bonaire, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, and Saba, makes up part of the Netherlands Antilles. Just 56km (35 miles) north of the coast of Venezuela, Curaçao, the *C* in the Caribbean's Dutch ABC (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) islands, is the most populous of the Netherlands Antilles. Visitors come for its distinctive culture, warm people, duty-free shopping, lively casinos, and watersports. Fleets of tankers head out from its harbor to bring refined oil to all parts of the world. If you want grand high-rise resorts on spectacular beaches, head for Aruba (see chapter 5). Curaçao has a few middle-bracket resorts on the beach, mostly along the island's southern coast, but we've always found the shopping and cultural experiences here more appealing than the beaches.

Alonso de Ojeda and Amerigo Vespucci spotted Curaçao in 1499. The Spaniards exterminated all but 75 members of a branch of the peaceful Arawaks. However, they, in turn, were ousted by the Dutch in 1634, who also had to fight off French and English invasions.

The Dutch made the island a tropical Holland in miniature. Peter Stuyvesant ruled Curaçao in 1644. The island was turned into a Dutch Gibraltar, bristling with forts. Thick ramparts guarded the harbor's narrow entrance; the hilltop forts protected the coastal approaches. Today many of these historic buildings have been converted into restaurants, shops, or hotels.

Curaçao remained sleepy until 1915, when the Royal Dutch/Shell Group built one of the world's largest oil refineries here to process crude oil from Venezuela. Workers from some 50 countries poured onto the island, turning Curaçao into a multicultural, cosmopolitan community of about 171,000. Curaçao has its own governmental authority, relying on the Netherlands only for defense and foreign affairs.

The largest of the Netherlands Antilles, Curaçao is 60km (37 miles) long and 11km (6 ¾ miles) across at its widest point. Because of all that early Dutch building, Curaçao is the most important island architecturally in the entire West Indies, with more European flavor than anywhere else. After leaving the capital, **Willemstad,** you plunge into a strange, desertlike countryside evocative of the U.S. Southwest. The relatively arid landscape is studded with candelabra and tuk's cap cacti, spiny-leafed aloe, and divi-divi trees, with their windblown foliage.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Curaçao Underwater Marine Park,** known for its snorkeling sites, which stretch for 20km (12 miles) along Curaçao's southern coastline. Sunken ships, gardens of hard and soft coral, and millions of fish are a snorkeler's treat.
- **Willemstad,** the island's capital, is renowned (especially among cruise ship passengers) for its shops, but the city's rows of pastel-colored, red-roofed town houses are also appealing. The historic center of Willemstad and the island's natural harbor, Schottegat, have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.
- **Christoffel National Park,** out toward the western tip of Curaçao, is awash in flora and fauna, including donkeys, wild goats, iguanas, the Curaçao deer, and many species of birds. In the higher regions, you can spot rare orchids.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

In the United States, contact the **Curaçao Tourist Board** at One Gateway Center, Ste. 2600, Newark, NJ 07102 (✆ **800/3-CURACAO** [328-7232]). You can also point your Web browser to **www.curacao.com**.

Once you're on the island, go to the **Curaçao Tourist Board,** Pietermaai 19 (✆ **599/9-434-8200**). The readily available and free glossy magazines ***Curaçao Events*** and ***Curaçao Nights*** are published by the tourism board and provide a good overview of where to go and what to see. Also pick up a copy of the weekly dining and entertainment guide ***K-Pasa*** (www.k-pasa.com) at any tourism office, hotel lobby, or many shops and restaurants.

GETTING THERE

The air routes to the modern **Hato International Airport,** Plaza Margareth Abraham (✆ **599/9-839-1980**), are firmly linked to those leading to nearby Aruba. In recent years, however, some airlines have initiated nonstop routings into Curaçao from such international hubs as Miami.

American Airlines (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) flies daily to Curaçao from Miami; it departs late enough in the day to permit easy connections from cities all over the northeastern U.S. American also offers flights to neighboring Aruba, from New York, Miami, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. American Airlines also offers discounted hotel/airfare packages.

Air Jamaica (✆ **800/523-5585;** www.airjamaica.com) flies nonstop from Montego Bay on Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Continental (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies to Curaçao on Saturdays via nonstop flights from Newark, New Jersey.

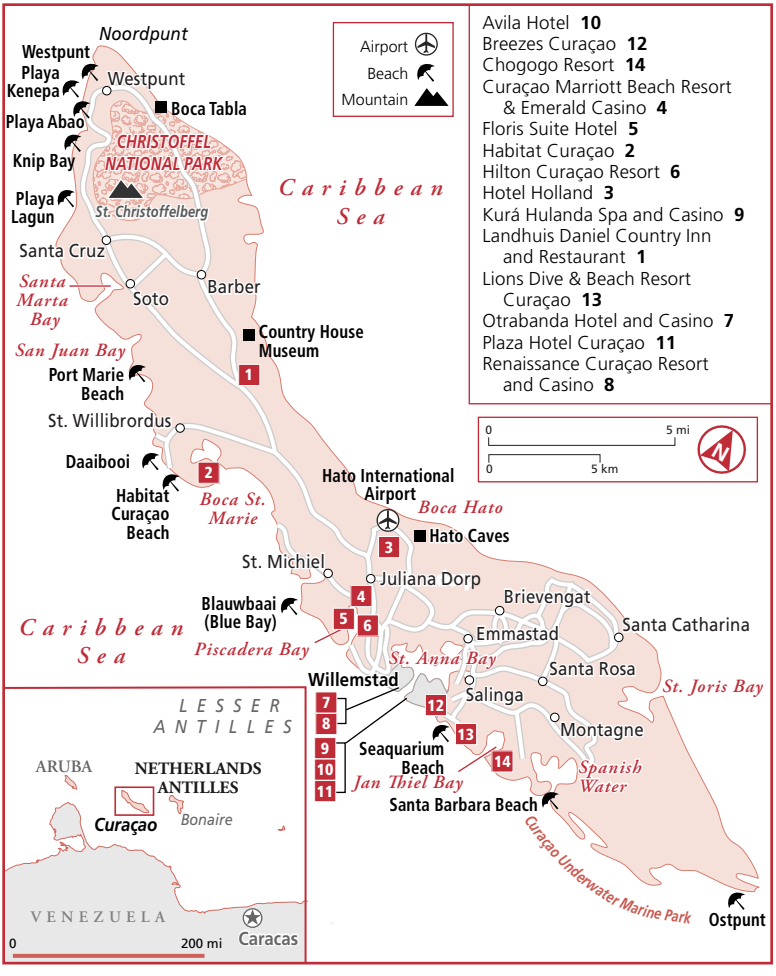
Delta (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies to Curaçao from its hub in Atlanta on Saturdays.

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR Because all points of interest on Curaçao are easily accessible via paved roads, you may want to rent a car. U.S., British, and Canadian visitors can use their own licenses, if valid. The minimum age to rent for many companies is 25. ***Note:*** Traffic moves on the right. International road signs are observed.

Fun Facts Special Events

The big event of the year is the **Curaçao Carnival,** which starts on New Year's Day, with various festivities and dozens of parades extending until Mardi Gras and the **Grand Farewell Parade.** The schedule is available at the tourism office. The most fun events, similar to hoedowns, are called "jump-ups." The highlight of Carnival is the **Festival di Tumba,** the second week in February, in which the island's musicians vie for prizes. Other Carnival events include the crowning of a queen and king, street parades, concerts, and even a children's parade.



Avis (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/9-839-1500; www.avis.com) and **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/9-868-3420; www.budget.com) offer some of the lowest rates. Budget usually offers the best deal if it has compact cars with manual transmissions in stock. **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/9-888-0188; www.hertz.com) is also on island. **National** (✆ **599/9-869-4433**) has an office at the airport. Rentals are cheaper if you reserve from North America at least a week before your departure, and rates vary depending on the times of the year and seasonal promotions.

BY TAXI Most taxis are metered and all drivers carry an official rate sheet. Charges go up by 20% after 8pm. Tipping isn't customary among islanders, but from tourists, drivers will appreciate a discretionary 10% tip, especially if they've helped with your luggage. The fare from the airport to Willemstad is about $20, and the cost can be split among four passengers. Each piece of luggage bears a surcharge of $1.

In town, the best place to get a taxi is on the Otrabanda side of the floating bridge. To summon a cab, call the dispatch office, ✆ **599/9-869-0752.** Cabbies will usually give you a tour of the island for around $40 per hour for up to four passengers. **Taber Tours** (✆ **599/9-868-7012** or 599/9-567-6770; www.tabertours.com) specializes in hotel transfers and island tours for big groups.

BY BUS Most of the large hotels operate a free shuttle that takes you from the suburbs to the shopping district of Willemstad. A fleet of DAF yellow buses (also called "convoys") operates from Wilhelmina Plein, near the shopping center, to most parts of Curaçao. Some minivans function as buses. If you see one listing your destination, you can hail it at any of the designated bus stops.

Fast Facts Curaçao

Banks Normal bank hours are Monday to Friday from 9am to 3:30 or 4:30pm. Banks and ATMs can be found in Willemstad.

Currency While U.S. dollars are accepted for purchases on the island, the official currency is the **Netherlands Antillean florin (NAf),** also called a **guilder,** which is divided into 100 NA (Netherlands Antillean) cents. The exchange rate as of this writing is US$1 to 1.77 NAf (1 NAf = 56¢). Shops, hotels, and restaurants usually accept most major U.S. and Canadian credit cards. While American Express, Visa, and MasterCard are preferred, Discover is gaining ground, while Diner's Club is rarely accepted. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents To enter Curaçao, U.S., British, and Canadian citizens need a passport, along with a return or continuing airline ticket out of the country and photo ID.

Electricity The electricity is both 220 and 110–130 volts AC (50 cycles), the same as in both Europe and North America, and most hotels have plugs that fit North American and European appliances.

Emergencies For **police,** call ✆ **911.** For an **ambulance,** call ✆ **912.** For **fire,** call ✆ **115.**

Hospital The **St. Elisabeth Hospital,** Breedestraat 193 (✆ **599/9-462-4900**), near Otrabanda in Willemstad, is one of the most up-to-date facilities in the Caribbean. It has a recompression chamber.

Language Dutch, Spanish, and English are spoken on Curaçao, along with Papiamentu, a patois that combines the three major tongues with Amerindian and African dialects. Most people in the tourism industry speak English, but you can always thank them by saying *masha danki* (*mas*-ha *dan*-key).

Safety Although Curaçao is not plagued with crime, it's wise to safeguard your valuables.

Taxes Curaçao levies a room tax of 5%, plus a 12% service fee on accommodations and a $3 daily (per room) energy tax on all hotels. There's a departure tax of $22, but it's usually built into the price of your ticket.

Telephone To call Curaçao from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **599** (the country code for Curaçao), and then **9** (the area code) and the local number. Once on Curaçao, to call another number on the island, only the local seven-digit number is necessary; to make calls to an off-island destination, dial **021** and then the area code and number.

Time Curaçao is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time and the same as eastern daylight saving time.

Water The water comes from a modern desalination plant and is safe to drink.

Weather Curaçao has an average temperature of 81°F (27°C); trade winds keep the island quite comfortable. It's flat and arid, with an average rainfall of only 22 inches per year.

2 WHERE TO STAY

A few hotels are in the capital of Willemstad, but most are in the suburbs, which lie only 10 to 15 minutes from the shopping center. The bigger hotels often have free shuttle buses running into town, and most have their own beaches and pools. Some hotels cater primarily to American and Canadian tourists, while others are occupied almost exclusively by the many Dutch visitors. The latter tend toward a quiet self-service atmosphere, with kitchenettes in the rooms and shuttles to local shopping markets. Many of these are clustered near the Jan Thiel Beach area. South Americans are an increasingly significant percentage of the tourist population, so many hotel desks can greet you in Spanish and Portuguese. Hotels listed here are a mixture, but the larger chain hotels are really U.S.-centric.

Curaçao is a bustling commercial center, and the downtown hotels often fill up fast with business travelers as well as visitors from neighboring countries such as Venezuela. It's important to reserve well in advance. When making reservations, ask if the room tax and service charge are included in the price you're quoted.

EXPENSIVE

Breezes Curaçao ★ Kids Adjacent to both the Undersea National Park and Sea Aquarium, this big all-inclusive resort—a member of SuperClubs—opens onto one of Curaçao's longest beaches, with good snorkeling offshore. Although it caters to couples and singles, the resort also welcomes families, and its Camp Breezes has the best children's program on island. For those who like to gamble, Breezes also has Curacao's largest casino. Dive enthusiasts get one free shore dive per day.

Bedrooms and suites come in a wide configuration of rooms, including the most desirable, those overlooking the ocean; others front the hotel's gardens. Bathrooms come with either showers or complete tub/showers, and all open onto private patios or balconies. If the food isn't gourmet, there is at least plenty of it. It's a real all-you-can-eat type of place, from breakfast buffets in the morning to lavish dinner feasts at night. The outdoor restaurant is cramped, but plans are in the works to relocate the cheesy stage outdoor and

make more room for seating. Cuisine choices range from Italian to island specialties, to Japanese, plus there's a beach grill. It also has an active entertainment program, complete with guest and staff talent shows. (Don't expect *American Idol,* but some shows incorporate a few of the lavish costumes from recent Carnival parades.)

Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd. 78, Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-736-7888.** Fax 599/9-461-4003. www.breezes.com. 339 units. Winter $324–$362 per person double, $466–$540 per person suite; off season $308–$389 per person double, $439–$561 per person suite. Rates are all-inclusive (no tipping). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's program (kids' snack bar, playground); fitness center; Internet; Jacuzzi; 3 outdoor pools; casino; spa; 2 tennis courts; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi w/purchase of a card for $20.

Curaçao Marriott Beach Resort & Emerald Casino ★★ (Kids) This is the most glamorous and most prominent hotel on the island, set beside the largest beach on Curaçao. It's 10 minutes from both the airport and Willemstad. The hotel is a cluster of three-story buildings whose distinctive shape and ocher color were adapted from traditional Dutch colonial architecture. The open-sided lobby was designed for optimum views of the beach and the hotel's many fountains. Scattered throughout the property are unusual, often monumental, artworks by local and international artists, and a collection of unfussy, overstuffed furniture. Most of the colorful rooms have a view of the ocean and one king-size or two double beds, plus a spacious bathroom with a tub/shower. Although never rising to any great imagination or flair, the food here is consistently good, with quality ingredients. There's an expansive beach with postcard-perfect beach bar complete with bar-swings. There's also a big casino.

Piscadera Bay (P.O. Box 6003), Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **800/223-6388** in the U.S., or 599/9-736-8800. Fax 599/9-462-7502. www.curacaomarriott.com. 247 units. Winter $274–$340 double, from $489 suite; off season $169–$199 double, from $389 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; free Wi-Fi in lobby; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; casino; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; diving; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, miniport.

Kurá Hulanda Spa and Casino ★★ (Finds) Curaçao's most imaginative and unusual hotel, in the heart of the city's Dutch colonial historic district, is part of the Kurá Hulanda Museum complex (p. 246), and the hotel's Dutch colonial architecture dates from the 18th and 19th centuries. Both the museum and the hotel are the brainchild of the Dutch millionaire Dr. Jacob Gelt Dekker, whose passion for preserving the architecture of Curaçao and the history and culture of its people is palpable. It's not on a beach, but this hotel offers the Dutch Caribbean's best West Indian character. The gorgeous rooms feature hand-woven linens from India and hand-carved mahogany and teak furniture. A free daily shuttle runs to nearby **Blaubai Beach** and **Blue Bay Golf Course,** and to a sister property, the **Lodge Kurá Hulanda,** where visitors can escape the city and enjoy an idyllic day at the beach or a relaxed meal at their waterside eatery, Watamula Restaurant.

Langestraat 8, Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **877/264-3106** in the U.S., or 599/9-434-7700. Fax 599/9-434-7701. www.kurahulanda.com. 80 units. Winter $199 double, $450 suite; off season from $180 double, $415 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; cafe; bar; babysitting; fitness center; 2 outdoor pools; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, TV, CD player, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minifridge, free Wi-Fi.

Renaissance Curacao Resort and Casino This new, modern, and upscale resort adjacent to the Rifort is responsible for the influx of new shops, restaurants, and bars to

the area. The rainbow-hued lobby has a colorful frenetic feel that matches the sounds and lights emanating from the hotel's appropriately named Carnival casino. A restaurant and bar are also integrated into the spacious lobby and look out over the outdoor plaza. The rooms are spacious, colorful, and loaded with comfortable linens, pillows, and plush chairs with ottomans. Bathrooms are cheerfully painted and well appointed, though the doors are irritatingly determined to shut on their own. The infinity beach is a new concept and works well in this urban setting, creating a serene respite to swim, sunbathe, and relax before hitting the casino.

Baden Powellweg 1, Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A.. ✆ **800/114-8079** or 599/9-435-5000. Fax 599/9-435-5025. www.renaissancecuracao.com. 223 units. Winter $450–$545 double, $705–$1,650 suite; summer $249–$309, double, $960–$1,250 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; room service; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

MODERATE

Avila Hotel ★★ The Avila Hotel consists of four separate structures: a beautifully restored 200-year-old colonial mansion; a large extension of deluxe rooms called La Belle Alliance wing; the Blues wing, an all-wood complex of deluxe rooms built on a pier off of the beach, each with a private terrace or balcony overlooking the sea; and the new contemporary-style Octagon Wing. Converted into a hotel in 1949, the Avila regularly hosts members of the Dutch royal family, including the queen of the Netherlands. The Blues wing rooms have a full bathroom, kitchenette, Jacuzzi tub, and balcony or terrace with an ocean view. Similarly, the recently refurnished La Belle Alliance units have full bathrooms and balconies; some have kitchenettes. Rooms in the Octagon Wing have a chic South Beach feel, with beige suede headboards, flatscreen TVs, and frosted-glass bathroom walls and doors.

Penstraat 130 (P.O. Box 791), Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **800/747-8162** or 599/9-461-4377. Fax 599/9-461-1493. www.avilahotel.com. 150 units. Winter $280–$430 double, $430–$575 suite; off season $230–$350 double, $320–$475 suite. Meal plans available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; coffee shop; babysitting; pool; spa/wellness center; tennis court; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Floris Suite Hotel ★★ Finds The Dutch philanthropist and architect Jan des Bouvrie created this gem of a boutique hotel in the vicinity of the Curaçao World Trade Center. Unlike any hotel on island, the all-suite hotel blends aspects of European colonial with West Indian architecture. Natural stone tiles are wedded with solid mahogany doors and windows. The compound is enveloped by a tropical garden whose focal point is a swimming pool. A good private sandy beach is just across the street. The standard of luxury differs from suite to suite. For example, the Royal Suites offer a separate bedroom with one king-size bed. In the living area is yet another queen-size sleeper sofa, and a fully equipped kitchen with a large covered porch or balcony. Everything is designed for comfort and convenience. A spa center is within walking distance, and a dive headquarters is just across from the hotel. Because the hotel has adopted an eco-friendly mentality, air-conditioning units turn off when guests leave the rooms.

John F. Kennedy Blvd., Piscadera Bay, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-462-6111.** Fax 599/9-462-6211. www.florissuitehotel.com. 71 units. Winter $129–$269 double; off season $149–$289 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, kitchenette, minibar.

Hilton Curaçao Resort ★★ Kids Built in 1965, and once a Sheraton, this hotel resort got an updated look when Hilton took it over. Today it rises five floors above the

 northern perimeter of Willemstad, amid rocky bluffs. Glass-enclosed elevators cling to the outside walls of the hotel, offering a panoramic view as you're whisked to your room. Each of the midsize accommodations has a view of either the ocean or the garden. Outfitted in pastel colors, the rooms contain traditional colorful furnishings, carpeting, plush bedding, private balconies, and generously proportioned bathrooms with tubs and showers. Rooms on the executive floor are somewhat better furnished and offer amenities such as fax machines. The hotel opens onto two private sandy beaches.

The food isn't great, but it's varied—everything from Italian trattoria favorites to fresh seafood. A social director organizes theme nights based on Mexican or Antillean food and dance music. There's a lively casino on-site.

John F. Kennedy Blvd. (P.O. Box 2133), Piscadera Bay, Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **800/774-1500** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/9-462-5000. Fax 599/9-462-5846. www.hiltoncaribbean.com/curacao. 196 units. Winter $188–$264 double, from $330 suite; off season $170–$240 double, from $260 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; free shuttle to town; babysitting; children's center; fitness center; Internet; 2 pools (outdoor and children's); casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; boating; dive shop; sailing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, high-speed Internet ($5 for a continuous 3-hr. block).

Lions Dive & Beach Resort Curacao On the island's largest white-sand beach, this hotel lies a 30-minute taxi ride southeast of the airport. The complete dive resort features programs supervised by the Underwater Curaçao staff. Each of its comfortable though standard accommodations has a sea and/or garden view, a balcony or terrace, two double beds, and a shower-only bathroom.

Bapor Kibrá, Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-434-8888.** Fax 599/9-434-8889. www.lionsdive.com. 137 units. Winter $170 single, $190 double, $210 triple, $230 quad; off season $178–$337 per person for 3 nights. Extra bed in room $25. Dive packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; beach bar; babysitting; health club; outdoor pool; dive shop; sailing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchenettes (in some).

Plaza Hotel Curaçao Standing guard over the Punda side of St. Anna Bay, right in the heart of Willemstad, the 14-story Plaza is nestled in the ramparts of an 18th-century waterside fort on the eastern tip of the harbor entrance. As one of the harbor's two "lighthouses," the hotel has to carry marine collision insurance (the only accommodations in the Caribbean with that distinction). The original part of the hotel was built in 1954, and the quirky lobby complete with fish pond, enormous rotating ceiling fans, and open-air balcony retains the 1950s look. However, now there's a modern tower of rooms stacked 15 stories high. Each of the smallish bedrooms is comfortably furnished and contains a small tub/shower.

The pool, with a bar and sun-tanning area, is inches away from the parapet of the fort. The **Waterfort Restaurant** serves standard American and Continental dishes.

Plaza Piar (P.O. Box 813), Willemstad, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-461-2500.** Fax 599/9-461-6543. www.plazahotelcuracao.com. 252 units. Winter $180–$235 double, $255–$390 suite; off season $150–$180 double, $210–$345 suite. Breakfast included. Children under 13 stay free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; outdoor pool; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; Sunset sailboats; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

INEXPENSIVE

Chogogo Resort In Curaçao's east end, a 2-minute walk from the busy and Dutch-dominated Jan Thiel Beach, this resort is for visitors seeking an apartment or a bungalow. It is named after a species of local flamingo and set within an arid landscape between the

oceanfront beaches and a shallow saltwater bay southeast of Willemstad. One- and two-story buildings dot the grounds; these contain the guest bungalows, studios, and apartments, each with a kitchenette, airy and unpretentious furniture, and a compact shower-only bathroom.

Jan Thiel Bay, Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-747-2844.** Fax 599/9-747-2424. www.chogogo.com. 120 units. Winter $135–$146 studio for 2, $147–$158 apt for 2, $252 bungalow for 4; off season $119–$129 studio for 2, $133–$144 apt for 2, $204 bungalow for 4. 3-night minimum stay. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; 2 pools (outdoor and children's wading pool). *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette.

Landhuis Daniel Country Inn and Restaurant Value Situated on the narrow middle part of the island, this mustard-colored plantation house is a 15-minute drive from the beach, but it offers the best value in Curaçao. Simple but comfortable guest rooms are tidily maintained and have small private bathrooms with showers. Only six rooms are air-conditioned, but all units have ceiling fans. The basic rooms and communal TV room give this simple country inn the aura of a youth hostel; guests also play billiards.

Weg naar, Westpunt z/n, Curaçao, N.A. ✆/fax **599/9-864-8400.** www.landhuisdaniel.com. 8 units. Year-round $50–$70 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant of the same name (p. 239); bar; pool; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, no phone, Wi-Fi.

Otrobanda Hotel and Casino Situated in the heart of town, this small hotel is more geared toward local business travelers than American tourists, but it provides an inexpensive way to stay in town for a few nights on the cheap, great for those who just need a crash pad close to the city bustle. The small guest rooms overlook the harbor, and even the pocket-sized pool has great views of town. Prices include breakfast at the restaurant, which also affords stupendous photo ops of the waterfront and the mouth of the harbor. The sad casino is not worth more than a glance, but at the other end of town, there are glitzy shops, restaurants, a piano bar, and a new casino at the Renaissance in the Riffort.

Breedestraat O, Willemstad (P.O. Box 2092), Curaçao, N.A. ✆ **599/9-462-7400.** Fax 599/9-462-7299. www.otrobandahotel.com. 45 units. Year-round $150 single; $175 double; $250 triple. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; casino. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi ($5 per day).

3 WHERE TO DINE

EXPENSIVE

Belle Terrace ★ INTERNATIONAL This open-air restaurant, in a 200-year-old mansion on the beachfront of Willemstad, offers superb dining in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The beachfront Schooner Bar, where you can enjoy rum punch, is shaped like a weather-beaten ship's prow looking out to sea. The restaurant, sheltered by an arbor of flamboyant branches, serves such specialties as pickled herring, smoked salmon, and a Danish lunch platter. Local dishes, such as *keshi yena* (baked Gouda cheese with a spicy chicken filling), are also on the lunch menu. The fish is always fresh, and the chef prepares it to perfection, whether grilled, poached, or meunière. On Saturday night there's a mixed grill and a serve-yourself salad bar, all accompanied by live music.

In the Avila Beach Hotel, Penstraat 130, Willemstad. ✆ **599/9-461-4377.** Reservations required. Main courses $17–$27. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm. From the center of town, drive east along the Pieter Maai Weg (which becomes Pennstraat) for about 1.5km (1 mile).

Bistro Le Clochard ★ FRENCH/SWISS This restaurant fits snugly into the grim ramparts of Fort Rif, at the gateway to the harbor. Its entrance is marked with a canopy leading to a series of r ooms, each built under the v aulting of the old D utch fort. This appealingly formal r estaurant has sev eral seating options, including a glassed-in dining room near the entrance and an outdoor terrace. A ppetizers such as snails marinated in cognac, frogs' legs, or crepes stuffed with a seafood ragout with a hollandaise sauce seem more appropriate to a P aris bistro than a tr opical island. The kitchen staff is at its best when preparing beef dishes; the tenderloin with mushr ooms in a cr eam sauce is r ecommended. The signature dish is La P otence, a swinging, r ed-hot metal ball co vered with bits of sizzling tenderloin, ser ved with v arious dipping sauces. The catch of the day always comes with a lemon-butter sauce.

In Riffort Village (a c ondominium complex), on the O trabanda side of the pont oon bridge. ✆ **599/9-462-5666.** inf o@bistroleclochard.com. Reser vations r ecommended. M ain c ourses $35–$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 6:30–10:45pm. Harborside Terrace bar daily noon–11pm.

La Pergola ★ ITALIAN This is one of the fiv e restaurants nestled into the weather-beaten core of Fort Amsterdam, the island's oldest fort, and it has thriv ed here for mor e than a decade. The eatery's centerpiece is a R enaissance-style pergola, or arbor, which is indoors and overlooks the seafront. The outdoor seating is along the edge of the fort and also overlooks the sea. The menu changes daily but might include a nice pasta dish such as tagliatelle with pesto and shrimp , or pumpkin ravioli with ricotta and bacon. S ome dishes have a touch of island panache.

In the Waterfront Arches, Waterfort Straat, Willemstad. ✆ **599/9-461-3482.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$29. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–11pm.

MODERATE

Blues SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL As you dine on a pier jutting far out fr om the beachfront of the Avila Beach Hotel, water ripples beneath your seat and heaping platters of fresh seafood challenge even the heartiest of appetites. You may enjoy homemade wild-mushroom ravioli or char-grilled swor dfish filet with a garlic-butter cr ust. An especially impressive dish is the seafood special, compiled fr om thr ee differ ent types of fish, depending on the catch of the day. If after all this hearty fare you still have room, the chef makes great desserts, including one of our fav orites, a lemon panacotta.

In the A vila Beach Hot el, P enstraat 130, Willemstad. ✆ **599/9-461-4377.** Reser vations recommended. Main c ourses $22–$33. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 7–11pm. Liv e jazz Thurs and Sat. F rom the c enter of t own, drive east along the P ieter Maai Weg (which becomes Pennstraat) for about 1.5km (1 mile).

Gouverneur DeRouville INTERNA TIONAL Overlooking the water front, this spectacular thr ee-story str ucture was the r esidence of the original go vernor of Willem-stad. Whether you sit on the balcony overlooking the water, in the courtyard next to the fountain, or inside the main dining r oom beneath the ornate chandelier, you will likely appreciate the charming D utch ar chitecture almost as much as y ou'll enjo y the w ell-prepared local and international food and pr ofessional ser vice. The *keshi yena* is wor th the wait, and the mix ed grill is cooked to per fection.

De Rouvilleweg 9-F. ✆ **599/9-462-5999.** www.de-gouverneur.com. Reser vations recommended. Main courses $17–$28. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

Jaanchie's Restaurant Finds SEAFOOD/CREOLE The proprietor of this estab-lishment is likely to greet you himself, and to inform you that his iguana soup is the best

on island. Since the iguana is not deboned and does not taste like chicken, you might want to take his word for it. On the other hand, iguana is reputed to have the same aphrodisiac properties as the legendary oyster. In a rustic country-style setting with antiques and oak walls, diners are treated to a savory local cuisine. The fish is among the freshest around; our recent sampling of the grilled wahoo was perfection itself. You can also order delectable garlic shrimp or stewed goat. Most visitors drop in for lunch, and locals swear by this place.

Westpunt 15, Westpunt. ✆ **599/9-864-0126.** www.jaanchiescuracao.com. Reservations required for dinner. Main courses $14–$20. Daily noon–7pm (last seating).

Jaipur INDIAN Within the breezy, European Kurá Hulanda "village" sits this fine Indian restaurant. With its terra-cotta walls, teak chairs, marble tabletops, and location beside the babbling eco-pool, Jaipur offers Indian fare with a pan-Asian flair and an unusually thorough wine list. The food—particularly the fresh naan, curries, and chicken and seafood, which emerge steaming from the tandoori oven—is finely honed, with details (bright chutneys, peppery purées) that show unexpected kitchen finesse.

Langestraat 8, within the Hotel Kurá Hulanda complex. ✆ **599/9-434-7700.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$34. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–11pm.

Landhuis Daniel ★ Finds FRENCH-MEDITERRANEAN/NOUVELLE CREOLE This restaurant serves a unique combination of loosely French and Mediterranean flavors using fresh produce organically grown on the premises. Surrounded by arid scrubland about 3km (1¾ miles) south of Westpunt, near the island's most northwesterly tip, this place was originally built in 1711 as an inn and tavern. Today its mustard-colored facade, white columns, terra-cotta roof, and old-fashioned green-and-yellow dining room are carefully preserved and historically authentic. Their three-course menu changes weekly, and items are cooked slowly, to order, in a setting of sea breezes and sunlight streaming in the big windows. Launch your repast with a spicy Caribbean seafood bisque. Then order the dover sole in butter or locally raised rabbit in stewed pears; another favorite is the Argentine beef tenderloin with spicy pumpkin sauce.

In the Landhuis Daniel Inn, Wegnaar, Westpunt. ✆ **599/9-864-8400.** www.landhuisdaniel.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$31 lunch, $15–$26 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–2pm and 5–11pm.

Rijsttafel Indonesia ★ Value INDONESIAN This is the best place on the island to sample Indonesian *rijstafel,* the traditional rice table served here with 16, 20, or 25 zesty side dishes. The spicy food is a good change of pace when you tire of seafood and steak. Warming trays are placed on your table; the service is buffet style. You can season your plate with peppers rated hot, very hot, and palate-melting. It's best to go with a party so that all of you can share in the feast, although at lunchtime, the selection of dishes is more modest.

Mercuriusstraat 13, Salinja. ✆ **599/9-461-6361.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$32; *rijsttafel* $22 for 16 dishes, $27 for 20 dishes, $43 for 25 dishes; vegetarian *rijsttafel* $23 for 16 dishes. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2pm and 6–10pm. Take a taxi to this villa in the suburbs near Salinja, near Breezes Curaçao southeast of Willemstad.

Watamula Restaurant SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL Perched over lapping water with views of the beach below, this breezy open-air restaurant features fresh local food prepared with a continental flair. The seared tuna or shrimp tempura appetizers

work well to open your palate before the ostrich filet with teriyaki sambal or blackened swordfish with blue-cheese mashed potatoes. Seafood is not the only option; the jerk chicken, spiced New Zealand rack of lamb, and wild-forest-mushroom linguini are just as satisfying. For dessert, tease your palate with the banana crepe flavored with local rum and seared with rum-raisin ice cream.

At the Lodge Kurá Hulanda, Playa Kalki 1, Westpunt. ✆ **599/9-839-3600.** Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses $20–$48. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

The Wine Cellar ★ FRENCH Near the center of town is the domain of Nico and Angela Cornelisse and their son, Daniel, who offer one of the most extensive wine lists on the island. The atmosphere is reminiscent of an old-fashioned Dutch home. The kitchen turns out an excellent lobster salad and a sole meunière in a butter-and-herb sauce. You might also try fresh red snapper in garlic sauce, filet mignon from Argentina, or the rack of lamb with rosemary-port sauce. Game dishes, imported throughout the year from Holland, usually include venison roasted with mushrooms, hare, and roast goose. After years of dining here, we have found the food commendable in every way—dishes are hearty and full of flavor, and there are selections for lighter appetites as well. Of course, as good as the food is, it never matches the impressive wine list.

Intersection of Ooststraat and Concordiastraat, Willemstad. ✆ **599/9-560-6589.** www.winecellar.an. Reservations required. Main courses $15–$37. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 6:30–11pm; Sat 6:30–11pm.

Zanzibar Restaurant INTERNATIONAL This stylish beach bar and restaurant caters to patrons at Jan Thiel Beach on the east side of the island. It has a global vibe and features Moroccan decor, under a large open African hut, and serves an international menu, with a Mediterranean flair, to mostly Dutch patrons. Shish kebab and seafood are good, but pizza is their specialty.

Jan Thiel Beach. ✆ **599/9-747-0633.** www.zanzibar-curacao.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$19. AE, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–11:30pm.

4 CURAÇAO'S BEACHES

Curaçao beaches (called *playas* or *bocas*) aren't the best in the Dutch Leewards, but there are nearly 40 of them on island, ranging from hotel sands to secluded coves. *Playas* are the larger, classic sandy beaches, and *bocas* are small inlets between two large rock formations. The northwest coast is generally rugged and difficult for swimming, but the more tranquil waters of the west coast are filled with sheltered bays, offering excellent swimming and snorkeling.

Tips A Word of Caution to Swimmers

Beware of stepping on the spines of the sea urchins that sometimes abound in these waters. To give temporary first aid for an embedded urchin's spine, try the local remedies of vinegar or lime juice. Locals advise a burning match if you're tough. Although the urchin spines are not dangerous, they can give you several days of real discomfort.

Seaquarium Beach (also known as Mambo Beach), just to the east of the center of Willemstad, charges a fee of $3 for access to its complete facilities, including two bars, two restaurants, a watersports shop, beach-chair rentals, changing facilities, and showers. The calm waters make this beach ideal for swimming.

Just northwest of Willemstad, **Blauwbaai (Blue Bay)** is the largest and most popular beach on Curaçao, with enough white sand for everybody. Along with showers and changing facilities, there are plenty of shady places to retreat from the noonday sun. To get here, follow the road that goes past the Holiday Beach Hotel, heading in the direction of Juliandorp. Follow the sign that tells you to bear left for Blauwbaai and the fishing village of San Michiel.

Farther up the west coast, about 30 minutes from Willemstad in the Willibrordus area on the west side of Curaçao, **Daaibooi** is a good beach, though there are no showers or changing rooms. Wooden umbrellas provide shade. Snorkelers are attracted to the sides of the bay, as the cliffs rise out of the surf. Small rainbow-hued fish are commonplace, and many varying corals cover the rocks. This beach gets very crowded with locals on Sunday.

A beach popular with families and a base for fishing boats, **Playa Lagun** lies well concealed in the corner of the village of Lagun as you approach from Santa Cruz. The narrow cove is excellent for swimming because of the tranquil, shallow water. Rainbow-hued fish appear everywhere, so the beach is also a favorite with snorkelers. Some concrete huts provide shelter from the scorching sun; a snack bar is open on weekends.

Knip Bay, just north of Playa Lagun, has white sands, rocky sides, and beautiful turquoise waters, making it suitable for snorkeling, swimming, and sunbathing. The beach tends to be crowded on weekends, often with locals. Changing facilities and refreshments are available. ***Warning:*** Manchineel trees provide some shade, but their fruit is poisonous; never seek shelter under the trees when it rains, as drops falling off the leaves will cause major skin irritation.

Playa Abao, with crystal turquoise waters, is at the northern tip of the island. One of Curaçao's most popular strands, this is often called Playa Grandi ("Big Beach"). It can get very, very hot at midday, but thatched shade umbrellas provide some protection. A stairway and ramp lead down to the excellent white sands. There's a snack bar in the parking lot. Near the large cove at Playa Abao is **Playa Kenepa** ★, which is much smaller but gets our nod as one of the island's most beautiful strips. Partially shaded by trees, it's a good place for sunbathing, swimming, and shore diving. A 10-minute swim from the beach leads to a reef where visibility is frequently 30m (98 ft.). Baby sea turtles are often spotted here. A snack bar is open on weekends.

Westpunt, a public beach on the northwestern tip of the island, is known for the Sunday divers who jump from its gigantic cliffs into the ocean below. You can spot little rainbow-hued boats and fishermen's nets hanging out to dry here. There are no facilities at this beach, which tends to be exceptionally hot and has no shade trees (bring lots of sunscreen). The calm waters offer excellent swimming, though they're not good for snorkeling.

South of Willemstad is **Santa Barbara Beach.** It's between the open sea and the island's primary watersports and recreational area known as Spanish Water. A mining company owns this land, which also contains Table Mountain, a remarkable landmark, and an old phosphate mine. The natural beach has pure-white sand and calm water. A buoy line protects swimmers from boats. Facilities include restrooms, changing rooms, a snack bar, and a terrace; water bicycles and small motorboats are available for rent. The beach, open daily from 8am to 6pm, has access to the Curaçao Underwater Marine Park.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CRUISES Travelers looking for an experience similar to the sailing days of yore should book a trip on the ***Insulinde,*** Handelskade (✆ **599/9-560-1340** [note that this is a cellular phone and the connection may be poor]; fax 599/9-461-1538; www .insulinde.com). This 37m (121 ft.) traditionally rigged clipper offers afternoon snorkel, scenic tour, beach swim, and sail safaris for $50 (children $30), and day trips to the island of Klein Curaçao for $90 (children $50). These depart at 6:30am and return at 6:30pm, and include breakfast and lunch. Boats leave from right next to the Queen Emma pontoon bridge in town.

Like a ghost ship from ancient times, a dual-masted, five-sailed wooden schooner cruises silently through the waters of Curaçao. It carries a name steeped in legend—the ***Bounty*** (✆ **599/9-767-9988;** www.bountyadventures.com)—though it's not a replica of its famous namesake. Sailing and snorkeling trips depart Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays at 10am from Spanish Water, making a stop at Caracas Bay for great snorkeling before a return at 2:30pm. The price is $69 for adults or $35 for children ages 4 to 12. Children 3 and under are free. Prices include a barbecue buffet, dessert, salad bar, drinks, and use of snorkeling gear. The same company also offers a catamaran sail to Klein Curaçao on Tuesdays to Thursdays and Sundays for $89 ($45 for children), which includes barbecue lunch, open bar, and snorkel gear. All departures are from **Boathouse,** at Brakkeput Ariba z/n.

DIVING & SNORKELING Curaçao is a close second to Bonaire when it comes to marine environments, where scuba divers and snorkelers can enjoy healthy reefs and good visibility. Stretching along 20km (12 miles) of Curaçao's southern coastline, the **Curaçao Underwater Park** ★ features steep walls, shallow wrecks, gardens of soft coral, and more than 30 species of hard coral. A snorkel trail with underwater interpretive markers is laid out just east of the Breezes Resort and is accessible from shore.

The two most spectacular dive sites are the **Mushroom Forest** and **Sponge Forest,** where oversized coral heads and sponges abound. Two good wreck dives are the **Superior Producer,** a sunken vessel near Willemstad Harbor, and **Tugboat** near Caracas Bay. Dramatic vertical drops abound and can be explored at **Knipbai** and **Blauwbaai.** Due to the abundance of marine life, night dives are particularly rewarding in Curaçao.

Ocean Encounters Diving (✆ **599/9-461-8131;** www.oceanencounters.com) offers the most complete dive facilities and services at many hotels, including Breezes, Lions

Tips Diving with a Soft Touch

Warning: Touching any coral, including soft corals such as sea fans, in any marine protected area is forbidden. Even the softest contact can be deadly to the coral, and it can result in scrapes, cuts, rashes, and stings much like that of a jellyfish (coral's closest kin). It's also prohibited to touch, pet, or otherwise harass any fish, including eels and rays, whose delicate skin is coated with antibacterial slime, which protects them from potentially deadly skin infections. Even the use of sunscreen or insect repellent before entering the water adds harmful chemicals to the water that can irritate and harm these sensitive creatures.

Moments Coral Above and Below

After emerging from an awe-inspiring dive to a healthy patchwork of pink, purple, and green coral reefs; waving fans; and a Carnival frenzy of topaz, yellow, and pink fish, I glanced skyward. As if to not be outdone, a flock of pink flamingos silently glided overhead in a synchronized single-file display that would surely take first prize in any marching parade. Thank goodness saltwater conveniently masked the tears of awe that welled up.

Dive & Beach Resort, Sea Aquarium Resort, Kontiki Dive and Beach Resort, Hilton Curaçao Resort, and both Kurá Hulanda properties. They offer daily two-tank dives for $87 and afternoon snorkel trips for $44, wreck dives, and night dives for $65, and can even arrange interactive open-water dolphin dives together with the Dolphin Academy for $242. Weekly trips to Mushroom Forest and East Punt and Klein Curaçao are also offered for $130 with their fleet of seven custom dive boats. Their Kid's Sea Camp offers underwater educational activities for children

FISHING Proximity to the continental shelf of South America and wanton overfishing significantly limit the likelihood of catching large pelagic fish, and their rarity significantly limits the pleasure of hauling these spectacular top predators from the sea as either a prize or a meal—but it ain't cheap. Deep-sea fishing is $350 for a half-day tour (six-person maximum) and $525 for a full-day tour, drinks, and equipment included. **Let's Fish** (✆ **599/9-561-1812;** www.letsfish.net) offers small-scale fishing charters, including bonefishing trips on the flats, which are strictly catch-and-release.

GOLF An 18-hole course lies at **Blue Bay Golf Course,** a par-72 course at Landhuis Blauw, on the road to Bullenbaai (✆ **599/9-868-1755;** www.bluebaygolf.com). This challenging course, designed by Rocky Roquemore, takes advantage of Curaçao's seaside terrain and views of the Caribbean. Some shots are over water. Depending on the time of year, greens fees range from $85 to $105, including a cart. Hours are daily from 7am to 7pm.

HORSEBACK RIDING **Craidero El Hijo de David,** at Seru Lora naast 175 (✆ **599/9-465-1166**), can arrange 2-hour tours along scenic trails near Salt Lakes at Jan Theil Bay for $50 or 3-hour tours to Caracasbaai for $75. They also offer beginner lessons in an outdoor ring. Call ahead for appointments.

OFF-ROADING ATV excursions into rugged off-road areas can be arranged through **Eric's ATV Adventures,** Martin Luther King Boulevard across from Lion's Dive (✆ **599/9-524-7418;** www.curacao-atv.com). The cost for a half-day tour is $90 for a single and $140 for a two-person machine suitable for two adults or one adult and one child. These hefty four-wheel behemoths, reminiscent of a large tractor mower, can take on the steepest and rockiest terrain. The vehicle is relatively easy to operate, if rather loud and extremely hot underneath you. Goggles and helmets are provided. Sunscreen, eye protection, long pants, and closed shoes are highly recommended. A valid U.S. or international driver's license is required, and all drivers must be at least 16 years of age. **The Bike Shop Curaçao,** Sta. Rosawegn 27a (✆ **599/9-560-3882;** www.thebikeshop.nl), also rents motorcycles and scooters.

MOUNTAIN BIKING Curaçao hosted the Union Cycliste Internationale's 2006 Mountain Bike World Cup, so it should come as no surprise that the trails here can be pretty challenging. **Wanna Bike** ★ (✆ **599/9-527-3720;** www.wannabike.net) offers guided tours for riders of all levels. In addition to well-equipped bikes and helmets, the knowledgeable guides provide an insightful historic narrative of key historic sites and ruins. Bike tours lasting from 8 to 11am cost $32.

6 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Most cruise-ship passengers see only Willemstad—or, more accurately, its shops—but you may want to get out into the *cunucu,* or countryside, and explore the towering cacti and rolling hills topped by *landhuizen* (plantation houses) built more than 3 centuries ago.

WILLEMSTAD ★★

Willemstad was originally founded as Santa Ana by the Spanish in the 1500s. Dutch traders found a vast natural harbor, a perfect hideaway along the Spanish Main, and they renamed it Willemstad in the 17th century. Not only is Willemstad the capital of Curaçao, but it's also the seat of government for the Netherlands Antilles. Today rows of pastel-colored, red-roofed town houses adorn the downtown area. After 10 years of restoration, the historic center of Willemstad and the island's natural harbor, Schottegat, were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

The easiest way to go exploring is to take a 1 1/4-hour **trolley tour,** visiting the highlights of the city. The open-sided cars, pulled by a silent "locomotive," make several trips each week. Tours leave at 10 or 11am. The tour begins at Fort Amsterdam near the Queen Emma Pontoon Bridge. The cost is $25 for adults, $20 for children 2 to 12. Call ✆ **599/9-461-0011** for more information.

The city developed on both sides of the canal. It's divided into **Punda** (old-world Dutch ambience and the best shopping) and **Otrabanda** (the "Other Side," the more contemporary side). A pedestrian walkway, the **Queen Emma Pontoon Bridge,** connects both sections. It is so unique, it was declared a World Heritage Site and was recently restored. Powered by a diesel engine at one end and operated by a driver, it swings open many times a day to let ships pass in and out of the harbor.

From the bridge, there's a view of the old **gabled houses** in harmonized pastel shades. The bright colors, according to legend, are a holdover from the time when one of the island's early governors had eye trouble, and flat white gave him headaches. The colonial-style architecture, reflecting the Dutch influence, gives the town a storybook look. The houses, built three or four stories high, are crowned by steep gables and roofed with orange Spanish tiles. Hemmed in by the sea, a tiny canal, and an inlet, the streets are narrow, and they're crosshatched by still narrower alleyways.

Except for the pastel colors, Willemstad may remind you of old Amsterdam. It has one of the most intriguing townscapes in the Caribbean. But don't let the colors deceive you: Up close, the city can be rather dirty.

A **statue of Pedro Luis Brion** dominates the square known as Brionplein right at the Otrabanda end of the pontoon bridge. Born in Curaçao in 1782, Brion became the island's favorite son and best-known war hero. Under Simon Bolivar, he was an admiral of the fleet and fought for the independence of Venezuela and Colombia.

Moments The Floating Market

A few minutes' walk from the pontoon bridge, at the north end of Handelskade, is the **Floating Market** ★, where scores of fishing boats tie up alongside the canal, a few yards from the main shopping area. Boats arrive from Venezuela and Colombia, as well as other West Indian islands, to dock here and sell tropical fruits and vegetables. Across the street is a little market square where handicrafts from Haiti and South America are sold.

In addition to the pontoon bridge, the **Queen Juliana Bridge** opened to vehicular traffic in 1973. Spanning the harbor, it rises 59m (194 ft.), which makes it the highest bridge in the Caribbean and one of the tallest in the world.

The Waterfront originally guarded the mouth of the canal on the eastern or Punda side, but now it has been incorporated into the Plaza Hotel. The task of standing guard has been taken over by **Fort Amsterdam,** site of the Governor's Palace and the 1769 Dutch Reformed church. The church still has a British cannonball embedded in it. The arches leading to the fort were tunneled under the official residence of the governor.

A corner of Fort Amsterdam stands at the intersection of Breedestraat and Handelskade, the starting point for a plunge into the island's major **shopping district.**

At some point, visit the **Waterfort Arches,** which stretch for .4km (¼ mile). They rise 9m (30 ft.) high and are built of barrel-vaulted 17th-century stone set against the sea. At Waterfort, you can explore a handful of small boutiques. The breezy terrace on the sea here is perfect for a local Amstel beer or dinner at a choice of restaurants. The grand buildings and cobbled walkways are illuminated at night.

Between the I. H. (Sha) Capriles Kade and Fort Amsterdam, at Hanechi di Snoa 29, stands the **Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue** (✆ **599/9-461-1067**), the oldest extant synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. Consecrated on the eve of Passover in 1732, it houses the oldest Jewish congregation in the New World. Joaño d'Illan led the first Jewish settlers (13 families) to the island in 1651, almost half a century after their expulsion from Portugal by the Inquisition. The settlers came via Amsterdam to Curaçao. This synagogue, a fine example of Dutch colonial architecture, covers about a square block in the heart of Willemstad; it was built in a Spanish-style walled courtyard, with four large portals. Following a Portuguese Sephardic custom, sand covers the sanctuary floor, representing the desert where Israelites camped when the Jews passed from slavery to freedom. The highlight of the east wall is the Holy Ark, rising 5m (16 ft.); a raised *banca* (balustraded dais), canopied in mahogany, is on the north wall.

Adjacent to the synagogue courtyard is the **Jewish Cultural Historical Museum,** Hanechi di Snoa 29 (✆ **599/9-461-1633**), housed in two buildings dating from 1728. They were originally the rabbi's residence and the bathhouse. The 250-year-old *mikvah* (a bath for religious purification purposes) was in constant use until around 1850, when the buildings were sold. They have since been reacquired through the Foundation for the Preservation of Historic Monuments and turned into the present museum. On display are ritual, ceremonial, and cultural objects, many of which date from the 17th and 18th centuries and are still used by the congregation for holidays and events.

The synagogue and museum are open to visitors Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm and, if there's a cruise ship in port, Sunday from 9am to 4:30pm. Services are

 Friday at 6:30pm and Saturday at 10am. Visitors are welcome, with appropriate dress required. There's a $6 museum entrance fee for adults (includes synagogue); it's free for children under 13.

Museum Kurá Hulanda, Kipstraat 9 (✆ **599/9-434-7765**), is one of the most unusual—and one of the largest—museums in the Caribbean, housed in once-dilapidated 1800s buildings rescued from oblivion. The exhibits reflect the passion of Dr. Jacob Gelt Dekker, a Dutchman who resides next door. He has spent a great deal of his life devoted to the history and culture of Africa, and he has roamed that continent in search of cultural artifacts. At Otrabanda, he has assembled his prize collection, including its most interesting exhibit, a life-size reconstruction of a slave ship that once sailed from the Ivory Coast carrying captured slaves into bondage and often death in the West. One exhibit, *Origin of Man,* has a series of intriguing fossils. You can hear African music as you study the grotesque wood masks, and look at everything from fertility dolls to sculptures from shona stone, along with such musical instruments as the djembe or the balaphone. Much of the museum is devoted to objects that evoke the cultures of the former empires of West Africa. Hours are daily 10am to 5pm; admission is $9 for adults, $7 for students, and $6 for children and seniors.

You can walk the distance or take a short cab ride to the sleepy **Curaçao Museum,** Van Leeuw enhoekstraat (✆ **599/9-462-3873;** www.curacaomuseum.an), from the Queen Emma Pontoon Bridge. Built in 1853 by the Royal Dutch Army Corps of Engineers as a military quarantine hospital, the building was carefully restored from 1946 to 1948 and is a fine example of 19th-century Dutch architecture, now housing paintings, objets d'art, and furniture crafted in the 19th century by local cabinetmakers. There's also a large collection from the Caiquetio tribes, the early inhabitants described by Amerigo Vespucci as 2m-tall (6½) giants, and a reconstruction of a traditional music pavilion in the garden, where Curaçao musicians give regular performances. It's open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm, Sunday 10am to 4pm. Admission is $4.50 for adults, $2.50 for children 11 and under.

Maritime Museum, Van De Brandhof Straat 7 (✆ **599/9-465-2327;** www.curacaomaritime.com), is in the historic Scharloo neighborhood of Willemstad, just off the old harbor of St. Anna Bay. More than 40 permanent displays trace the story of Curaçao, beginning with the arrival of the island's original inhabitants in 600 b.c. Video presentations cover the development of Curaçao's harbor and the role of the island as one of the largest slave depots in the Caribbean. There are also five oral histories (one from a 97-yr.-old Curaçaoan who served on the cargo vessel *Normandie*), antique miniatures, 17th-century ship models, and a collection of maps. Admission is $10 for adults, $7 for children 12 to 16, free for children 11 and under. Hours are Tuesday to Saturday 9am to 4pm.

WEST OF WILLEMSTAD

On Schottegatweg West, northwest of Willemstad, past the oil refineries, lies the **Beth Haim Cemetery,** the oldest Caucasian burial site still in use in the Western Hemisphere. Meaning "House of Life," the cemetery was consecrated before 1659. There are some 2,500 graves on about 1 hectare (2½ acres) here. The carving on some of the 17th- and 18th-century tombstones is exceptional.

En route to Westpunt, you'll come across a seaside cavern known as **Boca Tabla,** one of many such grottoes on this rugged, uninhabited northwest coast. In the Westpunt area, a 45-minute ride from Punda in Willemstad, **Playa Forti** is a stark region characterized by soaring hills and towering cacti, along with 200-year-old Dutch land houses, the former mansions that housed slave owners.

Out toward the western tip of Curaçao, a high-wire fence surrounds the entrance to the 1,800-hectare (4,446-acre) **Christoffel National Park** ★★ in Savonet (✆ **599/9-864-0363**), about a 45-minute drive from the capital. A macadam road gives way to dirt, surrounded on all sides by abundant cactus and bromeliads. In the higher regions, you can spot rare orchids. Rising from flat, arid countryside, 369m-high (1,210-ft.) **St. Christoffelberg** is the highest point in the Dutch Leewards. Donkeys, wild goats, iguanas, the Curaçao deer, and many species of birds thrive in this preserve, and there are some Arawak paintings on a coral cliff near the two caves. The park has 32km (20 miles) of one-way trail-like roads, with lots of flora and fauna along the way. The shortest trail is about 8km (5 miles) long and, because of the rough terrain, takes about 40 minutes to drive through. There are also various walking trails; one takes you to the top of St. Christoffelberg in about 1 1/2 hours. (Come early in the morning, when it isn't too hot.) The park is open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 4pm, Sunday from 6:30am to 3pm. The entrance fee is $10 per person and includes admission to the tiny museum, which will soon get a modern face-lift.

Next door, the park has opened the **National Park Shete Boka** (✆ **599/9-864-0363**). This turtle sanctuary, whose name translates to "Seven Mouths" or inlets, contains a cave with pounding waves off the choppy north coast. Admission to the park is $3 per person. To learn more about nature, conservation, and history in Curaçao, and to participate in exciting nature exploration for the whole family, such as deer spotting, a pickup truck safari, or day hike up the mountain, log onto the **Caribbean Research and Management of Biodiversity Foundation** (www.carmabi.org).

NORTH & EAST OF WILLEMSTAD

Just northeast of the capital, **Fort Nassau** was completed in 1797 and christened Fort Republic by the Dutch. Built high on a hill overlooking the harbor entrance to the south and St. Anna Bay to the north, it was fortified as a second line of defense in case the waterfront gave way. When the British invaded in 1807, they renamed it Fort George in honor of their own king. Later, when the Dutch regained control, they renamed it Orange Nassau in honor of the Dutch royal family. Today diners have replaced soldiers.

Curaçao Liqueur Distillery, Landhuis Chobolobo, Saliña a Arriba (✆ **599/9-461-3526;** www.curacaoliqueur.com), offers a chance to visit Chobolobo, the 17th-century *landhuis* where the famous Curaçao liqueur is made. The cordial is a distillate of dried peel of a particular strain of orange found only on Curaçao. Several herbs are added to give it an aromatic bouquet. One of the rewards of a visit here is a free sample of the liqueur, offered Monday to Friday from 8am to noon and 1 to 5pm. Some recently introduced flavors include chocolate, coffee, and rum raisin, but the original orange flavor (regardless of the color) is still our favorite. Another interesting product made from the orange oil is a cooling spray called **Alcolodo Glacial,** great to soothe hot skin and ward off insects, and reputed to have many curative properties.

Curaçao Seaquarium, off Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard at a site called Bapor Kibrá (✆ **599/9-461-6666;** www.curacao-sea-aquarium.com), has more than 400 species of fish, crabs, anemones, sponges, and coral on display in a natural environment. Located a few minutes' walk along the rocky coast from the Breezes Curaçao Resort, the Seaquarium is open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm. Admission is $19 for adults, $9.50 for children 5 to 12.

Special features of the aquarium are sea lion and dolphin encounters, costing $99 to $300 for divers or $39 to $149 for snorkelers. Divers, snorkelers, and experienced swimmers can feed, film, and photograph sharks, which are separated from them by a large

 window with feeding holes. In the animal-encounters section, you can swim among stingrays, grouper, sea turtles, and other marine life, feeding and photographing these creatures in a controlled environment where safety is always a consideration. The less adventurous can watch a dolphin show and pet marine invertebrates in a kid-friendly touch tank. The Seaquarium is also the site of Curaçao's only full-facility, palm-shaded, white-sand beach.

For those who swear by the curative properties of aloe, a visit to the **Aloe Vera Plantation** (✆ **599/9-767-5577;** www.aloecuracao.com) may be just what the doctor ordered. Not surprisingly, all guided tours, which describe the production process from plantation to shelf, conveniently end in the factory shop. It's open Monday through Friday 8am to 4pm and Saturday 8am to noon. Admission is free, though you may be inclined to purchase an aloe product—even without any sales pressure from the friendly staff.

The **Hato Caves,** F. D. Rooseveltweg (✆ **599/9-868-0379**), have been called mystical. Every hour, guides take visitors through this world of stalagmites and stalactites, found in the highest limestone terrace of the island. Actually, they were once old coral reefs and were formed when the ocean water fell and the landmass was lifted up over the years. Over thousands of years, limestone formations were created, some mirrored in an underground lake. After crossing the lake, you enter the Cathedral, an underground cavern. The largest hall of the cave is called La Ventana ("The Window"). Also on display are samples of ancient Indian petroglyph drawings. The caves are open daily from 10am to 4:45pm; admission is $8 for adults and $6 for childr en 12 and under.

7 SHOPPING ★★

Curaçao is a shopper's paradise. Some 200 shops line the major shopping streets such as Heerenstraat and Breedestraat. Right in the heart of Willemstad is the five-block **Punda** shopping district. Most stores are open Monday through Saturday from 8am to noon and 2 to 6pm (some 8am–6pm). When cruise ships are in port, stores are also open for a few hours on Sundays and holidays. To avoid the cruise ship crowds, do your shopping in the morning.

Look for good buys on French perfumes, Dutch Delft blue souvenirs, finely woven Italian silks, Japanese and German cameras, jewelry, silver, Swiss watches, linens, leather goods, liquor, and island-made rum and liqueurs, especially Curaçao liqueur, some of which has a distinctive blue color. The island is famous for its 2.3kg (5-lb.) wheels of Gouda and Edam cheeses. Some of the stores also stock some deals on intricate lacework imported from Portugal, China, and everywhere in between. If you're a street shopper and want something colorful, consider one of the woodcarvings or flamboyant paintings from Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Both are hawked by street vendors at any of the main plazas.

Incidentally, Curaçao is not technically a free port, but its prices are often inexpensive because of its low import duty.

The Art of Nena Sanchez (✆ **599/9-461-2882;** www.nenasanchez.com) displays the artist's vibrant Caribbean still-lifes and striking portraits, as well as affordable prints. Every garment sold in **Bamali,** Breedestraat Punda 2 (✆ **599/9-461-2258;** www.bamali.com), is designed and, in many cases, crafted by the store owners. Influenced largely by Indonesian patterns, the airy attire includes V-neck cotton pullovers perfect for a casual,

hot-weather climate, as well as linen shifts, often in batik prints, appropriate for a glamorous cocktail party. Most pieces here are for women; all are made from all-natural materials, such as cotton, silk, and linen, and there's also a limited array of sandals, hats, scarves, and leather bags. **Benetton,** Schottegatweg-Oost 148 Salinas (✆ **599/9-461-4619**), has invaded Curaçao with all its many colors. Some items are marked down by about 20% below U.S. prices (this is done to get rid of surplus stock from the previous season); in-season clothing is available as well.

Electronics are a good buy on Curaçao, as they can be sold duty free; we recommend the very reliable **Boolchand's,** Breederstraat 50, Punda (✆ **599/9-461-6233;** www.boolchand.com), in business since 1930. **Gandelman Jewelers,** Breedestraat 35, Punda (✆ **599/9-461-1854**), is the island's best and most reliable source for jewelry, often exquisitely designed and set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and other gemstones. You can also find watches and the unique line of Prima Classe leather goods embossed with the world map.

Little Holland, Braedestraat 37, Punda (✆ **599/9-461-1768**), reputedly changed hands but still specializes in silk neckties, Panama hats, Nautica shorts and shirts, Swiss Army knives, and, most important, a sophisticated array of cigars. Crafted in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil, they include some of the most prestigious names in smoke, including Montecristos, Cohiba, and Churchills. ***Remember:*** It's still illegal to bring Cuban cigars into the United States; smoke them here.

As the name implies, **Mr. Tablecloth,** Handelskade 3, on the waterfront (✆ **599/9-462-9588**), is where the finest linens on the island can be found.

Penha & Sons, Heerenstraat 1 (✆ **599/9-461-2266;** www.jlpenha.com), is in the oldest building in town (1708). It has long been known for its fine selection of perfumes, cosmetics, and designer clothing (for both men and women). It distributes such names as Calvin Klein, Yves Saint Laurent, Elizabeth Arden, Clarins, and Estée Lauder, among others.

For some truly unique nature-inspired jewelry and artistic prints, head over to **Maravia** (✆ **599/9-461-9866;** www.maraviagallery.com), at Handelskade #1 in Punda, near the swing bridge.

Wulfsen and Wulfsen, Gomezplein 7 at Gomez Sq. (✆ **599/9-461-2302**), sells fashionable ladies' clothing from Germany and Holland, and crisp men's shirts in every color of the rainbow.

La Casa Amarilla (The Yellow House), Breedestraat 46 (✆ **599/9-461-3222**), which has been operating since 1887 in a yellow-and-white building, sells an intriguing collection of perfume and cosmetics from all over the world and is an agent of Christian Dior, Guerlain, Gucci, and Versace.

In Otrobanda, there are a slew of high-end shops in Riffort Village next to the new Renaissance, including Brietling, Tiffany, and a Little Switzerland.

8 CURAÇAO AFTER DARK ★★

Most of the action on Curaçao spins around the island's **casinos.** These hotel gaming houses usually start their action at 4pm, and some of them remain open until 3am.

Emerald Casino at the **Marriott Beach Resort,** Piscadera Bay (✆ **599/9-736-8800**), is especially popular, designed to resemble a Monte Carlo casino. It features 149 slot

machines, 6 blackjack tables, 2 roulette wheels, 2 Caribbean stud poker tables, and a craps table. The **Princess Casino** at the **Breezes Curaçao Resort,** Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd. 8 (✆ **599/9-736-7888**), is the liveliest on the island. But the newest and flashiest casino on the island is the **Carnival Casino** at the **Renaissance Curacao Resort** (✆ **599/9-435-5000**). The flashing lights and noise from the slot machines (which feature hilarious themes such as Betti the Yetti and Revenge of the Moolah, featuring cows in space ships) spill into the hotel lobby. Nightly live music is a nice touch.

The landlocked, flat, and somewhat dusty neighborhood of **Salinja** is now the nightlife capital of Curaçao, but the island nightlife works on a time-share system: Each club has its unofficial "night" when the crowds gather under its roof and the fun lasts long into the early morning hours. Pick up a copy of the weekly dining and entertainment guide **K-Pasa** at any tourism office or hotel lobby, or log on to **www.k-pasa.com** to find out what's happening where.

Blues, in the Avila Beach Hotel, Penstraat 130 (✆ **599/9-461-4377**), is a restaurant with a hopping bar that's packed every night except Monday. Live jazz is offered Thursday from 7 to 10pm and Saturday from 9pm to midnight, with no cover.

If you like to party on the beach, head for **Hook's Hut,** Piscadera Bay (✆ **599/9-462-6575;** www.hookshut.com). Jazz and Caribbean are regular features here, and it's also known to book the best local music on the island.

Mambo Beach, at the **Seaquarium Beach** (✆ **599/9-461-8999;** www.mambobeach.com), features food, music, and a great beach bar that, on Tuesday nights, shows classic movies under the stars a mere stone's throw from the water. Sunday night is salsa night, and the place is usually packed. Another longtime favorite, especially for happy hour, is **Hook's Hut** (✆ **599/9-462-6575**), on the beach of the same name at Piscaderabaai z/n. **Asia de Cuba,** Zuikertuintjeweg z/n (✆ **599/9-747-9009;** http://asiadecuba.curacaoplaza.com), has live Cuban music and a pan-Asian decor and cuisine. Grab a mojito and belly up to a high-top table near the dance floor to watch the locals as they show off Latin moves so good you'll think you're in old Havana. **The Sopranos Piano Bar,** in Rifforte Village (✆ **599/9-567-0007;** www.sopranospianobar.com), has nightly dancing, cocktails, and live music. The bar is open from noon till 3am (or later). Live piano music plays from 9pm to 2am.

A pontoon boat, ***Mi Dushi,*** on Baya Beach at the end of Caracas Bai St. (✆ **599/9-747-4489;** www.midushi.com), is a floating club with a dance floor, three bars, and a full barbecue. *Mi Dushi* sails every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday 1 to 5pm, costing $55 for adults and $35 for children 3 to 12. Children under 3 are free.

11

Dominica

The pristine island of Dominica—the wildest in the Caribbean—was green long before anyone heard of eco-tourism. The government of Dominica has been preserving its shoreline and protecting its mountain rainforests since the 1960s, even while other Caribbean islands, including Barbados and Aruba, were in the process of extensive development. In fact, the little island nation was the first country benchmarked by Green Globe, an internationally recognized program certifying sustainable environmental and cultural tourism.

Dominica is struggling to preserve its reputation as the Caribbean's green island, yet attempting to attract more massive tourism. It deepened its port, making it navigable for the cruise industry's new jumbo liners, and it has spent millions illuminating and expanding its airport. Now planes can arrive at night, bypassing a long-standing hassle of overnighting in Puerto Rico.

Long a British colony, Dominica achieved independence in November of 1978. It occupies a seat in the United Nations and is the central Caribbean's only natural World Heritage Site. Its capital is Roseau, and its official language is English, although a dialect of Creole is spoken by most islanders.

The beaches aren't worth the effort to get here, but the green landscape and rivers, as well as increasingly renowned scuba diving, are. Nature lovers who visit Dominica (Dom-in-*ee*-ka) experience a wild, rugged Caribbean setting, as well as the rural life that has largely disappeared on the more developed islands. Dominica is, after all, one of the poorest and least developed islands in the Caribbean. Unlike St. Lucia, for example, there are no chain hotels, and the tourist infrastructure tends to be basic. It's also one of the less expensive islands in the Caribbean, and probably the only one that Columbus would still recognize.

Hiking and mountain climbing are good reasons to visit Dominica; its flora is made unbelievably lush by frequent rainfall. Covered by a dense tropical rainforest that blankets its mountain slopes, including cloud-wreathed Morne Diablotin at 1,424m (4,671 ft.), it has vegetation unique in the West Indies. The mountainous island is 47km (29 miles) long and 26km (16 miles) wide, with a total land area of 751 sq. km (293 sq. miles), much of which has never been seen by explorers. Should you visit, you'll find clear rivers, waterfalls, hot springs, and boiling lakes.

With a population of 79,000, Dominica lies in the eastern Caribbean, between Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The Caribs, indigenous people of the Caribbean, live as a community on the northeast of the island and still practice the art of traditional basketry.

Clothing is casual, including light summer wear for most of the year. However, take along walking shoes for those trips into the mountains and a sweater for cooler evenings.

DON'T MISS . . .

- An **escape to Mother Nature's Garden of Eden,** with 365 rivers, 483km (299 miles) of trails, waterfalls galore, 8 active volcanoes, 3 national parks, 40 dive sites, and mountains reaching heights of more than 1,500m (4,920 ft.).

- **Morne Trois Pitons National Park,** on about 6,800 hectares (16,796 acres), a World Heritage Site in the island's southern region, with a primordial rainforest and steamy hot springs.
- **Carib Indian Territory,** where the last of the once-cannibalistic Carib Indians are found on the northeast coast in a 1,480-hectare (3,656-acre) reserve with their own chief. Some 3,000 Indians still practice their ancient way of life, such as carving canoes from tree trunks.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you go, Americans and Canadians can contact the **Dominica Tourist Office** by calling ✆ **866/522-4057** (fax 767/448-5840) for information. You can also download information at **www.discoverdominica.com**.

In England, information is available from **Kate Popham** (✆ **020/7928-1600;** fax 020/7928-1700; www.discoverdominica.com).

You can also get information on the Web at **www.dominica.dm**.

On the island, the **Dominica Tourist Information Office** is on the Old Market Plaza, Roseau, with administrative offices at the National Development Corporation offices, Valley Road (✆ **767/448-2045;** fax 767/448-5840); it's open Tuesday to Friday 8am to 4pm, Monday from 8am to 5pm.

There are also information bureaus at **Melville Hall Airport** (✆ **767/445-7051**) and **Canefield Airport** (✆ **767/449-1199**).

GETTING THERE

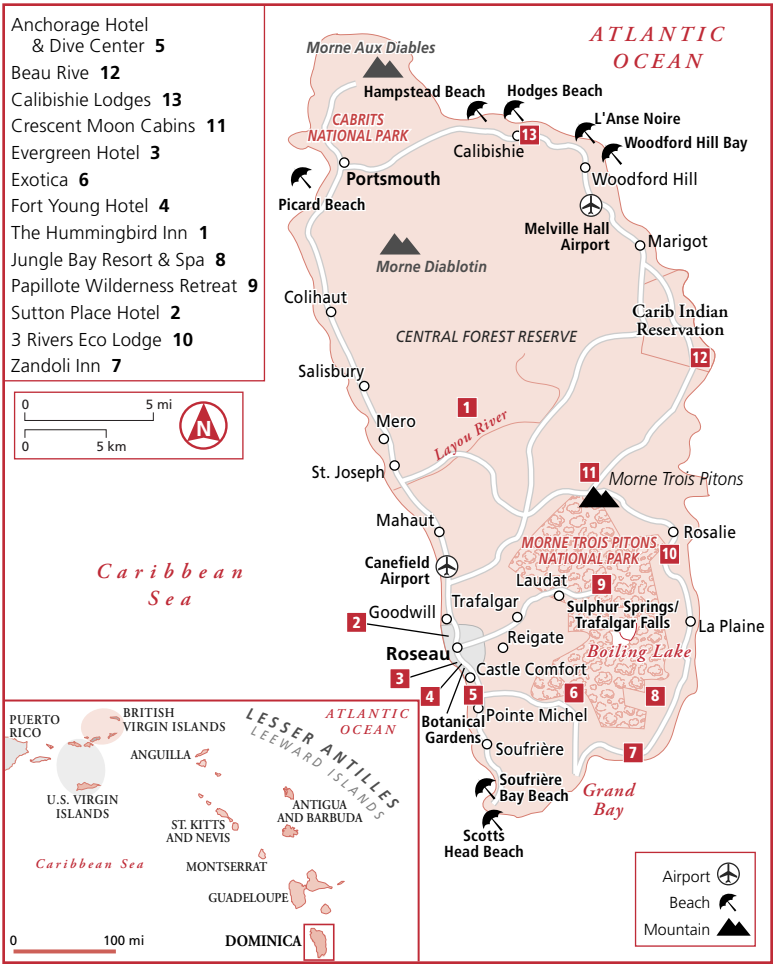
BY PLANE Neither of the two airports on Dominica is large enough to handle a jet, so there are no nonstop flights from the U.S. or Canada. The **Melville Hall Airport** (✆ **767/445-7101**) is on the northeastern coast, a 1 ½-hour taxi ride from Roseau on the southwestern coast. The drive takes you across the island through the forest and coastal villages; the fare is around $9.30 per person when there are four passengers. On your own, the fare could be $22.

The more modern **Canefield Airport** (✆ **767/449-1199**) is about a 15-minute taxi ride north of Roseau. The 600m (1,968-ft.) airstrip accommodates smaller planes than those that can land at Melville Hall. From here, the typical taxi fare into town is $8. There's also a public bus (with an h that precedes the number on the license plate) that costs only $8.20 per person; buses come every 20 minutes and hold between 15 and 18 passengers.

For many from the U.S., the easiest way to reach Dominica is via the daily **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) flight from American's hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

If you're already in the Caribbean, you can fly to Dominica from several other islands aboard **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liat.com). The little airline offers nonstop flights from St. Lucia, daily from Antigua, and daily from Barbados. There is one flight daily, but with a stopover from the islands of St. Kitts, St. Maarten, St. Vincent, Tortola (B.V.I.), and Trinidad.

BY BOAT The ***L'Express*** (✆ **767/448-2181;** www.express-des-iles.com), sailing from the French West Indies, runs between Guadeloupe in the north to Martinique in the south; Dominica is a port of call along the way. Departures are 6 days a week; call for



exact schedules. For schedule information, contact **White Church Travel,** 5 Great Marlborough St., Roseau (✆ **767/448-2181**). A one-way fare costs $25.

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR If you rent a car, there's a fee of $11 to obtain a driver's license, which is available at the airports. The island has 500km (310 miles) of paved roads, and only in a few areas is a four-wheel-drive vehicle necessary. ***Note:*** Driving is on the left.

There are a handful of small, usually family-owned car-rental companies, the condition and price of whose vehicles vary widely. They include **Valley Rent-a-Car,** Goodwill Road, Roseau (✆ **767/448-3233;** www.valleyrentacar.com); and **Best Deal Rent-A-Car,** 15 Hanover St., Roseau (✆ **767/449-9204;** www.bestdealrentacar.com).

Fun Facts National Day

National Day celebrations on November 3 commemorate both Columbus's 1493 discovery of the island and its independence, in 1978. Cultural celebrations of Dominica's traditional dance, music, song, and storytelling begin in mid-October and continue to Community Day, November 4, when people undertake community-based projects.

BY TAXI You can hire a taxi at either the Melville Hall or Canefield airports. Prices are regulated by the government (see "Getting There," above, for airport fares). If you want to see the island by taxi, the driver will charge from $70 to $90 for a tour that lasts between 4 and 5 hours. Rates are usually valid for between one and four passengers. After 6pm, taxis may be hard to find, so call ahead.

BY MINIBUS The public transportation system consists of private minibus service between Roseau and the rest of Dominica. These flamboyantly painted minibuses are filled mainly with schoolchildren, workers, and country people who need to come into Roseau. On most Caribbean islands we don't recommend buses, but on Dominica they afford terrific insights into local life. Taxis may be a more reliable means of transport for visitors, but there are hotels at which buses call during the course of the day You can also just hail a bus when you see it and tell the driver where you want to go. Fares range from 55¢ to $3.80. Buses are identified by the letter **h** that precedes their license numbers.

Fast Facts Dominica

Banks Banks are open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 2pm, Friday from 8am to 5pm. There are several major bank branches in Roseau, complete with ATMs that dispense EC dollars.

Currency Dominica uses the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$),** worth about EC$2.70 to US$1 (EC$1 = US37¢). At press time, the Eastern Caribbean dollar was trading to the British pound at the rate of EC$1 = 25p. (Stated differently, £1 = EC$4.) U.S. dollars are readily accepted throughout the island, though you'll usually get change in EC dollars. *Unless otherwise specified, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs Dominica is lenient, allowing you to bring personal and household effects, plus 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, and 40 ounces of liquor or wine per person.

Documents To enter, U.S. and Canadian citizens must have a passport. In addition, an ongoing or return ticket must be shown. British visitors should have a valid passport.

Electricity The electricity is 220–240-volt AC (50 cycles), so both adapters and transformers are necessary for U.S.-made appliances. It's smart to bring a flashlight with you, in case of power outages.

Emergencies To call the police, report a fire, or summon an ambulance, dial ✆ **999.**

Hospital There's **Princess Margaret Hospital**, Federation Drive, Goodwill (✆ **767/448-2231**), but those with serious medical conditions may want to forego a visit to the hospital in Dominica, as island medical facilities are often inadequate.

Language English is the official language. Locals often speak a Creole-French patois.

Pharmacies The island's best-stocked drugstore is **Jolly's Pharmacy,** in Roseau at 37 Great George St. and 12 King George V St. Both branches share the same phone number and hours (✆ **767/448-3388**). They're open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm, and Saturday from 8am to 2pm.

Safety Although crime is rare here, you should still safeguard your valuables. Never leave them unattended on the beach or in a locked car.

Taxes A 10% government room tax is added on accommodations, and a 15% tax applies to alcoholic drinks and food items. Anyone who remains on Dominica for more than 24 hours must pay a $22 departure tax.

Telephone To call Dominica from the United States, dial **1,** then **767** (the country code for Dominica) and the local number. To call Dominica from another island within the Caribbean, just dial **767** plus the seven-digit local number. International direct dialing is available on Dominica, as well as U.S. direct service through AT&T. You can contact **AT&T** in Dominica by dialing ✆ **800/225-5288.** Most hotel telephone operators throw up their hands at even placing a long-distance call for a resident. Instead, they connect their clients to the island's long-distance phone operator, who dials the call for a client, and then calls are billed directly to a client's room.

Time Dominica is on Atlantic Standard Time, 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time in the United States. Dominica does not observe daylight saving time, so when the United States changes to daylight saving time, clocks in Dominica and the U.S. East Coast tell the same time.

Tipping Most hotels and restaurants add a 10% service charge to bills; check carefully to see if it's been added. If this charge has not been included, tipping is up to you, though an additional 15% for particularly good service is always welcome.

Water Tap water is generally considered safe to drink, but because it's different from what you're used to, it still might cause a stomach disorder. Better stick to bottled water, to be on the safe side.

Weather Daytime temperatures average between 70° and 85°F (21°C–29°C). Nights are much cooler, especially in the mountains. The rainy season is June to October, when there can be hurricane activity. Dominica lies in the hurricane belt, and fierce storms have taken their toll on the island over the years.

2 WHERE TO STAY

The government imposes a 10% tax on hotel rooms and a 5% tax on beverages and food, which will be added to your hotel bill. On top of that, most hotels add a 10% service charge.

Tips Mosquito Alert

At night you are likely to be plagued with mosquitoes. If that's a real problem for you, check into the Fort Young Hotel (see below), which is above the "mosquito line." Most hotels offer mosquito netting. Remember, you came to Dominica for unspoiled nature, right?

If you don't want to rent a car, it's best to stay in Roseau, where you can get around better. But if you'd like to experience nature, head for one of the remote inns in exotic tropical settings.

IN ROSEAU & CASTLE COMFORT

Anchorage Hotel & Dive Center The Anchorage, established in 1971, is at Castle Comfort, .8km (1/2 mile) south of Roseau. For the active traveler, there is no better choice, as scuba diving, whale-watching, hiking, fishing, and bird-watching are emphasized. The Armour family provides small rooms with balconies overlooking a pool. The best open onto a view of the Caribbean and contain two double beds. The others are more standard, each with comfortable twin beds or one double. Although it's at the shore, there's little or no sandy beach available, so guests spend their days around the pool. However, the hotel has its own jetty, you can swim off the pebble beach, and there's a squash court. The hotel's French and Caribbean cuisine is simple, with an emphasis on fresh fish and vegetables.

Castle Comfort (P.O. Box 34), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/448-2638.** Fax 767/448-2639. www.anchoragehotel.dm. 32 units. Year-round $120–$145 double. Children 11 and under 50% deduction on meals. Dive packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some), Wi-Fi.

Evergreen Hotel This seafront, family-run hotel looks a bit like a Swiss chalet from the outside, but inside there's an open-air restaurant with bright jungle prints, crystal teardrop chandeliers, and an Art Deco bar. It lies 1.5km (1 mile) south of Roseau. A more modern-looking annex, though sterile, has better rooms than the main building. A few units have wraparound tile-floored verandas; all have stone accents. Accommodations are bright and airy, with most rooms having two double beds and ample storage space. The nicest is the Honeymoon Hut, an exotic and charming retreat for either honeymooners or off-the-record weekenders. A stony beach is visible a few steps beyond the garden. Inside and out, the airy, comfortably modern place is trimmed with local gommier wood.

Castle Comfort (P.O. Box 309), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/448-3288** or -3276. Fax 767/448-6800. www.evergreenhoteldominica.com. 16 units. Year-round $146–$176 double. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; horseback riding; pool; room service; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Fort Young Hotel ★ Occupying a cliff-side setting, this modern hotel grew from the ruins of the 1770 Fort Young, once the island's major military installation. Traces of its former historic role remain, including cannons at the entrance. It's always attracted business travelers, but now more and more tourists are drawn to the comfortable bedrooms with ceiling fans and balconies. Here you are elevated far above the "mosquito line," so

you can actually sit out and enjoy the balmy Caribbean air without being attacked. The hotel has 18 oceanfront guest rooms and three one-bedroom suites at the base of a cliff below the existing fort; it's worth the extra money to ask for one of these suites, which have direct ocean views and a sitting area.

Victoria St. (P.O. Box 519), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **800/581-2034** or 767/448-5000. Fax 767/448-5006. www.fortyounghotel.com. 70 units. Winter $135–$205 double; off season $115–$185 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; health club; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; spa; dive shop; mooring facilities. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar (in some), Wi-Fi.

Sutton Place Hotel ★★ This small historic property stands in the center of town and was once a 1930s guesthouse run by "Mother" Harris, a matriarch who became a local legend. Destroyed by Hurricane David in 1979, Sutton Place was rebuilt in a traditional Caribbean style by the same Harris family, which continues the old traditions but with far greater style. Rooms are tastefully furnished with antiques, including four-poster beds, brass desk lamps, and teak furnishings in the shower-only bathrooms. Suites contain fully equipped kitchenettes. The staircase and floors of the suites are laid with a fine hardwood, tauroniro, from South America. Stylized floral arrangements, exotic prints, and luxurious fabrics contribute to the upscale style. The nearest beach is about 2km (1¼ mile) away.

25 Old St. (P.O. Box 2333), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/449-8700.** Fax 767/448-3045. www.suttonplacehoteldominica.com. 8 units. Year-round $95 double; $135 suite. Extra person $30. Rates include breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in suites), Wi-Fi.

IN THE RAINFOREST

Papillote Wilderness Retreat ★ This eco-inn is run by the Jean-Baptiste family: Cuthbert, who handles the restaurant, and his wife, Anne Grey, a marine scientist. Their unique resort, 6km (3¾ miles) east of Roseau, stands right in the middle of Papillote Forest, at the foothills of Morne Macaque. In this remote setting, you're surrounded by exotic fruits, flowers, and herb gardens. The rooms are most inviting, with their hardwood floors, jungle-painted walls, floral quilts, and fresh flowers. Don't expect constantly sunny weather, since this part of the jungle is known for its downpours; however, that's what keeps the orchids, begonias, and brilliantly colored bromeliads lush. The 5 hectares (12 acres) of sloping and forested land have a labyrinth of stone walls and trails, beside which flow freshwater streams, a few of which originate in hot mineral springs. Natural hot mineral baths are available, and you'll be directed to a secluded waterfall where you can swim in the river.

Trafalgar Falls Rd. (P.O. Box 2287) Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/448-2287.** Fax 767/448-2285. www.papillote.dm. 7 units. Year-round $110 double; $115–$130 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $40 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. Closed Sept 1–Oct 15. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 3 hot mineral pools; room service. *In room:* Ceiling fan, no phone, Wi-Fi.

3 Rivers Eco Lodge Value Significantly more rustic than Jungle Bay Resort & Spa (below), this eco-friendly lodge lies in a rainforest valley where three rivers meet. Secluded cottages are set in an organic garden with fruit trees, and the hot showers are solar powered. Three Rivers even generates its own power with river currents. One covered building contains bunks and hammocks strung up dormitory style. You can even pitch your own tent on the grounds. A communal kitchen is also at the disposal of guests.

Hiking, horseback riding, bird-watching, even whale- and turtle-watching will fill your social calendar. You can take dips in a trio of river ponds.

New Foundland Estate (P.O. Box 1292), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/446-1886.** Fax 510/578-6578. www.3riversdominica.com. 6 cottages. Year-round $85 double; $22 per person dormitory; $43 per person tent. DC, MC. V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* No phone.

AT STOWE

Zandoli Inn ★ (Finds) Picture this: A small hideaway inn anchored on a scenic cliff on the southeast coast overlooking the Atlantic, set on 2.4 hectares (6 acres) of tropical gardens with lush mountains as a backdrop. This oasis is crisscrossed with forest trails, and stairs take you to a 610m (2,001-ft.) boulder shoreline. Near the fishing village of Fond St. Jean, the inn lies 21km (13 miles) southeast of Roseau. A red-roofed building in the Caribbean/Mediterranean style, the well-furnished bedrooms are spacious opening onto scenic views and have mosquito netting and ceiling fans.

Roche Cassée Stowe, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/446-3161.** Fax 767/446-3344. www.zandoli.com. 5 units. Year-round $145 double. AE, MC, V. Children 11 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Dining room; bar; outdoor plunge pool. *In room:* No phone.

AT MORNE ANGLAIS

Exotica ★ (Finds) This tropical setting is home to what's called an "agro-eco" resort, with some 38 different flowers and fruit trees growing on the 2-hectare (5-acre) organic farm. You can enjoy the cool mountain breezes 480m (1,574 ft.) above sea level, at a point some 8km (5 miles) from Roseau. In 1995, Fae and Alberton Martin built this cluster of cottages on the western slope of Mount Anglais in the southern half of the island. The resort's cottages are constructed from hardwoods, cured pine, and stone. Accommodations are comfortable and tastefully furnished, each with a private porch, spacious living room, kitchen, large bedroom with two double beds, and private bathrooms with tub/shower.

Morne Anglais (P.O. Box 109), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/448-8839.** Fax 767/448-8829. www.exoticacottages.com. 6 units. Winter $140 double; off season $109 double. Extra person $20. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $35 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Cafe; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, kitchen.

AT POINT MULATRE

Jungle Bay Resort & Spa ★ This is a so-called "wellness" and adventure retreat, one of the finest on this eco-friendly island. Opened in 2005, the resort is a holistic health spa with a mammoth "yoga terrace." Rustically outfitted cottages with wood furnishings are perched like birds' nests on the hillside. The structures were made from volcanic stone and tropical hardwoods. The resort also features the Spa du Soleil, yoga studios, two restaurants serving health food, and hiking trails shooting out in all directions. Hikes cover a 23-hectare (57-acre) sanctuary filled with tropical birds and an array of exotic plant life. A spring-fed stream cascades along the valley below the hotel. Cottages are accessed through a series of stone stairways and footpaths. At your semioutdoor shower, your body communes with nature, or so they say. Organized activities include a full range of spa treatments, yoga classes, and even cultural activities such as live entertainment and dancing.

Point Mulatre, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **800/790-5264** or 767/446-1789. Fax 767/446-1090. www.junglebaydominica.com. 35 units. Winter $269 double; off season $219–$249 double. 7-night honeymoon and

eco-adventure packages available. MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; beach bar; fitness classes; outdoor pool; spa. *In room:* Ceiling fan, no phone.

AT MORNE DANIEL

The Hummingbird Inn A 3km (1 3/4-mile) drive from Roseau and the Canefield Airport and a 2-minute walk to the beach, this hilltop retreat is a great little bargain. Opening onto panoramic views, the rooms are in two bungalows and have louvered windows and doors to capture the breezes in lieu of air-conditioning. Ceiling fans hum day and night, and you can also retreat to terraces with hammocks. Each of the accommodations has bedside tables and reading lamps (not always a guarantee on Dominica). The handmade quilts on the beds add a homey touch. One four-poster bed, a mammoth wooden affair, is 250 years old. This is a friendly, family-style place, and there are lovely gardens with exotic plants that attract both hummingbirds and iguanas.

Morne Daniel (P.O. Box 1901), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆/fax **767/614-9967.** www.thehummingbirdinn.com. 10 units. Winter $99 double, $140 suite; off season $85 double, $120 suite. Extra person $20. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Internet; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* Ceiling fan.

AT MORNE TROIS PITONS

Crescent Moon Cabins ★ Finds A stay here puts you in the midst of "Me Tarzan, You Jane" country. In a setting of a roaring river and cascades of water falls, this eco-friendly resort lies in the foothills of Morne Trois Pitons National Park, midway between Melville Hall Airport and Roseau. Hiking trails branch out in every direction. If your vehicle can survive the road getting here, you will have arrived at a tropical paradise with dozens of fruit plants such as the mango or papaya. Accommodations are in wood-built cabins or else a stone-built cottage, each opening onto a panoramic view. Your hosts are nature-loving Ron and Jean Viveralli (he's a master chef and makes the world 's best mango ice cream).

Sylvania (P.O. Box 2400), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/449-3449.** Fax 767/449-3449. www.crescentmooncabins.com. 5 units. Year-round $156 double cabin (2-night minimum). Rates include continental breakfast; dinner $35 extra. 3-night package $1,080 for cottage for 4 persons; meals extra. **Amenities:** Dining room; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* No phone.

AT CALIBISHIE

Calibishie Lodges ★ About an hour's drive northeast of Roseau, you can stay at this isolated Caribbean retreat, its rooms opening onto panoramic views of land and sea. It is near a typical village with banana and coconut plantations, with fine white, sandy beaches nearby. Accommodations are in small lodges on a hillside, each opening onto a balcony. The apartments here are self-contained and well furnished. Honeymooners are often attracted to this retreat, as are divers, hikers, bird-watchers, whale- and dolphin-watchers, and nature lovers in general. Lodges can house four guests comfortably. Features include mosquito screens, deck chairs on the veranda, and cooling by ceiling fans. Food and drink are served at the Bamboo Bar & Restaurant.

Calibishie Main Rd., Calibishie, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/445-8537.** www.calibishie-lodges.com. 6 units. Year-round $125–$145 double. Extra person $15. Rates include breakfast. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; airport transfers; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

AT CASTLE BRUCE

Beau Rive ★ Finds Just south of the Carib Indian Territory, this is a wonderful little guest house on the East Coast where owner Mark Steele welcomes you into his Zen

world. Moving from England, he achieved his dream, which was to "create the hotel I've always hoped to discover on a tropical island." He's succeeded brilliantly in what is truly a "green hotel." The hot water is solar heated, and even the soap in your bathroom is locally made. As much as possible, produce and fish are purchased from locals, and Steele planted 170 fruit and flowering trees, attracting a wide variety of birds. Every guest room is comfortably and attractively furnished with an ocean view and a private shower room.

Near Castle Bruce (P.O. Box 2424), Roseau, Dominica, W.I. ✆ **767/445-8992.** www.beaurive.com. 8 units. Year-round $180 double; $209 triple. Dinner $30 extra. MC, V. Closed Aug–Sept. Children 15 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Dining room; bar; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* No phone.

3 WHERE TO DINE

If you're going out in the evening, always call to make sure the restaurant you want to visit is open. You'll also have to arrange transportation there and back; you probably don't want to drive yourself because of the bad lighting, hairpin turns, and blind corners.

Dominica is a lush island like Grenada and grows a lot of its own foodstuff, but fish and meats are generally shipped in frozen.

IN ROSEAU

Crystal Terrace Restaurant & Bar ★ DOMINICAN At this previously recommended family-run hotel, you can order authentic island cuisine, using home-grown products when available. Most guests begin their evening with a drink in the open-air lounge. At elegant table settings, open to the breezes, you can sample the cuisine, which features local specialties such as stuffed crab backs. Preparations of the main courses—chicken, beef, or fish—change on the daily menus, ending with a homemade cake and ice cream. Fresh soups are always made daily. The menu is limited yet generous, most often with a good choice. For example, there are four different meat options featured at dinner.

Evergreen Hotel, Castle Comfort. ✆ **767/448-3288.** www.avirtualdominica. Reservations recommended. Breakfast $20; 3-course lunch $26; 3-course dinner $28. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:15–9am, 1–2pm, and 7–9pm.

Guiyave CREOLE This airy lunch restaurant occupies a wood-frame West Indian house. Rows of tables almost completely fill the narrow balcony overlooking the street outside. You can enjoy a drink at the stand-up bar on the second floor. Specialties include various Creole grills and different preparations of conch, octopus, lobster, spareribs, chicken, and pork chops. On Saturday, *rotis* (Caribbean burritos) and "goat water" (a local goat stew) are available. The place is known for refreshing juices like soursop, tamarind, sorrel, cherry, and strawberry. There's also a patisserie specializing in local pastries.

15 Cork St. ✆ **767/448-2930.** Reservations recommended. Lunch buffet $15–$17. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Mon 8am–3pm.

La Maison ★★ REGIONAL Dominica's best bet for dining is the domain of a Toulouse-born chef, Vincent Binet, who has brought a sophistication and style to Roseau dining not seen before. He takes infinite pains with his finely honed dishes created from the best of regional produce. A glance around the rather contemporary minimalist decor reveals diners intently reviewing the menu in anticipation. Asked what his specialties are,

the chef " modestly" says ev erything. He has a talent for making the best lobster and crayfish dishes on island, and those who 've sampled his garlic-flav ored lamb have found it enticing and tender. He is equally adept at handling local v egetables, adding just the right amount of spices.

4 Fort Lane. ✆ **767/440-5287.** Reser vations required. Main courses $26–$44. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm (or "when the last guest leaves").

La Robe Creole ★ WEST INDIAN/CREOLE One of the best independent restaurants in the capital, La Robe Creole sits on the second floor of a colonial house, beside a sunny plaza on a slope above the sea. The staff, dressed in madras Creole costumes, serves food in a long, narr ow dining r oom capped with heavy beams and filled with 19th-century relics. You can enjo y pumpkin-pimento soup , callaloo with cr eam of coconut soup, crab backs (in season), and shrimp in coconut with garlic sauce. F or dessert, try banana or coconut cake or ice cr eam.

A street-level section of the restaurant, **The Mouse Hole** (Mon–Sat 7:30am–4pm), is a good place for food on the go . You can buy freshly made sandwiches, salads, and light meals. They make good Trinidad-inspired *rotis.*

3 Victoria St. ✆ **767/448-2896.** Main courses $10–$30. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 6:30–10pm.

Pearl's Cuisine ★ Finds CARIBBEAN Come to this r estored C reole house with a veranda for a tr ue taste of D ominica: Chef P earl's island delicacies ar e renowned locally. Begin with one of her tropical fruit juices, followed by perhaps freshly caught crayfish as an appetizer. Whenever lobster is available, it's served at dinner any way y ou want it. She also makes some mean por k chops, and her curried goat will put hair on y our chest. Try the potato salad and spareribs, or the codfish and plantains, if y ou want to really go local.

50 King George V St. ✆ **767/448-8707.** Lunch $6.70–$7.40. DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 9:30am–6pm.

Waterfront Restaurant DOMINICAN/INTERNATIONAL Jermaine Mitchell, a talented chef impor ted fr om neighboring S t. L ucia, has awakened the taste buds of Roseau, for both guests of the F ort Young Hotel and nonguests as w ell. The restaurant, with its elegant place settings, opens onto r omantic views of Roseau at night. Although Mitchell prepares wonderful regional fare, such as callaloo soup and guava tarts, the chef can roam the world borr owing from Thailand, Italy, East India, or wher ever. A medley of seafood is presented along with good barbecue, even duck and lamb specialties. A live steel band often presents entertainment.

Victoria St., Roseau. ✆ **767/448-5000.** Main courses $13–$62. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10pm.

IN THE RAINFOREST

Papillote Wilderness Retreat CREOLE/CARIBBEAN Even if you're not staying here, come by taxi for lunch; it's only 6km (3¾ miles) east of Roseau. For dinner, you'll need to make r eservations. Amid exotic flowers, century-old trees, and filtered sunlight, you'll dine overlooking a gorgeous vista of riv ers and mountains. The array of healthful food includes flying fish and truly delectable freshwater prawns known as *bookh.* Freshly caught kingfish is also a tasty treat. Breadfruit or dasheen puffs merit a try if you've never had them, and the tropical salads—we recommend the green papaya chicken salad—are filled with flavor.

Trafalgar Falls Rd. ✆ **767/448-2287.** Reser vations r ecommended for lunch, r equired for dinner. Main courses $20–$30. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10:30pm (dinner ser ved at 7:30pm).

4 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

BEACHES If you really want a great beach, you should choose another island. Dominica has some of the worst beaches in the Caribbean; most are rocky and have gray-black volcanic sand. But some beaches, even though they don't have great sand or shade, are still good for diving or snorkeling in the turquoise waters.

Although the beach itself is filled with stones, the best place for swimming is at **Champagne,** south of Roseau and south of Ponte Michel but north of the southernmost town of Soufrière. Snorkeling and scuba diving are also actively pursued at this west coast beach. Why the name? Volcanic vents puff steam into the ocean, and swimmers have likened the effect to swimming in the bubbly. From the Soufrière Scotts Head Marine Reserve, you can take a boardwalk to the beach, where the stones discourage lying on the beach in the sun.

Another good place for swimming lies on the northwest coast. **Picard Beach** stretches for about 3km (1¾ miles), a strip of grayish sand with palm trees as a backdrop. It's ideal for snorkeling or windsurfing. You can drop in for food or a drink at one of the hotels along the beach.

On the northeast coast, four beaches— **Hampstead Beach, Hodges Beach, L'Anse Noire,** and **Woodford Hill Bay**—are among the island's most beautiful, although none is great for swimming. Divers and snorkelers often come here, even though the water can be rough. Watch out for the strong currents.

The southwest coast also has some beaches, but the sand here is black and rock studded. Nonetheless, snorkelers and scuba divers flock to **Soufrière Bay Beach** and **Scotts Head Beach** for the clear waters and the stunning underwater walls.

HIKING Wild and untamed Dominica offers hikers some of the most bizarre geological oddities in the Caribbean. Sights include scalding lava covered with a hot, thin, and not-very-stable crust; a boiling lake where mountain streams turn to vapor as they come into contact with superheated volcanic fissures; and a barren wasteland known as the "Valley of Desolation."

All these attractions are in the heavily forested 6,800 hectares (16,796 acres) of the **Morne Trois Pitons National Park** ★, in the island's south-central region. You should go with a guide—there are plenty of them waiting for your business in the village of Laudat. Few markers appear en route, but the trek, which includes a real assortment of geological oddities, stretches 10km (6¼ miles) in both directions from Laudat to the Boiling Lake. Ferns, orchids, trees, and epiphytes create a tangle of underbrush; insect, bird, and reptilian life is profuse.

The hill treks of Dominica have been described as "sometimes easy, sometimes hellish," and if it should happen to rain during your climb (and it rains very frequently on Dominica), the paths are likely to become very slippery. But botanists, geologists, and experienced hikers all agree that climbs through the jungles of Dominica are the most rewarding in the Caribbean. Hikers should walk cautiously, particularly in areas peppered with bubbling hot springs. Regardless of where you turn, you'll run into streams and waterfalls, the inevitable result of an island that receives up to 400 inches of rainfall a year. Winds on the summits are strong enough to have pushed one recreational climber to her death several years ago, so be careful.

An adventure only for the most serious and experienced hiker is to **Boiling Lake** and the **Titou Gorge,** a deep and very narrow ravine whose depths were created as lava flows cooled and contracted. En route, you might spot rare Sisserou and Jacquot parrots,

Tips Getting a Guide

Locals warn that to proceed along the island's badly marked trails into dangerous areas is not a good idea; climbing alone or even in pairs is not advised. Guides should be used for all unmarked trails. You can arrange for a guide at the office of the **Dominica National Park,** in the Botanical Gardens in Roseau (✆ **767/448-2401**), or the Dominica Tourist Board. Forestry officials recommend **Ken's Hinterland Adventure Tours & Taxi Service,** Fort Young Hotel on Victoria Street, Roseau (✆ **767/448-4850;** www.kenshinterlandtours.com). You can also call **Discover Dominica** (✆ **767/448-2045** or -4272) to arrange a tour. Depending on the destination and the attractions, treks cost $140 to $240 per person for up to four participants and require 4 to 8 hours round-trip. Minivan transportation from Roseau to the starting point of your hill climb is usually included in the price.

monkeys, and vines whose growth seems to increase visibly on an hourly basis. The lake itself lies 10km (6¼ miles) east of Roseau, but reaching it requires about 4 hours of hiking, some of it strenuous. Go only with a guide, which can be arranged through the tourist office. (See the nearby box "Getting a Guide.")

Taking the Wotton Waven Road, you branch off in the direction of **Sulphur Springs,** volcanic hot springs that are evidence of Dominica's turbulent past. Jeeps and Land Rovers can get quite close. This bubbling pool of gray mud sometimes belches smelly sulfurous fumes. The trail begins at the **Titou Gorge,** where you can go for a cooling swim in a pool or enjoy the hot spring waters alongside the pool. A 5-minute swim will take you up the gorge to a small cave with a beautiful waterfall. After the gorge, the marked trail goes through the appropriately named **"Valley of Desolation"** and comes out at Boiling Lake on the far side, a trek of 2 to 3 hours one-way. Sulfuric fumes in the area have destroyed much of the once-flourishing vegetation in the region.

Boiling Lake is the world's second-largest solfatara lake, measuring 63m (207 ft.) across. It is a bubbling cauldron with vapor clouds rising above blue-gray water. The depth of the lake is not known. The water temperature in the lake averages around 190°F (88°C). The lake is not the crater of a former volcano, but a flooded fumarole. Getting here is extremely difficult and even hazardous. Some visitors have even stumbled and fallen to their deaths into the boiling waters. The trail is most often very slippery because of rainfall. You'll encounter few visitors along this trail and, if you do, will likely be glad for the company, especially if a hiker is returning from the area where you're heading. He or she can give you advance reports of the conditions ahead of you.

See "Exploring the Island," below, for details on gorgeous **Cabrits National Park.**

KAYAKING ★★ Dominica is probably the best place in all the Caribbean for kayaking. Depending on the size, you can rent a kayak for $26 to $50 for a half-day, then go on a unique adventure around the rivers and coastline of the lushest island in the West Indies. **Nature Island Dive,** in Roseau (✆ **767/449-8181;** www.natureislanddive.com), offers rentals and gives the best advice. You can combine bird-watching, swimming, and snorkeling as you glide along. Consider Soufrière Bay, a marine reserve in southwest Dominica. Off the west coast, you will discover tranquil Caribbean waters with rainbow-hued fish along the beaches in Mero, Salisbury, and in the region of the Layou and Macoucherie rivers.

SCUBA DIVING Diving has taken off on Dominica. The underwater terrain is spectacular. Most of the diving is on the southwestern end of the island, with its dramatic drop-offs, walls, and pinnacles. These volcanic formations are interwoven with cuts, arches, ledges, and overhangs, home to sponges, gorgonians, and corals. An abundance of invertebrates, reef fish, and unusual sea creatures such as seahorses, frogfish, batfish, and flying gunards attract underwater photographers.

Dive Dominica, in the **Castle Comfort Diving Lodge** (P.O. Box 2253, Roseau), Castle Comfort, Dominica, W.I. (✆ **767/448-2188;** www.divedominica.com), gives open-water certification (both NAUI and PADI) and instruction. Two diving catamarans and a handful of smaller boats get you to the dive sites in relative comfort. The dive outfit is part of a hotel, a 15-room lodge where at least 90% of the clientele checks in as part of a dive package. A 6-night dive package, double occupancy, begins at $958 per person, including breakfasts and dinners, five two-tank dives, and one night dive. A single-tank dive for nonguests goes for $50, a two-tank dive for $90, and a night dive for $65. All rooms in the lodge are air-conditioned and have TVs, phones, and Wi-Fi. On the premises are a bar (for residents and their guests only) and a Jacuzzi.

Divers from all over the world come to the **Dive Centre,** at the Anchorage Hotel in Castle Comfort (✆ **767/448-2638**). With a pool, classrooms, a private dock, a miniflotilla of dive boats, and a fully qualified PADI staff, this is the most complete dive resort on Dominica. A single-tank dive costs $75; a double-tank dive, $150; and a one-tank night dive, $65. A whale- and dolphin-watch from 2pm to sunset is popular and costs $50 per person. There is an additional $4 charge for use of the marine park for two people. Rum punch is served.

SNORKELING Snorkeling sites are never far away, regardless of where you are on Dominica. In all, there are some 30 first-rate snorkeling areas immediately off the coast. The western side of the island, where nearly all of the snorkeling takes place, is the lee side, meaning the waters are tranquil. You can explore the underwater hot springs at Champagne and Toucari, the Coral Gardens off Salisbury, and the southern shoreline of Scotts Head Beach, with more than 190 species of flamboyantly colored fish. The closeness of the reefs to shore makes snorkeling here some of the best in the Caribbean. Your hotel or one of the dive shops can set you up with gear.

SWIMMING The beaches may be lousy, but Dominica has some of the best river swimming in the Caribbean. Some say the little island has 365 rivers, one for every day of the year. The best places for swimming are the refreshing ponds at the base of a waterfall, of which there are dozens on the island. Your best bets are on the west coast at the **Picard** or the **Machoucherie rivers.** On the east coast, the finest spot is **White River,** near the hamlet of La Plaine. Consider also the **Layou River** and its gorges. Layou is the island's largest river, ranging from tranquil beach-lined pools ideal for swimming to deep gorges and turbulent rapids. All the rivers are pristine and make nice spots for a little sunbathing or perhaps a picnic lunch along their banks.

The staff at the tourist office (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) knows the island intimately and will help you map out a place for a picnic and a swim during your tour of the island, depending on where you're going. They'll also arm you with a good map and directions if you're heading out on your own.

Our favorite place for a dip is the **Emerald Pool Trail,** which lies in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. You reach it northeast of Pont Casse, going for 6km (3 3/4 miles) along an unmarked road taking you north to Castle Bruce. Eventually, you reach a sign pointing to the Emerald Pool Trail, the most accessible trail in this lush national park.

A 30-minute hike takes you to a stunning cascade of water dropping 6m (20 ft.). This is Emerald Falls, where you can go for a cooling swim. Chances are, you'll have it all to yourself.

5 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Those making day trips to Dominica from other Caribbean islands will want to see the **Carib Indian Territory** ★, in the northeast. In 1903, Britain got the surviving Caribs to agree to live on 1,480 hectares (3,656 acres) of land. Today this reservation is the last remaining turf of the once-hostile tribe for whom the Caribbean was named. Today they survive by fishing, growing food, and weaving baskets and vetiver-grass mats, which they sell to the outside world. The baskets sold at roadside stands make especially good buys. An on-site cultural center, **Kalinago Barana Auté** (✆ **767/445-7979;** www.kalinagobaranaaute.com), acquaints you with the Carib history, culture, and native customs. A guided 45-minute tour is conducted, not only exploring the Indian village, but allowing you to watch the natives practice their local crafts. They even bake cassava bread for you. The tour costs $9.60, and the site is open from 9am to 5pm, but closed Monday from mid-October to mid-April and on Wednesday and Sunday for the rest of the year.

It's like going back in time when you explore **Morne Trois Pitons National Park** ★★, a primordial rainforest. Mists rise gently over lush, dark-green growth, drifting up to blue-green peaks that have earned Dominica the nickname "Switzerland of the Caribbean." Framed by banks of giant ferns, rivers rush and tumble, trees sprout orchids, green sunlight filters down through trees, and roaring waterfalls create a blue mist. One of the best starting points for a visit to the park is the village of **Laudat,** 11km (6¾ miles) from Roseau. (See also "Hiking," above.)

The best tour is the **Rain Forest Aerial Tram,** at the corner of Old Street and Great George Street in Laudat (✆ **767/448-8775**), but it's open only when cruise ships are in port. For $65 per person, you're taken on a 90-minute tour that starts at the village of Laudat, "sailing" over the rainforest through the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. Along the way, you're treated to exotic bird life, beautiful waterfalls, and much tropical flora.

Eight kilometers (5 miles) up from the **Roseau River Valley,** in the south-central sector of Dominica, **Trafalgar Falls** is reached after driving through the village of Trafalgar. Shortly beyond the hamlet of Trafalgar and up a short hill, there's a little kiosk where you can hire a guide to take you on the short walk to the actual falls. In all, allow about 1½ hours for the trip from Trafalgar to the falls. This is the only road or pathway into the falls, and you'll have to approach on foot, as the slopes are too steep for vehicles. After a 20-minute walk past ginger plants and vanilla orchids, you arrive at the base, where a trio of falls converges in a rock-strewn pool.

For another great way to spend half a day, head for the **Papillote Wilderness Retreat** (p. 257 and 261). The botanical garden alone is worth the trip, as are the views of mountains and lush valleys. Near the main dining terrace is a Jacuzzi-size pool, which is filled with the mineral-rich waters of a nearby hot spring. Nonguests can use the pool for $4.50. Bring sturdy walking shoes in addition to a bathing suit.

On the northwestern coast, **Portsmouth** is Dominica's second-largest settlement. Here you can row up the Indian River in native canoes, visit the ruins of old Fort Shirley in Cabrits National Park, and bathe at Sandy Beach on Douglas Bay and Prince Rupert Bay.

Moments Searching for Moby Dick

You'll see more sperm whales, pilot whales, killer whales, and dolphins during **whale- and dolphin-watching trips** ★ off Dominica than off any other island in the Caribbean. A pod of sperm whales can often be spotted just yards from your boat, since there are no laws here regarding the distance you must keep from the whales. The **Anchorage Hotel,** at Castle Comfort (✆ **767/448-2638**), offers the best tours. A 4-hour trip costs $50, but children 11 and under pay half-price. The vessels leave the dock every Wednesday and Sunday at 2pm (call ahead for availability).

Cabrits National Park ★★ (no phone), on Dominica's northwestern coast, immediately adjacent to Douglas Bay, is a 525-hectare (1,297-acre) protected site, only about 25% of which is devoted to dry land. Here are low-rising hills, tropical forests, swampland, volcanic-sand beaches, coral reefs, and the sprawling ruins of a fortified, 18th-century garrison of British, then French, construction. This is one of the area's great natural attractions, and if your time is limited, you may want to head here even if you skip everything else in Dominica. The park's land extends over a panoramic promontory formed by the low-rising twin peaks of extinct volcanoes (known as East Cabrit and West Cabrit) overlooking beaches, with Douglas Bay on one side and Prince Rupert Bay across the headland. The marine section of the park extends over the teeming marine life of the shallow waters of Douglas Bay.

If you want to explore the park underwater, we strongly encourage you to take one of the scuba or snorkeling trips organized by the officially designated dive operator for the park, **Cabrit's Dive Center,** Picard Estate, Portsmouth (✆ **767/445-3010;** www.cabritsdive.com). If you're interested in hiking, you'll find about 3km (1¾ miles) of trails, each clearly marked with brown-and-yellow signs, pointing out the geological and architectural highlights of the park. Foremost among these is **Fort Shirley,** a forbidding-looking hulk that was last used as a military post in 1854. The park's **Welcome Center** (no phone) contains a small on-site **museum** (daily 9am–5pm; free admission) that highlights the natural and historic aspects of the park. The staff will make suggestions about the trails you might want to follow, but since the surface of the park is relatively limited in scope, it's hard to get lost. Signs point from the welcome center to the ruins of Fort Shirley and to the low summits of the East and West Cabrit hills, neither of which rises more than about 150m (492 ft.) above sea level.

6 SHOPPING

Store hours are usually Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

In Roseau, the **Old Market Plaza,** of historical significance as a former slave-trading market and, more recently, the site of a Wednesday-, Friday-, and Saturday-morning vegetable market, now houses three craft shops, each specializing in coconut, straw, and Carib craft products.

The handmade Dominican vetiver-grass mats sold at **Tropicrafts Island Mats,** 41 Queen Mary St. and Turkey Lane (✆ **767/448-2747**), are known throughout the world, and you can watch the weaving process during store hours. They also sell dolls, shopping bags, and place mats, all appliquéd by hand.

Outlets for crafts include **Dominica Pottery,** Bayfront Street at Kennedy Avenue, Roseau (no phone), run by a local priest. An array of pottery made from local clays is on sale, as well as other handicrafts. **Ego Boutique,** 9 Hillsborough St., Roseau (✆ **767/448-2336**), has the best selection of clothing, much of it in the classic West Indian style, along with some locally made crafts and home accessories.

Crazy Banana, Leopold Building on the waterfront (✆ **767/449-8091**), offers a little preview of some of the best items for which the Caribbean is known, including handicrafts, handmade jewelry, bottles of rum, cigars, and regional paintings.

7 DOMINICA AFTER DARK

It's not very lively, but there is some evening activity. A couple of the major hotels, such as the **Fort Young Hotel,** Victoria Street (✆ **767/448-5000**), have entertainment on weekends, usually a combo or "jing ping" (traditional local music). The clubs and bars in these hotels attract mainly foreign visitors, so if you'd like to go where the locals go, head for one of the following.

The **Balas Bar,** at the previously recommended **Fort Young Hotel,** Victoria Street, in Roseau (✆ **767/448-5000**), is the place to be every Friday between 6 and 8pm. Drink specials, usually rum punches, are the feature, along with a live local band.

Another very happening bar is the **Cellars Bar** at the previously recommended Sutton Place Hotel, Old Street, in Roseau (✆ **767/449-8700**). Various events are staged here throughout the week, including karaoke night on Friday. Amateur bartenders tempt you with their specialties on Wednesday night.

Symes Zee's, 34 King George V St., Roseau (✆ **767/448-2494**), is the domain of Symes Zee, the island's best blues man. A local band entertains with blues, jazz, and reggae. Here's your chance to smoke a reasonably priced Cuban cigar.

12

The Dominican Republic

Sugar-white beaches, inexpensive resorts, and rich natural beauty have long drawn visitors to the Dominican Republic, while at the same time, a not-so-fair reputation for high crime, poverty, and social unrest has scared away many others. Which is it, a poverty-stricken country rife with pickpockets and muggers, or a burgeoning destination of beautiful beach bargains?

The answer is a little of both. The people of the Dominican Republic are among the friendliest in the Caribbean, and the hospitality here seems more genuine than in commercialized Puerto Rico. The weather is nearly perfect year-round. And the Dominican Republic's white-sand beaches are among the finest in the Caribbean. Punta Cana/Bávaro, for example, is the longest strip of white sand in the entire region.

Safety is still a concern in the Dominican Republic, but it shouldn't dissuade you from planning a vacation here. Crime consists primarily of theft, robberies, and muggings, and most of it is limited to Santo Domingo (although the north-coast resorts around Puerto Plata and Playa Dorada are not as safe as they should be). There is a low incidence of violent crime against tourists, however. Follow some simple common-sense rules, and you'll be fine. (See "Fast Facts," below, for details.)

The combination of low prices and beautiful terrain has made the Dominican Republic one of the fastest-growing destinations in the Caribbean. Bargain-hunting Canadians, in particular, flock here in droves. Don't expect the lavish, spectacular resorts that you'll find on Puerto Rico or Jamaica, but do expect your vacation to be much less expensive.

Often mistakenly referred to as "just a poor man's Puerto Rico," the Dominican Republic has its own distinct cuisine and cultural heritage. Its Latin flavor is a sharp contrast to the character of many nearby islands, especially the British- and French-influenced ones.

Columbus sighted its coral-edged Caribbean coastline on his first voyage to the New World and pronounced, "There is no more beautiful island in the world." The first permanent European settlement in the New World was in 1493, and its ruins still remain near Montecristi in the northeast part of the island.

In the heart of the Caribbean archipelago—nestled amid Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico—the island of Hispaniola ("Little Spain") is divided between Haiti, on the westernmost third of the island, and the Dominican Republic, which has a lush landmass about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. In the Dominican interior, the fertile Valley of Cibao (rich sugar-cane country) ends its upward sweep at Pico Duarte, the highest mountain peak in the West Indies, which soars to 3,125m (10,250 ft.).

Much of what Columbus first sighted still remains in a natural, unspoiled condition. One-third of the Dominican Republic's 1,401km (869-mile) coastline is devoted to beaches. The best are in Puerto Plata and La Romana, although Puerto Plata and other beaches on the Atlantic side of the island have dangerously strong currents at times.

Almost from its inception, the country has been steeped in misery and bloodshed, climaxing with the infamous reign of dictator Rafael Trujillo (1930–61) and the ensuing civil wars (1960–66). But the country has been politically stable since then and is building and expanding rapidly. The economic growth hasn't benefited everybody, though. The country is still poor, even by Caribbean standards.

The greatest threat to the Dominican Republic these days comes from hurricanes, which periodically flatten entire towns. The major resorts have become adept at getting back on their feet quickly after a hurricane, but if a hurricane hits the country before your trip, you might want to call ahead and make sure your room is still standing.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Altos de Chavón,** the most spectacular re-creation of a historical town in the Caribbean—in this case, a 16th-century Mediterranean village on a bluff overlooking Río Chavón in the south of the island. The cobblestone streets form a romantic setting with everything from fine restaurants to an amphitheater.
- **Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo:** Altos de Chavón is merely the mock, the old town of Santo Domingo the real thing. The buildings in the capital are crumbling, but a walk through the colonial zone is like flipping through the pages of history as you make your way along narrow streets, old stone buildings, and the remnants of the original city wall.
- **The Beaches of Punta Cana:** On the eastern coast, the white sands of this fast-rising resort—some 32km (20 miles) of beaches—have put it on the tourist map for North Americans and Europeans. Lavish seaside and pool facilities, along with spectacular gardens, and those endless miles of swaying palm trees, have earned for Punta Cana the label of the "Coconut Coast."

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

In the United States, you can contact the **Dominican Republic Tourist Information Center** at 136 E. 57th St., Ste. 803, New York, NY 10022 (✆ **888/374-6361** or 212/588-1012); or at 248 Le Jeune Rd., Miami, FL 33126 (✆ **888/358-9594** or 305/358-2899). In Canada, try the office at 2080 Rue Crescent St., Montréal, PQ H3G 288 (✆ **800/563-1611** or 514/499-1918). Don't expect too much specific information. In England, the office is at 20 Hand Court, High Holborn, WC1 (✆ **020/7242-7778**). For information online, check **www.godominicanrepublic.com**.

GETTING THERE

American Airlines (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has the most frequent service, offering at least a dozen flights daily from cities throughout North America to either Santo Domingo or Puerto Plata. Flights from hubs such as New York, Miami, or San Juan, Puerto Rico are usually nonstop.

If you're heading to one of the Dominican Republic's smaller airports, your best bet is with **American Eagle,** American's local commuter carrier. Its small planes depart every day from San Juan, Puerto Rico, for airports throughout the Dominican Republic, including Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, La Romana, and Punta Cana.

Continental Airlines (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies daily between Newark, New Jersey, and Santo Domingo. **JetBlue Airlines** (✆ **800/538-2583** in the U.S. and Canada; www.jetblue.com) flies from New York to the Dominican Republic. **US Airways** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) flies from Boston, Philadelphia, or Charlotte to the island. **Delta** (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies from both New York and Miami to the Dominican Republic.

Other airlines servicing the area include **Air Transat** (✆ **866/847-1112** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airtransat.ca), which flies to Santo Domingo from Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal.

Iberia (✆ **800/772-4642** in the U.S. and Canada; www.iberia.com) flies daily from Madrid to Santo Domingo, making a brief stop in San Juan.

For information on flights into Casa de Campo/La Romana, see the section "La Romana & Altos de Chavón," below.

Be warned: Arriving at Santo Domingo's Las Américas International Airport is confusing and chaotic. Customs officials, who tend to be rude and overworked, may give you a very thorough check. Stolen luggage is not uncommon here; beware of "porters" who offer to help with your bags. Arrival at La Unión International Airport, 37km (23 miles) east of Puerto Plata on the north coast, is generally much smoother and safer, but you should still be cautious.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around the Dominican Republic is not always easy if your hotel is in a remote location. The most convenient modes of transport are shuttle flights, taxis, rental cars, *públicos* (multipassenger taxis), and *guaguas* (public buses).

BY PLANE The quickest and easiest way to get across a difficult landscape is on one of the shuttle flights offered by **Air Santo Domingo** (✆ **809/261-5222;** http://airsantodomingo.com), flying from Santo Domingo to Punta Cana and La Romana, among other towns. A one-way fare from Santo Domingo to Punta Cana costs $115.

BY RENTAL CAR The best way to see the Dominican Republic is to drive. Motorists drive on the right here. Although major highways are relatively smooth, the country's secondary roads, especially those in the east, are riddled with potholes and ruts. Roads also tend to be badly lit and poorly marked in both the city and the countryside. Drive carefully and give yourself plenty of time when traveling between island destinations. Watch out for policemen who may flag you down and accuse you (often wrongly) of some infraction. Many locals give these low-paid policemen a $5 *regalo,* or gift "for your children," and are then free to go.

The high accident and theft rate in recent years have helped to raise car-rental rates here. Prices vary, so call around for last-minute quotes. Make sure you understand your insurance coverage (or lack thereof) before you leave home. Your credit card issuer may already provide you with insurance; call to find out.

For reservations and more information, call the rental companies at least a week before your departure: **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/535-7191; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/549-0351; www.budget.com), and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/221-5333; www.hertz.com) all operate in the Dominican Republic. All three have offices at the Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata airports, as well as in downtown Santo Domingo. Avis and Hertz also have offices in La Romana and in Punta Cana.

Although the cars may not be as well maintained as the big three above, you can often get a cheaper deal at one of the local firms, notably **McAuto Rental Cars** (✆ **809/688-6518**). If you want a car with seat belts, you must ask. Your Canadian or American driver's license is suitable documentation, along with a valid credit card or a substantial cash deposit.

BY TAXI Taxis aren't metered, and determining the fare in advance (which you should do) may be difficult if you and your driver have a language problem. You can easily hail a taxi at the airport and at most major hotels. ***Warning:*** Don't get into an unmarked street taxi. Many visitors, particularly in Santo Domingo, have been assaulted and robbed by doing just that. The minimum fare within Santo Domingo is $2.30. In Santo

 Domingo, the most reliable taxi company is **Tecni-Taxi** (✆ **809/567-2010**). In Puerto Plata, call **Tecni-Taxi** at ✆ **809/320-7621.**

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ***Públicos*** are unmetered multipassenger taxis that travel along main thoroughfares, stopping often to pick up people waving from the side of the street. A *público* is marked by a white seal on the front door. You must tell the driver your destination when you're picked up to make sure the *público* is going there. A ride is usually 20¢. The minimum fare is 10¢.

Public buses, often in the form of minivans or panel trucks, are called ***guaguas*** (pronounced *gwa-gwas*). For about the same price, they provide the same service as *públicos,* but they're generally more crowded. Larger buses provide service outside the towns. Beware of pickpockets on board.

Fast Facts The Dominican Republic

Banks Most banks are open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm. **ATMs** are found at all branches of **Banco Popular.** Banks at the malls stay open until 6pm.

Currency The Dominican monetary unit is the **peso (RD$),** made up of 100 centavos. Coin denominations are 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos; 1 peso; and 5 pesos. Bill denominations are RD$5, RD$10, RD$20, RD$50, RD$100, RD$500, RD$1,000, and RD$2,000. The use of any currency other than Dominican pesos is technically illegal, but few seem to heed this mandate. *As such, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars*. At the time of this writing, the exchange rate was about RD$28 to US$1. Stated differently, RD$1 equals 3.5¢. The exchange of the RD$ and the British pound was approximately RD$1 to 1.9p, or, stated differently, £1 to RD$52. Technically, every peso is divided into 100 centavos, and you'll occasionally see centavos as part of the barter agreements among local residents, but many foreign visitors to the D.R. pass a holiday without ever seeing one. For most purposes, they're practically worthless. Bank booths at the international airports and major hotels will change your currency at the prevailing free-market rate.

Customs Visitors are allowed to bring in 200 cigarettes, 1 liter of alcohol, and gifts not exceeding a value of $100. Anything over that will be subjected to import taxes.

Documents To enter the Dominican Republic, citizens of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries need a valid passport. Upon your arrival at the airport in the Dominican Republic, you must purchase a tourist card for $10. You can avoid waiting in line by purchasing this card when checking in for your flight to the island.

Electricity The country generally uses 110-volt AC (60 cycles), so adapters and transformers are usually not necessary for U.S. appliances. To be safe, ask when booking your hotel.

Embassies All embassies are in Santo Domingo, the capital. The **U.S. Embassy** is on Calle Cesar Nicholas Penson at the corner of Máximo Gomez (✆ **809/221-2171**). The embassy of the **United Kingdom** is located at Av. 27 de Febrero, No.

233 Edificio Corominas Pepin (✆ **809/472-7111**). The embassy of **Canada** is found at Calle Capitán Eugenio de Marchena 39 (✆ **809/685-1136**).

Emergencies Call ✆ **911.**

Language The official language is Spanish; many people also speak some English.

Safety The Dominican Republic has more than its fair share of crime. (See "Getting There," above, for a warning about crime at airports.) Avoid unmarked street taxis, especially in Santo Domingo; you could be targeted for assault and robbery. While strolling around the city, beware of hustlers selling various wares; pickpockets and muggers are common here, and visitors are easy targets. Don't walk in Santo Domingo at night. Locals like to offer their services as guides, and it is often difficult to decline. Hiring an official guide from the tourist office is your best bet. Lock valuables in your hotel safe, carry only a reasonable amount of cash or (better yet) one or two credit cards, and avoid dark, deserted places just like you would at home. (***One note:*** The single male will find more solicitations from prostitutes here than anywhere else in the Caribbean. Prostitutes are at their most visible and aggressive in such relatively unmonitored tourist zones as Cabarete, and within the bars and lounges of most of the deluxe hotels of Santo Domingo, especially the Jaragua.)

Taxes A departure tax of $20 is assessed and must be paid in U.S. currency. The government imposes a 16% tax on hotel rooms, which is usually topped by an automatic 10% service charge, bringing the total tax to staggering heights.

Telephone The area code for the Dominican Republic is **809.** You place calls to or from the Dominican Republic just as you would from any other area code in North America. You can access **AT&T Direct** by dialing ✆ **800/872-2881.** You can reach **MCI** at ✆ **800/888-8000** and **Sprint** at ✆ **800/751-7877.**

Time Atlantic Standard Time is observed year-round. Between November and March, when it's noon in New York and Miami, it's 1pm in Santo Domingo. However, during U.S. daylight saving time, it's the same time in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. East Coast.

Tipping Most restaurants and hotels add a 10% service charge to your check. Most people usually add 5% to 10% more, especially if the service has been good.

Water Stick to bottled water.

Weather The average temperature is 77°F (25°C). August is the warmest month, and January the coolest month, although even then it's warm enough to swim.

2 LA ROMANA ★ & ALTOS DE CHAVÓN ★★★

On the southeast coast of the Dominican Republic, La Romana was once a sleepy sugarcane town that specialized in cattle raising. Visitors didn't come near the place until Gulf + Western Industries opened a luxurious tropical paradise resort, the Casa de Campo, about 2km (1¼ mile) east of town. It's the finest resort in the Dominican Republic, and especially popular among golfers.

Just east of Casa de Campo is Altos de Chavón, a charming and whimsical copy of what might have been a fortified medieval village in Spain, southern France, or Italy. It's the country's leading attraction.

ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION The government maintains **La Romana Tourist Office** at Avenida Libertad 7 (✆ **866/588-6856** or 809/550-6922), open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. The staff is earnest and hardworking, but don't expect to come away with a wealth of information.

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S.; www.aa.com) flies once a day to the Casa de Campo airport (its international code is LRM) from Miami, with a travel time of about 2 1/2 hours each way. (Yes, it's a slow plane.) **American Eagle** (same phone number) operates at least two (and, in busy seasons, at least three) daily nonstop flights to Casa de Campo/La Romana airport (LRM) from San Juan, Puerto Rico. The flight takes about 45 minutes, and it departs late enough in the day to permit transfers from other flights.

By Car You can drive here in about an hour and 20 minutes from Santo Domingo's international airport (SDQ), along Las Américas Highway. (Allow another hour if you're in the center of the city.) Of course, everything depends on traffic conditions. (Watch for speed traps—low-paid police officers openly solicit bribes, whether you're speeding or not.)

GETTING AROUND Most visitors don't rent a car, but rely on local transportation, which is very haphazard and operated by independent drivers. You'll find both taxis and *motoconchos* (motorized scooters) at the northeast corner of Parque Central in the heart of La Romana. A typical ride almost anywhere within town costs less than $2.10, with the average taxi ride costing less than $4.20. Prices are always to be negotiated, of course.

LA ROMANA

Where to Stay

Casa de Campo ★★★ Translated as "country house," Casa de Campo, on its own beach, functioned for many years as the most visible, most alluring, and most glamorous resort in the Dominican Republic. And although its preeminence has been challenged by newer, more cutting-edge resorts, it still exerts a powerful hold on the imagination of the country's image of itself as a tourist destination. There's a staggering variety of accommodations you can rent here, from a conventional but very comfortable hotel room to an entire house. Decor tends to be reasonably consistent throughout: Tiles, craft objects, mahogany furniture mostly built in the D.R., mahogany louvered doors, and neutral-toned fabrics, usually white, adorn the interior of both the public areas and the accommodations.

La Romana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **800/877-3643** in the U.S., or 809/523-8698. Fax 809/523-8394. www.casadecampo.com.do. 279 units. Winter $285–$455 double, $527–$788 suite; off season $178–$215 double, $345 suite. All-inclusive plans are extra. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 5 bars; babysitting; bikes; horseback riding; polo; children's center (ages 3–12); 4 18-hole golf courses; health club; aerobics; 2 outdoor pools; 20 semiprivate pools; theater; room service; 13 tennis courts (10 lit); watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Sunscape Casa del Mar ★ (Kids) This contender on a spectacular beach is giving the grande dame of Casa de Campo a run for the money. The golf and tennis facilities here aren't as elaborate as those at Casa de Campo, and there are no polo grounds, but the

resort is beautifully landscaped and the beach is palm fringed. Accommodations are in a well-designed series of three-story buildings with yellow walls and blue-tiled roofs. Decor inside features lots of tile, varnished hardwood, wicker, and rattan. Everything served in all of the resort's restaurants is covered by the all-inclusive price. This is one of the very rare all-inclusive resorts that offers the availability of a day pass, allowing up-close and personal access to the facilities.

Bayahibe Beach, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **866/786-7227** in the U.S., or 809/221-8880. Fax 809/221-2776. www.sunscaperesorts.com. 751 units. Winter $150–$185 per person double, $195 per person suite; off season $60–$105 per person double, $75–$130 per person suite. A day pass for nonresidents costs $50 per person. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 7 bars; babysitting; bikes; horseback riding; children's programs; health club; Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; disco; room service; sauna; 4 tennis courts (each lit for night play); watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Where to Dine

La Casita ★ ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL This is the most elegant and substantial restaurant in downtown La Romana, a stylish and well-managed enclave of chic that's the regular dining choice of some of the homeowners from nearby Casa de Campo. Established in the late 1980s, and outfitted like a country tavern in the countryside of Italy, it has lined its walls with hand-painted porcelain collected during the owners' travels in Italy and Spain. We urge you to seek out the tiny corner bar of this place before or after your meal, where walls are lined with the sophisticated caricatures and cartoons of Dominican artist/architect Roberto Copa, the designer of Altos de Chavón. If you opt for a meal here, you'll be in rather upscale company: Menu items include lobster thermidor, filet of sea bass *meunière,* grilled salmon with white wine and herbs, and all manner of pastas.

Calle Francisco Richiez 57. ✆ **809/556-5932.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $7–$34. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

Hitting the Beach

La Minitas, Casa de Campo's main beach and site of a series of bars and restaurants, is a small but immaculate beach and lagoon that requires a 10-minute shuttle-bus ride from the resort's central core. Bus transportation is provided, or you can rent an electric golf cart. A bit farther afield (a 30-min. bus ride, but only a 20-min. boat ride), **Bayahibe** is a large, palm-fringed sandy crescent on a point jutting out from the shoreline. Finally, **Catalina** is a fine beach on a deserted island, surrounded by turquoise waters; it's just 45 minutes away by motorboat. Unfortunately, many other visitors from Casa de Campo have learned of the glories of this latter retreat, so you're not likely to have the sands to yourself.

Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits

Casa de Campo is headquarters for just about any sporting activity or outdoor pursuit in the area. Call the resort's guest services staff at ✆ **809/523-8698** for more information. **Casa del Mar** weighs in with a heavy array of outdoor activities ranging from horseback riding to banana boating. Call **809/221-8880** for more details.

FISHING You can arrange **freshwater river–fishing trips** through Casa de Campo. Some of the biggest snook ever recorded have been caught around here. A 3-hour tour costs $36 per person and includes tackle, bait, and soft drinks. A 4-hour deep-sea fishing trip costs $470 to $1,283 per boat, with 8 hours going for $627 to $2,533.

GOLF *Golf* magazine declared Casa de Campo (✆ **809/523-8800**) "the finest golf resort in the world." The **Teeth of the Dog** ★★★ course has been called "a thing of almighty beauty," and it is. The ruggedly natural terrain has seven holes skirting the ocean. Opened in 1977, **The Links** ★★★ is an inland course modeled after some of the seaside courses of Scotland. In the late 1990s, the resort added a third golf course to its repertoire, **La Romana Country Club,** which tends to be used almost exclusively by residents of the surrounding countryside rather than by guests of Casa de Campo.

The cost for 18 holes of golf is $130 at the Links and $165 at Teeth of the Dog and the La Romana Country Club. (Some golf privileges may be included in packages to Casa de Campo.) You can also buy a 3-day membership, which lets you play all courses for $400 per person (for Casa de Campo guests only). A 6-day membership costs $798. You can hire caddies for $25. Each course is open daily 7:30am to 5:30pm. Call far in advance to reserve a tee time if you're not staying at the resort.

HORSEBACK RIDING Trail rides at Casa de Campo or Casa del Mar cost $28 per person for 1 hour, $44 for 2 hours. The stables shelter 250 horses, although only about 40 of them are available for trail rides. For more information, call **Casa del Campo** at ✆ **809/523-3337,** or **Casa del Mar** at ✆ **809/221-8880.**

SNORKELING **Casa de Campo** has one of the most complete watersports facilities in the Dominican Republic. You can charter a boat for snorkeling, with a minimum of eight people. (The resort maintains eight charter vessels.) Full-day snorkeling trips to Isla Catalina cost $40 per snorkeler. Rental of fins and masks cost $11 per day; guests on all-inclusive plans use gear for free. Snorkeling is also included in the all-inclusive rates at **Casa del Mar** (✆ **809/221-8880**).

TENNIS **Casa de Campo**'s 13 clay courts are available from 7am to 9pm. (They're lit at night.) Charges are $22 per court per hour during the day or $28 at night. Lessons are $55 per hour with a tennis pro, and $44 with an assistant pro. Call far in advance to reserve a court if you're not staying at the resort. The four courts at **Casa del Mar** (✆ **809/221-8880**) are reserved for the resort's all-inclusive guests.

ALTOS DE CHAVÓN: AN ARTISTS' COLONY

In 1976, a plateau about 150km (93 miles) east of Santo Domingo was selected by Charles G. Bluhdorn, then chairman of Gulf + Western Industries, as the site for a remarkable project. Dominican stonecutters, woodworkers, and ironsmiths began the task that would produce **Altos de Chavón** (www.altosdechavon.com), a flourishing Caribbean art center set above the canyon of the Río Chavón and the Caribbean Sea.

A walk down one of the cobblestone paths of Altos de Chavón reveals architecture reminiscent of another era at every turn. Coral block and terra-cotta brick buildings house artists' studios, craft workshops, galleries, stores, and restaurants. Mosaics of black river pebbles, sun-bleached coral, and red sandstone spread out to the plazas. The **Church of St. Stanislaus** is the central attraction on the main plaza, with its fountain of the four lions, colonnade of obelisks, and panoramic views. Mass is held every Saturday and Sunday at 5pm.

The **galleries** (✆ **809/523-8011**) at Altos de Chavón offer an engaging mix of exhibits. In three distinct spaces—the Principal Gallery, the Rincón Gallery, and the Loggia—the work of well-known and emerging Dominican and international artists is showcased. The gallery has a consignment space where finely crafted silk-screen and other works are sold. Exhibits change about every month.

Altos de Chavón's *talleres* are craft ateliers, where local artisans produce ceramic, silk-screen, and woven-fiber products. From the clay apothecary jars with carnival devil lids to the colored tapestries of Dominican houses, the rich island folklore is much in evidence. The posters, note cards, and printed T-shirts that come from the silk-screen workshops are among the most sophisticated in the Caribbean. All the products of Altos de Chavón's *talleres* are sold at **La Tienda** (✆ **809/523-3333,** ext. 5398), the foundation village store.

The Altos de Chavón **Regional Museum of Archaeology** (✆ **809/523-8011**) houses the objects of Samuel Pion, an amateur archaeologist and collector of treasures from the vanished Taíno tribes, the island's first settlers. The timeless quality of some of the museum's objects makes them seem strangely contemporary in design—one discovers sculptural forms that recall the work of Brancusi or Arp. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 8pm; entrance is free.

At the heart of the village's performing-arts complex is the 5,000-seat open-air **amphitheater.** Since its inauguration by Frank Sinatra and Carlos Santana, the amphitheater has hosted concerts (by Julio Iglesias and Gloria Estefan, among others), symphonies, theater, and festivals. The annual Heineken Jazz Festival has brought together such diverse talents as Dizzy Gillespie, Toots Thielmans, Randy Brecker, Shakira, Carlos Ponce, Carlo Vives, and Jon Secada.

The creations at **Everett Designs** (✆ **809/523-8331**) are so original that many visitors mistake this place for a museum. Each piece of jewelry is handcrafted by Bill Everett in a minifactory at the rear of the shop.

Where to Dine

El Sombrero MEXICAN In this thick-walled, colonial-style building, within the upper altitudes of Altos de Chavón, near the village church, jutting timbers and roughly textured plaster evoke Old Mexico. There's a scattering of rattan furniture and an occasional example of Mexican weaving, but the main draw is the spicy cuisine. Red snapper in garlic sauce is usually very good, as are the beef and chicken fajitas. Most guests dine outside on the covered patio, within earshot of a group of wandering minstrels. Chances are, you've had better versions of the standard nachos, enchiladas, tortillas with shrimp, black-bean soup, pork chops, grilled steaks marinated in tequila, and brochettes served here, but a margarita or two will make it a fun night out anyway.

Altos de Chavón. ✆ **809/523-3333.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm.

Giacosa ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL This is one of the few restaurants within Altos de Chavón that's not owned and operated by Casa de Campo. Within a two-story stone Tuscan-style building whose windows open onto a spectacular view over the Chavón river's chasm, you can try Mediterranean dishes such as seafood soup studded with lobster and shrimp; eggplant filled with goat cheese, pine nuts, and prosciutto; and black Angus filet with wine sauce and truffles.

Altos de Chavón. ✆ **809/523-8466.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$43. 6-course tasting menu $50. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

La Piazzetta ITALIAN Much of the allure of this place derives from the way its outdoor tables are positioned on a stone terrace that showcases a spectacular view over the river valley of the Chavón. But if you prefer indoor dining, this restaurant offers an air-conditioned replica of an antique stone-sided farmhouse, the kind you'd have

expected in Tuscany or perhaps Andalusía. Our favorites are the gnocchi stuffed with three kinds of cheeses; risotto flavored with pumpkin and shrimp; grilled chicken; filet of hake with local greens and sautéed potatoes; and lasagna Bolognese.

In Altos de Chavón, near the church. ✆ **809/523-8698.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm.

3 PUNTA CANA ★

On the easternmost tip of the island is Punta Cana, site of several major vacation developments, with more scheduled to arrive in the near future. Known for its spectacular beaches and clear waters, Punta Cana is an escapist's dream. Its 32km (20 miles) of white sands, set against a backdrop of swaying palm trees, are unrivaled in the Caribbean.

Many Europeans (especially Spaniards) rushed to take advantage of Punta Cana's desirable climate—within one of the most arid landscapes in the Caribbean, it rarely rains during the day. Capitalizing on cheap land and the virtually insatiable desire of Europeans for sunny holidays during the depths of winter, European hotel chains participated in something akin to a land rush, acquiring large tracts of sugar-cane plantations and pastureland. Today at least a dozen megahotels, most with no fewer than 500 rooms, some with even more, attract a clientele that's about 70% European or Latin American. Some of them have among the most lavish beach and pool facilities in the Caribbean, spectacular gardens, and relatively new concepts in architecture (focusing on postmodern interplays between indoor and outdoor spaces).

Don't expect a real town here. Although the mailing address for most hotels is the dusty and distinctly unmemorable Higüey, very few guests ever spend time there. Most remain on the premises of their all-inclusive hotels.

If you choose to vacation in Punta Cana, you won't be alone, as increasing numbers of celebrities are making inroads, usually renting private villas within private compounds. Julio Iglesias has been a fixture here for a while. And one of the most widely publicized feuds in the Dominican Republic swirled a few years ago around celebrity designer Oscar de la Renta, who abandoned his familiar haunts at Casa de Campo for palm-studded new digs at Punta Cana.

Above all, don't expect a particularly North American vacation. The Europeans were here first, and many of them still have a sense of possessiveness about their secret hideaway. For the most part, the ambience is Europe in the Tropics, as seen through a Dominican filter. You'll find, for example, more formal dress codes, greater interest in soccer matches than in the big football game, and red wine rather than scotch and soda at dinner. Hotels are aware of the cultural differences between their North American and European guests, and sometimes strain to soften the differences that arise.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) offers two to six daily nonstop flights to Punta Cana from San Juan, Puerto Rico; flying time is about an hour. You can also opt for one of American Eagle's two or three (depending on the season) daily flights from San Juan to La Romana and then make the 90-minute drive to Punta Cana. **U.S. Airways** flies to Punta Cana from Boston, Philadelphia, and Charlotte, offering nonstop weekly service.

GETTING AROUND Most **taxi fares,** including those connecting the airport with most of the major hotels, range from $22 for up to four passengers. Your hotel can summon a cab for you. If you want to tour along the coast, you can **rent a car** on-site at the car-rental desks of all the major resorts.

WHERE TO STAY

Aqua Resort & Spa ★ Away from the hustle and bustle of the touristic center of Punta Cana, this water-bordering resort has both a rustic, tropical setting and a sophisticated international style that draws upon regional influences as well as Indonesian touches. Lying 24 miles north of Punta Cana, it is a family favorite with its spacious junior suites, along with its two- or three-bedroom units. Some of the well-furnished villas can house as many as four adults and three children comfortably, or else six adults. The least expensive rental is a junior suite, complete with such extras as a deep soaking tub and a walk-in closet. There is twice-daily maid service in all units. The thatch-roof, open-air lobby where you're welcomed by management transports you to the South Seas. The staff can provide such services as horseback riding or even helicopter tours.

Playa Uvero Alto, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **866/757-AQUA** (2782) or 809/468-0000. www.aguaresort.com. 45 units. Winter $500–$720 double; off season $350–$520 double. Children under 12 free in parent's room. Extra person $95 daily. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; children's programs (ages 5–9); gym; Internet; 2 outdoor pools; indoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

El Cortecito Inn It's definitely not on the A-list of megaresorts, but it exerts a strong appeal to independent and frugal travelers who like to keep life (and their vacation hotels) simple. It's one of the most visible buildings in the hamlet of Cortecito, positioned just across the town's sleepy main street from a bustling stretch of very white beachfront. This three-level structure offers simply yet comfortably furnished bedrooms. The decor, if it could be called that, is very Caribbean and rather minimalist, although the premises are well maintained. For a lot of your amenities, action, and facilities, you'll have to look outside your hotel.

Av. Meliá Fiesta, Playa Bávaro, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/552-0639.** Fax 809/552-0641. 75 units. Year-round $70–$90 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi.

IFA Villas Bávaro ★ Kids This midsize resort is one of the most fun-loving along the coast. It's not the most tasteful—certainly not the most elegant—but those who like a party day and night check in here and often don't want to go home. The balconied rooms are midsize and spread over 23 villa-style houses, each with 10 rental units. Walls are white or cream, with the fabrics and draperies providing the tropical color accents. Parties, dancing, live shows with carnival themes, and a "Jungle Disco" are just some of the amusements provided.

Playa Bávaro, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **877/200-6102** or 809/221-8555. Fax 809/221-8556. www.ifahotels.com. 262 units. Year-round $204–$230 double. Children 2–12 $21 extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 5 bars; beach club; babysitting; bikes; health club; dance classes; 3 pools (1 for kids); nightly entertainment; room service; tennis courts; watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Natura Park EcoResort & Spa ★★ Kids At last a resort with originality, an escape from the imitative peas-in-a-pod of the Coconut Coast's hotel sprawl. Set near a protected island estuary, the resort opens onto one of the coast's premier white sandy beaches. Nature lovers flock to its 32 hectares (79 acres) of parkgrounds; the setting

evokes *The Jungle Book.* Its rooms are distributed across 13 two-story buildings painted in blinding white and surrounded by an oasis of coconut palms. In general, accommodations are spacious and given homelike touches by the use of area rugs, comfy sitting areas, and king or paired double beds, the setting enhanced by tropical fabrics and the art of island artists.

Cabeza de Toro, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/221-2626.** Fax 809/221-6060. www.blau-hotels.com. 490 units. Year-round $160–$200 double. Children 2–12 pay 50% of adult rate. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; bikes; children's center; health club; botanical walks; 2 pools; water aerobics; disco; nightly entertainment; room service; sauna; spa; 3 tennis courts; watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Paradisus Palma Real ★★ Kids This is our favorite all-inclusive hotel in Punta Cana. It's the beneficiary of one of the most sophisticated creative contemporary designs in the area. The hotel's Iberian architecture seems to ripple and undulate from its entrance, past multiple and highly theatrical staircases and five different restaurants, one of which remains open through the long Caribbean night. The pools are spectacular, as is the beach. A complicated structure of add-on luxuries (spa packages, additional attention from the concierge staff, upgraded children's diversions) are available and usually come with occupancy of somewhat upgraded accommodations.

Playas de Bávaro, Higüey, Dominican Republic. ✆ **888/95-MELIA** (956-3542) or 809/688-5000. Fax 809/688-5800. www.solmelia.com. 689 units. Year-round $432–$1,244 double. Children 2–12 pay 50% of adult rate. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; 6 bars; horseback riding; children's center; nearby 18-hole golf; health club; archery; bike and walking tours; 3 pools; casino; karaoke disco; nightly entertainment; room service; sauna; spa; 3 tennis courts; watersports equipment; deep-sea fishing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Punta Cana Resort & Club ★★★ Kids This sprawling complex is an oasis of luxury, opening onto 4.8km (3 miles) of white, sandy beaches, all part of a massive 6,070-hectare (14,993-acre) residential community. The hotel itself stands on 42 hectares (104 acres) of lush gardens. The sprawling hotel complex is comprised of three- or four-story buildings, each decorated with tropical flair, with gabled balconies attached. The choice is for a studio, suite, or villa, each with tropical "Dorothy Lamour fabrics," cool tile floors, and carved and painted headboards. The villas are also equipped with kitchenettes. Oscar de la Renta designed a pocket of posh within this complex. The Tortuga Bay complex offers 15 luxurious beachfront villas in two-, three-, or four-bedroom villas, with wicker and wood furnishings.

Carretera Punta Cana/Bávaro, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **888/442-2262** or 809/959-2262. Fax 809/959-3951. www.puntacana.com. 420 units. Year-round $120–$240 double; $450–$600 2-bedroom beach casitas for 4 adults; $550–$700 3-bedroom beach casitas for 6 adults. Rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 5 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; children's center; mini-zoo for kids; golf course; health club; 24-hr. medical center; Internet; 2 outdoor pools; nightly entertainment; room service; spa; 6 tennis courts; watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar.

Sanctuary Cap Cana Golf & Spa ★★★ The biggest news coming out of the Caribbean Basin is the development of Capa Cana, of which the Sanctuary, a government-rated five-star resort, is the first to open. Plans call for this luxurious compound, lying a 5-minute drive from the Punta Cana airport, to include condos and villas, as well as a casino, and three Jack Nicklaus–designed golf courses, with several more hotels on the way. Bill and Hillary Clinton have already purchased property here.

The entire community, amazingly, will comprise an area the size of Manhattan, opening onto 4.8km (3 miles) of beachfront. The Sanctuary is constructed in a Spanish colonial style, with luxurious and beautifully furnished suites. The spa is among the best in the D.R., and the adjoining marina is the largest in the Caribbean. From here you can go out on a fishing vessel to some of the best fishing spots in the world. Private residences feature one, two, or three bedrooms, with large outdoor sitting areas. The resort is set on a bluff overlooking the ocean and miles of pristine white sandy beaches.

Cap Cana, Dominican Republic. ✆ **888/999-6461.** www.altabellahotels.com. Year-round $250–$450 double; $590–$670 suite; from $750 villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 11 bars; horseback riding; Punta Espada golf course; 3 outdoor pools; room service; spa; watersports; beach club. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, kitchen (in villas), Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Given the wealth of restaurants in the hotels listed above, many guests never leave the premises for meals. But the following are worth a special trip.

Capitán Cook ★ SEAFOOD Set between the beachfront and the main street of Cortecito, this is the most enduringly popular dive in town. Don't expect elaborate food, fancy sauces, or social prestige: In fact, when you approach the outdoor vestibule that prefaces the place, you might think you've entered the forecourt to a garage. The allure here is the ultrafresh seafood that's simply but superbly grilled to order from a chalkboard menu. A battery of outdoor grills lies near the entrance to a dining area whose tables are positioned beneath palm-frond gazebos overlooking a crowded stretch of rather narrow beach. Additional seating is upstairs, within an air-conditioned dining room that resembles a log cabin perched on stilts above Main Street. Platters of grilled fish, freshwater crab, or lobster will be accompanied by lime-flavored butter sauce.

Playa El Cortecito, Marina El Cortecito. ✆ **809/552-0645.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses $8–$39. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

Chez Palace ★ INTERNATIONAL This is the showcase restaurant of one of the biggest resort complexes in the Dominican Republic. If you're not staying here, you'll have to make reservations. The decor is cool and stylish, as if it were imported from a chic resort in the south of Spain. A formally dressed staff serves superb dishes that include salmon mousse in a prawn sauce, tartar of tenderloin, grilled red snapper, grouper with mustard sauce, and filet mignon with truffles and foie gras. The prix-fixe menu offers many different choices.

In the Bávaro Palace Hotel, within the Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort. ✆ **809/686-5797.** Reservations required. Prix-fixe dinner $30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–11pm.

BEACHES

One of the Caribbean's great beaches stretches along the **Costa del Coco,** or Coconut Coast, covering more than 32km (20 miles) of brilliant white sand. The major beaches include Playa Macao, Playa Cortecito, Playa Bávaro, Playa Punta Cana, and Playa Punta Juanillo. The all-inclusives have staked out the best beachfront properties, so everything is done for you here, including unlimited access to food and drinks and watersports concessions at each hotel. For facilities, bars, and restaurants, you can use the hotel at which you are a guest. This beachfront is the stuff of travel magazines, with perfect sand and lots of coconut palms. Under an almost constant blue sky during the day, European, American, and Canadian guests frolic at the gin-clear waters.

The beaches at **Punta Cana** are wide, gorgeous, and safe to swim offshore throughout the year. An improvised series of barricades run parallel to some stretches of the coastal road, prohibiting access to the various beaches fronting the hotels. Entrances guarded by security forces prevent nonguests from entering, since once inside, you're entitled to unlimited food and drink.

Activities abound, not only scuba diving, but snorkeling, windsurfing, kayaking, water biking, sailing, beach volleyball or soccer, and even water polo, along with aqua aerobics and tons of children's activities.

GOLF

The Bávaro Golf Course, at **Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort,** Bávaro Beach (✆ **809/686-5797**), is the best golf course on this end of the island and bears the honor of being the golf course whose allure helped open the eastern D.R. to the tourist boom. Greens fees are $65 for 18 holes; cart rentals are $50. Guests of the hotel pay only 50% of greens fees. The course is open daily 7am to 5pm.

Punta Cana Golf Club, near the Punta Cana Resort and Club (✆ **809/959-4653;** www.puntacana.com), is the best and most sought after of the four golf courses now flourishing in Punta Cana. Fourteen of its holes open onto panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea, and four play along the ocean itself. For 18 holes, hotel guests pay $125, and nonguests are charged $165. In summer, greens fees are reduced to $90 for hotel guests, $125 for nonguests.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Within Punta Cana, the guest services staff at your hotel can arrange horseback riding for you, but if they can't, consider an equestrian jaunt at the region's biggest stables at **Rancho RN-23,** Arena Gorda (✆ **809/747-7356** or **809/747-7538**). It supervises as many as 125 horses that are stabled at three separate "ranches," each within a reasonable distance of one another. For $56 an hour, you're guided on equestrian tours through groves of coconut palms near the beach and, in most cases, onto the beach. To reach it, you'll follow some clearly marked signs 3km (1 3/4 miles) through some of the wildest terrain left in Punta Cana, down winding sandy paths to a series of palm groves, to the site of these stables. ***Note:*** Many riders find the 2-hour equestrian excursion more tiring, with more mosquitoes and horseflies, than they expected.

PUNTA CANA AFTER DARK

Bávaro Disco, on the grounds of the Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort (✆ **809/686-5797**), has emerged as the hottest, most popular, and sexiest dance club in Punta Cana, thanks to a superb sound system. The venue is more European than North American, with a heavy concentration of clients from Italy, Spain, and Holland. If you've been tempted to dress provocatively but never had the courage, the permissive and sexually charged ambience at this enormous club will give you the confidence to try. Painted black, with simulated stars overhead and lots of mirrors, the place is open nightly from 11pm to 5am. Entrance is free for residents of the Barcelo Hotel complex; nonguests pay $36.

4 PUERTO PLATA ★★

Columbus wanted to establish a city at Puerto Plata and name it La Isabela. Unfortunately, a tempest detained him, so it wasn't until 1502 that Nicolás de Ovando founded Puerto Plata ("Port of Silver"), 209km (130 miles) northwest of Santo Domingo. The

port became the last stop for ships going back to Europe, their holds laden with treasures taken from the New World.

Puerto Plata appeals to a mass-market crowd that prefers less expensive all-inclusives. More accommodations of this kind continue to pop up on this coast, and yet many are still booked solid almost year-round.

Most of the hotels are not actually in Puerto Plata itself, but in a tourist zone called Playa Dorada, which consists of major hotels, a scattering of secluded condominiums and villas, a Robert Trent Jones, Jr.–designed golf course, and a riding stable.

The government has spent millions of dollars to rejuvenate the beaches of the D.R., including several long stretches along the North Coast. These improvements have made room for more sunbathers on the sands. But don't expect Robinson Crusoe–style isolation, either; you'll never be alone on a stretch of beach in Puerto Plata, since the beach is shared with the residents of at least nine hotels. However, if you enjoy beige sand that's rarely too hot to walk on, and a never-ending array of watersports kiosks, chaise longues, and loudspeakers projecting merengue music, you'll be happy here. ***One important note:*** It rains a lot in Puerto Plata during the winter. If you want guaranteed sun, go to Punta Cana or the beaches on the southern coast.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The international airport is east of Playa Dorado on the road to Sosúa. **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has daily flights (1 hr., 40 min.) from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Puerto Plata. American Airlines also flies daily from Miami (2 hr., 10 min.) and from New York (3½ hr.). Most Puerto Plata resorts are about a 40-minute drive from the airport.

From Santo Domingo, the 3½-hour drive directly north on Autopista Duarte passes through the lush Cibao Valley, home of the tobacco industry and Bermudez rum, and through Santiago de los Caballeros, the second-largest city in the country, 145km (90 miles) north of Santo Domingo.

GETTING AROUND **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/586-0214; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/586-0413; www.budget.com), and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/586-0200; www.hertz.com) all have offices at the airport.

You probably won't need to rent a car, however, if you're staying at one of the all-inclusive resorts. You might just like to get around Puerto Plata by **motor scooter,** although the roads are potholed. You can rent a scooter at the guest services kiosk at just about any large hotel in Puerto Plata.

Minivans are another means of transport, especially if you're traveling outside town. They leave from Puerto Plata's Central Park and will take you all the way to Sosúa. Determine the fare before getting in. Usually a shared ride between Puerto Plata and Sosúa costs $1.45 to $2 per person. Service is daily from 6am to 9pm.

If you take a **taxi,** agree with the driver on the fare before your trip starts, as cabs are not metered. You'll find taxis on Central Park in Puerto Plata. At night, it's wise to rent your cab for a round-trip. If you go in the daytime by taxi to any of the other beach resorts or villages, check on reserving a vehicle for your return trip. A taxi from Puerto Plata to Sosúa will cost around $17 each way (for up to four occupants).

VISITOR INFORMATION There's an **Office of Tourism** on Calle José del Carmen Ariza 45 (✆ **809/586-3676**). Hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 3pm.

FAST FACTS 'Round-the-clock **drugstore** service is found at **Farmacia Deleyte,** Calle John F. Kennedy 89 (✆ **809/586-2583**). Emergency medical service is provided by **Clínica Dr. Brugal,** Calle José del Carmen Ariza 15 (✆ **809/586-2519**). To summon the **police** in Puerto Plata, Calle Luis Ginêbra, call ✆ **809/586-2331.**

WHERE TO STAY

Casa Colonial ★★★ This is the most sophisticated, most intimate, and most socially prestigious hotel in the Dominican Republic. It was the first hotel in the country to join the Small Luxury Hotels of the World marketing group, and as an a la carte boutique hotel, it is distinctly and definitely never included within the roster of Puerto Plata's mass-market all-inclusives. Baronial and aristocratic looking, it evokes a combination of a Greek Orthodox church and a Palladian-style Renaissance villa, with hints of Andalusia and a definite sense of Spanish colonial chic. Its annex artfully combines lush gardens and a view of a primal-looking mangrove lagoon adjacent to a stretch of beachfront. Bedrooms are all-white retreats that are high-ceilinged, large, and, in some cases, very large. The best accommodations are the lavish oceanfront master suites with private entrances. This is a very adult kind of place, where children under 12 are not encouraged.

Playa Dorado (P.O. Box 22), Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/571-9727.** Fax 809/320-4017. www.casacolonialhotel.com. 50 units. Year-round $260–$450 junior suites for 2; $460–$690 specialty suites for 2. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; golf privileges; health club; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Grand Oasis Marien ★ Kids This is an artfully designed compound that we like almost as much as the Iberostar (see below), which sits immediately next door. Couples seeking privacy at this all-inclusive resort will find it here, but those wanting around-the-clock activities will also be rewarded. Decor inside is stylish and more cutting edge than what you'll find within some other, older resorts. A lagoon-shaped swimming pool and a series of three-story pastel-colored buildings radiate outward from an artful, Taíno-inspired central core, all of it set against a backdrop of sandy beach. A tobacco-leaf theme predominates, including replicas of broad leaves inlaid in ceramic tiles, upholstery fabrics, artwork, and even the handmade iron headboards in the bedrooms. On-site is a theater where concerts and merengue shows are presented for up to 750 people at a time. The bedrooms are midsize to spacious, each well furnished and containing a balcony or ground-floor patio.

Costa Dorada, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/526-2244**. Fax 809/526-3141. www.coralhotels.com. 325 units. Winter $275–$326 double; off season $213–$263 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants, including an all-night snack bar; 4 bars; babysitting; children's club; fitness room; Jacuzzi; 2 pools (outdoor and children's); sauna; smoke-free rooms; state-of-the-art spa; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Gran Ventana Beach Resort ★ Kids This is the largest of three nearly adjacent hotels that are each administered by the VH chain. Of the three, this has the most whimsical and least formal decor. It occupies 100 landscaped hectares (247 acres) of ocean front that's divided into three clusters. The quietest and calmest of the three is the Beata Wing, which is just a bit removed but easily accessible, on foot, to the more animated Catalina and Saona clusters. You'll find a higher percentage of children here than at many other of Playa Dorada's resorts, thanks to the Kid's Klub and a day-care center. The resort is composed of a series of three-story buildings, softened with landscaping, that are each trimmed with latticework and vaguely Victorian-inspired fretwork; each unit has mahogany furniture, ceiling fans, a balcony or patio, and, in many cases, views of the sea.

Playa Dorada (Apdo. Postal 22), Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/320-2111.** Fax 809/320-2112. www.vhhr.com. 506 units . Year-round $230–$290 double; $248–$408 junior suit es; $300–$500 suit es. Rates are per person, double occupancy, and all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 7 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; children's center; health club; 3 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; tennis court; watersports equipment; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Iberostar Costa Dorada ★ (Kids) With easy access to the beach, this hotel is owned and operated by a Madrid-based chain, Iberostar. Elegant and striking, it has one of the most exciting designs of any hotel in Puerto Plata, with some of the most intricate stone, tile, and mosaic wor k, and a rambling combination of Taíno, Andalusian, and M oorish architecture. Several roofs of this hotel are covered with woven palm fronds, noteworthy for a hotel of this scale, sheltering a design that opens onto vie ws of ar cades, hidden courtyards, and fountains. A day or night pass, which entitles y ou to a meal, a r ound of drinks, and a view of the unusual design, costs $50 per adult (either 6pm–2am or 10am–6pm), or half-price per child under age 12. Rooms are cool and airy, with tilework floors, earth tones, brightly color ed upholsteries, wall w eavings inspired by Taíno designs, and big windows.

Costa Dorada, Carretera Luperón, Km 4, Marapicá, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. ✆ **888/923-2722** or 809/320-1000. Fax 809/320-2023. www.iberostar.com. 506 units. Winter $228–$242 double; off season $198–$222 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 5 bars; children's activities; large pool; kayaks; sailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Chris & Mady 's ★ (Finds) SEAFOOD/INTERNA TIONAL This eater y is r eason enough to drive over to Playa Cofresi if you aren't staying here, with some of the best and freshest seafood along this par t of the nor th shor e. The price of fr eshly caught lobster changes daily based on mar ket quotations, but it is among the most affor dable in the area. We also like to come here to feast on Dominican crayfish (called *langostinos*). Guests sit at wood tables under a thatch r oof, feasting on fettuccine with shrimp , Cajun-style chicken breast deep-fried and served with a zesty tomato sauce, or fat shrimp cooked and flavored only with fresh garlic and olive oil.

Playa Cofresi. ✆ **809/970-7502.** Reservations recommended Dec–Apr. Main courses $7–$29. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm.

Hemingway's Café INTERNATIONAL/MEXICAN The rough-hewn character of this place stands in star k contrast to the manicur ed exterior of the shopping center that contains it. I nside, you'll find a dar k and shado wy plank-sheathed bar and grill, dotted with accessories y ou might hav e found on a pier in K ey West. The menu lists pastas, fajitas, quesadillas, meal-siz e salads, burgers, and gener ously por tioned steaks. After around 9pm, a karaoke machine cranks out r omantic or rock-'n'-roll favorites.

Playa Dorada Plaza. ✆ **809/320-2230.** Reservations not needed. Main-course platters $12–$32. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2am.

Le Papillon CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL This is an unusual but charming r estaurant set on a hillside in a r esidential neighborhood about 5km (3 miles) southwest of Puerto Plata. The expatriate G erman owner, Thomas Ackermann, manages to combine aspects of the B lack Forest with mer engue music. The best way to star t a meal her e is with a *caipirinha* (a B razilian cocktail) at the bar beneath the cane-fr ond ceiling. Later, within an open-sided pavilion overlooking a forest, you'll be presented with a menu that's divided into categories that feature different preparations of pork, chicken, beef, seafood, rabbit, and even vegetarian offerings. Enduring favorites include fettuccine with lobster;

"pirate" kabobs with shrimp, tenderloin of beef, and vegetables; an especially worthy chicken stuffed with shrimp and served with saffron sauce; and a four-fisted version of Chateaubriand that's only prepared for two. Some savvy locals have complained that this restaurant can get just a bit pricier than it should, but in light of its cultural oddities, it's probably worth it.

Villas Cofresi, in Cofresi. ✆ **809/970-7640.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$36. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–10:30pm. From the center of Puerto Plata, drive 5km (3 miles) south, following the signs to Santiago. Turn left at the signs to Villas Cofresi.

Sam's Bar & Grill STEAKHOUSE The *gringo* and *gringa* expats have made Sam's their favorite dive since way back in 1970, when it was first established. In the center of town, only a block and a half from Central Park and the Malecón, it lies in a Victorian building from 1896. Marilyn Monroe photographs and caricatures by local artists form the decor. Here is where you can order a plate of meatloaf like your mama made or, the eternal favorite, steak and eggs. The cook does a tasty filet of beefsteak and more ambitious dishes, such as chicken *cordon bleu.* Come here for the memories, the good times, and, of course, the good-tasting food. You can start your day with fluffy pancakes, and later enjoy freshly made soups, salads, and sandwiches for lunch, along with hot dishes.

Calle José del Carmen Ariza 34, Castilla Hotel. ✆ **809/586-7267.** Main courses $6–$20. No credit cards. Daily 8am–10pm.

Veranda/Lucia ★★★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL/ASIAN FUSION Set within different areas of Puerto Plata's most upscale hotel, these are the two most elegant and sophisticated restaurants along the north shore of the Dominican Republic. Much of their allure derives from Chef Rafael Vasquez, whose earthy but elegant culinary style has earned him the justifiable title of the country's most celebrated chef. Both restaurants emanate high-design, cutting-edge charm, although their respective colors and decors are carefully calibrated for view in streaming sunlight (Veranda) or within the shadows of the evening (Lucia).

Veranda, beside the beach, is a study in angular lines and cool tones of aqua and turquoise; Lucia, with its acres of white linen, evokes the high-ceilinged, candle-lit, intensely Europeanized dining room of a land bar on on a colonial plantation. The menu might include grilled red snapper with grilled pineapple and slices of lobster tail prepared tempura style and served with avocados. Delectable desserts include mango tacos with pistachio ice cream. And even more decadent dessert choice is known as a "volcano." Combining in sculptural elegance a deep-fried pyramid of semi-melted chocolate with ice cream, it tastes even better than it looks.

In the Casa Colonial. ✆ **809/571-9727.** Reservations required. In Veranda, main courses $10–$29; in Lucia, main courses $12–$38. AE, DC, MC, V. Veranda daily 11:30am–5pm. Lucia daily 6pm–midnight.

HITTING THE BEACH

Although they face the sometimes-turbulent waters of the Atlantic, and it rains a lot in winter, it's the beaches that put the north coast on the tourist map. The beaches at **Playa Dorada** are known collectively as the "Amber Coast" for the deposits of amber that have been discovered here. Playa Dorada has one of the highest concentrations of hotels on the north coast, so the beaches here, though good, are almost always crowded, with both tourists and locals. The beaches have lovely white or powdery beige sand, and the waters are very popular with water-skiers and windsurfers. Many concession stands along the beach rent equipment.

Another good choice in the area, **Luperón Beach** lies about an 80-minute drive to the west of Puerto Plata. This is a wide stretch of powdery white sand, set amid palm trees that provide wonderful shade when the noonday sun grows too fierce. It's better for windsurfing, scuba diving, and snorkeling than swimming. Various watersports concessions are found here, along with several snack bars.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

The north coast is a watersports scene, although the sea tends to be rough. Snorkeling is popular, and the windsurfing is among the best in the Caribbean.

GOLF Robert Trent Jones, Jr., designed the 18-hole **Playa Dorada** championship golf course (✆ **809/320-3472;** www.playadoradagolf.com), which surrounds the resorts and runs along the coast. Even nongolfers can stop at the clubhouse for a drink or a snack to enjoy the views. Greens fees are $40 to $75 for 18 holes, $25 to $50 for 9 holes; a caddy costs $8 to $15. It's best to make arrangements at the activities desk of your hotel.

TENNIS Nearly all the major resort hotels in this area have tennis courts.

WATERSPORTS Your watersports options in Puerto Plata are numerous. Most of the kiosks on the beaches are run by the same company, and prices don't vary among them. If there isn't one close to your hotel, try **Playa NACO Centro de Deportes Acuaticos** (✆ **809/320-2567**), a rustic clapboard-sided hut on the beach front of the Dorado NACO Hotel. Prices are as follows: banana-boat rides, $10 for a 10- to 12-minute ride; water skiing, $20 for a 10- to 15-minute ride; sea kayak and Sunfish sailboat rental, $20 per hour; sailboards, $20 a day; and paragliding, $50 for a 10-minute ride.

There are watersports kiosks about every 100m (328 ft.) along the beach, any of which will rent you snorkeling gear and tell you the best spots for seeing fish. Puerto Plata isn't great for snorkeling, but you can take a boat trip to some decent sites.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Ocean World ★★, Calle Principale 3 at Cofresi (✆ **809/291-1000;** www.oceanworld.net), is the largest entertainment complex in the country, lying 5km (3 miles) west of Puerto Plata. It combines a plush casino and a world-class marina with such mass market venues as a kiddie park and an aquarium for marine life. There is a series of watery "pens" and habitats for the care, feeding, and display of dolphins, sea lions, sharks, stingrays, piranhas, and other denizens of the Amazon rainforest. A number of close encounters with these nautical creatures, especially dolphins, is offered, but these encounters are not cheap, ranging from $40 to $250 per person, depending on your age and the length of exposure you opt for. Supervision of these encounters is carefully monitored by trainers, and reservations are recommended. For those 13 and up, admission is $55, lowered to $40 for ages 4 to 12 and free for those 3 and under.

Fort San Felipe, the oldest fort in the New World, is a popular attraction (✆ **809/261-6043**). Philip II of Spain ordered its construction in 1564, a task that took 33 years to complete. Built with 2m-thick (6½-ft.) walls, the fort was virtually impenetrable, and the moat surrounding it was treacherous—the Spaniards sharpened swords and embedded them in coral below the surface of the water. The doors of the fort are only 1m (3¼ ft.) high, another deterrent to swift passage. During Trujillo's rule, Fort San Felipe was used as a prison. Standing at the end of the Malecón, the fort was restored in the early 1970s. Admission is 75¢, free for children 11 and under. It's open daily 8am to 5pm.

Isabel de Torres (✆ **809/970-0501**), an observation tower that was heavily fortified during the reign of Trujillo, affords a panoramic view of the Amber Coast from a point

near the top, 780m (2,558 ft.) above sea level. You reach the observation point by *teleférico* (cable car), a 10-minute ascent. Once here, you're also treated to 3 hectares (7½ acres) of botanical gardens. The round-trip costs $7 for adults, $2.80 for children ages 12 and under. The aerial ride runs Thursday to Tuesday 8am to 5pm. There's often a long wait in line for the cable car, and at certain times it's closed for repairs, so check at your hotel before you head out.

You can see a collection of rare amber specimens at the **Museo de Ambar Dominicano (Museum of Dominican Amber),** Calle Duarte 61 (✆ **809/586-2848;** http://ambermuseum.com), near Puerto Plata's Central Park. It's open Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm. Guided tours in English are offered. Admission is $1.10, or 20¢ for children.

SHOPPING

The neoclassical house sheltering the Museo de Ambar Dominicano (see above) has the densest collection of **boutiques** in Puerto Plata. Many of the paintings here are from neighboring Haiti, but the amber, larimar, and mahogany woodcarvings are local.

Plaza Turisol Complex, the largest shopping center on the north coast, has about 80 different outlets and the most upscale and tasteful merchandise. Make this your first stop if you want to get an idea of what's available in Puerto Plata—make it your only stop if you don't have time to visit all the shopping centers. It's about 5 minutes from Puerto Plata and Playa Dorada, on the main road heading east. Nearby is a smaller shopping center, **Centro Commercial Playa Dorada** (✆ **809/320-8243**), with about 80 shops selling handicrafts, clothing, souvenirs, and gifts. Both it and the Plaza Turisol are open daily 9am to 9pm.

Plaza Isabela, in Playa Dorada about 450m (1,476 ft.) from the entrance to the Playa Dorada Hotel complex, is a collection of small specialty shops constructed in Victorian gingerbread style, although much of its inventory has a Spanish inspiration or flair. Here you'll find the main branch of the Dominican Republic's premier jeweler, **Harrison's** (✆ **809/586-3933**), a specialist in platinum work. Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Keith Richards have been spotted wearing Harrison's jewelry. The store has a special clearance area; tours are available. There's another branch in the Centro Comercial Playa Dorada (✆ **809/320-2219**) in the Playa Dorada Hotel complex.

PUERTO PLATA, PLAYA DORADO & COSTA DORADA AFTER DARK

Casino action dominates the night. The most imaginative decor is the **Casino at Ocean World** ★★, Calle Principale 3 at Cofresi (✆ **809/291-1000**). Its cabaret show staged here, with gorgeous dancers, is the best in the D.R., rivaling some of the spectaculars in Las Vegas. A well-recommended way to experience the charms of this place involves booking a place on the "Ocean World Magical Nights." For $89 per person, you'll get round-trip transfers by minivan from most of Puerto Plata's hotels, unlimited access to a well-stocked dinner buffet, access to a dolphin night show and a sea lion night show, access to the casino and the location's many bars, and access to a Las Vegas–style review, replete with views of performers artfully outfitted in a minimalist style. Your hotel desk can usually book such tours for you.

Less modern, but within the Playa Dorado hotel complex, is the sprawling, blockbuster-style casino at the **Holiday Village Golden Beach** (✆ **809/320-3800**). The Playa Dorada Hotel complex itself contains about 14 hotels, some of which have **discos** that welcome anyone, guest or not. These after-dark diversions tend to be filled mainly with

foreign visitors, although they occasionally attract locals looking to hook up with tourists. None charges a cover, and the almost-universal drink of choice, Presidente beer, costs $3.80 a bottle.

At least three discos pulse out dance music every night of the week within the Playa Dorada complex beginning at 10pm. The wildest, most animated, and most raucous is **Mangú,** Playa Dorado (✆ **809/320-3800**). Its designers positioned it adjacent to the Holiday Village Golden Beach Resort, but with separate entrances. You'll find an attractive blend of both local residents, many eager to score with an off-island visitor, and holiday makers, who merge and mix in an animated blend of hot bodies and hot merengue. Entrance is free for residents of the Holiday Village, but around $3 for nonresidents. Expect flashing lights, hundreds of writhing bodies, and a skin, glitter, and feathers show that begins nightly at 11:30pm.

Mangu's most visible competitor is the **Roadway Western Bar and Mix Grill,** in the Playa Dorada Plaza (✆ **809/320-4502**). Set within a simulated re-creation of a log cabin, on the back side of the resort's busiest shopping center, its walls are outfitted with slogans like "Gringas are forever." There's no cover charge, but a Presidente beer goes for $4.20.

A final contender for the nightlife circuit in Puerto Plata is **Crazy Moon,** adjacent to the lobby of the Paradise Hotel (✆ **809/320-3663**). Though not as sweepingly popular as either Mangu or the Roadway Bar, it can be a lot of fun, and the music is always danceable.

5 SOSÚA ★

About 24km (15 miles) east of Puerto Plata is one of the finest beaches in the Dominican Republic, **Sosúa Beach.** A strip of soft, white sand more than .8km (1/2 mile) wide, it's tucked in a cove sheltered by coral cliffs and has crystal-clear water. The beach connects two strikingly disparate communities, which together make up the town known as Sosúa. As increasing numbers of visitors flock to Sosúa, mainly for its beach life, it is beginning to rival Puerto Plata. You won't find the super deluxe resorts that are commonplace in Puerto Plata, but prices in Sosúa are half what they are at the big resorts and the beaches are just as lovely.

At one end of the beach is **El Batey,** an area with residential streets, gardens, restaurants, shops, and hotels. Real-estate transactions have been booming in this area and many villas have been constructed, fronted by newly paved streets.

At the other end of Sosúa Beach lies the typical village community of **Los Charamicos,** a sharp contrast to El Batey. Here you'll find tin-roofed shacks, vegetable stands, chickens scrabbling in the rubbish, and warm, friendly people.

Sosúa was founded in 1940 by European Jews seeking refuge from Hitler. Trujillo invited 100,000 of them to settle in his country on a banana plantation, but only 600 or so Jews were actually allowed to immigrate, and of those, only about a dozen or so remained on the plantation. There are some 20 Jewish families living in Sosúa today, and for the most part they are engaged in the dairy and smoked-meat industries, which the refugees began during the war. Biweekly services are held in the local one-room synagogue. Many of the Jews intermarried with Dominicans, and the town has taken on an increasingly Spanish flavor; women of the town are often seen wearing both the Star of David and the Virgin de Altagracia, the patron saint of the Dominicans. Nowadays many German expatriates are also found in the town.

GETTING THERE To get here from Puerto Plata, take the *autopista* (Rte. 5) east for about 30 minutes. If you venture off the main highway, anticipate enormous potholes. Taxis, charter buses, and *públicos* from Puerto Plata and Playa Dorada let passengers off at the stairs leading down from the highway to Sosúa beach. Most rides cost $1.70 to $2.80.

WHERE TO STAY

La Puntilla de Piergiorgio ★ (Value) This hotel lies in a residential neighborhood, within a 10-minute walk from the bustling commercial center of Sosúa. Built on a rocky promontory high above the beach, it has a neo-Victorian design that includes lots of enticing gingerbread, lattices, and whimsical grace. Accommodations are bright; large; well maintained; and outfitted with white-tile floors, flowered chintz upholsteries, and a semicircular veranda with views of either the garden or the ocean. Each room has a small but neatly arranged tiled private bathroom with shower stall.

Calle La Puntilla 1, El Batey, Sosúa, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/571-2215.** Fax 809/571-2786. www.piergiorgiopalace.com. 51 units. Year-round $95–$125 double, $219–$310 suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Sosúa Bay Hotel ★★ This handsome colonial-style hotel is all-inclusive, with some of the consistently best food at the resort and a view that opens directly onto the tranquil waters of Sosúa Bay. This is one of Sosúa's attempts to attract more upscale clients who might normally patronize Playa Dorada. The pillared lobby is the most impressive at the resort. You can start your breakfast with a mimosa and be wined and dined throughout the day, staying up late dancing to the sound of merengue. The midsize bedrooms, scattered across a three-floor building, are decorated with colonial-style wood furnishings and colorful bedspreads and draperies. If available, choose one of the superior doubles with ocean view; others open onto lushly planted gardens. Most accommodations come with private balconies. The hotel also has some of the best entertainment at Sosúa and offers one of the most diversified activities programs.

Dr. Alejo Martínez 1, Sosúa, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/571-4000.** Fax 809/571-4545. www.sosuabayresort.com. 243 units. Winter $210–$230 double; off season $140–$160 double. Children 4–11 50% discount. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; bikes; health club; aerobics; yoga; 2 outdoor pools (1 for children); watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

WHERE TO DINE

Morua Mai INTERNATIONAL This is the most visible, and most deeply entrenched, restaurant in downtown Sosúa. Established by German entrepreneurs in the 1970s, and set at the town's busiest intersection, it manages to remain somewhat aloof from Sosúa's burgeoning sex industry, thanks to a location in a neighborhood that's a few blocks removed from the densest concentration of prostitutes and their pimps. It was designed of timbers and palm thatch like an enormous Taíno teepee, under which ceiling fans slowly spin, and wicker and wooden furniture help create an ambience conducive to the leisurely consumption of tropical drinks and well-prepared food. Steaks and seafood are staples here. Depending on the arrival of fresh supplies that day, the menu might also include four different preparations of lobster; several kinds of shrimp, including a version with spicy tomato sauce and fresh vegetables; four different preparations of sea bass, including a version flavored with Chablis; orange-flavored chicken spiced with ginger; steak Diana, flavored with bacon; and pork in mustard-flavored cream sauce. An excellent version of paella contains chunks of lobster and fresh shrimp.

Pedro Clisante 5, El Batey. ✆ **809/571-2966.** http://moruamai.com. Breakfast $3–$10; pizzas and pastas $6–$11; main courses $12–$38. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–midnight.

On the Waterfront ★★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD The memory of Marlon Brando's Oscar-winning 1954 movie, *On the Waterfront,* is perpetuated here. This informal yet elegant restaurant sits on a cliff side, serving the finest cuisine among the independent restaurants of Sosúa. To everyone's delight, especially the owners, in 2005, ocean currents and tides unexpectedly deposited vast amounts of sand at the base of this restaurant, creating an "instant beach" which has added considerably to its allure. Take in the sweeping views before deciding on the best of the catch of the day, which might feature fresh lobster, sea bass, conch, calamari, or red snapper, the latter tasting delectable when perfectly grilled as it is here. If you don't want fish, try a tender steak in pepper sauce or some lamb chops grilled with aromatic herbs. Other menu highlights include filet of sole in a tangy orange sauce or fettuccine primavera.

Calle Dr. Rosendo 1. ✆ **809/571-2670.** www.hotelwaterfrontdr.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$42. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

There are watersports kiosks about every 90m (295 ft.) along the beach, any of which will rent you snorkeling gear and tell you the best spots for seeing fish. You can also rent sailboats, windsurfers, and other watersports gear at any of the kiosks.

Gipsy Ranch, Carretera Sosúa-Cabarete, opposite the Coconut Palm Resort (✆ **809/571-1373**), is the region's largest and best-recommended **riding stable,** home to about 20 horses, which can be hired for equestrian treks of between 1 and 4 hours. You'll begin your experience at the stone corral about 7km (4¼ miles) from Sosúa and 5km (3 miles) from Cabarete. A half-hour jaunt goes for $25; a 4-hour excursion through forests and along beaches costs $52. Reservations are strongly recommended.

Many divers are attracted to the waters off Sosúa. In town the best outfitter is **Northern Coast Diving,** Calle Pedro Clisante 8 (✆ **809/571-1028;** www.northerncoastdiving.com). There are more than a dozen diving sites off the coast, including a wreck, a canyon dive, and a wall dive. Northern Coast offers PADI-certified divemasters or instructors, featuring a two-tank boat dive for $80 with equipment, $50 without. For $300, you get 3 days of diving and certification training. The outfitter also offers 3-hour snorkeling excursions for $35 per person.

SHOPPING

Patrick's Silversmithy, Calle Pedro Clisante 3 (✆ **809/571-2121**), was established by British expatriate Patrick Fagg in 1973 as a showcase for his unusual jewelry designs. At least half of the inventory here is made within his studios, and each incorporates such local stones as larimar, amber, and black coral. About 80% of the inventory is made from silver, making these one-of-a-kind creations affordable.

6 CABARETE

The winds that blow constantly southward off the Atlantic swept in a hip young crowd in the 1990s, when Cabarete emerged as the premier windsurfing site in the Caribbean. But only a small portion of the visitors who come here today are actually interested in

Tips Serious Windsurfing

Cabarete hosts an annual weeklong windsurfing tournament every June. Only amateurs are allowed to participate. For more information, contact the **Happy Surf School,** Hotel Villa Taina, Calle Principal (✆ **809/571-0784;** www.villataina.com), or any staff member at the **Azurro Club** (✆ **809/571-0808;** www.starzresorts.com).

the waves and jumping on a board. Many bask in the glory of the surfers by day and strut their stuff in the hyperhip town bars by night.

To service the needs of the growing number of visitors, the town has attracted some of the most aggressive prostitutes in the Dominican Republic: all ages, all skin tones, all degrees of blatancy. If you're a heterosexual male in Cabarete, you'll absolutely never, ever, lack for female companionship, paid or unpaid.

News of Cabarete's allure has spread among the 20-something populations of Europe. Especially prevalent are visitors from northern Europe; there are fewer North Americans here than you'd expect.

The big attraction is **Cabarete Beach,** with its white sands and ideal wind and surf conditions. Cabarete isn't particularly distinguished architecturally, consisting of a series of relatively small-scale hotels, restaurants, and gift shops lining either side of the highway that parallels the north coast. Virtually everything in town lies along this street (Calle Principal), with the exception of small-scale shops that are on narrow alleyways that bisect the main street. But as word of the resort has spread, there have been increasing numbers of large all-inclusive hotels built on the outskirts of town.

GETTING THERE To reach Cabarete from Sosúa, continue east along the *autopista* (Rte. 5) for about 13km (8 miles). Taxis and *públicos* from Sosúa will also take you here.

WHERE TO STAY

Azurro Club (Azurro Club Estrella and Azurro Club Cabarete) ★ One of Cabarete's more deeply entrenched resorts was built in the late 1990s in a stylish, avant-garde design. Today you'll find slightly more upscale accommodations in the Azurro Cabarete, and lodgings that are just a notch less comfortable across the road, in the Azurro Estrella. With direct access to a wide beach, on the outskirts of Cabarete's main commercial core, it's noted for a soaring network of steel girders and an attempt on the part of the staff to keep its guests amused with a variety of organized although somewhat haphazard daily activities. Despite a slightly disorganized staff, this is one of our favorite large-scale hotels in Cabarete, thanks to its convenient location and sense of style. The respective buildings of this resort rise in four-story designs, usually around well-landscaped central courtyards. Bedrooms are well maintained, attractive, and airy.

Calle Principal, Cabarete, Dominican Republic. ✆ **888/790-5264** or 809/571-0808. Fax 809/571-0904. www.starzresorts.com. 272 units. $280 double year-round. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; gym; 3 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Natura Cabañas & the Attabeyra Spa ★ Finds This is the ultimate eco-sensitive boutique hotel. Located between Cabarete and Sosúa, the hotel occupies the site that was

conceived as the owner's private home. In 1990, she opted to improve her acreage with a series of artfully rustic wood and concrete structures for the shelter and amusement of like-minded new-age friends. Some are mushroom-shaped organic-looking structures; others are more functional structures of wood clapboards and thick beams. Regardless of the shelter you select, you'll get a sense of living at a sunny, not particularly stressful summer camp for adults and their children. Yoga classes are conducted without charge for residents twice a week. The on-site spa is New Age centered, small scale, and personalized.

In the La Perla Marina Complex, Cabarete, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/571-1507.** www.naturacabana.com. 11 units. Year-round $180 double; $240 triple; $280 quad. MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; mountain bikes; horseback riding; yoga classes; outdoor pool; spa. *In room:* Kitchen (in some), no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Casa del Pescador ★ SEAFOOD Since 1988, Casa del Pescador has served sophisticated seafood in an engagingly hip environment that's the domain of a Swiss expatriate. It's right on the beach, in the heart of town. To begin, sample the chef's flavor-filled fish consommé. He does very well with shrimp, too, either with pastis sauce or with curry and fresh garlic. On a hot day, the seafood salads are a welcome relief and tasty, too, as are the grilled octopus in spicy Creole sauce and fresh lobster in garlic sauce. (Unless you love garlic, you might find the latter overpowering; ask for butter instead.) Although there's a full wine list, Presidente beer seems the best accompaniment to the fish, especially on hot, sultry nights.

Calle Principal. ✆ **809/571-0760.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses $11–$22. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–11pm.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Not surprisingly, Cabarete is home to one of the Caribbean's best **windsurfing schools, Carib Wind Center,** Playa Cabarete (✆ **809/571-0640;** www.caribwind.com). It's devoted to teaching proper techniques and to renting state-of-the-art equipment. Equipment rental costs $35 for 5 hours, and instruction is $20 per hour. Clients who book a week or more in advance receive discounts of around 20%. A worthy competitor, located just a few doors away, is the **Fanatic Windsurfing Center,** Calle Principale (✆ **809/571-0861;** www.fanatic-cabarete.com). Fanatic sometimes offers rates a bit less expensive than those at the Carib Wind Center.

Although windsurfing attracts more media attention than any other sport in Cabarete, conventional surfing is also big and getting bigger. Because of the prevailing tides and wind patterns, it's best undertaken at **Playa Encuentro,** a 2km (1 1/4-mile) stretch of beachfront that's 4km (2 1/2 miles) west of Cabarete and 5km (3 miles) east of Sosúa. Here, surfboards are rented from a crowd of active aficionados at the Club M-Endy, Playa El Encuentro, Carretera Sosúa-Cabarete (✆ **809/571-1625**). Renting a surfboard costs $20 per day, and lessons can be arranged for around $35 an hour.

Iguana Mama at Cabarete (✆ **800/849-4720** in the U.S., or 809/571-0908; www.iguanamama.com) offers the best **mountain biking** and **hiking.** Going strong since 1993, it features a trek to Mount Isabel de Torres with experienced guides that lasts a full day and costs $75 per person. If enough people book, this tour is offered daily. Another trek involves a 900m (2,952-ft.) downhill cruise, costing $40 per person and held only Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Finally, **Gipsy Ranch** (✆ **809/571-1373**) is the most complete riding stable in the Dominican Republic; they'll take you **horseback riding** at a cost of $20 per person for an hour or $60 for a 4-hour ride.

CABARETE AFTER DARK

Las Brisas, Calle Principal Cabarete (✆ **809/571-0614**), is the most popular nightlife venue in Cabarete. Arrive after 10:30pm, when the dance club action begins. From 8am to 10:30pm daily, food is served. The dance floor is illuminated with strobe lights and lasers, and the bar is always busy. Many patrons arrive with dates of their own, but if you're a man flying solo, never fear, as a bevy of attractive working women are invariably on hand to provide companionship.

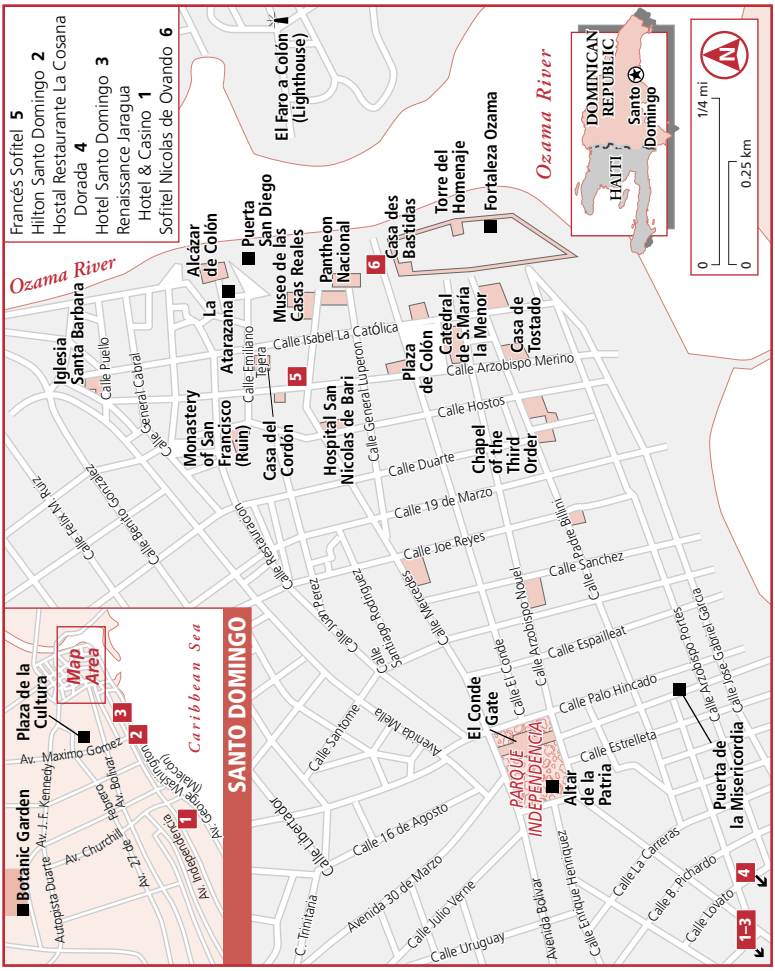
Hip nightlife is also found at the little bars—shanties, really—along the beach. There's live music every night after sunset. Tuesday nights it's salsa and merengue at **Onno's Bar** (✆ **809/571-0461**). **The Bamboo Bar** is the place to be on Friday night, and on Saturday the new **Wave Bar** and **Tribal Café** (no phones) draw the most patrons. On virtually any night of the week, you can find dialogue and a sense of cosmopolitan hip at the **Café Pitu,** Calle Principal (✆ **809/571-0861**). Set a few steps from the also-recommended Onno's Bar, it's the bar that's almost always cited as a centerpiece of Cabarete nightlife. It also offers wireless Internet access throughout its premises, thereby creating a sometimes studious venue of scantily clad athletes swigging rum punches and surfing the Net. ***Note:*** Only some of these bars have phone numbers, and none bears an individual street number on the Calle Principale, but each of them is easy to spot as you walk up and down either the beach or the town's main street.

7 SANTO DOMINGO ★★★

Santo Domingo is one of the Caribbean's most vibrant cities, with a 12-block Colonial Zone to rival that of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. Come here to walk in the footsteps of Cortés, Ponce de León, and, of course, Columbus himself. Allow at least a day to capture some of the highlights of the old city, such as its Alcazar and its Catedral Santa Maria la Menor.

Santo Domingo is also one of the grand shopping bazaars of the Caribbean, with such "hot" items as hand-wrapped cigars for sale virtually everywhere, along with local handicrafts. Jewelry made of larimar or amber is also much sought after. From gambling to merengue, Santo Domingo is also one of the liveliest cities in the Caribbean after dark. Be careful, however. Most of the Dominican Republic's crime is concentrated in Santo Domingo. Keep valuables in your hotel safe, carry a minimum of cash with you, don't wear flashy jewelry, and if in doubt, take a cab.

Bartholomeo Columbus, brother of Christopher, founded the city of New Isabella (later renamed Santo Domingo) on the southeastern Caribbean coast in 1496. It's the oldest city in the New World and the capital of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo has had a long, sometimes glorious, more often sad history. At the peak of its power, Diego de Velázquez sailed from here to settle Cuba, Ponce de León went forth to conquer and settle Puerto Rico and Florida, and Cortés set out for Mexico. The city today still reflects its long history—French, Haitian, and especially Spanish.



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE See the beginning of this chapter for details on the airlines ser ving Santo Domingo.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tourist Office** is located at Avenida Mexico, Esquina Calle 30 de Marzo (✆ **809/221-4660**), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 3pm.

FAST FACTS Ther e's a **24-hour drugstore** called San Judas Tadeo, Ave. Independencia 57 (✆ **809/685-8165**). The best hospital in S anto Dominco, and the one r ecommended by the U.S. E mbassy, is **Clinica Abreu,** Calle B eller 42 (✆ **809/688-4411**). Most of its English-speaking doctors trained in the United States, and it never closes. For the **police,** call ✆ **911.**

Expensive

Hilton Santo Domingo ★★★ A soaring, ar tfully designed to wer set dir ectly on the seafront, this is the finest, tallest, and most desirable hotel in S anto D omingo. Its inauguration added the first ne w major hotel to the nation's capital in 15 y ears, and its location at the corner of the piv otal M aximo G omez filled what had until then been a gaping dark hole on a key building site in one of the town's showplace neighborhoods. It was configur ed as par t of the M alecón Center, a waterside dev elopment that includes three separate towers for condominiums, a 21-story hotel, the newest casino in town, and a small but choice shopping mall. We prefer its ultracomfortable rooms to any others in town. This hotel is not, and doesn't even try to be, a full-ser vice resort, but if y ou want to play tennis or golf , the concierge can set it up for y ou. Rooms, which begin on the eighth floor and go upward from there, are richly furnished and plush.

Av. Geor ge Washington 500 at the NW c orner of the A v. M aximo Gomez, M alecón C enter, Sant o Domingo, Dominican Republic . ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) in the U .S. or 809/685-0000. F ax 809/685-0202. www.hiltoncaribbean.com. 228 units. $189–$239 double; from $269 suite year-round. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; ex ercise room; outdoor swimming pool; casino; r oom service. *In room*: A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Santo Domingo ★★★ Run by Premier Resorts & Hotels, the Hotel Santo Domingo is tastefully extravagant without having the glitzy overtones of the Jaragua (see below). Those seeking local character in a home-gr own hotel should check in her e. This waterfront hotel sits on 6 tr opical hectar es (15 acr es), 15 minutes fr om the do wntown area, in the La F eria district. O scar de la R enta helped design the interior . Most of the rooms have views of the sea, though some face the garden. Accommodations have bright floral carpets, tasteful Caribbean fabrics, and mirr ored closets along with firm double beds. The superior Excel Club rooms offer seaview balconies and other amenities. E xcel guests also have access to a priv ate lounge.

Av. I ndependencia (at the c orner of A v. Abraham Linc oln), Sant o Domingo , Dominican Republic . ✆ **800/877-3643** in the U .S., or 809/221-1511. F ax 809/535-4050. w ww.hotelsantodomingo.com.do. 215 units. Year-round $140–$170 double; $260–$410 Ex cel Club double. Rates include American br eakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 r estaurants; 2 bars; bab ysitting; gym; Olympic-siz e out door pool; r oom service; sauna; 3 lit tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Renaissance Jaragua Hotel & Casino ★★ A Las Vegas–style palace, this 10-story hotel lies on the 6-hectar e (15-acre) site of the old J aragua (Ha-*ra*-gwa) Hotel, which was popular in Trujillo's day. Open since 1988, it's a splashy pink waterfront palace that doesn't have the dignity and class of the H otel Santo Domingo. For example, the casino and bars are often rife with pr ostitutes plying their trade. Located off the M alecón and conv enient to the city's major attractions and shops, the hotel consists of two separate buildings: the 10-story J aragua Tower and the two-lev el J aragua G ardens Estate. J aragua has the largest casino in the Caribbean, a 1,000-seat Vegas-style showroom, a cabaret theater, and a dance club. The luxurious rooms, the largest in S anto Domingo, feature multiple phones, refrigerators, and marble bathrooms with large makeup mirr ors.

Av. Geor ge Washington 367, Sant o Domingo, Dominican Republic . ✆ **800/331-3542** in the U .S. and Canada, or 809/221-2222. F ax 809/686-0528. w ww.marriott.com. 300 units. Year-round $109–$159 double; $229 junior suite; $242–$429 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking $2. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; health club and spa; outdoor pool; casino; dance club; room service; smoke-free rooms; tennis c enter w/4 lit cla y c ourts and pr o shop. *In r oom:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dr yer, k itchenettes (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Sofitel Nicolas de Ovando ★★ In the heart of the colonial city, this 16th-century mansion has been restored and reopened as a hotel with all the modern amenities. For those seeking comfort among antiquity, this is an even better bet than the smaller Francés Sofitel (see below), another restoration. On the premises is a restaurant with a terrace facing a courtyard and two bars with a view of the pool. All the bedrooms are well furnished and handsomely maintained. The choice of accommodations ranges from standard doubles to spacious suites, which can also be used as family units. The classic architecture of the original mansion has been respected, although the property has been vastly enlarged.

Calle Las Damas, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. ✆ **800/SOFITEL** (763-4835) or 809/685-9955. Fax 809/686-6590. www.sofitel.com. 104 units. Year-round $203–$239 double; from $500 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; gym; outdoor pool; dance club; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

Francés Sofitel ★ A favorite small hotel in the old city, this intimate inn lies within a stone-fronted town house dating from the 16th century. Arches surround an Iberian-style fountain, and columns reach up to the second-floor patios, with palms and tropical plants surrounding the rooms. You'll think you've arrived in Seville. A gracefully winding stone staircase leads to the high-ceilinged and thick-walled bedrooms outfitted in a somber, rather dark colonial style. Accommodations are simple but tasteful, with rugs resting on tile floors.

Calle las Mercedes (corner of Calle Arzobispo Meriño), Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. ✆ **800/763-4835** or 809/685-9331. Fax 809/685-1289. www.sofitel.com. 19 units. Year-round $124–$194 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Restaurante La Casona Dorada ★ Value This 18th-century building once belonged to former president Buenaventura Báez. A mansion converted to receive paying guests, the hotel lies on grounds set back from the street at the corner of Osvaldo Báez; it's a 5-minute ride to the Colonial Zone or a 30-minute ride to the beaches. Opened in 1993, the hotel caters to visitors and business clients. The small bedrooms are traditionally and comfortably decorated and are well maintained.

Av. Independencia 255 at the corner of Osvaldo Báez, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. ✆ **809/221-3535.** Fax 809/221-3622. www.casona.dorada.com. 51 units. Year-round $54 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Most of Santo Domingo's restaurants stretch along the seaside, bordering Avenida George Washington, popularly known as the Malecón. Some of the best restaurants are in hotels. It's safest to take a taxi when dining out at night.

In most restaurants, casual dress is fine, although shorts are frowned upon at the fancier, more expensive spots. Many Dominicans prefer to dress up when dining out, especially in the capital.

Expensive

El Mesón de la Cava ★ DOMINICAN/INTERNATIONAL At first we thought this was a gimmicky club—you descend a perilous iron stairway into an actual cave with stalactites and stalagmites—but the cuisine is among the finest in the capital. The quality ingredients are well prepared and beautifully flavored. Recorded merengue, Latin jazz,

blues, and salsa give the place a bit of festivity. Start with small shrimp sautéed in a delicate sauce of garlic or white wine, perhaps a mixed seafood or "sexy" conch gratinée. The gazpacho is also excellent, as is the bubbling *sopa de pescado* (red snapper chowder). Follow it up with the grilled Caribbean rock lobster or the double French lamb chops, which are done to tender perfection.

Mirador del Sur 1. ✆ **809/533-2818.** Reservations required. Main courses $20–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

Lina Restaurant ★★ INTERNATIONAL/SPANISH This is one of the most prestigious restaurants in the Caribbean. Spanish-born Lina Aguado originally came to Santo Domingo as the personal chef of the dictator Trujillo, whom she served until opening her own restaurant. Today four master chefs, whom Doña Lina entrusted with her secret recipes, rule the kitchen of this modern hotel restaurant. The cuisine is international, with an emphasis on Spanish dishes, and the service is first rate. Try the paella Valenciana, the finest in the Dominican Republic. We're equally enticed by the sea bass flambé with brandy, and few can resist the mixed seafood medley doused with Pernod. (It's cooked casserole style.) Lina's cuisine even wins the approval of hard-to-please Madrileños, who are a bit contemptuous of Spanish food served outside Spain.

In the Barcelo Gran Hotel Lina. Máximo Gómez and 27 de Febrero aves. ✆ **809/563-5000,** ext. 7250. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$36. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 6:30pm–midnight.

Vesuvio I ★ ITALIAN Along the Malecón, the most famous Italian restaurant in the Dominican Republic draws crowds of visitors and local businesspeople in spite of its fading decor. What to order? That's always a problem, as the Neapolitan owners, the Bonarelli family, have worked since 1954 to perfect and enlarge the menu. They claim they catch it themselves, cook it from scratch, or even grow it if that's possible. Their homemade soups are excellent. Fresh red snapper, sea bass, and oysters are prepared in enticing ways. Specialties include Dominican crayfish *a la Vesuvio* (topped with garlic and bacon). Recent menu additions feature *pappardelle al Bosque* (noodles with porcini mushrooms, rosemary, and garlic), and black tallarini with shrimp *a la crema.*

The owner claims to be the pioneer of pizza in the Dominican Republic. At **Trattoria Vesuvio** next door (✆ **809/221-3000**), he makes a unique .9m-long (3-ft.) pizza! There's also **Vesuvio II** at Av. Tiradentes 17 (✆ **809/562-6060**).

Av. George Washington 521. ✆ **809/221-1954.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight.

Inexpensive

La Briciola ★★ ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL This place has a touch of class, offering an elegant setting in two restored colonial palaces from the 16th century. Tables are romantically candlelit at night. In the Colonial Zone, it stands in front of Plazoleta Park. The menu reflects a commitment to prime ingredients and a determination not to let style overrule substance. The dishes here hardly test the creative culinary limits of the chefs, but are tried-and-true favorites, beginning with many different pastas and sauces—all made fresh daily. Our favorite is the delectable linguini with "fruits of the sea." Sometimes you're in the mood just for a good steak, and the chefs oblige with a perfectly grilled T-bone cooked to your specifications. This is also a good place at which to order fresh fish. Dominican rice accompanies all the meat and fish courses. A piano bar overlooks a courtyard.

Calle Arzobispo Meriño 152-A. ✆ **809/688-5055.** Reservations required. Main courses $12–$27. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight. Closed Dec 24, 25, 31, and Jan 1.

La Résidence ★ (Finds) CONTINENTAL/CARIBBEAN It isn't particularly animated, but the food is surprisingly lavish at this showcase of the France-based Sofitel chain. The setting is historic (a ca.-1502 mansion transformed into a hotel), and if you happen to be within the historic zone, it's an excellent and easy-to-find dining choice. This is one of the few upscale restaurants in town offering spit-roasted lamb (rubbed with spices and served with bacon, garlic, and vinegar sauce) and rabbit (a boned saddle stuffed with bacon and mushrooms). Dominican-inspired dishes include roast lobster with wok-fried vegetables, a fricassee of pork chops with local spices, and braised "Dominican-style" red snapper. There's even a frequently changing array of vegetarian dishes.

In the Sofitel Nicolas de Ovando, Calle Las Damas. ✆ **809/685-9955.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $10–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight.

Pata é Palo ★ INTERNATIONAL Part of Pata é Palo's charm derives from its location, overlooking Plaza Colón, the graceful arcades of the Alcazar de Colón, where amiable clusters of Dominican families promenade every night at dusk. During the 1500s, the building was a bistro under the supervision of a mysterious Dutch buccaneer known as Peg-Leg (Paté Palo), who's credited with establishing the first tavern in the New World.

In the late 1990s, another Dutchman and his four partners transformed the place into a gregarious and engaging bistro that on weekends is one of the most crowded and popular singles bars in the country. Tables are thick-topped wooden affairs, set either on the plaza outside or within the antique walls of the dark and shadowy interior. The food is some of the best in the capital and is usually accompanied by live guitar music every Thursday to Sunday from 6 to 10pm. Having dined here many times, we can highly recommend the sautéed shrimp in coconut-curry sauce. On festive occasions, ask for the brochette of mixed meats; the meat has been marinated in fresh spices and herbs and is artfully flambéed at your table. The sea bass with white-wine sauce is perfectly prepared, although the fancy Continental dishes such as charbroiled steak with onion sauce and a grilled rack of lamb might be more suited for the cold Alps.

La Atarazana 21, Zona Colonial. ✆ **809/687-8089.** Burgers and salads $14–$16; main courses $18–$28. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 4pm–1:30am; Sat–Sun noon–1:30am.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

BEACHES The Dominican Republic has some great beaches, but they aren't in Santo Domingo. The principal beach resort near the capital is at **Boca Chica,** less than 3km (1¾ miles) east of the airport and about 31km (19 miles) from the center of Santo Domingo. Here you'll find clear, shallow blue water, a white-sand beach, and a natural coral reef. The east side of the beach, known as "St. Tropez," is popular with Europeans. In recent years, the backdrop of the beach has become rather tacky, with an array of pizza and fast-food stands, beach cottages, chaise longues, watersports concessions, and plastic beach tables.

Slightly better maintained is the narrow white-sand beach of **Playa Juan Dolio** or **Playa Esmeralda,** a 20-minute drive east of Boca Chica. With all the hotels lining this beach, it's likely to be as crowded as Boca Chica any day of the week.

Moments Uno, Dos, Tres Strikes You're Out

Dominicans were crazy about baseball long before their countryman Sammy Sosa set the United States on fire with his home-run race against Mark McGwire. Almost every Major League baseball team has at least one player from the Dominican Republic on its roster these days. Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez, and Alphonso Soriano are just a few of the all-star team of players who hail from the Dominican Republic.

If you're here between October and January, you might want to catch a game in the Dominican Republic's Professional Winter League. The **Liga de Beisbol stadium** (✆ **809/567-6371**) is in Santo Domingo; check local newspapers for game times, or ask at your hotel. There are also games at the Tetelo Vargas Stadium in San Pedro de Macoris, known to die-hard sports fans as the "land of shortstops" for the multitude of infielders that call this tiny town home.

HORSE RACING Santo Domingo's racetrack, **Galapagos Hipódromo V Centenario,** on Avenida Las Américas, Km 14.5 (✆ **809/687-6060**), schedules races Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 2pm. You can spend the day here and have lunch at the track's restaurant. Admission is free.

TENNIS You can often play on the courts at the major resorts if you ask your hotel desk to call in advance for you and make arrangements.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Prieto Tours, Av. Francia 125 (✆ **809/685-0102;** www.prieto-tours.com), one of the capital's leading tour operators, offers a 3-hour tour of the **Colonial Zone,** leaving most mornings at 9am and again at 3pm if there's sufficient demand; it costs $25. A 6-hour tour visits the Colonial Zone, the **Columbus Lighthouse,** the **Aquarium,** and the city's modern neighborhoods; the $35 fee includes lunch and entrance to several well-known museums and monuments. About an hour of the tour is for shopping.

The Relics of Columbus & the Colonial Era

Santo Domingo—a treasure trove of historic, sometimes crumbling, buildings—is undergoing a major government-sponsored restoration. The old town is still partially enclosed by remnants of its original city wall. The narrow streets, old stone buildings, and forts are like nothing else in the Caribbean, except perhaps Old San Juan. The only thing missing is the clank of the conquistadors' armor.

Ancient and modern Santo Domingo meet at the **Parque Independencia,** a big city square whose most prominent feature is its **Altar de la Patria**—a national pantheon dedicated to the nation's heroes, Duarte, Sanchez, and Mella, who are buried here. These men led the country's fight for freedom from Haiti in 1844. As in provincial Spanish cities, the square is a popular family gathering place on Sunday afternoon. At the entrance to the plaza is **El Conde Gate,** named for El Conde (the count) de Penalva, the governor who resisted the forces of Admiral Penn, the leader of a British invasion. It was also the site of the March for Independence in 1844 and holds a special place in the hearts of Dominicans.

In the shadow of the Alcázar, **La Atarazana** is a fully restored section of one of the New World's finest arsenals. It extends for a city block, holding within it a catacomb of shops, art galleries, boutiques, and some good regional and international restaurants.

Just behind river moorings is the oldest street in the New World, **Calle Las Damas (Street of the Ladies),** named not because it was the red-light district, but for the elegant ladies of the viceregal court who used to promenade here in the evening. It's lined with colonial buildings.

Just north is the chapel of **Our Lady of Remedies,** where the first inhabitants of the city attended Mass before the cathedral was erected.

Try to see the **Puerta de la Misericordia** (Calle Palo Hincado just north of Calle Arzobispo Portes). Part of the original city wall, this "Gate of Mercy" was once a refuge for colonists fleeing hurricanes and earthquakes.

The **Monastery of San Francisco** is a mere ruin, lit at night. That any part of it is still standing is a miracle; it was hit by earthquakes, pillaged by Drake, and bombarded by French artillery. To get here, go along Calle Hostos and across Calle Emiliano Tejera; continue up the hill, and about midway along you'll see the ruins.

You'll see a microcosm of Dominican life as you head east along **Calle El Conde** from Parque Independencia to **Plaza de Colón (Columbus Square),** which has a large bronze statue honoring the discoverer, made in 1882 by a French sculptor, and the **Catedral de Santa Maria la Menor** (see below).

Alcázar de Colón ★ The most outstanding structure in the old city is the Alcázar, a palace built for Columbus's son, Diego, and his wife, who was also niece to Ferdinand, king of Spain. Diego became the colony's governor in 1509, and Santo Domingo rose as the hub of Spanish commerce and culture in America. For more than 60 years, this coral limestone structure on the bluffs of the Ozama River was the center of the Spanish court, entertaining such distinguished visitors as Cortés, Ponce de León, and Balboa. The nearly two dozen rooms and open-air loggias are decorated with paintings, period tapestries, and 16th-century antiques.

Calle La Atarazana (at the foot of Calle Las Damas). ✆ **809/687-5361.** Admission $1.40. Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 9am–4pm.

Catedral de Santa Maria la Menor ★ The oldest cathedral in the Americas was begun in 1514 and completed in 1540. Fronted with a golden-tinted coral limestone facade, the church combines elements of both Gothic and baroque; the high altar is chiseled out of silver. The treasury has an excellent art collection of ancient woodcarvings, furnishings, funerary monuments, silver, and jewelry.

Calle Arzobispo Meriño (on the south side of Plaza de Colón). ✆ **809/689-1920.** Free admission. Cathedral Mon–Sat 9am–4:30pm; Sun Masses begin at noon. Treasury Mon–Sat 9am–4pm.

El Faro a Colón (Columbus Lighthouse) Built in the shape of a cross, the towering 206m-tall (676-ft.) El Faro a Colón monument is both a sightseeing attraction and a cultural center. In the heart of the structure is a chapel containing the Columbus tomb and, some say, his mortal remains. The "bones" of Columbus were moved here from the Cathedral de Santa Maria la Menor (see above). (Other locations, including the Cathedral of Seville, also claim to possess the explorer's remains.) The most outstanding and unique feature is the lighting system composed of 149 searchlights and a 70-kilowatt beam that circles out for nearly 70km (43 miles). When illuminated, the lights project a gigantic cross in the sky that can be seen as far away as Puerto Rico.

Although the concept of the memorial is 140 years old, the first stones were not laid until 1986, following the design submitted in 1929 by J. L. Gleave, the winner of the worldwide contest held to choose the architect. The monumental lighthouse was inaugurated on October 6, 1992, the day Columbus's "remains" were transferred from the cathedral.

Av. España (on the water side of Los Tres Ojos, near the airport in the Sans Souci district). ✆ **809/591-1492.** Admission $1.80 adults, 15¢ children 11 and under. Tues–Sun 9am–5:30pm.

Museo de las Casas Reales (Museum of the Royal Houses) Through artifacts, tapestries, maps, and re-created halls, including a courtroom, this museum traces Santo Domingo's history from 1492 to 1821. Gilded furniture, arms and armor, and other colonial artifacts make it the most interesting museum of Old Santo Domingo. It contains replicas of the *Niña,* the *Pinta,* and the *Santa Maria,* and one exhibit is said to hold some of Columbus's ashes. In addition to pre-Columbian art, you can see the main artifacts of two galleons sunk in 1724 on their way from Spain to Mexico, along with remnants of another 18th-century Spanish ship, the *Concepción.*

Calle Las Damas (at corner Las Mercedes). ✆ **809/682-4202.** Admission 85¢. Children 11 and under free. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm.

SHOPPING

The best buys in Santo Domingo are handcrafted native items, especially amber jewelry.

Ever since the Dominicans presented John F. Kennedy with what became his favorite rocker, visitors have wanted to take home a **rocking chair.** These rockers are often sold unassembled, for easy shipping. Other good buys include Dominican rum, hand-knit articles, macramé, ceramics, and crafts in native mahogany.

The best shopping streets are **El Conde,** the oldest and most traditional shop-flanked avenue, and **Avenida Mella.** In the colonial section, **La Atarazana** is filled with galleries and gift and jewelry stores, charging inflated prices. Duty-free shops are found at the airport, in the capital at the **Centro de los Héroes,** and at both the Hotel Santo Domingo and the Hotel Embajador. Shopping hours are generally Monday to Saturday from 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 5pm.

Head first for the National Market, **El Mercado Modelo,** Avenida Mella, filled with stall after stall of crafts, spices, and produce; you can easily get lost in the crush. The merchants are eager to sell, so remember to bargain. You'll see a lot of tortoiseshell work, but exercise caution, since many species, especially the hawksbill turtle, are on the endangered species list and could be impounded by U.S. Customs if discovered in your luggage. Also for sale are rockers, mahogany, sandals, baskets, hats, and clay braziers for grilling fish.

Amber World Museum, Arzobispo Meriño 452 (✆ **809/686-5700**), lives up to its name. Many visitors flock here to see plants, insects, and even scorpions fossilized in resin millions of years ago. Although some of the displays are not for sale, in an adjoining salon you can watch craftspeople at work, polishing and shaping raw bits of ancient amber for sale. To visit the museum costs adults $1.40, and children up to age 12 enter free. It's open Monday to Saturday 8:30am to 6pm and Sunday 9am to 1pm.

Another reliable source for stunning amber, as well as coral, is **Ambar Nacional,** Calle Arzobispo Meriño (✆ **809/686-5700**). This is also the best source for purchasing larimar jewelry. In general, prices here are a bit less expensive than those at the more prestigious Amber World Museum nearby.

Tips You Call That a Bargain?

Always haggle over the price of handicrafts, particularly in the open-air markets. No stall keeper expects you to pay the first price asked. Remember the Spanish words for "too expensive": *muy caro*.

In the center of the most history-laden section of town is the well-known **Galería de Arte Nader,** Rafael Augusto Sanchez 22 (✆ **809/544-0878**), which displays so many Latin paintings that they're sometimes stacked in rows against the walls. The works of the country's best-known painters and most promising newcomers are displayed here (though, to be honest, the Dominican Republic is short on painters with international reputations). There is also a lot of tourist junk, shipped in by the truckload from Haiti. In the ancient courtyard in back, you can get a glimpse of how things looked in the Spanish colonies hundreds of years ago.

Nuebo, Fantino Falco 36, Naco (✆ **809/562-3333**), is patronized by some of the capital's most upscale buyers. This shop sells a carefully chosen assortment of art objects, lamps, and furnishings. With some persuasion, anything you buy here can be shipped.

Columbus Plaza (Decla, S.A.), Calle Arzobispo Meriño 206 (✆ **809/689-0565**), is one of the largest supermarket-style gift and artifacts stores in the country. Well organized and imaginative, with a helpful English-speaking staff, it sprawls over three floors of a modern building divided into boutiques specializing in amber, larimar, gold and silver jewelry, cigars, paintings and sculpture, plus craft items.

Cigars are big sellers in Santo Domingo. The best selection is at **Cigar King,** Calle Conde 208, Baguero Building (✆ **809/686-4987**), in the colonial city. Its selection of Dominican and Cuban cigars in a temperature-controlled room is wide ranging.

SANTO DOMINGO AFTER DARK

Dance Clubs

Local young people flock to the dance clubs in droves after dinner. Even the hotel dance clubs cater to locals as well as tourists. Great dancers abound, so go and watch even if you don't feel like dancing.

La Guácara Taína, Avenida Mirador del Sur, in Parque Mirador del Sur (✆ **809/533-1051**), is the best *discoteca* in the country, drawing equal numbers of locals and visitors. Set in an underground cave within a verdant park, the specialty is merengue, salsa, and other forms of Latin music. There are three bars, two dance floors, and banquettes and chairs nestled into the rocky walls. The cover is $8.40 and includes one drink. It's open Wednesday to Sunday from 9pm; closing time varies.

Fantasy Disco, Avenida Heroes de Luperón 29, La Feria (✆ **809/535-5581**), is one of the capital's most popular dance clubs, about a block inland from the Malecón. Once you get past the vigilant security staff, you'll find lots of intimate nooks and crannies, a small dance floor, and one of the country's best-chosen medleys of nonstop merengue music. Entrance is free, and beer costs $2.10 to $2.80 a bottle. The place is open daily from 6pm to 4am.

Jet Set, Centro Comercial El Portal, Avenida Independencia (✆ **809/533-9707**), is one of the capital's most formal and elaborate nightclubs, admitting couples only, and

nobody who is too rowdy. Most of the tables and chairs slope down toward an amphitheater-style dance floor, giving the place the feel of a bullfighting arena. The collection of live orchestras that play here is better than anywhere else in town. Entrance costs between $8.40 and $34, depending on the artist. The Jet Set takes off at 9pm and flies until the early morning.

Rolling the Dice

Santo Domingo has several major casinos, all of which are open nightly until 4 or 5am. Gambling here is a very minor attraction, and the odds are pretty much against you. If gambling is your raison d'être, you'd do better to plan a holiday in Puerto Rico.

The **Majestic Casino** in the Malecón Center, Av. George Washington 500 (✆ **809/687-4853**), manages to be somehow glittery but tasteful at the same time; it isn't the most animated casino in the capital, and on quiet nights it can be a bit staid, but you'll quickly get the feeling that it's deep into the process of finding a clientele of its own. It's open daily 4pm to 4am.

The **Renaissance Jaragua Hotel & Casino,** Av. George Washington 367 (✆ **809/535-9292**), has the most razzmatazz, and it's where Las Vegas–style gamblers converge to lose big bucks. You can't miss the brightly flashing sign; it's the most dazzling light along the Malecón. You can wager on blackjack, baccarat, roulette, and slot machines in either Dominican pesos or U.S. dollars. Daily hours are 4pm to 4am.

Another casino is at the **Hispaniola Hotel,** Avenida Independencia (✆ **809/221-7111**), open daily noon to 5am. One of the most stylish choices is the **Casino Diamante,** in the Meliá Santo Domingo Hotel & Casino, Av. George Washington 361 (✆ **809/682-2102**). Its bilingual staff will help you play blackjack, craps, baccarat, and keno, among other games. There's also a piano bar. The casino is open daily noon to 6am.

Grenada

This sleepy island has friendly people, a lush interior that includes Grant Etang National Park, and the lovely and popular white sands of Grand Anse Beach. Crisscrossed by nature trails and filled with dozens of secluded coves and sandy beaches, Grenada has moved beyond the political turbulence of the 1980s. It's not necessarily for the serious party person and definitely not for those seeking action at the casino. Instead, it attracts visitors who like snorkeling, sailing, fishing, and doing nothing more invigorating than lolling on a beach under the sun.

The "Spice Island," Grenada is an independent, three-island nation (the other two islands are Carriacou, the largest of the Grenadines, and Petite Martinique). Grenada has more spices per square mile than any other place in the world: cloves, cinnamon, mace, cocoa, tonka beans, ginger, and a third of the world's supply of nutmeg. "Drop a few seeds anywhere," the locals will tell you, "and you have an instant garden." The interior is like a jungle of palms, oleander, bougainvillea, purple and red hibiscus, crimson anthurium, bananas, breadfruit, ferns, and palms.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Grand Anse Beach,** one of the most spectacular in the Caribbean, 3km (1¾ miles) of sugar-white sand opening onto a sheltered bay. Gin-clear waters against a backdrop of swaying palms.
- **St. George's,** the capital of Grenada, a landlocked inner harbor—actually the crater of a long dead volcano—is the prettiest capital in the Caribbean. It's known for its colorful waterfront, the Carenage, dating from the 18th century.
- **Grand Etang National Park,** the host of one of the most spectacular rainforests in the Caribbean. Found deep in the lush, tropical, and mountainous interior of Grenada, this park and forest reserve is riddled with fishing streams, panoramic lookout points, and miles of marked hiking trails.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

In the United States, contact the **Grenada Tourist Office** at P.O. Box 1668, Lakeworth, FL 33460 (✆ **800/927-9554** or 561/588-8176).

In London, contact the **Grenada Board of Tourism,** 11 Blades Court, 121 Deodar Rd., London SW15 2NU (✆ **020/8877-4516**).

On the island, pick up maps, guides, and general information at the **Grenada Board of Tourism,** Bums Point, in St. George's (✆ **473/440-2279**), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm.

You can find information on the Web at **www.grenadagrenadines.com**.

Fun Facts **Carnival on Grenada**

The second weekend of August brings colorful Carnival parades, music, and dancing. The festivities begin on Friday, continuing practically nonstop through Tuesday. Steel bands and calypso groups perform at Queen's Park. **Jouvert,** one of the highlights of the festival, begins at 5am on Monday with a parade of Djab Djab/Djab Molassi, devil-costumed figures daubed with molasses. (***Be warned:*** Don't wear nice clothes to attend this event—you may get sticky from close body contact.) The Carnival finale, a gigantic "jump-up" (like a hoedown), ends with a parade of bands from Tanteen through the Carenage into town.

GETTING THERE

Point Salines International Airport lies at the southwestern toe of Grenada. The airport is a 5- to 15-minute taxi ride from most of the major hotels.

American Airlines (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 473/444-2222; www.aa.com) flies from New York or Miami to San Juan, where you can take an **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300**) shuttle flight into Grenada. **US Airways** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada, or 473/439-0681; www.usairways.com) has weekly flights from Philadelphia.

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) flies to Grenada every Tuesday and Friday from London's Gatwick Airport, making a single stop at Antigua en route.

Air Jamaica (✆ **800/523-5585** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airjamaica.com) offers nonstop flights from New York to Grenada two to three times a week.

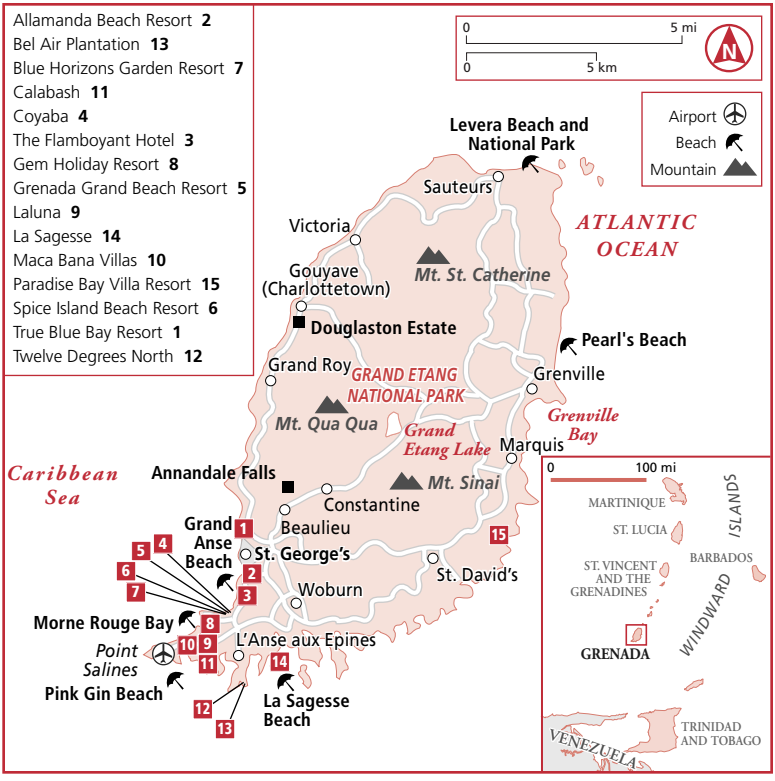
LIAT (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428] in most of the Caribbean, or 473/440-3967; www.liatairline.com), which early in the millennium incorporated the corporate structures of the regional airlines formerly known as Caribbean Star and SVG into its orbit, flies between Grenada, Carriacou, Petit Martinique, and several neighboring islands in the southern Caribbean. LIAT's twin hubs, into which most of the routes on its network are funneled, include both Antigua and Barbados.

Finally, **Virgin Atlantic Airways** (✆ **800/821-5438** in the U.S. and Canada, or 800/744-7477 in Grenada; www.virgin-atlantic.com) flies nonstop once a week from London's Heathrow Airport.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Taxi rates are set by the government. Most arriving visitors take a cab at the airport to one of the hotels near St. George's, at a cost of $18. Add $4 to the fare from 6pm to 6am. You can also use most taxi drivers as a guide for a day of sightseeing; negotiate a price beforehand.

BY RENTAL CAR ***Remember:*** Drive on the left. A U.S., British, or Canadian driver's license is valid on Grenada; however, you must obtain a local permit, costing $11. These permits can be bought either from the car-rental company or from the traffic department at the Carenage in St. George's. The Carenage is both the walkway and the road that loops around the horseshoe-shaped St. George's Harbour. It is the capital's principal thoroughfare.



Try **Dollar Rent-a-Car,** at the airport (✆ **800/800-4000** in the U.S. and Canada, or 473/444-4786; www.dollar.com). You can also find a branch of **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S.; www.avis.com) at the airport, as well as an office for **Thrifty** (✆ **800/847-4389** in the U.S., or 473/847-4984; www.thrifty.com).

Warning: There's such a thing as Grenadian driving machismo; the local drivers take blind corners with abandon. An extraordinary number of accidents are reported in the lively local paper. Gird yourself with nerves of steel, and be on the lookout for children and pedestrians when driving at night. Many foreign visitors, in fact, find any night driving hazardous.

BY BUS Minivans, charging 60¢ to $2.40, are the cheapest way to get around. The most popular run is between St. George's and Grand Anse Beach. Most minivans depart from Market Square or from the Esplanade area of St. George's.

Fast Facts Grenada

Banks Banks in St. George's, the capital, include **First Caribbean International Bank,** at Church and Halifax streets (✆ **473/440-3232**); **Scotiabank,** on Halifax Street (✆ **473/440-3274**); the **Public Bank of Grenada,** at Halifax and Hillsborough streets (✆ **473/440-3566**); and the **Grenada Cooperative Bank,** on Church Street (✆ **473/440-2111**). Most have ATMs that, in virtually every case, distribute only Eastern Caribbean dollars. Banking hours are usually Monday through Thursday from 8am to 3pm and Friday from 8am to 5pm.

Currency The official currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$),** which trades at a rate of approximately EC$2.70 to US$1 (stated differently, EC$1 = 37¢), and at a rate of approximately EC$4 = £1 (stated differently, EC$1 = 25p). However, U.S. dollars are widely accepted on island. Always determine which dollars, EC or U.S., you're talking about when someone on Grenada quotes you a price. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents A valid passport is required of U.S., British, and Canadian citizens entering Grenada, plus a return or ongoing ticket. Additionally, a valid U.S. passport is now required for readmission into the U.S.

Electricity Electricity is 220–240-volt AC (50 cycles), so transformers and adapters will be needed for U.S.-made appliances.

Embassies & High Commissions The **U.S. Embassy** is located at L'Anse aux Epines Salines, St. George's (✆ **473/444-1173**). The **British High Commission** is on Church Street, St. George's (✆ **473/440-3536**).

Emergencies Dial ✆ **911** for police, fire, or an ambulance.

Hospital **St. George's General Hospital,** located on Grandetang Road, St. George's (✆ **473/440-2051**), has an X-ray department and operating room. Private doctors and nurses are available on call.

Language English is commonly spoken. Creole English, a mixture of several African dialects, English, and French, is spoken informally by most.

Pharmacies Try **Gittens Pharmacy,** which maintains its central headquarters on Halifax Street in St. George's and a branch on Wall Street in Grand-Anse (✆ **473/440-2165** for both branches), is open at both branches Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm (Thurs until 5pm), and Saturday 8am to 3pm.

Post Office The general post office, at the Pier, St. George's, is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm.

Safety Street crime occurs here, tourists have been victims of armed robbery in isolated areas, and thieves frequently steal U.S. passports and alien registration cards in addition to money. Muggings, purse snatchings, and other robberies occur in areas near hotels, beaches, and restaurants, particularly after dark. Don't leave valuables unattended at the beach. Be cautious when walking after dark, or take a taxi. Report a stolen or lost passport immediately to the local police and the embassy.

Taxes At press time, there was a 10% VAT (value-added tax) imposed on food and beverages, but be warned in advance that during the lifetime of this edition,

it might be raised to 15%. Additionally, there's an 8% room tax. You'll pay a departure tax of $19 when you leave the island.

Telephone The area code for all of Grenada is **473.** You can call to or from Grenada as you would to or from any other area code in North America. Public phone and fax services are available at the Carenage offices of **Grenada Cable & Wireless** in St. George's (✆ **473/440-1000** for all offices). The office is open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 5pm, and Friday from 8am to 4pm.

Time Grenada is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, which means it's usually 1 hour ahead of the U.S. East Coast—except during daylight saving time, when the clocks are the same.

Tipping A 10% service charge is added to most restaurant and hotel bills. No additional tip is expected.

Water Stick to bottled water.

Weather Grenada has two distinct seasons: dry and rainy. The dry season is from January to May; the rest of the year is the rainy season, although the rainfall doesn't last long. The average temperature is 80°F (27°C). Because of constant trade winds, there's little humidity.

2 WHERE TO STAY

Whether you're looking for a kitchenette apartment; a small, intimate inn; or a major resort, you'll find it waiting for you in Grenada, which has some of the best and most varied accommodations in the southern Caribbean. Unless you want to stay in an atmospheric inn tucked away somewhere, opt for a hotel lined up along Grand Anse Beach. All you'll have to do is walk out the door and head for the ocean.

Your hotel or inn will probably add a service charge of 10% to your bill—ask about this in advance.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Bel Air Plantation ★★ (Finds) This secluded hideaway stands on a 7-hectare (17-acre) tract of lush, sloping land on the southwestern side of the island. Beautifully integrated into an almost junglelike terraced waterfront landscape, this is a coterie of vibrantly colored gingerbread cottages built up and down the hillside overlooking St. David's Harbour. Surrounded by tropical gardens, each of the airy, spacious accommodations offers privacy and old-world charm, but also modern amenities. Each unit is furnished with its own character and personality, everything centering on a "waterfront village," complete with a restaurant, bar, gift shop, and a combination delicatessen and cafe. Even the simplest accommodations here, the cottages, are among the best-furnished accommodations on the island. You can live higher on the hog by renting one of the two-bedroom villas with spacious master bedrooms and living rooms furnished in wicker and Indonesian teak.

St. David's Harbour, St. David's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **866/504-3359** or 473/444-6305. Fax 473/444-6316. www.belairplantation.com. 11 units. Winter $375 cottage for 2, $475 villa for 2, $675 2-bedroom villa for 4; off season $295 cottage for 2, $380 villa for 2, $520 2-bedroom villa for 4. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; kayaks; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Calabash ★★ Set within a sinuously curved building that straddles a landscaped 3-hectare (7½-acre) beach, the posh and elegant Calabash is one of the leading boutique hotels on Grenada, even though the Spice Island Inn surpasses it in style and cutting-edge amenities. Everything is refined and low key—nothing splashy. It occupies an isolated section of L'Anse aux Epines (Prickly Bay) 8km (5 miles) south of St. George's and only minutes from the airport. Foremost among the multitude of shrubs here are the scores of beautiful *calabashes* (gourds) for which the resort was named. The eight private plunge-pool suites and 22 whirlpool-bath suites all have verandas and either one king-size bed or two double beds.

L'Anse aux Epines (P.O. Box 382), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **866/978-6194** or 473/444-4334. Fax 473/444-5050. www.calabashhotel.com. 30 units. Winter $570–$750 double, $1,000 suite; off season $295–$405 double, $660 suite. Children 16 and under stay free in parent's room. Dinner $65 per person extra. Rate includes breakfast. AE, MC, V. Children 12 and under not permitted Jan to mid-Mar. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; golf privileges; exercise room; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court; sailboat rentals; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Laluna ★★ One of Grenada's best hotels lies on an isolated, beautiful beach at Quarantine Point, near the extreme southern tip of the island. Designed along architectural lines you might expect in Indonesia, the resort consists of 16 thatch-covered, wood-and-stone-sided cottages, each with a small pool, artwork, and fabric-swathed four-poster beds imported from Bali. Scattered up and down a hillside, about 1.5km (1 mile) north of the Port Salines airport, they lie within a 2-minute walk of the beach. Bathrooms are light, airy, tropical affairs, often open to the breezes. The resort's social and architectural centerpiece is a clubhouse, the site of big verandas.

The resort is a glittery, hedonistic niche. The restaurant (p. 314), which is open to nonresidents who phone in advance, is less than 12m (39 ft.) from the beach.

Morne Rouge (P.O. Box 1500), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **866/452-5862** in the U.S., or 473/439-0001. Fax 473/439-0600. www.laluna.com. 16 cottages. Winter $775–$1,150 double; off season $415–$885 double. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $90 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bikes; exercise room; room service; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar, plunge pools (in some), Wi-Fi.

Maca Bana Villas ★ This is the most charming cottage colony on Grenada. It consists of seven artfully designed, artfully decorated, self-contained, self-catering cottages, clustered together on a hillside high above the sea, each with sprawling decks set amid verdant landscapings, and each themed in ways to correspond to the fruit trees that flourish nearby. The place is especially appropriate for people who seek privacy and independence. The smartest way to handle a rental here involves a phone dialogue with Rebecca Thompson, the British co-owner and artist who decorated each of the cottages. Expect one-of-a kind decor, panoramic views, a supremely upscale kitchen, a private hot tub, and an environment that's conducive to relaxation and romance.

Point Salines, P.O. Box 496, St. George's G.P.O. Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/439-5355.** Fax 473/439-6429. www.macabana.com. 7 units. Winter $490–$581 double, $673 villa for 4; off season $295–$391 double, $487 villa for 4. *In room:* Kitchens, ceiling fans, TV, Wi-Fi.

Spice Island Beach Resort ★★★ This is the most desirable resort in Grenada, the yardstick by which every other hotel on island is compared. Its location along a 360m (1,181-ft.) expanse of Grand Anse Beach is unequaled. The main house, a rambling series of open-air verandahs and gracefully rambling arcades, is reserved for dining, socializing, sunbathing, and dancing. Of the accommodations, we prefer the location of the Sea

Grape beach suites, but even more, we like the layout of the intimate pool suites, which are a few steps back from the beach. Least expensive are the second-floor suites, each of which has a terrace overlooking the ocean and the garden; 17 units have private plunge pools and 4 offer private saunas.

Grand Anse Beach (P.O. Box 6), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-4258.** Fax 473/444-4807. www.spiceislandbeachresort.com. 64 units. Winter $850–$875 double, $1,200–$1,675 suite; off season $700–$775 double, $850–$1,265 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. Children 4 and under stay free in parent's room; children 5–11 $165 extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; complimentary greens fees at Grenada Golf Course; fitness center; swim-up Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; spa; tennis court; free use of Hobie Cats; kayaks; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

EXPENSIVE

Blue Horizons Garden Resort ★ Lying 8km (5 miles) south of Point Salines Airport, this is an eco-tourist resort, with energy-saving toilets, solar heaters, and a reputation for housing young U.K.- and U.S.-based families. A short walk from Grand Anse Beach, the resort also attracts both scuba divers and nature enthusiasts. Each efficiently furnished unit comes with a private terrace and a small kitchenette. Rentals are in two configurations—one with a king-size bed and pullout bed settee, the other with two queen beds plus a pullout. Trees and tropical plantings are spread across the handsomely landscaped 2.5-hectare (6¼-acre) grounds. It is estimated that nearly two dozen species of birds consider the property as home.

Grand Anse, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-4316.** Fax 473/444-2815. www.grenadabluehorizons.com. 32 units. Winter $210–$230 double; off season $155–$165 double. Extra person winter $60, off season $45. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Coyaba ★ On a flat, meticulously landscaped 2-hectare (5-acre) site on Grand Anse Beach, this is an upper-middle-bracket resort whose name means "heaven" in Arawak. Permeated with a Carib/Arawak theme, it evokes a white-walled Iberian-inspired apartment compound with lots of bustle. Set amid the densest concentration of resort hotels on the island, it lies 10km (6¼ miles) from St. George's and 5km (3 miles) north of the airport. The hotel has across-the-water views of town and of St. George's Harbour. All units have double beds plus verandas or patios.

Grand Anse Beach (P.O. Box 336), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **866/783-5413** or 473/444-4129. Fax 473/444-4808. www.coyaba.com. 80 units. Winter $360 double; off season $240 double. Extra person $50 winter, $25 off season. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $77. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 open-air restaurants; 2 bars (1 swim-up); golf; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; canoes; sailing; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Grenada Grand Beach Resort ★ Set on an 8-hectare (20-acre) tract of lush terrain, this resort stands within mature gardens upon a desirable stretch of white-sandy beachfront. Guests, often groups, are ushered along garden paths to the various two- and three-story annexes containing the bedrooms, the floors of which are covered with either ceramic or marble tiles and furnished with English (usually Queen Anne–style) mahogany bed frames, dressers, and armoires. Each has a balcony or patio. The beachview rooms are the most desirable, naturally. The swimming pool here, incidentally, is the largest and most dramatic in Grenada, replete with waterfalls, two Jacuzzis, and a swim-up bar.

Grand Anse Beach (P.O. Box 441), Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-4371.** Fax 473/444-4800. www.grenadagrand.com. 240 units. Winter $185–$295 double, $700–$950 suite; off season $160–$220 double, $470–$690 suite. Children 16 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3

bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; fitness center; 2 Jacuzzis; 2 pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts; diving; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

True Blue Bay Resort This resort takes its name from an old indigo plantation that once stood here, but panoramic views of Prickly Bay's blue waters make the name appropriate today as well. English-born Russ Fielding and his South American–born wife, Magdelena, have infused the place with an Anglo-Hispanic charm that's vaguely reflected in the rooms' decor. Housing options include one-bedroom apartments with verandas overlooking the bay, or two-bedroom cottages nestled in tropical gardens. The accommodations are tastefully furnished in pastels and tropical rattan pieces.

Old Mill Rd., True Blue (P.O. Box 1414), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **888/883-2482** or 473/443-8783. Fax 473/444-5929. www.truebluebay.com. 31 units. Winter $220–$336 double; off season $147–$209 double. Extra person $55. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; exercise room; 2 outdoor pools; room service; dive shop; yacht charter; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Twelve Degrees North ★★ On a very private beach, this cluster of spotlessly clean efficiency apartments is owned and operated by Joseph and Patricia Gaylord, who personally greet visitors. Members of the staff cook breakfast, prepare lunch (perhaps pumpkin soup and flying fish), do the cleaning and laundry, and fix regional specialties for dinner (which you can heat up for yourself later). A housekeeper/cook, assigned to each unit, arrives as early as 8am (you determine the exact time) to perform the thousand small kindnesses that make Twelve Degrees North a favorite lair for repeat guests. All units are equipped with kitchens and large beds.

L'Anse aux Epines (P.O. Box 241), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆/fax **473/444-4580** (call collect to make reservations). www.twelvedegreesnorth.com. 8 units. Winter $225 1-bedroom apt for 2, $350 2-bedroom apt for 4; off season $165 1-bedroom apt for 2, $265 2-bedroom apt for 4. Extra person $60–$70. MC, V. No children 14 or under accepted. **Amenities:** Beach bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; tandem kayak; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

MODERATE

Allamanda Beach Resort ★ (Value) Opening onto a wide stretch of Grand Anse Beach, this is one of the best of the cost-conscious full-service operations on the island, with everything from a watersports center to a spa. Accommodations open onto views of the water. Units come with either a little terrace or a balcony. The decor is light and airy, in a Caribbean tropical motif, with tile floors, and, in some cases, whirlpool baths. Although its amenities, plush and posh, fall far short of, say, the Spice Island Inn or the Coyoba, the relatively low prices and good value ensure its ongoing popularity.

Grand Anse Beach (P.O. Box 27), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-0095.** Fax 473/444-0126. www.allamandaresort.com. 50 units. Year-round $140–$170 double; $250 suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; outdoor pool; room service; spa; tennis court; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenettes (in some), Wi-Fi.

The Flamboyant Hotel Well established and completely unpretentious, this hotel occupies a relatively barren hillside that slopes down to Grand Anse Beach. It's a complex of 13 separate buildings, each low slung, red roofed, and modern, and each focusing on the resort's centerpiece, an outdoor swimming pool that's adjacent to the beach. Each medium-size unit has a loggia-style balcony overlooking the beach, tile floors, good beds, and floral-patterned curtains and upholsteries. Each unit was conceived as a self-sufficient private apartment with kitchenette.

Grand Anse Beach (P.O. Box 214), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-4247.** Fax 473/444-1234. www.flamboyant.com. 68 units. Winter $150–$180 double, from $230 suite; off season $150–$170 double, from $180 suite. Extra person $30–$50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; game room; outdoor pool; room service; dive shop; kayaks; snorkeling equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenettes (in about 40 units), minibar.

INEXPENSIVE

Gem Holiday Resort (Kids) Opening onto Morne Rouge Beach, this complex of no-nonsense, ultrasimple, self-catering apartments is family-friendly, completely unpretentious, and, by island standards, reasonably priced. Its one- and two-bedroom apartments are a bit small, but they are fully equipped, with a kitchenette, comfortable beds, mahogany furnishings, and a private terrace opening onto the beach.

Morne Rouge Bay (P.O. Box 58), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-4224.** Fax 473/444-1189. www.gembeachresort.com. 18 units. Winter $155–$175 double or triple; off season $110–$130 double or triple. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Internet; dance club. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

La Sagesse ★ (Finds) On a tree-lined beach of black volcanic sand, 15km (9 1/4 miles) from the airport, La Sagesse is a small-scale, eco-friendly beach resort that includes a sea-fronting guesthouse; a simple, open-air restaurant serving Caribbean meals; a bar; and an art gallery. Nearby are trails for hiking and exploring, a haven for wading and shore birds, hummingbirds, hawks, and ducks. Rivers, mangroves, and a salt pond sanctuary enhance its natural beauty. Scuba and snorkeling and sailboat rentals can be arranged on-site. The most impressive building is an imposing "Great House," built as a vacation home for a prominent Englishman (Peregrine Brownlow, the second cousin of Queen Elizabeth II). The Manor House now contains five accommodations, each with high ceilings and comfortable beds.

St. David's (P.O. Box 44), St. George's, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/444-6458.** Fax 473/444-6458. www.lasagesse.com. 12 units. Winter $185–$230 double; off season $125–$155 double. Extra person $20. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; kayaks; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (1 room), ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

Paradise Bay Villa Resort ★ (Value) Surrounded by two good beaches on each side, this eco-friendly resort is a hidden-away retreat for the discerning traveler seeking comfort, good food, and an escape. This compound of villas is set on 3.2 lush hectares (8 acres), with forest trail hikes and easy walks along the beach readily available. It's an all-inclusive with fine island cooking with a French accent. House drinks, including occasional champagne, are served, and a roster of activities are featured, including massages, horseback riding, and such water sports as scuba diving. The midsize bedrooms are comfortably but rather simply furnished, the beds draped in mosquito netting plantation style.

Paradise Bay, Grenada, W.I. ✆ **473/405-8888.** www.paradisebayresort.net. Year-round $144–$182 per person. Rates all-inclusive. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; beach bar; outdoor pool; tennis court. *In room:* Ceiling fans, no phone.

3 WHERE TO DINE

EXPENSIVE

Coconut Beach Restaurant ★ FRENCH/CREOLE This informal restaurant occupies a green clapboard house set directly on the beach. From the dining room, you can watch the staff working in the exposed kitchen. They'll definitely be working on

callaloo soup, made with local herbs and blended to a creamy smoothness. The kitchen specializes in various kinds of lobster, including the classic served with garlic butter, and an imaginative stir-fry with ginger chili. Fish dominates, including a catch of the day served with mango chutney. Almost anything prepared with fresh conch is terrific, but we also like the chicken breast cooked in local herbs and lime juice.

Warning: Because the restaurant is close to several major hotels, many people have opted to walk along the beach to reach it. Don't! Tourists have been robbed and had their lives threatened by machete-carrying thugs. Even if it's a short ride, take a taxi.

Grand Anse Beach (about .8k m/½ mile north of St. George's). ✆ **473/444-4644.** Reservations recommended. Lunch platters $7–$11; main courses $14–$35. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–9:30pm.

La Belle Creole ★★ WEST INDIAN The inspired Creole cuisine and its romantic setting make this restored restaurant one of the island leaders. It's run by the Hopkins family, who still use recipes from the founding matriarch who for years was hailed as the island's finest chef, especially in her use of homegrown products. Set in the lush tropical gardens of the Blue Horizons resort, the restaurant offers both elegant surroundings and good service. Begin with the green banana soup (the finest version of this we've had). Lobster is prepared as you like it, and there are such other delights as a pork tenderloin with a spicy peanut sauce or fish mousse. Lunch is taken poolside.

At the Blue Horizons Garden Resort, Grand Anse. ✆ **473/444-4316.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast or lunch $8–$17; dinner main courses $20–$39. Daily 7:30–10am, 12:30–2:30pm, and 7–9pm.

Laluna ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL This is the restaurant that feeds, nourishes, and entertains the hedonistic international clientele of this stylish cottage compound. And it does so exceedingly well. You'll dine in a thatch-covered setting, adjacent to the sea and a swimming pool, enjoying the cooking of a Sicily-born chef with wide-ranging experience in Asia. The best dishes include seafood gnocchi; sushi; pasta *a l'amatriciana* (with salami, ham, tomatoes, capers, and olives); and seafood Benedetto, a medley of wine-and-tomato-soaked seafood served over rice. A perfectly grilled steak or lobster almost invariably appears on the menu.

In the Laluna Resort, Morne Rouge (P.O. Box 1500). ✆ **473/439-0001.** Reservations required. Main courses $26–$39. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–11pm.

Oliver's Restaurant ★ CREOLE/SEAFOOD Want to dine within one of Grenada's most stylish resorts, facing an uncrowded beachfront, protected from sudden tropical showers? The parapet here, built of imported pine and cedar, looks like a Le Corbusier rooftop. Some of the best hotel food on the island is served in this winning open-air setting. Dinners are elegant, candlelit affairs; lunches are more casual, although service is very attentive regardless of when you happen to show up. Local seafood is featured on the constantly changing menu. The most generous buffet on the island, a real Grenadian spread, is served on Friday, along with live entertainment.

Spice Island Beach Resort, Grand Anse Beach. ✆ **473/444-4258.** Reservations required for nonguests. Full breakfast $30, continental breakfast $20; lunch main courses $10–$27; 6-course fixed-price dinner $80. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10am, 12:30–3:00pm, and 7–9:30pm.

Red Crab ★ WEST INDIAN/INTERNATIONAL The food at the Red Crab isn't as good as that at other restaurants recommended here, but it's a fun, lively place to be at night, and many locals consider it a kind of landmark. Only a short taxi ride from the major hotels, it attracts visitors and locals alike and is especially popular with students from the medical college. Patrons can dine inside or out. The beefsteaks, especially the

pepper steak, are among Grenada's finest. Other offerings include local lobster tail; *lambi* (conch); and locally caught fish such as snapper, dolphin (mahimahi), and grouper. If you weren't old enough to have dined in the '50s, you can at least experience that decade's popular cuisine and order beef stroganoff, veal *cordon bleu,* or lobster Newburg.

L'Anse aux Epines. ✆ **473/444-4424.** Reservations required. Main courses $13–$35. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–2pm and 6–11pm.

Rhodes ★★★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD One of London's most exciting celebrity chefs, Gary Rhodes, has invaded Grenada. This chic and stylish restaurant is the most prestigious and manicured on the island. Rhodes came to Grenada to acquaint himself with its local produce and many spices. He then designed the menu around these flavors, and trained local chefs in his cooking style. The actual recipes change daily but feature seafood. In London, Rhodes is known for his daring twists and creative flavors, so expect some delightful surprises if you show up here.

In the Calabash Hotel, L'anse Aux Epines. ✆ **473/444-4334.** Reservations required. Main courses $29–$47. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–9:30pm.

MODERATE

Aquarium Beach Club & Restaurant ★★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL This is one of our favorite restaurants in Grenada, a whimsical, offbeat place that represents aspects of the West Indies and the funkiest charms of the homelands (England and Germany) of its owners. If Peter Pan were to design a Grenadian lair for himself, it would probably look like this combination of grotto and forest canopy with decking. It's the only custom-excavated restaurant on the island, carved as it was into a location midway between a cliff face, a jungle, and the beach. The menu is flavorful but unpretentious. Examples include calalloo cannelloni with Parmesan in a cream sauce, *spanakopita* (Greek-style puff pastry with callaloo and pesto), scallops wrapped in bacon with a bitter orange sauce, Creole curried chicken, and a pumpkin-and-ginger soup. Although this restaurant occupies a shadowy spot under a canopy of trees, a sun-flooded beach bar is steps away.

In the Maca Bana Villa Complex, on Magazine Beach, Point Salines. ✆ **473/444-1410.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$34. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 10am–10pm; Sun noon–9pm.

La Boulangerie FRENCH/ITALIAN Don't be deterred by the shopping center location, or the way this place resembles a coffee shop. It's an appropriate spot for a good breakfast or light lunch (served throughout the afternoon), and prices at dinner are very reasonable. In the early morning, visitors throng here for the freshly brewed coffee, pastries, and croissants. The lunch and dinner crowd devours well-stuffed baguettes, sandwiches, and pizzas.

Le Marquis Shopping Complex, Grand Anse Beach. ✆ **473/444-1131.** Sandwiches and pizzas $10–$16; dinner main courses $9.30–$27. No credit cards. Daily 8:30am–9:30pm.

The Nutmeg SEAFOOD/CREOLE/INTERNATIONAL Right on the harbor, the Nutmeg is an island staple, a burger, club sandwich, and seafood joint that's a rendezvous point for the yachting set. Its informal atmosphere is suitable for a snack or full-fledged dinner. The drinks are especially good; try one of the Grenadian rum punches. There's always fresh fish, and usually callaloo or pumpkin soup. *Lambi* (the ubiquitous conch) is done very well here.

The Carenage, St. George's. ✆ **473/440-2539.** Main courses $5.90–$26. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–11pm; Sun 4–11pm.

Belmont Estate ★ Finds GRENADIAN Here is a rare opportunity to dine on a 4-centuries-old working plantation, producing nutmeg and cocoa. The location of this 160-hectare (400-acre) property lies in the green mountains between the parishes of St. Patrick and St. Andrew in the northeast corner of the island. If you're touring the island, consider a luncheon stopover here to enjoy a plantation buffet of creatively prepared, home-cooked dishes. Many of the ingredients are grown on the estate, including the fresh fruit for the juices and fresh greens for the salads. The meal begins with a delectable homemade soup; followed by a choice of traditional chicken, beef, or mutton dishes; along with the catch of the day, everything enhanced by the locally grown vegetables. A scrumptious dessert brings an end to this skillfully blended and aromatic buffet seasoned with local spices. You can also tour the property from 9am to 4pm Sunday to Friday.

Belmot, St. Patrick. ✆ **473/442-9524.** Reservations recommended. Fixed-price lunch menu $15. MC, V. Sun–Fri noon–3pm.

Deyna's Tasty Food ★ Finds GRENADIAN This little eatery is a closely guarded secret among locals. It's reached by heading up Melville Street to a modest three-story building overlooking the sea. The chef, Deyna Hercules, resembles her namesake. Her savory stuffed crabs are the island's best, and you'll see her other specialties scribbled on a countertop chalkboard. She's known for her "fix up"—a sampling of the best food of the day, perhaps stewed fish, green plantains, and curried goat. She also serves Grenada's national dish, an "oil down," made with salted meat and breadfruit cooked in coconut milk. And where else could you get a tasty batch of *titiri,* minnow-size fish just plucked from the Caribbean? Wash them down with "bush tea" steeped from black sage leaves. Adventurous diners opt for one of the gamey specialties such as *manicou* (a cross between an opossum and a large rat).

Melville St., St. George's. ✆ **473/440-6795.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8.20–$11. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–7pm; Sun 10am–4pm.

La Sagesse ★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL Opening onto a sandy beach, this romantic open-air spot is one of the quirkiest places to dine on island. It is casually run and serves good food based on fresh ingredients. The seafood is some of the island's finest. You can order freshly made salads and well-stuffed sandwiches throughout the day. The *lambi* is an excellent choice, but on most nights, you can choose from a full range of fish, including mahimahi and grouper. In the evening, several Continental dishes appear. The restaurant also caters to vegetarians.

In the La Sagesse nature center, south of St. David's. ✆ **473/444-6458.** Reservations not required. Main courses $13–$22. MC, V. Daily 8am–10:30pm.

Morne Fendue Plantation House ★ Finds CREOLE This plantation house is the ancestral home of the late owner, Betty Mascoll. It was built in 1912 of carefully chiseled river rocks held together with a mixture of lime and molasses. Miss Mascoll died in 1998, but her loyal staff carries on her tradition. They need time to prepare food for your arrival, so it's imperative to give them a call to let them know you're coming by. Lunch is likely to include yam-and-sweet-potato casserole, curried chicken with lots of hot spices, and a hot pot of pork and oxtail. Because this is very much a private home, tipping should be done tactfully. Nonetheless, the hardworking cook and maid seem genuinely appreciative of a gratuity.

St. Patrick's (40km/25 miles north of St. George's). ✆ **473/442-9330.** Reservations required. Fixed-price lunch $19. No credit cards. Daily 12:30–4pm. Dinner served upon request. Follow the coastal road north out of St. George's; after you pass through Nonpareil, turn inland (east) and continue through Sauteurs and follow the signs to Morne Fendue.

Ocean Grill Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL This appealing masonry-and-wood-framed venue is propped on pilings above the waters of one of the Caribbean's most atmospheric harbors. The sides of the building are open to the view, the breeze, and the sense of big ships coming and going. Menu items include a roster of salads, burgers, and sandwiches, as well as more substantial fare such as a seasonal version of grilled chunks of lobster, each wrapped in bacon and served with rice or potatoes; conch kebabs with Dijon mustard and honey; grilled seafood and kebabs; and a mixed grill of chicken, steak, and lamb.

On the St. George's Harbourfront (Carenage). ✆ **473/440-9747.** Reservations not necessary. Lunch salads, platters, and burgers $5.60–$24; dinner main courses $20–$31. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–11pm.

Patrick's Local Homestyle Restaurant GRENADIAN Set one floor above street level, in a crumbling 1970s-era concrete house, this restaurant does a brisk trade with locals and yacht owners alike. It's not glamorous and it's anything but pretentious, but portions, as prepared by Patrick Levine, are large and flavorful, and many locals define it as their regular island bistro. It's been thriving in this unlikely spot since 2001, presenting a buffet-style cornucopia of as many as 15 to 20 different dishes every day, each served atop battered tables covered with linoleum, plastic tablecloths, and rusted metal chairs. Expect, as its name implies, strictly local cooking, including curried mutton, stewed beef, *lambi,* crayfish, rabbit, pork, chicken salad, and breadfruit salad.

Lagoon Rd., St. Georges. ✆ **473/440-0364.** Reservations not necessary. Fixed-price meals $22; main courses $11–$17. MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–10:30pm.

4 BEACHES

The best of Grenada's 45 beaches are in the southwestern part of the island. The granddaddy of them all is **Grand Anse Beach** ★★★, 3km (1 3/4 miles) of sugar-white sand fronting a sheltered bay. This beach is really the stuff of dreams—it's no surprise that many of the major resort hotels are here. A lot of visitors never leave this part of the island. Protected from strong winds and currents, the waters here are relatively safe, making Grand Anse a family favorite. The clear, gentle waters are populated with schools of rainbow-hued fish. Palms and sea-grape trees offer shade. Watersports concessions include water-skiing, parasailing, windsurfing, and scuba diving; vendors peddle coral jewelry, local crafts, and the inevitable T-shirts.

The beach at **Morne Rouge Bay** ★ is less popular but just as nice, with white sands bordering clear waters. Morne Rouge, noted for its calm waters and some of the best snorkeling in Grenada, is about 2km (1 1/4 miles) south of Grand Anse Bay.

Pink Gin Beach lies near the airport at Point Salinas. This is also a white-sand beach with clear waters, ideal for swimming and snorkeling. (No one seems to know why it's called Pink Gin Beach.) You can find a restaurant and kayak rentals here.

Also on Grenada's southern coast, **La Sagesse Beach** is part of La Sagesse nature center. This strip of gray-and-black volcanic sand is a lovely, tranquil area; between sojourns on the beach, you can go for walks through the nearby countryside. A small restaurant, set beneath a veranda-style roof, opens onto the beach.

If you like your waters more turbulent, visit the dramatic **Pearl's Beach,** north of Grenville on the Atlantic coast. The light-gray sand stretches for miles and is lined with palm trees. You'll practically have the beach to yourself.

Part of Levera National Park, **Levera Beach,** at the northeastern tip of the island, is one of the most beautiful on Grenada. Its sands front the Atlantic, which usually means rough waters. Many locals come here for Sunday picnics.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

DEEP-SEA FISHING Fishers visit from November to March in pursuit of both blue and white marlin, yellowfin tuna, wahoo, sailfish, and more. Most of the bigger hotels have a sports desk that arranges fishing trips. The **Annual Game Fishing Tournament,** held in January, attracts a number of regional and international participants. For more information, call Robert Miller at (✆ **473/444-2200**).

GOLF At the **Grenada Golf Country Club,** Woodlands (✆ **473/444-4128**), you can tee off on a 9-hole course with views of both the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic. Greens fees are only $25 for 9 holes, or $40 if you want to play it twice (to get 18 holes). Hours are Monday to Saturday 8am to 6pm.

HIKING Grenada's lushness and beauty make it one of the best Caribbean islands for hiking. If you have time for only one hike here, schedule it for points within the **Grand Etang National Park and Forest Preserve** ★ (✆ **473/440-6160**). Its sheer scenic beauty makes the **Lake Circle Trail** our top choice on the island. The trail follows a 60-minute circuit along Grand Etang Lake, the crater of an extinct volcano, amid a forest preserve and bird sanctuary. You're likely to see the yellow-billed cuckoo and the emerald-throated hummingbird. The park is also a playground for Mona monkeys. Another easy hike, the **Morne LeBaye Trail,** originates at the park's center. The 15-minute trek affords a view of the 710m (2,329-ft.) Mount Sinai and the east coast. Of course, you can take longer hikes, perhaps to the peak of **Mount Qua Qua** at 712m (2,335 ft.), a trek which, round-trip, takes 3 to 3½ hours. Carry insect repellent and plenty of water, and remember that trails can be slippery after a rainfall (especially June–Nov), so wear good hiking shoes and bring a sense of humor.

You can hike the shorter trails independently, but you might wish to hire a guide for the ascent to Mount Qua Qua or the even more demanding hike to Mount Catherine, at 827m (2,713 ft.). The former costs $25 per person for a 4-hour hike, while the latter is $35. For information, call **Telfor Bedeau Hiking Tours** (✆ **473/442-6200**). Good hiking trails can also be found at **Levera National Park** (see "A Spectacular Rainforest & More," below).

SAILING Two large party boats, designed for 120 and 250 passengers, operate out of St. George's Harbour. The ***Rhum Runner*** and ***Rhum Runner II,*** c/o Best of Grenada, P.O. Box 188, St. George's, Grenada, W.I. (✆ **473/440-4386**), make one to three trips daily, depending on the season, with lots of emphasis on liquor, steel-band music, and good times. Conducted every morning and afternoon, the 3-hour tours coincide with the arrival of cruise ships and, as such, tend to be packed with passengers, but independent travelers are welcome if space is available. Depending on advance bookings, evening tours on Friday and Saturday from 7:30pm to midnight are much more frequently attended by island locals and are more bare-boned, louder, and usually less restrained. The cost is $15 per person.

SCUBA DIVING AND SNORKELING Grenada provides divers with submarine gardens, exotic fish, and coral formations, sometimes with visibility stretching to 36m (118 ft.). Off the coast is the wreck of the ocean liner *Bianca C,* which is nearly 180m (590 ft.) long. Novice divers can stick to the west coast of Grenada, while more experienced divers might search out sights along the rougher Atlantic side.

Aquanuts, in the True Blue Bay, Grand Anse Beach (✆ **473/444-1126;** www.aquanutsgrenada.com), has night dives or two-tank dives for $55 to $95, respectively; PADI instructors offer an open-water certification program for $460 per person. They also offer **snorkeling trips** (1½–2 hr.) for $26. You can rent snorkel gear as well, even if you don't take the boat ride. Giving Aquanuts serious competition is affable **Eco-Dive,** at the Coyaba Beach Resort on Grand Anse Beach (✆ **473/444-7777** or -4129; www.ecodiveandtrek.com). There's a PADI instructor on-site and the dive boat is well equipped. Both scuba diving and snorkeling jaunts to panoramic reefs and ship wrecks teeming with marine life are offered. A single dive costs $50, and a six-dive package, $240. A **snorkeling trip** can be arranged for $32. Diving instruction, including a resort course, is available. **Dive Grenada,** Flamboyant Hotel, Grande Anse Beach (✆ **473/444-1092;** www.divegrenada.com), offers dives daily at 10am and 2pm, costing $50 for a one-tank dive and $95 for a two-tank dive. Snorkeling trips are also available for $35. The organization sank two rusted, terminally aged ships offshore as a catalyst for the creation of some underwater reefs.

If you'd rather strike out on your own, drive to Woburn and negotiate with a fisher for a ride to **Glovers Island,** an old whaling station, and snorkel away. Glovers Island is an uninhabited rock spit a few hundred yards offshore from the hamlet of Woburn.

TENNIS Most big resorts have tennis courts. There are public courts, as well, both at Grand Anse and in Tanteen in St. George's.

YACHT CHARTERS Grenada is increasingly known for the number and size of its yacht regatta. As such, the island is home to yacht-racing events throughout the year, including the Port Louis Grenada Sailing Festival in late January (www.grenadasailingfestival.com), the Easter Round the Island Regatta (www.aroundgrenada.com), and the Carriacou Regatta Festival in late July (www.carriacouregatta.com).

If you'd like to sail the waters yourself, **Horizon Yacht Charters** at True Blue Resort, Old Mill Road, True Blue (✆ **473/439-1000;** www.horizonyachtcharters.com), specializes in bareboat or crewed charters, including 3-day trips to the Grenadines, arguably the best sailing waters in the Caribbean. Daily rates begin at $342, weekly rates at $2,395.

6 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

ST. GEORGE'S & VICINITY

The capital city of Grenada, **St. George's** ★★ is the prettiest harbor town in the West Indies. Its landlocked inner harbor is actually the deep crater of a long-dead volcano. In the town, you can see some of the most charming Georgian colonial buildings in the Caribbean, still standing despite a devastating hurricane in 1955. The steep, narrow hillside streets are filled with houses of ballast bricks, wrought-iron balconies, and sloping, red-tile roofs. Many of the pastel warehouses date from the 18th century. Frangipani and flamboyant trees add to the palette of color. The port, which some compare to Portofino, Italy, is flanked by old forts and bold headlands. Among the town's attractions are

an 18th-century pink **Anglican church,** on Church Street, and the **Market Square,** where colorfully attired farm women offer even more colorful produce for sale. **Fort George,** on Church Street, built by the French, stands at the entrance to the bay, with subterranean passageways and old guardrooms and cells.

Everyone strolls along the waterfront of the **Carenage** ★ on the inner harbor, or relaxes on its pedestrian plaza, with seats and hanging planters providing shade from the sun. The best place to sit and have a drink is the **Nutmeg** (p. 315). From its large open windows you'll have great views of the harbor activity. The hamburgers and rum drinks are great, too. On this side of town, the **Grenada National Museum,** at the corner of Young and Monckton streets (✆ **473/440-3725**), is set in the foundations of an old French army barracks and prison built in 1704. Small but interesting, it houses finds from archaeological digs, petroglyphs, native fauna, the first telegraph installed on the island, a rum still, and memorabilia depicting Grenada's history. The most comprehensive exhibit traces the native culture of Grenada. Hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 4:30pm, Saturday from 10am to 1pm. Admission is $5 for adults, $1 ages 6 to 16, and free 5 and under.

You can drive up to Richmond Hill and **Fort Frederick** (✆ **473/440-6158**), begun by the French in 1779, completed by the English in 1791, and radically restored by the Canadian government in the late 1990s. From its battlements is a superb view of the harbor and yacht marina. Admission is $1 and includes the services of a guide, who will expect a small tip. Access to the fort is Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm.

An afternoon tour of St. George's and its environs might take you into the mountains north of the capital. A 15-minute drive delivers you to **Annandale Falls** ★, a tropical wonderland, with a cascade about 15m (49 ft.) high. You can enjoy a picnic surrounded by liana vines, elephant ears, and other tropical flora and spices. The **Annandale Falls Centre** (✆ **473/440-2452**) offers gift items, handicrafts, and samples of the indigenous spices of Grenada. Nearby, an improved trail leads to the falls, where you can enjoy a refreshing swim. Swimmers can use the changing cubicles at the falls for free. The center is open daily 8am to 4pm.

A SPECTACULAR RAINFOREST & MORE

If you head north out of St. George's along the western coast, you can take in beaches, spice plantations, and the fishing villages that are so typical of Grenada. You'll pass through **Gouyave,** a spice town that's the center of the nutmeg and mace industry. At the **Gouyave Nutmeg Processing Cooperative,** Gouvave, St. John (✆ **473/444-8337**), near the entrance to Gouyave, huge quantities of the spice are aged, graded, and processed. This is the best place to see spices being readied for market. Workers sit on stools in the natural light from the open windows of the aging factory, and laboriously sort the raw nutmeg and its byproduct, mace, into different baskets for grinding, peeling, and aging. Jams, jellies, syrups, and more are sold. Hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm; admission is $1.

In the northeast corner of the island (just east of Sauteurs) is palm-lined **Levera Beach,** an idyll of sand where the Atlantic meets the Caribbean. This is a great spot for a picnic lunch, but swimming can sometimes be dangerous. On the distant horizon you'll see some of the Grenadines. The 180-hectare (445-acre) **Levera National Park** ★ actually has several white-sand beaches for swimming and snorkeling, although the surf is rough here where the Atlantic meets the Caribbean. It's a **hiker's paradise,** although you should go hiking here only after you've hiked Grand Etang National Park and Forest Preserve (see "Hiking," above), which is more lush and of far greater interest. Levera Park

contains a mangrove swamp, a lake, and a bird sanctuary, where you might see a rare tropical parrot. Offshore are coral reefs and sea-grass beds.

Heading down the east coast of Grenada, you reach **Grenville,** the island's second city. If you pass through on a Saturday morning, you can enjoy the hubbub of the native produce market. There's also a fish market along the waterfront. A nutmeg factory here welcomes visitors. From Grenville, you can cut inland into the heart of Grenada. Here you're in a world of luxuriant foliage, and you pass along nutmeg, banana, and cocoa plantations.

In the center of the island, reached along the major interior road between Grenville and St. George's, is **Grand Etang National Park** ★★ (✆ **473/440-6160**), containing the island's spectacular rainforest. The entrance fee of $2 per person is, according to local officials, merely a means of registering the identities of whomever opts to wander around these isolated landscapes, just in case someone should be injured or lost. For information about hikes in the park, see "Hiking," above.

Our favorite attraction north of St. Georges is the **River Antoine Rum Distillery** ★, St. Andrew Parish (✆ **473/442-7109**), which offers a set of almost bizarre visuals, each ripped directly from the pages of the colonial Caribbean's mid-19th-century's Industrial Revolution. It's the oldest rum distillery in the world, replete with much of its original cane-crushing machinery and complicated network of siphons and distillation vats. Components of the facility include a late-18th-century water-powered mill whose groaning, creaking gears continue to mesh, connect, and crush the sugar cane. About 90 people are employed here, operating in low-tech, not particularly sanitary conditions. Tours depart whenever an interested observer happens to show up. Although tours are free, your guide will expect a tip of around $3. The finished product (River Antoine Rum) comes in strengths of 138 proof and 150 proof, and in the locally famous Rivers brand, an alcohol content so high that it's too flammable to pass through the security screening devices at airports. Clearly signposted from the coastal road, the distillery is open Monday to Saturday 9am to 4pm.

On your descent from the mountains, you'll pass hanging carpets of mountain ferns. Going through the tiny hamlets of **Snug Corner** and **Beaulieu,** you eventually come back to the capital.

7 SHOPPING

Everybody who visits Grenada goes home with a basket of **spices,** better than any you're likely to find in your local supermarket. Vendors will besiege you wherever you go. Their hand-woven panniers of palm leaf or straw are full of items grown on the island, including the inevitable nutmeg, as well as mace, cloves, cinnamon, bay leaf, vanilla, and ginger.

If you like to attend Caribbean markets as much as we do, head for **Market Square** ★, at the foot of Young Street in St. George's. The market is at its liveliest on Saturday morning but is also open Monday to Friday. It's best to go between 8am and noon. An array of handicrafts is for sale, but fresh spices are more plentiful.

For something really special, visit **Arawak Islands Ltd.** ★, Upper Belmont Road, in St. George's (✆ **473/444-3577;** www.arawak-islands.com), founded in 1986 by Angelia Clements, a German woman. From the raw materials of Grenada, especially nutmeg and cinnamon, she manufactures delectable tropical perfumes and toiletries. The company is

committed to natural products and minimal processing, and sells some items purchased from island companies and packaged here at the workshop.

If it's upscale, breezy, and insouciant resort wear you're looking to acquire, consider the twin retail outlets **Gatsby Male** and **Gatsby Female** (✆ **473/444-4258**), both of which lie a few steps from one another within the forecourt arcade of the previously recommended Spice Island Inn, on Grand Anse Beach. Inventories here include resort wear and bathing suits by Gottex, La Perla, and Paul & Shark.

Two crafts markets, which can be either bountiful sources of island crafts or sweaty, dusty repositories of things you'll eventually discard, include **The Spiceland Mall,** a 19-shop emporium on Grand Anse Beach, and the **Grand Anse Vendor Market** (✆ **473/439-6450**), also on Grand Anse Beach, wherein 80 vendors of spices, woodcarvings, batiks, and T-shirts are assembled into one intensely mercantile place.

There are dozens of souvenir shops on Grenada, but one which we find particularly appealing is the **Vineyhard D#1 Spice Shop** (✆ **473/425-5920**), within the cruise ship–friendly Esplanade Mall. Inside you'll find a staggering array of flavored rums, including sorrel, cinnamon, and passion fruit flavors, each distilled and bottled (in decorative, hand-painted flasks) in Grenada. Somewhat less potent are artfully decorated bottles of wine fermented from mango, sea grapes, and golden apples.

Tikal, Young Street, St. George's (✆ **473/440-2310**), is the best place to shop for regional art. Its matriarch and founder is grande dame Jeanne Fisher, an American expat who founded this shop in 1959. About 85% of the paintings on display are by Grenadians, some of them untutored, others the product of formal training. There's also a variety of arts and crafts from Mexico and Latin America.

The merchandise at **Art Fabrik,** Young Street, St. George's (✆ **473/440-0568**), is quirky and eccentric and, in most cases, very appealing—quite simply, the finest and most comprehensive collection of island-made batiks in Grenada. Garments made from this ancient Indonesian dyeing technique tend to be airy, breathable, and appropriate for resort wear. There's an array of dresses and shirts for men and women, as well as table linens whose random patterns evoke the airy spontaneity of the islands.

8 GRENADA AFTER DARK

Regular evening entertainment is provided by the resort hotels and includes steel bands, calypso, reggae, folk dancing, and limbo—even crab racing. Ask at your hotel desk to find out what's happening at the time of your visit.

The island's most popular nightspot is **Fantazia 2001,** Morne Rouge Beach (✆ **473/444-2288**). Although it gets progressively rougher as the evening progresses, it's air-conditioned, with state-of-the-art equipment, good acoustics, and fantastic lights, and plays the best in regional and international sounds. There are live shows Saturday. The cover ranges from $5 to $8.

Just as fun and a bit less gratuitously rowdy is **Club Banana,** True Blue, St. George's (✆ **473/444-4662**), down by the marina. Every Friday and Saturday night it operates a disco from 10pm to 2am, charging a cover of $13 to $17. Some visitors have proclaimed Club Banana as the best nightlife hangout on the island.

The **Beachside Terrace** and **The Owl Sports Pub,** both at the Flamboyant Hotel, Grand Anse (✆ **473/444-4247**), have an amicable and sometimes boisterous clientele, a pair of pool tables, two wide-screen TVs, and a penchant for broadcasting cricket or

soccer matches. They're the site of the island's longest happy hour (daily 4–7pm and again 11pm–midnight), during which hours prices are reduced by about 40%. Karaoke is featured Thursday and Friday nights beginning around 8:30pm. Full meals, including American burgers and Caribbean-style curries, are served in the Beachside Terrace daily from noon to 10:30pm.

Another favorite is **Aquarium Beach Club & Restaurant** ★ at Point Salines (✆ **473/444-1410**), which also serves delectable steaks (p. 315), with a special reputation for its Sunday barbecue specials. From the sprawl of decks open to the trade winds, you can enjoy the lights of St. George's Harbour here at night.

For those seeking culture, the 250-seat **Marryshow Folk Theatre** ★, Herbert Blaize Street near Bain Alley, St. George's (✆ **473/440-2451**), offers performances of Grenadian, American, and European folk music, drama, and West Indian interpretative folk dance. Tickets usually cost $11.

14

Guadeloupe

If you have time for only one French island, should it be Martinique or Guadeloupe? The question's a tough one. Martinique is more sophisticated, with more culture, but Guadeloupe has more diversity and calmer leeward bathing beaches. Its Creole cookery is every bit as good as that of the more celebrated Martinique. Columbus discovered Guadeloupe in 1493, 9 years before he found Martinique.

In Guadeloupe, two islands are linked by a drawbridge over the Rivière Salée, a river that wends the calmer Caribbean with the more turbulent Atlantic. Not only that, but you can also visit Guadeloupe's dependencies, the nearby islands of **Marie Galante, Iles des Saintes,** and **La Désirade.** The cluster is now being packaged as Les Isles de Guadeloupe.

The island is riddled with sandy beaches and a mountainous, lush interior terrain full of gorgeous scenery. The resorts are not as spectacular or plush as those on two other French islands, St. Martin and St. Barts, but there are some large first-class beachfront properties nonetheless. You can have an even better France-in-the-Tropics experience at small inns where locally prepared food and tranquillity prevail.

Lying 320km (198 miles) north of Martinique, Guadeloupe is part of the Lesser Antilles, dividing its land mass between **Grande-Terre,** the eastern island, full of rolling hills and sugar plantations; and **Basse-Terre** to the west, a rugged mountainous island dominated by the 1,444m (4,736-ft.) volcano, La Soufrière, which is still alive and dotted with banana plantations. Guadeloupe's mountains are covered with tropical forests, impenetrable in many places.

The French government is helping Guadeloupe to become more economically self-sufficient, although there is no major push among islanders to break away from the mother country. The island exports much of what it produces to France, including sugar, bananas, rum, and pineapple, but the income from these exports falls short of the money spent on imports. Therefore, Guadeloupe remains dependent on France for its survival. Help from France arrives in the form of aid, including health care and education, and Guadeloupéans depend on low-priced imports, including machinery, to keep its economy rolling.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Creole cuisine** like nowhere else in the world, including land crab with hot peppers and fresh coconut, freshwater crayfish, and mashed bananas and breadfruit.
- **Parc Naturel de Guadeloupe,** a 30,000-hectare (74,100-acre) park hailed by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve.
- **The Grand-Terre Riviera** with white-sandy beaches and the seaside resorts or **Gosier, Sainte-Anne,** and **Saint-François.**

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

For information before you go, contact the **French Government Tourist Office** (✆ **202/659-7779;** www.francetourism.com). There are offices at 444 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022 (✆ **212/838-7800**); 9454 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 715, Beverly Hills, CA 90212 (✆ **310/271-6665**); and 676 N. Michigan Ave., Ste. 3360, Chicago, IL 60611 (✆ **312/751-7800**).

GETTING THERE

To get to Guadeloupe, most U.S. travelers will have to fly elsewhere in the Caribbean and transfer. You can take an **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) flight to its hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and then get the one **American Eagle** flight daily on to Guadeloupe. There are also connections available through Martinique (see chapter 16). **Delta** (✆ **800/241-4141** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) also offers flights from Atlanta on Wednesday and Saturday.

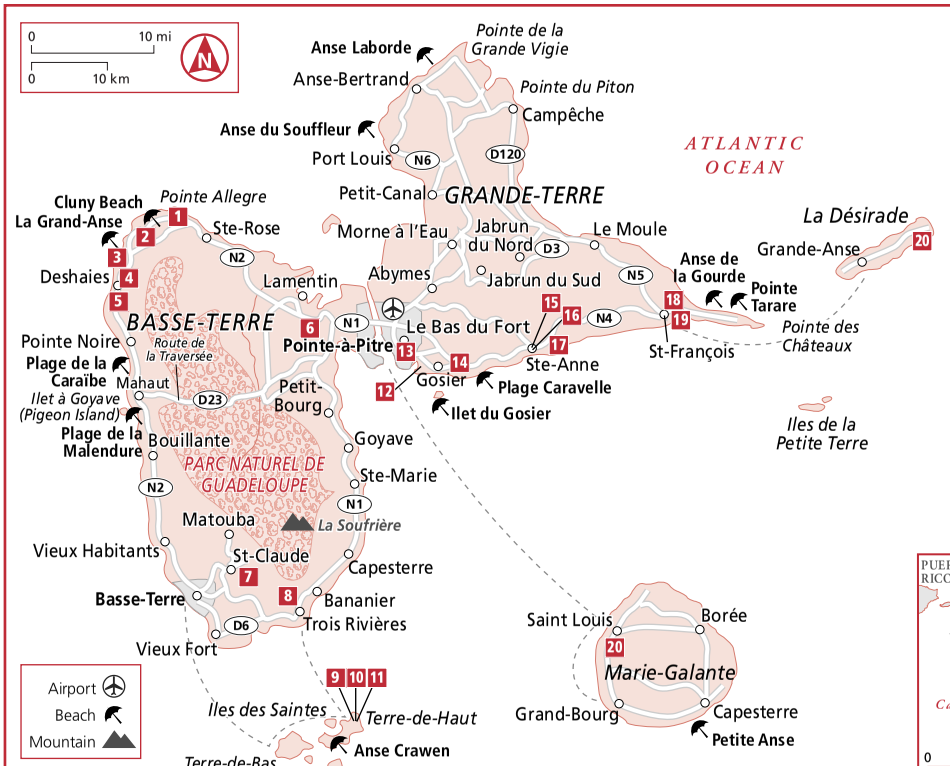
Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/21-12-77; www.aircanada.ca) flies between Montréal and Guadeloupe every Saturday year-round. Between December and April only, they also maintain an additional flight from Montréal and Guadeloupe every Wednesday. Passengers can also fly from Toronto on one of the daily nonstop flights to Barbados and transfer onto other carriers (usually LIAT), making the ongoing journey to points within the French West Indies.

Air France (✆ **800/237-2747** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airfrance.com) flies into Guadeloupe every day from Paris, with efficient connections from Britain and the rest of Europe. Air France also maintains direct service to Guadeloupe from Miami, via Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 3 days per week.

If you're already on the islands, you can wing into Guadeloupe on **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428] in most of the Caribbean, or 268/480-5601; www.liatairline.com), which flies from Antigua, St. Maarten, St. Croix, St. Lucia, Martinique, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad, and Dominica. **Air Caraïbes** (✆ **877/772-1005** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/82-47-00; www.aircaraibes.com) operates a half-dozen flights a day into Guadeloupe from Martinique, as well as at least one flight a day from St. Barts, French St. Martin, and Cayenne in French Guyana.

Consider arriving in Guadeloupe as many of the locals do, on one of the daily **ferryboats** operated by **Express des Iles** (✆ **590/91-11-05**), whose vessels originate every day in Fort-de-France, Martinique, at 2pm; make a 30-minute stopover in Dominica en route (departing from Dominica around 4pm); and then dock at the quays of Pointe-à-Pitre sometime around 5:45pm, depending on weather, tides, and the vagaries of island life.

One-way passage to Pointe-à-Pitre from Dominica costs 72€ per person each way; one-way passage to Guadeloupe from Martinique is 130€ and round-trip 180€, partly the result of government subsidies. For timetables and more information in Guadeloupe, call **Agence Penchard** (the local representative of Express des Iles) at ✆ **590/83-04-43.** For timetables and information in Martinique, contact Express des Iles directly at ✆ **596/63-05-45** (www.express-des-iles.com).



Bois Joli **10**
Club Med La Caravelle **15**
Eden Palm **17**
Habitation Grande Anse **4**
Hotel Fleur d'Épée **13**
Hôtel St-Georges **7**
Hôtel Saint-John Perse **6**
L'Auberge les Peitis Saints aux Anacardiers **9**
La Cocoteraie **19**
La Cohoba Hotel **11**
La Créole Beach Hôtel **14**
La Métisse **18**
La Sucrerie du Comté **1**
La Toubana **16**
Le Jardin Malanga **8**
Le Rayon Vert **5**
L'Oasis **20**
Oualiri Beach **20**
Résidence Hoteliére de la Pointe Batterie **3**
Sofitel Auberge de la Vieille Tour **12**
Tainos Cottages **2**

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR You may want to rent a car on Guadeloupe so that you can explore Basse-Terre; the loop around the island is one of the most scenic drives in the Caribbean. Car-rental kiosks at the airport are open to meet international flights. Rental rates at local companies may appear lower, but several readers have complained of mechanical problems, billing irregularities, and difficulties in resolving insurance disputes in the event of accidents. We recommend reserving a car in advance through **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/21-13-46; www.hertz.com) or **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/21-13-54; www.avis.com), both of which are headquartered at the airport. Many of the major hotels also have car-rental desks. You'll have to pay a one-time airport surcharge of 20€ and VAT (value-added tax) of 8.5%. Prices are usually 20% to 25% lower between March and early December, excepting July and August.

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, and there are several gas stations along the island's main routes. Because of the distance between gas stations in outlying regions, try not to let your gas gauge fall below the halfway mark when driving outside of the capital.

BY TAXI You'll find taxis when you arrive at the airport, but no limousines or buses. From 7pm until 6am, cabbies are legally entitled to charge you 40% more than the regular fare. Some taxis in Guadeloupe have meters, although the driver will either activate them or not, depending on a complicated set of parameters involving the time of day, your destination, and his whim, even though fares are technically regulated by the French government. If the taxi you're about to enter doesn't have a working meter, always agree on a price before getting in. Approximate fares are 28€ from the airport to the hotels of Gosier, or about 18€ from the airport to anywhere within Pointe-à-Pitre. Taxis can be contacted throughout Guadeloupe by calling **Radio Cabs** at ✆ **590/82-00-00.** It's possible, but very expensive, to sightsee by taxi. Usually, the concierge at your hotel will help you make arrangements. Fares are usually around 200€ for a 7-hour day for up to four passengers.

BY BUS Small buses link almost every hamlet to Pointe-à-Pitre. However, you may need to know some French to use the system. In Pointe-à-Pitre, you can catch a bus from the following departure points: If you're going anywhere in Basse-Terre, you'll depart from the Gare Routière de Bergevin. If the northern half of Grande-Terre is your destination, catch a bus at the Gare Routière de Mortenol. For the southern end of Grande-Terre, the buses depart from the *prolongement* (extension) of the Marché de la Darse. Infrequent and somewhat erratic service is available daily from 5:30am to 7:30pm. There is no direct bus service from the airport to Pointe-à-Pitre. To travel the entire island would cost around 5€. Many visitors find it easier, especially when they first arrive on Guadeloupe, to take a taxi.

Fast Facts Guadeloupe

Banks Banks on Guadeloupe are usually open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, but in recent years, some, but not all, as a means of coordinating their hours with those of their clients, have begun operating Monday to Friday 8am to noon and 2 to 3:30pm. There are about a dozen banks in Pointe-à-Pitre, most with ATMs (they're called *distributeurs des billets*).

Currency Because the territory of Guadeloupe falls under the same monetary system as mainland France, the island uses the **euro (€)** as its mode of exchange. The current rate of exchange is 1€ to US$1.30. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in euros.*

Customs Items for personal use, such as tobacco, cameras, and film, are admitted without formalities or tax if not in excessive quantity.

Documents U.S., British, or Canadian residents need a passport, plus a return or ongoing plane ticket.

Electricity The local electricity is 220-volt AC (50 cycles), which means that U.S.-made appliances will need a transformer and an adapter. Some of the big resorts may lend these to guests, but don't count on it.

Emergencies Call the **police** at ✆ **17.** To report a **fire** or summon an **ambulance,** dial ✆ **18.** For **medical emergencies,** dial ✆ **15.**

Hospitals There are five modern hospitals on Guadeloupe, plus about two dozen clinics. Hotels and the Guadeloupe tourist office can assist in locating English-speaking doctors. A 24-hour emergency room is at the **Centre Hôpitalier Universitaire de Pointe-à-Pitre,** Abymes (✆ **590/89-10-10**), on the northern fringe of Pointe-à-Pitre; for emergency services here, dial ✆ **15.**

Language The official language is French; Creole is the unofficial second language. English is spoken only in the major tourist centers, rarely in the countryside.

Liquor Laws Liquor is sold in grocery and liquor stores on any day of the week. It's legal to have an open container, though the authorities are very strict about littering, disorderly behavior, and drunk driving.

Pharmacies The pharmacies carry French medicines, and most over-the-counter U.S. drugs have French equivalents. Prescribed medicines can be purchased if you have the prescription with you. At least one drugstore is always open; the tourist office can tell you what pharmacies are open at what time.

Police In an emergency, call ✆ **17.** Otherwise, call ✆ **590/89-77-17.**

Safety Guadeloupe is relatively free of serious crime. But don't go wandering alone at night on the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre; by nightfall they are relatively deserted and might be dangerous. Purse snatching by fast-riding motorcyclists has been reported, so exercise caution.

Taxes A departure tax, required on scheduled flights, is included in the air fares. Hotel taxes are included in all room rates.

Telephone To call Guadeloupe from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **590** (the country code for Guadeloupe), then **590** again, and the rest of the local number, which will be six digits. If you want to call another island of the French Antilles, be aware that St. Barts, French St. Martin, and offshore dependencies of Guadeloupe such as Ile des Saints or La Désirade are all directly linked to the phone network of Guadeloupe. Consequently, no telephone prefix is required, and you can dial any of those islands simply by dialing the six-digit local phone number. But if you're on Guadeloupe and want to dial someone in

Martinique, you'll have to punch in the prefix for Martinique **(0596),** followed by the six-digit local number.

Time Guadeloupe is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (when it's 6am in New York, it's 7am on Guadeloupe). When daylight saving time is in effect in the U.S., clocks in New York and Guadeloupe show the same time.

Tipping Hotels usually add a 10% to 15% service charge. Restaurants always add a 15% service charge, and no additional tip is needed. Most taxi drivers who own their own cars do not expect a tip; if they've been especially helpful with your luggage, you might give them an additional 10%.

Water While on Guadeloupe, stick to bottled water only.

Weather The average temperature in Guadeloupe is 82°F (28°C) in summer, dropping to an average of 76°F (24°C) in winter. The rainiest months are between June and October.

2 POINTE-À-PITRE

The port and chief city of Guadeloupe, Pointe-à-Pitre, lies on Grande-Terre. Unfortunately, it doesn't have the old-world charm of Fort-de-France on Martinique, and what beauty it does possess is often hidden behind closed doors.

Having been burned and rebuilt so many times, the port now lacks character. Modern apartments and condominiums form a high-rise backdrop over jerry-built shacks and industrial suburbs. The rather narrow streets are crammed during the day with a colorful crowd that creates a permanent traffic jam. However, at sunset the town becomes quiet again and almost deserted. The only charm left is around the waterfront, where you half expect to see Bogie sipping rum at a cafe table.

Most visitors just drop in to Pointe-à-Pitre for **shopping.** It's best to visit the town in the morning (you can easily cover it in half a day), taking in the waterfront and outdoor market (the latter is livelier in the early hours).

The town center is **Place de la Victoire,** a park shaded by palm trees and poincianas. Here you'll see some old sandbox trees said to have been planted by Victor Hugues, the mulatto who organized a revolutionary army of both whites and blacks to establish a dictatorship. In this square he kept a guillotine busy, and the death-dealing instrument stood here until modern times.

With the completion of the **Centre Saint-John-Perse,** the waterfront of Pointe-à-Pitre has been transformed from a bastion of old warehouses and cruise-terminal buildings into an architectural complex comprising a hotel, three restaurants, 80 shops and boutiques, a bank, and the expanded headquarters of Guadeloupe's Port Authority. Named for Saint-John Perse, the 20th-century poet and Nobel Laureate who was born just a few blocks away, the center is designed in contemporary French Caribbean style, which blends with the traditional architecture of Pointe-à-Pitre. On the island, go to the local tourist office, the **Comité du Tourisme des Iles de la Guadeloupe,** Square de la Banque 5 (✆ **590/82-09-30;** www.go2guadeloupe.com), for maps, information, and advice.

Moments Your own Villa

If you'd like to rent a villa on island, contact **Aquarelle's Villas,** 1 Domaine de Nogent, Ste-Rose (✆/fax **590/68-65-23;** www.aquarelles-villas.com), which offers 15 luxurious villas on the north coast of Basse-Terre. Each bungalow has a private pool and direct beach access. Villas contain two to five bedrooms and are an excellent choice for families. They range in price from 165€ to 800€. Each unit contains a fully equipped kitchen and two or three bathrooms. Room service is available from an on-site restaurant serving French and Creole specialities.

French Caribbean International (✆ **800/322-2223** in the U.S. and Canada; www.frenchcaribbean.com) is the largest resource for villa rentals in the French West Indies, with a wide variety of accomodations. Cottages are for rent in both Basse-Terre and Grand-Terre, starting at 115€ a night.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Saint-John Perse Stay here only if you have business in town or need to be here for an early morning flight (it's 15 min. from the airport). This hotel rises four stories above the harbor front, near the quays. The small rooms are clean, simple, and furnished with locally crafted mahogany pieces. Very few have views of the sea. Bathrooms are small with no frills; about half have tub/showers. Once you check in, the laissez-faire staff will probably leave you alone until the end of your stay. There's a simple coffee shop/cafe on street level. To reach a beach, you'll have to travel 3km (1¾ miles) to the east to Le Bas du Fort and the Gosier area (see below).

Centre Saint-John-Perse, quai de Croisières (at the harbor front), 97110 Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/82-51-57.** Fax 590/82-52-61. www.saint-john-perse.com. 42 units. Winter 100€ double; off season 90€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coffee shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Côté Jardin ★ FRENCH This is one of the finest, most upscale independent restaurants in Guadeloupe, with an allegiance to the tenets of French cooking that you might expect on the French mainland. Because of its fine food and its sense of Gallic style, no one really cares that there isn't a water view. Surrounded by potted flowers and shrubs, with a view over palm trees and reproductions of paintings by Miró and Matisse, you'll dine in a white-and-green room with a hint of Provence. Menu items focus on fresh shellfish, much of which comes from fish tanks near the restaurant's entrance. Scallops with a Noilly Prat vermouth sauce, sweetbreads and morels in puff pastry, and several different preparations of foie gras (including a succulent version that's fried and served with a reduction of sweet Banyuls wine) make a flavorful beginning. This restaurant is particularly proud of specific European menu items, which include *boeuf charolais* imported from France, usually served with pepper sauce.

La Marina, Pointe-à-Pitre. ✆ **590/90-91-28.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 27€–37€; prix-fixe menus 40€–45€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 7:30–10pm.

Sucré-Salé TRADITIONAL FRENCH In the heart of Pointe-à-Pitre, adjacent to an Air France office and near several banks, this restaurant is always filled at lunchtime with deal makers and office workers. The theme revolves around jazz, with portraits of Louis Armstrong, Billie Holliday, and Miles Davis. A terrace overlooking the busy boulevard

serves as an animated singles bar on Friday and Saturday nights. The charming Marius Pheron, the Guadeloupéan-born owner who did an 18-year stint in Paris, offers filets of snapper served with pommes soufflés and black pepper, or meal-size salads, entrecôte steaks, and an impressive medley of grilled fish.

Bd. Légitimus, Pointe-à-Pitre. ✆ **590/21-22-55.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 16€–28€; fixed-price menus 15€–22€. MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sat 7–9:30pm.

SHOPPING

We suggest that you skip a shopping tour of Pointe-à-Pitre if you're going to Fort-de-France on Martinique, as you'll find far more merchandise there, and perhaps friendlier service. If you're not, however, we recommend the following shops, some of which line rue Frébault.

Your best buys will be anything French—perfumes from Chanel, silk scarves from Hermès, cosmetics from Dior, crystal from Lalique and Baccarat. Though they're still expensive, we've found some of these items discounted (but not often) as much as 30% below U.S. or Canadian prices. Most shops will accept U.S. dollars, but they'll give these discounts only for purchases made by traveler's check. Purchases are duty free if brought directly from store to plane. In addition to the places below, there are also two duty-free shops at **Aérpport Guadeloupe Pôle Caraibes** (✆ **590/21-14-66**) selling liquor, rums, perfumes, crystal, and cigarettes.

Most shops open at 8:30am, close at 1pm, and then reopen between 3 and 5:30pm. They're closed on Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and holidays. When the cruise ships are in port, many shopkeepers stay open longer and on weekends, and sometimes remain open throughout the midday closing.

One of the best places to buy French perfumes, at prices often lower than those charged in Paris, is **Phoenicia,** 8 rue Frébault (✆ **590/83-50-36**), which has a good selection of imported cosmetics as well. Another leading perfume shop is **Au Bonheur des Dames,** 49 rue Frébault (✆ **590/82-00-30**), also known for its skin-care products.

If you're adventurous, you may want to seek out some native goods in little shops along the back streets of Pointe-à-Pitre. Look for the straw hats, or *salacos,* made in Les Saintes islands, usually created from split bamboo. Native **doudou dolls** are also popular gift items.

Open-air stalls surround the **Marché Couvert (covered market)** at the corner of rue Frébault and rue Peynier. Here you can discover the many fruits, spices, and vegetables that are fun to look at as well as to taste. In madras turbans, local Creole women make deals over their strings of fire-red pimientos. The bright fabrics they wear compete with the rich colors of oranges, papayas, bananas, mangos, and pineapples. Best times to visit are Monday to Saturday 7am to 1pm.

Moments The Essence of Guadeloupe

At some point as you stroll through the market, order a glass of rum from one of the local vendors, and ask for ***rhum agricole,*** a pure form of the drink that's fermented from sugar-cane juice. Savvy locals claim that the rum (whose brand name is Rhum Damoiseau) is the only kind you can drink without a hangover the next morning.

3 LE BAS DU FORT

Just 3km (1 3/4 miles) east of Pointe-à-Pitre is the tourist area of Le Bas du Fort, near Gosier. This is the best place to stay if you'd like to be near (but not in) the capital and if you'd like a location near the international airport. Although it has some good sandy beaches, there are far better ones farther out from the center. One drawback is that the area is rather built up and you may not find the tranquillity here you'll enjoy in other parts of Guadeloupe.

Aquarium de la Guadeloupe, place Créole, Marina Gosier (✆ **590/90-92-38**), is one of the most modern aquariums in the Caribbean, and it can be visited in about an hour. Just off the highway near Le Bas du Fort Marina, the aquarium is home to tropical fish, coral, underwater plants, huge sharks, and other sea creatures. Hours are daily from 9am to 7pm. Admission is 9€ for adults, 6€ for children 5 to 12, and free for kids 4 and under.

WHERE TO STAY

Fleur d'Epée (Kids) Few other hotels on Guadeloupe have been reconfigured and regrouped as often and as radically as this one. Originally built as a member of the chain hotel Novotel in the mid-1970s, it was combined with neighboring structures into a larger resort. That megaresort was carved up early in the millennium into condo units (now independent and positioned across the boulevard). Fleur d'Epée isn't the most stylish hotel on Guadeloupe, but its owners have spruced up the design (basically a chain-motel boxy look) with bright colors, especially tones of blue. Most units have tiled floors, an efficiently designed floor plan, and, in most cases, either a private terrace or a veranda. It sits directly beside a coastline dotted with a pair of crescent-shaped bays and a short, white-sand beach.

Le Bas du Fort, 97100 Gosier, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/90-40-00.** Fax 590/90-99-07. www.blue-season-hotels.com. 190 units. Winter 236€–264€ double; off season 160€–194€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; children's programs; Internet; outdoor pool; free use of snorkeling equipment; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Rosini ★ (Kids) NORTHERN ITALIAN/VENETIAN This is the best Italian restaurant in the French West Indies, thanks to the sophisticated father-in-law/son-in-law team of Venice-born Luciano Rosini and Christophe Giraud, from Provence. It's contained within two air-conditioned dining rooms on the ground floor of an upscale condo complex across from the Fleur d'Eté in Le Bas du Fort. Recorded opera music sets the mood for succulent versions of tournedos layered with foie gras, *osso buco* (veal shanks), and freshwater prawns served *diavolo* style in a spicy tomato, garlic, and parsley sauce with freshly made fettuccine. Ravioli comes stuffed either with veal and herbs or with lobster. At least 10 types of pizza are available for kids. English is readily understood here.

La Porte des Caraïbes, Le Bas du Fort Gosier. ✆ **590/90-87-81.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 20€–35€. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–11pm.

4 GOSIER

Gosier is where some of the best beachfront in Guadeloupe begins, and it has become one of the island's major resort centers, since it has nearly 8km (5 miles) of sandy but

narrow beach, stretching east from Pointe-à-Pitre. All the hotels below are close to the sands. We like the funky charm of the town, which evokes a little resort along the French Riviera. Unlike many parts of the Caribbean, this area attracts mainly French visitors, so you'll feel as though you're on a Mediterranean holiday. Gosier also has some of the island's best dining and nightlife, plus a casino.

You can take a 15-minute climb to the 18th-century ruins of **Fort Fleur-d'Epée.** Its dungeons and battlements are testaments to the ferocious fighting between the French and British armies in 1794. The ruins command the crown of a hill, which affords good views over the bay of Pointe-à-Pitre in a gardenlike setting. If the visibility is good, you can see the neighboring offshore islands of Marie-Galante and Iles des Saintes.

WHERE TO STAY

La Créole Beach Hôtel Kids This is one of the largest resorts on Guadeloupe, but because it's divided into four distinct sections, you'll get a sense of isolation and privacy. It's alongside two sandy beaches within a lush setting of lawns, trees, hibiscus, and bougainvillea, and it has a strong French Creole flavor. The most upscale section is Les Palmes, which has the best furnishings and the most spacious rooms. Second is Le Creole, a three-story building with verandas influenced by French colonial architecture. Slightly less desirable is Le Mahogany, a comfortable compound with oceanfront rooms (most without kitchens). The most basic, Le Yucca, houses the family units with kitchens. Most rooms are spacious and contain two queen-size beds.

Pointe de la Verdure, B.P. 61, 97190 Gosier, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/90-46-46.** Fax 590/90-46-66. www.creolebeach.com. 218 units. Winter 145€–324€ double, 475€ junior suite; off season 110€–211€ double, 235€ junior suite. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; deep-sea fishing; sailboat rentals; scuba diving; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi (in some).

Sofitel Auberge de la Vieille Tour ★ Though today it's a Sofitel, this place was once a family inn built around the shadow of an old sugar mill. Set on a 3-hectare (7½-acre) bluff, the property encompasses a small private beach. The older guest rooms are short on charm. The better-maintained units are usually within La Résidence, a series of town house–style accommodations set near the pool. Their desirability is rivaled only by units referred to as *luxury class,* set close to the water near the beach. Rooms have comfortable furnishings and compact bathrooms. The restaurants La Vieille Tour and Le Zagaya serve excellent French and Creole food, respectively, in relatively elegant, semiformal settings. L'Ajoupa is a grill-style indoor/outdoor affair.

Montauban, 97190 Gosier, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **800/263-4835** in the U.S., or 590/84-23-23. Fax 590/84-33-43. www.sofitel.com. 176 units. Winter 265€–410€ double; off season 240€–310€ double; year-round 650€ suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Le Bananier CREOLE Locals flock to this air-conditioned, 60-year-old clapboard-sided cottage for some of the most imaginative dishes in the Creole repertoire. Old-fashioned staples such as stuffed crab backs and *accras* (beignets) of codfish are handled with finesse and charm. Much more appealing, however, are dishes such as filet mignon served with black pepper and papaya sauce; *aclafoutis* (gratinéed medley) of shellfish; and a *tourtière d'oeufs aux crabes* (an omelet with breaded and baked crabmeat, fresh tomatoes,

and reduction of callaloo leaves). The menu's most appealing dessert is banana flambéed in Schrubb, an obscure island liqueur made from fermented orange peels and prized by the owners' grandparents.

Rue Principale de Gosier, Montauban. ✆ **590/84-34-85.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 14€–32€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2pm and 7–10pm.

5 STE-ANNE

About 14km (8¾ miles) east of Gosier, little Ste-Anne is a sugar town and a resort with many fine beaches and lodgings. In many ways, it's the most charming village of Guadeloupe, with its pastel-colored town hall, its church, and its principal square, **Place de la Victoire,** which features a statue of French abolitionist Victor Schoelcher.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Club Med La Caravelle ★ (Kids) This all-inclusive chain resort, covering 19 hectares (47 acres) along a peninsula dotted with palm trees, opens onto one of the finest beaches in the French West Indies. The renovated guest rooms tend to be small but have good beds. (All but 10 units have twin beds; the others have queen-size beds.) The building known as Marie-Galante contains the resort's largest and most comfortable rooms (each with a terrace or veranda). Children are welcome here, and there's been an upgrade in the facilities here, with a "Mini-Club" with child-minding and day-camp facilities. The resort has an annex containing only single rooms. The meals here are nothing if not generous. The breakfast and lunch buffet tables groan with French, Continental, and Creole food. Dinner is served in the main dining room or in the candlelit, more romantic annex restaurant beside the sea.

97180 Ste-Anne, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **800/CLUB-MED** (258-2633) in the U.S., or 590/85-49-50. Fax 590/85-49-70. www.clubmed.com. 300 units. Dec to early Jan and Aug 1,400€ per person; mid-Jan to July and Sept–Nov 1,005€ per person. Rates all-inclusive for 7-night stays. Rates are based on double occupancy. Children age 4–12 are charged 80% of the adult rate. Single supplement 10%–50% above the per-person double rate. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; children's program; fitness center; gym; aerobics; archery; basketball; volleyball; Internet; outdoor pool; nightclub; 4 tennis courts; kayaks; snorkeling; scuba diving; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Eden Palm ★ (Finds) This hidden-away charmer grew up around an antique windmill of a former sugar plantation. Branching out from its core is a series of stylishly furnished cottages, actually duplex bungalows with two well-furnished guest rooms opening onto terraces fronting landscaped grounds. Accommodations are attractively furnished with tiles, Italian marble, and teak and mahogany wood furnishings. One of the reasons to stay here is to enjoy the tropical gardens of flowers and herbs, complete with a fish pond and enough water lilies to enchant Claude Monet. The hotel provides a golf cart to haul you to a white-sandy beach about a 2-minute ride away. The most festive time to be here is at Sunday brunch, when island musicians entertain while diners enjoy a lavish buffet.

Lieu dit Le Helleux, Ste-Anne, 97180 Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/88-48-48.** Fax 590/88-48-49. www.edenpalm.com. 66 units. Winter 299€–364€ double, 416€–576€ suite; off season 156€–203€ double, 244€–416€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

La Toubana ★ Built on 2 hectares (5 acres) of sloping land close to the beach (a 5-min. walk on a path carved into the cliff side), La Toubana is centered around a low-

Moments Begin the Beguine

The folkloric dance troupe **Les Ballets Guadeloupéans** makes frequent appearances at the big hotels, whirling and moving to the rhythms of island music in colorful costumes and well-choreographed routines. Some resorts, including the Club Med La Caravelle, use their visit to set the theme for the evening, serving up a banquet of traditional island dishes to accompany the dance, music, and costumes.

Ask at your hotel where the Ballets Guadeloupéans will be appearing during your stay. Schedules vary widely according to the season and the touring agenda of the Ballets (part of their year is spent touring, usually in Europe or aboard some of the larger cruise ships), but you can usually catch them as they rotate through the Kalenda Resort, the Club Med La Caravelle, and—depending on a wide set of circumstances—the Creole Beach and/or the Novotel Coralia. On the night of any of these performances, you can order a drink at the bar and catch the show, or join in the hotel buffet for a flat price. Buffets usually start around 7:30pm, with the show beginning at 9:30pm.

lying stone building on a rocky cliff overlooking the bay and Ste-Anne Beach. Many guests come for the panoramic view, which on a clear day encompasses Marie-Galante, Dominica, La Désirade, and the Iles des Saintes, but you'll quickly learn that there's more to this place than just a panorama. The red-roofed bungalows lie scattered among the tropical shrubs along the adjacent hillsides (*toubana* means "small house" in Arawak); there are 10 garden units and 12 more upscale oceanview units. Each has a kitchenette, comfortable French furnishings, a terrace, a rather compact bathroom, and either two twin beds or one king-size bed. Cots for kids are available on request.

Durivage (B.P. 63), 97180 Ste-Anne, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **800/451-3734** in the U.S., or 590/88-25-78. Fax 590/88-38-90. 32 units. Winter 235€–421€ double; off season 140€–295€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; scooters; outdoor pool; tennis court; deep-sea fishing; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette.

6 ST-FRANÇOIS ★

Continuing east from Ste-Anne, you'll notice many old round towers named for Father Labat, the Dominican founder of the sugar-cane industry. These towers were once used as mills to grind the cane. St-François, 40km (25 miles) east of Pointe-à-Pitre, used to be a sleepy fishing village. Then Air France discovered it and opened a Meridien hotel with a casino. That was followed by the promotional activities of J. F. Rozan, a native who invested heavily to make St-François a jet-set resort. Now the once-sleepy village has first-class accommodations, as well as an airport available to private jets, a golf course (it's the golfing center of the island), and a marina, where there's a casino (see "Guadeloupe After Dark," near the end of this chapter). It also has some good beaches and is known for its Creole restaurants.

WHERE TO STAY

La Cocoteraie ★★ This is a plush, suites-only resort, the island's finest choice for a luxury holiday. It opens onto a lagoon with two private but small white-sand beaches. The hotel hides behind a colonial plantation-style facade, flanked by a series of buildings, also in the colonial style. Twenty of the units are more desirable because they open right onto the beach. Across from the hotel lies the Robert Trent Jones, Sr., golf course. Each unit comes with a spacious patio or a balcony overlooking the water or else one of the largest hotel pools on Guadeloupe. Some of the accommodations are equipped with a duo of tub-only baths; others have tub/showers. Meals are served in a well-designed open-sided pavilion, La Varangue (see below).

Ave. De l 'Europe, 97118 St-François, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/88-79-81.** Fax 590/88-78-33. www.lacocoteraie.com. 50 suites. Year-round 404€–550€ suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed Aug 24–Oct 21. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; golf; fitness center; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; 2 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

La Métisse ★ (Value) The French would call this pink-stucco hotel with personalized service and tasteful accommodations a *hotel de charme.* It's not on the beach, but there is an artificially illuminated swimming pool with a raised hot tub, and the property's grounds are cooled by trade winds. The owners will transport you to the beach, into town, or to the nearby golf course. Doors can be opened to connect some of the units, which is a plus for families. The gardens are attractively planted with jasmine, gardenia, palms, hibiscus, and frangipani. The bar is noted for its fresh-fruit cocktails, including the cocktail Métisse (a blend of coconut, banana, maracudja, and cinnamon). Immaculate bedrooms are furnished with white-cane pieces.

66 Les Hauts de Saint François, 97118 St-François, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/88-70-00.** Fax 590/90-88-59. www.im-caraibes.com/metisse. 7 units. Winter 181€–330€ double; off season 145€–287€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

La Varangue ★ FRENCH Named after the figureheads that used to grace the prows of pirate ships, this is the culinary showcase of La Cocoteraie hotel. In many ways, it functions as the social and decorative showcase of the hotel as well, positioned adjacent to a low bridge that traverses the resort's swimming pool, near the reception desk, within full view of the beach and the gardens. Menu items at lunch revolve around fresh salads, pastas, and relatively simple versions of grilled fish and meats. Dinners are more elaborate, more leisurely, and more romantic, with flickering candles and such dishes as a crabmeat tart with exotic mushrooms; cream of shellfish soup; a confit of dorado (mahi-mahi) with tandoori spices and coconut milk; and an elegant version of lobster salad. And for any die-hard lover of Gallic food, there's even foie gras flash-seared in butter, similar to something you'd find on the French mainland.

In La Cocoteraie, Ave. de l 'Europe, St-François. ✆ **590/88-79-81.** Reservations recommended for nonresidents of the hotel. Lunch platters 18€–29€; dinner main courses 20€–40€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm.

7 POINTE DES CHÂTEAUX

Eleven kilometers (6 3/4 miles) east of St-François is the rocky headland of Pointe des Châteaux, the easternmost tip of Grand-Terre, where the Atlantic meets the Caribbean.

Moments Nude Trysting

This part of Guadeloupe is studded with wind-carved coves. At **Anse Tarare,** the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean. From the signposted parking lot along the Route de la Pointe des Châteaux, you'll see a narrow pathway leading through scrub to the sea and Anse Tarare. If you want, you (and your loved one) can strip down here. Of course, it's wise to bring the makings of a French beach-side picnic—a bottle of chilled rosé, a wheel of brie, and a freshly baked baguette.

You'll see cliffs sculpted by the sea into dramatic castlelike formations, the erosion typical of France's Brittany coast. The view is panoramic. At the top is a cross erected in the 19th century.

You might want to walk to **Pointe des Colibris,** the extreme end of Guadeloupe. From here you'll have a view of the northeastern sector of the island, and to the east a look at La Désirade, an island that has the appearance of a huge vessel anchored far away. (See the section "Side Trips from Guadeloupe," later in this chapter.)

Pointe des Châteaux has miles of coved white-sand beaches. Most of these are safe for swimming, except at the point where the waves of the turbulent Atlantic encounter the tranquil Caribbean Sea, churning up the waters. Since there are no hotels here, you can come just for the day to enjoy the beaches.

WHERE TO DINE

Iguane Café ★ **Finds** FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL This bistro/cafe is one of the best dining choices on the island. Owners Marie Laure and Sylvan Serourt serve their creative cuisine at a point on the road connecting St.-François with Pointe des Châteaux. The restaurant has a colorful West Indian decor, an open-air kitchen, and English-language menus. Don't come here in a rush, as food is cooked to order and the service is, well, relaxed. Mellow out at the bar, with its selection of nearly two dozen rum punches, including one flavored with cinnamon. A novelty drink comes from a large jar of rum with several hibiscus flowers floating inside. On the creative and varied menu, begin with a delectable sheep's cheese appetizer, battered in a crust with zesty Creole spices. You might also opt for the goose-liver pâté or a napoleon of sweet breads and lobster. We always gravitate to the fresh fish of the day, perhaps snapper, aromatically cooked in a puff pastry, or John Dory with Indian spices.

Route de la Pointe des Châteaux, St. François. ✆ **590/88-61-37.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 25€–32€; fixed-price menus 54€ and 79€. AE, MC,V. Wed–Mon 7:30–10:30pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm. Closed Sept 10–Oct 10.

A STOP IN LE MOULE

To go back to Pointe-à-Pitre from Pointe des Châteaux, you can use an alternative route, the N5 from St-François. After a 14km (8 3/4-mile) drive, you'll reach the village of **Le Moule,** which was founded at the end of the 17th century and known long before Pointe-à-Pitre. It used to be a major shipping port for sugar but was devastated in the hurricane of 1928 and never regained its importance. Now it's a tiny coastal fishing village. Because it offers more than 15km (9 1/4 miles) of crescent-shaped beach, it's developing as a destination.

Specialties of this Guadeloupean village are *palourdes,* clams that thrive in the semisalty mouths of freshwater rivers. Known for being more tender and less rubbery than saltwater clams, they have a distinct sulfur taste not unlike that of overpoached eggs. Local gastronomes prepare them with saffron and aged rum or cognac.

To return to Pointe-à-Pitre, we suggest that you use Route D3 toward Abymes. The road winds around as you plunge deeply into Grand-Terre. About halfway along the way a road is signposted to **Jabrun du Nord** and **Jabrun du Sud.** These two villages are inhabited by Caucasians with blond hair, said to be survivors of aristocrats slaughtered during the Revolution. Those who escaped found safety by hiding out in Les Grands Fonds. The most important family here is named Matignon, and they gave their name to the colony known as "les Blancs Matignon." These citizens are said to be related to the late Prince Rainier of Monaco. Pointe-à-Pitre lies only 16km (10 miles) from Les Grand Fonds.

8 THE NORTH COAST OF GRANDE-TERRE ★★

From Pointe-à-Pitre, head northeast toward Abymes, passing next through Morne à l'Eau; you'll reach the small but not insignificant settlement of **Petit Canal** after 21km (13 miles). This is Guadeloupe's sugar-cane country, and a sweet smell fills the air.

PORT LOUIS

Continuing northwest along the coast from Petit Canal, you come to Port Louis, well known for its beautiful beach, **Anse du Souffleur,** which lacks facilities. We like it best in spring, when the brilliant white sand is effectively shown off against the flaming red poinciana. During the week, the beach is an especially quiet spot. The little port town has some good restaurants.

Where to Dine

Le Poisson d'Or ★ (Finds) CREOLE You enter this white-sided Antillean house by walking down a narrow corridor and emerging into a rustic dining room lined with varnished pine. Despite the simple setting, the food is well prepared and satisfying. You might begin with rillettes of marlin or stuffed crabs, followed by a heaping platter of raw shellfish, grilled lobster, or local fish, either grilled or prepared as a savory *court bouillon.* If you're in the mood for something French inspired, consider a wine-flavored boeuf bourguignon, or an *entrecôte maître d'hotel* (grilled steak with butter and fresh herbs). Dessert might be a flambéed banana or a scoop of coconut-flavored ice cream. Don't even think of coming here at night without an advance reservation—you might find the place locked up and empty.

2 blvd. Achille René Boisneuf, Port Louis. ✆ **590/22-88-63.** Reservations required for dinner. Main courses 14€–21€. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 6:30–11pm. Closed Sept. Drive northwest from Petit-Canal along the coastal road.

ANSE-BERTRAND

About 8km (5 miles) from Port Louis is Anse-Bertrand, the northernmost village of Guadeloupe. What is now a fishing village was the last refuge of the Carib tribes, and a reserve was once created here. Everything now, however, is sleepy.

Where to Dine

Les Tables d'Hote au Jar din de l'Eden ★ FRENCH/CARIBBEAN This little discovery lies 2.4km (1½ miles) from the sea, featuring dining on a large terrace centered in a well-landscaped garden. The menu depends on the catch of the day . Fish is market fresh and is featured with the vegetables of the season. The changing menu also offers a homemade soup of the day . For those not into seafood, a select few of pork, beef, and chicken dishes are also prepared for you. Eel is an occasional delicacy, as is lobster.

The little inn also r ents four utterly simple bedr ooms, costing only 25€ per person nightly. Cooling is by ceiling fan.

Rue Toussain Louverture. ✆ **590/22-16-66.** Reservations required. Main courses 12€–25€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–3pm; Fri–Sun 6–11pm; winter Sun 11am–3pm.

CONTINUING AROUND THE NORTHERN TIP

From Anse-Bertrand, you can drive along a gravel road heading for **Pointe de la Grande Vigie** ★, the northernmost tip of the island, which you'll reach after 6km (3¾ miles) of what we hope will be cautious driving. P ark your car and walk car efully along a narrow lane that will bring you to the northernmost rock of Guadeloupe. The view of the sweeping Atlantic from the top of r ocky cliffs is r emarkable—you stand about 85m (279 ft.) above the sea.

Afterward, a 6km (3¾-mile) drive south on a good r oad will bring y ou to the **Porte d'Enfer,** or "Gateway to Hell," where the sea rushes violently against two narrow cliffs.

After seeing this remote part of the island, you can head back, going to either **Morne à l'Eau** or **Le Moule** before connecting to the road back to Pointe-à-Pitre.

9 AROUND BASSE-TERRE ★★★

Leaving Pointe-à-Pitre by Route N1, you can explore the western coast and the island of Basse-Terre. Here you'll find vie ws as panoramic as those along the corniche along the French Riviera, but without the heavy traffic and cr owds. After 2km (1 ¼ miles), y ou cross the Rivière Salée at Pont de la Gabarre. This narrow strait separates the two islands that form G uadeloupe. For the next 6km (3 ¾ miles), the r oad r uns straight thr ough sugar-cane fields.

Turn right on Route N2 toward **Baie Mahault.** (Don't confuse this with the town of Mahault on B asse-Terre's w esternmost coast.) H ead nor thwest to **Lamentin,** a village settled by *corsairs* at the beginning of the 18th century. Scattered about are some colonial mansions, but neither of these villages merits a stopo ver.

STE-ROSE

From Lamentin, you can drive for 10km (6¼ miles) to Ste-Rose, where you'll find several good **beaches.** On your left, a small r oad leads in a few minutes to **Sofaia,** from which you'll have a panoramic view over the coast and forest preserve. You can easily skip this, however, if you're rushed for time.

Where to Stay

La Sucrerie du Comté ★ Although you'll see the ruins of a 19th-century sugar factory (including a rusting locomotive) on this hotel's 5 hectares (12 acres) of forested land overlooking the sea, most of the resort is modern. The medium-size accommodations are

in 26 red- or green-toned bungalows. Each cozy bungalow has chunky and rustic handmade furniture and a bay window overlooking either the sea or a garden. (Each bungalow contains two units, both with ceiling fans; none has a TV or phone.) The nearest major beach is La Grand-Anse, a 10- to 15-minute drive from the hotel. There's a small and narrow beach (Plage des Amandiers) within a 5-minute walk from the hotel, although the swimming here isn't very good.

Comté de Loheac, 97115 Ste-Rose, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/28-60-17.** Fax 590/28-65-63. www.primeahotels.com. 52 units. Winter 83€–101€ double; off season 59€–64€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed Sept 1–Oct 5. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; fishing; scuba diving; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar, no phone.

Where to Dine

Restaurant Clara ★ CREOLE On the water front near the center of town is the culinary statement of Clara Lesueur. Clara lived for 12 years in Paris as a member of an experimental jazz dance troupe, but years ago she returned to Guadeloupe, her home, to set up this breezy restaurant. Try for a table on the open patio, where palm trees complement the color scheme. Clara artfully melds the classic French style of fine dining with authentic Creole flavors. Specialties include skate fish with rice and curry sauce, poached crayfish with Creole sauce and vegetables, brochette of swordfish and/or tuna, different preparations of conch, *salade de coffre* (made from a local fish whose name translates as "trunkfish"), and braised chicken thighs stuffed with pulverized conch or stuffed crab with avocado. The "sauce chien" that's served with many of the dishes is a blend of hot peppers, garlic, lime juice, and "secret things."

Bd. Maritime, Ste-Rose. ✆ **590/28-72-99.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 13€–30€; fix ed-price menu 12€. MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm; Sun noon–2:30pm.

DESHAIES/LA GRAND-ANSE

A few miles farther along, you reach Pointe Allegre, the northernmost point of Basse-Terre. **Cluny Beach** is where the first settler landed on Guadeloupe, and it's a great place to break up your drive with a swim, although the waters are sometimes rough and there are no beach facilities.

Three kilometers (1¾ miles) farther will bring you to **La Grand-Anse ★**, one of the best beaches on Guadeloupe. It is very large and still secluded, sheltered by many tropical trees, especially palms. The place is ideal for either a swim or a picnic, although, again, there are no facilities.

At **Deshaies,** immediately to the south, snorkeling and fishing are popular, but you must bring your own equipment. The narrow road alongside the beach winds up and down and has a corniche look to it, with the blue sea underneath, and the view of green mountains studded with colorful villages.

Fourteen kilometers (8¾ miles) from Deshaies, **Pointe Noire** comes into view; its name comes from the black volcanic rocks. Look for the odd polychrome cenotaph in town, the only reason to stop over.

Where to Stay

Habitation Grande Anse ★ Lying across the coastal road from one of the island's best beaches, Grande-Anse, this somewhat battered assemblage of bungalows and studio apartments, each with natural-grained wood trim, is evocative of a Mediterranean village. All units have kitchenettes and contain rattan furniture, white walls, and a simple, summery decor that's well suited to life close to the beach. Don't expect too many activities

here—the focus is on sunbathing surrounded by the tropical landscaping beside the beach. The on-site restaurant is, in theory, open for breakfast and dinner, but because the hotel does not have a full-time chef and because business is often slow, it may not be running when you visit. But since most guests are devoted to preparing their own meals, no one really seems to care.

Localité Ziotte, 97126 Deshaies, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/28-45-36.** Fax 590/28-51-17. www.hotelhga.com. 50 units. Winter 165€–270€ double studio with kitchen, 265€–305€ 2-bedroom apt with kitchen for up to 6; off season 98€ double studio with kitchen, 188€ 2-bedroom apt with kitchen for up to 6. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, minibar.

Le Rayon Vert ★ (Finds) This boutique hotel is a favorite choice for honeymooners seeking a haven of tranquillity opening onto the water of Ferry Bay. You have a choice of spacious double rooms in the main building or bungalows set out on a hillside studded with tropical vegetation. Room furnishings are not luxurious—in fact, they could use some freshening—but the views from some of the units are almost incomparable on the island. You don't need to leave the premises at night to enjoy market-fresh cuisine, including the day's catch.

La Coque Ferry, 97126 Deshaies, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/284323**. http://hotel.leravonvert.free.fr. 22 units. Winter 78€–93€ double; off season 68€–80€ double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Closed June to mid-July and Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fans, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Résidence Hoteliére de la Pointe Batterie Built on steeply sloping land near the edge of both the rainforest and the sea, these all-wood villas each contain a veranda, a kitchen, ceiling fans, good beds, and summery furniture made from rattan, local hardwoods, and wicker. The nearest beach, La Grand-Anse, is a 3-minute drive, or a long uphill walk, away. In addition to the communal pool, some of the villas have their own private pools. Le Canon de la Baie specializes in Creole food from atop a wooden deck whose pilings are sunk directly into the seabed.

97126 Pointe Batterie, Deshaies, 97126 Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/28-57-03.** Fax 590/28-57-28. www.pointe-batterie.com. 22 villas. Winter 131€ studio for 2, 287€–344€ units for 4–6 people; off season 70€ studio for 2, 161€–207€ units for 4–6 people. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; spa; tennis court (nearby); rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, TV, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Tainos Cottages ★ (Finds) This property, opening onto Grande-Anse Beach, is unique in Guadeloupe. Its seven cottages were actually made in Indonesia and shipped to Guadeloupe for reassembly. Each cottage has an exotic name such as Jaïba or Guana, and each is furnished with Indonesian pieces, including Persian carpeting and four-poster beds draped in mosquito netting. The tropical-style swimming pool overlooks the ocean. The cuisine is one of the reasons to stay here. You enjoy such dishes as filet of duck in a fresh mango coilis or medallions of crayfish.

Plage de Grande-Anse, Deshaies, 97126 Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/28-44-42.** Fax 590/21-30-20. www.tainosvillage.com. 7 units. 300€ double; off season 150€ double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge.

Where to Dine

La Caféière Beauséjour ★ (Finds) CREOLE In the green Pointe-Noire Valley on the site of a coffee plantation, this restaurant is one of Guadeloupe's dining secrets. It is the domain of Bernadette Hayot-Beauzelin, who grows the produce and herbs used in many of her nouvelle Creole dishes. Ms. Hayot-Beauzelin's home was constructed in 1764, years after Louis XIV sent the first coffee plant to Guadeloupe in 1721.

Don't expect a menu—you'll be told what the kitchen prepared that day. Starting in the early morning, Hayot-Beauzelin gathers the fresh fruits and vegetables that make her meals so special—everything from tomatoes and bananas to passion fruit and avocados. Your main course might be a delectable smoked duck served with some Pan-Asian sauce that tastes of ginger, with side dishes of fries (cut like French fries) from the breadfruit tree and pumpkin purée.

The restaurant also rents out two very basic bedrooms with air conditioning and a terrace, costing 100€ per day in a double.

Acomat Pointe Noire. ✆ **590/98-10-09.** Reservations required. Main courses 18€–30€. MC, V. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Sept 1–Oct 15.

Les Gommiers CREOLE Named after the large rubber trees that grow nearby, this popular restaurant serves up well-flavored dishes in a dining room lined with plants. You can order such Creole staples as *accras de morue* (codfish beignets), *boudin Créole* (blood pudding), fricassee of freshwater crayfish, seafood paella, and a custardlike dessert known as *flan coco*. Dishes inspired by France include goat-meat stew, grilled steaks, and veal scallops. We return year after year and have never detected any lessening of quality. One chef told us, "We are not technically perfect, but we cook from the heart."

200 Rue Baudot, Pointe Noire. ✆ **590/98-01-79.** Main courses 15€–18€; fixed-price lunch 15€. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm; Tues–Sat 7–10pm.

PARC NATUREL DE GUADELOUPE: A TROPICAL FOREST ★★

Six kilometers (3 3/4 miles) from Pointe Noire, you reach **Mahault.** On your left is the **Route de la Traversée** ★★, the Transcoastal Highway. This is the best way to explore the scenic wonders of **Parc Naturel de Guadeloupe,** passing through a tropical forest as you travel between the capital, Basse-Terre, and Pointe-à-Pitre.

To preserve Parc Naturel, Guadeloupe has set aside 30,000 hectares (74,100 acres), about a fifth of its entire terrain. Easily accessible via modern roads, this is a huge tract of mountains, tropical forests, and gorgeous scenery, and one of the largest and most spectacular parks in the Caribbean.

The park is home to a variety of tame animals, including *titi* (a raccoon, adopted as the park's official mascot) and such birds as the wood pigeon, turtledove, and thrush. Small exhibition huts, devoted to the volcano, to the forest, or to coffee, sugar cane, and rum, are scattered throughout the park. Parc Naturel has no gates, no opening or closing hours, and no admission fee.

You can hike for a mere 15 minutes or stretch out your adventure for an entire day. The 290km (180 miles) of trails here take in rainforests, hot springs, rugged gorges, rushing streams, and the wooded slopes of the 1,444m-high (4,736-ft.) Soufrière volcano. (See "Hiking" under "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits," later in this chapter.)

From Mahault, you drive slowly in a setting of giant ferns and luxuriant vegetation. Six kilometers (3 3/4 miles) after the fork, you reach **Les Deux Mamelles** ("The Two Breasts"), where you can park your car and go for a hike. Some of the trails are for experts only; others, such as the **Pigeon Trail,** will bring you to an impressive summit of about 780m (2,558 ft.). Expect to spend at least 3 hours going each way. Halfway along the trail you can stop at **Forest House;** from that point, many lanes, all signposted, branch off on trails that will take anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours.

The most enthralling walk in the park is to the **Chute de l'Ecrevisse** ★, the "Crayfish Waterfall," a little pond of very cold water at the end of a .4km (1/4-mile) path. This spot

in the tropical forest is one of the most beautiful spots on the island. The pool found at the base of the falls is an ideal place for a cooling swim. In just 10 minutes you can reach this signposted attraction from the Corossol River Picnic Area. To the left of the Route de la Traversée, a short trail parallels the Corossol River, ending at the crayfish falls.

After the hike, the main road descends toward **Versailles,** a village about 8km (5 miles) from Pointe-à-Pitre.

BOUILLANTE

If you don't take the Route de la Traversée at this time but want to continue exploring the west coast, you can head south from Mahault until you reach the village of Bouillante, which is exciting for only one reason: You might encounter former French film star and part-time resident Brigitte Bardot.

Where to Dine

Chez Loulouse ★ CREOLE This good choice for lunch offers plenty of offhanded charm, and it stands on the well-known beach opposite Pigeon Island. Many guests prefer their rum punches on the lovely veranda, overlooking loaded boats preparing to depart and merchants hawking their wares. The colorful dining room has a ceiling of palm fronds, wraparound Creole murals, and reggae music emanating from the bar. The charming Mme. Loulouse Paisley-Carbon holds court here, assisted by her nieces, nephews, and children. She offers house-style Caribbean lobster, spicy versions of conch, octopus, *accras de mor ue* (codfish beignets), gratin of *christophene* (Caribbean squash), and savory *colombos* (curries) of chicken or pork.

Plage de Malendure. ✆ **590/98-70-34.** Reservations required for dinner. Main courses 14€–30€. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7–10pm.

Le Rocher de Malendure FRENCH/CREOLE On a rocky peninsula 9m (30 ft.) above the rich offshore reefs near Pigeon Island, this restaurant offers gorgeous views. Each table is sheltered from direct sunlight (and rain) by a shed-style roof, which also affords a greater sense of privacy. Much of the cuisine served here is seafood caught in offshore waters: grilled red snapper, fondues of fish, marinated marlin steaks, and different preparations of crayfish and conch. There's a special emphasis here on marlin, with several creative adaptations of it. Examples include rillettes of marlin, marlin sushi, brochettes of marlin, and fried scallops of marlin.

The restaurant also operates a small hotel on-site, **Le Jardin Tropical** (✆ **590/98-77-23**), renting 10 bungalows, which cost 64€ per night, single or double occupancy. Each small unit has a sea view, air-conditioning, a ceiling fan, a tiny bathroom with shower, and a simple kitchenette, where many visitors cook most of their meals. Amenities include a pool, laundry service, and a bar.

Malendure Pigeon, 97125 Bouillante. ✆ **590/98-70-84.** Fax 590/98-89-92. www.au-jardin-tropical.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses 14€–30€; fixed-price menus 17€, 29€, or 40€. AE,V. Thurs–Tues noon–4pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed Sept.

BASSE-TERRE ★

The winding coastal road brings you to **Vieux Habitants** ("Old Settlers"), one of the oldest villages on the island, founded in 1636. The name comes from its founders: After serving in the employment of the West Indies Company, they retired here, but they preferred to call themselves "inhabitants," so as not to be confused with slaves.

Another 15km (9¼ miles) of winding roads bring you to **Basse-Terre,** the capital of Guadeloupe. This sleepy town of some 15,000 inhabitants lies between the water and La

Soufrière, the volcano. Founded in the 1640s, it's the oldest town on the island and still has a lot of charm. Tamarind and palm trees shade its market squares. Although there are many modern buildings, some grand old colonial structures are still standing.

The town suffered heavy damages at the hands of British troops in 1691 and again in 1702. It was also the center of fierce fighting during the French Revolution, when the political changes that swept across Europe caused explosive tensions on Guadeloupe. As it did in France, the guillotine claimed many lives on the island during the infamous Reign of Terror.

In spite of the town's history, there isn't much to see in Basse-Terre except for a 17th-century **cathedral** and **Fort St-Charles,** which has guarded the city (not always well) since it was established. Much modernized and reconstructed over the years, the cathedral is only of passing interest. On the narrow streets, you can still see old clapboard buildings, upper floors of shingle-wood tiles, and wrought-iron balconies. For the most interesting views, seek out the **Place du Champ d'Arbaud** and the **Jardin Pichon.** At the harbor on the southern tier of town, you can see **Fort Delgrès,** which once protected the island from the English. There are acres of ramparts to be walked with panoramic vistas in all directions.

Originally selected as Guadeloupe's capital because of its prevailing breezes and location above the steaming lowlands of Pointe-à-Pitre, Basse-Terre is today a city that's curiously removed from the other parts of the French Antilles that it governs, and, when the business of the day is concluded, it's an oddly calm and quiet town. The neighboring municipality of **St-Claude,** in the cool heights above the capital, was always where the island's oldest families proudly maintained their ancestral homes and where they continue to live today. These families, direct descendants of the white, slave-owning former plantation owners who originally hailed from such major French Atlantic ports as Bordeaux and Nantes, tend to live quietly, discreetly, and separately from both the island's blacks and the French *métropolitains* whose tourist ventures have helped change the face of Guadeloupe.

Where to Stay & Dine

Hôtel St-Georges This tastefully modern inn is set on a hill with sweeping views over the town, the gardens, and, from the upper floors, the sea. A series of three-story buildings centers on a large swimming pool. The medium-size bedrooms are outfitted, Creole style, with dark-grained and rattan furniture, tiled floors, and small bathrooms trimmed with touches of marble. Overall, this place has the feel of a business hotel. Le Lamasure specializes in French, Continental, and Creole cuisine, serving dinner only.

Rue Gratien, Parize, 97120 St-Claude, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/80-10-10.** Fax 590/80-30-50. www.hotelstgeorges.com. 40 units. Year-round 110€ double; 155€ suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; snack bar; fitness center; squash court; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Le Jardin de Malanga ★ Finds Clandestine lovers, honeymooners, and those passionate about nature view this as their secret hideaway in Guadeloupe. In a secluded location in the midst of a former banana plantation, it overlooks the Les Saintes archipelago. The nearest beach, La Plage de Trois Rivières, lies a 15-minute drive away. Wander in a secret garden of banana trees, birds of paradise flowers, rare orchids, hibiscus (the favorite food of iguanas), and flowering tropical foliage. Those who appreciate a place that looks like an outpost of French Guinea will gravitate to the main house of the inn, which was constructed in 1927 and contains a smattering of family antiques. Each of the

bedrooms is comfortably and tastefully furnished, with bathrooms tiled in white. Some bathtubs open onto scenic views. The French Creole meals are often made with produce from the hotel's own gardens.

Route de Hermitage, Trois Rivières 97114, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/92-67-57.** Fax 590/92-67-58. 9 units. Year-round 261€ double in cottage; 355€ family unit in colonial house; 286€ triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar.

AROUND LA SOUFRIERE ★★

The big attraction of Basse-Terre is the famous sulfur-puffing **La Soufrière** volcano, which is currently dormant. Rising to a height of some 1,444m (4,736 ft.), it's flanked by banana plantations and lush foliage.

After leaving the capital at Basse-Terre, you can drive to **St-Claude,** a suburb 6km ($3^3/_4$ miles) up the mountainside at a height of 570m (1,870 ft.). It has a reputation for a perfect climate and various privately owned tropical gardens.

From St-Claude, you can begin the climb up the narrow, winding road the Guadeloupéans say leads to hell—that is, **La Soufrière.** The road ends at a parking area at La Savane à Mulets, at an altitude of 990m (3,247 ft.). At this point, you have to leave your car and climb to the mouth of the volcano. Currently, the belching beast is quiet and it's presumed safe to climb to the summit at 1,444m (4,736 ft.), the tallest elevation in the Lesser Antilles. (Allow about 2 hr. for this climb.) In 1975, the appearance of ashes, mud, billowing smoke, and earthquakelike tremors proved that the old beast was still alive. In the resettlement process that followed the eruption, 75,000 inhabitants were relocated to safer terrain in Grande-Terre. No deaths were reported, but the inhabitants of Basse-Terre still keep a wary eye on this smoking giant.

Even in the parking lot, you can feel the heat of the volcano merely by touching the ground. Steam emerges from fumaroles and sulfurous fumes from the volcano's "burps." Of course, fumes come from its pit and mud cauldrons as well. Esoteric and technical information is available only with advance reservations, Fridays between 2 and 5pm, at a government-funded laboratory, **Observatoire Volcanologique le Houëlmont,** 97113 Gourbeyre (✆ **590/99-11-33**). Conceived as an observation post for seismic and volcanic activities, and staffed with geologists and volcanologists from the French mainland, it can be toured without charge by anyone who's interested in the technical aspects of this science. A visit here is best for children ages 10 and up.

Where to Dine

Chez Paul de Matouba CREOLE/INTERNATIONAL You'll find good food in this family-run restaurant, which sits beside the banks of the small Rivière Rouge (Red River). The dining room on the second floor is enclosed by windows, which allow you to take in the surrounding dark-green foliage of the mountains. The cooking is Creole, and the specialty is crayfish dishes, though well-prepared East Indian meals are also available. By all means, drink the mineral or spring water of Matouba. Hearty meals include perfectly executed stuffed crab, *colombo* (curry) of chicken, and an array of French, Creole, and Hindu specialties. You're likely to find the place overcrowded in winter with the tour-bus crowd.

Rivière Rouge, Matouba, St-Claude. ✆ **590/80-01-77.** Main courses 12€–22€; fixed-price menu 16€–20€. No credit cards. Daily noon–3pm. Follow the clearly marked signs; it's beside a gully close to the center of the village.

THE WINDWARD COAST ★★

From Basse-Terre to Pointe-à-Pitre, the N1 road follows the east coast, called the Windward Coast. The country here is richer and greener than elsewhere on the island. There's no major sight or stopover along the way, so if your time is limited, you can simply savor the views along the coastal road, with the sea to your right and scenic landscapes to your left.

To reach the little town of **Trois Rivières** you have a choice of two routes: One goes along the coastline, coming eventually to Vieux Fort, from which you can see Les Saintes archipelago. The other heads across the hills, Monts Caraïbes.

Near the pier in Trois Rivières, you'll see the pre-Columbian petroglyphs carved by the original inhabitants, the Arawaks. They're called merely **Roches Gravées,** or "carved rocks." In this **Parc Archéologique** at Bord de la Mer (✆ **590/92-91-88**), the rock engravings are of animal and human figures, probably dating from a.d. 300 or 400. You can also see specimens of plants, including cocoa, pimento, and banana, that the Arawaks cultivated long before the Europeans set foot on Guadeloupe. Hours are daily 8:30am to 5pm; admission is 2€ for adults, free for children 11 and under.

After leaving Trois Rivières, continue north on N1. Passing through the village of Bananier after a 15-minute drive, you turn to your left at Anse Saint-Sauveur to reach the famous **Les Chutes du Carbet** ★, a trio of water falls that are wonderful to behold year-round. If you have time for only one stopover along the route, make it this one. The road to two of them is a narrow, winding one, along many steep hills, passing through banana plantations as you move deeper into a tropical forest.

Les Chutes du Carbet are the tallest falls in the Caribbean. The waters pour down from La Soufrière at 240m (787 ft.) in a trio of stages on the eastern slopes. The upper cascade falls 123m (403 ft.) through a steep crevice. Drawing the most visitors and the easiest to reach is the middle falls at 108m (354 ft.), dropping into a bigger canyon than the upper cascade. The second cascade in the falls is likely to be overrun with tours. The lower cascades drop only 20m (66 ft.) and are less interesting.

You can hike to each cascade. To reach the dramatic second stage from the little town of Saint-Sauveur, head inland via the village of Habituée, going to the end of the road. From here, follow the signs for a 30-minute walk along a marked trailway to the foot of the falls. There is a picnic area nearby.

If you have plenty of time and are in good shape, you can also reach the upper falls from here. Follow a signposted trail, but note that this level of hiking takes about 1 ½ hours and is very steep, difficult, and often slippery.

After your hike, continue northeast on N1 to Capesterre. From there, a 7km (4 ¼-mile) drive brings you to **Ste-Marie.** In the town square, you can see the statue of the first visitor who landed on Guadeloupe: Christopher Columbus, who anchored .4km (¼ mile) from Ste-Marie on November 4, 1493. If you'd like to see the same view that greeted Columbus, you can stop off here. The statue and that view are the only reasons to take a look.

After Ste-Marie, you pass through Goyave, then Petit-Bourg, seeing on your left the route de la Traversée before reaching Pointe-à-Pitre.

10 BEACHES

Chances are your hotel will be right on a beach, or no more than 20 minutes from a good one. Plenty of natural beaches dot the island, from the surf-brushed dark strands of

western Basse-Terre to the long str etches of white sand encir cling Grande-Terre. Public beaches are generally free, but some charge for par king. Unlike hotel beaches, they have few facilities. Hotels welcome nonguests but charge for changing facilities, beach chairs, and towels. Sunday is family day at the beach. Topless sunbathing is common at hotels, less so on village beaches.

Most of the best beaches lie between Gosier and St-François on Grande Terre. Visitors usually head for the hotel beaches at **Gosier.** Stone jetties were constructed here to protect the beaches from erosion. Since this area has the largest concentration of tourists, it's likely to be crowded.

These beaches are not peas in a pod. There's no shade at the **Creole Beach** fronting Creole Beach Hotel, although you can retreat to the bar there for a drink. A stone retaining wall blocks access to the water . Nearby, the **Salako Beach** has more sand and is set against a backdrop of palms that provide some shade. Part of this beach also leads up to a jetty. This is a fine sandy beach (although a little too cr owded at times), and it also contains a snack bar.

Also nearby, **Arawak Beach** is a gorgeous spot, with plenty of swaying palm tr ees providing a bit of shade on the beige sands. It, too, is protected by jetties. Close at hand, **Callinago Beach** is smaller than Arawak but still has a pleasant cr escent of beige sand and palms.

Le Bas du Fort, 3km (1¾ miles) east of Pointe-à-Pitre and close to Gosier, is another popular area. Guests at the H otels Fleu d'Eté and M arissol share its beaches, which ar e also protected by jetties. This is a pictur e-postcard tropical beach with tranquil waters, plenty of sand, and palms for shade.There are hotel bars as well as snack bars and vendors (some of whom are rather aggressive).

Some of G rande-Terre's best beaches ar e in the **Ste-Anne** area, site of Club M ed La Caravelle. **Plage Caravelle** is heaped with white sand, attracting cr owds of sunbathers; snorkelers, too, are drawn to the beach's reef-protected waters.

The French visitors here often like to go nude, and ther e is no finer nude beach than **Pointe Tarare,** a 45-minute driv e fr om G osier. This beach lies east of S t-François at Pointe des Chateaux. I t's one of the island 's most pristine, tranquil beaches, but ther e's no shade to protect you from the fierce noonday sun. You can snorkel here if the water's not kicking up . There's a good r estaurant by the car par k. ***Warning:*** The tourist office doesn't recommend that women come her e unaccompanied.

If y ou're not a nudist, y ou can enjo y the lo vely strip of white sand at **Anse de la Gourde,** lying betw een St-François and P ointe des Chateaux. I t has good sand, but it tends to become crowded on weekends.

The eastern coast of Grande-Terre is less desirable for swimming, as it fronts the more turbulent Atlantic. Nonetheless, the sands at **Le Moule** make for an idyllic beach because a reef protects the shoreline. There are also beach bars her e—and the inevitable crowds, especially on w eekends. You'll find a mor e secluded strip of sand nor th of her e at **La Porte d'Enfer.**

There are two other excellent beaches on the northwestern coast: one at **Anse Laborde** just outside the village of Anse-B ertrand, the other called **Anse du Souffleur** at P ort-Louis. We especially like the beach at S ouffleur for its brilliant, flambo yant trees that bloom in the summer. There are no facilities here, but you can pick up provisions in the shops in the little village, then enjo y a picnic on the beach.

In B asse-Terre, a highly desirable beach is **La Grande-Anse,** just outside D eshaies, reached by heading w est from Sainte Rose along the N2. You won't find any facilities

here, but we think you'll like the powdery sands, tranquil waters, and palm trees. Another desirable beach is **Plage de la Malendure,** on the west coast (the more tranquil side) of Basse-Terre across from Pigeon Island. This is a major center for scuba diving, but the sand tends to be dark here.

If you want to escape the crowds, seek out the spurs and shoulders produced by the mountains of Basse-Terre. In the northwest is a string of fine sandy beaches. Although small, these are highly desirable enclaves for sunbathing. Favorites include **La Plage de Cluny** (near Pointe Allegre), **Plage de la Tillette,** and **Plage de la Perle.** ***Warning:*** The beaches on the north coast of Basse-Terre are exceedingly dangerous for swimming. **Plage de Cluny** is especially treacherous (with very large waves), and there have been several deaths by drowning.

South of Pointe Noire, also on the west coast, is **Plage des Caraïbes,** with its calm waters and sandy strip. This beach has picnic facilities, a shower, and toilets.

Other good beaches are found on the offshore islands, **Iles des Saintes** (see below) and **Marie-Galante** (see the end of this chapter).

11 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

DEEP-SEA FISHING Blue marlin, wahoo (known locally as *thazar*), and yellowfin tuna can be fished throughout the year; the season for dorado (mahimahi) is limited to November through May. Hotels can usually recommend a deep-sea outfitter or two. A well-recommended outfitter is **Michel's Deep Sea Fishing** (✆ **590/55-21-35**), who's usually moored offshore the Plage de Malendure, but who moves his craft to various ports on Guadeloupe and its offshore dependencies, depending on the tides, the season, and business. For a "very full" half-day experience at big game fishing, with a departure at 7:30am and a return scheduled for around 3pm, he charges 120€ per person, with all equipment included, minimum three passengers. A competitor that we know less well, but with roughly the same deal, is **Le Manolo** (✆ **590/90-75-49**).

GOLF Guadeloupe's only golf course is the well-known **Golf de St-François,** avenue de l'Europe, 97110 St-François ★★ (✆ **590/88-41-87**), opposite the Le Kalenda Resort. The course runs alongside a 320-hectare (790-acre) lagoon where windsurfing, water-skiing, and sailing prevail. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr., it's a challenging 6,755-yard, par-71 course, with water traps on 6 of the 18 holes, not to mention massive bunkers, prevailing trade winds, and a particularly fiendish 400-yard, par-4 9th hole. The par-5 6th is the toughest hole on the course; its 450 yards must be negotiated in the constant easterly winds. Greens fees are 5€ per day per person. You can rent clubs for 15€ a day; an electric cart costs 25€ for 18 holes. Hours are daily from 7:30am to 6:30pm.

HIKING The 30,000-hectare (74,100-acre) **Parc Naturel de Guadeloupe** (✆ **590/80-86-00**) contains some of the best hiking trails in the Caribbean. The 290km (180 miles) of trails cut through the deep foliage of rainforest, passing waterfalls and cool mountain pools, hot springs, and rugged gorges along the way. The big excursion country, of course, is around the volcano, La Soufrière. Another highlight is Les Chutes du Carbet, one of the tallest waterfalls in the Caribbean, with a drop of 240m (787 ft.). More details are available in the notes on the Windward Coast near the end of "Around Basse-Terre," earlier in this chapter.

Hiking brochures are available from the tourist office. Hotel tour desks can make arrangements. For information about this and other hikes in the national park, contact

Organisation des Guides de Montagne de la Caraïbe, Maison Forestière, Matouba (✆ **590/92-06-10**).

Warning: Hikers may experience heavy downpours. The annual precipitation on the higher slopes is 6.3m (248 in.) per year, so be prepared with rain gear.

SCUBA DIVING Guadeloupe is more popular for scuba diving than any other French-speaking islands. The allure is the relatively calm seas and **La Réserve Cousteau,** a national park where the underwater environment is rigidly protected. Jacques Cousteau once described the waters off Guadeloupe's Pigeon Island as "one of the world's 10 best diving spots." Sergeant majors become visible at a depth of 9m (30 ft.); spiny sea urchins and green parrotfish at 18m (59 ft.); and magnificent stands of finger, black, brain, and star coral at 24m (79 ft.).

The most popular dive sites include Aquarium, Piscine, Jardin de Corail, Pointe Carrangue, Pointe Barracuda, and Jardin Japonais. Although scattered around the periphery of the island, many are in the bay of Petit Cul-de-Sac Marin, south of Rivière Salée, the channel that separates the two halves of Guadeloupe. North of the Salée is another bay, Grand Cul-de-Sac Marin, where the small islets of Fajou and Caret also boast fine diving.

Reacting to the rich diversity of underwater flora and fauna, which thrive at relatively shallow—and relatively safe—depths, several entrepreneurs have set up shop. One of these is **Les Heures Saines,** Rocher de Malendure, Bouillante (✆ **590/98-86-63**), whose trio of dive boats departs three times a day at 10am, 12:30pm, and 3pm, for explorations of the waters within the reserve. With all equipment included, dives—depending on the level of expertise of the participants, and the intended destination—cost from 50€ each. Novices, at least for the very first time they engage in the sport, pay 58€ for what is referred to as a *baptème* (baptism).

Les Heures Saines maintains its own 13-unit hotel, **Le Paradis Creole** (✆ **590/98-71-62;** www.plongee-guadeloupe.com). Here, simple motel-style accommodations rent for 80€ in winter and 60€ off season. All have either air-conditioning or ceiling fans, but no TV or phone, and very few frills. Many of them are occupied almost exclusively by avid divers and, to a lesser degree, hill climbers, on tour-group holiday from the French mainland.

This outfit's slightly larger competitor, located a short distance away, is **Centre International de la Plongée (C.I.P. Bouillante),** Lieu-Dit Poirier, Malendure Plage, Pigeon, 97125 Bouillante (✆ **590/98-81-72;** www.cip-guadeloupe.com). It's acknowledged as the most professional dive operation on the island. In a wood-sided house on Malendure Plage, close to a well-known restaurant, Chez Loulouse, it's well positioned at the edge of the Cousteau Underwater Reserve. Certified divers pay 35€ for a one-tank dive. A "resort course" for first-time divers costs 45€ and is conducted one-on-one with an instructor. Packages of four dives are offered for 132€; PADI open-water certification costs 500€. It's usually awarded as part of an 8-day instruction ritual, but in a pinch, if its participants are extremely motivated, it can be passed in 3 days if you communicate your wishes and ambitions in advance.

TENNIS If you're a guest at a large-scale hotel with courts of its own, tennis will usually be free, although there might be a small fee for nighttime illumination if it's available. If your hotel doesn't have a court of its own, and if you've called nearby hotels without any luck about using—even for a fee—one of their courts, try either of the two tennis courts at the **Tennis Club de St-François,** Plage des Raisins Claires, St-François (✆ **590/88-75-61**). Use of one of the courts costs 8€ per hour.

WINDSURFING For an intensive immersion in the sport, consider enrolling (along with lots of like-minded aficionados) in one of the windsurfing programs at **UCPA (Union des Centres de Plein-Air),** 97118 St-François (✆ **590/99-54-94;** www.ucpa.com). This organization devoted to outdoor warm-weather sports has its own hotel-style bungalows, each of them beach-fronting affairs built in 1986, set close to a swimming pool and dining hall. They all contain simple and durable furniture and ceiling fans, but none have TVs, phones, air-conditioning, or any other grace notes. If you're already an experienced windsurfer, you can always drop in for a practice run—windsurfers rent for 30€ for a half-day—but participants are encouraged to remain on-site for between 5 and 7 days, buying sports packages whose arithmetic makes each individual session cost a lot less. With half-board included, per-person rates, double occupancy, cost from 395€ to 450€ per week. Packages can be built around windsurfing, surfing, kite surfing, and golf.

12 GUADELOUPE AFTER DARK

Guadeloupeans claim that *la biguine* was invented here, not on Martinique, and they dance it as if it truly was their own. Of course, there's also calypso, technically imported from points farther south such as Trinidad, merengue sounds from the Dominican Republic, salsa from Puerto Rico, and fusion jazz from Cuba, too—the islanders are known for their dancing.

Ask at your hotel for details on the folkloric **Ballets Guadeloupéans** performances (p. 335). This troupe makes frequent appearances at the big resorts.

The major casino, one of only two on the island, both administered by the same company, is **Casino Gosier-les-Bains,** 43 Pointe de la Verdure, Gosier (✆ **590/84-79-68**). A casually elegant spot, it's open daily from 10am until 4am, although the hottest games—those associated with roulette, chemin de fer, and blackjack—don't open till 8:30pm. ID is requested. All areas of the casino are free of admission.

A smaller casino, with fewer slot machines, is **Casino de St-François,** avenue de l'Europe (✆ **590/88-41-31**), near the Le Kalenda Resort in St-François. It is open daily 10am to 3am.

If you don't like casino action, you can find other nighttime diversions in Guadeloupe, although these tend to be seasonal, with more offerings in the winter. Sheathed in wood and open to the outdoor breezes, the **Zoo Rock Café** at La Marina in Gosier (✆ **590/90-77-77;** www.zoorockcafe.com) offers a revolving series of theme parties ("Midnight in Rio" and "Carnival in New Orleans") that might remind you of something in St-Tropez.

Cuban salsa and Latin dancing draw patrons to **Lollapalooza,** 122 Montauban, Gosier (✆ **590/84-56-18**), where pictures of dictator Fidel and the long-dead Che Guevara decorate the walls. If you get tired of this joint, try **Fanzy Bar,** Mathurin Poucette (✆ **590/84-41-34**), where musical styles might include 1980s-style French disco, Bob Marley reggae, and in an occasional orgy of nostalgia, Edith Piaf singing songs from the 1940s and '50s. **Zenith,** Bord de Mer, Bas-du-Fort (✆ **590/90-72-04**), goes in and out of fashion as a sought-after island nightclub and dance club. All these bars are free, but the island's dance clubs charge a uniform fee of about 20€, which includes the cost of a first drink. After that, most cocktails are a pricey 10€ to 15€.

The clientele and psychedelic colors of **Bar Americano,** sur la Plage in Ste-Anne (✆ **590/88-38-99**), might make you believe that the 1960s era of flower power is still alive and thriving. Set directly adjacent to the beach and artfully grungy, it's the kind of

hangout that might remind you of your college years. More animated, but open only Friday and Saturday nights, is **La Cascade,** in Gosier (✆ **590/84-33-69**), which rocks and rolls, often to salsa or other Latin beats, for an audience of locals and short-term holidaymakers.

13 SIDE TRIPS FROM GUADELOUPE

ILES DES SAINTES ★

A cluster of eight islands off the southern coast of Guadeloupe, the Iles des Saintes are certainly off the beaten track. The two main islands and six rocks are Terre-de-Haut, Terre-de-Bas, Ilet-à-Cabrit, La Coche, Les Augustins, Grand Ilet, Le Redonde, and Le Pâté. Only Terre-de-Haut ("Land of High") and, to a lesser extent, Terre-de-Bas ("Land Below") attract visitors; **Terre-de-Haut** is the most interesting and the only island with overnight accommodations.

Some claim that Iles des Saintes has one of the nicest bays in the world, a Lilliputian Rio de Janeiro. The isles, just 10km (6 1/4 miles) from the main island, were visited by Columbus on November 4, 1493, who named them Los Santos.

The history of Iles des Saintes is very much the history of Guadeloupe itself. In years past, the islands have been heavily fortified, as they were Guadeloupe's Gibraltar. The climate is very dry, and until the desalination plant opened, water was often rationed.

The population of Terre-de-Haut is mainly Caucasian, all fisherfolk or sailors and their families who are descended from Breton *corsairs* (pirates). The very skilled sailors maneuver large boats called *saintois* and wear hats called *salacos,* which are shallow and white, with sun shades covered in cloth built on radiating ribs of thick bamboo. Frankly, the hats look like small parasols. If you want to take a photograph of these sailors, please make a polite request (in French—otherwise, they won't know what you're talking about). Visitors often like to buy these hats (if they can find them) for use as beachwear.

The main tourist attraction of the island is **Fort Napoleon,** Bourg (✆ **590/37-99-59**), which is open daily 9am to 12:30pm, charging 5€. Walk uphill to enjoy the panoramic views and a garden filled with cacti and iguanas. Explore the barracks and former prison cells and take in the collection of some 260 contemporary paintings, focusing largely on surrealism or cubism. As a curiosity, note the large exhibit of the world's greatest sea battles.

Some visitors travel to the Iles des Saintes for the day just to go scuba diving. The island's two leading dive outfitters are **Dive-Bouteille** (✆ **590/99-54-25**) and **Pisquettes** (✆ **590/99-88-80**). Both charge competitive rates and have staffs well versed in the esoterica of the region's many dive sites. Rates are 50€ for the first dive, with a three-dive package costing from 130€.

Essentials

GETTING THERE From Pointe-à-Pitre, **flights** depart via **Air Caraïbes** (✆ **0820/825-825**) two or three times a week for the 15-minute ride to Terre-de-Haut, on Iles des Saintes. One-way passage costs 80€; round-trip passage costs 150€. You should confirm these tariffs because of rising worldwide gas prices. The airport is a truncated landing strip that accommodates nothing larger than small propeller planes such as a 20-seat Twin Otter.

Since air connections from Grande-Terre to Terre-de-Haut are scheduled only 3 days a week (see above) and are expensive, most islanders reach Terre-de-Haut by ferryboat, for which there are two distinctly different departure points. Every Monday and Thursday at 8am, boats leave Pointe-à-Pitre's Gare Maritime de Bergevin, Centreville, across the street from the city's biggest open-air market, arriving an hour later on Terre-de-Haut. Round-trip passage costs 37€ per person. Returns from Terre-de-Haut for Pointe-à-Pitre are scheduled those same days (Mon and Thurs) at 4pm. For transit information, contact **Exprès des Iles** at ✆ **590/91-11-05.**

Other ferryboats, operated by a different carrier, depart twice a day from Guadeloupe's port at Trois-Rivieres (near the southern point of Basse-Terre) at 6:45am and 3:45pm, taking 25 or 30 minutes for the transit to the quays at Bourg, on Terre-de-Haut, for a price of 20€ round-trip. Boats return to Trois-Rivieres from Terre-de-Haut every day at 8:30am and 6:30pm. For transit information, contact the **Compagnie des Iles du Sud** (✆ **590/98-30-08**).

GETTING AROUND On an island that doesn't have a single car-rental agency, you get about by walking or riding a bike or motor scooter, which can be rented at hotels and in town near the pier. **Localizé,** at Route Aerodrome in Terre-de-Haut (✆ **590/99-51-99**), rents both motorboats and scooters, costing from 15€ to 25€ per day, depending on the model.

There are also minibuses called ***taxis de l'Ile*** (eight in all), which take six to eight passengers. A taxi from the airport to the port at Bourg costs 12€.

VISITOR INFORMATION In the center of town and easy to spot is the **Office du Tourisme,** 39 rue de la Grand Anse, Bourg, 97137 Terre-de-Haut (✆ **590/99-58-60**). Its information, for the most part, is in French, but a map of the island might come in handy.

Where to Stay on Terre-de-Haut

Bois Joli Set on the western edge of the island, about 3km (1¾ miles) from the village of Bourg, this complex of pink-stucco buildings forms one of the most isolated resorts on the island. Known for housing families from the French mainland, it offers both conventional bedrooms within the main house and eight outlying bungalows set into palm groves near the beach. Two of the bungalows have kitchenettes but don't cost more than the other units. Decor includes bold-patterned fabrics, comfortable chairs, and modern but blandly international furnishings, plus small bathrooms with a shower. The food served in the dining room emphasizes local Creole cuisine.

97137 Terre-de-Haut, Les Saintes, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/99-50-38.** Fax 590/99-55-05. www.hotelboisjoli.fr. 31 units. Winter 144€ double, 202€ bungalow for 2; off season 96€ double, 138€ bungalow for 2. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, fridge, kitchen (in some).

L'Auberge les Petits Saints aux Anacardiers ★ The choice place to stay—and also to dine—is this antiques-filled former mayor's house set on a hillside site with a view of the turquoise bay and the adjacent beach. Surrounded by a tropical garden, a 5-minute walk north of Bourg, this is a tranquil retreat with much colonial charm. The owners, Jean Foraste and Laurence Nonjoie, have filled the house with their collection of furnishings and objects from around the world. All bedrooms, except a one-bedroom bungalow and a separate guesthouse, have queen-size or twin beds. The guesthouse has four spacious rooms and is suitable for friends traveling together or families. Well-prepared food

Finds An Escape to Pristine Beaches

There is no finer beach than **Plage de Pompierre,** which curves around the bay like a half-moon and is set against a backdrop of palms. The beach lies only a 15- to 20-minute walk from where the ferry from Basse-Terre docks. Unless a cruise ship is in port, the beach is generally uncrowded, filled with mainland French enjoying the powdery white sand wearing next to nothing. If you want to bare all, head for **Anse Crawen,** on the western coastline. It is the legal nudist beach, although people often go nude on the other beaches, too. The best snorkeling is on the southern coast at **Plage Figuier,** which, chances are, you'll have almost to yourself.

(French and Creole) on the island is served for dinner here—the restaurant is open to the public, but you should call for a reservation.

La Savane, 97137 Terre-de-Haut, Les Saintes, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/99-50-99.** Fax 590/99-54-51. www.petitssaints.com. 16 units. Winter 110€–140€ double, 160€–520€ suite; off season 90€–110€ double, 140€–420€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV (in some), hair dryer, minibar, no phones (in some).

Where to Dine on Terre-de-Haut

Couleurs du Monde ★ FRENCH/CARIBBEAN Opened by talented expatriates from the French mainland, this spot is the best and most posh restaurant on Terre-de-Haut, with a suave sense of style that's head and shoulders above most of the competition. Its walls are covered with paintings, and at least some of its surfaces are accented with art objects. Menu items combine local ingredients with creative flair and precepts of classical French cuisine, including tuna Kurasawa (sushi-quality tuna lightly seared, raw in the center, served with spices and algae, and named in honor of the Japanese film director), a brochette of chicken with soya and curry, magret of duckling with passion-fruit sauce, and smoked swordfish.

Place du Débarcadères, Bourg. ✆ **0590/92-70-98.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 10€–26€. MC, V. Thurs–Mon 10am–11:30pm. Closed Sept–Oct.

La Saladerie FRENCH/SEAFOOD With a decor of art painted on shipwreck parts, this restaurant serves the best and freshest fish on island. Naturally, most guests order the fish of the day, which can be simply grilled or else served in a delectable fondue with six homemade sauces. Begin perhaps with the local version of gazpacho, going on to such Creole-inspired dishes as shrimp cooked in coconut milk. You compose your own salad from a choice of ingredients. French music is played in the background if you want to linger, sipping Calvados imported from Normandy.

Anse Mire, Terre-de-Haut. ✆ **590/99-53-43.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 10€–20€. DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 11:45am–2pm and 6:45–9pm. Closed Sept 15–Oct 15.

Les Amandiers CREOLE Across from the town hall on the main square of Bourg is the most traditional Creole bistro on Terre-de-Haut. Monsieur and Madame Brudey are your hosts in this blue-and-white building, which has tables and chairs on upper balconies for open-air dining. *Lambi* is prepared either in a fricassee or a *colombo,* a savory curry stew. Also offered are a court bouillon of fish, a *gâteau* (terrine) of fish, and a seemingly endless supply of grilled crayfish, a staple of the island. The catch of the day is also

grilled the way you like it. You'll find an intriguing collection of stews, concocted from fish, bananas, and *christophene.* Knowledge of French is helpful around here.

Place de la Mairie. ✆ **590/99-51-77.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 7.50€–14€; fixed-price menu 12€–17€. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–9pm; off season closed Fri evening.

Diving off Terre-de-Haut

Scuba diving is not limited to mainland Guadeloupe. The underwater world off Les Saintes has attracted deep-sea divers as renowned as Jacques Cousteau, but even the less experienced may explore its challenging depths and multicolored reefs. Intriguing underwater grottoes can be found near Fort Napoléon on Terre-de-Haut. Two well-recommended outfitters include **La Dive Bouteille,** Fond-du-Curé (✆ **590/99-54-25;** www.dive-bouteille.com), and **Club Pisquette,** Le Mouillage, in Bourg (✆ **590/99-88-80**). A resort course designed for unlicensed scuba divers costs 51€, and a one-tank dive for already-certified divers also goes for 46€, with all equipment included.

Terre-de-Haut After Dark

Seemingly everybody, both locals and visitors, heads to **Coconuts,** rue Benoit Cassin (✆ **590/99-53-02**). This old-style *lolo* ("food kiosk" in the local dialect) is called Chez Cécile by locals; it's named for its owner, Cécile Samson. The club is near the place where the fishermen rest between trips, and some of them often hit the bar with their congas and bongos to drum up some music.

MARIE-GALANTE

Come to Marie-Galante to see the Caribbean the way it used to be before the advent of high-rise hotels and casinos. In just 1 hour from Pointe-à-Pitre, you can be transported to a world that time seems to have forgotten. This offshore dependency of Guadeloupe is an almost-perfect circle of about 155 sq. km (60 sq. miles). Almost exclusively French speaking, it lies about 30km (19 miles) south of Guadeloupe's Grand-Terre and is full of rustic charm, including some 19th-century windmills dotting the island and an occasional ox-drawn cart. We could skip those Sunday cockfights, however.

Today some 12,500 inhabitants live here, making their living from sugar and rum, the latter said to be the best in the Caribbean. The best distillery to visit is **Distillerie Bielle,** Section Bielle, 97112 Grand-Bourg (✆ **590/97-93-62**). The island's climate is rather dry, and there are many good beaches, some of the finest in Guadeloupe's archipelago. One of these stretches of brilliantly white sand covers at least 8km (5 miles). However, swimming can be dangerous in some places. **Grand-Bourg,** the main town, is dominated by an 1845 baroque church. The island's best beach lies almost immediately adjacent to Grand-Bourg, **Plage de la Feuillère,** a 2km (1 1/4-mile) stretch of white sand that's favored by swimmers and sunbathers. Equally appealing, and more isolated, are the **Plages du Nord,** stretching across the island's northern tier. They include the **Plage du Vieux-Fort,** a 1km (1/2-mile) stretch of open white sand, and the **Place de l'Anse Canot,** a semicircular bay whose white sands encompass waters that are ideal for small sailcraft, thanks to wave-sheltered waters that are relatively calm.

Essentials

GETTING THERE **Express des Iles,** Gare Maritime, Bergevin, Pointe-à-Pitre (✆ **590/91-11-05**), operates boat service to the island with three daily round-trips between Point-à-Pitre and Grand-Bourg. The round-trip costs 35€. Monday to Saturday, ferryboats depart from Pointe-à-Pitre for Grand-Bourg on Marie Galante, at 8:15am, 12:30pm,

and 5:15pm, with Sunday departures occurring at 8:15am, 5pm, and 7pm. Monday to Saturday, ferryboats to Pointe-à-Pitre depart from Marie-Galante at 6am, 9am, and 4pm, and on Sunday, ferryboats leave from Marie-Galante at 6am, 4pm, and 6pm.

GETTING AROUND A limited number of **taxis** are available at the airport, but be sure to negotiate the price before you drive off. Should you wish to rent a car, go to **Hertz** in Grand-Bourg (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S., or 590/97-59-80; www.hertz.com), where rentals range from 30€ to 60€ per day.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Office de Tourisme** is at rue du Fort, BP 15, 97112 Grand-Bourg, Marie-Galante (✆ **590/97-56-51;** fax 590/97-56-54; www.ot-marie galante.com).

Where to Stay & Dine

La Cohoba Hotel (Value) On Folle Anse, an uncrowded white-sand beach, this completely renovated hotel is a comfortable nest. The beach is edged with sea-grape and mahogany trees. The hotel itself takes its name from the cohoba plant, known to the Caribs as a plant whose red pods have hallucinogenic powers. The hotel, the largest on Marie-Galante, has small, suitelike rooms decorated with white tile and ghost-white walls, along with bright Caribbean colors and tiny but efficient shower-only bathrooms. The superior rooms have kitchenettes.

Cocoyer, BP 59, 97112 Marie-Galante, Guadeloupe, F.W.I. ✆ **590/97-50-50**. Fax 590/97-97-96. 100 units. Winter 125€–150€ double; off season 95€–125€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Le Touloulou CREOLE Adjacent to the beach, with a hardworking staff and a casual crowd, Le Touloulou specializes in shellfish and crayfish culled from local waters. If sea urchins or lobster are your passion, you'll find them here in abundance, prepared virtually any way you want. Other standbys include a savory, and highly ethnic, version of *bébelé* (cow tripe enhanced with breadfruit, dumplings, and plantains) and conch served either as fricassee or in puff pastry.

The restaurant has five very basic bungalow-style accommodations, each with air-conditioning and a small private bathroom. Double occupancy costs 55€, with or without a kitchenette. A two-bedroom bungalow, with kitchenette, suitable for up to four occupants, costs 110€. Staff here tends to be blasé, bordering on terminally lethargic, so come armed with a sense of humor. At night, the bar is transformed into the island's only dance club.

Petite Anse, Marie-Galante. ✆ **590/97-32-63.** Fax 590/97-33-59. Main courses 16€–32€; fixed-price menu 30€. MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3:30pm; Tues–Sat 7–10:30pm. Closed Sept 15–Oct 15.

LA DESIRADE

La Désirade is one of the few islands in the Caribbean that is not touched by tourism of any significance. Most visitors come just for the day to enjoy the uncrowded white sandy beach or perhaps to tour the island's barren expanses.

Columbus spotted this *terre désirée,* or "sought-after land," after his Atlantic crossing in 1493. The island, just 8km (5 miles) off the eastern tip of Guadeloupe proper, is less than 11km (6¾ miles) long and about 2km (1¼ miles) wide, and it has a single potholed road running along its length.

The island has fewer than 1,700 inhabitants, including the descendants of Europeans exiled here by royal command. There are a handful of exceptionally simple guesthouses

charging from 50€ for overnight accommodations for two. Don't expect anything grand.

The main village is **Grande-Anse,** which has a small church with a presbytery and flower garden. **Le Souffleur** is a boat-building community, and at **Baie Mahault,** you'll see the ruins of the old leper colony (including a barely recognizable chapel) from the early 18th century.

The best **beaches** on the island's south side are **Souffleur,** a tranquil oasis near the boat-building center, and **Baie Mahault,** a small, quintessentially Caribbean beach with white sand and palm trees.

Essentials

GETTING THERE From Grand-Terre, most passengers opt for transit to La Désirade by **ferry,** which leaves from the wharves at St-François every day at 8am. Returns from La Désirade for St-François include a daily departure at 4:45pm, allowing convenient access for day-trippers. Trip time is around 50 minutes each way, depending on conditions at sea. Round-trip passage on the ferryboat costs 18€. Call ✆ **590/20-05-03** for schedules, but only from 4 to 7pm daily.

GETTING AROUND Three or four **minibuses** run between the dock and the towns. To get around, you might negotiate with a local driver. **Bicycles** are also available at the hotels.

Where to Stay & Dine

L'Oasis (Value) One of the more suitable accommodations of a lackluster lot, lying .8km (½ mile) from the airport, this simple and boxy building is but a short walk from a good beach. It's decorated (if that is the word) in a plain, simple, yet comfortable way, almost how remote Caribbean inns looked in the 1950s. All bedrooms have a bathroom with a toilet, but little else other than a decent bed. Meals are taken at the Restaurant Lagranlang, specializing in Creole dishes and French cuisine, a typical menu usually with fresh fish, costing from 15€.

Beausejour, 97127 La Désirade. ✆ **590/20-01-00.** www.oasisladesirade.com. 7 units. Year-round 48€ for 2 persons in a single; 60€ for 4 persons in a studio with kitchenette. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Oualiri Beach Its recent elevation to fame derives from its ownership and administration by Guadeloupe-born hotelier Theodore Compper, who retired to La Désirade after years successfully managing such large-scale hotels as The Holiday Inn and other blockbuster resorts on Guadeloupe. You'll find the ultimate minimalist hotel here, with few amenities other than access to the beach and the jetty of the hamlet of Beau Séjour, each with a 274m (898-ft.) walk. Don't expect a raft of organized activities, as frankly, there's not a lot to do or see other than celebrate the sea, the clean air, and the ultra-laid-back island lifestyle. There's an on-site restaurant, open daily from 6:30am to 10pm, where set menus cost 18€ each. Menu items focus on fresh fish, shellfish, and whatever Creole recipes the locals are inspired to cook that day. Bedrooms have clear pale colors and concrete walls that were among the first erected on this island, more than 60 much-renovated years ago. Public areas are warmly decorated with Creole paintings, often in bright primary colors.

Plage Beau Séjur, Beau Séjur, 97127 La Désirade. ✆ **0590/20-20-08.** www.rendezvouskarukera.com. 6 units. Winter 95€ double, 105€ triple; off season 66€ double, 70€ triple. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV.

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Jamaica

Jamaica is a mixed blessing. Arguably, it's one of the most beautiful of all Caribbean islands, but also the most potentially dangerous. After a visit to Jamaica, experiencing the dynamism of its people, Aruba will put you to sleep, St. Maarten will seem like a shopping mall, and Antigua will appear like a refuge for the elderly.

Most visitors already have a mental image of Jamaica before they arrive: boisterous reggae and Rastafarianism; white-sandy beaches; and lush landscapes, rivers, mountains, and clear waterfalls. Now add some remarkable art and cuisine, and you have a pretty accurate picture of this island nation.

Jamaica lies 145km (90 miles) south of Cuba and is the third-largest of the Caribbean islands, with some 11,396 sq. km (4,444 sq. miles) of lush greenery, a mountain ridge peaking at 2,220m (7,282 ft.), and, on the north coast, many white-sand beaches with clear blue waters.

It can be a tranquil and intriguing island, but there's no denying that it's plagued by crime, drugs, and muggings. There is also palpable racial tension. But many visitors are untouched by these problems; they're escorted from the airport to their patrolled hotel grounds and venture out only on organized tours. Vacationers are largely sheltered from the more unpredictable and dangerous side of Jamaica, and this kind of trip can suit you just fine if all you want is to unwind on a beautiful beach. Those who want to see the "real Jamaica," or at least see the island in greater depth, had better be prepared for some hassle. For example, vendors on the beaches and in the markets can be particularly aggressive.

Should you go? Certainly. You'll want to be prudent and cautious, just as if you were visiting New York, Miami, or Los Angeles. But the island has fine hotels and cuisine. It's a good choice for couples getting married or honeymooning. As for sports, Jamaica has the best golf courses in the West Indies and offers lots of other outdoor activities, like rafting and serious hiking. The island has gorgeous beaches and some of the finest diving in the world.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **The hedonistic resort of Negril.** There's nothing like it in the Caribbean—from ganja cakes to rent-a-Rasta boys, Negril is the ultimate party resort. It's all here in the northwestern corner of Jamaica.
- **Dunn's River Falls.** In Ocho Rios, the get-wet tour takes you along a stair-stepped cascade of falling water down the mountainside, joining the sea by a white-sandy beach.
- **Port Antonio.** Errol Flynn's retreat for indulging in "my wicked, wicked ways," is as sleepy as ever, opening onto two picture-book harbors. Its glamorous past now a distant memory, Port Antonio remains the best place in Jamaica for an off-the-record weekend. What happens in Port Antonio stays in Port Antonio.

CHOOSING WHERE TO STAY

Jamaica is such a large island that you have a wide range of choices.

Jamaica's grande dame is **Montego Bay,** which has three of the leading and poshest resorts in the Caribbean (Half Moon, Round Hill, and Tryall), plus a very good selection of moderately priced hotels. The beaches are fabulous here, though often crowded in winter because of the hotel density. There are fine golf courses, and the shopping is excellent, but the nightlife is surprisingly lackluster.

Younger and hipper than Montego Bay, **Negril** is a sleepy town (with surprisingly little in the way of dining or nightlife) that has a free-wheeling, sensual personality and a spectacular stretch of beach. A row of resorts, many of them lavish all-inclusives, has sprouted up along its shores.

To the west, **Ocho Rios** has some of the grandest and most traditional resorts in Jamaica, as well as some of the leading Sandals properties. But it doesn't have the best beaches, shops, or scenic attractions, and it's frequently overrun with cruise-ship passengers. Nonetheless, if you like the sound of a particular resort there and just plan to stay put on your resort's beach, this might be for you.

Port Antonio is for the upscale traveler who wants to escape the mass package tours of Ocho Rios or even Montego Bay. Come here for some good beaches plus great river rafting, scuba diving, or snorkeling.

Most visitors go to **Kingston** for business reasons. It does have interesting museums and historic sights, fine galleries, and a diverse nightlife scene. But it's a city with some serious urban problems, and not what you're looking for in an island vacation. You certainly wouldn't go to Kingston for beaches.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you go, you can get information from the **Jamaica Tourist Board** at 5201 Blue Lagoon Dr., Ste. 670, Miami, FL 33126 (✆ **800/233-4582** in the U.S., or 305/665-0557; fax 305/666-7239). In Canada, contact the office in Toronto at 303 Eglinton Ave. E, Ste. 200, Toronto, ON M4P IL3 (✆ **800/465-2624** or 416/482-7850). Brits can contact the London office at 1-2 Prince Consort Rd., SW7 2BZ (✆ **020/7225-9090**). The official website of the Jamaica Tourist Board is **www.visitjamaica.com**.

On the island, you can find tourist offices at 64 Knutsford Blvd., **Kingston** (✆ **876/929-9200**); and Cornwall Beach, St. James, **Montego Bay** (✆ **876/952-4425**). For more information, check http://Jamaica-guide.info.

GETTING THERE

There are two **international airports** on Jamaica: **Donald Sangster Airport** in Montego Bay (✆ **876/952-3124;** www.mbjairport.com) and **Norman Manley Airport** in Kingston (✆ **876/924-8452;** www.manley-airport.com.jm/flash). The most popular flights to Jamaica are from New York and Miami.

Among the most convenient service to Jamaica is that provided by **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) through its hubs in New York and Miami. Throughout the year, one daily nonstop flight departs from New York's JFK airport for Montego Bay, continuing on to Kingston. Return flights to New York usually depart from Montego Bay. From Miami, at least two daily flights depart for Kingston

Moments A True Taste of Jamaica

Wherever you go in Jamaica, you'll see ramshackle stands selling **jerk pork.** There is no more authentic local experience than to stop at one of these stands and order a lunch of jerk pork, preferably washed down with a Red Stripe beer. Jerk is a way of barbecuing spicy meats on slats of pimento wood, over a wood fire set in the ground. You can never be quite sure what goes into the seasoning, but the taste is definitely of peppers, pimento (allspice), and ginger. You can also order jerk chicken, sausage, fish, and even lobster. The cook will haul out a machete and chop the meat into bite-size pieces for you, then throw them into a paper bag.

and three daily flights for Montego Bay. **US Airways** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) has two daily flights from New York, stopping in Charlotte or Philadelphia. One daily flight leaves out of Baltimore, stopping in either Charlotte or Philadelphia before continuing to Jamaica. **Northwest Airlines** (✆ **800/225-2525** in the U.S. and Canada; www.nwa.com) flies directly to Montego Bay from Detroit or Minneapolis. **Continental Airlines** (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies from its Houston hub at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport to Montego Bay.

Air Jamaica (✆ **800/523-5585** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/952-4300; www.airjamaica.com) operates one or more flights daily to Montego Bay and Kingston from such cities as Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Atlanta, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Newark, Boston, Houston, Los Angeles, and New York. The airline has connecting service within Jamaica through its reservation network to **International Air Link** (see below).

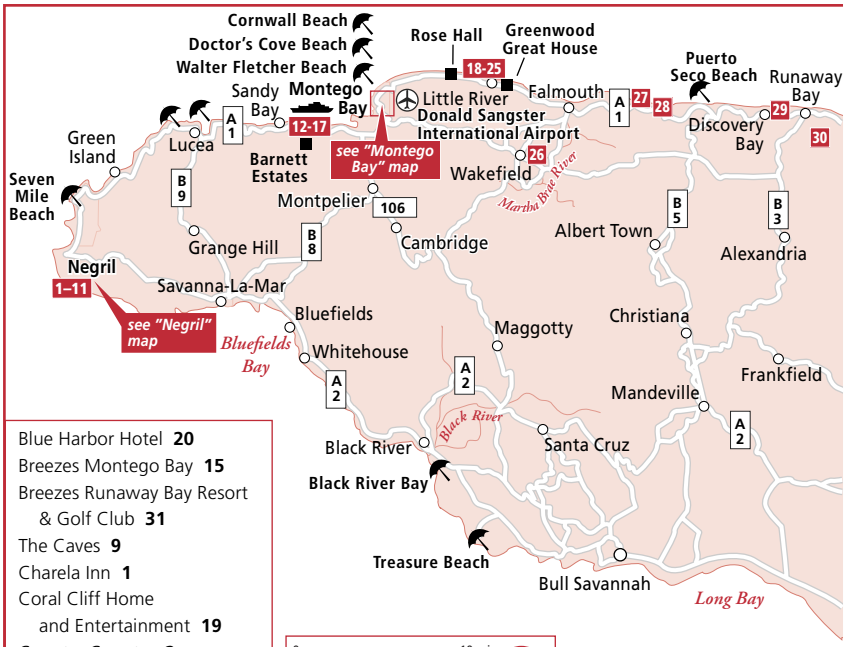
Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com) flies from Toronto to Jamaica daily.

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297;** www.britishairways.com) has three nonstop flights weekly to Kingston from London's Gatwick Airport.

GETTING AROUND

Especially if you've booked a package at one of the big resorts, you're likely to have airport transfers from Montego Bay included. Many resorts send buses to pick up and drop off their arriving and departing guests.

BY PLANE Most travelers enter the country via Montego Bay. If you want to fly elsewhere, you'll need to use the island's domestic air service, which is provided by **International Air Link** (✆ **866/952-5807;** www.intlairlink.com), a subsidiary of Air Jamaica, whose planes usually hold between 10 and 17 passengers. The airline flies from the island's international airports at Montego Bay and Kingston to small airports around the island, including Boscobel (near Ocho Rios) and Tinson Pen (a tiny airport near Kingston for domestic flights only). For example, there are seven flights a day between Kingston and Montego Bay. In addition, there are two flights a day between Kingston and Ocho Rios, and two flights between Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, each costing about $71 one-way. The only airports with car-rental facilities are the international airports at Kingston and Montego Bay.



Blue Harbor Hotel **20**
Breezes Montego Bay **15**
Breezes Runaway Bay Resort & Golf Club **31**
The Caves **9**
Charela Inn **1**
Coral Cliff Home and Entertainment **19**
Country Country **2**
Couples Negril **5**
Couples San Souci Resort & Spa **38**
Couples Swept Away Negril **3**
Coyaba Beach Resort & Club **23**
Doctors Cave Beach Hotel **16**
FDR (Franklyn D. Resort) **30**
FDR Pebbles **27**
Goblin Hill Villas at San San **43**
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Grand Lido Braco **28**
Half Moon Rose Hall **21**
Hedonism II **6**
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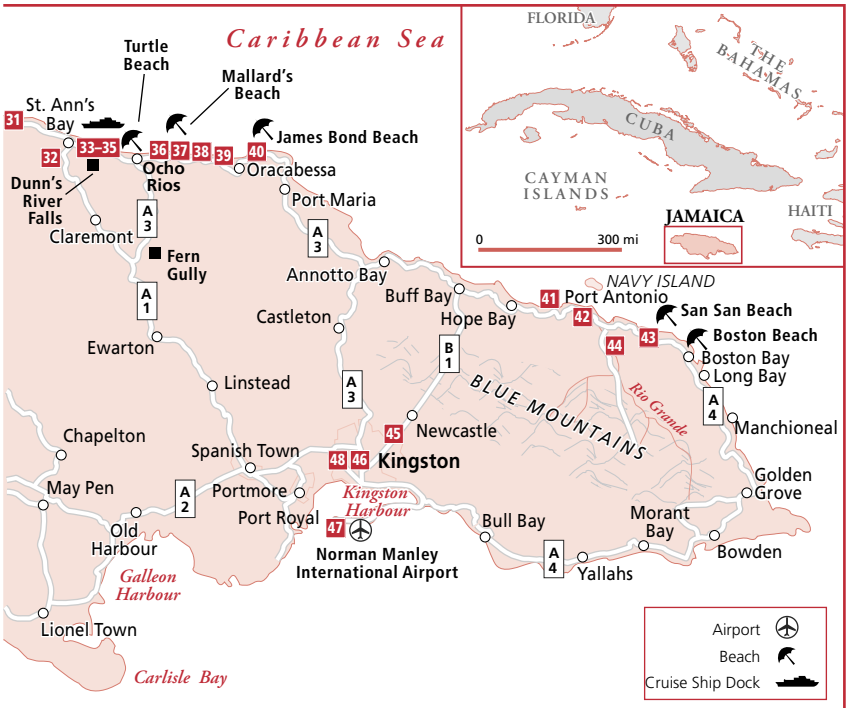
Hibiscus Lodge Hotel **34**
High Hope Estate **32**
Hotel Mocking Bird Hill **41**
Iberostar Rose Hall Beach Hotel **24**
Idle Awhile Resort **11**
Jamaica Heights Resort **42**
Jamaica Inn **37**
The Jamaica Pegasus **47**
Morgans Harbour Hotel **48**
Richmond Hill Inn **17**
Rio Vista Resort Villas **44**
Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall Jamaica **25**
Rockhouse **7**

BY TAXI Not all of Jamaica's taxis are metered; if yours is not, negotiate the price before you get in. Special taxis and buses for visitors are operated by **JUTA** (Jamaica Union of Travelers Association; ✆ **876/957-4620**) and have the union's emblem on the side of the vehicle. All prices are controlled, and any local JUTA office will supply a list of rates. JUTA drivers handle nearly all the ground transportation, and some offer sightseeing tours. A typical fare is $18 per person for an airport transfer between Montego Bay and Negril, or $80 for an airport transfer between Montego Bay and Ocho Rios. Rates are 25% higher after midnight.

BY RENTAL CAR Jamaica is big enough, and public transportation is unreliable enough, that a car is a necessity if you plan to do much independent sightseeing. You can



Round Hill Hotel and Villas **13**
Royal Plantation Spa & Golf Resort **35**
Runaway Bay H.E.A.R.T Hotel **22**
Sandals Dunn's River Villagio Golf Resort & Spa **33**
Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort **36**
Sandals Negril Beach Resort & Spa **4**
Sandals Royal Caribbean & Private Island **18**
Starfish Trelawny **26**
Strawberry Hill **45**
Sunset at the Palms Resort & Spa **8**
Tensing Pen **10**
Terra Nova All Suite Hotel **46**
Tower Isle **39**
Tryall Golf, Tennis & Beach Club **12**
Wexford Court Hotel **14**
Whispering Bamboo Cove **45**

also take an organiz ed tour or a taxi tour to the major sights and spend the r est of the time on the beaches near y our hotel.

Depending on road conditions, driving time for the 80km (50 miles) fr om Montego Bay to Negril is 1½ hours; from Montego Bay to Ocho Rios, 1½ hours; from Ocho Rios to Port Antonio, 2½ hours; and from Ocho Rios to Kingston, 2 hours.

Unfortunately, car-rental rates on Jamaica have skyrocketed recently, making it one of the most expensive rental scenes in the Caribbean. There's also a 15% government tax on rentals. Equally unfortunate are the unfavorable insurance policies that apply to virtually every car-rental agency on Jamaica.

Try **Budget Rent-a-Car** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, 876/952-3838 at the Montego Bay Airport, or 876/924-8762 in Kingston; www.budget.com); with Budget, a daily collision-damage waiver is mandatory at $15 per day. **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada; www.hertz.com) operates branches at the airports at both Montego Bay (✆ **876/979-0438**) and Kingston (✆ **876/924-8028**). A typical rental might be a Mitsubishi Mirage for $480 per week in winter, dropping to $330 weekly off season.

If you'd like to shop for a better deal with one of the local companies in Montego Bay, try **Jamaica Car Rental,** 23 Gloucester Ave. (✆ **876/952-5586;** www.jamaicacar.net), with a branch at the Sangster International Airport at Montego Bay (✆ **876/952-9496**). Daily rates range from $50 to $65. You can also try **United Car Rentals,** 49 Gloucester Ave. (✆ **876/952-3077**), which rents Toyotas and Hondas costing from $65 per day for a four-door standard car with air-conditioning.

In Kingston, try **Island Car Rentals,** 17 Antigua Ave. (✆ **876/926-8012;** www.islandcarrentals.com), with a branch at Montego Bay's Sangster International Airport (✆ **876/952-7225**). It rents Hondas and Jimmys with rates beginning at $80 daily in winter, $60 in the off season.

Remember: Drive on the left, and exercise more than your usual caution here because of the unfamiliar terrain. Be especially cautious at night. Speed limits in town are 48kmph (30 mph), and 80kmph (50 mph) outside of town. Gas is measured in liters, and the charge is officially payable only in Jamaican dollars; some stations accept credit cards. Your own valid driver's license from back home is acceptable for short-term visits to Jamaica.

Fast Facts Jamaica

Banks Banks islandwide are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. You'll find **ATMs** in all the major resort areas and towns, including Port Antonio, Ocho Rios, and Kingston. There are several in Montego Bay, of course, and even one or two in sleepy Negril.

Currency The unit of currency on Jamaica is the **Jamaican dollar (J$),** and it uses the same symbol as the U.S. dollar ($). There is no fixed rate of exchange. Visitors to Jamaica can pay for most goods in U.S. dollars or with credit cards. Always check if prices are listed in U.S. dollars or Jamaican dollars.

In this guide we've quoted prices in American dollars, even if the price-quotation policy of the establishment is in Jamaican dollars. The symbol J$ denotes prices in Jamaican dollars. *Unless otherwise specified, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Jamaican currency is issued in bank notes of J$50, J$100, J$500, and J$1,000. Coins are available in denominations of J$1, J$5, J$10, and J$20. At press time, but subject to change, US$1 equaled approximately J$83, and 1£ equaled approximately J$125 Jamaican dollars. As this will probably fluctuate a bit during the lifetime of this edition, use these rates for general guidance only.

There are Bank of Jamaica exchange bureaus at both international airports (Montego Bay and Kingston), at cruise ship piers, and in most hotels.

Customs Do *not* bring in or take out illegal drugs t o or fr om Jamaica. Your luggage will be sear ched; marijuana-sniffing police dogs are stationed at the airpor t. You cannot bring fr esh f oodstuffs int o the U .S.; ho wever, y ou can bring in t o Jamaica most it ems int ended for personal use .

Documents U.S., British, and C anadian residents need a passpor t and a r eturn or an ongoing ticket. I mmigration cards, needed for bank transac tions and currency exchange, are g iven to visit ors at the airpor t arrival desks .

Electricity Most plac es ha ve 110-v olt A C (60 c ycles), as in the Unit ed Stat es. However, some establishments operat e on 220-v olt A C (50 c ycles). I f y our hot el is on a diff erent current from your U.S.-made appliance, ask for a transformer and an adapter.

Embassies, Consulates & High C ommissions Calling embassies or c onsulates in Jamaica is a challenge . Phones will ring and ring bef ore being picked up , if they are answered at all. Extreme patience is needed t o reach a live voice on the other end. The embassy of the **United Sta tes** is locat ed at the Jamaica Mutual Lif e Bldg., 2 Oxf ord Rd ., K ingston 5 (✆ **876/929-4850**). The H igh C ommission of **Canada** is situat ed at 3 West K ings House Rd ., K ingston 10 (✆ **876/926-1500**). The High Commission of the **United Kingdom** is found at 28 Trafalgar Rd., Kingston 10 (✆ **876/510-0700**).

Emergencies F or the **police,** dial ✆ **119;** to report a **fire** or call an **ambulance,** dial ✆ **110.**

Language Jamaicans speak English with a lo vely lilt. Among themselv es, they also speak pat ois, a fast-spoken blend of F rench, English, and a number of other languages.

Safety Major r esorts ha ve securit y guar ds who pr otect the g rounds, so most vacationers don't ha ve an y real problems. I t's not wise t o ac cept an in vitation to see the "real Jamaica" fr om some stranger y ou meet on the beach. Ex ercise caution when tra veling ar ound Jamaica. Saf eguard y our valuables , and nev er lea ve them unatt ended on a beach. Likewise , nev er lea ve luggage or other valuables in a car , or ev en the trunk of a car . The U.S. State Depar tment has issued a tra vel advisory about crime rat es in K ingston, so don 't walk ar ound alone at night. Caution is also advisable in man y nor th-coast t ourist ar eas, especially r emote houses and isolat ed villas that can 't aff ord securit y.

Taxes The government imposes bet ween 10% and 15% r oom tax, depending on your category of hotel. You'll be charged $27 depar ture tax at the airpor t, payable in either Jamaican or U .S. dollars . There's also a 20% go vernment tax on r ental cars and a 20% tax on all o verseas phone calls .

Time Jamaica is on Eastern Standard Time year-round and doesn't follow daylight saving time. When the Unit ed Stat es is on da ylight sa ving time, at 6am in M iami it's 5am in K ingston.

Tipping A general 15% or 20% is expec ted in hotels and restaurants on occasions when y ou w ould normally tip . S ome plac es add a ser vice char ge t o the bill , so make sure y ou k now whether it 's al ready included. Tipping is not allo wed in the all-inclusive hot els. Taxi driv ers expect about 15%.

Water It's usually safe to drink piped-in water, islandwide, as it's filtered and chlorinated. However, it's prudent to drink bottled water if it's available.

Weather Expect temperatures around 77°F to 79°F (25°C–26°C) on the coast. Summer is a little warmer. In the mountains, it can get as low as 40°F (4°C). There is generally a breeze, which in winter is noticeably cool. The rainy periods generally are October and November (although it can extend into Dec), and May and June. Normally rain comes in short, sharp showers; then the sun shines.

2 MONTEGO BAY ★★★

Situated on the northwestern coast of the island, Montego Bay (MoBay) first attracted tourists in the 1940s, when Doctor's Cave Beach became popular with wealthy vacationers who bathed in the warm water fed by mineral springs. It's now Jamaica's second-largest city. Despite the large influx of visitors, Montego Bay still retains its identity as a thriving business and commercial center, and it functions as the market town for most of western Jamaica. It has cruise ship piers and a growing industrial center. Montego Bay has its own airport, so those who vacation here have little need to visit the capital, Kingston. MoBay is the most cosmopolitan of Jamaica's cities.

ESSENTIALS

MEDICAL FACILITIES The **Cornwall Regional Hospital** is at Mount Salem (✆ **876/952-6683**). For medicines and prescriptions, try the **Overton Pharmacy,** 49 Union St., Overton Plaza (✆ **876/952-2699**).

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

Half Moon Rose Hall ★★★ (Kids) Opening onto 160 hectares (395 acres) that take in a .8km (1/2-mile) stretch of white-sand beach, this is one of the Caribbean's grand hotels, without the snobbery of Round Hill or Tryall (see below). One of the top 25 tropical resorts according to *Condé Nast Traveler,* it also has far more activities, excitement, amenities, restaurants, and a better beach. About 13km (8 miles) east of Montego Bay's city center and 10km (6 1/4 miles) from the international airport, it's a grand and appealing place, a true luxury hideaway with taste and style, and also highly acclaimed as an eco-sensitive resort. Accommodations include conventional hotel rooms, suites, and a collection of superbly accessorized private villas. (Most villas have private pools and a full-time staff.) Each unit is comfortably furnished with an English colonial/Caribbean motif and a private balcony or patio, plus a state-of-the-art bathroom. Queen Anne–inspired furniture is set off by vibrant Jamaican paintings, and many units contain mahogany four-poster beds.

Half Moon Post Office, Rose Hall, St. James, Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **866/648-3951** in the U.S., or 876/953-2211. Fax 876/953-2731. www.halfmoon.com. 398 units. Winter $400–$470 double, $690–$1,680 suite; off season $250–$290 double, $420–$1,680 suite. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $85 per person extra. Ask about golf and spa packages. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 7 bars; babysitting; bikes; horseback riding; children's activities; golf course; fitness club; croquet; squash; Internet; Jacuzzi; 4 outdoor pools; room service; 2 saunas; spa; 13

Warning! A Word on Marijuana

You will almost certainly be approached by someone selling *ganja* (marijuana)—in fact, that's why many travelers come here. However, drugs, including marijuana, are illegal, and imprisonment is the penalty for possession. You don't want to experience the Jamaican penal system firsthand. Don't smoke pot openly in public. Of course, hundreds of visitors do and get away with it, but you may be the one who gets caught, and the person selling to you might even be a police informant. Above all, don't try to bring marijuana back into the United States. There are drug-sniffing dogs stationed at the Jamaican airports, and they will check your luggage. U.S. Customs agents, well aware of the drug situation on Jamaica, have arrested many tourists who have tried to bring some home.

tennis courts (9 lit); deep-sea fishing; dive shop; medical center. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi (in some).

Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall Jamaica ★ Kids This blockbuster complex is big, bustling, upscale, and impressive, sprawling across a wide stretch of white-sand beach. (Clients seeking a better beach are shuttled to the nearby Rose Hall Beach Club, site of many motorized and nonmotorized watersports.) One of its major draws is the White Witch golf course, a 15-minute shuttle ride away. Its public areas try to duplicate the ambience of a traditional Jamaican Great House that's been updated and modernized. Come here if you're looking for a somewhat sanitized stopover in a big hotel with international comforts, including a full-service spa. Frankly, this is not our favorite of the ultra-upscale resorts of Montego Bay—it lacks the sense of fantasy (gazebos, lavish gardens, bougainvillea burgeoning over lattices) of Half Moon and the intimacy of Round Hill. And for such a supposedly top-notch venue, the swimming pool isn't big enough. Accommodations, however, are appropriately luxurious, but with an upscale motif that could have been imported from virtually any luxury hotel in North America.

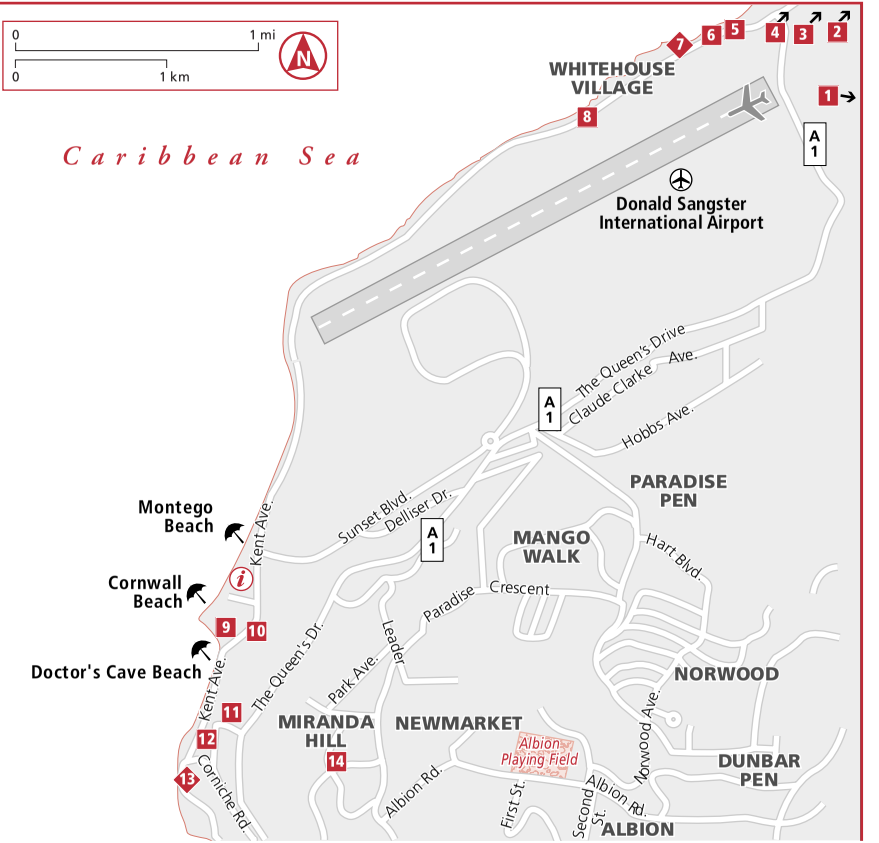
Rose Hall, Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/241-3333** in the U.S. or Canada, or 876/953-2800. Fax 876/518-0110. www.ritzcarlton.com. 427 units. Winter $389–$529 double, from $589 suite; off season $199–$379 double, from $499 suite. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's activities; golf course; health club; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; nonmotorized watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

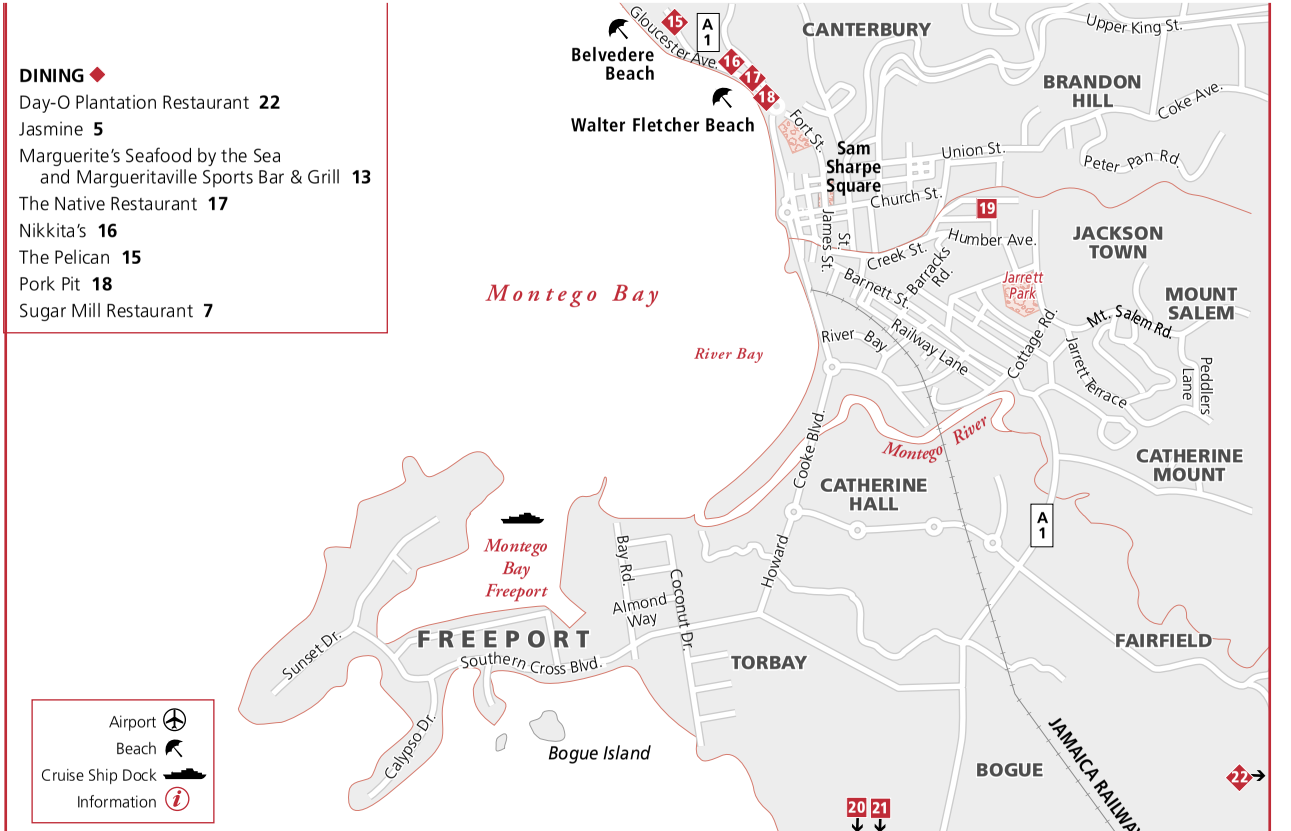
Round Hill Hotel and Villas ★★★ Opened in 1953 on a small, private, white-sand beach, Round Hill is a legend, the most prestigious address in Jamaica, even though it lacks the extensive facilities (and, in some cases, the whimsical sense of romantic fantasy) of Half Moon. It originated as a small, clubby compound of private villas on the grounds of a 44-hectare (109-acre) plantation devoted to the production of pineapples and allspice, attracting the aristocracy of Europe and some of the biggest moguls of the New World. By far the most spectacular accommodations here are those cloistered away on the surrounding hillsides, within white-sided villas. Decors of these luxurious villas are elegant and theatrical, thanks to acres of mahogany and marble, the skill of some of the best architects in North America and Europe, and frequent renovations. Less grand accommodations in the Pineapple House, a rambling, two-story building set at the edge

ACCOMMODATIONS

Blue Harbour Hotel **14**
Breezes Montego Bay **10**
Coral Cliff Home and Enterainment **12**
Coyaba Beach Resort & Club **9**
Doctors Cave Beach Hotel **8**
FDR Pebbles **2**
Half Moon Rose Hall **6**
Iberostar Rose Hall Beach Hotel **4**
Richmond Hill Inn **19**
Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall Jamaica **5**
Round Hill Hotel & Villas **20**
Sandals Royal Caribbean & Private Island **3**
Starfish Trelawny **1**
Tryall Golf, Tennis & Beach Club **21**
Wexford Court Hotel **11**

For Tryall Club and Round Hill Hotel & Villas, see the "Jamaica" map.




DINING
Day-O Plantation Restaurant 22
Jasmine 5
Marguerite's Seafood by the Sea and Margueritaville Sports Bar & Grill 13
The Native Restaurant 17
Nikkita's 16
The Pelican 15
Pork Pit 18
Sugar Mill Restaurant 7
Belvedere Beach
Walter Fletcher Beach
Gloucester Ave.
A 1
CANTERBURY
Upper King St.
BRANDON HILL
Coke Ave.
Peter Pan Rd.
Union St.
Sam Sharpe Square
Church St.
Fort St.
James St.
Creek St.
Humber Ave.
JACKSON TOWN
Barnett St.
Barracks Rd.
Jarrett Park
MOUNT SALEM
Mt. Salem Rd.
Montego Bay
River Bay
Railway Lane
Cottage Rd.
Jarrett Terrace
Peddlers Lane
Montego River
CATHERINE MOUNT
Cooke Blvd.
CATHERINE HALL
Howard
Montego Bay Freeport
Bay Rd.
Almond Way
Coconut Dr.
FREEPORT
Sunset Dr.
Southern Cross Blvd.
TORBAY
FAIRFIELD
Calypso Dr.
Bogue Island
BOGUE
JAMAICA RAILWAY
Airport
Beach
Cruise Ship Dock
Information

Fun Facts Catch a Fire: Jamaica's Reggae Festival

For a week in mid-July, Montego Bay comes alive with the pulsating sounds of reggae: **Red Stripe Reggae Sumfest** (www.reggaesumfest.com) takes place at the Bob Marley Performing Arts Center, an open field set up with a temporary stage in the Freeport area. Performers have included some of the biggest names in reggae, both from Jamaica and abroad—Ziggy Marley, Cocoa Tea, the Melody Makers, Barefoot Hammond, the Mystic Revelers, and others. Many local hotels are fully booked for the festival, so advance reservations are necessary. The Jamaican Tourist Board's U.S. and Canadian offices can give you information about packages and group rates for the festivals and fill you in on other events held throughout the year on Jamaica.

of the sea, overlook a swimming pool. Decor inside Pineapple House is all white, light hearted, and airy, with four-poster bamboo beds.

Rte. A1 (P.O. Box 64), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **866/978-6093** in the U.S., or 876/956-7050. Fax 876/956-7505. www.roundhilloffers.com. 74 units. Winter $628–$842 double, from $954 villa suite; off season $434–$490 double, from $546 villa suite. Breakfast and dinner $90 extra. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; babysitting; health club; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 5 tennis courts (2 lit); dive shop. *In room:* A/C, kitchen (in some), fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi (in some).

Sandals Royal Caribbean & Private Island ★★ This all-inclusive, couples-only (any combination) tranquil resort lies on its own private beach. Some British colonialism remains here (formal tea in the afternoon), but there are modern touches as well, including a private, clothing-optional island reached by boat. The spacious rooms range from standard to superior to deluxe. Best are the grand luxe beachfront rooms, with private patios or balconies. The cuisine is more varied here than at other MoBay Sandals resorts, with, for example, Royal Thai, an Indonesian restaurant on the offshore island. The Regency and The Pavilion serve a rather good Jamaican-inspired cuisine, among other options.

Mahoe Bay (P.O. Box 167), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/SANDALS** [726-3257] in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/953-2231. Fax 876/953-2788. www.sandals.com. 181 units. Winter $423–$643 double, from $816 suite; off season $364–$540 double, $767 suite. Rates are per person and include all meals, drinks, and activities. 2-night minimum stay required. AE, DISC, MC, V. No one under 18 allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 7 bars (2 swim-up); fitness center; Wi-Fi; room service; 4 outdoor pools; 5 whirlpools; sauna; smoke-free rooms; 3 lit tennis courts; canoes; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Tryall Golf, Tennis & Beach Club ★★★ Kids This is a top choice for vacationers who are serious about golf. With more spacious grounds than almost any other Jamaican hotel, this stylish and upscale resort sits 19km (12 miles) west of town on the site of an 880-hectare (2,174-acre) former sugar plantation. It has neither the fine beach of Half Moon nor the elegant house-party atmosphere of Round Hill, but it's one of Jamaica's grandest resorts. The property lies along a 2km (1 1/4-mile) beachfront and is presided over by a 165-year-old Georgian-style great house. The accommodations in luxurious villas are decorated in cool pastels with English colonial touches. Picture windows frame sea and mountain views. Bedrooms are spacious, with luxurious beds, private patios or terraces, and tile floors. The resort's villas are set amid lush foliage and are designed for

privacy, each with a private pool. Nothing rents here for less than 5 days, and Tryall prefers weekly bookings. The most formal of the resort's dining areas is in the great house, but it's not the equal of the options available at Half Moon and the Ritz-Carlton. Tryall is gaining recognition as one of the most eco-sensitive resorts in the Caribbean, winning acclaim as a "Green Globe Hotel."

St. James (P.O. Box 1206), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/238-5290** in the U.S., or 876/956-5660. Fax 876/956-5673. www.tryallclub.com. 69 villas. Winter $550 1-bedroom villa; from $950 2-bedroom villa; off season $400 1-bedroom villa; from $475 2-bedroom villa. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; horseback riding; children's programs; championship par-71 golf course; fitness center; Internet; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; 9 tennis courts; deep-sea fishing; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Expensive

Breezes Montego Bay ★★ A five-story complex, this SuperClub is the only major hotel directly on the sands of Montego Bay's most popular public beach, Doctor's Cave. It's adult and indulgent, but without the raucous partying of Hedonism II (a member of the same chain). Bedrooms are tastefully furnished and breezy, overlooking either the beach or the garden that separates the hotel from the traffic of Montego Bay's main commercial boulevard, Gloucester Avenue. Rooms range from intimate cabins to lavish suites. The cabin rooms, 31 in all, are similar to a ship's cabin, with a queen-size bed. Slightly larger are the deluxe rooms, with twins or a king-size bed. The best are the deluxe oceanfront rooms, with king-size beds, and the oceanfront suites. Informal but good meals are served at Jimmy's Buffet, a terrace overlooking the pool and the beach. More formal meals, with a more refined cuisine, are dished out at the candlelit Martino's, an Italian rooftop restaurant.

Gloucester Ave., Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **877/GOSUPER** [467-8737] in the U.S., or 876/940-1150. Fax 876/940-1160. www.superclubs.com. 124 units. Winter $261–$299 double, $340 suite; off season $222–$262 double, $282 suite. Rates include all meals, drinks, airport transfers, and most activities. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. No children 13 or under accepted. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars; golf; fitness center; Wi-Fi (in lobby); rooftop Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; dance club; 2 tennis courts; billiards; table tennis; dive shop; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Coyaba Beach Resort & Club ★★ On a lovely strip of private beachfront, this small all-inclusive resort evokes a British colonial atmosphere. East of the center of Montego Bay, it's centered on an adaptation of an 18th-century great house. Accommodations in the main building overlook the garden; those in the pair of three-story outbuildings lie closer to the beach and are more expensive. The decor is plantation style, with traditional prints, expensive chintz fabrics, French doors leading onto private patios or verandas, and mahogany furniture. Hand-carved bedsteads, often four-posters, are fitted with luxury coverings. Its bedrooms are modern and well maintained, and some units have been upgraded to junior suites with small refrigerators and sleeper sofas. The hotel's most formal restaurant, the Vineyard, serves first-rate Jamaican and Continental dinners. Less upscale is Docks Caribbean Bar & Grill.

Little River, Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **877/232-3224** or 876/953-9150. Fax 876/953-2244. www.coyabaresortjamaica.com. 50 units. Winter $340–$390 double, $390–$440 suite; off season $230–$250 double, $250–$270 suite. Breakfast and dinner $70 per person. 2 children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Children 11 and under get a 50% discount on meals. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; health club; Jacuzzi; Wi-Fi (in lobby); outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; lit tennis court w/free tennis clinic; kayaks; scuba; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboat; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer.

FDR Pebbles ★ Kids No, it's not named after the U.S. president. This resort invaded Montego Bay and quickly became the most family-friendly place in the area. It's even better than its parent outside Ocho Rios. FDR lies a 35-minute drive east of the airport, opening onto the waterfront and a beach. The resort is an all-inclusive property of cedar-wood accommodations designed with real Jamaican flair, offering spacious living and bedroom areas, plus generous balconies opening onto a view. It's most suited for families with two children, although a larger family can be very comfortable in adjoining units. Everything is geared toward family fun, with an array of activities including fishing and swimming in a nearby river and hiking along nature trails. Each family is assigned a "vacation nanny," who helps with housekeeping and babysitting. In the restaurant, first-rate ingredients are fashioned into a rather standard repertoire of both Jamaican and American dishes. A 3-night minimum stay is required.

Main St., Trelawny (P.O. Box 1933), Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/FDR-KIDS** [337-5437] in the U.S., or 876/617-2500. Fax 876/617-2512. w www.fdrholidays.com. 96 units. Winter $270–$325 double; off season $230–$325. Children 5 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; bikes; children's club; teen center; hiking; volleyball; Internet cafe; Wi-Fi (in lobby); Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; dance club; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Iberostar Rose Hall Beach Hotel ★★ Iberostar, the Spanish hotel chain, is the vanguard of Spanish hotel companies that are planning to open properties in Jamaica in the future. (Others include Barcelo and Grupo Pinero.) Iberostar currently operates some 100 first-class and deluxe hotels in 13 countries around the world. The MoBay deluxe hotel is operating as an all-inclusive, catering to well-heeled singles, couples, and families, and it's also aggressively pursuing honeymooners. A series of nearly three dozen suites are among Jamaica's finest, each elegantly decorated and spacious. Next in line are 100 oceanview rooms, each with balcony or terrace. The garden- and pool-view rooms are also desirable and, of course, less expensive.

Rose Hall, Montego Bay, St. James, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/923-2722** or 876/680-0000. Fax 876/680-0007. www.iberostar.com. 978 units. Winter $462–$594 double, $694 junior suite; off season $384–$454 double, $506 junior suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 6 bars; golf; health club; Internet; 3 pools; room service; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Starfish Trelawny ★ Kids Following a much-needed renovation, this all-inclusive resort, operated by SuperClubs, is one of the best-value vacations on the island. Opening onto a stretch of powder-white, soft, sandy beach, it offers activities for both children and adults. The location is 37km (23 miles) east of MoBay airport. The most spacious rooms are the cottages at the rear of the hotel, which can house three adults and two children. For those who must have an ocean view, the resort rents some "superior" rooms, suitable for three adults and one child, with a balcony overlooking the beach. The least expensive units have a mountain or garden view, with a balcony, which can also accommodate three adults and a child. The wide range of sports and amenities makes this an alluring choice. The food is fairly standard, but there's a sushi bar with teppanyaki tables and a pasta and pizza restaurant. Four-course gourmet dinners are served in the Casablanca Restaurant.

North Coast Hwy, Falmouth, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **877/467-8737** in the U.S., or 876/954-2451. Fax 876/518-6356. www.starfishresorts.com. 350 units. Winter $1,263–$1,882 double; off season $1,396–$1,729 double. Rates are all-inclusive for 7 nights. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 6 bars; babysitting; children's center; minigolf; fitness center; badminton; basketball; ice skating; trapeze; Internet cafe; 4 pools; dance club; sauna; 4 lit tennis courts; dive shop; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate

Coral Cliff Home and Entertainment ★ (Value) For good value, the Coral Cliff may be your best bet in Montego Bay, lying only a 2-minute walk from Doctor's Cave Beach. The hotel grew from a colonial-style building that was once the private home of Harry M. Doubleday (of the famous publishing family). It's located about 2km (1 1/4 miles) west of the center of town. Many of the light, airy, and spacious bedrooms open onto seaview balconies. The rooms, as befits a former private house, come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, most of them containing old colonial furniture, wicker, and rattan. Most units have twin beds. The bathrooms are small in the older bedrooms, but more spacious in the newer wing out back. Decent Jamaican and international dishes are served at Ma Loos restaurant.

165 Gloucester Ave. (P.O. Box 253), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/952-4130.** Fax 876/952-6532. www.coralcliffjamaica.com. 12 units. Winter $110–$180 double, $120–$200 triple; off season $80–$140 double, $95–$160 triple. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; fitness center; library; outdoor pool; casino; room service; spa. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Doctors Cave Beach Hotel ★ (Value) This three-story hotel offers great value and lies in the bustle of the town's commercial zone. It's across from Doctor's Cave Beach, the busiest and most crowded beach, but with the best sands, in the Montego Bay area. It has 2 hectares (5 acres) of tropical gardens. The well-maintained rooms are simply but comfortably furnished, and suites have kitchenettes. Rooms are rated standard or superior; the latter are more spacious and have balconies with a view. All units have tile floors and queen-size or twin beds (suites have king-size beds). The food is more authentic than at the resorts recommended above.

Gloucester Ave. (P.O. Box 94), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/952-4355.** Fax 876/952-5204. www.doctorscave.com. 85 units. Winter $129–$144 double, $167 suite; off season $120–$130 double, $141 suite. Extra person $28. Breakfast and dinner $30 per person extra. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some).

Richmond Hill Inn ★ (Finds) If you're an avid beach lover, you should know in advance that the nearest beach is a 15-minute drive away from this hotel. It was built as the homestead of the Dewar family (the scions of scotch). Very little of the original villa remains, but what you'll find is a hilltop aerie ringed with urn-shaped concrete balustrades, a pool terrace suitable for sundowner cocktails, and comfortable, slightly fussy bedrooms done up in lace-trimmed curtains, homey bric-a-brac, and pastel colors. Both the bar and restaurant look out over Montego Bay.

Union St. (P.O. Box 362), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/952-3859.** Fax 876/952-6106. www.richmond-hill-inn.com. 20 units. Winter $115 double, $189–$450 suite; off season $90 double, $168–$400 suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some).

Inexpensive

Blue Harbour Hotel On a hillside overlooking the harbor, midway between the airport and town off Route A1, this small four-story hotel offers basic service in a friendly atmosphere. Rooms are simple, and kitchenettes in the suites enable you to cook your own meals instead of dining out. If you do plan to dine out, the hotel offers a dine-around plan that includes 10 of Montego Bay's restaurants. (Transportation to and from the restaurants is provided.) Facilities include a swimming pool, air-conditioned lounge, and coffee shop serving breakfast and light lunch. Tennis courts are nearby, and arrangements can be made

Finds Going Native on the Street

MoBay has some of the finest and most expensive dining on the island. But if you're watching your wallet and have an adventurous streak, try the terrific **street food.** The densest concentration of street food in Montego Bay is available at the junction of Gloucester Avenue and Kent Road. (The .8km/1/2-mile strip of beach-fronting boulevard stretching along both sides of that junction is also known as Bottom Road or, less formally, as "The Hip Strip.") The **Hip Strip** is lined with bars, food stands, and shops catering to the beach trade. At any of these stands, you might try authentic jerk pork or seasoned spareribs, grilled over charcoal fires and sold with extra-hot sauce. To complete the experience, order a Red Stripe beer to go with it. Cooked shrimp are also sold on the streets of downtown MoBay, especially along St. James Street. They don't look it, but they're very spicy, so be warned. And if you have an efficiency unit with a kitchenette, you can buy fresh lobster or the catch of the day and make your own dinner.

for golf, deep-sea fishing, scuba diving, and island tours. The hotel operates a shuttle once a day to Doctor's Cave Beach, leaving at 10am.

6 Sewell Ave. (P.O. Box 212), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/952-5445.** Fax 876/952-8930. http://fly.to/jamaica. 25 units. Winter $68 double, $86 triple; off season $54 double, $70 triple. Each additional person $15. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; lounge; nearby sports such as golf and tennis; outdoor pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some).

Wexford Court Hotel Kids Especially good for families on a budget, this hotel lies within a 5-minute walk of Doctor's Cave Beach. The apartments have living/dining areas and kitchenettes, so you can cook for yourself. All the rooms have patios shaded by gables and Swiss chalet–style roofs, and each has a tiled, shower-only bathroom. The restaurant serves some zesty Jamaican dishes in a setting that evokes a 1950s Howard Johnson.

39 Gloucester Ave. (P.O. Box 108), Montego Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** or 876/952-2854. Fax 876/952-3637. www.thewexfordhotel.com. 60 units. Winter $115–$120 double, $130 apt; off season $105–$110 double, $120 apt. Up to 2 children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $34 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some), Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Expensive

Jasmine ★★ INTERNATIONAL Small, boutique-y, and intimate, this is the most upscale and fussed-over restaurant within the also-recommended Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall Resort (p. 365). To reach the dining room, depending on which access doors are open at the time, you might have to pass through the rambling length of a less upscale restaurant, Horizons, next door. Jasmine's occupies a jewel-like circular room that, if you squint your eyes and if the illumination is by candlelight, you might almost imagine was transplanted directly from a château in France. Twelve intricately laid tables accent tones of blue-gray and white, and flickering candles set the mood. Additional seating is available on an outdoor veranda. What impresses here is the sense of intimacy, romance, and stylish internationalism. Delectable menu items include Asian spring rolls, a napoleon of blue

crabmeat, Jamaican pumpkin and carrot soup, Singapore-style lobster chili, spice-encrusted loin of lamb, Asian-style grilled filet mignon, and five-spice marinated pork loin.

In the Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall Hotel, Rose Hall, Montego Bay. ✆ **876/953-2800.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $36–$52. AE, DC, MC, V. Dinner only, daily 6:30–9:30pm.

Nikkita's ★★ MODERN JAMAICAN In terms of cuisine, this is the most ambitious restaurant in Montego Bay. It occupies a prominent ochre-colored building along Montego Bay's "Hip Strip," in the heart of town. Inside, the decor is reminiscent of Miami, with dark-wood trim and a floral, slightly Florentine twist. There are two distinctly different venues here: a posh-looking and deliberately upscale bar and a restaurant. Menu items are carefully researched, more "fussed over" than anything within any other restaurant in the neighborhood, and artful. Examples include a country veal and pork pâté; a terrine of grilled vegetables; a gâteau of smoked marlin and ackee (the national fruit) served with *bammy* (cassava) bread; and a whole baked lobster that's removed from its shell, diced, and mixed with diced scallops, crabmeat, and shrimp, and then put back into the lobster shell.

Gloucester Ave. ✆ **876/979-6373.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $29–$60. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6pm–midnight.

Sugar Mill Restaurant ★★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN After a drive through a rolling landscape, you'll come across this restaurant near the ruin of what used to be a water wheel for a sugar plantation. The lovely setting and exquisite cuisine make this place a perennial favorite. You can dine by candlelight either indoors or on an open terrace with a view of a pond, the water wheel, and plenty of greenery. Lunch can be a relatively simple affair—a daily a la carte offering is best preceded by Mama's pumpkin soup and followed with homemade rum-and-raisin ice cream. For dinner, try one of the chef's zesty versions of jerk pork, fish, or chicken. He also prepares the day's catch with considerable flair. Smoked north-coast marlin is a specialty. On any given day, you can ask the waiter what's cooking in the curry pot. Chances are, it will be a Jamaican specialty such as goat, full of flavor and served with island chutney.

At Half Moon, Rose Hall. ✆ **876/953-2314.** Reservations required. Main courses $30–$48. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10pm. Private van transportation provided; ask when you reserve.

Moderate

Day-O Plantation Restaurant ★ (Finds) INTERNATIONAL/JAMAICAN Here's your chance to wander back to Jamaica's plantation hey day. This place was originally built in the 1920s as the home of the overseer of one of the region's largest sugar producers, the Barnett Plantation. It occupies a long indoor/outdoor dining room that's divided into two halves by a dance floor and a small stage. Owner Paul Hurlock performs as a one-man band, singing and entertaining the crowd, while his wife, Jennifer, and their three children manage the dining room and kitchen. Every dish is permeated with Jamaican spices. Try the plantation-style chicken, with red-wine sauce and herbs; the filet of red snapper Day-O style, with olives, white wine, tomatoes, and peppers; or, even better, some of the best jerked snapper in Jamaica. We also like the grilled rock lobster with garlic butter.

Day-O Plantation, Lot 1 Fairfield. ✆ **876/952-1825.** www.dayorestaurant.com. Reservations suggested. Main courses $15–$27. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–11pm. 8-min. drive west of town off Rte. A1 toward Negril. Private van transportation provided; ask when you reserve.

Marguerite's Seafood by the Sea and Margueritaville Sports Bar & Grill INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD This two-in-one restaurant across from the Coral Cliff Hotel serves its seafood on a breeze-swept terrace overlooking the sea. There's also an air-conditioned lounge with an adjoining "Secret Garden." The chef specializes in exhibition cookery at a flambé grill. Although the menu is mainly devoted to seafood and fresh fish, there are also numerous innovative pastas and rather standard meat dishes. The Cheeseburger in Paradise is the most popular item on the menu, but you can also order Jamaican jerk chili, jerk burgers, and Jamaican pizza, even such Rastafarian dishes as Rasta Roots served with rice and peas. The homemade dessert options change, and a reasonable selection of wines is served. The DJ lives in a lair in the mouth of a faux great shark and, of course, plays more than just Jimmy Buffet tunes. The sports bar and grill features a 34m (112-ft.) waterslide, live music, satellite TV, watersports, a sun deck, and a straightforward menu of seafood, sandwiches, pasta, pizza, salads, and snacks—nothing fussy Naturally, the bartenders specialize in margaritas, which come in 52 different flavors.

Gloucester Ave. ✆ **876/952-4777.** Reservations recommended for Marguerite's Seafood by the Sea. Main courses $14–$42; snacks and platters $10–$18. AE, MC, V. Restaurant daily 6–10:30pm; sports bar daily 11am–10pm (club open until 3am).

The Native Restaurant ★ Finds JAMAICAN/INTERNATIONAL Some of the finest Jamaican dishes in the area are served at this casual, open-air restaurant. While taking in the panoramic views, try some of the appetizers, including ackee and saltfish, jerk reggae chicken, and smoked marlin, which you can follow with steamed fish or jerk chicken. A more exotic specialty is Boonoonoonoos; billed as a "taste of Jamaica," it's a big platter with a little bit of everything—meat, fish, and vegetables.

29 Gloucester Ave. ✆ **876/979-2769.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$32. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–10:30pm.

The Pelican JAMAICAN A Montego Bay landmark, the family-friendly Pelican has been serving good food at reasonable prices for more than a 25 years. Most of the dishes are at the lower end of the price scale, unless you order shellfish. Many come here at lunch for the well-stuffed sandwiches, juicy burgers, or barbecued chicken. You can also choose from a wide array of Jamaican dishes, including stewed peas and rice, curried goat, Caribbean fish, and fried chicken. A "meatless menu" is also featured. The soda fountain serves old-fashioned sundaes with real whipped cream.

Gloucester Ave. ✆ **876/952-3171.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$45. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Inexpensive

Pork Pit ★ JAMAICAN This joint—right in the heart of Montego Bay, near Walter Fletcher Beach—is the best place to go for jerk pork and jerk chicken. Many beachgoers desert their towels at noontime and head here for a big, reasonably priced lunch. Picnic tables encircle the building, and everything is open-air and informal. A half-pound of jerk meat, served with a baked yam or baked potato and a bottle of Red Stripe, is usually enough for a meal. The menu also includes steamed roast fish.

27 Gloucester Ave. ✆ **876/940-3008.** 1 lb. of jerk pork $14. MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

HITTING THE BEACH

Doctor's Cave Beach, on Gloucester Avenue (✆ **876/952-2566** for the beach club), is arguably the loveliest stretch of sand bordering Montego Bay. Its gentle surf, golden sands, and fresh turquoise water make it an inviting place to swim, and there's always a

beach-party atmosphere. Placid and popular with families, it's the best all-around beach in Montego Bay. Sometimes schools of tropical fish weave in and out of the waters, but usually the crowds of frolicking people scare them away. Since it's almost always packed, especially in winter, you have to get there early to stake out a beach blanket–size spot. Admission is $5 for adults, $2.50 for children 12 and under; it's open daily 8:30am to sunset. The beach club here has well-kept changing rooms, showers, restrooms, a food court, a bar, a cybercafe, and a sundries shop. Beach chairs and umbrellas can be rented daily.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

DEEP-SEA FISHING **Seaworld Resorts,** whose main office is at the Cariblue Hotel, Rose Hall Main Road (✆ **876/953-2180;** www.diveseaworld.com), operates flying-bridge cruisers, with deck lines and outriggers, for fishing expeditions. A half-day fishing trip costs $500 for up to four participants.

DIVING, SNORKELING & OTHER WATERSPORTS **Seaworld Resorts** (see above) operates scuba-diving, sailing, and windsurfing excursions. Its dives plunge to offshore coral reefs, among the most spectacular in the Caribbean. There are three certified dive guides, one dive boat, and all the necessary equipment for both inexperienced and already-certified divers. One-tank dives cost $70; night dives are $95.

Doctor's Cave Beach is part of the **Montego Bay Marine Park,** which was established to protect the wide variety of marine life among the coral reefs right offshore from the popular beaches. You can rent snorkel gear from the beach club at Doctor's Cave, or from the beach clubs at any of the local beaches.

You might also like to head across the channel to check out **Coyaba Reef, Seaworld Reef,** and **Royal Reef,** which are full of barjacks, blue and brown chromis, yellow-headed wrasses, and spotlight parrotfish. You must have a guide here, as the currents are strong and the wind picks up in the afternoon. If you're not staying at a resort offering snorkeling expeditions, then Seaworld is your best bet. For about $30 per hour, a guide swims with you and points out various fish.

GOLF The **White Witch of Rose Hall Golf Course,** part of the Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall (✆ **876/518-0174**), is one of the most spectacular courses in the Caribbean, set on 80 hectares (198 acres) of lush greenery in Jamaica's old plantation country. The course is named after Annie Palmer, the notorious "White Witch" and mistress of Rose Hall nearby. Ten minutes from the deluxe resort by wheels, the course was created by Robert von Hagge, who designed the course to wind up and down the mountains, with panoramic vistas of the sea visible from 16 of the 18 holes. Greens fees are $99 to $159 for hotel guests, $179 for nonguests.

Cinnamon Hill Ocean Course ★★, Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2650**), has a noted course with an unusual and challenging seaside and mountain layout. Its 8th hole skirts the water, then doglegs onto a promontory and a green thrusting 180m (590 ft.) into the sea. The back 9 are the most scenic and interesting, rising up steep slopes and falling into deep ravines on Mount Zion. The 90m-high (295-ft.) 13th tee offers a rare panoramic view of the sea and the roof of the hotel, and the 15th green is next to a 12m (39-ft.) waterfall, once featured in a James Bond movie. Amenities include a fully stocked pro shop, a clubhouse, and a professional staff. Guests pay $141 for 18 holes, or $99 for 9 holes; nonguests pay $160 for 18 holes and $99 for 9 holes. Cart rental and the use of a caddy are included in the greens fees.

Kids A Waterworld for Families

For years, Walter Fletcher Beach was a sunny, well-maintained beach, without too many improvements, positioned a short walk from the heart of Montego Bay. In 2004, a team of entrepreneurs added a compound of entertainment options, fenced everything in, and renamed it **Aquasol Theme Park** (✆ **876/979-9447** or 876/940-1344; www.aquasoljamaica.com). Its sands now bustle with scantily clad sunbathers and swimmers throughout the day. Beginning at around 8pm every Friday to Sunday, the site experiences a change of clientele, when mobs of both Jamaicans and foreign visitors hang out in the moonlight, jamming and gossiping till the wee hours. The entrance fee allows access to a watersports kiosk; a pier where glass-bottomed boats are moored; a strip of sand; a salon; a bar and grill–style restaurant; a gym/health club with a private local membership; and a dance club/bar with views of the sea, a collection of caged macaws, and surges of reggae and soca. Admission is $5 for adults, $3 for children 11 and under. Regardless of which of the facilities you opt to patronize, the entire compound is open Monday to Thursday 9am to 7pm, and 9am to at least midnight (sometimes, later, depending on business) on Friday to Sunday.

The excellent course at the **Tryall Club Jamaica** ★★★ (✆ **876/956-5660**), 20km (12 miles) from Montego Bay, is so regal that it's often the site of major tournaments. For 18 holes, guests of Tryall are charged $65 in winter, $40 the rest of the year. Nonguests pay $125 year-round.

Half Moon, at Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2211**), features a championship course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr., with manicured and diversely shaped greens. Half Moon hotel guests pay $105 for 18 holes, including caddy and cart. Nonguests pay $150 for 18 holes.

The **Superclubs Ironshore Golf Club,** Ironshore, St. James, Montego Bay (✆ **954/925-0925**), is another well-known 18-hole, par-72 course. Privately owned, it's open to all golfers. Greens fees for 18 holes are $50.

HORSEBACK RIDING A good program is offered at the **Rocky Point Riding Stables,** at Half Moon, Rose Hall, Montego Bay (✆ **876/953-2286**). Housed in the most beautiful barn and stables in Jamaica are around 30 horses, with a helpful staff. A 90-minute beach or mountain ride costs $80.

RAFTING **Mountain Valley Rafting,** P.O. Box 23, Montego Bay (✆ **876/956-4920**), gives somewhat tame and touristy excursions on the Great River, which depart from the Lethe Plantation, about 15km (9¼ miles) south of Montego Bay. For a little more adventure, skip that, and head over to Falmouth, 45km (28 miles) to the east, where you can raft on the **Martha Brae.** To reach the starting point from Falmouth, drive approximately 5km (3 miles) inland to **Martha Brae's Rafters Village** (✆ **876/952-0889**). The rafts are similar to those on the Rio Grande, near Port Antonio; you sit on a raised dais on bamboo logs. The cost is $55, with two riders allowed on a raft, plus a small child if accompanied by an adult (but use caution). The trips last 1 ¼ hours and operate daily from 9am to 4pm. It's not necessary to wear swimsuits. Along the way, you can stop and order cool drinks or beer along the banks of the river. There's a bar, a restaurant, and two souvenir shops in the village.

TENNIS **Half Moon** ★★★, outside Montego Bay (✆ **876/953-2211**), has the finest courts in the area. Its 13 state-of-the-art courts, 7 of which are lit for night games, attract tennis players from around the world. Lessons cost $30 per half-hour, $55 to $65 per hour. Residents play free, day or night. The pro shop, which accepts reservations for court times, is open daily from 7am to 9pm. If you want to play after those hours, you switch on the lights yourself. If you're not a hotel guest, you must purchase a day pass ($40 per person) at the front desk; it allows access to the resort's courts, gym, sauna, Jacuzzi, pools, and beach facilities.

Tryall Club Jamaica, St. James (✆ **876/956-5660**), offers nine hard-surface courts, three lit for night play. Day games are free for guests; nonguests pay $30 per hour. There's a $20-per-hour charge to light the courts after dark. At least four on-site pros provide lessons for $25 to $35 per half-hour, or $45 to $60 per hour.

Rose Hall Resort & Country Club, Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2650**), outside Montego Bay, is an outstanding tennis resort, though not the equal of Half Moon or Tryall. The hotel offers four hard-surface courts, each lit for night play. The resident pro charges $50 per hour for lessons, $35 for 45 minutes, or $30 for 30 minutes.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Tours & Cruises

A **Hilton High Day Tour,** P.O. Box 162, Reading, St. James (✆ **876/952-3343;** www.jamaicahiltontour.com) showcases the rich sociology of plantation life in the Jamaican hinterlands. At 8am every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday, an air-conditioned minivan picks up participants at hotels in both Montego Bay and Negril, and returns them to their hotels the same day—at around 3pm to Montego Bay, and at around 4pm to Negril. Breakfast and a buffet lunch of Jamaican food (such as spit-roasted pork and a dozen different Jamaican vegetables) are included. Lunch, during which a local calypso band performs, takes place on the grounds of an 18th-century citrus farm, Hilton Plantation, reminiscent of the Jamaica of long ago.

All-inclusive costs are $64 per person for participants picked up at hotels in Montego Bay, $75 for those picked up in Negril. Advance reservations are required.

Day and evening cruises are offered aboard the ***Calico,*** a 17m (56-ft.) gaff-rigged wooden ketch that sails from Margaritaville on the Montego Bay waterfront. An additional vessel, ***Calico B,*** carries another 40 passengers. For either cruise, transportation to and from your hotel can be arranged. The daily voyage departs at 10am and returns at 1pm, and costs $60; snorkeling (with equipment) is available. On the *Calico*'s evening voyage, which goes for $25 and is offered daily from 5 to 7pm, cocktails and wine are served as you sail through the sunset. For information and reservations, call **Calico Pirate Cruises** (✆ **876/940-4465;** www.calicopiratecruises.com) a few days in advance.

The Great Houses

Occupied by plantation owners, each great house of Jamaica was always built on high ground so that it overlooked the plantation itself and was in sight of the next house in the distance. It was the custom for the owners to offer hospitality to travelers crossing the island by road. While these homes are intriguing and beautiful, it's important to remember that they represent the sad legacy of slavery—they were built by slaves, and the lavish lifestyle of the original owners was supported by the profits of slave labor. The two great houses below can be toured in the same day.

Greenwood Great House ★ Some people find the 15-room Greenwood more interesting than Rose Hall (see below) because it has undergone less restoration and has more literary associations. Erected between 1780 and 1800, the Georgian-style building was the residence of Richard Barrett, cousin of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Elizabeth herself never visited Jamaica, but her family was one of the largest landholders. An absentee planter who lived in England, her father owned close to 33,600 hectares (82,992 acres) and some 3,000 slaves. On display is the original library of the Barrett family, with rare books dating from 1697, along with oil paintings of the family, Wedgwood china, rare musical instruments, and antique furniture.

On Rte. A1, 23km (14 miles) east of Montego Bay. ✆ **876/953-1077.** Admission $12 adults, $6 children 11 and under. Daily 9am–6pm.

Rose Hall Great House ★ The legendary Rose Hall is the most famous great house on Jamaica. The subject of at least a dozen Gothic novels, it was immortalized in the H. G. de Lisser book *White Witch of Rose Hall.* The house was built from 1778 to 1790 by John Palmer, a wealthy British planter. At its peak, this was a 2,640-hectare (6,521-acre) plantation, with more than 2,000 slaves. However, it was Annie Palmer, wife of the builder's grandnephew, who became the focal point of fiction and fact. Called "Infamous Annie," she was said to have dabbled in witchcraft. She took slaves as lovers and then killed them off when they bored her. Servants called her the "Obeah woman" (*Obeah* is Jamaican for voodoo). Annie was said to have murdered several of her husbands while they slept and eventually suffered the same fate herself. Long in ruins, the house has now been restored. Annie's Pub is on the ground floor.

Rose Hall Hwy., 15km (9¼ miles) east of Montego Bay. ✆ **876/953-2323.** Admission $20 adults, $10 children 12 and under. Daily 9am–6pm. Last tour at 5:15pm.

SHOPPING ★★

Be prepared for aggressive vendors in Montego Bay, as in all of Jamaica. There's a feverish attempt to peddle goods to tourists, all of whom are viewed as rich. Therefore, prepare yourself for being pursued persistently.

Some so-called "duty-free" prices are lower than in the U.S., until you're hit with a 10% "general consumption tax" on all purchases. But you can still find good duty-free items here, including Swiss watches, Irish crystal, Italian handbags, Indian silks, and liquors and liqueurs. Appleton's rums are an excellent value. Tia Maria, laced with coffee, and rum-based Rumona are among the best of the traditional liqueurs. Increasingly popular additions to the liquor inventories of Jamaica include Smirnoff Black Ice, a light version of Red Stripe Beer, and delicious (and incredibly fattening) mudslides that are sold as individual servings in short brown bottles. Khus Khus is the most famous of the local perfumes. Jamaican arts and crafts are available throughout the resorts, from vendors on the beaches, and at the Crafts Market (see below).

The main shopping areas are at **Montego Freeport,** within easy walking distance of the pier; **City Centre,** where most of the duty-free shops are, aside from those at the large hotels; and the **Holiday Village Shopping Centre,** located across from the Holiday Inn, on Rose Hall Road, heading from Montego Bay toward Ocho Rios.

If you have time for only one shopping complex, make it **Old Fort Craft Park,** as its handicrafts are more varied. It's grazing country for souvenirs and more serious purchases. This shopping complex with 180 vendors (all licensed by the Jamaica Tourist Board) fronts Howard Cooke Boulevard (up from Gloucester Ave. in the heart of

Montego Bay, on the site of Fort Montego). You can see wall hangings, hand-woven straw items, and wood sculptures. You can even get your hair braided. Be aware that vendors can be very aggressive. If you want something, be prepared to bargain.

At the **Crafts Market,** near Harbour Street in downtown Montego Bay, you can find a good selection of handmade souvenirs of Jamaica, including straw hats and bags, wooden platters, straw baskets, musical instruments, beads, carved objects, and toys. That *jipijapa* (Panama-style) straw hat is important if you're out in the island sun.

One of the most intriguing places for shopping is an upscale minimall, **Half Moon Shopping Village,** on the coastal road about 13km (8 miles) east of the commercial center of Montego Bay. It caters to the guests of Half Moon, and the carefully selected merchandise is expensive. A bank, about 25 relatively upscale boutiques, a private hospital, and a private and well-respected prep school named in honor of the long-time manager of Half Moon, Heinz Simonowitz, are on the premises.

The best selection of native art is found at the **Gallery of West Indian Art,** 11 Fairfield Rd. (✆ **876/952-4547;** www.galleryofwestindianart.com), with a wide selection of paintings from not only Haiti and Jamaica, but Cuba as well, along with Jamaican hand-carved wooden animals and even some painted, hand-turned pottery.

MONTEGO BAY AFTER DARK

Nightlife is not guaranteed at Montego Bay's top hotels. In winter, the restaurants and bars of the Ritz-Carlton or Half Moon have the most diverse amusements. After dark, it's sleepy at Round Hill and Tryall.

The top nightspot in MoBay is a two-in-one restaurant, **Marguerite's Seafood by the Sea** and **Margueritaville Sports Bar & Grill,** Gloucester Avenue (p. 374), which attracts mainly a crowd in their 20s to 40s.

Cricket Club, at Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2650**), is more than just a sports bar; it's where people go to meet and mingle with a young, international crowd. Televised sports, karaoke sing-alongs, tournament darts, and backgammon are all part of the fun. It's open daily from 10pm to 2am; there's no cover.

The Brewery, Gloucester Avenue (✆ **876/940-2433**), is one of the city's most popular nightlife hangouts. It's a cross between an English pub and a Jamaican jerk-pork pit, but everyone is into Red Stripe and reggae. There's a woodsy-looking bar, lots of neo-Medieval memorabilia, and a covered veranda in back overlooking busy Gloucester Avenue.

Moments Rum, Reggae & an Escape

When you want to escape, head for **Time 'n' Place,** just east of Falmouth (✆ **876/954-4371**). On an almost deserted 3km (1¾-mile) beach sits this funky beach bar, built of driftwood. From Montego Bay, you can spot the sign by the side of the road before you reach Falmouth: IF YOU GOT THE TIME, THEN WE GOT THE PLACE. Sit back in this relaxed, friendly spot and listen to the reggae from the local stations. You can order daiquiris made from fresh local fruit, or stick around for peppery jerk chicken or lobster. Of course, Time 'n' Place isn't completely undiscovered—the fashion editors of *Vogue* occasionally use it as a backdrop for beach fashion shots.

Montego Bay's latest hot spot is **The Groovy Grouper,** at Doctor's Cave Bathing Club along Gloucester Avenue (✆ **876/952-8287**). It's a private club, but a $5 daytime admission can gain your entrance. After 5pm, you can just walk right in. The lively bar and restaurant is located right on the sands of what is the best beach along the north coast of Jamaica. You can order some of the best rum punches in Montego Bay, especially the bartender's special, "Groovy Delight." Food includes conch chowder (or fritters), along with freshly made salads and wings. Jerk calamari is a specialty. The big night is Friday, when chefs present a $20 all-you-can-eat seafood beach buffet.

3 NEGRIL ★★★

This once-sleepy village is now a tourist mecca, with visitors drawn to its beaches along three well-protected bays: Long Bay, Bloody Bay (also known as Negril Harbour), and Orange Bay. There are really two Negrils: The **West End** is the site of many little local restaurants and funky cottages that still take in visitors. This is the area to head to if you want to recapture some of the charm and freewheeling spirit first publicized here in the '60s, but don't expect a lot of creature comforts here. The other Negril is on the **East End,** the first area you approach on the road from Montego Bay. Here are the upscale hotels and some of the most gorgeous beachfronts. Come here if you want to experience Negril from the confines of a luxury resort, particularly an all-inclusive.

Negril became famous in the late 1960s, when it attracted American and Canadian hippies, who liked the idea of a place with no phones and no electricity; they rented modest digs on the West End, where the local people extended their hospitality. But those days are long gone, and a strip of sophisticated hotels and all-inclusive resorts has sprouted along the sands of famous **Seven Mile Beach.**

Situated on the western tip of the island, Negril is 80km (50 miles) and about a 2-hour drive from Montego Bay's airport, along a winding road and past ruins of sugar estates and great houses.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE If you're going to Negril, you will fly into **Donald Sangster Airport** in Montego Bay. Some hotels, particularly the all-inclusive resorts, will arrange for airport transfers from that point. Be sure to ask when you book.

If your hotel doesn't provide transfers, you can fly to Negril's small airport, **International Air Link** (✆ **876/957-5924** in Negril, or 876/940-6660 in Montego Bay). The airfare for these scheduled charter flights—two passengers or more—is $174 for two.

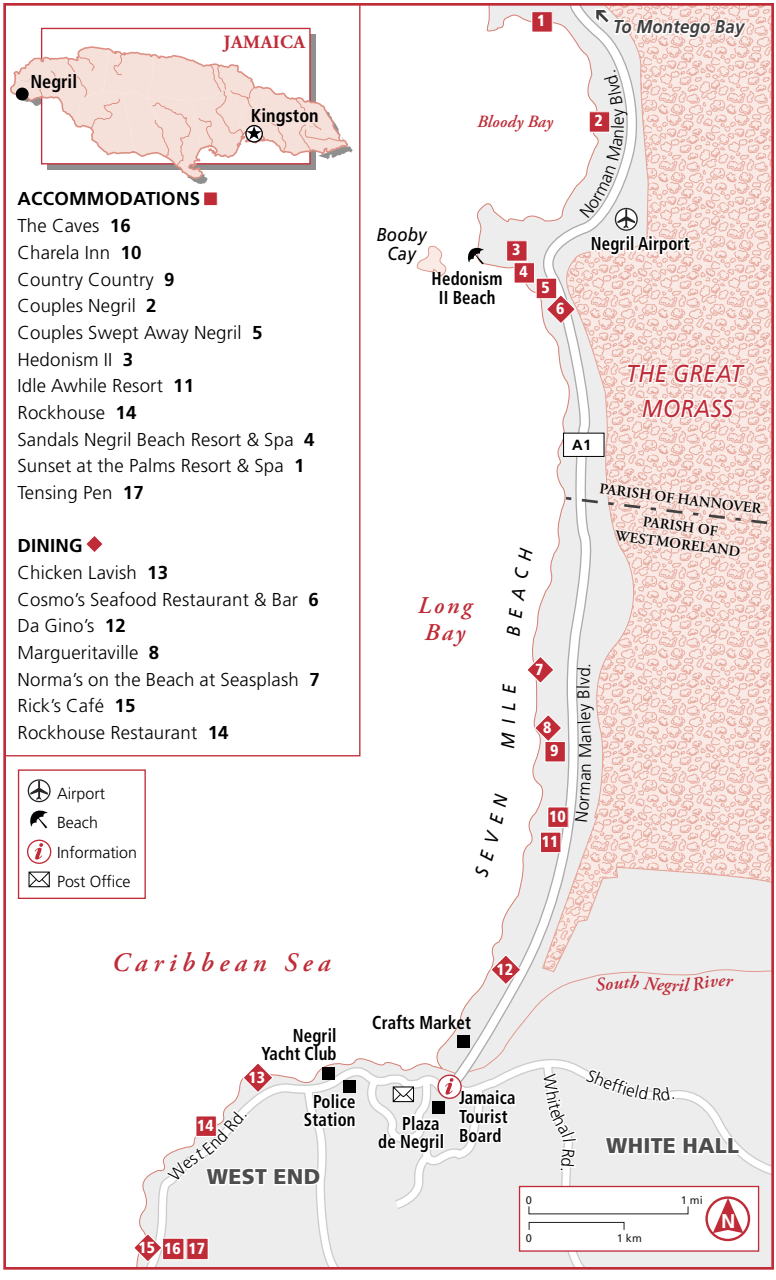
The 1¼-hour **bus trip** costs $21. We recommend **Tour Wise** (✆ **876/952-4943** or 876/952-0019 in Montego Bay, or 876/974-2323 in Ocho Rios). The bus will drop you off at your final destination once you reach Negril.

MEDICAL SERVICES For a non-life-threatening emergency, try the **Negril Beach Medical Center,** Plaza Negril (✆ **876/957-4888**). **Negril Pharmacy,** Shop no. 14, in the Coral Seas Plaza (✆ **876/957-4076**), is open Monday to Saturday 9am to 7pm, and Sunday 10am to 4pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

The Caves ★ Although the nearest beach is a 12-minute ride away, Negril's most atmospheric and elegant small inn still attracts international celebrities. In spite of its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PARISH OF WESTMORELAND
Long Bay
SEVEN MILE BEACH
Caribbean Sea
South Negril River
Crafts Market
Negril Yacht Club
Police Station
Plaza de Negril
Jamaica Tourist Board
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fame, however, there are drawbacks. There's a sense of snobbishness at this member of Chris Blackwell's Island Outpost hotels, generally the finest in the Caribbean, and the prices are high compared to the competition's. The hotel is on 1 hectare (2½ acres) of land perched above a honeycombed network of cliffs, 10km (33 ft.) above the surf on a point near Negril's lighthouse, close to Jamaica's westernmost tip. The setting, though lavishly publicized, is difficult to negotiate with its stairwells and catwalks.

Accommodations, well suited for groups of friends traveling together, are in breezy units within five cement and wood-sided cottages, each with a thatched roof and sturdy furniture. Matisse could have designed them. None has air-conditioning, and the windows are without screens. A TV and VCR can be brought in if you request them. Many of the units contain alfresco showers.

Sumptuous meals are prepared only for guests and are included, along with domestic Jamaican drinks from the bar, as part of the all-inclusive price.

P.O. Box 3113, Lighthouse Station, Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/688-7678** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/957-0270. Fax 876/957-4930. www.thecavesresort.com. 10 units. Winter $579–$675 double; off season $425–$495 double. Rates include all meals and self-service bar. AE, MC, V. No children 15 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; airport transfers; bikes; Jacuzzi; outdoor saltwater pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; snorkeling. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Couples Negril ★ If you're a loving male-female couple, you're welcomed at this romantic resort, lying on around 300m (984 ft.) of white-sand beach, fronting Bloody Bay, 8km (5 miles) from the center of Negril. The formula worked at the Couples in Ocho Rios (p. 391), so it was repeated here. A rival of Sandals properties, this love nest is the site of many weddings and honeymoons. On 7 hectares (17 acres) facing crescent-shaped Negril Harbour, this resort caters to those who want back-to-back scheduled activities, ranging from tennis tournaments to fashion shows. Each good-size unit has a king-size bed and a CD player (bring your own tunes), plus a balcony or patio with a view of the bay or of the lush gardens. Furnishings, though standard, are comfortable, and everything is modern, including the tub/shower bathrooms. The best doubles are the deluxe beachfront suites, which have Jacuzzis and hammocks. No building in the complex is higher than the tallest coconut tree. On the east side of the property, nude sunbathing is permitted.

Bloody Bay, Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/268-7537** in the U.S., or 876/957-5960. Fax 876/957-5858. www.couples.com. 234 units. Winter $670–$776 double, $871–$1,042 suite; off season $588–$743 double, $795–$943 suite. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities. AE, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars (1 swim-up); golf; fitness room; aerobics; basketball court; 2 outdoor pools; limited room service; 14 tennis courts; dive shop; glass-bottom boat trips; Sunfish sailing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Couples Swept Away Negril ★★ This is one of the best beachside hotels in Negril—conscious of both sports and relaxation. All-inclusive, it caters to those eager for an ambience of all possible diversions available but absolutely no organized schedule and no pressure to participate if you just want to relax. Unlike the Couples above, this resort allows same-sex couples. The resort occupies 8 flat and sandy hectares (20 acres), which straddle both sides of the highway leading in from Montego Bay. The accommodations (called "veranda suites" because of their large balconies) are in 26 two-story villas clustered together and accented with flowering shrubs and vines, a few steps from Seven Mile Beach. Each lovely, airy, and spacious unit has a ceiling fan, a king-size bed, and (unless vegetation obscures it) sea views. Wooden shutters let sunlight and breezes in.

Fun Facts The Naked Truth

Nude bathing is allowed at a number of hotels, clubs, and beaches (especially in Negril), but only where there are signs stating SWIMSUITS OPTIONAL. Elsewhere, the law prohibits even topless sunbathing.

Norman Manley Blvd. (P.O. Box 3077), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/268-7537** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/957-4061. Fax 876/957-4060. www.couples.com. 212 units. Winter $697–$900 double; off season $593–$784 double. Rates are all-inclusive. Ask about spa packages. AE, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; airport transfers; bikes; health club; racquetball; squash; 2 Jacuzzis; 2 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; spa; 10 tennis courts; glass-bottom boat trips; sailing; scuba diving; sea kayaks; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hedonism II ★ Devoted to the pursuit of sophomoric pleasure, and with less class than Couples Negril, Hedonism II packs the workins into a one-package deal, including all the drinks and partying anyone could want. The complex lies at the northern end of Negril Beach. Of all the members of the SuperClubs chain, this is the most raucous. It's a meat market, deliberately inviting its mainly single guests to go wild for a week. The rooms are stacked in dull two-story clusters dotted around a sloping 9-hectare (22-acre) site about 3km (1¾ miles) east of the town center. The hotel will find you a roommate if you'd like to book on the double-occupancy rate. Accommodations don't have balconies but are very spacious. On one section of this resort's beach, clothing is optional. It's called the "Nude" section; the other is known as the "Prude." The resort also has a secluded beach on nearby Booby Cay, where guests are taken twice a week for picnics.

Negril Beach Rd. (P.O. Box 25), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/859-7873** in the U.S., or 876/957-5070. Fax 876/957-5214. www.superclubs.com. 280 units. Winter $2,252–$3,238 double; off season $2,126–$3,092 double. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities for 7 days. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Children 17 and under not accepted. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 5 bars (1 swim-up); airport transfers; fitness center; aerobics; badminton; basketball court; rock climbing; 2 indoor squash courts; Internet cafe; glass-bottom Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; dance club; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 6 tennis courts; dive shop; glass-bottom boat rides; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Sandals Negril Beach Resort & Spa ★ On 5 hectares (12 acres) of prime beachfront land, a short drive east of the center of Negril, Sandals Negril is an all-inclusive, couples-only (straight and gay) resort that attracts a basically young, convivial, and unsophisticated audience. It's far more active and freewheeling than the more formal Sandals properties in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay. The casual, well-furnished rooms have a tropical motif and come in a wide range of styles, but are generally spacious. The best units open directly on the beach. Honeymooners usually end up in a Jamaican-built four-poster mahogany bed. For a balcony and sea view, you have to pay the top rates. In the typical Sandals style, the food is rather standard, but there is great variety and no one goes hungry.

Norman Manley Blvd., Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/726-3257** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/957-5216. Fax 876/957-5338. www.sandals.com. 223 units. Winter $475–$691 per person double, from $1,107 per person suite; off season $446–$663 per person double, from $850 per person suite. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children 15 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 5 bars (2 swim-up); airport transfers; fitness center; aerobics; basketball; racquetball; shuffleboard; table tennis; volleyball; 2 outdoor pools; 2 whirlpools; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 tennis

 courts; canoes; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar (in some), Wi-Fi.

Sunset at the Palms Resort & Spa (Value) (Kids) This place appeals to eco-travelers who want to get away from it all without spending a fortune; it's an especially good choice for families with kids. The wooden cabins (which have been featured in *Architectural Digest*) are in a forest, across the road from a beach called Bloody Bay. The 4 hectares (10 acres) of gardens are planted with royal palms, bull thatch, and a rare variety of mango tree. The simple but stylish cabins are small timber cottages, none more than two stories high, rising on stilts. Each offers two spacious and comfortable bedrooms, plus a balcony. Units are brightened with vibrant Jamaican fabrics. The best are rented as "executive suites," with a sunken living and dining area, plus a pull-out queen-size sofa bed for small families. Simple but tasty Jamaican and international dishes are served.

Norman Manley Blvd. (P.O. Box 118), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/234-1707** in the U.S., or 876/957-5350. Fax 876/957-5381. www.sunsetatthepalms.com. 85 units. Winter $430 double, $650 suite; off season $355 double, $525 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. Children 2 and under stay free in parent's room; children 3–12 $100 extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; bikes; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service; spa services; tennis court; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Charela Inn ★ (Value) Simplicity, a sense of calm, a well-managed restaurant, and good value are the hallmarks of this seafront inn reminiscent of a Spanish hacienda. The inn sits on the main beach strip on 1 hectare (2½ acres) of landscaped grounds. The building's inner courtyard, with a tropical garden and a round, freshwater pool, opens onto one of the widest (75m/246 ft.) sandy beaches in Negril. Try for one of the 20 or so rooms with a view of the sea. Accommodations are generally spacious, often with a bit of Jamaican character with wicker furnishings and ceiling fans. All have private patios or balconies. Le Vendôme, facing the sea and the garden, offers both an a la carte menu and a five-course fixed-price meal that changes daily. Several times a week in winter, the hotel offers some form of live entertainment.

Norman Manley Blvd. (P.O. Box 33), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/957-4277.** Fax 876/957-4414. www.charela.com. 49 units. Winter $174–$232 double; off season $120–$163 double. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $43 per person extra. 5-night minimum stay in winter. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; kayaks; Sunfish sailboats; windsurfing; rooms for those w/ limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer.

Idle Awhile Resort ★ (Finds) Enjoying a choice but narrow spot in the middle of Seven Mile Beach, this is an intimate, personal inn. The inn offers deluxe bedrooms with king-size beds and large verandas, and eight junior suites, each with a kitchenette and enclosed patio. There are also larger suites available with more living area and a more spacious veranda. Catering to families, singles, or couples, the resort offers guest privileges at the large sports complex at the nearby Couples Swept Away. Bedrooms are nestled in tropical gardens. On a luxury-living note, if you book a one-bedroom suite, you can hire a cook. For an extra $20 per day (plus groceries), the chef will go grocery shopping for you and prepare regional Jamaican dishes for you.

Norman Manley Blvd., Negril. ✆ **877/243-5352** or 876/957-3303. Fax 876/957-9567. www.idleawhile.com. 13 units. Winter $210–$250 double, $260–$335 1-bedroom suite; off season $130–$150 double, $190–$230 1-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some rooms), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Tensing Pen ★★ (Finds) Our favorite nest in Negril lies on the western tip and has grown and evolved since its hippie era in the early 1970s. On a cliff, a 10-minute stroll from the landmark lighthouse, it is 6km (3 3/4 miles) south of the center of Negril. Hidden away from the world, the place is a little gem. Those aggressive beach vendors will never find you here, tucked behind a high wall. On 1 hectare (2 1/2 acres) of grounds, you're surrounded by tropical planting. Laze in the hammocks or sunbathe on the terraces hewn out of rock. Sleep in a rustic stone cottage covered in thatch in a four-poster draped in mosquito netting, plantation house style. Local tiles, tropical woods, bamboo rockers, ceiling fans, and louvered windows set the tone. There's a communal kitchen where guests sometimes cook for each other. The only minor downfalls here are that the nearest beach is a 10- to 15-minute drive or a 30-minute walk and the staff tends to be disorganized.

Lighthouse Rd. (P.O. Box 3030), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/957-0387** in the U.S., or 876/957-0387. Fax 876/957-0161. www.tensingpen.com. 15 units. Winter $170–$539 double; off season $102–$368 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; communal kitchen; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), fridge, no phone.

Inexpensive

Another low-budget option for lodging is found at **Da Gino's** (see "Dining," below).

Country Country ★ The owners of this intimate hotel were determined to outclass the competition, so they turned to celebrity architect Ann Hodges, the creative force behind the gorgeous decor in many of the much more expensive Island Outpost properties. A narrow meandering path stretches from the coastal boulevard to the white-sand beach, where watersports await. Along the way, a collection of neo-Creole, clapboard-sided buildings drip with elaborate gingerbread and cove moldings, each inspired by an idealized vision of vernacular Jamaican colonial architecture. The buildings are painted in a variety of peacock hues, highlighting their architectural features. Inside, concrete floors keep the spacious interiors cool. Each unit has a slight Victorian feel, with comfortable furnishings. There's a beachfront bar and grill.

Norman Manley Blvd. (P.O. Box 39), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** in the U.S., or 876/957-4273. Fax 876/957-4342. www.countryjamaica.com. 20 units. Winter $170–$190 double; off season $140–$155 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (in lounge); room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Rockhouse ★ This funky boutique inn stands in stark contrast to hedonistic all-inclusive resorts like Sandals, and it offers very affordable rates. It's a cross between a South Seas island retreat and an African village, with thatched roofs capping stone-and-pine huts. A team of enterprising young Aussies restored and expanded this place, which was one of Negril's first hotels (the Rolling Stones hung out here in the 1970s). The rooms have ceiling fans, four-poster beds draped in mosquito netting, and open-air showers. All units contain queen-size beds, and four cottages have sleeping lofts with extra queen-size beds. Less than half a kilometer (1/4 mile) from the beach, Rockhouse has a ladder down to a cove where you can swim and snorkel. After a refreshing dip in the cliff-side pool, you can dine in the open-sided restaurant pavilion, serving excellent, spicy local fare three times a day.

West End Rd. (P.O. Box 3024), Negril, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/957-4373.** Fax 876/957-0557. www.rockhousehotel.com. 34 units. Winter $160–$425 double; off season $125–$350 double. AE, MC, V. No children 11 or under allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; sea kayaks; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar.

Along Seven Mile Beach, **Chill Awhile** (✆ **876/957-3303**), is luring beach devotees to its open-air precincts where they eat as the Rastas do—that is, a vegetarian cuisine with no salt, oil, or meat. The cooking is called *ital,* which is short for "vital food." An ital plate sells for $7, and you get an assortment of specialties from callaloo to rice, beans, squash, carrots, avocado, and tomato. It's eaten with a coconut shell spoon and plenty of coconut milk; Scotch bonnet peppers add flavor.

Expensive

Norma's on the Beach at Seasplash ★★ INTERNATIONAL/JAMAICAN The durable matriarch, Norma Shirley, is hailed as the finest chef in Jamaica. Although it's unlikely that she'll appear on the premises at the time of your arrival, the chefs use her recipes for their inspiration—characterized by such regional products as callaloo (a spinachlike vegetable), papaya, and corn-fed free-range chicken. To reach the place, you proceed down a long, jungle-landscaped pathway from the parking lot (near the sea-hugging boulevard), through the gardens of the Sea Splash resort, to a pair of lattice-ringed wooden decks beside a stretch of Seven Mile Beach. Pick your preferred dining venue—there are at least two, one of which is at the top of a flight of wooden stairs. The menu is seasonally adjusted, with items that may include grilled red snapper served with a garlic-butter sauce, or jerk penne pasta with slivers of chicken, fresh basil leaves, and sun-dried tomatoes. A specialty is jerk pork marinated in jerk sauce and grilled and served with a pimento jerk glaze. That's a lot of jerk.

In the Sea Splash Resort, Norman Manley Blvd. ✆ **876/957-4041.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast $5.95–$12; lunch main courses $7–$16; dinner main courses $12–$35. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–10:30pm.

Rick's Café ★ SEAFOOD/STEAKS At sundown, everybody in Negril heads toward the lighthouse along the West End strip to Rick's Café, whether they want a meal or not. Of course, the name was inspired by the old watering hole of Bogie's *Casablanca.* There was a real Rick (Richard Hershman), who first opened this bar back in 1974, but he's long gone. This laid-back cafe was made famous in the '70s as a hippie hangout, and ever since it's attracted the bronzed and the beautiful (and some who want to be). Management claims the sunset here is the most glorious in Negril, and after a few fresh-fruit daiquiris, you'll agree with them. (Actually, the sunset is just as spectacular at any of the waterfront hangouts in Negril, if nothing is blocking the view.) Casual dress is the order of the day, and the background music comprises reggae and rock. If you want dinner, you can order imported steaks along with a complete menu of blackened dishes, Cajun style. The fish (red snapper, fresh lobster, or grouper) is always fresh. The food is rather standard, and expensive for what you get, but that doesn't keep the touristy crowds away from the sunset party. You can also buy plastic bar tokens at the door, which you can use instead of money, a la Club Med. A bit tacky, we'd say. Bogie would never have tolerated this.

West End Rd. ✆ **876/957-0380.** www.rickscafejamaica.com. Reservations accepted for parties of 6 or more. Main courses $15–$28. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm for food, till 2am for drinks.

Rockhouse Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL This is a gorgeous setting for enjoying some of the best food in Negril. Set on the premises of the previously recommended Rockhouse (p. 385), it was developed by a team of Australian and Italian entrepreneurs who designed a bridgelike span, equivalent to a railway trestle, high above the surging tides of a rocky inlet on Negril's West End. You may get a touch of vertigo if you lean over the railing. This place attracts a hip international crowd. Enjoy a drink or two

at the bar, which is built with glossy tropical hardwoods and coral stone, before your meal. Menu items, which are always supplemented with daily specials, might include a seasonal platter of smoked marlin or an upscale version of Jamaican peppered pork with yams.

In the Rockhouse, West End Rd. ✆ **876/957-4373.** Reservations required for dinner in high season. Main courses $10–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–10:30pm.

Moderate

Da Gino's ITALIAN Four octagonal, open-sided dining pavilions, separated from Negril's beachfront by a strip of trees, evolved as the escapist dream of Gino Travaini, the Italy-born owner. Pastas and bread are made fresh daily. The best chef's specialties feature linguine with lobster, filet of beef with peppercorns, various forms of scaloppini, and huge platters of grilled seafood.

On the premises are a dozen very simple huts, each octagonal, rustic, and camplike, that rent for $60 to $150 double, depending on the season. Each has a TV, a very basic kitchenette, and a ceiling fan, but no air-conditioning.

In the Hotel Mariposa Hideaway, Norman Manley Blvd. ✆ **876/957-4918.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$25. MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Margueritaville AMERICAN/INTERNATIONAL It's practically Disney gone Jamaican at this rowdy bar, restaurant, and entertainment complex. Thanks to the loaded buses that pull in for field trips from some of Negril's all-inclusive hotels, it's a destination in its own right. People party here all day and night. There's an on-site art gallery where most of the works are by the very talented U.S.-born artist Geraldine Robbins. Every evening, beginning around 9pm, there's live music or perhaps karaoke. Permanently moored a few feet offshore is a pair of Jamaica's largest trampolines, whale-size floaters that feature high-jumping contests by any participant whose cocktails haven't affected them yet. Rock climbing is also available. Drinks are deceptively potent. With all this, you wouldn't expect the food to be that good, but you might be surprised (even though it consists of such far as shrimp-and-tuna kabobs). You'll find Southern-fried chicken, along with the standard club steaks and burgers.

Norman Manley Blvd. ✆ **876/957-4467.** Burgers and sandwiches $8.75–$12; main courses $12–$25. MC, V. Daily 9am–10:30pm.

Inexpensive

Chicken Lavish ★ (Finds) JAMAICAN Chicken Lavish, whose name we love, is the best of the low-budget eateries. Just show up on the doorstep of this place along the West End beach strip, and see what's cooking. Curried goat is a specialty, as is fresh fried fish. The red snapper is caught in local waters. But the big draw is the restaurant's namesake, the chef's special Jamaican chicken. It's amazingly consistent, fried or served with curry or sweet-and-sour sauce. The chef will tell you, and you may agree, that it's the best on the island. Ironically, this utterly unpretentious restaurant has achieved something like cult status among counterculture travelers who have eaten here since the 1970s. You can dine on the roofed veranda or ask for takeout.

West End Rd. ✆ **876/957-4410.** Main courses $5–$13. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–11pm.

Cosmo's Seafood Restaurant & Bar ★ (Finds) SEAFOOD/JAMAICAN One of the best places to go for local seafood is this Polynesian thatched *bohio* (beach hut) open to the sea and bordering the main beachfront. In this rustic setting, Cosmo Brown entertains locals and visitors. You can order his famous conch soup, or conch in a number of

other ways, including steamed or curried. He's also known for his savory kettle of curried goat, or you may prefer freshly caught seafood or fish, depending on the catch. Unless you order shellfish, most dishes are rather inexpensive.

Norman Manley Blvd. ✆ **876/957-4330** or 876/957-9072. Main courses $4–$14. AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–10pm.

FUN ON & OFF THE BEACH

BEACHES Beloved by the hippies of the 1960s, **Seven Mile Beach** ★★ is still going strong, but it's no longer the idyllic retreat it once was. Resorts attracting an international crowd now line this beach. Nudity, however, is just as prevalent as it's always been, especially along the stretch near Cosmo's. On the western tip of the island, the white powdery sand stretches from Bloody Bay in Hanover to Negril Lighthouse in Westmoreland. Clean, tranquil aquamarine waters; coral reefs; and a backdrop of palm trees add to the appeal. When you tire of the beach, you'll find all sorts of resorts, clubs, beach bars, and open-air restaurants. Vendors will try to sell you everything from Red Stripe beer to ganja. Many of the big resorts have nude beaches as well. The hottest and most exotic is found at **Hedonism II,** although **Grand Lido** next door draws its fair share. Nude beaches at each of these resorts are in separate and "private" areas of the resort property. Total nudity is required for strolling the beach, and security guards keep peeping Toms at bay. Photography is not permitted. Most of the resorts also have nude bars, nude hot tubs, and nude swimming pools.

GOLF **Negril Hills Golf Club,** Sheffield Road (✆ **876/957-4638;** www.negrilhillsgolfclub.com), is Negril's only golf course. It may not have the cachet of such Montego Bay courses as Tryall, but it's the only golf course in western Jamaica. Greens fees for this 18-hole, par-72 course are $58, and club rental is $18. Carts and caddies, which are not obligatory, cost $35 and $14, respectively. Anyone can play, but advance reservations are recommended before 7am.

HORSEBACK RIDING Horseback riding, heretofore confined to the north shore, has come to Negril. For a close encounter with the natural beauty of this part of Jamaica, head for **Rhodes Hall Plantation,** signposted at the eastern edge of the resort (✆ **876/957-6422;** www.rhodesresort.com). The guided 2-hour excursions here ramble across the most scenic spots on the outskirts of Negril. Along the way you'll pass some of the richest vegetation in the Caribbean, including breadfruit, guava, and even wild tobacco plants. Costs average $80 per rider. There is a free pick-up service.

WATERSPORTS **Watersports equipment** is easily available at any of at least seven associated kiosks that operate at strategic intervals along the sands of Seven Mile Beach. The best area for **snorkeling** is off the cliffs in the West End. The coral reef here is extremely lively, with marine life visible at a depth of about 3 to 5m (9 3/4–16 ft.). The waters are so clear and sparkling that just by wading in and looking down, you can see lots of marine life. The fish are small but extremely colorful.

Negril has the best and most challenging **scuba diving** in Jamaica. Unusual dive sites within an easy boat ride of Negril include **Shallow Plane,** the site of a Cessna aircraft that crashed in 15m (49 ft.) of water, and which is a diving attraction today; an underwater cave, **Throne Room,** which allows divers to enter at one end and ascend into the open air at the other; and two separate sites, each about 20m (66 ft.) underwater, known as **Shark's Reef** and **Snapper Drop.** Each of these is loaded with flora and fauna whose species change as the elevations change.

Negril Scuba Centre, in the Negril Beach Club Hotel, Norman Manley Boulevard (✆ **800/818-2963** in the U.S., or 876/957-9641; www.negrilscuba.com), is the most modern, best-equipped scuba facility in Negril. A professional staff of internationally certified scuba instructors and dive masters guides divers through Negril's colorful coral reefs. Beginners' dive lessons are offered daily, as well as multiple-dive packages for certified divers. (Dives range from $46 to $80.) Full scuba certifications and specialty courses are also available.

NEGRIL AFTER DARK ★

Negril is not without nightspots, though you're likely to spend most evenings enjoying the entertainment in your own resort. Fun places are easy to find, as nearly *everything* is on Norman Manley Boulevard, the only major road in Negril.

See "Dining," above, for details on **Rick's Café** and **Margueritaville. The Jungle,** in Mariner's Negril Beach Club (✆ **876/957-4005;** www.junglenegril.com), is the most crowded, horny, exuberant, and famous dance club in Negril, with a penchant for attracting sports and music-industry celebrities. Its slogan? "Unleash the Animal." The scene gets so mobbed during spring break that movie crews have flown in from the U.S. to film it. Most of the perspiration here is spilled on the ground level, where four bars and dance floors rock 'n' roll with music that varies according to the night's theme. Head for the upper level for the much-needed "cool-downs" that, at least here, have developed into a laid-back art form all their own. Red Stripe and rum punches are the drinks of choice for a crowd that really seems to enjoy their estrogen and testosterone highs. Fortunately, security at least appears tight, with a prominent sign in front that declares, no prostitutes or gigolos, no drugs, no soliciting, no misconduct and a forbidding-looking bar that locks the place up tighter than a jail during off-hours. The cover charge is $9 for men (referred to on signs at the entrance as tarzans) and $7 for women (referred to as janes). The Jungle Arcade is a gaming room with around 100 slot machines. The club is open Wednesday to Saturday 8:30pm until the last patron staggers back to his or her hotel.

Alfred's Ocean Palace, Norman Manley Boulevard (✆ **876/957-4735;** www.alfreds.com), draws mainly locals, but visitors are welcome. Set directly on the beach, it attracts primarily a young party crowd, but if you're 80, you'll still be warmly embraced, your cold Red Stripe waiting. The $7 cover is for shows, and in addition to grabbing a drink, you can order a bite to eat until midnight. Particularly interesting is the beach-party area, with a stage for live reggae and jazz acts. You can also boogie on the dance floor inside, shaking to hits you'll hear at clubs stateside.

Risky Business, Norman Manley Boulevard (✆ **876/957-3008;** www.riskybusinesses.com), sits a few feet from the waves. It can be sleepy or manic, depending on the music. In season, you can order burgers and sandwiches, and the Red Stripe is cheap year-round. It's mostly a young hangout with parties Monday, Thursday, and Saturday beginning at 9pm. There's no cover.

Mary's Bay Boat Bar & Grill, West End Road (✆ **876/454-2284**), the brainchild of a U.S. ex-pat, William H. Miller, is about a 10-minute walk west from the center of Negril. This popular bar opens onto a panoramic sweep of Negril's Seven Mile Beach. It has a wide selection of drinks and serves an array of hot, tasty Jamaican dishes. Live reggae music is presented on Tuesday night after 9pm. The bar is also a magnet during the day, with showers and lockers, chaise longues, and an Internet cafe. Boat charter services—featuring fishing, snorkeling, and sunset cruises—also operate out of here.

Rick's bar has long dominated the after-dark scene in Negril. But recently it's getting some serious competition. **Pirates Cave Bar & Restaurant,** at Pirates Cave (✆ **876/957-0925**), is carved out of a 9m-tall (30-ft.) sea cliff in the West End. In the 1970s, Steve McQueen leaped from the cliffs here to make his escape from Devil's Island in that prison classic *Papillon*. Today's barflies still jump off the cliff, calling it a "McQueen off the rocks." When not cliff jumping, guests drink rum punches and sample such dishes as grilled lobster or chicken in a homemade jerk sauce, even rasta pasta if you want to veg out.

Another watering hole gaining renown is **Ivan's Bar,** at the Catcha Falling Star Resort in the West End (✆ **876/957-0390**), named after the infamous Hurricane Ivan that struck Jamaica in 2004. Because of limited seating, the bar is open only to guests of the inn—and their friends—or else those who called and made dinner reservations. The bartenders make the best soursop martini on island. The kitchen turns out such delights as coconut pimento chicken or seafood linguini. Sometimes the heavy drinking lasts until the sun comes up over the drunken revelers.

4 OCHO RIOS ★

This north-coast resort is a 2-hour drive east of Montego Bay or west of Port Antonio. Ocho Rios was once a small banana and fishing port, but tourism became the leading industry long ago. Short on charm, it's now Jamaica's cruise ship capital. The bay is dominated on one side by a bauxite-loading terminal and on the other by a range of hotels with sandy beaches fringed by palm trees.

Ocho Rios and neighboring Port Antonio have long been associated with Sir Noël Coward (who invited the world to his doorstep) and Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond. (See p. 398 and 391 for details about their homes here.)

Frankly, unless you're a cruise passenger, you may want to stay away from the major attractions when a ship is in port. The duty-free markets are overrun then, and the hustlers become more strident in pushing their crafts and junk souvenirs. Dunn's River Falls becomes almost impossible to visit at those times.

However, Ocho Rios has its own flavor and offers a range of sports, including a major fishing tournament every fall, in addition to a wide variety of accommodations.

In our view, you go to Ocho Rios only if you want to stay put at one of the resorts: It is home to some of the leading inns of the Caribbean, as well as two stellar Sandals properties. When in the area, we prefer to stay away from the center of Ocho Rios, at a resort in Runaway Bay or something really special like Ian Fleming's Goldeneye.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE If you're going to Ocho Rios, you fly into the **Sangster Airport** in Montego Bay. Some hotels, particularly the larger resorts, will arrange for airport transfers from that point. Be sure to ask when you book.

By taxi, a typical one-way fare from Montego Bay to Ocho Rios is around $120. Always negotiate and agree on a fare *before* getting into the cab.

If your hotel does not provide transfers, you can go by bus for a $25 one-way fare. We recommend **Tour Wise** (✆ **876/952-1027** in Montego Bay, or 876/974-2323 in Ocho Rios). The bus will drop you off at your hotel; the trip takes 1 hour and 45 minutes.

You can rent a car for the 108km (67-mile) drive east along Route A1 (see "Getting Around" in the section "Essentials" at the beginning of this chapter).

VISITOR INFORMATION The local office of the **Jamaica Tourist Board** is at Office #3 in the Ocean Villa Plaza on Main Street (✆ **876/974-2582**). It is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm.

MEDICAL SERVICES The nearest hospital is St. Ann's Bay Hospital (✆ **876/972-0150**), 11km (6 3/4 miles) west. The most central pharmacy is **Ocho Rios Pharmacy,** Shop 67 in Ocean Village Plaza (✆ **876/974-2398**), open Monday to Saturday 9am to 8pm and Sunday 9am to 7pm.

WHERE TO STAY

More and more discerning travelers to Jamaica are renting private villas such as **The Cottage at Te Moana** (✆ **876/974-2870;** www.harmonyhall.com), lying a half-hour drive east of Ocho Rios and inland from the little town of Oracabessa. The seaside bungalow is owned by Peter and Annabella Proudlock, who also run the Harmony Hall Art Gallery. Their rental contains an outdoor shower, a hammock-lined veranda, a loft-style bedroom, and a full kitchen, costing $100 in off season or $120 in winter.

Very Expensive

Couples Sans Souci Resort & Spa ★★★ If a cookie-cutter Sandals is the last thing you want, head for this classier beachfront joint. Winner of four diamonds from AAA, this pink, cliff-side luxurious resort is 5km (3 miles) east of town on a forested plot of land abutting a good white-sand beach. There's a separate clothing-optional beach, a mineral bath big enough for an elephant, and a labyrinth of catwalks and bridges stretching over rocky chasms filled with surging water.

Each unit has a veranda or patio, copies of Chippendale furniture, plush upholstery, and subdued colonial elegance. Some contain Jacuzzis. Accommodations range from standard bedrooms to vast suites with large living and dining areas, plus kitchens. Deluxe touches include glazed-tile floors, luxurious beds, and marble bathrooms with whirlpool tubs. You'll enjoy the food at the elegant Casanova restaurant.

Rte. A3 (P.O. Box 103), Ocho Rios, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/268-7537** in the U.S., or 876/994-1206. Fax 876/994-1544. www.couples.com. 148 units. Winter $697–$860 double; off season $635–$795 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children 15 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 6 bars; golf; health club; 2 Jacuzzis; 4 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 lit tennis courts; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Goldeneye ★★ Few hotels in the world manage to be so luxurious and yet so appealingly informal as this intimate retreat. It surrounds the villa where the most famous secret agent in the world, James Bond (007), was created in 1952 by then-owner Ian Fleming. Fleming built the imposing but simple main house in 1946 and wrote each of the 13 original James Bond books there. In the early 1990s, music-publisher-turned-hotelier Chris Blackwell bought and restored the by-then dilapidated property to its original modernist dignity. Fleming's original desk remains. The oversize Indonesian furniture is placed among memorabilia from what became the most famous spy movies in the world. The main house is usually rented only as a three-bedroom whole for extended house parties, often to rock stars and other celebs.

You're more likely to rent one of the four additional villas that were built on the surrounding property. Each evokes a tropical version of a billionaire's summer camp in Maine, thanks to a juxtaposition of indoor and outdoor spaces, sofas, and well-chosen decorative pieces. Each unit has a fully equipped kitchen. All drinks, food, and most activities are included in the price. Masonry paths lead to a nearby beach.

Oracabessa, St. Mary, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/688-7678** in the U.S., or 876/975-3354. Fax 876/975-3620. www.islandoutpost.com. 5 villas. Winter $840 1-bedroom villa, $1,040 2-bedroom villa, $3,400 Ian Fleming main house; off season $660 1-bedroom villa, $860 2-bedroom villa, $2,500 Ian Fleming main house. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; Wi-Fi; outdoor pool (for Ian Fleming house guests); room service; lit tennis court; jet skis; kayaks; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, minibar.

Jamaica Inn ★★★ Built in 1950, the gracious beachfront Jamaica Inn is a series of long, low buildings set in a *U* shape near the sea, 2km (1 1/4 miles) east of town. Noël Coward, arriving with Katharine Hepburn or Claudette Colbert, was a regular, and Errol Flynn and Ian Fleming used to drop in. It's an elegant anachronism, a true retro hotel, and has remained little changed in 4 decades, avoiding the glitter of all-inclusive resorts like Sandals. Lovely patios open onto the lawns, and the bedrooms are reached along garden paths. Guest rooms are spacious, with colonial two-poster beds, quality carved-wood period pieces, and balconies with balustrades that offer nice views. The beach is a wide, champagne-colored strip; close to the shore, the sea is almost too clear to make snorkeling an adventure, but farther out it's rewarding. The European-trained chef prepares both refined international and Jamaican dishes.

Main St. (P.O. Box 1), Ocho Rios, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/834-4608** in the U.S., or 876/974-2514. Fax 876/974-2449. www.jamaicainn.com. 47 units. Winter $550–$860 double, from $895 cottage; off season $300–$440 double, from $460 cottage. AE, MC, V. Children 12 and under not accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; spa; kayaks; Sunfish sailboats; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan.

Royal Plantation Spa & Golf Resort ★★ This stately inn, a rival of the Jamaica Inn, has fallen under the Sandals umbrella and become the chain's most upmarket property in Jamaica. The hotel entrance evokes the antebellum South. At any moment, you expect Scarlett O'Hara to rush out to greet Rhett. You drive up a sweeping driveway and enter through a colonnaded portico. A complete renovation has brought major improvements to the rooms and public areas, and added a full-service European spa. Accommodations are all suites, each opening onto the ocean views. Bedrooms are handsomely equipped with such extras as plush cotton robes, daily *New York Times,* fax service, Internet connections, CD players, and the like. Guests have full exchange privileges with the two other Sandals resorts in the area. The cuisine is far superior to that at the other Sandals properties, and the atmosphere less rowdy.

Main St., Ocho Rios, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/487-6925** in the U.S., or 876/974-5601. Fax 876/974-5912. www.royalplantation.com. 74 units. Winter $804–$1,677 double; off season $670–$1,055 double. Rates include meals, complimentary greens fees, airport transfers, and unlimited access to scuba diving and other watersports. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; bar; golf at nearby Upton Golf & Country Club; fitness center; billiards; croquet; room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; glass-bottom boat; scuba diving. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi

Expensive

Tower Isle ★★ In 1949 Tower Isle hotel opened as Jamaica's first year-round resort and first beach resort. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, it was a haven for movie stars and various celebrities. In 2008, after a $25-million renovation, it has made a comeback as a couples-only resort. It is set on 7.6 hectares (19 acres) of beautiful beachfront property, with five gourmet restaurants as well as spacious and romantically decorated bedrooms and suites. Accommodations come in a wide range of choices, with the oceanfront accommodations at the higher price level. In general, this is a classier operation than the more mass-market Sandals (at least, the Dunn's river and the Ocho Rios versions). Some

guests slip away from the resort, which lies an 18-minute drive (8km/5 miles) east of Ocho Rios, to Couples' private island to bask in the buff. A shuttle boat transports visitors to this beautiful little island with a fine sandy beach, a bar, and a pool. Security guards keep the gawkers from bothering guests.

Tower Isle, Rte. A3 (P.O. Box 330), Ocho Rios, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/268-7537** in the U.S., or 876/975-4271. Fax 876/975-4439. www.couples.com. 226 units. Winter $648–$769 double, $852–$956 suite; off season $597–$735 double, $823–$905 suite. Rates are per couple, per night, and include all meals, drinks, and activities. AE, DISC, MC, V. The hotel usually accepts bookings for a minimum of any 3 nights of the week, though most guests book by the week. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars; bikes; horseback riding; golf; health club; squash courts; yoga; Internet; 4 Jacuzzis; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 tennis courts; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Sandals Dunn's River Villagio Golf Resort & Spa ★ Located on a wide, sugary beach, this is probably the finest of the Sandals resorts. Set on the beachfront between Ocho Rios and St. Ann's Bay, the resort is very sports oriented. It occupies 10 well-landscaped hectares (25 acres), offering attractively furnished and often quite spacious accommodations. Most rooms have an Italianate/Mediterranean motif. The elegant guest rooms are scattered among the six-story main building, two lanai buildings, and a five-story west wing. Extras include spacious balconies, walk-in closets, and king-size beds. Before retreating to the dance club or enjoying the nightly entertainment, guests can choose among several dining options, selecting from an array of restaurants that attempt variety in lieu of first-rate cuisine. The International Room is elegant, with fabric-covered walls and rosewood furniture. The Windies Restaurant serves Caribbean specialties. D'Amoré offers Italian cuisine, and Restaurant Kimonos serves Chinese, Polynesian, and Japanese dishes.

Rte. A3 (P.O. Box 51), Ocho Rios, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/726-3257** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/972-1610. Fax 876/972-1611. www.sandals.com. 250 units. Winter $832–$1,214 double, from $2,016 suite; off season $786–$1,144 double, from $2,016 suite. Rates are per couple and all-inclusive. Minimum stay of 2 nights. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 6 bars (2 swim-up); shuttle to 18-hole golf course; pitch-and-putt golf course; health club; billiards; croquet; shuffleboard; volleyball; Internet; 3 Jacuzzis; 2 outdoor pools; 3 whirlpools; dance club; saunas; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 tennis courts; canoes; kayaks; sailboats; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort ★ This all-inclusive resort is located 2km (1 1/4 mile) southeast of town, set on 18 hectares (44 acres) of tropical gardens on a private estate dotted with red-tile villas. A great house in the hills overlooks the Caribbean. Across from the imposing gate near the resort's entrance are the white sands of a private beach. All but a handful of the accommodations are in one-, two-, or three-bedroom villas, each with a small pool, a fully equipped kitchen, and a shaded terrace. Honeymoon villas have their own whirlpools. Thirty-six units are traditional single or double rooms on the third floor of the great house. Accommodations are roomy, decorated in Caribbean colors, and have high ceilings. They're well furnished, with particularly fine beds.

Main St. (P.O. Box 728), Ocho Rios, St. Ann, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/726-3257** in the U.S. and Canada, or 876/974-5691. Fax 876/974-5700. www.sandals.com. 524 units. Winter $409–$613 double, $659–$1,717 suite; off season $392–$569 double, $598–$1,717 suite. Rates are per couple and all-inclusive. 2-night minimum stay required. AE, MC, V. Children 15 and under not accepted. **Amenities:** 11 restaurants; 12 bars; 5 Jacuzzis; 7 outdoor pools; 2 saunas; smoke-free rooms; European-style spa; 6 tennis courts; scuba diving; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, minibar.

Moderate

Hibiscus Lodge Hotel (Value) This intimate little inn offers more value for your money than any other resort at Ocho Rios. Perched precariously on a cliff along the shore 3 blocks from the Ocho Rios Mall, the inn has character and charm. Mallards Bay Beach, shared by residents of some of the biggest hotels in Ocho Rios, lies within a 3- to 4-minute walk. All medium-size bedrooms, either doubles or triples, have small, shower-only bathrooms, ceiling fans, and verandas opening to the sea.

After a day spent in a pool suspended over the cliffs or lounging on the large sun deck, guests can enjoy a drink in the unique bar with swinging chairs. The owners provide dining at the Almond Tree Restaurant (see below).

83 Main St. (P.O. Box 52), Ocho Rios, St. Ann, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/974-2676.** Fax 876/974-1874. www.hibiscusjamaica.com. 26 units. Winter $141–$153 double, $184 triple; off season $129–$141 double, $165 triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; limited room service; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, no phone.

High Hope Estate ★ Because this hotel is so intimate, whether you like it will depend on whether you click with the owner and the other guests. Basically, it's an upscale private home in the style of the British colonial world at its most rarefied that accepts paying guests. It was built for a socially prominent heiress, Kitty Spence, granddaughter of Prairie State populist William Jennings Bryan, and later served as the home and laboratory of a horticulturist who successfully bred 560 varieties of flowering hibiscus. The estate's 15 hectares (37 acres), set 165m (541 ft.) above the coast and 11km (6¾ miles) west of Ocho Rios, thrive with flowering plants, as well as memories of such luminaries as Noël Coward, who used to play the grand piano that graces one of the public areas. There are absolutely no planned activities. Bedrooms are a delight—spacious, well thought out, and exceedingly comfortable. The staff is on hand to help supervise children, maintain the property, and prepare meals for anyone who gives advance notice. The nearest beach is a 10-minute ride away.

16 Top Rd. (P.O. Box 11), St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/972-2277.** Fax 876/972-1607. www.highhopeestate.com. 5 units. $110–$185 double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; outdoor pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Walkerswood Caribbean Foods (✆ **876/917-2318**), tucked away in the hills of St. Ann, gives a 45-minute tour that includes a meal at their on-site cafe. Part of the tour involves a stop at a wattle-and-daub hut where "Mother Thyme" shares herbal secrets of healing. Another part lets you look in on some of the company's nearly two dozen sauces being made. Call the number above to make arrangements for this unique tour.

Expensive

The Dinner Terrace at The Jamaica Inn ★★ CONTINENTAL/CARIBBEAN The timeless and discreetly upscale dining presentations at the Jamaica Inn seem to have endured better than many of this hotel's counterparts. There is, quite simply, nothing more upscale and dignified in town. A dinner here may recall aspects of earlier, more graceful eras: It can start in the elegant, wood-paneled bar area, or on the moonlit terrace, for predinner drinks. Then migrate into the open-sided (or, weather permitting, open-air) dining room that's steeped in formal and undeniably upscale service rituals—the kind of venue where Sir Winston Churchill could (and frequently did) get in touch with colonial Jamaican posh. The menu changes nightly, and nonresidents

who opt to dine here are expected to reserve a table in advance. In 2004, age-old rules were modernized, allowing men to abandon their jackets and neckties in favor of well-groomed shirts with collars and long pants during the dinner hour.

Main St. ✆ **876/974-2514.** Reservations required. Set-price 6-course menu $80 without drinks. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30–9pm.

Moderate

Almond Tree Restaurant JAMAICAN/CONTINENTAL The Almond Tree is a two-tiered patio restaurant with a tree growing through the roof. Lobster thermidor is the tastiest item on the menu, but we also like the bouillabaisse (made with conch and lobster). Other excellent choices are the roast suckling pig, medallions of beef, and a fondue bourguignon. Jamaican plantation rice is a local specialty. The wine list offers a variety of vintages, including Spanish and Jamaican. Have a cocktail in the unique "swinging bar"—with swinging chairs, that is.

In the Hibiscus Lodge Hotel, 83 Main St., St. Ann's Bay. ✆ **876/974-2813.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$32. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10:30am, noon–2:30pm, and 6–9:30pm.

Evita's Italian Restaurant ★ ITALIAN A 5-minute drive south of the commercial heart of Ocho Rios, in a hillside residential neighborhood that enjoys a panoramic view over the harbor and beachfronts, this is one of the most fun restaurants along the north coast of Jamaica. Its soul and artistic flair come from Eva Myers, the convivial former owner of some of the most legendary bars of Montego Bay, who established her culinary headquarters in this green-and-white gingerbread Jamaican house in 1990. An outdoor terrace adds additional seating and enhanced views. More than half the menu is devoted to pastas, including almost every variety known to northern and southern Italy. The fish dishes are excellent—especially the snapper stuffed with crabmeat and the lobster and scampi in a buttery white-cream sauce. Italian (or other) wines by the bottle might accompany your main course.

Eden Bower Rd. ✆ **876/974-2333.** www.evitasjamaica.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

Little Pub Restaurant JAMAICAN/INTERNATIONAL Located in a redbrick courtyard with a fishpond and waterfall, in the center of town, this pub is the town's most popular. No one will mind if you just drop in for a drink at the bar. If you want dinner, proceed to one of the linen-covered tables topped with cut flowers and candles. We're fond of the barbecued chicken and grilled king fish; you might also like the snapper or fresh lobster.

59 Main St. ✆ **876/974-5825.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$30. MC, V. Daily 10am–11pm.

Inexpensive

BiBiBips INTERNATIONAL/JAMAICAN Set in the main tourist strip of Ocho Rios, this restaurant (whose name is the owner's nickname) occupies a sprawling open-air compound of porches and verandas. Lots of single folks come just to hang out at the bar. Drinks and flirtations sometimes segue into dinner at the adjacent restaurant, where well-prepared menu items include Red Stripe shrimp, which is deep-fried in a beer-based batter; coconut-curried chicken; vegetarian Rasta Pasta; and a combination Creole-style seafood platter. Lunches are a bit simpler, focusing mostly on sandwiches, salads, and an especially delicious jerk chicken burger. Most dishes are at the low end of the price scale.

There's live entertainment, usually some kind of rap or reggae band, on weekday afternoons or Saturday and Sunday nights.

93 Main St. ✆ **876/974-8759.** Main courses $7–$22 lunch, $10–$30 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am.

Margaritaville at Ocho Rios Kids JAMAICAN Lying in the Island Village, a shopping and entertainment complex, this is one of the largest restaurants ever constructed on the north coast, seating 450 diners and drinkers. A high-energy bar and grill, Margaritaville provides all-day family fun with the entertainment continuing late at night. Attractions include a rooftop whirlpool tub, a 30m-long (98-ft.) waterslide, and a freshwater pool, along with three bars and a trading post. The decor is rustic West Indian, with an Afro-Cuban aura. Of course, being a Jimmy Buffett dive, expect the world-famous tropical margaritas and those delectable Cheeseburgers in Paradise. There's dancing here—reggae-disco style—at night.

Turtle Beach Rd. (at the cruise ship docks). ✆ **876/675-8976.** Main courses $12–$18; burgers and salads $7–$12. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm for food. Bar daily 8am–4:30am.

Ocho Rios Village Jerk Centre ★ Finds JAMAICAN At this open-air restaurant, you can get the best jerk dishes along this part of the coast. When only a frosty Red Stripe beer can quench your thirst and your stomach is growling for the fiery taste of Jamaican jerk seasonings, head here—and don't dress up. The place isn't fancy; it's the food that counts. Fresh daily specials are posted on a chalkboard menu on the wall. The dishes are hot and spicy, but not *too* hot; hot spices are presented on the side for those who want to go truly Jamaican. The barbecue ribs are especially good, and fresh fish is a delight, perfectly grilled—try the red snapper. Vegetarian dishes are also available on request, and if you don't drink beer, you can wash it all down with natural fruit juices.

Da Costa Dr. ✆ **876/974-2549.** Jerk pork $4.70 ¼ lb., $13 1 lb.; whole jerk chicken $16. MC, V. Daily 10am–11pm.

HITTING THE BEACH

The most idyllic sands are at the often-overcrowded **Mallards Beach,** in the center of Ocho Rios and shared by hotel guests and cruise ship passengers. Locals may steer you to the white sands of **Turtle Beach,** which is smaller, more desirable, and not as overcrowded as Mallards.

The most popular spot (stay away when cruise ships are in port!) is **Dunn's River Beach,** located below the famous falls. Another great spot is **Jamaica Grande's Beach,** which is open to the public. Parasailing is a favorite sport here.

Our favorite beach is at Goldeneye, writer Ian Fleming's former home, now a hotel. Follow the trail of 007 and head for **James Bond Beach** (✆ **876/726-1630**), east of Ocho Rios at Oracabessa Beach. For $5 adults, $3 children, nonguests can enjoy its sand strip any day except Monday. There's a watersports rental center here as well.

You might also escape the crowds at Ocho Rios and head to the lovely beach at nearby Runaway Bay. (See section 5, "Runaway Bay," later in this chapter.)

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

GOLF **SuperClub's Runaway Golf Club,** at Runaway Bay near Ocho Rios on the north coast (✆ **876/973-7319**), charges no fee to guests who stay at any of Jamaica's affiliated SuperClubs. For nonguests, the price is $80. Any player can rent carts for $35 for 18 holes; clubs are $14 for 18 holes.

Sandals Golf & Country Club (✆ **876/975-0119**), a 15-minute ride from the center of the resort, is a 6,500-yard course, known for its panoramic scenery some 210m (689 ft.) above sea level. (From the center of Ocho Rios, travel along the main bypass for 3km/1¾ miles until you reach Mile End Rd. A Texaco station is located at the corner of Mile End Rd. Turn right and drive for another 8km/5 miles until you come to the Sandals course on your right.) Sandals guests play free; nonguests pay $25 for 9 holes or $45 for 18 holes.

TENNIS **Sandals Grand Ocho Rios Golf Resort & Spa,** Main Street, Ocho Rios (✆ **876/974-1027**), focuses more on tennis than any other resort in the area. It offers three clay-surface and three hard-surface courts, all lit for night play. Guests play free, day or night, but nonguests must call and make arrangements with the manager. Nonguests can purchase a day pass for $80 per person. The resort also sponsors twice-a-day clinics for both beginners and advanced players. Frequent guest tournaments are also staged, including handicapped doubles and mixed doubles.

EXPLORING THE AREA

A scenic drive south of Ocho Rios along Route A3 takes you inland through **Fern Gully** ★, a lush gorge. Originally a riverbed, the main road now winds up some 210m (689 ft.) among a profusion of wild ferns, a tall rainforest, hardwood trees, and lianas. There are hundreds of varieties of ferns, and roadside stands offer fruits and vegetables, carved-wood souvenirs, and basketwork. The road runs for about 6km (3¾ miles). At Moneague, a small town, the A1 continues south into the interior of Jamaica, but it also heads back north along a route to the west of the southbound A3. If you take the A1 north, you'll come to the coast on the north shore at St. Ann's Bay.

Heading up A1 north, you'll pass the ruins of **Edinburgh Castle** lying 13km (8 miles) southwest of Claremont, the major town on the route back. These ruins—not worth a detour, but of passing interest if you're driving by—are a local curiosity.

This 1763 lair was the former abode of one of Jamaica's most famous murderers, a Scot named Lewis Hutchinson, who used to shoot passersby and toss their bodies into a deep pit. At his so-called "castle," really a two-story house, Hutchinson invited his victims inside. There he would wine and dine them before murdering and then robbing them. The authorities got wind of his activities. Although he tried to escape by canoe, Hutchinson was captured and hanged at Spanish Town on March 16, 1773. Evidently proud of his achievements (evidence of at least 43 bodies was found), he left 100 British pounds and instructions for a memorial to be built in his honor. It never was.

These castle ruins can be viewed on the northern outskirts of the village of Bensonton, near the Bensonton Health Club.

In **St. Ann's Bay,** the site of the first Spanish settlement on the island, you can see the **statue of Christopher Columbus,** cast in his hometown of Genoa and erected near St. Ann's Hospital on the west side of town, close to the coast road. There are a number of Georgian buildings in the town. We think that the **Courthouse** near the parish church, built in 1866, is the most interesting.

Brimmer Hall Estate Some 34km (21 miles) east of Ocho Rios, in the hills 3km (1¾ miles) from Port Maria, this 1817 estate is an ideal place to spend a day. You can swim in the pool and sample a wide variety of brews and concoctions. The Plantation Tour Eating House offers typical Jamaican dishes for lunch, and there's a souvenir shop with a good selection of ceramics, art, straw goods, woodcarvings, rums, liqueurs, and cigars. You can also take a tour around the working plantation in a tractor-drawn jitney

to see the tropical fruit trees and coffee plants; the knowledgeable guides will explain the various processes necessary to produce the fine fruits of the island. This is far more interesting than the trip to Croydon Plantation in Montego Bay, so if you're visiting both places and have time for only one plantation, make it Brimmer Hall.

Port Maria, St. Mary's. ✆ **876/974-2244.** Tours $18. Reservations required 3 days in advance. Tours Mon–Fri 9am–3pm.

Coyaba Gardens & Museum & Mahoe Falls Two kilometers (1¼ miles) south of the center of Ocho Rios, at an elevation of 126m (413 ft.), this park and museum were built on the grounds of the former Shaw Park plantation. The word *coyaba* comes from the Arawak name for paradise. Coyaba is a Spanish-style museum with a river and gardens filled with native flora, a cut-stone courtyard, fountains, and a crafts shop and bar. The museum displays a collection of artifacts from the Arawak, Spanish, and English settlements in the area.

Shaw Park Rd. ✆ **876/974-6235.** www.coyabagardens.com. Admission to the garden $10; half-price for ages 12 and under. Daily 8am–5pm. Take the Fern Gully–Kingston Rd., turn left at St. John's Anglican Church, and follow the signs to Coyaba, just .4km (¼ mile) farther.

Dunn's River Falls Overrated For a fee, you can relax on the beach or climb with a guide to the top of the falls. You can splash in the waters at the bottom of them or drop into the cool pools higher up between the cascades of water. A beach restaurant serves lackluster snacks and drinks, and dressing rooms are available. If you're planning to climb the falls, wear sneakers or sport sandals to protect your feet from the sharp rocks and to prevent slipping. Climbing the falls with the crowds is a chance to experience some 180m (590 ft.) of cold but clear mountain water. In contrast to the heat swirling around you, the splashing water hitting your face and bare legs is cooling on a hot day. The problem here is slipping and falling, especially if you're joined to a chain of hands linking body to body. In spite of the slight danger, there seem to be few accidents. The falls aren't exactly a wilderness experience, with all the tour buses carrying cruise ship passengers here. The place is always overrun.

Rte. A3. ✆ **876/974-2857** or -5944. Admission $6 adults, $3 ages 6–12. Daily 8:30am–4pm. From the center of Ocho Rios, head west along Rte. A3.

Firefly ★ This vacation retreat was the home of Sir Noël Coward and his longtime companion, Graham Payn, who, as executor of Coward's estate, donated it to the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. The recently restored house is more or less as it was on the day Sir Noël died in 1973. His Hawaiian-print shirts still hang in the closet of his austere bedroom, with its mahogany four-poster. The library contains a collection of his books, and the living room is warm and comfortable, with big armchairs and two grand pianos (where he composed several famous tunes). Guests stayed at Blue Harbour, a villa closer to Port Maria; they included Evelyn Waugh, Winston Churchill, Errol Flynn, Sir Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Claudette Colbert, Katharine Hepburn, Mary Martin, and the Queen Mother. Paintings by the noted playwright/actor/author/composer adorn the walls. An open patio looks out over the pool and the sea. Across the lawn, Sir Noël is buried under a simple marble gravestone.

Grants Town, in St. Mary, 32km (20 miles) east of Ocho Rios above Port Maria. ✆ **876/997-7201.** Admission $10 adults, $5 children 11 and under. Mon–Thurs and Sat 9am–5pm.

Harmony Hall This was the centerpiece of a sugar plantation in the late 19th century. Today it has been restored and is the focal point of an art gallery and restaurant that

showcases the painting and sculpture of Jamaican artists, as well as a tasteful array of arts and crafts. Among the featured gift items are Sharon McConnell's Starfish Oils, which contain natural additives harvested in Jamaica. The gallery shop also carries the "Reggae to Wear" line of sportswear, designed and made on Jamaica, and Anabella boxes (for jewelry).

Tower Isles on Rte. A3, 6km (3¾ miles) east of Ocho Rios. ✆ **876/974-2870.** Free admission. Gallery daily 10am–6pm; restaurant Tues–Sun 10am–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

Island Village and Island Village Shopping Center ★ Scattered over 2 hectares (5 acres) on a beachfront within a few steps of the city's cruise ship terminal is a replica of an idealized Jamaican village, complete with elaborate gingerbread, hundreds of feet of boardwalk, and a medley of psychedelic colors that glow, rainbow style, in the streaming sunlight. It's not without its own Disney-ish theme-park overtones—**sound stages** are strategically scattered within the sightlines of **bars** that serve the kind of high-octane cocktails that could fuel a heavily loaded jetliner from here to Kingston. Music and hotel impresario Christopher Blackwell, who takes credit for the "discovery" and marketing of Bob Marley, is half-owner of this venture—thus, you won't find any shame here about emphasizing reggae as both a lifestyle and an artistic venue.

Within the compound are about 35 **shops** selling clothing, books, souvenirs, "reggae wear," and Bob Marley memorabilia, as well as four or five restaurants and bars. Small-scale reggae presentations occur spontaneously, often when a cruise ship is in port, and large-scale **blockbuster concerts** are scheduled about once a month and are usually attended by hundreds, or even thousands. Except when there's a world-class concert—usually when there's no cruise ship in port—there's no admission charged for entrance to the compound, but an alert security staff ensures that "panhandlers, pickpockets, and lowlifes" (at least, those residing in Jamaica) are kept off the premises. Access to the beachfront—with its own floating trampoline—costs $5 per person.

Island Village, Turtle Beach Rd. No central switchboard—each establishment has its own phone. Free admission. Daily 9am–midnight.

Prospect Plantation This working plantation adjoins the 18-hole Prospect Mini Golf Course. A visit to this property is an educational, relaxing, and enjoyable experience. On a leisurely tour by covered jitney through the scenic beauty of Prospect, you'll readily see why this section of Jamaica is called "the garden parish of the island." You can view the many trees planted by such visitors as Winston Churchill, Henry Kissinger, Charlie Chaplin, Pierre Trudeau, and Noël Coward. You'll learn about and see pimento (allspice), bananas, cassava, sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, coconut, pineapple, and the famous leucaena ("Tree of Life"). You can even sample some of the exotic fruit and drinks.

Horseback riding ($80 per person for 1 ½ hr.) is available for adults on three scenic trails at Prospect. Dolphin Cove Tours runs a jitney bus tour to the plantation from the center of Ocho Rios Monday to Saturday at 10:30am, 2pm, and 3:30pm.

Rte. A3, 5km (3 miles) east of Ocho Rios, in St. Ann. ✆ **876/994-1058.** Tours $44 adults, free for children 7 and under. Tours Mon–Sat at 10:30am, 2pm, and 3:30pm.

SHOPPING

For many, Ocho Rios provides an introduction to Jamaica-style shopping. After surviving the ordeal, some visitors may vow never to go shopping again. Literally hundreds of Jamaicans pour into Ocho Rios to peddle items to cruise ship passengers and other visitors. Be prepared for aggressive vendors. Pandemonium greets many an unwary shopper,

who must also be prepared for some fierce haggling. Every vendor asks too much at first, which gives them the leeway to "negotiate" until the price reaches a more realistic level. Is shopping fun in Ocho Rios? A resounding no. Do cruise ship passengers and land visitors indulge in it anyway? A decided yes.

In general, the shopping is better in Montego Bay. If you're not going there, wander the Ocho Rios crafts markets, although much of the merchandise is repetitive.

SHOPPING CENTERS & MALLS There are a number of shopping plazas in Ocho Rios. We've listed them because they're here, not because we recommend them. They include the **New Ocho Rios Plaza,** in the center of town, with some 60 shops; opposite is the **Taj Mahal Mall,** with 26 duty-free stores. **Island Plaza** is another major shopping complex, as is the **Mutual Security Plaza,** with some 30 shops.

Ocean Village Shopping Centre (✆ **876/974-2683**) is one of the originals, with numerous boutiques, food stores, a bank, sundries purveyors, travel agencies, and service facilities. The **Ocho Rios Pharmacy** (✆ **876/974-2398**) sells most proprietary brands, perfumes, and suntan lotions, among its many wares. Nearby is the major competitor of Ocean Village, the **Coconut Grove Shopping Plaza,** which is linked by walkways and shrubs. The merchandise here consists mainly of local craft items, and this center is often overrun with cruise ship passengers. Ocean Village is slightly bigger and more upscale—we prefer it.

Just east of Ocho Rios, the **Pineapple Place Shopping Centre** is a collection of shops in cedar-shingle-roofed cottages set amid tropical flowers.

The **Ocho Rios Craft Park** has 135 stalls. A vendor will weave a hat or a basket while you wait, or you can buy a ready-made hat, hamper, handbag, place mats, or lampshade. Other stands stock hand-embroidered goods and will make small items while you wait. Woodcarvers work on bowls, ashtrays, statues, and cups.

Island Plaza, right in the heart of Ocho Rios, has some of the best Jamaican art—all paintings are by local artists. You can also purchase local handmade crafts (be prepared to haggle), carvings, ceramics, kitchenware, and the inevitable souvenir T-shirts.

SPECIALTY SHOPS **Swiss Stores,** in the Ocean Village Shopping Centre (✆ **876/974-2519**), sells jewelry and all the big names in Swiss watches. The Rolex watches here are real, unlike those fakes touted by hustlers on the streets.

One of the best bets for shopping is **Soni's Plaza,** 50 Main St., which is the address of all the following recommended shops. **Casa de Oro** (✆ **876/974-5392**) specializes in duty-free watches, fine jewelry, and classic perfumes. **Gem Palace** (✆ **876/974-2850**) is the place to go for diamond solitaires, tennis bracelets, and 14-karat gold chains. **Mohan's** (✆ **876/974-9270**) offers one of the best selections of 14-karat and 18-karat gold chains, rings, bracelets, and earrings. **Soni's** (✆ **876/974-2303**) focuses strictly on souvenirs, from coffee mugs to T-shirts. **Taj Gift Centre** (✆ **876/974-9268**) has a little bit of everything: Blue Mountain coffee, film, cigars, and hand-embroidered linen tablecloths. **Diamonds Duty Free Fine Jewelry** (✆ **876/974-6455**) beats most competition with its name-brand watches and jewelry.

OCHO RIOS AFTER DARK

Most evenings are devoted to some form of entertainment, often karaoke. Also see "Dining," earlier in this chapter, for a review of **BiBiBips,** where there's a hopping bar and live bands on Saturday and Sunday nights.

On other fronts, **Ocean's 11 Watering Hole,** Lot #6, Fisherman's Point Row (✆ **876/974-6896**), overlooks a boardwalk-style waterfront pier and is open daily from 8am until

midnight. The club is liveliest on Tuesday night for karaoke from 9pm to 2am. **Strawberry's,** 6 James Ave. (✆ **876/898-1091**), is a three-tiered restaurant, bar, and night spot, where most of the money is generated from the street-level sports bar open daily noon to midnight. The upstairs dance club is open only Friday to Sunday 8pm to 2am.

5 RUNAWAY BAY

Once a mere satellite of Ocho Rios, Runaway Bay, about 15km (9 1/4 miles) to the west, has become a destination in its own right, with white-sand beaches that are much less crowded than those in Ocho Rios. Since you're so far removed from the action, such as it is, in Ocho Rios, you stay at Runaway Bay mainly if you're interested in hanging out at a particular resort. It is especially recommended if you want to escape from the hordes descending on Ocho Rios, where cruise ship crowds and aggressive vendors can intrude on your solitude.

Most people who stay at Runaway Bay stay at one of the all-inclusives, where meals are included. If you're not staying at such a resort, you can dine at **Runaway Heart Country Club,** which is open to nonguests; otherwise, you can dine in Ocho Rios.

This part of Jamaica's north coast has several distinctions: It was the first part of the island seen by Columbus, the site of the first Spanish settlement on the island, and the point of departure of the last Spaniards leaving Jamaica following their defeat by the British.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Breezes Runaway Bay Resort & Golf Club ★ This stylish resort is all-inclusive. Passing through a park filled with tropical trees and shrubbery leads to the clubhouse. The lobby is the best re-creation of the South Seas on Jamaica, with hanging wicker chairs and totemic columns. There's a minijungle with hammocks and a nearby nude beach, in addition to the lovely stretch of sandy beach right out front. The resort lies 3km (1 3/4 miles) east of Paradise Beach and just next door to the town's second-best beach, Cardiffall. Guest rooms are spacious, with a light, tropical motif. They're fitted with local woods, cool tile floors, and private balconies or patios. The most elegant are the suites, with Jamaican-made four-poster beds. Live music emanates from the stylish Terrace every evening at 7pm, and a nightclub offers live shows 6 nights a week at 10pm. The club offers exchange and day-pass privileges with Hedonism III, immediately next door.

P.O. Box 58 (10km/6 1/4 miles west of Ocho Rios), Runaway Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **877/467-8737** in the U.S., or 876/973-4825. Fax 876/516-4155. www.superclubs.com. 274 units. Winter $357–$452 double; off season

Fun Facts Nude Nuptials

At Hedonism III Resort (p. 402), couples who want to see what they're getting before they tie the knot can be married in their birthday suits. Instead of a gown and a tuxedo, suntan lotion is recommended so that any body parts, already exposed, might not become overexposed, at least to the sun. After the "I do's" are said, the happy couple can head for the honeymoon suite at this adults-only all-inclusive.

$264–$338 double. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. No children 13 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars; bikes; golf; fitness center; basketball; cricket; squash; 3 Jacuzzis; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; 4 tennis courts; dive shop; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar (in some), Wi-Fi.

FDR (Franklyn D. Resort) ★ Kids Located on Route A1, 27km (17 miles) west of Ocho Rios, FDR is an all-inclusive that's the number-one choice if you're traveling with children. FDR lies 3km (1¾ miles) east of Paradise Beach and about .4km (¼ mile) east of Cardiffall. Its own no-name beach stretches for about 180m (590 ft.), a mixture of stone and sand. The resort, named after its Jamaican-born owner and developer, Franklyn David Rance, is on 2 hectares (5 acres) of flat, sandy land dotted with flowering shrubs and trees, on the main seaside highway. Each of the Mediterranean-inspired buildings has a terra-cotta roof, a loggia or an outdoor terrace, Spanish marble in the bathrooms, a kitchenette, and a personal attendant (called a vacation nanny), who cooks, cleans, and cares for children. Although neither the narrow beach nor the modest pools are the most desirable on the island, and most rooms lack a sea view, many visitors appreciate the spacious units and the resort's wholehearted concern for kids.

Main St. (P.O. Box 201), Runaway Bay, St. Ann, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **888/337-5437** in the U.S., or 876/973-4591. Fax 876/973-4600. www.fdrholidays.com. 76 units. Winter $300–$410 per person double; off season $280–$350 per person double. Rates are all-inclusive. Children 5 and under stay free in parent's suite; children 6–15 $50 extra each. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 3 bars; free babysitting; bikes; children's center; health club; Internet cafe; Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; dance club; smoke-free rooms tennis court; dive shop; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchen.

Grand Lido Braco ★ This is one of the most historically evocative all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica, lying on a prime stretch of sandy, 320m (1,050-ft.) beachfront. Set on 34 hectares (84 acres) of land near Buena Vista, a 15-minute drive west of Runaway Bay, it's a re-creation of a 19th-century Jamaican Victorian village, with gingerbread architecture. A courthouse replica has entertainment, and benches line the town square, where artisans display their handiwork. The old Jamaica that's portrayed is a rather sanitized, Disney version. Yet this is not a place for children; it is a primarily adult retreat. Accommodations are in 12 blocks of three-story buildings, each filled with wicker furniture. All the spacious units have private patios or verandas and face the ocean; blocks one through six are closer to the beachfront, and blocks five and six face a strip of sand designated as a "clothing-optional" area. Beds are very comfortable, with fine linen; all rooms are equipped with CD players and radios.

Rio Bueno, Trelawny, Jamaica. ✆ **877/467-8737** in the U.S., or 876/954-0000. Fax 876/518-6748. www.superclubs.com. 226 units. Winter $483–$577 double; off season $376–$630 double. Rates include all meals, drinks, airport transfers, and activities. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. No children 15 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 8 bars; bikes; 9-hole golf course; health club; squash; 4 Jacuzzis; 2 outdoor pools; dance club; room service; sauna; spa; 3 tennis courts; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hedonism III ★ Following a chain format established in Negril, this latest beachfront Hedonism bills itself as a "truly active (and slightly wicked!) vacation." Though this branch of Hedonism isn't as rowdy and raunchy as the Negril branch—it's a little more serene and isolated from the action in town—it's still for the serious party person who likes to drink all night, hang out at the beach all day, and go wild at those toga parties. Set on 6 hectares (15 acres) of landscaped gardens on the eastern end of Runaway Bay, it features ocean views from all rooms and an all-inclusive package deal. Hedonism III has

its own private, slightly rocky beach stretching for some 180m (590 ft.); a part of the beach is often nude. It's a 15-minute drive east of Paradise Beach and a 10-minute walk west of Cardiffall. Bedrooms are roomy and freshly decorated, with Jamaica's first-ever block of "swim-up" rooms. Single guests are paired up with a roommate of the same sex or have to pay a single supplement. Unique in Jamaica, the resort offers a circus workshop that features a flying trapeze, juggling, a trampoline "clinic," and various unicycle and bike-balancing acts.

Runaway Bay, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **877/467-8737** in the U.S., or 876/973-4100. Fax 876/973-5402. www.superclubs.com. 225 units. Year-round $2,126–$2,331 double; $2,504 suite. Rates include all meals, drinks, and activities for 2 guests for 7 nights. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 6 bars; fitness center; basketball court; ice skating rink; rock climbing; volleyball; 3 Jacuzzis; 3 large pools; dance club; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; 3 tennis courts; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Runaway Bay H.E.A.R.T. Hotel ★ (Value) This place wins, hands down, as the bargain of the north coast. One of Jamaica's few training and service institutions, the club and its adjacent academy are operated by the government to provide a high level of training for young Jamaicans interested in the hotel trade. The helpful staff of both professionals and trainees offers the finest service of any hotel in the area. Runaway lies a 30-minute drive east of Paradise Beach and a 5-minute drive to Cardiffall. Free shuttles are offered only to Cardiffall. The good-size rooms are bright and airy. The accommodations open onto private balconies with views of well-manicured tropical gardens or vistas of the bay and golf course. Guests enjoy having a drink in the piano bar (ever had a cucumber daiquiri?) before heading for the dining room, the Cardiff Hall Restaurant, which serves superb Jamaican and Continental dishes.

Ricketts Ave. (P.O. Box 98), Runaway Bay, St. Ann, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/973-6671.** Fax 876/973-4704. www.runawayheart.com. 56 units. Winter $100–$102 double, $105 junior suite, $200 2-bedroom suite; off season $90–$92 double, $95 junior suite, $180 2-bedroom suite. Breakfast and dinner $37 per person. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; gym; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV.

BEACHES & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

The two best beaches at Runaway Bay are **Paradise Beach** and **Cardiffhall Lot Public Beach.** Both wide, white-sand strips are clean and well maintained—ideal spots for a picnic. If you're staying in Ocho Rios and want to escape the crowds, come here. There is a great natural beauty to this part of Jamaica, and many foreigners, especially Canadians, seek it out. You don't get a lot of facilities, however, so you'd better bring along whatever you need. Since there are no lifeguards, be careful, especially if you're with children.

Runaway Bay offers some of the best **snorkeling** in Jamaica. The reefs are close to shore and swarming with marine life, including enormous schools of tropical fish such as blue chromis, trigger fish, small skate rays, and snapper. All the major resorts offer equipment.

Jamaica's most complete **equestrian center** is the **Chukka Caribbean Adventures,** at Richmond Llandovery, St. Ann (✆ **876/953-6699;** www.chukkacaribbean.com), less than 6km (3¾ miles) east of Runaway Bay. A 1-hour trail ride costs $76. A vast array of other options—the most on the north coast—are also offered, including river kayak safaris and jeep safaris at $76, and such adventures as mountain-to-sea bike adventures for $60 or Jamaica dogsled encounters at $100. A special adventure is the Ocean Safari,

costing $69. Guests pilot a two-seat, inflatable, Zodiac-style boat on a wild coastal adventure, taking in views of unspoiled coves and beaches, with a stop at Sandy Bay on a private beach.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Columbus Park Museum, on Queens Highway, Discovery Bay (no phone), is a large, open area between the main coast road and the sea at Discovery Bay. Just pull off the road and walk among the fantastic collection of exhibits; admission is free. There's everything from a canoe made from a solid piece of cottonwood—the way Arawaks did it more than 5 centuries ago—to a stone cross that was originally placed on the Barrett Estate (14km/8¾ miles east of Montego Bay) by Edward Barrett, brother of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. You can see a tally, used to count bananas carried on men's heads from plantation to ship, as well as a planter's strongbox with a weighted lead base to prevent its theft. Other items are 18th-century cannons, a Spanish water cooler and calcifier, a fish pot made from bamboo, a corn husker, and a water wheel. Pimento trees, which produce allspice, dominate the park, which is open Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm, Saturday 8am to noon.

You can also visit the **Seville Great House,** Heritage Park (✆ **876/972-2191**). Built in 1745 by the English, it contains a collection of artifacts once used by everybody from the Amerindians to African slaves. In all, you're treated to an exhibit of 5 centuries' worth of Jamaican history. Modest for a great house, it has a wattle-and-daub construction. A small theater presents a 15-minute historical film about the house on request. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is $5.

6 PORT ANTONIO ★

Port Antonio, sometimes called the Jamaica of 100 years ago, is a verdant, somewhat bustling seaport on the northeast coast, 101km (63 miles) northeast of Kingston. It's a mecca of the titled and the wealthy, including European royalty and stars like Whoopi Goldberg and Peter O'Toole.

This small town is like many on the island: clean but cluttered, with sidewalks around a market filled with vendors, and tin-roofed shacks competing with old Georgian and modern brick and concrete buildings. At the market, you can browse for local craftwork, spices, and fruits.

Travelers used to arrive by banana boat and stay at the Titchfield Hotel (which burned down). Captain Bligh landed here in 1793 with the first breadfruit plants, and Port Antonio claims that the ones grown in this area are the best on the island. Visitors still arrive by water, but now it's in cruise ships that moor close to Navy Island, and the passengers come ashore just for the day.

Navy Island and the long-gone Titchfield Hotel were owned for a short time by Errol Flynn. The story is that after suffering damage to his yacht, he put into Kingston for repairs, visited Port Antonio by motorbike, fell in love with the area, and in due course acquired Navy Island (some say he won it in a bet). Later, he either lost or sold it and bought a nearby plantation, Comfort Castle. He was much loved and admired by the Jamaicans and was totally integrated into the community. They still talk of him in Port Antonio—his reputation for womanizing and drinking lives on.

We find Port Antonio one of the more relaxed retreats in Jamaica, certainly not as undiscovered as it was when William Randolph Hearst or J. P. Morgan visited, but a virtual Shangri-La compared to Ocho Rios or Montego Bay. It also has some of the finest beaches in Jamaica and has long been a center for some of the Caribbean's best deep-sea fishing. It's a good place to go to get away from it all.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE If you're going to Port Antonio, you can fly into the **Donald Sangster Airport** in Montego Bay or the **Norman Manley International Airport** in Kingston. Some hotels, particularly the larger resorts, will arrange for airport transfers from that point. Be sure to ask when you book. Port Antonio has its own small airfield. There are no regularly scheduled flights into the resort—only private charters.

You can rent a car for the 214km (133-mile) drive east along Route A1 (see "Getting Around" in the section "Essentials," at the beginning of this chapter), but we don't advise this 4-hour drive for safety's sake, regardless of which airport you fly into.

If you take a taxi, the typical one-way fare from Montego Bay is $110, but always negotiate and agree upon a fare before you get into the cab.

MEDICAL FACILITIES The **Port Antonio General Hospital** is at Naylor's Hill (✆ **876/993-2646**).

WHERE TO STAY

Despite its charms, Port Antonio is suffering increasingly from a lack of business as travelers are drawn to the more famous Negril, Ocho Rios, and Montego Bay. Many of the hotels are forced to fill up empty rooms with low-cost tour groups hailing from everywhere from Italy to Canada. Because of this, we've found that some of the hotels in the area are showing signs of wear and deterioration.

Goblin Hill Villas at San San ★ This green and sunny hillside—once said to shelter goblins—is now filled with Georgian-style vacation homes on San San Estate. The pool is surrounded by a vine-laced arbor, which lies just a stone's throw from an almost impenetrable forest. A long flight of steps leads down to the crescent-shaped sands of San San beach. This beach is now private, but guests of the hotel receive a pass. Everything has the aura of having last been fixed up in the 1970s, but the resort is still comfortable. The accommodations are town house style; some have ceiling fans and king-size beds, some have twin beds, and none have phones. The generally roomy units are filled with handmade pine pieces, along with a split-level living and dining area with a fully equipped kitchen. Housekeepers prepare and serve meals and attend to chores in the villas.

San San (P.O. Box 26), Port Antonio, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/472-1148** in the U.S., or 876/925-8108. Fax 876/925-6248. www.goblinhillvillas.com. 28 units. Winter $155–$255 1-bedroom villa, $235–$325 2-bedroom villa; off season $135–$195 1-bedroom villa, $200–$250 2-bedroom villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, kitchen, no phone.

Hotel Mocking Bird Hill ★ (Value) A 10km (6¼-mile) drive east of Port Antonio, this charming, homey, and well-maintained inn competes effectively with hotels and resorts that are larger, grander, and sometimes much more pretentious. The place is an enclave of good taste, reasonable prices, and ecological consciousness. Set about 180m (590 ft.) above the coastline on a hillside laden with tropical plants, within a 5-minute drive from Frenchman's Cove Beach, the hotel attracts a clientele of mostly European

visitors who r evel in the ar tsy and ecologically aler t setting. The accommodations ar e tasteful and at their best, understatedly elegant, with neatly kept shower-only bathrooms, balconies or verandas, spinning ceiling fans, mosquito netting, and views that sweep over the rainfor est do wn to the sea. M uch of the interior , including its separately r ecommended restaurant (Mille Fleurs; see below), is decorated with ar tworks, many executed by Barbara Walker, one of the owners. There are massage options available on-site, as well as day hikes and classes in painting and drawing.

Mocking Bird Hill, North Coast Hwy. (east of Port Antonio), Port Antonio, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/993-7267.** Fax 876/993-7133. w ww.hotelmockingbirdhill.com. 10 units . Winter $165–$510 double; off season $135–$450 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, Wi-Fi, no phone.

Jamaica Heights Resort ★ Finds The funkiest, most amusing, and hippest guesthouse in town might be full of rock stars from Düsseldorf or up-and-coming filmmakers cranking out tomorr ow's indie fav e. The v ery worldly o wner, H elmut S teiner, former professor of literature and philosophy in B erlin, and his wife, Charmaine, maintain this affordable but sophisticated r etreat. It's set at the top of a r utted and very steep series of roads. The resort is not on a beach but provides transportation to two of the finest beach strips of sand at P ort Antonio, F renchman's Co ve and S an S an. Scatter ed amid the wedge-shaped 3-hectar e (7 1/2-acre) pr operty ar e a half-doz en buildings, each white-walled with shutters, gazebos, climbing vines, and a pavilion for meditating over views of the forested terrain that cascades down to Port Antonio's harbor. The garden sports exotic palms, a stream with its o wn waterfalls, and the most elegant P ing-Pong pavilion in the world. The minimalist accommodations ar e spotless; each has a four-poster bed and funky lighting fixtures.

Spring Bank Rd., Port Antonio, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/993-3305.** Fax 876/993-3563. w ww.jahsresort.com. 8 units . $95–$175 double . No cr edit car ds. **Amenities:** Restaurant; out door pool; smoke -free r ooms; watersports. *In room:* Ceiling fan, no phone.

Rio Vista Resort Villas ★★ Finds F eatured in *Condé Nast Traveler,* this place is ideal for a luxurious v acation, a honeymoon, or ev en an off-the-r ecord w eekend. S ix kilometers (3 3/4 miles) west of Port Antonio (most of the luxe properties lie to the east), Rio Vista is only 3km (1 3/4 miles) fr om the little local airstrip , nestled betw een the Rio Grande Riv er and the Caribbean S ea. O n a 4-hectar e (10-acr e) estate planted with tropical fr uits, it offers handsomely furnished one- and two-bedr oom cottages, with vaulted ceilings, plus a honeymoon villa with a river view. The setting is a garden of flowers, spices, and sw eet-smelling herbs. A housekeeper ser vices each cottage and can assist with meals, and candlelit dinners can be arranged.

St. M argarets Bay (P.O. Box 4), P ort Ant onio, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/993-5444.** Fax 876/993-5445. w ww.riovistajamaica.com. 5 villas . Winter $75–$115 double , $160–$340 suit e; off season $65–$175 double , $120–$330 suite or apt. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; rafting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

WHERE TO DINE

All hotel restaurants welcome nonguests for dinner, but reservations are required.

Mille F leurs ★★ CARIBBEAN This r estaurant is terraced into a v erdant hillside about 180m (590 ft.) abo ve sea lev el, with sw eeping vie ws over the J amaican coastline and the faraway harbor of P ort Antonio . S heltered fr om the fr equent rains, but open on the side for maximum access to cooling br eezes, it featur es candlelit dinners,

Moments A Dip in the Blue Lagoon

The young Brooke Shields made the film *The Blue Lagoon* in a calm, protected cove 15km (9¼ miles) east of Port Antonio. The water is so deep, nearly 6m (20 ft.) or so, that it turns a cobalt blue; there's almost no more scenic spot in all of Jamaica. The Blue Lagoon, with its small, intimate beach, is a great place for a picnic. (You can pick up jerk pork at various shacks along the Bost on Beach area.)

well-prepared food, and lots of New Age charm. Lunches include sandwiches, salads, grilled fish platters, and soups. At night, you might feast on fresh lobster or tender lamb and beef dishes, even savory rabbit or smoked marlin. The restaurant has been praised by *Gourmet* magazine for its dishes. You may want to try the coconut-and-garlic soup, and the fish with spicy mango-shrimp sauce is a specialty. Breads and most jams are made on the premises. Two dishes are vegetarian.

In the Hotel Mocking Bird Hill, North Coast Hwy. ✆ **876/993-7267.** Reservations recommended. Lunch platters $10–$35; main courses $21–$49. AE, MC, V. Daily 8:30–10:30am, noon–2pm, and 7–9:30pm.

Norma's at the Marina ★★ JAMAICAN/CONTINENTAL Established in 2005, this is a branch of an upscale, Jamaica-wide restaurant chain made famous by a Jamaica-born, Florida-trained matriarch (Norma Shirley), who has been the subject of more publicity in the culinary press than any equivalent entrepreneur in Jamaica. The restaurant sprawls between two oversized gazebos that mark both ends of a brick-floored beachside terrace inside the fenced-in compound of the Port Antonio marina. Your meal might be served outdoors, on the above-mentioned terrace, or one floor above ground level, within a high-ceilinged, mahogany-trimmed dining room that's open to the breezes on two sides. Menu items are elegant and flavorful, representing the best of modern and creative Jamaican cuisine, and include crab back salad, elegant slices of smoked marlin, a "reggae salad" studded with sautéed shrimp, several different versions of grilled fish, teriyaki-flavored rib-eye steak, wood-smoked pork riblets with a tamarind-flavored honey sauce, pan-seared butterfish filets, and grilled lobster with lime-flavored herb butter.

At the Port Antonio Marina. ✆ **876/993-9510.** www.normasatthemarina.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$36. MC, V. Tues–Sat 10am–10pm; Sun noon–8pm.

HITTING THE BEACH

Port Antonio has several white-sand beaches, including the famous **San San Beach,** which has recently gone private. Guests of certain hotels are admitted with a pass; otherwise, the fee is $8.

Boston Beach is a free public beach, and it often has light surfing; there are picnic tables, as well as a restaurant and snack bar. On your way here, stop and get the makings for a picnic lunch at the most famous area for peppery jerk pork and chicken on Jamaica. These rustic shacks also sell the much rarer jerk sausage. The beach is 18km (11 miles) east of Port Antonio and just east of the Blue Lagoon.

Also free is **Fairy Hill Beach** (Winnifred), but there are no changing rooms or showers here. **Frenchman's Cove Beach** attracts a chic crowd to its white-sand beach, combined with a freshwater stream. Nonguests are charged $3.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

DEEP-SEA FISHING Northern Jamaican waters are world renowned for their game fish, including mahimahi, wahoo, blue and white marlin, sailfish, tarpon, barracuda, and bonito. The **Jamaica International Fishing Tournament** and **Jamaica International Blue Marlin Team Tournament** run concurrently at Port Antonio every October. Most major hotels from Port Antonio to Montego Bay have deep-sea-fishing facilities, and there are many charter boats. Ask at your hotel.

RAFTING Although it's not exactly adventurous, the best—and the most fun—rafting experience on the island is here. Rafting started on the Rio Grande as a means of transporting bananas from the plantations to the waiting freighters. In 1871, a Yankee skipper, Lorenzo Dow Baker, decided that a seat on one of the rafts was better than walking, but it was not until Errol Flynn arrived that the rafts became popular as a tourist attraction. Flynn used to hire the crafts for his friends, and he encouraged the rafters to race down the Rio Grande, betting on the winners. If you want to take a trip, contact **Rio Grande Experience,** Berrydale (✆ **876/993-5778**).

Trips last 2 to 2 1/2 hours and are offered from 9am to 5pm daily at a cost of $50 per raft, which holds two passengers. A fully insured driver will take you in your rented car for a $20 fee to the starting point at Berrydale or Grant's Level, where you board your raft. If you feel like it, take a picnic lunch, but bring enough for the skipper, too, who will regale you with lively stories of life on the river.

PORT ANTONIO AFTER DARK

The **Tree Bar** draws a fashionable crowd to the grounds of Goblin Hill Villas at San San (✆ **876/925-8108**), high on a hill commanding a panoramic view of 5 hectares (12 acres). The aptly named bar is wrapped around huge ficus trees, whose mammoth aerial roots dangle over the drinking area. Giant-leafed pothos climb down the trunks. It's a sort of "Me Tarzan, You Jane" kind of place.

Go at your own risk to the infamous **Roof Club,** 11 West St. (✆ **876/715-5281**). The most crowded and animated nightclub in Port Antonio, it's one floor above street level in a boxy-looking industrial building in the heart of town. Inside, the venue is earthy, raunchy, crowded, and boozy, with enough secondhand ganja smoke to get virtually anyone high. Recorded (and, more rarely, live) reggae and soca music blares at high volumes. Expect a neopsychedelic decor of mirrors, UV lighting, and free-form Day-Glo artwork. A visit here is not for the squeamish or the faint-hearted, and it's a good idea to come with a friend and/or ally. Try to stay relatively sober, keep your wits about you, and enjoy the slow-moving gyrations of ordinary folks who—sometimes with the help of a spliff or two—get involved in the beat of the music and groove accordingly. Beers cost from $2.50 each. It's open nightly from around 6pm, but most of the genuine hanging out happens after 11pm, especially from Thursday through Sunday.

7 KINGSTON & VICINITY

Kingston, the largest English-speaking city in the Caribbean, is the capital and cultural, industrial, and financial center of Jamaica. It's home to some 660,000 people, including those living on the plains between Blue Mountain and the sea.

The buildings here are a mixture of the modern, graceful, old, and just plain ramshackle. It's a busy city, as you might expect, with a natural harbor that's the

seventh-largest in the world. The University of the West Indies has its campus on the edge of the city.

Few other cities in the Caribbean carry as many negative connotations for North American travelers as Kingston, thanks to widely publicized, and sometimes exaggerated, reports of violent crime. Marry that with urban congestion, potholed roads, and difficult-to-decipher road signs that make it hard to navigate, and you've got a bad reputation.

But if you're an urban dweller who copes with everyday life in, say, New York, Atlanta, or Los Angeles, you know how to deal with city life, and Kingston doesn't have to be that scary. It offers resources and charms that can't be found anywhere else. It is here that Jamaica is at its most urban and confident, its most witty, its most exciting, and its most challenging. No other place in Jamaica offers as many singles bars, dance clubs, and cultural outlets—it's the nation's creative cauldron. If you're truly interested in Jamaican culture, Kingston can be very stimulating, as it's very far removed from the tourist-oriented economies of Negril, Ocho Rios, and Montego Bay.

We've carefully screened the recommendations contained within this guidebook, eliminating any that lie within the most dangerous neighborhoods. So keep an open mind about Kingston—it can be a lot of fun and very exciting.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE See "Getting There," in section 1 of this chapter, for details on the airlines that serve Kingston's international airport.

GETTING AROUND Because Kingston is a rather confusing place to negotiate, many visitors rely on taxis.

MEDICAL FACILITIES The **University Hospital** of the West Indies is at Mona (✆ **876/927-1620**). **Moodie's Pharmacy** is in the New Kingston Shopping Centre (✆ **876/926-4174**).

WHERE TO STAY

Jamaica Pegasus ★ A favorite with business travelers, the Jamaica Pegasus is located in the banking area of Kingston, which is also a fine residential area. After a major renovation, the hotel is now better than ever and is the site of many conventions and social events. The hotel combines British style with Jamaican warmth, arranging watersports and sightseeing. Each of the well-furnished bedrooms is of moderate size and decorated in dark tones, often brown, making you yearn for the lighter pastel look of most Caribbean hotel bedrooms. Several floors of luxuriously appointed suites form the Knutsford Club, which offers special executive services. The 4pm tea service is a bit of a social event among some residents. The premier restaurant is the Columbus. The Brasserie is the hotel's informal restaurant that opens onto the swimming pool, where a splashing fountain cools the air. It adjoins a circular bar near the pool, at which occasional barbecues are prepared.

81 Knutsford Blvd., Kingston 5, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/926-3691.** Fax 876/929-0593. www.jamaicapegasus.com. 300 units. Year-round $300 double; $370 junior suite; $800 royal suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; fitness center; jogging trail; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Terra Nova All Suite Hotel ★ (Finds) This house is on the western edge of New Kingston, near West Kings House Road. Built in 1924 for a young bride, it was converted into a hotel in 1959. It was the birthplace of well-known hotelier and Island Records mogul Chris Blackwell. Set in 1 hectare (2½ acres) of gardens with a backdrop of greenery and mountains, it's now one of the best small Jamaican hotels, although the

rooms are rather basic and not at all suited for those who want a r esort ambience. Most of the bedr ooms are in a ne wer wing. The Regency, with a marble floor and wide windows, serves local and international food.

17 Waterloo Rd., Kingston 10, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/926-2211.** Fax 876/929-4933. www.terranovajamaica.com. 35 units. Year-round $135–$165 double; $280–$350 suit e. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; coffee shop; 2 bars; fitness center; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar (in some).

In Nearby Port Royal

Morgans Harbour Hotel On the premises of this yachtie fav orite is a 200-year-old redbrick building once used to melt pitch for H is M ajesty's navy, a swimming ar ea defined by docks and buoys, and a series of wings whose eaves are accented with hints of gingerbread. Set on 9 hectar es (22 acr es) of flat and r ocky seashore, the r esort contains the largest marina in Kingston, plus a br eezy water front r estaurant and a popular bar (where ghost stories about the old Port Royal seem especially lurid as the liquor flows on Friday night). Longtime r esidents claim that the ghosts of soldiers killed b y a long-ago earthquake ar e especially visible on hot and v ery calm days, when B ritish formations seem to march out of the sea. The simple bedrooms are suitable for an o vernight stay.

Port Royal, Kingston 1, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/448-8355** in the U .S., or 876/967-8040. F ax 876/967-8873. www.morgansharbour.com. 50 units . $190–$200 double; $230–$250 suit e. AE, MC, V. Take the public ferryboat that departs every 2 hr. from near Victoria Pier on Ocean Blvd.; many visitors arrive by car or taxi. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Norma's on the Terrace ★★ JAMAICAN This is the cr eation of J amaica's most famous businesswoman, Norma Shirley, purveyor of food to stylish audiences as far away as M iami. It's housed beneath the wide por ticos of the galler y surr ounding Kingston's most famous monument, D evon House. Ms. S hirley has taken the old, woefully dusty gardens and transformed them into something you'd find on a manicured English estate. Menus change with the season but usually r eflect Ms. S hirley's penchant for cr eative adaptations of her nativ e Jamaican cuisine. S tellar examples include J amaican chowder with crabmeat, shrimp , conch, and lobster; grilled whole r ed snapper encr usted with herbs and ser ved with a thyme-and-caper sauce; and grilled smoked por k loin in a teriyaki/ginger sauce, served with caramelized apples. The hearty breakfast here—of American and international dishes—is the best in to wn.

In Devon House, 26 Hope Rd. ✆ **876/968-5488.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm.

Redbones the Blues C afé ★★ Finds JAMAICAN The name alone lur ed us to this elegant place, which is the only r estaurant in Kingston with cuisine as good as Norma's on the Terrace. All aglo w in y ellow and peach hues, R edbones is in a former Spanish colonial house. You're greeted with pictures of jazz greats on the wall, everybody from Billie Holiday to Louis Armstr ong. A cozy bar, its ceiling studded with r ecords, is installed in someone's former bedroom. Owners Evan and Betsy Williams give standard Jamaican dishes a new twist. Ask for *bammy,* a cassava dish crowned with sautéed shrimp, or a platter of stuffed crab backs, a delectable selection on a tri-color salad. A spinach callaloo with cr eam cheese is encased in a divine str udel. S eafood pasta is laden with shrimp, lobster, and salmon in a cr eamy coconut sauce. The best item on the menu is spicy lamb chops in a guav a glaze. Live jazz—or something—is always going on.

21 Braemar Ave. ✆ **876/978-6091.** www.redbonesbluecafe.com. Reservations required. Main courses $17–$42. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–11pm; Sat 6–11pm.

HITTING THE BEACH

You don't really come to Kingston for beaches, but there are some here. To the southwest of the sprawling city are black-sandy **Hellshire Beach** and **Fort Clarence.** Both of these beaches are very popular with the locals on weekends. Both have changing rooms, heavy security, and numerous food stands. The reggae concerts at Fort Clarence are legendary on the island.

Just past Fort Clarence, the fisherman's beach at **Naggo Head** is an even hipper destination, or so Kingston beach buffs claim. After a swim in the refreshing waters, try out one of the food stands selling "fry fish" and *bammy* (cassava bread). The closest beach to the city (although it's not very good) is **Lime Cay,** a little island on the outskirts of Kingston Harbour, reached after a short boat ride from Morgan's Harbour at Port Royal.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Even if you're staying at Ocho Rios or Port Antonio, you may want to visit Kingston for the sights or to make a trip to nearby Port Royal and Spanish Town.

From Kingston, you can make excursions into the Blue Mountains. See the section "The Blue Mountains," below.

In Town

One of the major attractions, **Devon House,** 26 Hope Rd. (✆ **876/929-6602**), was built in 1881 by George Stiebel, a Jamaican who made his fortune mining in Latin America, becoming one of the first black millionaires in the Caribbean. A striking classical building, the house has been restored to its original beauty by the Jamaican National Trust. The grounds contain crafts shops, boutiques, two restaurants, shops that sell the best ice cream in Jamaica (in exotic fruit flavors), and a bakery and pastry shop with Jamaican puddings and desserts. The main house also displays furniture of various periods and styles. Admission to the main house is $5; hours are Monday to Saturday 9:30am to 4:30pm. Admission to the grounds (the shops and restaurants) is free.

Almost next door to Devon House are the sentried gates of **Jamaica House,** residence of the prime minister, a fine, white-columned building set well back from the road.

Continuing along Hope Road, at the crossroads of Lady Musgrave and King's House roads, turn left and you'll see a gate on the left with its own personal traffic light. This leads to **King's House,** the official residence of the governor-general of Jamaica, the queen's representative on the island. The outside and front lawn of the gracious residence, set in 80 hectares (198 acres) of well-tended parkland, is sometimes open for viewing Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. The secretarial offices are housed next door in an old wooden building set on brick arches. In front of the house is a gigantic banyan tree in whose roots, legend says, *duppies* (ghosts) take refuge when they're not living in the cotton trees.

National Library of Jamaica (formerly the West India Reference Library), Institute of Jamaica, 12 East St. (✆ **876/967-1526**), a storehouse of the history, culture, and traditions of Jamaica and the Caribbean, is the finest working library devoted to West Indian studies in the world. It has the most comprehensive, up-to-date, and balanced collection of materials on the region, including books, newspapers, photographs, maps, and prints. It's open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 5pm, Friday from 9am to 4pm.

Bob Marley Museum, 56 Hope Rd. (✆ **876/927-9152;** www.bobmarley-foundation.com), is the most-visited sight in Kingston, but if you're not a Marley fan, it may not mean much to you. The clapboard house with its garden and high surrounding wall was the famous reggae singer's home and recording studio until his death on May 11, 1981. You can tour the house and view assorted Marley memorabilia, and you may even catch a glimpse of his children, who often frequent the grounds. Hours are Monday to Saturday from 9:30am to 4pm. Admission is $20. It's reached by bus no. 70 or 75 from Halfway Tree, but take a cab to save yourself the hassle of dealing with Kingston public transport.

In Port Royal

From West Beach Dock in Kingston, a ferry ride of 20 to 30 minutes will take you to Port Royal, whose name in pirate lore conjures up visions of swashbuckling pirates led by Henry Morgan, swilling grog in harbor taverns. This was once one of the largest trading centers of the New World, with a reputation for being the wickedest city on Earth. Blackbeard stopped here regularly on his Caribbean trips. But it all came to an end on June 7, 1692, when a third of the town disappeared underwater after a devastating earthquake. Nowadays, Port Royal, with its memories of the past, has been designated by the government for redevelopment as a tourist destination.

Today Port Royal is a small fishing village at the end of the Palisades strip. Some 2,000 residents live here with what many locals claim are a "lot of ghosts." Port Royal's seafaring traditions continue, and it's known for its seafood and ramshackle and much-battered architecture of yesterday. Once there were six forts here with a total of 145 guns, some of which can be seen today. Only Fort Charles still stands, however.

Fort Charles (✆ **876/967-8438**) has withstood attack, earthquake, fire, and hurricane. Built in 1656 and later strengthened by Morgan for his own purposes, the fort was expanded and further armed in the 1700s, until its firepower had more than 100 cannons, covering both the land and the sea approaches. In 1779, Britain's naval hero, Horatio Lord Nelson, was commander of the fort and trod the wooden walkway inside the western parapet as he kept watch for the French invasion fleet. Scale models of the fort and ships of past eras are on display. The fort is open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is $1.50.

Part of the complex, **Giddy House,** once the Royal Artillery storehouse, is another example of what the earth's movements can do. Walking across the tilted floor is an eerie and strangely disorienting experience.

In Spanish Town

From 1662 to 1872, Spanish Town (19km/12 miles west of Kingston on A1) was the capital of the island. Originally founded by the Spaniards as Villa de la Vega, it was sacked by Cromwell's men in 1655, and all traces of Roman Catholicism were obliterated. The English cathedral, surprisingly retaining a Spanish name, **St. Jago de la Vega** (✆ **876/986-4405**), was built in 1666 and rebuilt after being destroyed by a hurricane in 1712. As you drive into the town from Kingston, the ancient cathedral catches your eye with its brick tower and two-tiered wooden steeple, which was not added until 1831. Since the cathedral was built on the foundation and remains of the old Spanish church, it is half English and half Spanish, and displays two distinct styles: Romanesque and Gothic. Of cruciform design and built mostly of brick, it's one of the most interesting buildings on the island. The black-and-white marble stones of the aisles are interspersed with ancient tombstones, and the walls are heavy with marble memorials that almost chronicle Jamaica's history, dating back as far as 1662.

After visiting the cathedral, walk 3 blocks north along White Church Street to Constitution Street and the **Town Square.** This little square is surrounded by towering royal palms. On the west side is old **King's House,** gutted by fire in 1925, although the facade has been restored. This was the residence of Jamaica's British governors until 1872, when the capital was transferred to Kingston.

Beyond the house is the **Jamaica People's Museum of Craft & Technology,** Old King's House, Constitution Square (✆ **876/907-0322**), open Monday to Thursday from 9:30am to 4:30pm and Friday 8:30am to 4pm. Admission is $1.50. The garden contains examples of old farm machinery, an old water-mill wheel, a hand-turned sugar mill, a fire engine, and more. An outbuilding houses a museum of crafts and technology, together with a number of smaller agricultural implements. In the small archaeological museum are old prints, models, and maps of the town's grid layout from the 1700s.

The streets around the old Town Square contain many fine Georgian town houses intermixed with tin-roofed shacks. Nearby is the **market,** so busy in the morning that you may find it difficult, almost dangerous, to pass through. It provides, however, a bustling view of Jamaican life.

SHOPPING

Downtown Kingston, the old part of the town, is centered around **Sir William Grant Park,** formerly Victoria Park, a showpiece of lawns, lights, and fountains. Covered arcades lead off from King Street, and everywhere are teeming masses of people going about their business. There are some beggars and the inevitable hucksters who sidle up and offer "hot stuff, mon," frequently highly polished brass lightly dipped in gold and offered at prices as high as real gold.

For many years, the richly evocative paintings of Haiti were viewed as the most valuable contribution to Caribbean arts. There is on Jamaica, however, a rapidly growing perception of itself as one of the artistic leaders of the Third World. An articulate core of Caribbean critics is focusing the attention of the art world on the unusual, eclectic, and sometimes politically motivated paintings produced here.

Frame Centre Gallery, 10 Tangerine Place (✆ **876/926-4644**), is one of the most important art galleries on Jamaica. Its founder and guiding force, Guy McIntosh, is widely respected today as a patron of the Jamaican arts. There are three viewing areas and a varied collection of more than 300 works.

Kingston Crafts Market, at the west end of Harbour Street (reached via Straw Ave., Drummer's Lane, or Cheapside), is a large, covered area of small stalls, selling all kinds of island crafts: wooden plates and bowls; pepper pots made from *mahoe* (the national wood of the island); straw hats, mats, and baskets; batik shirts; banners for wall decoration, inscribed with the Jamaican coat-of-arms; and wood masks with elaborately carved faces. You should bargain a bit, and vendors will take something off the price, but not very much.

The **Shops at Devon House,** 26 Hope Rd., ring the borders of a 200-year-old courtyard once used by slaves and servants. It's associated with one of the most beautiful and historic mansions on Jamaica, a building owned by the Jamaican National Trust. On-site is a mellow old restaurant and pub, **The Grog Shop** (✆ **876/960-9730**). The most important shop is **Things Jamaican** (✆ **876/926-1961**), showcasing the crafts of the country and carrying a food section that features island-made sauces and spices. **Wassi Art** (✆ **876/906-5016**) exhibits locally made ceramics, and **Jamaican Juice** (✆ **876/906-9424**) sells natural and organic juices made from island-grown fruits. **Cooyaa**

 (✆ **876/920-6167**) sells T-shirts and other memorabilia inspired by the career of Bob Marley and other reggae artists.

8 THE BLUE MOUNTAINS ★★★

Just a short drive north of Kingston is some of the most varied and unusual topography in the Caribbean, a beautiful mountain range laced with rough rivers, streams, and waterfalls. The 78,000-hectare (192,660-acre) **Blue Mountain–John Crow Mountain National Park** is maintained by the Jamaican government. The mountainsides are covered with coffee fields, producing a blended version that's among the leading exports of Jamaica. For the nature enthusiast, the mountains reveal a complex series of ecosystems that change radically as you climb from sea level into the fog-shrouded peaks.

The most popular, the most scenic, and our favorite climb begins at **Whitfield Hall** (✆ **876/927-0986**), a high-altitude hostel and coffee estate about 10km (6 1/4 miles) north of the hamlet of Mavis Bank. Reaching the **summit of Blue Mountain Peak** (900m/2,952 ft. above sea level) requires about 3 1/2 hours, each way. Of course, there are much shorter variations if you don't want to see "everything." En route, hikers pass through acres of coffee plantations and forest, where temperatures are cooler than you might expect, and where high humidity encourages thick vegetation. Along the way, watch for an amazing array of bird life, including hummingbirds, many species of warblers, rufous-throated solitaires, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, and Greater Antillean pewees.

Dress in layers and bring bottled water. If you opt for a 2am departure in anticipation of watching the sunrise from atop the peak, carry a flashlight as well. Sneakers are usually adequate, although many climbers bring their hiking boots. Be aware that even during the "dry" season (Dec–Mar), rainfall is common. During the "rainy" season (the rest of the year), fogs and mists are frequent.

At no point do we recommend that you hike alone in the Blue Mountains, even if you're an experienced hiker. Weather conditions can change rapidly, and hiking maps are, in general, very poor. Since there are so few discernible landmarks, it is easy to lose your way.

Security is a major concern for an unaccompanied hiker, especially for those hiking on the Kingston side of the mountain. A guide will not only clear an overgrown path for you, but also may keep you out of harm's way. Bandits might rob you and then disappear into the vast wilderness of the Blue Mountains, where they are hard, if not impossible, to track down. If you appeal to local authorities, you will probably face indifference and a belated suggestion that "you should have used a guide." A better bet involves engaging one of Kingston's best-known specialists in eco-sensitive tours, **Sunventure Tours,** 30 Balmoral Ave., Kingston 10 (✆ **876/960-6685;** fax 876/929-5694; sunventuretours.com). The staff here can always arrange an individualized tour for you or your party, but offers a mainstream roster of choices as well. The **Blue Mountain Sunrise Tour** involves a camp-style overnight in one of the most remote and inaccessible areas of Jamaica. For $80 to $295 per person, participants are picked up at their Kingston hotels, driven to an isolated ranger station, Wildflower Lodge, that's accessible only via four-wheel-drive vehicle, in anticipation of a two-stage hike that begins at 2pm. Cost of the tour depends on the number of participants. A simple mountaineer's supper is served at 6pm around a campfire at a ranger station near Portland Gap. At 2am, climbers hike by moonlight and flashlight to a mountaintop aerie that was selected for its view of the 5am sunrise over the Blue Mountains. Climbers stay aloft until around noon that day, then head back

down the mountain and return to their hotels by 4pm. A 4-hour trek, costing from $45 to $70 per person, can also be arranged.

Blue Mountain Bike Tours (✆ **876/974-7075;** www.bmtoursja.com) offers all-downhill bike tours through the Blue Mountains—you peddle only about a half-dozen times on this several-mile trip. Visitors are driven to the highest navigable point in the Blue Mountains, where they are provided bikes and protective gear. Breakfast, lunch, snacks, and lots of information about coffee, local foliage, and history are provided. The cost is about $93 per person. The tours run Monday to Saturday, departing at 9am and returning around 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Strawberry Hill ★★ (Finds) Music-industry-mogul-turned-hotelier-extraordinaire Chris Blackwell has re-created an idealized version of Jamaica that he remembered from his childhood. The setting is a former coffee plantation in the Blue Mountains, on precariously sloping rainforest terrain 930m (3,050 ft.) above the sea. Views from its terraces overlook the capital's twinkling lights. Eco-sensitive and fully contained, the resort has its own power and water-purification system, a small-scale spa, and elaborate botanical gardens. This exclusive resort is a kind of "home away from home for five-star Robinson Crusoes." Maps and/or guides are provided for tours of nearby coffee plantations, hiking and mountain biking through the Blue Mountains, and tours by night or by day of the urban attractions of nearby Kingston. Accommodations are lavishly nostalgic, draped in bougainvillea and Victorian-inspired gingerbread, and outfitted with gracious mahogany furniture like that of a 19th-century Jamaican great house. Local craftspeople fashioned the cottages and furnished them with canopied four-poster beds and louvered mahogany windows.

Irish Town, Blue Mountains, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **800/688-7678** in the U.S., or 876/944-8400. Fax 876/944-8408. www.strawberryhillresort.com. 12 units. Winter $595–$895 double; off season $395–$595 double. Rates include all meals. AE, DISC, MC, V. Guests are personally escorted to the hotel in a customized van or via a 7-min. helicopter ride. It's a 50-min. drive from the Kingston airport or 30 min. via mountain roads from the center of the city. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa w/hydrotherapy facilities and massage; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Whispering Bamboo Cove (Value) The prices at Strawberry Hill are not for everyone. Frugal travelers who want to stay in the Blue Mountains head for this inn, a 25-mile drive from the center of Kingston, on the scenic south coast of Morant Bay. The rooms are midsize and comfortably furnished with traditional Jamaican furnishings. The cheapest units are cooled by ceiling fans and have no balconies; others are air-conditioned and have balconies opening onto the seafront. A homemade Jamaican breakfast is served in the elegant dining room, and, if you give notice, a lunch or dinner of island fare, specializing in seafood, is offered. The hotel opens onto a private beach with good swimming in a reef-protected area.

105 Crystal Dr., Retreat, Jamaica, W.I. ✆ **876/982-1788.** Fax 876/734-1049. www.discoverjamaica.com/whisper/html. 15 units. $50–$90 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Dining room; private beach. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan.

16

Martinique

Of all the French West Indies, Martinique is the most French, beginning with its capital, Fort-de-France. It is truly France in the Tropics, and we're talking Gauloise cigarettes and *gendarmes* directing traffic. You can even expect French brusqueness on occasion.

Martinique is one of the Caribbean's most beautiful islands, with its white-sandy beaches and lush rainforests. It is part of the Lesser Antilles and lies in the semitropical zone; the western shore faces the Caribbean, and its eastern shore fronts the more turbulent Atlantic. The island is only 1,088 sq. km (424 sq. miles)—81km (50 miles) at its longest point and 34km (21 miles) at its widest.

The terrain is mountainous, especially in the rainforested northern part, where the volcano Montagne Pelée rises to a height of 1,397m (4,582 ft.). In the center of the island, the mountains are smaller, with Carbet Peak reaching a 1,188m (3,897-ft.) summit. The high hills rising among the peaks or mountains are called *mornes.* The southern part of Martinique has big hills that reach peaks of 350m (1,148 ft.) at Vauclin and 420m (1,378 ft.) at Diamant. The irregular coastline of the island has five bays, dozens of coves, and miles of sandy beaches. Almost a third of the island's year-round population of 360,000 lives in the capital and largest city, Fort-de-France.

The climate is relatively mild, with the average temperature in the 75°F to 85°F (24°C–29°C) range. At higher elevations, it's considerably cooler. The island is cooled by a wind the French called *alizé,* and rains are frequent but don't last very long. Late August to November is the rainy season. April to September are the hottest months.

The early Carib peoples, who gave Columbus such a hostile reception, called Martinique the "island of flowers," and it has remained so. The vegetation includes hibiscus, poinsettias, bougainvillea, coconut palms, and mango trees. Almost any fruit can sprout from Martinique's soil, including pineapples, avocados, bananas, papayas, and custard apples.

Bird-watchers are often pleased at the number of hummingbirds, and visitors can also see mountain whistlers, blackbirds, and mongooses. Multicolored butter flies flit about, and after sunset, there's a concert of grasshoppers, frogs, and crickets.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Les Grands Ballets Martiniquais,** performances by a vibrant young troupe of singers, musicians, and dancers, who combine tales of plantation days with choreographed beguines, mazurkas, and waltzes.
- **Fort-de-France,** the capital of Martinique, a combination of Nice on the French Riviera and New Orleans. The heart of the city is La Savane, a large green park.
- **St-Pierre,** once the "Paris of the West Indies," is now Pompeii, as it was the victim in 1902 of the eruption of Montagne Pélee, killing 30,000 people.

1 ESSENTIALS

For information abut Martinique in advance of your departure, contact the **Martinique Department of the French Government Tourist Office,** at 825 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022 (✆ **212/838-6887** or 212/838-7800). Other points of contact within the U.S. and the rest of the world include **French Government Tourist Offices** at 9454 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 210, Beverly Hills, CA 90212 (✆ **310/271-6665**); or 205 N. Michigan Ave., Ste. 3770, Chicago, IL 60601 (✆ **312/327-0290**). In Britain, contact the **French Government tourist office** at Lincoln House, 300 High Holborn, London WC1V 7JH (✆ **09068/244123**). In Canada, the organization's name and address is **Maison de la France Canada,** 1800 McGill College Ave., Ste. 1010, Montréal, Quebec H3A 3J6 (✆ **514/288-2026**). For information about Martinique on the Web, go to **www.martinique.org**. For Web-derived information about *la France métropolitaine* (mainland France), click on **www.FranceGuide.com**.

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE **Airport Martinique Aime Cesaire** (✆ **596/42-18-05**) is outside the village of Lamentin, a 15-minute taxi ride east of Fort-de-France and a 40-minute taxi ride northeast of Les Trois-Ilets peninsula (the island's densest concentration of resort hotels). Most flights to Martinique require a transfer on a neighboring island—usually Puerto Rico, Antigua, or Barbados. From there another stopover or transfer in Guadeloupe is often required. Nonstop flights to any of the French islands from the U.S. mainland are rare.

Passengers living in the southeast United States can take a weekly direct flight on **Delta** (✆ **800/241-4141** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) from Atlanta. Many passengers from other parts of America fly into Atlanta to make this connection. Otherwise, **Air France** (✆ **800/237-2747** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airfrance.com) flies to Martinique several times a week from Miami, with stopovers in either Haiti or Guadeloupe. Many passengers also fly to San Juan on various airlines, connecting to Martinique on **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com).

Other smaller airlines flying to Martinique include **Air Antilles Express** (✆ **0890/64-86-48;** www.airantilles.com), flying in from Guadeloupe or St. Maarten; and **Air Caraïbes** (✆ **596/42-16-52**), also flying in from Guadeloupe and St. Maarten.

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada, or 0870/850-9850 within the British isles; www.britishairways.com) flies separately and daily to both Antigua and Barbados from Gatwick in London. From either of those Caribbean islands, **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liatairline.com) connects to Martinique. LIAT also flies into Martinique from other islands.

BY FERRY One particularly evocative means of travel between Martinique and Guadeloupe involves taking one of the motorized catamarans that are maintained by a local operator, **Exprèss des Iles.** Carrying between 395 and 495 passengers, depending on the boat, they require $3^3/_4$ hours of waterborne transit, which includes an intermediate stopover on either Dominica or Terre-de-Haut, in the Iles des Saintes. The company usually operates three passages a week and sometimes more, between the two largest islands of the French West Indies.

Morning departures from Pointe-à-Pitre for Fort-de-France are usually at 8am (Sat at 11:30am, Sun at 10am), and departures from Fort-de-France for Pointe-à-Pitre are usually at 1pm, although the schedule can vary unexpectedly according to the season and the day of the week. Fares are 83€ round-trip or 67€ one-way (52€ one-way for children 11 and under). For details and reservations, contact **Exprèss des Iles,** Gare Maritime, de Bergevin, 97110 Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe (✆ **590/91-52-15**), or **Terminal Inter-Iles,** Bassin de Radoub, 97200 Fort-de-France, Martinique (✆ **596/63-05-45**).

GETTING AROUND

BY RENTAL CAR Unless you never plan to leave the beach, you probably want to rent a car to explore the island. Martinique has several local car-rental agencies, but clients have complained of mechanical difficulties and billing irregularities. We recommend renting from one of the U.S.-based firms. Driving in Martinique is on the right side of the road. ***Note:*** An international driver's license is required.

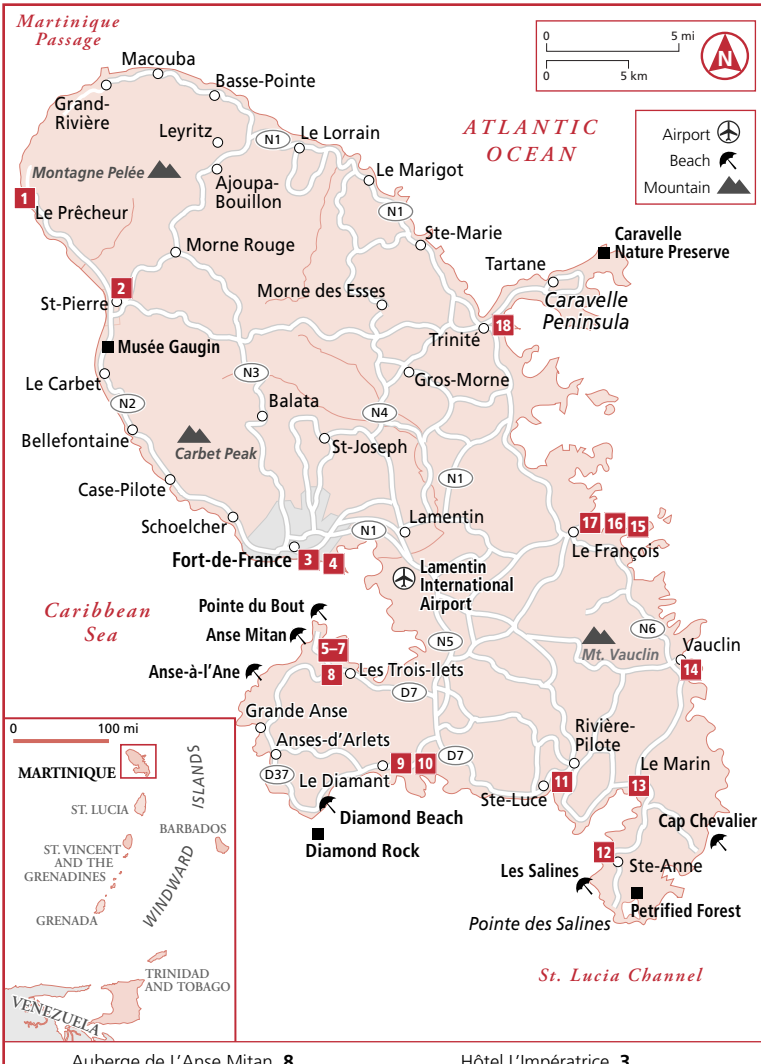
Budget has an office at 30 rue Ernest-Desproges, La Baie, Cruise Terminal, Fort-de-France, in addition to one at Lamentin (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 596/42-16-79 or 596/42-04-04; www.budgetrentacar.com). **Avis** is located at Airport Martinique Aime Cesaire (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 596/42-11-00; www.avis.com), as is **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 596/51-01-01; www.hertz.com).

Regardless of which company you choose, you'll be hit with a value-added tax (VAT) of 8.5% on top of the final bill, plus either a charge of around 25€ if you ask the car to be delivered to your hotel, or an airport pickup charge of about 20€ if you retrieve your car at the airport. Collision damage waivers (CDWs), which eliminate some or all of your financial responsibility in the event of an accident, cost between 12€ and 25€ per day at Budget and Hertz, and usually a bit more at Avis. Of these three car-rental companies, the rates at Budget tend to be the least expensive, although that depends on a wide array of seasonal variations.

BY TAXI Local laws demand that any bona-fide Martiniquais cab must contain a working meter. For specific itineraries—wherein a passenger tells the driver where he or she wants to go—the meter must be "on" and functioning. The island's largest dispatcher advises us that if a taxi driver quotes a flat rate to a passenger instead of activating the meter, you're being robbed, and you should immediately get out and find another cab. For an idea of prices, taxi rates between Fort-de-France and any hotel of La Pointe du Bout are 65€, but only 50€ from Airport Martinique Aime Cesaire to any hotel of La Pointe du Bout. For a general tour of the island, prices are negotiable with the driver. Between 7pm and 6am, a 40% surcharge is assessed.

The rule about using a taxi's meter does not apply to passengers who want to hire a taxi for a **general tour** of the island. If that is your goal, expect to pay from 50€ per hour for up to four passengers, depending on the itinerary and routing you negotiate with the driver. Frankly, we find touring the island by taxi so expensive, and so easily corrupted by the whims of the individual driver, that we advise visitors to rent their own car for the day, driving themselves—armed with a good map—around the island's many rutted but often panoramic roads.

Taxi companies include **Taxi de Place** (✆ **0696/31-91-05**) or **Peloponese Taxis** (✆ **0696/25-61-02**), the latter offering more luxurious cars, such as a Mercedes-Benz.



Auberge de L'Anse Mitan **8**
Cap Est Lagoon Resort & Spa **17**
Club Med Buccaneer's Creek **13**
Frégate Bleue **15**
Habitation Anse Couleuvre **1**
Hotel Cap Macabou **14**
Hotel Carayou **6**
Hotel Diamant Les Bains **9**
Hotel Diamond-Rock **10**
Hôtel L'Impératrice **3**
Karibéa Amandiers Resort **11**
La Domaine Saint-Aubin Hôtel **18**
La Dunette **12**
La Pagerie **7**
Le Lafayette **4**
Le Plein Soleil **16**
Sofitel Bakoua **5**
Villa St. Pierre **2**

Fun Facts Carnival

If you like masquerades and dancing in the streets, you should be here to attend **Carnival,** or *Vaval,* as it's known here. Most of the celebrations associated with Carnival occur, depending on when Lent falls, for 5 days in either late February or early March, but there is also usually some form of celebration or contest conducted for the six Sundays prior. Most visible of these is the election of the **Carnival Queen,** a contest that's usually held the first Sunday before the actual week of Carnival. Each village prepares costumes and floats. Weekend after weekend, frenzied celebrations take place, reaching fever pitch just before Lent. Fort-de-France is the focal point for Carnival, but the spirit permeates the whole island. On Ash Wednesday, the streets of Fort-de-France are filled with ***diablesses,*** or she-devils (portrayed by members of both sexes). Costumed in black and white, they crowd the streets to form King Carnival's funeral procession. As devils cavort and the rum flows, a funeral pyre is built at La Savane. When it's set on fire, the dancing of the she-devils becomes frantic (many are now thoroughly drunk). Long past dusk, the cortege takes the coffin to its burial, ending Carnival until next year.

BY BUS & TAXI COLLECTIF There are two types of buses operating on Martinique. Regular buses, called ***grands busses,*** hold about 40 passengers and cost 2€ to 2.50€ anywhere within the city limits of Fort-de-France. To travel beyond the city limits, nine-passenger ***taxis collectifs*** are used. These are privately owned minivans that traverse the island and bear the sign t c. Their routes are flexible and depend on passenger need. A one-way fare from Fort-de-France to Ste-Anne is about 8€ to 10€. *Taxis collectifs* depart from the heart of Fort-de-France from the parking lot of Pointe Simon. There's no phone number to call for information about this unpr edictable means of transpor t, and ther e are no set schedules. Traveling in a *taxi collectif* is for the adventurous—these vehicles are crowded and not very comfortable.

BY FERRY The least expensive—and most colorful—way to transfer between Fort-de-France and the hotel and tourist district of Pointe du Bout is via one of the *vedettes* (ferryboats) that depar t from rue de la Liber té in Fort-de-France. Transit costs 4€ one-way or 5.50€ r ound-trip. Schedules for the ferr yboats, at least 20 of which r un at r egular (usually 30-min.) inter vals every day betwe en 6:30am and 9pm, ar e printed in the fr ee visitor's guide *Chouboulout e,* in F rench and E nglish, which is distributed b y the tourist office. However, because the ferries are so frequent, most visitors dispense with attempting to understand the schedule altogether, and meander down to the waterfront to wait for the next boat.

There's a smaller ferr yboat that r uns betwe en F ort-de-France and the unpr etentious resorts of Anse Mitan and Anse-à-l'Ane, both across the bay and home to many two- and three-star hotels and modest Creole restaurants. The boat departs from rue de la Liberté in Fort-de-France at inter vals of betwe en 20 and 30 minutes ev ery day from 7:30am to 6pm. The trip takes about 20 minutes. O ne-way and round-trip passage cost 3.80€ and 6€, respectively. If seas are extremely rough, or if there's a hurricane warning, all ferryboat services may be suspended. For more information, call **Vedettes Madinina** (✆ **596/63-06-46;** www.vedettesmadinina.com).

Fast Facts Martinique

Banks Most of the banks of Martinique maintain the following hours: Monday to Friday 7:30am to noon and 2:30 to 4pm. A few of them have opted to close on Wednesday afternoon. Others maintain a policy of remaining closed all day Monday, but opening their doors every Saturday morning between 7:30am and noon. There are about a dozen ATMs in Fort-de-France, at least three at Lamentin Airport, and a scattering of others throughout the island, usually in such touristed areas as Pointe du Bout, Le Diamant, and Ste-Anne.

Currency Because Martinique falls under the same monetary system as mainland France, the island uses the **euro (€)** as its mode of exchange. The rate of exchange at press time was 1€ to US$1.30. **Change Caraïbes** maintains full-service foreign currency divisions, as well as ATMs, at both Lamentin Airport (✆ **596/42-17-11**) and 4 rue Ernest Desproges, in the center of Fort-de-France (✆ **596/60-28-40**). Banks give better exchange rates than hotels. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in euros.*

Customs Items for personal use, such as tobacco, cameras, and film, are admitted without formalities or tax if not in excessive quantity.

Documents U.S. and Canadian citizens need a valid passport. A return or ongoing ticket is also necessary. British citizens need only an identity card.

Electricity Electricity is 220-volt AC (50 cycles), the same as that used on the French mainland. However, check with your hotel to see if it has converted the electrical voltage and outlets in the bathrooms (some have). If it hasn't, bring your own transformer and adapter for U.S. appliances.

Emergencies Call the **police** at ✆ **17,** report a **fire** by dialing ✆ **18,** and summon an **ambulance** at ✆ **17** or **18.**

Hospitals There are about 18 hospitals and clinics on the island, and there's a 24-hour emergency room at the island's largest, **Hôpital Pierre Zabla Quitman,** Châteauboeuf, 5km (3 miles) south from Fort-de-France (✆ **596/55-20-00**), on the road to Lamentin Airport.

Information The **Tourist Office of Fort-de-France** is at 76 rue Lazare Carnot in Fort-de-France (✆ **596/60-27-73;** www.tourismefdf.com).

Language French, the official language, is spoken by almost everyone. The local Creole patois uses words borrowed from France, England, Spain, and Africa. In the wake of increased tourism, English is occasionally spoken in the major hotels, restaurants, and tourist organizations—but don't count on driving around the countryside and asking for directions in English.

Liquor Laws Liquor is sold in grocery and liquor stores on any day of the week. It's legal to have an open container in public, though the authorities will be very strict with any littering, disorderly behavior, or drunk driving.

Pharmacies Try the **Pharmacie de la Paix,** at the corner of rue Perrinon and rue Victor-Schoelcher in Fort-de-France (✆ **596/71-94-83**), open Monday to Friday from 7:15am to 6:15pm and on Saturday from 7:45am to 1pm.

Safety Crime is hardly rampant on Martinique, yet there are still those who prey on unsuspecting tourists. Follow the usual precautions, especially in Fort-de-France and in the tourist-hotel belt of Pointe du Bout. It's wise to protect your valuables and never leave them unguarded on the beach.

Taxes & Service Charges Most hotels include a 10% service charge in the bill; all restaurants include a 15% service charge. Also added onto your hotel bill is a resort tax known locally as *une taxe hotelière,* which ranges from 1.50€ to 2€ per person per night, depending on the hotel's rating and category.

Telephone To call Martinique from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **596** (the country code for Martinique), and then, if it's a conventional (that is, noncellular) phone, dial 596 again, followed by the six-digit local number. If the number you're calling is a cellphone, dial 011, followed by 596, followed by 696, followed by the six-digit local number. To call the United States from Martinique, dial **19-1,** then the area code, then the seven-digit local number. To make a call within Martinique, dial 0596 followed by the 6-digit local number.

Time Martinique is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, 1 hour earlier than Eastern Standard Time except when daylight saving time is in effect in the U.S. Then Martinique time is the same as on the East Coast of the United States.

Tipping Restaurants generally add a 15% service charge to all bills, which you can supplement if you think the service is outstanding. Some hotels also add a 10% service charge to your bill. Tip taxi drivers at least 15% of the fare.

Water The water is safe to drink throughout the island, but most residents stick to bottled water anyway.

Weather The climate is relatively mild—the average temperature is in the range of 75°F to 85°F (24°C–29°C).

2 FORT-DE-FRANCE

With its iron-grille-work balconies overflowing with flowers, Fort-de-France, the largest town on Martinique, seems like a cross between New Orleans and a town on the French Riviera. It lies at the end of a large bay surrounded by green hills.

The proud people of Martinique are even more fascinating than the town of Fort-de-France, although today the Creole women are likely to be seen in jeans instead of their traditional turbans, Empress Joséphine–style gowns, and massive, jouncing earrings.

Narrow streets climb up the steep hills, where houses have been built to catch the overflow of the capital's more than 100,000 inhabitants.

WHERE TO STAY

Don't stay in town if you want a hotel near a beach (see the hotels listed later in this chapter for beach resorts). If you do opt to stay in Fort-de-France, you'll have to take a ferryboat to reach the beaches at **Pointe du Bout** (see the section "Pointe du Bout & Les Trois-Ilets," later). The one exception is the Hôtel La Bâtelière, in the suburb of Schoelcher, which opens onto a small beach.

Hôtel L'Impératrice Favored by businesspeople without unlimited expense accounts, this stucco-sided, five-story hotel faces a landscaped mall in the heart of town, near the water's edge. The much-renovated L'Impératrice was originally built in the 1950s and named in honor of one of Martinique's most famous exports, Joséphine. Its balconies overlook the traffic at the western edge of the sprawling promenade known as La Savane. The small-to-medium-size guest rooms are modern and functional. The front rooms tend to be noisy, but they offer a look into life along La Savane. Don't expect outstanding service—almost no one speaks English, and much of the staff seems a bit jaded. But despite the confusion in the very noisy lobby, you might end up enjoying this hotel's unpretentiousness.

Place de la Savane, 15 rue de la Liberté, 97200 Fort-de-France, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/63-06-82.** Fax 596/72-66-30. hotellimperatrice@wanadoo.fr. 24 units. Winter 137€–162€ double; off season 60€–80€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Le Lafayette After 10pm, you'll enter this modest downtown hotel through its entrance on rue Victor-Hugo; during daylight hours, you'll use a larger entrance that opens onto rue de la Liberté, and climb a short flight of terra-cotta steps to reach the simple lobby. Don't expect grandeur; this hotel's snob appeal is practically nonexistent. The hotel was renovated, and its bedrooms are tidy and clean. Most units contain comfortable twin beds, with small pure-white, shower-only bathrooms. The overall impression is neat but simple and unpretentious. The inn is the oldest continuously operating hotel on Martinique, originally built in the 1940s with quasi–Art Deco hints that are now slightly dowdy.

5 rue de la Liberté, 97200 Fort-de-France, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/73-80-50.** Fax 596/60-97-75. www.lelafayettehotel.com. 24 units. Year-round 65€ double; 75€ triple. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV.

WHERE TO DINE

La Belle Epoque ★★ FRENCH In a turn-of-the-20th-century house, this elegant choice features haute French cuisine. In the affluent suburb of Didier, this colonial-style restaurant stands high above the capital of Fort-de-France. The dining room is filled with crystal, silver, white linens, and beautiful tiles, the room opening onto a terrace with a view of the garden. Guests savor the inventive, superbly prepared cuisine. The fish dishes are the finest in the area, particularly filet of John Dory served with a lime butter and the roasted scallops served with spice butter. Some classic beef dishes are also offered, cooked to order and served with sauces that often contain foie gras and truffles. The best is filet of beef Périgourdine with foie gras and truffles. Smoked salmon appears on the plate with a vinaigrette of passion fruit, and magret de canard (duckling) is served with a foie gras and a port wine sauce. Fresh lamb is flavored with thyme juice, and the chocolate fondant makes the perfect French dessert.

97 Route de Didier. ✆ **596/64-41-19.** Reservations required. Main courses 25€–42€; business lunch 30€. MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 7:30–9:30pm.

Le Dôme ★★ Finds FRENCH/ANTILLEAN Set on the top (eighth) floor of a hotel in the Valmenière district, midway between Fort-de-France's commercial center and the airport—and far from the neighborhoods and haunts visited by tourists—this place caters almost exclusively to business travelers, many from the French mainland. Outfitted with a contemporary decor and hues of red, it boasts large bay windows, through which diners enjoy a view that sweeps along the island's coastline. Menu items blend traditional

French cuisine with Antillean ingr edients, sometimes in v ery cr eative ways. The best examples include a cream of *christophene* (Caribbean squash) soup with crayfish; ground rack of lamb ser ved with a sauce made fr om cocoa po wder and r ed wine; seawolf with coconut sauce; filet of J ohn Dory with y ellow bananas and anise; and braised br east of duckling served with a sauce based on Caribbean cherries.

In the Hôtel Valmenière, Ave. des Arawaks. ✆ **596/75-75-77.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 20€–40€; business lunch 26€; fix ed-price menus 36€–55€. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Fri 12:30–2pm; M on–Sat 7:30–10pm. Bus: 7.

On the Outskirts

Le Br édas ★★ FRENCH/MAR TINIQUAIS/INTERNATIONAL A gastr onomic landmark attracting a clientele fr om miles ar ound, this r estaurant occupies a modern, white-walled Creole house, positioned in a verdant and isolated location to the nor theast of Fort-de-France. Cuisine changes ev ery 3 months, as envisioned b y the cr eative talent of Martinique-born Chef Brédas and the restaurant's charming manager, Marie-Julie. You might find the régime here a refreshing and rather stylish br eak from too constant a diet of mainstream Creole cuisine. The best examples might include a mille-feuille (Napoleon) of foie gras with gr een bananas, filets of a local whitefish (cobia) with lemon-flav ored mustard sauce, and yam cakes served with morels and Madeira sauce. Most of the pottery, plates, and tilework within the restaurant were manufactured locally, by local artisans.

Entrée P resqu'île, R ivière Blanche , Saint Joseph. ✆ **596/57-65-52.** w ww.lebredas.com. Reser vations required. Main courses 28€–35€; set menus fr om 45€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 7:30–10pm. Aug 7–Oct 10 open only for dinner.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

If it's a beach you're looking for, take the ferry to **Pointe du Bout** (see the section "Pointe du Bout & Les Trois-Ilets," below). The island's only **golf course** is in Les Trois-Ilets, also discussed in the next section.

HIKING Inexpensive guided hikes ar e offer ed b y the **Parc Naturel Régional de la Martinique,** 9 bd. G énéral de Gaulle at Fort-de-France (✆ **596/64-42-59**). This organization also gives out maps of recommended hikes within Martinique and offers advice about routings and access to depar ture points for walks and hill tr eks.

EXPLORING FORT-DE-FRANCE

At the heart of town is **La Savane,** a broad garden with many palms and mangos; playing fields, walks, and benches; plus shops and cafes lining its sides. In the middle of this grand square stands a statue of J oséphine, "Napoleon's little Creole," made of white marble b y Vital Debray. Joséphine poses in a Regency gown and looks toward Les Trois-Ilets, where she was born. The statue was decapitated in 1991, pr obably because islanders felt she championed slavery. Near the harbor, at the edge of the par k, you'll find v endors' stalls with handmade crafts, including baskets, beads, bangles, woodcar vings, and straw hats.

Your next stop could be the 1875 **Cathédrale St-Louis,** on rue Victor-Schoelcher. The religious centerpiece of the island, it 's an extraor dinary ir on building, which has been likened to "a sort of Catholic railway station." A number of the island's former governors are buried beneath the choir loft.

A statue in front of the Palais de Justice is of the island's second main historical figure, **Victor Schoelcher,** who worked to free the slaves more than a century ago. **Bibliothèque Schoelcher,** 1 rue de la Liberté (✆ **596/70-26-67**), also honors this popular her o. Functioning today as the island 's central go vernment-funded librar y, the elaborate str ucture was first displayed at the Paris Exposition of 1889. The Romanesque portal, the Egyptian

Martinique's Traditional Dances

The sexy and rhythmic **beguine** was *not* an invention of Cole Porter. It's a dance of the islands—though exactly which island depends on whom you ask. Popular wisdom and the encyclopedia give the nod to Martinique, though Guadeloupeans claim it as their own, too.

Everybody who goes to Martinique wants to see the show performed by **Les Grands Ballets Martiniquais,** a troupe of about two dozen dancers, along with musicians, singers, and choreographers, who tour the island regularly. Their performances of the traditional dances of Martinique have been acclaimed in both Europe and the United States. With a swoosh of gaily striped skirts and clever acting, the dancers capture all the exuberance of the island's soul. The group has toured abroad with great success, but they perform best on their home ground, presenting tableaux that tell of jealous brides and faithless husbands, demanding overseers and toiling cane cutters. Dressed in traditional costumes, the islanders dance the spirited **mazurka,** which was brought from the 18th- and 19th-century ballrooms of Europe, and, of course, the exotic beguine.

Les Grands Ballets Martiniquais usually perform at area hotels, but schedules vary, so check locally. The cost of dinner and the show is from 50€. Most performances are at 8:30pm, with dinners at the hotels beginning at 7:30pm. The show is free for guests of the hotel where the troupe is performing. In addition, the troupe gives mini-performances aboard visiting cruise ships.

lotus-petal columns, even the turquoise tiles were imported piece by piece from Paris and reassembled here. It's open Monday 1 to 5:30pm, Tuesday to Friday 8:30am to 5:30pm, and Saturday 8:30am to noon.

Fort St-Louis, built in the Vauban style on a rocky promontory, guards the port. **Fort Tartenson** and **Fort Desaix** also stand on hills overlooking the port.

Musée Departemental d'Archeologie et de Prehistoire de la Martinique, 9 rue de la Liberté (✆ **596/71-57-05**), has preserved Martinique's pre-Columbian past and has relics from the early settlers, the Arawaks and the Caribs. The museum has exhibits from the years from 3000 b.c. to a.d. 1635, but stops shortly after the arrival of the first French colonials in the early 1600s. In other words, it's mostly an ethnological museum. The museum faces La Savane and is open Monday 1 to 5pm, Tuesday to Friday from 8am to 5pm, and on Saturday 9am to noon. Closed Saturday in July and August. Admission is 3.05€ for adults, 1.50€ for children 3 to 12 and students.

Le Musée Régional d'Histoire et d'Ethnographie, 10 bd. de Général-de-Gaulle, in Fort-de-France (✆ **596/72-81-87**), is devoted to an illumination of the island's agrarian past (and the slave culture that made it possible). Expositions showcase the late-19th-century volcanic eruption that leveled St-Pierre, slavery and its effects on the island's society, and explorations of the sugar-cane industry. It's open Tuesday from 2 to 5pm, Saturday from 8:30am to noon, and Monday and Wednesday to Friday from 8:30am to 5pm. Entrance costs 3€ for adults and .75€ for children 11 and under. Entrance is free for anyone with a valid student ID.

Sacré-Coeur de Balata Cathedral, at Balata, overlooking Fort-de-France, is a copy of the one looking down from Montmartre upon Paris—and this one is just as incongruous, maybe more so. It's reached by going along route de la Trace (Rte. N3). Balata is 10km (6¼ miles) northwest of Fort-de-France.

A few minutes away on Route N3, **Jardin de Balata** (✆ **596/64-48-73**) is a tropical botanical park created by Jean-Philippe Thoze on land that the jungle was rapidly reclaiming around a Creole house that belonged to his grandmother. He restored the house, furnishing it with antiques and engravings. The garden contains a profusion of flowers, shrubs, and trees. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Admission is 6.50€ for adults, 2.50€ for children 7 to 12, and free for children 6 and under.

SHOPPING

Your best buys on Martinique are French luxury imports, such as perfumes, fashions, Vuitton luggage, Lalique crystal, and Limoges dinnerware. Sometimes (but don't count on it) prices are as much as 30% to 40% below those in the United States.

You're usually better off shopping in the smaller stores, where prices are 8% to 12% lower on comparable items, and paying in euros.

FORT-DE-FRANCE AFTER DARK

The most exciting after-dark activity is seeing a performance of the folkloric troupe **Les Grands Ballets Martiniquais** (see "Martinique's Traditional Dances," above).

The popularity of individual bars and dance clubs in Martinique rises and falls almost monthly. Many of them charge a cover between 10€ and 15€, although that's often ignored if business is slow—and if you're an appealing physical specimen. A nightclub and restaurant where anyone can be a star, at least for a few minutes, is **Le Karaoke Café California,** Immeuble Les Corneaux, Lamentin (✆ **596/50-07-71**).

If you're on the party circuit around Martinique, you are likely to find the most action at **Crazy Nights,** Ste-Luce (✆ **596/68-56-68**), a wild dance parlor that on weekends can attract hundreds of patrons, each bent on having one "crazy night." Jazz is showcased at the **Calembasse Café,** 19 bd. Allègre Le Marin (✆ **596/74-69-27**), which sometimes features its own Billie Holiday clone. Meals are served, and the place is packed on Saturday nights. Live performances on Thursday around 10:30pm are a regular feature at **Les Soirees de l'Amphore,** Anse-Mitan (✆ **596/66-03-09**), a small restaurant and minibar. Funk, disco, and soul are all featured.

If you want to gamble, head for Martinique's major casino, **Casino Bâtelière Plaza,** at Schoelcher (✆ **596/61-73-23**), a 10-minute drive from the center of Fort-de-France. You'll need a passport and 11€ to enter the gaming rooms (men do not need a jacket or tie). A special area reserved just for slot machines is open daily, without charge, from 10am to 3 or 4am. A more formal gambling area, with poker, roulette, and blackjack, is open from 8pm to 3am. There's a restaurant on-site. This is the larger, newer, and more crowded of the two casinos in Martinique, with 140 slot machines, compared to the 40 slots at the Casino des Trois-Ilets (see "Pointe du Bout After Dark," later in this chapter). But that might change if and when the new casino at Trois-Ilets opens.

On a cultural note, **L'Atrium,** boulevard Général de Gaulle, Fort-de-France (✆ **596/70-79-29**), is the venue for major island cultural events, including dance and music. The theatrical presentations, of course, are in French. You can ask on island what might be happening at the time of your visit. For a not-always-up-to-date rundown on what's cooking entertainment-wise, click on **www.martiniquescoop.com**.

3 POINTE DU BOUT ★ & LES TROIS-ILETS

Pointe du Bout is a narrow peninsula across the bay from the busy capital of Fort-de-France. It's the most developed resort area of Martinique, with at least four of the island's largest hotels, an impressive marina, about a dozen tennis courts, countless pools, facilities for horseback riding, and all kinds of watersports. There's also a handful of independent restaurants, a casino, boutiques, and, in nearby Les Trois-Ilets, a Robert Trent Jones, Sr.–designed golf course. Except for the hillside that contains the Sofitel Bakoua, most of the district is flat and verdant, with gardens and rigidly monitored parking zones. All the hotels listed below are near the clean white-sand beaches of Pointe du Bout. Some of the smaller properties are close to the white-sand beaches of Anse Mitan. Les Trois-Ilets, the birthplace of Joséphine, the empress of France and wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, lies at the base of the peninsula on the bay.

GETTING THERE

If you're driving from Fort-de-France, take Route 1, which crosses the plain of Lamentin—the industrial area of Fort-de-France and the site of the international airport. Often the air is filled with the fragrance of caramel, from the large sugar-cane factories in the surrounding area. After about 30km (19 miles), you reach Les Trois-Ilets. Five kilometers (3 miles) farther on your right, take Route D38 to Pointe du Bout.

For the **ferry service,** see "Getting Around" in section 1 for details.

WHERE TO STAY

Expensive

Hotel Carayou ★ Kids This hotel is popular with families because of its children's programs, and prides itself on its lush gardens and glamorous garden setting opening onto a small beach. The accommodations aren't the most attractive in the area, but they are housed in a series of three-story outbuildings, each encircled by large lawns dotted with coconut or palm trees and flowering shrubs. The seaside rooms are the best, and some of the units are air-conditioned. Against a setting of wood trim and white washed walls, the rooms are generally small but well maintained.

Pointe du Bout, 97229 Trois-Ilets, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/66-04-04.** Fax 596/66-00-57. www.hotelcarayou.com. 201 units. Winter 260€–310€ double; off season from 150€ double. Rates include American buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; children's program; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; spa; tennis court; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, hair dryer.

Sofitel Bakoua ★ Airline crews fill up many of the rooms at the Sofitel Bakoua, a hotel known for the beauty of its landscaping and its somewhat isolated hillside location. It consists of four low-rise buildings in the center of a garden. Built in 1967 and renovated several times since, accommodations come in a wide range of sizes, from small to spacious, and are comfortable. Rooms have balconies or patios.

Pointe du Bout, 97229 Trois-Ilets, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S., or 596/66-02-02. Fax 596/66-00-41. www.sofitel.com. 138 units. Winter 324€–534€ double, from 595€ suite; off season 324€–422€ double, from 538€ suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; outdoor pool; room service; 2 tennis courts; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate

La Pagerie The facilities here are relatively modest compared to those in some of the larger and more expensive hotels of Pointe du Bout, but guests can compensate by visiting the many restaurants, bars, and sports facilities in the area. Set close to the gardens of the Sofitel Bakoua (see above) and a 26km (16-mile) drive from the airport, this hotel offers comfortably modern bedrooms. Although the walls are thin, the units are neat and uncomplicated, with tile floors, small fridges, and balconies with views opening onto the bay. About two-thirds of the units contain tiny kitchenettes, at no extra charge. The accommodations are outfitted with floral prints, low-slung furnishings, and louvered closets. Guests usually walk 5 minutes to Hotel Carayou (see above) for watersports and access to the beach.

Pointe du Bout, 97229 Trois-Ilets, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/66-05-30.** Fax 596/66-00-99. www.hotellapagerie.com. 93 units. Winter 134€–145€ double; off season 84€–110€ double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchenette (in some).

Inexpensive

Auberge de L'Anse Mitan You don't get anything special here, but the price is right and many guests like this hotel's location at the isolated end of a road whose more commercial section is laden with restaurants and bustles at night. The hotel was built in 1930 but has been renovated several times by the hospitable Athanase family. What you get today is a three-story concrete structure. Six of the units are studios with kitchens and TVs; all have showers. Rooms are boxy, but the beds are comfortable.

35 rue des Anthuriums, L'Anse Mitan, 97229 Trois-Ilets, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/66-01-12.** Fax 596/66-01-05. www.auberge-ansemitan.com. 21 units. Winter 70€–90€ double, 65€ studio, 90€–110€ triple; off season 55€ double, 50€ studio, 70€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, TV (in studios), kitchenette (in studios).

WHERE TO DINE

There isn't a great choice of restaurants, but here's the pick of the litter.

Au Poisson d'Or CREOLE Its position near the entrance of the resort community of Pointe du Bout makes it easy to find. There's no view of the sea, and the traffic runs close to the edge of the veranda and terrace, but the reasonable prices and the complete change of pace make up for that. The rustic dining room offers such classics as grilled fish cooked in coconut milk; grilled conch scallops sautéed in white wine; poached local fish; and flan. These ordinary dishes are prepared with flair and served with style.

12 rue du Bougainvilliers, L'Anse Mitan. ✆ **596/66-01-80.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 12€–20€; prix-fixe lunch 15€–25€, dinner 25€–33€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2pm; Tues–Sat 7–10pm. Closed July.

Havana Café FRENCH Set in Pointe du Bout, amid the densest concentration of tourist hotels and leisure facilities of Martinique, this cafe evokes an idealized version of Cuba in its most decadent period, just before the rise to power of Fidel. Amid a color scheme of bright yellow and blue, and prefaced with a big American sedan, painted yellow, from the early 1960s, a mostly French-born staff serves stiff drinks as well as meal-size salads, burgers, grilled cutlets, and heaping platters of mussels. There's a selection of raw tartars of fish, and a house cheeseburger called a "Havana Burger." And for anyone nostalgic for metropolitan France, there's a short list of *des galettes,* the buckwheat crêpes endemic to Brittany stuffed, Breton style, with savory or sweet fillings that include ham

and cheese or ice cream with chocolate sauce. Some kind of music, either live or recorded, rocks-and-rolls the place every evening between 9:30pm and midnight, during which time it takes on the aura of a holiday maker's singles bar. There's another beachside branch of this place, **Havana Plage,** at Grand Anse, Anse d'Arlets (✆ **596/69-07-38**), with the same menu items, prices, and hours, but the Le Cabestar Café is the more animated of the two.

In the Village Creole, Pointe du Bout. ✆ **596/66-15-93.** Main courses 10€–17€. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11:30pm.

La Villa Creole ★ CREOLE/FRENCH This restaurant, which lies a 3- or 4-minute drive from the hotels of Pointe du Bout, has thrived since the late 1970s, offering a colorful, small-scale respite from the island's high-rise resorts. Set within a simple but well-maintained Creole house, with no particular views other than the small garden that surrounds it, the restaurant serves fairly priced set-price menus of such staples as *accras de morue* (beignets of codfish), *boudin Creole* (blood sausage), and *feroce* (a local form of pâté concocted from fresh avocados, pulverized codfish, and manioc flour). A special delight is the red snapper either prepared with tomato sauce or grilled. If Creole food doesn't appeal to you, there's also a short list of dishes inspired by the traditional cuisine of mainland France, focusing on such Gallic staples as terrine of duck liver, a terrine of smoked salmon, and a confit of duckling with a purée of shallots. Owner Guy Bruère-Dawson, a singer and guitarist, entertains as you dine.

18 rue des Anthuriums, L'Anse Mitan. ✆ **596/66-05-53.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 16€–35€; vegetarian menu 19€, gourmet menu 39€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 7–10:30pm.

Le Pacha ★ FRENCH/CARIBBEAN Le Pacha is in a seafronting building that's virtually hidden from the landward side by a thick screen of palm trees and vegetation. Inside, in an environment painted in tones of pink, orange, and variations of green, you'll find a dedication to creative cuisine that's directly affected by the French Alps origins of the creative team who run the place. The same menu is offered at lunch and dinner. Alongside pizzas and salads, the menu includes such elaborate creations as a duet of fish (Atlantic mackerel and Caribbean *balahou*) served with orange sauce; a cassolette of freshwater crayfish with foie gras; and a roasted half-lobster served with fresh tomatoes, tarragon, and pistou. A deeply upholstered leather sofa near the entrance functions as a kind of throne at this place, supposedly allowing any Jean, Philippe, or Pierre to feel like a *pacha,* or sultan, in his own right. Le Pacha is a short walk from the departure point for the ferryboats heading to and from Fort-de-France.

Anse Mitan. ✆ **596/66-02-99.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 17€–25€. DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 7–10:30pm.

Pignon sur Mer CREOLE Simple and unpretentious, with a decor and a menu that has remained the same for the past 20-plus years, this intimate Creole restaurant has about 15 tables in a rustically dilapidated building beside the sea. (It's a 12-min. drive from Pointe du Bout.) Menu items are island inspired and may include a platter of shellfish or whatever fish was hauled in that day. *Lambi* (conch), shrimp, and crayfish are usually available, and brochettes of chicken are flavorful. A specialty is a well-flavored filet of beef with a choice of green-peppercorn sauce or Roquefort sauce.

Anse-a-l'Ane, Trois Ilets. ✆ **596/68-38-37.** Main courses 9€–33€. MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:15–2:15pm; Tues–Sat 7–9:30pm. Closed 3 weeks in June, 2 weeks in September.

HITTING THE BEACH

The clean white-sand beaches of **Pointe du Bout,** site of the major hotels of Martinique, were created by developers and tend to be rather small. Most of the tourists head here, so the narrow beaches are among the island's most crowded. It doesn't help that Pointe du Bout also has several marinas lining the shore and serves as the docking point for the ferry from Fort-de-France. Even if you don't find a lot of space on the beach, with its semiclear waters, you will find toilets, phones, restaurants, and cafes galore. The waters suffer from industrial usage, although apparently the pollution is not severe enough to prevent people from going in. You'll often see the French standing deep in the water, smoking cigarettes—not our idea of an idyllic beach vacation.

To the south, the golden-sand beaches at **Anse Mitan** are far less crowded and more inviting, with cleaner waters. But the steepness of Martinique's shoreline leaves much to be desired by its swimmers and snorkelers. The water declines steeply into depths, no reefs ring the shores, and fish are rarely visible. Nonetheless, beaches here are good for sunbathing. The neighboring beach is **Anse-à-l'Ane,** an ideal place for a picnic.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

GOLF Robert Trent Jones, Sr., designed the 18-hole **Golf de l'Impératrice-Joséphine,** at Trois-Ilets (✆ **596/68-32-81**), a 5-minute drive from Pointe du Bout and about 30km (19 miles) from Fort-de-France. The only golf course on Martinique has greens that slope from the birthplace of Joséphine across rolling hills down to the sea. Amenities include a pro shop, a bar, and a restaurant. Greens fees are 50€ for 18 holes. There are also three rather battered tennis courts, which cost 13€ per hour.

HORSEBACK RIDING The premier riding facility on Martinique is **Ranch Jack,** Esperanze, Trois-Ilets (✆ **596/68-37-69**). It offers morning horseback rides for both experienced and novice riders, at a cost of 50€ for a 4-hour ride (either 8:30am–12:30pm or 2:30–6:30pm). Jacques and Marlene Guinchard make daily treks across the beaches and fields of Martinique, with a running (English-language) explanation of the history, fauna, and botany of the island. Cold drinks are included in the price, and transportation is usually free to and from the hotels of nearby Pointe du Bout. Four to 15 participants are needed to book a tour. This is an ideal way to discover both the botany and geography of Martinique.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING The beachfront of the **Hotel Carayou** is the headquarters for the island's best dive outfit, **Espace Plongée Martinique** (✆ **596/66-01-79**), which welcomes anyone who shows up, regardless of where they're staying. Daily dive trips, depending on demand, leave from Le Kalenda's pier every day at 8am, returning at noon, and departing again at 2pm, returning at 5pm. Popular dive sites within a reasonable boat ride, with enough diversity and variation in depth to appeal to divers of all levels of proficiency, include La Baleine (The Whale) and Cap Salomon. A dive shop stocks everything you'll need to take the plunge, from weight belts and tanks to wet suits and underwater cameras. Uncertified divers pay 52€ for a *baptême* ("baptism"), which consists of instruction and practice time in the hotel's swimming pool, followed by a brief experience with a scuba tank in open water.

Certified divers pay 47€ for a one-tank dive, or around 90€ for a full-day excursion to Baie de St-Pierre (St. Peter's Bay) on Martinique's northern coast. Here the excursion includes two dives (morning and afternoon, in different spots), excursions in a minibus to sites of natural beauty along the north coast, and continental breakfast and a picnic

lunch. It departs whenever at least five participants show sufficient interest, at 8am. Participants return to the Kalenda the same day at 5:30pm.

Coral, fish, and ferns abound in the semiclear waters around the Pointe du Bout hotels, and snorkeling equipment is usually available free to hotel guests.

JET SKIING Also on the grounds of the Hotel Carayou is an outfit specializing in jet-skiing, **Jet Caraibes** (✆ **596/66-09-31**). A 30-minute rental of a jet ski costs 60€ for 1 or 2 persons.

WINDSURFING An enduringly popular sport in the French West Indies, *la planche à voile* (windsurfing) is available at most of the large-scale hotels. One of the best equipped (and longest lived) of Martinique's windsurfing centers is **Windsurf Club Martinique,** which occupies a site directly on the beachfront of the Hotel Carayou (✆ **596/66-19-06**). Lessons cost 40€ per hour, and boards, depending on their make and model, rent for 20€ per hour. A 10-hour rental costs 185€.

A VISIT TO LES TROIS-ILETS

Marie-Josephe-Rose Tascher de la Pagerie was born here in 1763. As Joséphine, she was to become the wife of Napoleon I and empress of France from 1804 to 1809. Six years older than Napoleon, she pretended that she'd lost her birth certificate so he wouldn't find out her true age. Although many historians call her ruthless and selfish, she is still revered by some on Martinique as an uncommonly gracious lady. Others have less kind words for her—Napoleon is said by some historians to have "reinvented" slavery, and they cite Joséphine's influence.

Thirty kilometers (19 miles) south of Fort-de-France, you reach Les Trois-Ilets, a charming little village. Two kilometers (1 ¼ miles) outside the village, turn left to La Pagerie, where the small **Musée de La Pagerie** (✆ **596/68-33-06**) has been installed in the former estate kitchen, where Joséphine gossiped with her slaves and played the guitar. Regrettably, most of the other buildings associated with this once-thriving plantation were destroyed in a hurricane. Visitors today can see mementos of Josephine's childhood, including the bed she slept in as a teenager and a passionate letter from Napoleon. The collection was compiled by Dr. Robert Rose-Rosette. Still remaining are the partially restored ruins of the Pagerie sugar mill and the church (in the village itself) where she was christened in 1763. The museum is open Tuesday to Friday 9am to 5:30pm, Saturday and Sunday 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3 to 5pm; closed in September. Admission is 5€ for adults, 1.50€ for children 5 to 12.

Modern artists and local potters banded together in 2005 to form a cooperative of shops, galleries, and studios at **Trois-Ilets Pottery** (✆ **596/63-03-44**), at La Pagerie, next to the Musée de La Pagerie. You can shop for one-of-a-kind items such as a clay lamp hand painted in Creole colors.

Maison de la Canne, Pointe Vatable (✆ **596/68-32-04**), is on the road to Trois-Ilets. Located on the premises of an 18th-century distillery, its permanent exhibitions demonstrate the sweeping role sugar cane played in the economic and cultural development of Martinique. It's open Tuesday to Sunday 9am to 5pm; admission is 3€ for adults, .75€ for children 5 to 12, and free for children 4 and under.

The marina complex has a number of fashionable boutiques; several sell handicrafts and curios from Martinique. They're sometimes of good quality but are quite expensive, particularly the enameled jewel boxes and some of the batiks of natural silk.

POINTE DU BOUT AFTER DARK

For such a popular resort area, nightlife is mostly confined to bars. Other entertainment options are sporadic, including offerings at the **Havana Café,** Village Creole, Pointe du Bout (✆ **596/66-15-93**). If you like a party atmosphere, head for the **Coconuts Club,** Quartier Laugier, Rivière Salée (✆ **596/68-20-49**). This is a three-in-one threat—bar/lounge, restaurant, and dance club. **L'Amphore,** a piano and karaoke bar, is found at the rear of Sofitel Bakoua, Pointe du Bout (✆ **596/66-03-09**).

Martinique's **Casino des Trois-Ilets** is at 24 Rue Bougainvilliers (✆ **596/66-00-30**). Slot machines are available daily 10am to 3am. Roulette and *les grands jeux* (blackjack) are open nightly from 9pm to 3am, but there's an entrance charge of 11€, and visitors must present ID or a passport.

4 THE SOUTH LOOP

South of Pointe du Bout, you can find sun and beaches. Resort centers here include Le Diamant and Ste-Anne. From Trois-Ilets, you can follow a small curved road that brings you to **Anse-à-l'Ane, Grande Anse,** and **Anses-d'Arlets.** At any of these places you'll find small beaches, which are quite safe and usually not crowded.

ANSES-D'ARLETS

The scenery is beautiful here. Brightly painted fishing boats known as *gommiers* draw up on the white-sand beach, and the nets are spread out to dry in the sun. Children swim and adults fish from the good-size pier. The waters off Anses-d'Arlets are a playground for divers, with a wide variety of small tropical fish and colorful corals.

The area has been a choice spot for weekend second homes for many years, and is now becoming a destination for tourists. The little village features a pretty steepled church, a bandstand for holiday concerts, and a smattering of modest little dining spots. Aficionados of Martinique come here to see the "way it used to be" on the island. Unspoiled and folkloric, the hamlet still retains its *charm typique Martiniquaise.*

From Anses-d'Arlets, panoramic Route D37 takes you to Le Diamant.

LE DIAMANT

Set on the island's southwestern coast, about 40 minutes by taxi from the airport, this village offers a good beach, open to the prevailing southern winds. The village is named after one of Martinique's best-known geological oddities, **Le Rocher du Diamant (Diamond Rock),** a barren offshore island that juts upward from the sea to a height of 172m (564 ft.). Sometimes referred to as the Gibraltar of the Caribbean, it figured prominently in a daring British invasion in 1804, when British mariners carried a formidable amount of ammunition and 110 sailors to the top Despite frequent artillery bombardments from the French-held coastline, the garrison held out for 18 months, completely dominating the passageway between the rock and the coast of Martinique. Intrepid foreigners sometimes visit Diamond Rock, but the access across the strong currents of the channel is risky.

Diamond Beach ★★★, on the Martinique mainland, offers a sandy bottom, verdant groves of swaying palms, and many different surf and sunbathing possibilities. The district has developed into a resort, scattered with generally small hotels.

Where to Stay

Hotel Diamant Les Bains This is an unpretentious, family-style hotel with direct access to a sandy beach. From the edge of the resort's pool, you can enjoy a view of the offshore island of Diamond Rock. Twenty units are in outlying motel-style bungalows set either in a garden or beside the beach; the others are in the resort's main building, which also houses the restaurant and bar. Accommodations have furnished terraces or patios, white-tile floors, small fridges, and built-in furniture made from polished fruitwood. Most rooms are medium in size except for the small units on the second floor of the main building, which are often rented to business travelers from the French mainland. The best are the 10 rustic bungalows directly above the beach.

97223 Le Diamant, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/76-40-14.** Fax 596/76-27-00. 27 units. Winter 112€ double, 159€ bungalow; off season 80€ double, 112€ bungalow. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Closed 1st week of June and Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Diamond-Rock On 2 hectares (5 acres) of forested land, 3km (1 3/4 miles) outside the village and 29km (18 miles) south of Fort-de-France, this low-rise building is in one of the most beautiful districts on Martinique. It's the ultimate in laissez-faire management—guests, often tour groups from France, are basically left to themselves. Guest rooms, housed in four three-story wings, face either the pool or the coast, with its view of Diamond Rock. The inviting units have tropical decor, white-tile floors, white-washed walls, roomy closets, and rattan furnishings, plus adequate desk space. Outside the hotel, the narrow neighboring white-sand beaches aren't too crowded.

97223 Le Diamant, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/76-42-42.** Fax 596/76-22-87. www.diamondrockhotel.com. 181 units. 252€–326€ double. Rates include full board. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; Internet; large outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; watersports; diving; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

STE-LUCE

Between Le Diamant and Ste-Anne lies this sleepy fishing village, which is known for its fine beaches of white sand. Scuba divers flock to the waters at Pointe Figuier to the east of Ste-Luce. Most visitors come here to lodge at the hotel below or just to enjoy the beaches. You can also visit **Ecomusée de Martinique,** Anse Figuier (✆ **596/62-79-14**), which exhibits artifacts unearthed from the days of the earliest settlers, the Carib and Arawak Indians. Entrance is 3€ for adults, .75€ children 5 to 12; hours are Tuesday to Thursday 9am to 5pm, Friday 8:30am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am to 1pm and 2 to 5pm.

Where to Stay

Karibéa Amandiers Resort This is our favorite of three interrelated, side-by-side resorts, each of which is managed by the France-based Karibea Hotel Group. Opening directly onto the sea and a beach, it's a winning choice and imbued with a tropical ambience and a welcoming staff. In the south, this property enjoys a scenic location on a natural cove with a beach. Accommodations are found in buildings rising three floors, the upper levels reached by stairs in lieu of an elevator. The main feature of the hotel is its lovely pool, and the entire complex is set in well-landscaped tropical gardens. Many units open onto balconies and are equipped with full kitchenettes. Cane furniture and West Indian decorative motifs are used throughout. Each room comes with two bathrooms with shower. The names of this hotel's two sister resorts include the **Karibéa Amyris** and the **Karibéa Caribéa.** Each is within walking distance of the other, and

clients at one tend to mingle around the amenities of each of the three. When their room count is combined, the three hotels have a total of 298 units.

Quartier Déser t 97228 St e-Luce, M artinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/62-12-00.** F ax 596/62-12-12. w ww.hotel-caribbean-karibea.com. 115 units . Winter 178€–206€ double , fr om 216€ suit e; off season 105€–127€ double, fr om 122€ suit e. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 r estaurants; 2 bars; childr en's pr ograms (ages 4–12); Internet; 3 out door pools; smoke -free r ooms; 2 t ennis c ourts; snorkeling; r ooms f or those w/limit ed mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenettes (in some).

LE MARIN

This is the yachting capital of M artinique, lying between Ste-Luce and Ste-Anne, about an hour south from the capital of Fort-de-France. Here, pleasure boats fill the protected harbor. There is also a Jesuit church from 1766 crowning the hill overlooking town with a stone ruin next to it. From Le Marin, a signposted narrow road leads to **Cap Chevalier (Cape Knight),** one of the most panoramic lookout points on M artinique, lying about 1.5km (1 mile) fr om town. Waterfront restaurants specializing in seafood and clubs fill the town of Le Marin itself.

Where to Stay

Club Med Buccaneer's Creek ★ Set on a tranquil cove at the southernmost tip of Martinique, Club Med is designed as a series of outbuildings evocative of a Creole village. It is set on a 22-hectar e (54-acre) former pirate's hideaway at B uccaneer's Creek, amid a forest of coconut palms. The property fronts a beach of white sand with vie ws of D iamond R ock off shor e. F eatures include a modern spa, an "infinity edge " pool, and a beach *palapa* for yoga and fitness classes. B edrooms are midsize and furnished tastefully and comfortably, but far fr om lavishly. The hotel staff pr ovides an activity-filled agenda for its guests and a r espectable cuisine of Antillean and F rench dishes. All winter rates include chartered round-trip flights fr om Atlanta, with supplements charged for flights winging in from other parts of the country to hook up with the Atlanta-based flights. In the off season, rates do not include air fare.

Pointe M arin, 97227 St e-Anne, M artinique, F.W.I. ✆ **800/258-2633** in the U .S., or 596/76-72-72. F ax 596/76-83-36. w ww.clubmed.com. 293 units . Winter 1,845€–2,650€ all-inclusiv e per person, based on double occupancy for 1 week (including round-trip passage from Atlanta); off season 1,100€–1,500€ all-inclusive per person double (not including air fare). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 r estaurants; 3 bars; 2 outdoor pools; dance club; tennis court; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Where to Dine

Le Zanzibar ★ (Finds) FRENCH/SEAFOOD/NORTH AFRICAN There's nothing finer in the south of M artinique than sitting on the second-floor v eranda of this restaurant, drinking tropical punch and overseeing the yacht-clogged harbor. The restaurant is built in the courtyard style of a Moroccan *riad.* Also in the North African style, both the bar and restaurant are a series of alco ves for intimate dining and drinking. I n the background, a DJ spins lounge music as y ou study the menu. The chef spins his magic with sea bass, sea ur chins, and a tagine of lamb , each with a sav ory sauce. We especially like the roast duck with mango . If you didn't go for the chicken tagine, y ou can also or der fish tagines Morocco style. Saffron-flavored cod filets on a bed of leeks or Indian chicken tikka are other main dish specialties.

Comptoir des boucaniers , 11 bd . Allèg re, L e M arin. ✆ **596/74-08-46.** Reser vations r equired. M ain courses 16€–28€. DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2:30pm and 7:30–11pm.

STE-ANNE

From Le Marin, an 8km (5-mile) drive brings you to Ste-Anne, at the extreme southern tip of Martinique. This sleepy little area is known for the white-sand beaches of Les Salines. (Those to the north are more grayish in color.) In many ways, these are Martinique's finest. The climate is arid, and the beaches are almost always sunny, perhaps too much so at midday. The name comes from Etang des Salines, a large salt pond forming a backdrop to the strip of sand. Manchineel trees are found at the southeastern end of the beach. ***Warning:*** Under no circumstances should you go under these trees for protection in a rainfall. When it's sunny you can seek shade here, but when it rains, drops falling from the poisonous tree will be like acid on your skin.

Holidays and weekends tend to be crowded, as many islanders and their families flock to this beach, which is just not big enough to handle the hordes.

Les Salines is also the site of Martinique's only real gay beach. Drive to the far end of the parking lot, near the sign labeled petite anse des salines. Here you'll find a trail leading through woods to a sun-flooded beach often populated by naked gay men, with an occasional lesbian couple. Technically, there are no legal nudist beaches on Martinique, so it's possible you could be arrested for going nude, although authorities don't seem to enforce this. (Throughout the island, however, the European custom of topless bathing is not uncommon on any of the beaches or even around hotel pools.)

Ste-Anne opens onto views of the Sainte Lucia Canal, and nearby is the Petrified Savanna Forest, which the French call **Savane des Petrifications.** It's a field of petrified volcanic boulders in the shape of logs. The eerie, desertlike site is studded with cacti.

Where to Stay

La Dunette (Value) A three-story motel-like stucco structure directly beside the sea, this hotel draws guests who appreciate its simplicity and its isolation from the more built-up resort areas of other parts of Martinique. An unpretentious seaside inn with summery decor and basic bedrooms painted in bright tropical colors, the hotel is accented with a garden filled with flowers and tropical plants. The furnishings are casual and modern, although some rooms are quite small.

97227 Ste-Anne, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/76-73-90.** Fax 596/76-76-05. www.ladunette.com. 18 units. Winter 93€ double; off season 88€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

LE FRANÇOIS

Along the east coast of Martinique, you can stop over in Le François to visit the **Musée Rhum Clement** at the Domaine de l'Acajou (✆ **596/54-62-07**), about 2km (1¼ miles) south of the village center. The setting for this museum is an outmoded distillery in the cellar of an 18th-century mansion with period furnishings that the Clement Rum Company closed in the early 1990s, when it shifted its production to a newer plant 6km (3¾ miles) away (which cannot be visited). A Columbus exhibit is set up in caves, and other exhibits trace the institution of slavery in the islands. Products of the Clement rum distillery are prominently displayed for purchase, and tastings of some of the rums are available. The museum is in a botanic park; you could easily spend 2 or 3 hours exploring the exhibits and grounds. It's open daily from 9am to 5:30pm. Admission is 7€ for adults, 4€ for ages 7 to 18, and free for ages 6 and under.

Directly south of Le François, with Mt. Vauclin looming in the background, is the little fishing village of Vauclin, where you can find a good luncheon stopover, or else a place for a vacation retreat.

Rooms can also be rented at La Maison de L'Ilet Oscar and Le Plein Soleil (see "Dining," below).

Cap Est Lagoon Resort & Spa ★★★ Set on the island's east coast between the fishing hamlets of Vauclin and Le François—5km (3 miles) from either of them—this is the poshest and most cutting-edge hotel on Martinique. Scattered across nearly 3.5 hectares (8 3/4 acres) of gently sloping palm-studded beachfront, it's composed of 18 veranda-fronted one- and two-story villas housing 50 well-designed suites. This is as top of the line as you'll find in the French West Indies outside of St. Barts. It's the only government-rated five-star hotel on Martinique, and the only Relais & Château in either Martinique or Guadeloupe. The venue is very French, artfully permissive, and luxurious. Topless sunbathing for women is permitted on the beach or beside any of the pools. Views throughout the resort extend outward over a coral reef to the wide blue seas. Construction and design emulates Creole models elsewhere, with ample use of louvered doors and tropical hardwoods. Each unit has a landscaped terrace or balcony. Besides the showpiece public pool, there are 36 plunge pools.

Quartier Cap Est, 97240 Le François, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **800/633-7411** in the U.S. and Canada, or 596/54-80-80. Fax 596/54-96-00. www.capest.com. 50 suites. Year-round 450€–1,750€ suite. Rates include buffet or American breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed Sept to mid-Nov. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; helipad; bar; library; health club; outdoor pool; 36 plunge pools; room service; spa; lit tennis court; dock for mooring of private yachts and sailboats; fishing. *In room:* A/C, plasma TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Frégate Bleue ★ (Finds) This is the closest thing to a European B&B on the island. It's a calm and quiet choice, with touches of personal, old-fashioned charm. It's not the place for vacationers looking for nightlife and lots of activities—it's for escapists who don't mind the 10-minute drive to the beaches of St-François or the prevailing sense of isolation. Much of this ambience is the work of owner Yveline de Lucy de Fossarieu, an experienced veteran of the hotel industry. Her house is a 5-minute drive inland from the sea, and it overlooks several chains of deserted offshore islands (including Les Ilets de St-François and Les Ilets de l'Impératrice). Bedrooms are small but cozy. The site is perched in a quiet residential neighborhood high on a hill. Each room has either a terrace or a balcony, with sweeping views over the coast.

Route de Vauclin, 97240 Le François, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **800/633-7411** in the U.S., or 596/54-54-66. Fax 596/54-78-48. www.fregatebleue.com. 8 units. Winter 122€–224€ double, 290€ suite; off season 84€–166€ double, 216€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchenette.

Hôtel Cap Macabou Set about 50 paces from a good beach, Martinique's newest hotel opened in November 2008 in a three-story format that features a large veranda for each of the units. Painted a shade of pale yellow, with lots of exposed brick, it's the only hotel within 15 miles, but within a quiet fishing village (LeVauclin) that has traditionally been home to scores of expatriate French "mainlanders." Life here is calm, quiet, and unpretentious, with lots of emphasis on families preparing their own meals within their own kitchens, which are positioned on each unit's veranda, along with a dining table and chairs. Management is particularly proud of the oversized swimming pool and its romantic, even theatrical lighting, as well as the beauty of the nearby beach. Decor within the accommodations includes simple, contemporary furniture, tones of white and off-white, and an occasional painting or memento by a local artist. Don't overlook this place as a nightlife option. Every Friday and Saturday night, the hotel's "second" restaurant opens in a spot adjacent to the pool for disco evenings attended by locals from the neighborhood.

The "main" restaurant is open to both residents and outsiders every day from noon to 3pm and 7:30 to 10pm. Main courses cost 15€ to 20€, and focus on international, French, and Creole cuisine.

Petit Macabou, 97280 Le Vauclin, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/74-24-24.** Fax 596/78-67-01. www.capmacabou.fr. 45 units. Year-round 130€–150€ double; 290€–320€ suite. Half-board 35€ per person per day. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Le Plein Soleil ★★ (Finds) If a celebrity visits Martinique, chances are, he or she will check into this luxurious retreat, which has been featured in several magazines, mostly the French press. The serene location is on the more tranquil eastern coast close to the village of Le François and near several good beaches. (There's a beach within a walk of about 275m/902 ft. and a formal-looking swimming pool, but in most cases, whatever distractions and diversions appeal to you, you'll have to organize on your own.) The retreat enjoys a hilltop perch, with views of the ocean (though in rainy weather, the road to Le Plein Soleil is often rough riding). The hotel also attracts a sophisticated clientele to its deluxe restaurant (see below).

Some units for rent are in Creole cottages painted in flamboyant colors. Some rooms are small but others are generous, and each comes with a terrace opening onto a panoramic vista. Other accommodations are in two-level bungalows, each with a private plunge pool. The decoration and furnishings in large part come from Thailand.

Pointe Thalémont, 97240 Le François, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/38-07-77.** Fax 596/65-58-13. www.pleinsoleil.mq. 16 units. Winter 189€–345€ double; off season 140€–295€ double. MC, V. 5km (3 miles) north of Le François, follow signs first to Le Robert, then veer eastward when you see the signs to Thalemont, Mansarde, and Plein Soleil. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, Wi-Fi.

Where to Dine

La Maison de L'Ilet Oscar ★ (Finds) INTERNATIONAL/FRENCH Inside an antique Creole house, this establishment lies on a nearly adjacent island off the southeast coast of Martinique; you access it by motorboat from the marina at Le François. If you make advance reservations, you'll be taken on a 12-minute boat ride to the island, stopping at an emerald-colored tidal pool where legend says that Joséphine, wife of Napoleon I, once went swimming. You'll then head to the island's only dwelling, a one-story wood-sided house that was originally built in 1898 on nearby Ilet Thierry, and disassembled and floated, beam by beam, across to Ilet Oscar and reassembled there in 1935. Menu items focus on Creole specialties like an all-fish menu, an all-shrimp menu, or an all-lobster menu, but if you desire food inspired by the traditions of mainland France, Brittany-born Jean-Louis de Lussy and his staff will whip you up avocados stuffed with crayfish, magret of duckling, or whatever else happens to be in the larder. If you want to overnight, the four bedrooms (all with shower, toilet, and double sinks) rent for 153€ to 275€ per person, with half-board included. None has TV, phone, or air-conditioning.

L'Ilet Oscar, B.P. 12, 97240 Baie du François, Martinique. ✆ **596/45-33-30.** Reservations essential 1 day in advance. Fixed-price menu 40€–50€. Round-trip transport from Le Marina du François 45€ for up to 6 passengers. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 6–9:30pm (dinner only for hotel guests).

Le Bélem/Le Campêche ★★ FRENCH/ANTILLEAN Two of the best-recommended dining spots in Martinique lie on the Atlantic coastline. If you arrive for lunch, you'll be steered toward the less expensive and less formal of the two, Le Campêche, an oceanfronting outdoor bistro where good-looking people in teeny bathing suits are not at all out of the ordinary. Menu items focus on tried-and-true Creole specialties, as well as salads, pastas, and well-prepared grilled fish and meats.

At Le Bélem, a romantic eatery noted for its wine list and its "gastronomic" interpretation of all things French and Antillean, dinners are more elaborate and more formal. Begin with a tarte tatin of foie gras with caramelized yellow bananas, shallots, and a confit of limes. You might also enjoy a succulent version of magret of duckling with green papaya and *christophene.* Main courses include a filet of red snapper served with a fondue of leeks and truffled fava beans. Another artful dish is spiny lobster prepared three different ways: roasted with vanilla-flavored butter; as lobster ravioli; and served cold, in gelatin, with caviar.

In the Cap Est Lagoon Resort & Spa, Quartier Cap Est. ✆ **596/54-80-80.** Reservations strongly recommended for nonresidents. Main courses in Le Bélem 35€–60€; main courses in Le Campêche 20€–55€. AE, DC, MC, V. Le Bélem daily 7:30–10:30pm. Le Campêche daily noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm.

Le Plein Soleil ★★ Finds INTERNATIONAL With the noteworthy exception of the Cap Est Lagoon Resort and Spa (above), this is the most upscale and elegant hotel in this part of Martinique. The owners have spent lots of money reworking the layouts, upgrading the accommodations, and revamping the restaurant. Meals here are taken on the wide veranda of a 1880s French colonial–style house that sits on a hillside about 90m (295 ft.) from the sea. Your hosts are entrepreneurs José Saint-Rose and Jean-Christophe Yo-Yo, who will organize your meal (if you phone in your intentions a day in advance) and cook the sublime food. Menu items combine the aesthetics of France and the Antilles. Among the best examples are a terrine of foie gras with a compote of apples; an herb-enriched combination of scallops and dorado (mahimahi) in puff pastry; and a well-prepared filet of beef served with red-butter sauce.

Pointe Thalémont. ✆ **596/38-07-77.** Fax 596/65-58-11. Reservations required 1 day in advance. Fixed-price lunches 34€, dinners 40€. MC, V. Daily noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 7:30–9pm.

5 THE NORTH LOOP

As we swing north from Fort-de-France, our main targets are **Le Carbet, St-Pierre, Montagne Pelée,** and **Leyritz.** However, we'll sandwich in many stops along the way.

From Fort-de-France, there are three ways to head north to Montagne Pelée. The first is to follow Route N4 up to St-Joseph. From there, take the left fork for 5km (3 miles) and then turn onto Route D15 toward Le Marigot.

Another option is to take Route N3 through the vegetation-rich *mornes* (hills) to Le Morne Rouge. This road is known as "Route de la Trace" and is now the center of the Parc Naturel de la Martinique.

Yet a third route to Montagne Pelée is via Route N2 along the coast, and the order in which we'll list the towns along the way is as follows. Near Fort-de-France, the first town you reach is **Schoelcher.** Farther along Route N2 is **Case-Pilote,** and then Bellefontaine. This portion, along the most popular drive in Martinique—from Fort-de-France to St-Pierre—is very reminiscent of the way the French Riviera used to look. **Bellefontaine** is a small fishing village, with boats stretched along the beach. Note the many houses also built in the shape of boats.

LE CARBET

Leaving Bellefontaine, an 8km (5-mile) drive north will deliver you to Le Carbet. Columbus landed here in 1502, and the first French settlers arrived in 1635. In 1887,

Gauguin lived here for 4 months before going to Tahiti. You can stop for a swim at an Olympic-size pool set into the hills, or watch the locals scrubbing clothes in a stream. The town lies on the bus route from Fort-de-France to St-Pierre.

Centre d'Art Musée Paul-Gauguin, Anse Turin, Le Carbet (✆ **596/78-22-66**), is near the beach represented in the artist's *Bord de Mer.* The landscape hasn't changed in 100 years. The museum, housed in a five-room building, commemorates the French artist's stay on Martinique in 1887, with books, prints, letters, and other memorabilia. There are also paintings by René Corail, sculpture by Hector Charpentier, and examples of the paintings of Zaffanella. Of special interest are faience mosaics made of once-white pieces that turned pink, maroon, blue, and black in 1902 when the fires of Montagne Pelée devastated St-Pierre. There are also changing exhibits of works by local artists. Hours are daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm; admission is 4€ for adults, 2€ for students, and 1€ for children 7 and under.

Set in 4 hectares (9 3/4 acres) of tropical gardens, **Aqualand Martinique,** Route des Pitons, Le Carbet (✆ **596/78-40-00**), lies on the road to St-Pierre, about an hour's drive from Fort-de-France. It features eight nautical attractions, with three especially designed for children. The big hit is a wave pool that can go from almost unnoticed sways to real breakers. Other attractions range from super slaloms to water slides, water beds, and even a minipark for kids to experience the adult attractions but on a smaller scale. Fast-food options here, including crepes and freshly made salads, are the best on the island. The park is open daily 10am to 5:30pm; admission is 18€ for adults or 14€ ages 3 to 12.

ST-PIERRE ★

At the beginning of this century, St-Pierre was known as the "Little Paris of the West Indies." Home to 30,000 inhabitants, it was the cultural and economic capital of Martinique. On May 7, 1902, the citizens read in their daily newspaper that "Montagne Pelée does not present any more risk to the population than Vesuvius does to the Neapolitans."

However, on May 8, at 8am, the southwest side of Montagne Pelée exploded into fire and lava. At 8:02am, all 30,000 inhabitants were dead—that is, all except one. A convict in his underground cell was saved by the thickness of the walls. When islanders reached the site, the convict was paroled and left Martinique to tour in Barnum and Bailey's circus.

St-Pierre never recovered its former splendor. It could now be called the Pompeii of the West Indies. Ruins of the church, the theater, and some other buildings can be seen along the coast.

Musée Volcanologique, rue Victor-Hugo, St-Pierre (✆ **596/78-15-16**), was created by the American volcanologist Franck Alvard Perret, who turned the museum over to the city in 1933. Here, in pictures and relics dug from the debris, you can trace the story of what happened to St-Pierre. Dug from the lava is a clock that stopped at the moment the volcano erupted. The museum is open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is 3€, free for children 7 and under. About a kilometer (1/2 mile) away, higher up the mountain, and clearly signposted, is a modern-looking museum, **Le Centre Decouverte des Sciences de la Terre** (✆ **596/52-82-42**), containing exhibits about the region's seismology and geology, replete with public service warnings about what to do in the event of another explosion. It's open Wednesday to Sunday 9am to 5pm or 10am to 6pm in July and August. Admission is 5€ for adults, 3€ students and children 6 to 17, and free for children 5 and under.

Fun Facts Photo Ops

Martinique is a photographer's dream—certainly the French fashion magazines know it, because crews are always around on shoots. The most picturesque sites are **La Savane,** in Fort-de-France; **St-Pierre,** the best place to photograph towering Montagne Pelée; **La Pagerie,** with its decaying ruins of a sugar factory; and the panoramic overlooks along **La Trace,** a serpentine road winding through the entire rainforest.

Dining

Le Fromager ★ Finds CREOLE/FRENCH Set less than 1km (1/2 mile) east of the center of St-Pierre, this indoor-outdoor villa, owned by the René Dement family, welcomes luncheon guests with a humor and charm that's part French, part Martiniquais. The restaurant, which resembles a covered open-air pavilion, has a sweeping view of the town. Recommended dishes include marinated octopus, grilled conch or lobster, curried goat or chicken, and whatever grilled fish is available that day. This is a good lunch stopover during your tour of the island.

Route de Fonds–St-Denis, Quartier St. James, St-Pierre. ✆ **596/78-19-07.** Reservations recommended on Sun. Main courses 13€–28€. MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm.

LE PRECHEUR

From St-Pierre, you can continue along the coast north to Le Prêcheur. Once the home of Madame de Maintenon, the mistress of Louis XIV, it's the last village along the northern coast of Martinique. Here you can see hot springs of volcanic origin and the **Tombeau des Caraïbes (Tomb of the Caribs),** where, according to legend, the collective suicide of many West Indian natives took place after they returned from a fishing expedition and found their homes pillaged by the French.

Accommodations & Dining

Habitation Anse Couleuvre Few other hotels in Martinique boast as colorful an agrarian and colonial past as the farm on which this much-restored, much-rebuilt, small-scale manor house stands. Much of what you'll see today dates from 50 years ago, but between the 17th and early 20th century, the site functioned as a working plantation with scores of workers, thousands of cocoa plants, and a reputation for rum, cocoa, and citrus byproducts that extended as far away as France and, later, the U.S. Today the retreat sits in an isolated beach-fronting location around 35 bumpy, potholed kilometers (22 miles) from the hamlet of Prêcheur, near the extreme northern tip of Martinique. Ringed with airy verandas, it's a shadow of its former grandeur, but a relaxing and isolated bastion of Creole nostalgia. On the premises is a restaurant that's open to the public every day for fixed-price lunches at 25€ to 32€, from 11am to 4pm. Dinners, priced at 45€ to 55€, are available only to residents of the hotel, from 7 to 9:30pm. Don't come here looking for luxury, since it's cozy, downhome, and laissez-faire.

Anse Couleuvre, 97250 Prêcheur, F.W.I. ✆ **596/52-97-74.** http://anse-couleuvre.com/nos_prestations.php. 4 units. 140€ double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Closed Sept–Nov. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; offshore excursions with local fishermen. *In room:* Ceiling fans.

MONTAGNE PELEE ★

A panoramic and winding road (Rte. N2) takes you through a tropical rainforest. The curves are of the hairpin variety, and the road is not always kept in good shape. However, you're rewarded with tropical flowers, baby ferns, plumed bamboo, and valleys so deeply green you'll think you're wearing cheap sunglasses.

The village of **Morne Rouge,** right at the foot of Montagne Pelée, is a popular vacation spot for Martiniquais. From here on, a narrow and unreliable road brings you to a level of 750m (2,460 ft.) above sea level, 480m (1,574 ft.) under the round summit of the volcano that destroyed St-Pierre. Montagne Pelée itself rises 1,373m (4,503 ft.) above sea level.

If you're a serious mountain climber and you don't mind 4 or 5 hours of hiking, you can scale the peak, though you should hire an experienced guide to accompany you. Remember, this is a real mountain, rain is frequent, and temperatures drop very low. Tropical growth often hides deep crevices in the earth, and there are other dangers. The park service maintains more than 150km (93 miles) of trails. Although the hikes up from Grand-Rivière or Le Prêcheur are generally the less arduous of the three options leading to the top, most visitors opt for departures from Morne Rouge because it doesn't take as long to finish the trip. It's steeper, rockier, and more exhausting, but you can make it in just 2½ hours versus the 5 hours it takes from the other two towns. There are no facilities other than these villages, so it's vital to bring water and food with you. Your arduous journey will be rewarded at the summit with sweeping views over the sea and panoramas that sometimes stretch as far as mountainous Dominica to the south. As for the volcano, its deathly eruption in 1902 apparently satisfied it—for the time being.

Upon your descent from Montagne Pelée, drive down to **Ajoupa-Bouillon,** one of the most beautiful towns on Martinique. Abounding in flowers and shrubbery with bright yellow-and-red leaves, this little village is the site of the remarkable **Gorges de la Falaise.** These are minicanyons on the Falaise River, up which you can travel to reach a waterfall. Ajoupa-Bouillon also makes a good lunch stop.

GRAND-RIVIÈRE

After Basse-Pointe, the town you reach on your northward trek is Grand-Rivière. From here you must turn back, but before doing so, you may want to stop at Yva Chez Vava, a good restaurant right at the entrance to the town.

Where to Dine

Yva Chez Vava ★ (Finds) FRENCH/CREOLE Directly west of Basse-Pointe, in a low-slung building painted the peachy-orange of a paw-paw fruit, Yva Chez Vava is a combination private home and restaurant. It represents the hard labor of three generations of Creole women. Infused with a simple country-inn style, it was established in 1979 by a well-remembered, long-departed matron, Vava, whose daughter, Yva, is now assisted by her own daughter, Rosy. Family recipes are the mainstay of this modest and very ethnic bistro. A la carte items include Creole soup, lobster, shark steak, and various *colombos* (curries). Local delicacies include *z'habitants* (crayfish), *vivaneau* (red snapper), *tazard* (kingfish), *accras de morue* (codfish beignets), roasted or curried goat, and court bouillon of fish. Occasionally available during certain periods are the very ethnic, and not-to-everyone's taste, *aceras de titiris,* hundreds of tiny *des titiris* (barely visible fish) which are caught with nets as they swarm in the nearby river. These, heads, skeletons and all, are mixed with flour, herbs, and spices, and deep-fried in oil into *aceras* (fritters).

Before or after their meal, clients can bathe in the nearby river or walk to an unnamed strip of sand, the nearest beach, which lies about .4km (1/4 mile) from the restaurant.

Bd. Charles-de-Gaulle. ✆ **596/55-72-72.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 13€–26€. AE, MC, V. Dec–Apr daily noon–5pm; off season Thurs–Tues noon–5pm.

STE-MARIE

Heading south along the coastal road, you'll pass Le Marigot en route to the little town of Ste-Marie. **Musée du Rhum Saint-James,** route de l'Union at the Saint James Distillery (✆ **596/69-30-02**), displays engravings, antique tools and machines, and other exhibits tracing the history of sugar cane and rum from 1765 to the present. Guided tours of the distillery are offered daily, from March to June at 10am, 11:30am, and 1:30pm. Tours cost 5€ per person. Admission to the museum (daily 9am–5pm, regardless of whether the distillery is functioning) is free. Rum is available for purchase on-site.

From here you can head out the north end of town and loop inland a bit for a stop at Morne des Esses, or continue heading south straight to Trinité.

TRINITE

Passing through Morne des Esses, continue south, then turn east, or from Ste-Marie, head south along the coastal route (N1), to reach Trinité. The town is the gateway to the Caravelle peninsula, where the **Caravelle Nature Preserve,** a well-protected peninsula jutting into the Atlantic Ocean from the town of Trinité, has safe beaches and well-marked trails through tropical wetlands and to the ruins of historic Château Debuc. It offers excellent hiking and one of the only safe beaches for swimming on the Atlantic coast. It would hardly merit an actual stop, however, were it not for the Domaine Saint Aubin.

Where to Stay & Dine

Le Domaine Saint-Aubin ★ (Finds) This restored three-story Victorian house is architecturally one of the loveliest inns in the Caribbean. With fancy gingerbread, the hotel was originally built in 1920 of brick and poured concrete as a replacement for a much older wood-sided house, which served as the seat of a large plantation. It sits on a hillside above sugar-cane fields and the bay, 3km (1 3/4 miles) from the village of Trinité itself. The nearest beach is Plage Cosmy, lying 1.5km (1 mile) from the hotel. The bedrooms are spacious and modern, with 19th-century furnishings, and there are some family rooms as well.

97220 Trinité, Martinique, F.W.I. ✆ **596/69-34-77.** Fax 596/69-41-14. www.ledomainesaintaubin.com. 28 units. Winter 125€–220€ double; off season 99€–145€ double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Fitness center; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, Wi-Fi.

La Table de Mamy Nounou FRENCH/ANTILLEAN Set less than 1km (1/2 mile) east of the fishing village of Tartane, this is the most easterly restaurant in the most easterly hotel on La Caravelle peninsula. The setting, as created and maintained by a team of English-speaking expatriates from the French mainland, is idyllic, a renovated complex perched within a hill-hugging compound of veranda-fronted buildings overlooking the sea. The restaurant is the main allure of the well-managed and carefully maintained Hotel Caravelle.

Lunches are faster, and less elaborately orchestrated, than the candlelit dinners, where guests linger longer within an ambience that falls midway between what you'd expect on the French mainland and what you find in Fort-de-France. Menu items change frequently but might include a *colombo* (spicy Creole stew) concocted from shark meat, fish, shellfish, or chicken; braised filets of red mullet with tropical fruits; or, depending on the mood of the chef, classic dishes such as boeuf bourguignon. Desserts might feature a semi-moist version of chocolate cake, or perhaps a rum-and-orange-flavored soufflé. There's dining on the veranda, easy access to a garden, and, from virtually all points, a sweeping view of the sea.

On-site are 15 studio apartments, each with telephone, air-conditioning, ceiling fans, a kitchenette, and TV. Accommodations rent for 68€ to 84€ double.

In the Hotel Caravelle, Route du Château Dubuc, L'Anse l'Etang, 97720 Tartane (Trinité). ✆ **596/58-07-32.** Fax 596/58-07-90. www.hotel-la-caravelle-martinique.com. Reservations recommended for nonresidents of the hotel. Lunch platters and salads 16€–30€; fixed-price dinner 25€. MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed Tues from mid-May to mid-Nov.

17

Puerto Rico

No one has ever suffered from boredom on Puerto Rico. It has hundreds of beaches, a mind-boggling array of watersports, miles of golf courses, acres of tennis courts, a huge variety of resorts, and casinos galore. It has more dance clubs than any other place in the Caribbean and shopping bargains to equal St. Thomas. Puerto Rico, however, also has cultural and historic treasures, picturesque and refreshing mountain towns, virgin rainforest, and all the attractions of a big city metropolis in San Juan.

Lush, verdant Puerto Rico is half the size of New Jersey and is located some 1,600km (992 miles) southeast of the tip of Florida. With 438km (272 miles) of Atlantic and Caribbean coastline and a culture some 2,000 years old, Puerto Rico is packed with attractions. Old San Juan (also known as Old Town) is its greatest historic center, with 500 years of history, as reflected in its restored Spanish colonial architecture.

It's also a land of contrasts. There are 79 cities and towns on Puerto Rico, each with a unique charm and flavor. The countryside is dotted with centuries-old coffee plantations, working sugar estates, a fascinating tropical rainforest, and forbidding caves and enormous boulders with mysterious petroglyphs carved by the Taíno peoples, the original settlers.

San Juan is the world's second-largest home port for cruise ships. More importantly, it is a cosmopolitan city teeming with art, culture, history, architecture, and an old-world vibe that rivals most European cities. This is no Bronx on the Beach. Old San Juan and surrounding neighborhoods seem more Castillian than American, with residents appreciating the slower and infinitely more civilized pace of their mainland countrymen.

You can base yourself at one resort and still do a lot of exploring elsewhere, if you don't mind driving for a couple hours. It's possible to branch out and see a lot of the island even if you're staying in San Juan.

For even more comprehensive coverage, consider getting yourself a copy of *Frommer's Puerto Rico.*

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Old San Juan:** This square-mile historic zone, sprawled across a breathtaking headland separating San Juan Bay from the Atlantic Ocean, is probably the best example of Spanish colonial architecture in the Americas, most of it exquisitely restored, along with Art Deco beauties and other architectural gems, all of it graced with bountiful bougainvillea, as if one were walking through a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel. Many of the island's best shops, galleries, museums, restaurants, and clubs are located in the Old Town.
- **Fajardo's offshore islands:** Even if you are staying in San Juan, you can take one of the day trips on one of the several luxury catamarans plying the waters off the coast of Fajardo, which make for some of the finest snorkeling in the Caribbean. They usually anchor on a beach of a small cay for lunch and some sunbathing and swimming. Transportation from San Juan area hotels is often provided. It's worth the trip even if you don't want to snorkel. There's great music and a bar on board. There are a number of reputable operators. (See "Fajardo & the East," later in this chapter.)

- **El Yunque Caribbean National Forest:** Known as El Yunque, this is the only tropical forest in the U.S. National Forest Service system. Some 40km (25 miles) east of San Juan are some 240 tree species (only half a dozen of which are found on the mainland U.S.), as well as a bird sanctuary that may be the last retreat of the rare Puerto Rican parrot. Hiking trails plunge through lush forest and gushing rivers and water falls. You can also take a leisurely tour bus approach and still see some of the best sights.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

For information before you leave home, visit **www.gotopuertorico.com** or contact the **Puerto Rico Tourism Company** offices at La Princesa Building, Paseo La Princesa 2, Old San Juan, PR 00902 (✆ **800/866-7827** or 787/721-2400).

Other Tourism Company offices are located at **Luís Muñoz Marín Airport** (✆ **787/791-1014**), open December to April daily from 9am to 10pm, May to November daily 9am to 8pm; and **La Casita,** at Plaza de la Darsena, Old San Juan, near Pier 1, where the cruise ships come in (✆ **787/722-1709**). This office is open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 5pm.

There are several tourism-related websites on Puerto Rico. Some of the best are: **The Tourism Association of Rincón** (www.rincon.org), **Insider's Guide to South Puerto Rico** (www.letsgotoponce.com), **Enchanted Isles** (www.enchanted-isle.com), **Discover Culebra** (www.culebra-island.com), **Puerto Rico Travel Maps** (www.travelmaps.com), and **Welcome to Puerto Rico** (http://welcome.topuertorico.org), which has a lot of links to local maps and agencies that are helpful for the tourist searching for more detailed information. Ask for a copy of ***Qué Pasa,*** the official visitors' guide, which is distributed free at many hotels and restaurants.

GETTING THERE

With San Juan as its hub for the entire Caribbean, **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; wwwaa.com) offers nonstop daily flights to San Juan from Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas–Fort Worth, Hartford, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New York (JFK), Orlando, Philadelphia, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale, and Washington (Dulles), plus flights to San Juan from both Montréal and Toronto, with changes in Chicago or Miami.

Delta (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) has three daily nonstop flights from Atlanta Monday to Friday, six nonstop on Saturday, and six nonstop on Sunday. Flights into Atlanta from around the world are frequent, with excellent connections from points throughout Delta's network in the South and Southwest.

United Airlines (✆ **800/538-2929** in the U.S. and Canada; www.united.com) offers daily nonstop flights from Chicago to San Juan. United also offers flights to San Juan from both Memphis and Minneapolis, with a schedule that varies according to the season and the day of the week.

KLM Royal Dutch Airways/Northwest Airlines (✆ **800/225-2525** in the U.S. and Canada; www.nwa.com) offers three nonstop flights weekly to San Juan from Detroit.

US Airways (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) has several daily direct flights between Charlotte, North Carolina, and San Juan. The airline also offers three daily nonstop flights to San Juan from Philadelphia, and one daily nonstop Saturday and Sunday flight to San Juan from Pittsburgh.

Continental Airlines (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies nonstop daily from Newark, Houston, and Cleveland. The airline also flies from Newark direct to the northwestern airport outside Aguadilla, should you wish to begin your tour of Puerto Rico in the west. In winter, service is increased to daily flights. Continental offers one weekly flight from Detroit to San Juan.

JetBlue (✆ **800/538-2583** in the U.S. and Canada; www.jetblue.com) flies from New York's JFK airport and the Newark International Airport to San Juan. The airline also serves 20 other U.S. cities, including Boston, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Seattle.

Spirit Air (✆ **800/772-7117** in the U.S. and Canada; www.spiritair.com) offers two daily nonstop flights from Orlando, and one from Fort Lauderdale to San Juan.

Canadians can fly **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.com) from either Montréal or Toronto to San Juan.

Puerto Rico is the major transportation hub of the Caribbean, with the best connections for getting anywhere in the island. In addition to **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300;** www.aa.com), **Cape Air** (✆ **800/352-0714** in the U.S. and Canada; www.flycapeair.com) links two of the major islands of the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Thomas and St. Croix, as well as Tortola in the B.V.I., with San Juan.

Seaborne Airlines (✆ **888/359-8687** in the U.S. and Canada; www.seaborneonline.com) offers daily links between St. Croix and St. Thomas with San Juan. The one-way cost from the U.S. Virgin Islands to Puerto Rico is $146 per person. The planes are small and frequent, carrying 15 to 19 passengers. Often there are more than 50 flights a day.

LIAT (✆ **800/844-LIAT** [5428] in the U.S. and Canada; www.liatairline.com) provides an air link to the Lesser Antilles islands.

British travelers can take a **British Airways** (✆ **800/AIRWAYS** [247-9297] in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) weekly flight direct from London to San Juan on Sunday. **Lufthansa** (✆ **800/399-LUFT** [5838] in the U.S. and Canada; www.lufthansa.com) passengers can fly on Saturday (one weekly flight) from Frankfurt to San Juan via USAir from Philadelphia. And **Iberia** (✆ **800/772-4642** in the U.S. and Canada, or 902/400-500 in Spain; www.iberia.com) has two weekly flights from Madrid to San Juan, leaving on Thursday and Saturday.

GETTING AROUND

BY PLANE **Cape Air** (✆ **800/352-0714** in the U.S. and Canada; www.flycapeair.com) flies from Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport to Mayagüez, Ponce, and Vieques several times a day. They also offer many flights daily to St. Thomas, St. Croix, and Tortola.

BY RENTAL CAR Puerto Rico offers some of the most scenic drives in all the Caribbean. Driving is the best way to discover its little hidden beaches, coastal towns, mountain villages, vast forests, and national parks. In fact, if you want to explore the island in any depth, driving a private car is about the only way, as public transportation is woefully inadequate.

Of course, if you want to stay only in San Juan, having a car is not necessary. You can get around San Juan on foot or by bus, taxi, and, in some cases, hotel minivan. There's also now the Tren Urbano, an elevated rail from the outskirts of Santurce through metro San Juan and its western suburbs.

Driving in Puerto Rico, depending on the routes you take, can lead to a number of frustrating experiences. Local drivers are often dangerous, older coastal highways provide the most scenic routes but are often congested, and in the mountainous interior, some roads are just too narrow to drive, especially circuitous routes that swing along cliff sides.

Aguadilla Marriott Courtyard **1**
At Wind Chimes Inn **15**
Caribe Hilton **9**
Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino **10**
Copamarina Beach Resort **6**
El Canario Inn **11**
El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa **25**
El Convento **20**
El San Juan Hotel & Casino **18**
Embassy Suites Dorado del Mar **8**
Gallery Inn at Galéria San Juan **21**
Gran Melia **24**
Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino **7**
The Horned Dorset Primavera **3**
Hostería del Mar **16**
InterContinental San Juan Resort & Casino **19**
La Concha **12**
Mayagüez Resort & Casino **4**
Número 1 Guest House **14**
Rincón Beach Resort **2**
Ritz-Carlton San Juan Spa & Casino **17**
Salinas Beach Hotel **5**
San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino **13**
San Juan Water and Beach Club Hotel **23**
Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino **22**

Fun Facts Special Events

The annual **Casals Festival,** staged annually in late February and early March, is the Caribbean's most celebrated cultural event. The bill at San Juan's Performing Arts Center includes an array of international guest conductors, orchestras, and soloists who come to honor the memory of Pablo Casals, the renowned cellist who was born in Spain to a Puerto Rican mother and who died in Puerto Rico in 1973. Tickets range from $35 to $100; a 50% discount is offered to students, seniors, and persons with disabilities. Call ✆ **787/620-4444** for tickets.

Old San Juan's **San Sebastián Street Festival** takes place along the street that bears its name over a long weekend in mid-January. It's one of the biggest parties in the Caribbean—with art, live music, food, and dancing from day to night to day again. Call ✆ **787/721-2400.**

The island's **Carnival** celebrations feature float parades, dancing, and street parties in the week leading up to Ash Wednesday. The festivities in **Ponce** are marked by masqueraders wearing brightly painted horned masks, the crowning of a Carnival queen, and the closing "burial of the sardine." Hotel rates go up at this time of year, sometimes considerably. For more information, call the Ponce City Hall at ✆ **787/284-4141.**

However, modern highways now circumvent nearly the entire island, extending even to the center of the island. And authorities have been cracking down on speeding and reckless driving, which has improved conditions somewhat. ***Note:*** Distances are often posted in kilometers rather than miles (1 mile = 1.61km), but speed limits are displayed in miles per hour.

Reliable local agencies include **Target Car Rental** (✆ **866/786-2278;** www.targetrentacar.com) and **Charlie Car Rental** (✆ **800/289-1227;** www.charliecars.com). Larger players are also here: **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 787/253-5926; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 787/791-0600; www.budget.com), or **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 787/791-0840; www.hertz.com). Each of these companies offers minivan transport to its office and car depot. Be alert to the minimum-age requirements for car rentals in Puerto Rico. Avis, Hertz, and Budget require renters to be 21 or older, but those between the ages of 21 and 24 pay a $25-to-$37 daily surcharge to the agreed-upon rental fee.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ***Públicos*** are cars or minibuses that provide low-cost transportation. They usually operate only during daylight hours, carry up to six passengers at a time, and charge rates that are loosely regulated. Although prices are low, this option is slow and inconvenient, with frequent erratic stops, and is used primarily by locals who cannot afford any other means.

Most *públicos* operate from a town's main square. In San Juan, main staging areas include Old San Juan's Plaza Colón and the international airport. Information about *público* routes between San Juan and Mayagüez is available from **Lineas Sultana,** Calle Esteban González 898, Urbanización Santa Rita, Rio Piedras (✆ **787/765-9377**). Information about *público* routes between San Juan and Ponce is available from **Choferes Unidos de Ponce,** Terminal de Carros Públicos, Calle Vive in Ponce (✆ **787/764-0540**). Fares from San Juan to Ponce cost $12 to $50, and from San Juan to Mayagüez it's $35.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS **Puerto Rico Tours,** Condo Inter-Suite, Ste. 5M, on Isla Verde in San Juan (✆ **787/791-5479,** or 787/306-1540; www.puertorico-tours.com), offers specially conducted private sightseeing tours of Puerto Rico, including trips to the rainforest, Luquillo Beach, the caves of Camuy, and other attractions, such as a restored Taíno Indian village.

Backstage Partners (✆ **787/791-0099;** fax 787/791-2760; www.backstagepartners.com) offers customized tours that take in a wide range of island attractions, including eco-tours, deep-sea fishing, scuba diving and snorkeling, safaris, and golf packages.

Other leading escorted tour operators include **Atlantic San Juan Tours** (✆ **787/644-9841;** www.puertoricoexcursions.com), which covers all the major sights of the island, from Ponce to El Yunque; and **Sunshine Tours** (✆ **866/785-3636;** www.puerto-rico-sunshinetours.com), which encompasses much the same ground as the others. **Legends of Puerto Rico** (✆ **787/605-9060;** www.legendsofpr.com) hosts personalized tours, specializing in entertaining cultural and nature adventure tours.

If you'd like to experience Puerto Rico on horseback, consult **Catch a Dream** (✆ **787/409-0155**), where a short training session and a 6.4km (4-mile) beach ride in the shadow of the rainforest will cost you $85 (including transport from San Juan). At **Tropical Trail Rides** (✆) **787/872-9256;** www.tropicaltrailrides.com), a dozen well-trained Paso Fino horses are available to accommodate both advanced and novice riders and explore cavernous cliffs and tropical forests—all on horseback. Tours are customized. A 2-hour tours runs $40.

Several other tour operators cater to special tastes, including **Castillo Tours & Travel Service,** 2413 Laurel St., Punta Las Marias, Santurce (✆ **787/791-6195;** www.castillotours.com), which is known for some of the best deep-sea fishing, rainforest, and catamaran tours.

AdvenTours, Luquillo (✆ **787/530-8311;** www.adventourspr.com), features customized private tours that include such activities as bird-watching, hiking, camping, visits to coffee plantations, and kayaking.

Eco Xcursion Aquatica, Route 191, Km 1.7, Rio Grande, Fajardo (✆ **787/888-2887**), offers some of the best rainforest hikes and mountain-bike tours for both individuals and groups. They also offer kayak tours to one of several **Bioluminescent Bays** ★★ in Fajardo, where you enter the water at dusk and paddle through calm water teeming with small marine organisms that respond to the slightest touch by glowing an eerie greenish yellow. **Las Tortugas Adventures,** P.O. Box 1637, Canóvanas (✆ **787/809-0253** or 787/637-8356; www.kayak-pr.com), also runs tours to Fajardo's biobay, as well as river tours of the rainforest and Piñones wetlands, and kayaking/snorkeling trips to deserted beaches, rimmed with reefs and teeming schools of tropical fish. **Aventuras Tierra Adentro** (✆ **787/766-0470;** www.aventuraspr.com) offers the best island adventure tours, focusing on hiking through virgin forests, rock climbing, or cliff jumping. Four different adventures are offered, costing $150 per person, which includes transportation from San Juan. Most of the jaunts take place on weekends.

Fast Facts Puerto Rico

Banks Most major U.S. banks have branches with **ATMs** in the cities, and are open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4pm. Bank branches in malls are also open on Saturday from 8:30am to 6pm and Sunday from 9am to 3pm.

Currency The **U.S. dollar** is the coin of the realm. Canadian currency is accepted by some big hotels in San Juan, although reluctantly. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents Since Puerto Rico is part of the United States, American citizens do not need a passport or visa. Canadians and citizens of the United Kingdom must have a passport.

Electricity The electricity is 110-volt AC (60 cycles), the same as in the United States and Canada.

Emergencies Call ✆ **911.**

Language English is understood at the big resorts and in most of San Juan, though it's polite to at least greet people in Spanish and ask if they speak English before you make assumptions. Out in the island, Spanish is still *número uno*.

Safety Use common sense and take precautions. Muggings are rare in tourist areas, so you should confine your moonlit-beach nights to the fenced-in and guarded areas around some of the major hotels. The countryside of Puerto Rico is safer than San Juan, but caution is always the rule. Avoid narrow little country roads and isolated beaches day or night.

Taxes There's a government tax of 9% in regular hotels or 12% in hotels with casinos. The airport departure tax is included in the price of your ticket.

Telephone Puerto Rico is on the North American telephone system; the area code is **787.** Place a call to or from Puerto Rico just as you would from within the United States or Canada.

Time Puerto Rico is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, putting it 1 hour ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time. In winter, when it's noon in Miami, it's 1pm in San Juan. But during daylight saving time on the U.S. East Coast, Puerto Rico and the East Coast keep the same time.

Tipping Some hotels add a 10% service charge to your bill. If they don't, you're expected to tip for services rendered. Tip as you would in the United States (15%–20%).

Water The water in Puerto Rico is generally safe to drink, although you may prefer bottled water. Many locals do.

Weather Puerto Rico is cooler than most of the other Caribbean islands because of its northeast trade winds. Sea, land, and mountain breezes also help keep the temperatures at a comfortable level. The climate is fairly stable all year, with an average temperature of 76°F (24°C). The only variants are found in the mountain regions, where the temperature fluctuates between 66°F and 76°F (19°C–24°C), and on the north coast, where the temperature ranges from 70°F to 80°F (21°C–27°C). There is no real rainy season, but August is the wettest month.

2 SAN JUAN ★★★

Puerto Rico's capital is a major city. Its architecture ranges from classic colonial buildings that recall the Spanish empire to modern beachfront hotels reminiscent of Miami Beach.

There are also other interesting buildings, from 1930s Art Deco gems, to a form of tropical modernism that took root on the island in the 1940s and 1950s.

SAN JUAN ESSENTIALS

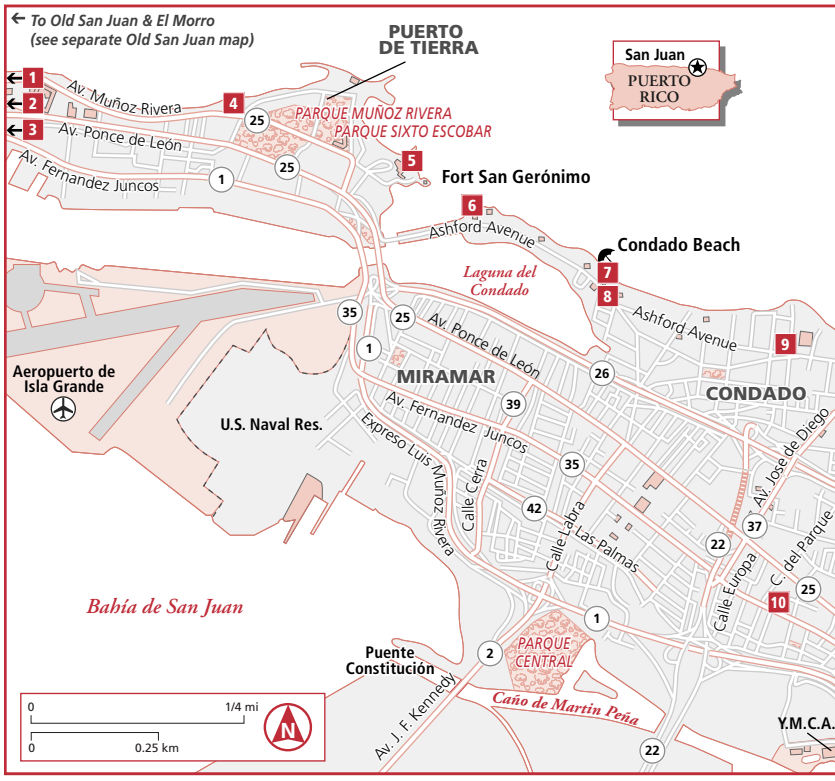
ARRIVING Dozens of taxis line up outside the airport to meet arriving flights, so you rarely have to wait. The island's **Puerto Rico Tourism Company** (✆ **787/999-2100** transportation division) sets flat rates between the Luís Muñoz Marín Airport and major tourist zones as follows: From the airport to any hotel in Isla Verde, $10; to any hotel in the Condado district, $15; and to any hotel in Old San Juan, $19. At the airport, a dispatcher will give you a ticket with the fare. There are also baggage fees (50¢ for the first three bags, $1 for every bag after). Tips of between 10% and 15% of that fare are expected.

There are a number of companies offering limousine service, from Lincoln Town Car limousines to deluxe stretch Hummers. Service must be prearranged. A simple airport pickup to a San Juan hotel can cost from $100 to $125. Other trips are generally $70 to $125 an hour, with most vehicles sitting six. Many companies offer tours, with drivers doubling as guides, to places such as Old San Juan or El Yunque. They are listed in the telephone guide under *limosinas.*

VISITOR INFORMATION Tourist information is available at the **Luís Muñoz Marín Airport** (✆ **787/791-1014**) daily from 9am to 10pm. Another office is at **La Casita,** Pier 1, Old San Juan (✆ **787/722-1709**), open Saturday to Wednesday 9am to 8pm, and Thursday and Friday 8:30am to 6:30pm.

ORIENTATION **Old San Juan** sits on an elevated headland at the end of a peninsula leading into the sprawling city of San Juan. Leaving the historic zone (a 1-sq-mile/2.5 sq. km area bordered by San Juan Bay and the Atlantic Ocean) over land to the east, the next neighborhood is **Puerta de Tierra,** which contains important government buildings like the Capitol and the Supreme Court, a huge park and a public beach, plus two of the island's most famous hotels, the Caribe Hilton and the Normandie. It's also a literal translation of its name, a bridge of land connecting the historic district with the rest of San Juan. Once you pass through this area, you'll either go to **Miramar,** a beautiful residential neighborhood that also encompasses the city's waterfront redevelopment project (which already contains a Convention Center, and with new hotels, luxury residences, and other amenities under construction), or you'll travel over a bridge to **Condado,** another narrow strip of land bordered by a saltwater lagoon and the Atlantic beachfront. It is lined with luxury hotels, gourmet restaurants, snazzy nightclubs, and great shops. Farther east is **Ocean Park,** a lovely residential area with a great beach that is perhaps the city's best-kept secret. There are now more reasons than ever to visit **Santurce,** for decades San Juan's traditional downtown, and which is now being revitalized, after decades of neglect, with new movie houses, concert halls, museums, restaurants, and nightclubs. **Isla Verde** is home to some of the Caribbean's most upscale resort hotels and San Juan's widest, most populous beach. The international airport lies to the east. **Hato Rey,** the city's financial district, has great restaurants, concert venues, movie houses, and nightclubs. **Rio Piedras** is host to the University of Puerto Rico, a botanical gardens, and a thriving shopping district and marketplace.

GETTING AROUND Walking is the best way to get around Old San Juan. The historic core of the old city is very compact. If your feet tire of the old cobblestone streets, board one of the free open-air trolleys that slowly make their way through the old city. You can



board a trolley at any point along its route (either side of the Calle Fortaleza or Calle San José are good bets), or you can go to La Puntilla for departures.

It's great walking through most neighborhoods as well. But if you are traveling from one area to another, you'll want to take a bus, taxi, or rental car. The **Metropolitan Bus Authority** (✆ **787/767-7979**) operates buses in the greater San Juan area. Bus stops are marked by upright metal signs or yellow posts that say parada. Bus terminals in San Juan are in the dock area and at Plaza de Colón. The fare is 75¢. Call for more information about routes and schedules.

Taxis are metered; tips between 10% and 15% are customary. The initial charge for destinations in the city is $2, plus 10¢ for each .15km ($^1/_{10}$ mile) and 50¢ for every suitcase, with a minimum fare of $3 ($1 for each suitcase over three). Taxis are invariably lined up outside the entrance to most of the island's hotels, and if not, a staff member can almost always call one for you. If you want to arrange a taxi on your own, call the **Cooperative Major Taxi** (✆ **787/723-2460**), **AAA Asociacion Servicios Tax Capetillo** (✆ **787/758-7000**) or **Rochdale Taxi Cabs** (✆ **787/721-1900**).

If you want to take a cab to a destination outside the city, you must negotiate a flat fee with the driver. For complaints or questions, contact the **Puerto Rico Tourism Company** (✆ **787/999-2100** transportation division).

At Wind Chimes Inn **11**	InterContinental San Juan Resort & Casino **15**
Caribe Hilton **5**	La Concha **7**
Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino **6**	Normandie Hotel **4**
El Canario by the Lagoon Hotel **8**	Numéro 1 Guest House **10**
El Convento **1**	Ritz-Carlton San Juan Spa & Casino **13**
El San Juan Hotel & Casino **14**	San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino **9**
Gallery Inn at Galería San Juan **2**	San Juan Water and Beach Club Hotel **16**
Hostería del Mar **12**	Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino **3**

Tren Urbano, the first mass-transit pr oject in the histor y of P uerto Rico, opened in 2005, linking San Juan (though not Old San Juan) to its suburbs such as B ayamón and Guaynabo. The system pr ovides an easy mode of transpor tation to the most congested areas of metropolitan San Juan. During rush hour (5–9am and 3–6pm), the train operates every 5 minutes; otherwise, it runs every 10 minutes. There is no service daily from 11pm to 5am. The fare is $1.50 one-way. From the airport, it's possible to take the AMA-B40 bus to the Tren U rbano, a 15-minute ride. F or one far e, y ou can transfer fr om the train to bus to go bey ond its r each. For more information, call customer ser vice at ✆ **866/900-1284** or 787/625-0325.

FAST FACTS One of the most centrally located **pharmacies** is **Walgreens,** 1130 Ashford Ave., Condado (✆ **787/725-1510**), open 24 hours. There is at least one 24-hour Walgreens in every tourist district (Condado, Old San Juan, and Isla Verde), and they are linked with the U.S. chain for pr escriptions. Another option is the **Puerto Rico Drug Co.,** Calle San Francisco 157 (✆ **787/725-2202**), in Old San Juan, which is open Monday to Friday from 7:30am to 9:30pm, Saturday from 8am to 9:30pm, and Sunday from 7:30am to 9:30pm.

In a **medical emergency,** call ✆ **911. Ashford Memorial Community Hospital,** 1451 Ashford Ave., Condado (✆ **787/721-2160**), maintains a 24-hour emergency room and is one of the most convenient in the area. Another option is **Pavia Hospital,** 1462 C. Asia, Santurce (✆ **787/727-6060**).

WHERE TO STAY

All hotel rooms on Puerto Rico are subject to a 9%-to-12% tax, which is not included in the rates listed in this chapter. Most hotels also impose a 10% service charge. Many also impose a "resort fee" of between 12% and 22% of the cost of your room. Packages can save you a lot of money, especially if you want to stay at one of the big resorts.

In Old San Juan

Expensive

Gran Hotel El Convento Puerto Rico's most famous hotel came back to life after a 1997 restoration, and it remains one of the most charming historic hotels in the Caribbean and a quintessential Old San Juan experience. The core of the building was constructed in 1651 as the New World's first Carmelite convent, but over the years it played many roles, from a dance hall to a flophouse, to a parking lot for garbage trucks. It first opened as a hotel in 1962. The restoration has returned the property to its past glory, while injecting it with an urban, up-to-date feel, very much like Old San Juan itself. Its fourth-floor rooftop has a small pool, adjacent Jacuzzi, and a big sun terrace with blessed views of the nearby Catedral de San Juan, as well as views of the bay and the Atlantic. The lower two floors feature a collection of shops, bars, and restaurants, all worth staying for a while. A late-afternoon wine-and-cheese offering is served on a beautiful midfloor dining area spilling onto an outdoor terrace overlooking Calle Cristo. The midsize accommodations include Spanish-style furnishings, throw rugs, beamed ceilings, paneling, and Andalusian terra-cotta floor tiles. Each unit contains king-size, queen-size, or two double or twin beds, fitted with fine linens. The small bathrooms, with tub/showers, contain scales and second phones. For the ultimate in luxury, there are two specialty suites: Gloria Vanderbilt's restored suite and the Pablo Casals suite, which run, respectively, $1,700 and $850 nightly. Room no. 508 is a corner room with panoramic views.

Calle del Cristo 100, San Juan, PR 00901. ✆ **800/468-2779** or 787/723-9020. Fax 787/721-2877. www.elconvento.com. 68 units. Winter $355–$410 double, from $650 suite; off season $225–$285 double. Rates include afternoon wine and cheese reception and free Wi-Fi. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Parking $20. Bus: Old Town Trolley. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 3 bars; fitness center; Jacuzzi; small rooftop plunge pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer.

Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino ★ This may be convenient for cruise-ship passengers wanting to spend a few nights in San Juan before or after a cruise, but don't expect Old City charm. Opened in 1997, this dignified, nine-story, waterfront hotel was part of a $100-million renovation of San Juan's cruise-port facilities. With an unusual and desirable position between buildings erected by the Spanish monarchs in the 19th century and the city's busiest and most modern cruise-ship terminals, it remains a good option for cruise travelers wanting to extend their trip with a stay in San Juan. Most of the major cruise ships dock nearby. On days when cruise ships pull into port, the hotel's lobby and bars are likely to be jammed with passengers stretching their legs after a few days at sea. Most of the lobby level here is devoted to a mammoth casino. Take a pass on the hotel restaurants; you are steps from SoFo (South Fortaleza St. near Plaza Colón), which has some of the finest eateries in the city.

Calle Brumbaugh 100, San Juan, PR 00902. ✆ **800/325-3535** or 787/721-5100. Fax 787/721-1111. www.sheraton.com. 240 units. Winter $255–$345 double; $395–$595 suite; off season $209–$345 double, $339–$475 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $21. Bus: A7. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; casino; room service (6:30am–11:30pm); smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate

Gallery Inn at Galería San Juan ★ (Finds) This unique hotel's location and ambience are unbeatable. The inn rambles through a 300-year-old building overlooking Old San Juan's northern sea wall. There are sweeping sea views, as well as the vista across the colonial city rooftops, extending all the way down to San Juan Bay. Verdant courtyards, interior gardens, and patios and terraces appear around every bend one takes in the inn. The chatter of tropical birds and the murmur of fountains complete the atmosphere in the Caribbean's most whimsically bohemian hotel. In the 1700s, it was the home of an aristocratic Spanish family, but today Jan D'Esopo and Manuco Gandia created this inn out of their home and Jan's art studio. The entire inn is covered with clay and bronze figures, as well as other original art by Jan, and each guest room also functions as gallery space, with Jan's original silk screens, paintings, and prints on display. We suggest booking one of the least expensive doubles; even the cheapest units are fairly roomy and attractively furnished, with good beds. The rooftop Wine Deck has the best view in Old San Juan. Classical music concerts are often held in the Music Room and are free for guests. A small pool has also been added to the property.

Calle Norzagaray 204–206, San Juan, PR 00901. ✆ **866/572-ARTE** (2783) or 787/722-1808. Fax 787/977-3929. www.thegalleryinn.com. 22 units (some with shower only). Year-round $225–$325 double; $410 suite. Off-season specials available. Rates include continental breakfast and 6pm wine and cheese reception. AE, DC, MC, V. 6 free parking spaces, plus parking on the street. Bus: Old Town trolley. **Amenities:** Breakfast room. *In room:* A/C, dataport, hair dryer.

Hotel Milano There's not much remarkable about this hotel built from a 1920s warehouse, except clean, modern facilities at a good price in a great location, right near all the restaurants and bars along South Fortaleza Street. You enter a wood-sheathed lobby at the end of Calle Fortaleza before ascending to one of the clean, well-lit bedrooms. The simple, modern rooms have cruise-ship-style decor and unremarkable views, and there's excellent Wi-Fi access. The rooftop terrace has outstanding views and is a great spot to relax or enjoy the $5 continental breakfast. The best rooms are on the upper floors overlooking the street. You're in SoFo, home to some of Puerto Rico's best restaurants.

Calle Fortaleza 307, San Juan, PR 00901. ✆ **877/729-9050** or 787/729-9050. Fax 787/722-3379. www.hotelmilanopr.com. 30 units. Winter $95–$185 double; off season $85–$145 double. $5 continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Bus: Old Town trolley. **Amenities:** Rooftop terrace cafe; Wi-Fi; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

In Puerta de Tierra

Caribe Hilton ★ Thanks to rivers of money poured into its radical renovation, this deluxe hotel is one of the most up-to-date spa and convention hotels in San Juan. Because of an unusual configuration of natural barriers and legal maneuverings, the hotel has the only private beach on the island (and the only garden incorporating an antique naval installation: the semiruined colonial Fort San Gerónimo). Because this beachfront hotel was the first Hilton ever built outside the U.S. mainland (in 1949), the chain considers it its most historic property. The Caribe's size (7 hectares/17 acres of parks and gardens) and sprawling facilities often attract conventions and tour groups.

Rooms have been substantially upgraded. Variations in price are related to the views outside and the amenities within. Each room has a larger-than-expected bathroom with a tub/shower, as well as comfortable, tropical-inspired furniture. In the Caribe Terrace Bar, you can order the bartender's celebrated piña colada, which was once enjoyed by movie legends Joan Crawford and Errol Flynn. An oceanfront spa and fitness center, **Las Olas,** features such tantalizing delights as couples massages, body wraps, hydrotherapy tub treatments, and soothing cucumber sun therapies.

Calle Los Rosales, San Juan, PR 00901. ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) or 787/721-0303. Fax 787/725-8849. www.caribe.hilton.com. 812 units. Winter $385–$400 double; off season $275–$369 double; year-round $500–$1,220 suite. Children 16 and under stay free in parent's room (maximum 4 people per room). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20; self-parking $15. Bus: B21. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's activities and playground; health club; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

In Condado

Expensive

Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino ★ This is one of the busiest hotels on Puerto Rico, with enough facilities and restaurants to keep a visitor occupied for weeks. It's a favorite of business travelers, tour groups, and conventions, but it also attracts independent travelers. A $65-million renovation spiffed up guest rooms and the multiple lobby areas. The pool area, with salt- and freshwater pools, overlooks a pretty beach at the entrance to Condado Lagoon, but there are both nicer beaches and hotels elsewhere in Condado and Isla Verde. The rooms, however, all have private terraces and are spacious, bright, and airy, fitted with deluxe beds and mattresses, either king-size or doubles, but most often twins. The good-size bathrooms contain tub/shower. Only Hotel El San Juan has a larger choice of dining options. This place is known for creating restaurants with culinary diversity. Fine restaurants include Gusta de Italia, a casual delicious classic Italian eatery, and the Strip House, which serves up delectable steaks in a boudoir-red interior with art that pays erotic homage to female beauty. The Eight Noodle Bar, outside its 24-hour casino, has become one of the favorite late-night snacking spots for San Juan's party set, with its kitchen open from noon to 4am daily. The casino remains one of the island's best.

Av. Ashford 999, San Juan, PR 00907. ✆ **800/468-8588** or 787/721-1000. Fax 787/721-1968. www.luxuryresorts.com. 570 units. Winter $259–$499 double, $585–$1,500 suite; off season $150–$400 double, $450–$1,400 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15; self-parking $10. Bus: C10 or B21. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 3 bars; children's activities; health club; 3 Jacuzzis; 3 outdoor pools; casino; 24-hr. room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; watersports equipment; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

La Concha: A Renaissance Resort ★★ The reopening of this hotel—50 years to the day from when it first opened to rave reviews in December 1958—took 7 years and carried a $220-million price tag, but it was well worth it. Thank former San Juan mayor and governor Sila Calderón and the Puerto Rico Architects Association for stopping the wrecking ball on this one. This renovation completes the comeback of Condado, with oceanfront rooms that feel as if they are part of the horizon, and multilevel infinity pool area and adjoining beaches that form a dreamscape in which guests willfully lose themselves. The water motif extends to the cascading fountain at its entrance, the fountains surrounding an open-air deck, and views of the sea from every vantage point. The lobby's Italian marble, white furniture, and huge window to the sea also pull the resort's exteriors and interiors together. The signature shell structure, which sits on the beach surrounded by water, is home to Perla restaurant, a seafood restaurant run by prominent local chef

Dayn Smith. The hotel's lobby bar is a great spot for tapas and wine, and the casino sits just off it. Surrounded by designer boutiques and trendy restaurants, La Concha has been a local hot spot since it reopened, and its lobby area always has the sound of Latin rhythms.

Guest rooms have the latest high-tech gadgets; understated natural wood and beige interiors form a canvas for the beautiful views and tropical prints on the walls.

Av. Ashford 1077, San Juan, PR 00907. ✆ **877/524-7778** or 787/721-7500. Fax 787/724-7929. www.laconcharesort.com. 248 units. Winter $369–$439 double, $522–$549 suite; off season $199–$258 double, $438–$459 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25; self-parking $18. Bus: B21. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 2 bars; pools; high-speed Wi-Fi; room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV, music players for any format, hair dryer.

San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino ★ This centrally located hotel is on one of the Condado's nicest beaches and within walking distance of two parks and the best restaurants in the sector. The tallest building on the Condado, this 21-story landmark packs lots of postmodern style and has an open, comfortable lobby area. A hit with families and kids, it has extensive children's activities and a pool with two water slides. It also has a jumping casino and lobby area, the scene of big band and Latin jazz performances. Even the sports bar by the pool is active with sports fans from up and down the East Coast. The guest rooms are generally spacious, with good views of the water, and each comes with a tiled bathroom with a tub/shower. The pastel tones of the comfortable bedrooms are a bit too washed out for our taste, but that's the only legitimate gripe about this property. Junior suites have a living area with a sofa bed. We can't say enough about its great location in the best part of Condado, which is not immediately apparent to visitors. It's an easy walk to anywhere you want to go. And the staff is among the friendliest in town.

Av. Ashford 1309, San Juan, PR 00907. ✆ **800/228-9290** or 787/722-7000. Fax 787/722-6800. www.marriott.com. 525 units. Winter $295–$410 double, $510 junior suite; summer $219–$309 double, $410 junior suite; $1,500 vice-presidential suite, $2,000 presidential suite. Suite rate includes breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20; self-parking $16. Bus: B21. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; health club; Jacuzzi; 2 pools; casino; 24-hr room service; sauna; 2 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

At Wind Chimes Inn ★ This restored and renovated Spanish manor, 1 short block from the beach and 5.5km ($3^1/_2$) miles from the airport, is one of the best guesthouses on the Condado. Upon entering a tropical patio, you'll find tile tables surrounded by palm trees and bougainvillea. There's plenty of space on the deck and a covered lounge for relaxing, socializing, and eating breakfast. Dozens of decorative wind chimes add melody to the daily breezes. The good-size rooms offer a choice of size, beds, and kitchens; all contain ceiling fans and air-conditioning. Beds are comfortable and come in four sizes, ranging from twin to king size. The shower-only bathrooms, though small, are efficiently laid out. Families like this place not only because of the accommodations and the affordable prices, but because in three of the suites they can also prepare light meals, cutting down on food costs. A sister property, **Acacia Seaside Inn,** right around the block, is also recommended. One of Condado's finest, and most low-key, beaches is a block away.

Av. McLeary 1750, Condado, San Juan, PR 00911. ✆ **800/946-3244** or 787/727-4153. Fax 787/728-0671. www.atwindchimesinn.com. 22 units (shower only). Winter $99–$155 double, $135–$150 suite; off season $75–$140 double, $125 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. Parking $10. Bus: B21 or A5. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; limited room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, kitchen (in some).

El Canario Inn Value This little bed-and-breakfast, originally built as a private home, is one of the best values along the high-priced Condado strip. The location is just 1 block from the beach (you can walk there in your bathing suit). This well-established hotel lies directly on the landmark Ashford Avenue, center of Condado action, and is close to casinos, nightclubs, and many restaurants in all price ranges. Although surrounded by megaresorts, it is a simple inn, with rather small but comfortable rooms and good maintenance by a helpful staff. All units are nonsmoking and have small, tiled, shower-only bathrooms. You can relax on the hotel's patios or in the whirlpool area, which is surrounded by tropical foliage. There is no elevator. Affiliated with the nearby El Canario by the Lagoon and El Canario by the Beach, which are also recommended, this is the most charming of the three El Canario properties. El Canario by the Sea is right around the block.

Av. Ashford 1317, Condado, San Juan, PR 00907. ✆ **800/533-2649** or 787/722-3861. Fax 787/722-0391. www.canariohotels.com. 25 units (shower only). Winter $119–$134 double; off season $90–$100 double. $3 energy fee. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: B21 or C10. *In room:* A/C, TV.

In Ocean Park

Hosteria del Mar ★ The hotel boasts medium-size oceanview rooms. Those on the second floor have balconies; those on the first floor open onto patios. The decor is invitingly tropical, with wicker furniture, good beds, pastel prints, and ceiling fans. The bathrooms are small but efficient, some with shower, some with tub only. There are standard and oceanview rooms, suites with kitchenettes, and apartments with full kitchens and living rooms. Our favorite unit is 201, with a king-size bed, private balcony, kitchenette, and view of the beach; it's idyllic for a honeymoon. There's no pool, but you are right on the beach. Uvva is one of the hardest-working restaurants in town, open from 8am to 10pm; it has a large menu of upscale breakfast and lunch choices, and also throws in some cutting-edge, creative world cuisine. On a beachfront street completely enveloped by a canopy of trees, this is one of San Juan's most charming spots. Given the setting, the place is simple, but puts out its own elegance and warm hospitality.

Calle Tapía 1, Ocean Park, San Juan, PR 00911. ✆ **877/727-3302** or 787/727-3302. Fax 787/268-3302. hosteria@caribe.net. 27 units. High season $89–$239 double, $244–$264 apt; off season $69–$179 double, $199–$209 apt. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Bus: A5. **Amenities:** Restaurant; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette (in 3 units), Wi-Fi.

Número 1 Guest House ★★ Finds As a translation of its name implies, this is the best of the small-scale, low-rise guesthouses in Ocean Park. It was originally built in the 1950s as a private beach house in a prestigious residential neighborhood adjacent to the wide sands of Ocean Park Beach. A massive renovation transformed the place into the closest thing in Ocean Park to the kind of stylish boutique hotel you might find in an upscale California neighborhood. Much of this is thanks to the hardworking owner, Esther Feliciano, who cultivates within her walled compound a verdant garden replete with splashing fountains, a small swimming pool, and manicured shrubbery and palms. Stylish-looking bedrooms (all of which are nonsmoking) contain tile floors, wicker or rattan furniture, comfortable beds, and tiled, shower-only bathrooms. Some repeat clients, many of whom are gay, refer to it as their fantasy version of a private villa beside a superb and usually convivial beach. The staff can direct you to watersports emporiums nearby for virtually any tropical watersport. Although it lacks the staggering diversity of the big

hotels of the nearby Condado or Isla Verde, some guests value its sense of intimacy and small-scale charm.

Calle Santa Ana 1, Ocean Park, San Juan, PR 00911. ✆ **866/726-5010** or 787/726-5010. Fax 787/727-5482. www.numero1guesthouse.com. 13 units (shower only). High season (Dec 15–Apr 30) $139–$279 double, $269–$279 apt, $249 suite; low season (Aug 1–Oct 31) $89–$179 double, $169–$179 apt, $159 suite; midseason (May 1–July 31, Nov 1–Dec 14) $75–$115 double, $165 apt, $145 junior suite. $20 each additional occupant of a double room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Bus: A5. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; limited room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

In Isla Verde

El San Juan Hotel & Casino ★ (Kids) Despite formidable competition by the Ritz-Carlton and the Water Club for elite and sophisticated travelers, this posh resort still has the power to dazzle. The beachfront hotel is surrounded by 350 palms, century-old banyans, and gardens. It lies on a 3.2km-long (2-mile) golden sandy beach with aquamarine water that is the finest in San Juan. Lined with luxury hotels and condominiums, the beach is always full of activity and has great watersports activities.

The lobby is the most opulent and memorable in the Caribbean. Entirely sheathed in red marble and hand-carved mahogany paneling, the public rooms stretch on almost endlessly. No other hotel in the Caribbean offers such a rich diversity of dining options and such high-quality food. And with live music and DJs playing at nightclubs nearly every night, and a beautiful casino, El San Juan is still the place to be seen in the city.

The large, well-decorated rooms are outfitted with the latest in high tech. The Vista guest rooms are bright and tropical, while the Lanai rooms are imbued with honey-hued woods and rattans, with darker wooden doors, windows, and other furnishing. Bathrooms have all the amenities and tub/shower; a few feature Jacuzzis. The oceanfront Lanai rooms overlook the fern-lined paths of the resort's tropical garden.

Av. Isla Verde 6063, San Juan, PR 00979. ✆ **787/791-1000.** Fax 787/791-0390. www.luxuryresorts.com. 382 units. Winter $279–$1,150 double, from $1,700–$2,200 suite; off season $192–$509 double, from $599–$799 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15; self-parking $10. Bus: A5. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's programs; health club; 2 outdoor pools; casino; 24-hr. room service; sauna and steam room; spa; tennis courts; watersports equipment/rentals; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV w/in-house movies, iPod docking station, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Inter-Continental San Juan Resort & Casino We love the pool area and the cafe overlooking the beach, but this is a regimented resort where service often proves too rigid or flops. On the plus side, the comfortable, medium-size rooms, which underwent a needed renovation in 2007, have balconies and terraces and tastefully conservative furnishings. Executive Club–level rooms carry additional features, such as complimentary meals and drinks. However, neither the casino nor the lobby entertainment can compete with those at the El San Juan next door.

Warning: We've been frustrated by the staff's inability to resolve a variety of situations (ranging from an air-conditioner problem to changes to a bill). If it's not in the book of rules, they are clueless. We were particularly annoyed by the aggressive enforcement of a guest-only policy at the pool by security personnel—that is, don't enter the pool area without your room key and or your day-glo wristband, or you'll be asked to leave (and not too politely). And if you want visitors to sit with you by the pool, the hotel will charge you a steep per-person fee for the privilege. Since many travelers going to Puerto Rico are visiting friends or family, this can be an issue.

Av. Isla Verde 5961, Isla Verde, PR 00979. ✆ **800/468-9076** or 787/791-6100. Fax 787/253-2510. www.ichotelsgroup.com. 402 units. Winter $329–$545 double, $579–$1,090 suite; off season $212–$312 double, $300–$979 suite. Children 15 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $22; self-parking $16. Bus: A7, M7, or T1. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; lounge; babysitting; health club; Wi-Fi; the Caribbean's largest free-form pool; whirlpool; 24-hr. room service; sauna; scuba diving; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar.

Ritz-Carlton San Juan Spa & Casino ★★★ The Ritz-Carlton is one of the most spectacular deluxe hotels in the Caribbean. Set on 3.2 hectares (8 acres) of prime beachfront, within a 5-minute drive from the airport, it appeals to both business travelers and vacationers. The hotel decor reflects Caribbean flavor and the Hispanic culture of the island, with artwork by prominent local artists. More visible, however, is an emphasis on Continental elegance. Some of the most opulent public areas feature wrought-iron balustrades and crystal chandeliers.

Beautifully furnished guest rooms open onto ocean views or the gardens of nearby condos. Rooms are very large, with excellent furnishings, fine linens, and dataports. The marble bathrooms are exceptionally plush, with tub/shower scales, bathrobes, and deluxe toiletries. Preferred accommodations are in the ninth-floor Ritz-Carlton Club, which has a private lounge and personal concierge staff.

The scope and diversity of dining here is second only to that at the El San Juan Hotel & Casino (see above), and as for top-shelf dining venues, the Ritz-Carlton has no equal. Renowned gourmet chains BLT Steak and Il Mulino of New York are both located here. The hotel also houses one of Puerto Rico's largest casinos, and it's most stylishly elegant. This is a great spot for families, with a full range of children's activities and a great beach for kids, with lots of watersports options for active families.

Av. de los Gobernadores (State Rd.) 6961, no. 187, Isla Verde, PR 00979. ✆ **800/241-3333** or 787/253-1700. Fax 787/253-1777. www.ritzcarlton.com. 416 units. Winter $399–$769 double; off season $285–$599 double; year-round from $1,109–$1,529 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $22; self-parking $17. Bus: A5, B40, or C45. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 3 bars; night club; babysitting; children's program; health club; large pool; Caribbean's largest casino; 24-hr. room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar.

The Water Club ★★ A refreshing change from the megachain resorts of San Juan, this ultrachic hotel is hip and contemporary. It's the city's only "boutique hotel" on a beach. We find much to praise at this small and exclusive hotel because of its highly personalized and well-trained staff. Although avant garde, the design is never off-putting. The illuminated lobby might recall *2001: A Space Odyssey,* but it's still warm and friendly. Behind glass are "waterfalls," even on the elevators, and inventive theatrical-style lighting is used to bring the outdoors inside. The one-of-a-kind glass art doors are from Murano, the famed center of glassmaking outside Venice. Overlooking Isla Verde's best beach area, all the bedrooms are spacious and contain custom-designed beds positioned to face the ocean. Bathrooms are tiled and elegant, with tub/showers. Unique features are the open-air 11th-floor exotic bar with the Caribbean's only rooftop fireplace. The pool is a level above; it's like swimming in an ocean in the sky. This hotel is super pet friendly; it offers four-legged friends complimentary doggie bags and their owners welcome drinks. Grooming, walking, and massage services are available.

Calle José M. Tartak 2, Isla Verde, Puerto Rico 00979. ✆ **888/265-6699** or 787/253-3666. Fax 787/728-3610. www.waterclubsanjuan.com. 84 units. Winter $275–$450 double; off season $209–$399 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Bus: T1 or A5. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor rooftop pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, high-speed Internet, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

In Old San Juan

Expensive

Aquaviva ★★ LATINO/SEAFOOD Located on Calle Fortaleza near Plaza Colón, at the entrance of Old San Juan, this cool, turquoise-colored restaurant features sometimes as frenetic action as the three large replicas of three *aquaviva* (jellyfish), quivering with illumination, each painstakingly manufactured from stained glass specifically for this site. Bioluminescent drinks are served at the bar, and the hip raw bar here features sushi and a host of ceviches, including one made with dorado and mango and lemon juices, and another with marlin and garlic. The hot and cold appetizer towers are great for small groups (fried oysters, coco-flavored shrimp, fried octopus, and calamari). The best main courses include grilled fresh mahimahi with smoky shrimp, salsa, and coconut-poached yucca; seared medallions of halibut with a fondue of spinach and crabmeat; and a succulent version of paella garnished with seafood and pork sausage.

Calle Fortaleza 364. ✆ **787/722-0665.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $16–$45. AE, MC, V. Lunch daily 11am–4pm; dinner Mon–Wed 6–11pm, Thurs–Sat 6pm–midnight, Sun 4–11pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Barú ★ CARIBBEAN/MEDITERRANEAN This is one of the most fashionable and popular of a wave of imaginative new restaurants in Old San Juan, with an attractive and hard-playing clientele, some of whom look like they walked out of one of those Hispanic soap operas. Named after an unspoiled island off the north coast of Colombia, a personal favorite of its Colombian-born owner, it occupies a stately looking, high-ceilinged space capped with massive timbers, fronted with a hyper-convivial mahogany bar, and decorated with paintings by such Colombia-born artistic luminaries as Botéro.

Many dishes are deliberately conceived as something midway between an appetizer and a main-course platter, so it's hard to know how much, or how many courses, to order. If unsure, ask your waitperson to guide you. Menu items include an unusual choice of five different kinds of carpaccio (tuna, halibut, salmon, beef, or Serrano ham). Ceviche of mahimahi is appropriately tart, appealingly permeated with citrus; and the marinated lamb chops with a paprika-and-pineapple mojo sauce are flavorful. Other culinary creations include almond-encrusted goat cheese with Jamaican jerk mango dip and yucca chips, and sliced filet mignon. Regrettably, the place is not cheap, and service is well intentioned but disorganized, as the youthful staff maneuvers as best it can through the packed-in crowd.

Calle San Sebastián 150. ✆ **787/977-7107.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$28. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6pm–3am; Sun 6pm–midnight. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Carli Café Concierto ★ INTERNATIONAL This stylish restaurant is owned by Carli Muñoz. The gold disc hanging on the wall attests to Carli's success in his previous role as a pianist for the Beach Boys. Nowadays, he entertains his dinner guests nightly with a combination of standards, romantic jazz, and original material on his grand piano. Diners can sit outside on the Plazoleta, where they can enjoy a panoramic view of the bay, or they can eat inside against a backdrop of a tasteful decor of terra-cotta walls and black marble tables. The chef tempts visitors with an imaginative international menu, including such delights as plantain-crusted sea scallops with a coconut curry sauce. The filet of salmon and a mouthwatering rack of lamb are among the finest main dishes. The bar, with its mahogany and brass fittings, is an ideal spot to chill out. The concert starts every night at 8pm.

 Edificio Banco Popular, Calle Tetuán 206, off Plaza Rafael Carrión. ✆ **787/725-4927.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$36. AE, V. Mon–Fri 3:30–11pm; Sat 4–11:30pm. Bus: M2 or M3.

Il Perugino ★★ ITALIAN Located across from Hotel El Convento, this is Puerto Rico's finest Italian restaurant, serving an inspired cuisine that chef and owner Franco Seccarelli says he hopes is authentic to his homeland of Umbria. Our favorite homemade pastas include black fettuccine with a shellfish ragout or ricotta and spinach gnocchetti with fresh tomatoes. For a starter, opt for the shrimp salad with grilled zucchini, a sublime dish, as is another salad made with scallops and porcini mushrooms. Seccarelli shines with his pheasant breast alla Cacciatora and his pork filets flavored with an unusual combination of thyme and blueberries. We also raved about the rack of lamb with fresh herbs and a rich red-wine sauce. Homemade desserts are also succulent, and wine comes from a cellar in a converted dry well in the center of the restaurant. Service is impeccable and friendly.

Cristo St. 105. ✆ **787/722-5481.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $29–$41. AE, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; Tues–Sun 6:30–11pm. Bus: Old San Juan Trolley.

Parrot Club ★★ NUEVO LATINO/CARIBBEAN This bistro and bar, owned by husband-and-wife team Emilio Figueroa and Gigi Zafero, is one of the most sought-after restaurants in Old San Juan. The Nuevo Latino cuisine blends traditional Puerto Rican cookery with Spanish, Taíno, and African influences. The restaurant is set in a stately 1902 building that was originally a hair-tonic factory. Today you'll find a cheerful-looking dining room, where San Juan's mayor and the governor of Puerto Rico can sometimes be spotted, and a verdantly landscaped courtyard, where tables for at least 200 diners are scattered amid potted ferns, palms, and orchids. Live music (either Brazilian, salsa, or Latino jazz) is offered nightly, as well as during the popular Sunday brunches. Menu items are updated interpretations of old Puerto Rican specialties. They include an excellent ceviche of halibut, salmon, tuna, and mahimahi; delicious crab cakes; *criolla*-style flank steak; and pan-seared tuna served with a sauce made from dark rum and essence of oranges. Everybody's favorite drink is a "Parrot Passion," made from lemon-flavored rum, triple sec, oranges, and passion fruit.

Calle Fortaleza 363. ✆ **787/725-7370.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $12–$20 lunch, $18–$36 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–4pm and 6–11pm. Closed 2 weeks in Sept. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Trois Cent Onze (311) ★★ FRENCH When the French and Puerto Rican owners of this place renovated this building in 1999, they discovered some of the most beautiful Moorish–Andalusian tile work in San Juan's Old Town buried beneath layers of later coverings. Because of those tiles, and because of the delicate Andalusian-style iron rosette above the door, they wisely decided to retain the area's Moorish embellishments during the reconfiguration of their restaurant's decor. What you'll get today is the premier French restaurant of San Juan, replete with a zinc bar near the entrance, a soaring and richly beamed ceiling, and decor in the Casbah of old Tangiers. The building was used as the photography studio that developed many of Puerto Rico's earliest movies. Colors, textures, and flavors combine here to produce an irresistible array of dishes. Menu items include a carpaccio of salmon marinated in citrus; sautéed sea scallops served with an almond-flavored butter sauce; mango and crabmeat salad; magret of duckling roasted with honey; and pork medallions served with caramelized onions, stewed white beans, and spicy *merguez* sausage.

Calle Fortaleza 311. ✆ **787/725-7959.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$35. AE, MC, V. Tues–Thurs noon–2:30pm and 6:30–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm; Sun 5–10pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley, T2, or 2.

Moderate

Dragonfly ★★ LATIN/ASIAN FUSION One of San Juan's hottest restaurants, the place has been compared to both an Old San Francisco bordello and a Shanghai opium den, descriptions that evoke as much the lusty appeal and addictive power of its cuisine as the red-walled interior, a world of fringed lamps and gilded mirrors behind beaded curtains. It's good for a late meal, as the portion sizes, called *platos* or plates, are somewhere between appetizers and entrees. We always order the marinated churrasco and the pork and plantain dumplings with orange dipping sauce. Other standouts: seared tuna in green peppercorn sauce, tempura rock shrimp tacos with chunky salsa, and the Chino Latino lo mein. This is the island's first Latin–Asian menu, and it remains one of the best anywhere. An expansion has added a lounge and full sushi bar to the original dining room, but the crowds keep filling the place, one of the city's trendiest places for a night out.

Calle Fortaleza 364. ✆ **787/977-3886.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$30. AE, MC, V. Mon–Wed 6–11pm; Thurs–Sat 6pm–midnight. Bus: A5 or T1.

El Picoteo ★★ Moments SPANISH Spilling across a front and interior terrace overlooking the courtyard of the historic El Convento Hotel, this is the best place in the Old City to savor some drinks and tapas while watching the action near Calle San Sebastián. On most nights, there's a parade of people walking up and down Calle Cristo in front of the restaurant as they go back and forth to the bars and restaurants just up the hill. We love the spicy potatoes *(papas bravas),* shrimp in garlic sauce, and the brick oven pizza, but there are also full meals, like seafood paella. With 80 tapas to choose from, there's also real Spanish flavor here, in such dishes as garbanzo salad, sausages, various ceviches, fresh octopus, and the best selection of cheese in the city. The setting amid Spanish colonial facades and wildly blooming bougainvillea is one of the Old City's most charmed. It's equally inviting for a weekend lunch. Try the champagne-laced sangria. Dinner is festive, accompanied by salsa and lights in the courtyard.

In El Convento hotel, Calle del Cristo 100. ✆ **787/723-9202.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $6–$17; paella $20–$35. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–midnight. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Old Harbor Brewery Steak and Lobster House ★ AMERICAN San Juan's only microbrewery also has top-drawer tavern fare in an upscale mariner setting. Brewmaster Brad Mortensen handcrafts five distinct house beers, as well as seven seasonal beers, on the premises in state-of-the-art brewing facilities. The restaurant specializes in top-quality steaks and fresh Puerto Rican spiny lobster. The cuts are served steakhouse style with a choice of sauces (we recommend the mushroom and chimichurri) and a la carte sides (our favorites are the Lyonnise potatoes and asparagus with béarnaise). The hanging tender steak was as promised, and the New York Strip was flavorful and cooked to perfection. We've grown used to the taste of Caribbean lobster, which is lighter than Maine lobster, and the ones here are among the best we tried. Go with the citrus beurre blanc sauce rather than the coconut, almond-spiced rum. We always start with the rich French onion or lobster bisque soup, probably because both are so hard to find here. The crisp Santo Viejo pilsner and the flavorful Old Harbor pale ale are our favorites. The restaurant dates to the 1920s, when it housed the New York Federal Bank, and it was beautifully restored before opening in 2005. A classic tavern setup surrounds the elegant brew vats, but the place is formal, with fully dressed tables, classic black and white tiles, and metal and wooden finishings.

Calle Tizol 202 (near Recinto Sur). ✆ **787/721-2100.** Reservations recommended. Platters and main courses $13–$38. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–7pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Tantra ★ (Value) INDO-LATINO Set in the heart of "restaurant row" on Calle Fortaleza, it has become famous for a sophisticated fusion of Latino with South Indian cuisine. Its chef and owner, Indian-born Ramesh Pillai, oversees a blend of slow-cooked tandoori cuisine from South India with Puerto Rico–derived spices, flavors, and ingredients. All of this occurs within a warm, candlelit environment that focuses on Indian handicrafts and Hindu and Buddhist symbols.

An appropriate way to begin a meal here is to order one of the best martinis we've ever had—a concoction flavored with cinnamon and cloves. Menu highlights include sesame masala-crusted sushi tuna with peanut sauce, fried coconut sesame jumbo shrimp with Indian noodles, chicken tikka masala with naan (flatbread), and rice and chicken rolls with passion-fruit sauce. One of the establishment's bestsellers is an absolutely brilliant version of tandoori chicken that combines the traditional Indian recipe with manchego and mozzarella cheese, guyaba fruit, guava-flavored dip, and naan. There's also belly-dancing shows on many nights and huge water pipes in a lounge area where you can buy legal weed to puff.

Calle Fortaleza 356. ✆ **787/977-8141.** Reservations only for groups. Main courses $13–$19. AE, MC, V. Mon 3pm–3am; Tues–Sat noon–3pm; Sun noon–midnight. Bus: T1 or 2.

Inexpensive

La Bombonera ★ (Value) PUERTO RICAN This place offers exceptional value in its homemade pastries, well-stuffed sandwiches, and endless cups of coffee—and it has done so since 1902. Its atmospheric evokes turn-of-the-20th-century Castille transplanted to the New World. The food is authentically Puerto Rican, homemade, and inexpensive, with regional dishes such as rice with squid, roast leg of pork, and seafood *asopao* (a thick rice soup). For dessert, you might select an apple, pineapple, or prune pie, or one of many types of flan. Service is polite, if a bit rushed, and the place fills up quickly at lunchtime.

Calle San Francisco 259. ✆ **787/722-0658.** Reservations recommended. American breakfast $4.50–$6.45; main courses $6–$18. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–8pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Raíces ★ PUERTO RICAN Don't let the apparent touristy trappings fool you; it's not the cheapest meal in town, but it's among the tastiest and most authentic, and we recommend it for a big taste of Puerto Rican cuisine. These are Caguas boys in the kitchen, so enjoy the rustic Puerto Rican setting—beautifully outfitted with local arts and crafts—and the waitresses and waiters decked out in the beautiful folkloric dress. It's a perfect fit for its location near the cruise ship docks, but the first location was in Caguas, which is decidedly untouristy. The "typical festival" combines a number of classic island treats, like meat turnovers, stuffed fried plantain fritters, codfish fritters, and mashed cassava, but you'll also want to try the delicious plantain soup. The stuffed *mofongo* entrees are the real specialty here; along with the typical stuffed chicken or shrimp, the options range to breaded pork, skirt steak, and Creole-style mahimahi. If you want hearty fare, the chicken or shrimp *asopao* is another option. The coconut flan and guava cheesecake do not disappoint. Traditional Puerto Rican music, with occasional live entertainment, further compliments the experience.

Calle Recinto Sur 315. ✆ **787/289-2121.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $10–$26. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–4pm and 6–10pm; Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

In Puerta de Tierra

El Hamburger ★ BURGERS This no-frills burger stand offers tasty grilled burgers and hot dogs, cold beer, and perfectly golden french fries and onion rings. From its perch

overlooking the Atlantic on the oceanfront drive into San Juan, the grill has become a late-night local favorite for those leaving the bars of Old San Juan, and is also popular for a bite during work or after the beach. A really good, cheap opportunity to soak up some real local atmosphere, the ramshackle wooden establishment is the kind of burger joint that has disappeared throughout much of the United States with the advent of the modern fast-food restaurant. One of its joys lives on here with a selection of condiments—from onions to relish, to thick tomatoes, to pickles—which is brought to your table with your burger. There's a patch of palm trees on the undeveloped coastal bluff across the street, and the ocean breeze flows all through the white wooden building. It's always packed, but service is still super fast and the conversation animated.

Muñoz Rivera 402. ✆ **787/721-4269.** Reservations not accepted. Burgers from $3.50. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–1am. Bus: A-5 or M-1.

Morton's of Chicago ★★ STEAKHOUSE When it comes to steaks, Ruth's Chris Steak House in Isla Verde enjoys a slight edge, but otherwise Morton's is king of the steaks and other choice meats. The chain of gourmet steakhouses was founded in 1978 by Arnie Morton, former executive vice president of the *Playboy* empire. Beef lovers, from Al Gore to Liza Minnelli, know they'll get quality meats perfectly cooked at Morton's. Carts laden with everything from prime Midwestern beefsteaks to succulent lamb or veal chops are wheeled around for your selection. And Morton's has the island's best prime rib. This is a place where the bartenders make stiff drinks and the waiters tempt you with their fresh fish, lobster, and chicken dishes. The vegetables here are among the freshest in the area. The house specialty is a 24-ounce porterhouse. Appetizers include perfectly cooked jumbo shrimp with cocktail sauce and smoked Pacific salmon. For dessert, we always gravitate to one of the soufflés, such as raspberry or Grand Marnier.

In the Caribe Hilton, Calle Los Rosales. ✆ **787/977-6262.** Reservations required. Main courses $20–$40. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Bus: B21.

In Condado

Expensive

Ajili Mójili ★ PUERTO RICAN/CREOLE This restaurant serves *comida criolla,* the starchy, down-home cuisine that developed on the island a century ago. It's housed in a huge two-story building on the Condado Lagoon. Locals come here for a taste of the food they enjoyed at their mother's knee, like *mofongo* (green plantain casserole stuffed with veal, chicken, shrimp, or pork), *arroz con pollo* (chicken and rice), *medallones de cerdo encebollado* (pork loin sautéed with onions), *carne mechada* (beef rib-eye stuffed with ham), and *lechon asado con maposteado* (roast pork with rice and beans). Wash it all down with an ice-cold bottle of local beer. The staff will eagerly describe menu items in colloquial English.

Av. Ashford 1006. ✆ **787/725-9195.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$39; lunch $13–$26. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:45am–3pm and 6–10pm; Fri noon–3pm and 6–11pm; Sat 11:45am–3:30pm and 6–11pm; Sun 12:30–4pm and 6–10pm. Bus: B21.

Budatai ★★★ LATIN/ASIAN The new home of Puerto Rico's "Iron Chef" mixes local flavors with Asian ingredients to deliver one of San Juan's finest dining experiences. Scrumptiously situated in an Art Deco town house overlooking an oceanfront park at the heart of Condado's redevelopment revival, Budatai's muted brown interior is as stylish as the designer boutiques surrounding it. With wall-sized windows inside and a rooftop terrace, diners have great views and are pampered with oversized tables and leather chairs. Chef Roberto Trevino, who fell just short against Mario Batali on the Food Network's

Iron Chef America (the secret ingredient was catfish), reworks the Nuevo Latino and Asian fusion concepts he developed at Old San Juan's Parrot Club, Dragonfly, and Aguaviva restaurants and kicks up the portion sizes. Get started with the sesame-crusted pork-wrapped asparagus with a soy mayonnaise, an explosion of flavor and texture, or if sushi's your thing, the geisha roll—lobster, cream cheese, jicama, and meringue kisses. The soy-glazed salmon with coconut hash main course artfully balances the salty and sweet, while the veal sirloin with lobster mashed Asian potatoes is as rich as it sounds. Skip the lo mein with *chicharon de pollo* and the karate pork chop, which are not bad, just ordinary. The waitstaff is friendly, efficient, and knowledgeable about the menu and extensive wine list. The second-floor bar and lounge is a hot spot for the city's young and beautiful, especially on weekends.

Av. Ashford 1056, Condado. ✆ **787/725-6919.** Main courses $24–$35. AE MC, V. Mon–Wed 11:30am–11pm; Thurs–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–10 pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Great Taste ★★ CHINESE This is the place where the island's Chinese community goes to eat dim sum, and with good reason, as this restaurant has been serving up among the best Chinese food on the island for decades. About 5 years ago, it also installed a sushi bar and added a few menu items. Set in a 1970s condominium with a tattered facade, the dining room is spacious, comfortable, and bright, with Japanese prints, huge lobster tanks, and an enviable view over the Condado lagoon. We come here for the Chinese, and everything we've tried, from the cashew chicken to the Peking duck, to the shrimp in lobster sauce, is excellent, but we really come for the dim sum: the sticky rice in lotus leaf, skewered beef, and steamed vegetable dumplings. Sunday specials attract droves of diners from the local Chinese community and elsewhere with a refined sense of what good dim sum is all about.

Av. Ashford 1018 ✆ **787/721-8111.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$45. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. Bus: B21.

Moderate

Via Appia ★ PIZZA/ITALIAN A favorite of *sanjuaneros* with a craving for Italian, Via Appia offers praiseworthy food at affordable prices. Its pizzas are among the best on the island, and basic pasta dishes like baked ziti, lasagna, and spaghetti taste like somebody's Italian grandmother prepared them. However, the restaurant really shows its stuff with dishes like clams *posillipo,* veal and peppers, broiled sirloin with red-wine mushroom sauce, and the delectable chicken français. The house sangria is tasty and packs a punch, and the house wine is tasty and helps keep a meal here in the budget category. A wine bar and more formal dining room have been added to the original deli-like main building, but the place to sit is on one of the two terraces fronting the establishment.

Av. Ashford 1350. ✆ **787/725-8711.** Pizza and main courses $9–$16. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–11pm; Sat–Sun 11am–midnight. Bus: B21 or C10.

In Santurce

Bistro de Paris ★★ FRENCH This elegant version of a classic Paris bistro has moved to freshly restored quarters across from Puerto Rico's beautiful art museum, but the growing legend of its classic French cuisine continues to attract a huge local following. The restrained beige-and-green bistro has a front terrace under shaded awnings and a dining room with huge glass windows and doors all around. Roomy and comfortable chairs and tables are the only things not authentic about the place. Basic genre dishes like French onion soup, Niçoise salad, and mussels Provençal are executed with perfection. The boneless whole trout in "Meuniere" sauce was the best fish one member of our party

ever tried, and the shrimp blazed with Pastis liquor, ratatouille, and sun-dried tomatoes also knocked some socks off. A big question each night is whether to go for the strip loin with tomatoes Provençal or the steak au poivre. The crème brûlée is fantastic, but the warm apple tart also reigns supreme.

Plaza de Diego, Av. José de Diego 310. ✆ **787/998-8929.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $25–$37; weekend brunch $17. AE, MC, V. Sun, Tues–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight; closed Sun. Bus: A5.

Pikayo ★★★ (Moments) PUERTO RICAN FUSION This is an ideal place to go for the next generation of Puerto Rican fusion cuisine. Pikayo not only keeps up with the latest culinary trends, but it also often sets them, thanks to the inspired guidance of owner and celebrity chef Wilo Benet. Formal but not stuffy, and winner of more culinary awards than virtually any other restaurant in Puerto Rico, Pikayo is a specialist in the *criolla* cuisine of the colonial age, emphasizing the Spanish, Indian, and African elements in its unusual recipes. Appetizers include a dazzling array of taste explosions: Try shrimp spring rolls with peanut *sofrito* sauce; crab cake with aioli; or perhaps a ripe plantain, goat-cheese, and onion tart. Main-course delights feature charred rare yellowfin tuna with onion *escabeche* and red-snapper filet with sweet-potato purée served with foie gras butter. Our favorite remains the grilled shrimp with polenta and barbecue sauce made with guava.

In the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico, Av. José de Diego 299. ✆ **787/721-6194.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $28–$40; fixed-price menus $65. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6–11pm. Bus: M2, A7, or T1.

In Ocean Park

Pamela's ★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN FUSION One of San Juan's new oceanfront restaurants, the food here matches its impressive setting on a white-sand beach free of the high-rises that dominate much of the city's coast. The menu takes flavors from distinct Caribbean cuisines and wraps them around classic continental fare. The result is appetizers like green lip mussels served in *sofrito* (a Puerto Rican blend of onion, garlic, sweet peppers, and herbs) and spicy tomato-sauce-and plantain-crusted calamari with toasted African peanut and chili vinaigrette. Main courses include roasted chicken over caramelized ripe plantain in a coriander au jus and grilled lamb chops with dark rum and star anise sauce. Diners can eat in a courtyard, marked by hand-painted tiles and stone fountains, or take a table under a palm tree outside and listen to the rumble of the ocean. Tasty snacks—like club sandwiches stuffed with barbecued shrimp and cilantro-flavored mayonnaise or Jamaican jerk chicken—and a full-service bar make this a great spot for a beach break, too. Service is friendly but a bit laid back during the day; it improves for dinner. This is one of actor Benicio del Toro's favorite restaurants when visiting his hometown.

In the Número 1 Guest House, Calle Santa Ana 1, Ocean Park. ✆ **787/726-5010.** Reservations recommended. Lunch $8–$24; main course $15–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm. Tapas daily 3–7pm. Bus: A5.

Repostería Kasalta (Value) SPANISH/PUERTO RICAN This is the most widely known of San Juan's cafeterias/bakeries/delicatessens. You'll enter a cavernous room flanked with sun-flooded windows and a long row of display cases filled with meats, sausages, and pastries appropriate to the season. Patrons line up to place their orders at a cash register, then carry their selections to one of the many tables. Knowledge of Spanish is helpful but not essential. Among the selections are steaming bowls of Puerto Rico's best

caldo gallego, a hearty soup laden with collard greens, potatoes, and sausage slices, served in thick earthenware bowls with hunks of bread. Also popular are Cuban sandwiches (sliced pork, cheese, and fried bread), steak sandwiches, a savory octopus salad; and an assortment of perfectly cooked omelets. Paella Valenciano is a Sunday favorite.

Av. McLeary 1966. ✆ **787/727-7340.** Reservations not accepted. Full American breakfast $3.50–$5; soups $3–$6; sandwiches $4.50–$6; platters $4–$22. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6am–10pm. Bus: A5.

In Isla Verde

Expensive

La Piccola Fontana ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Just off a luxurious wing of El San Juan Hotel, this restaurant delivers plate after plate of delectable food nightly. From its white linens to its classically formal service, it enjoys a fine reputation. The food is straightforward, generous, and extremely well prepared. You'll dine in one of two neo-Palladian rooms whose wall frescoes depict Italy's ruins and landscapes. Menu items range from the appealingly simple (grilled filets of fish or grilled veal chops) to more elaborate dishes such as *tortellini San Daniele,* made with veal, prosciutto, cream, and sage; or *linguine scogliere,* with shrimp, clams, and seafood. Grilled medallions of filet mignon are served with braised arugula, Parmesan cheese, and balsamic vinegar.

In El San Juan Hotel & Casino, Av. Isla Verde 6063. ✆ **787/791-0966.** Reservations required. Main courses $18–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. Bus: A5.

Moderate

Metropol CUBAN/PUERTO RICAN/INTERNATIONAL This is part of a restaurant chain known for serving the island's best Cuban food, although the chefs prepare a much wider range of dishes. Metropol is the happiest blend of Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisine we've ever had. The black-bean soup is among the island's finest, served in the classic Havana style with a side dish of rice and chopped onions. Endless garlic bread accompanies most dinners, including Cornish game hen stuffed with Cuban rice and beans or perhaps marinated steak topped with a fried egg (reportedly Castro's favorite). Smoked chicken and chicken-fried steak are also hearty recommended; portions are huge. Plantains, yucca, and all that good stuff accompany most dishes. Finish with a choice of thin or firm custard. Most dishes are at the low end of the price scale.

Club Gallistico, Av. Isla Verde. ✆ **787/791-4046.** Main courses $10–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11:30pm. Bus: C41, B42, or A5.

Soleil Beach Club Piñones ★★ Finds CARIBBEAN When it opened in 1997, Soleil was a pioneer in operating a fine dining establishment among the barbecues, wooden shacks, and open-air bars of the Piñones dining scene. More than a decade later, Soleil still rules from its roost amid the sand dunes and palm trees of the undeveloped beach it fronts. Soak in that breeze and listen to those waves from a table or the bar on the oceanfront terrace, and have a drink as the sun goes down before dinner. The food here's as good as its rustic beachfront surroundings. For starters, we like the fish skewers with mango sauce and the coconut breaded shrimp in aioli sauce. The surf-and-turf pairs Argentinean-style skirt steak with shrimp, baby octopus, mahimahi, and scallops. The halibut is served in an oriental beurre blanc sauce and cassava *mofongo;* the tuna is grilled, topped with a tropical fruit salsa, and served with cilantro jasmine rice. This is the best oceanfront dining in San Juan, and one of the best in Puerto Rico. Today the restaurant hosts corporate dinners and special events, with facilities for concerts and live shows, a dance floor, and DJ area. There's also Wi-Fi Internet service.

Soleil Beach Club, Carretera 187 Km.4.6, Piñones. ✆ **787/253-1033.** Reservations recommended. Lunch and dinner main courses $13–$39; lunch specials $7–$10; lunch and dinner main courses $18–$38. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–2am. Bus: Call ahead to arrange free transportation to and from your hotel in the Soleil Beach Club van.

Tierra Santa Restaurant (Finds) MIDDLE EASTERN Housed in fanciful quarters, with glass mosaics etched into the facade and the main dining room adorned with Arabian fabric and scenic oil paintings, this is one of the better of the city 's many fine Middle Eastern restaurants. We always start out with the hummus and falafel, and get the baba ganoush if there are more than two of us. The succulent, perfectly seasoned grilled chicken, beef, and shrimp kebabs are what draw us here, but we have also enjoyed the grilled lamb shank, curry chicken, and the stuffed grape leaves. The entrees are served with a tasty cucumber and tomato salad and Arabian rice pilaf with almonds. Don't leave without trying the baklava; there's a reason it's the oldest dessert in the world. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, a belly-dancing show starts at 9pm. It's a great show.

Calle Loíza 2440. ✆ **787/726-6491.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $11–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. Bus: A5.

HITTING THE BEACH

Some public stretches of shoreline around San Juan are overcrowded, especially on Saturday and Sunday; others are practically deserted. If you find that secluded, hidden beach of your dreams, proceed with caution. On unguarded beaches you'll have no way to protect yourself or your valuables, should you be approached by a robber or mugger, which has been known to happen.

All beaches on Puerto Rico, even those fronting the top hotels, are open to the public. Public bathing beaches are called ***balnearios*** and charge for parking and for use of facilities, such as lockers and showers. Beach hours in general are 8:30am to 5pm, with a $3 parking fee per car. For more information, contact the **Compañía de Parques Nacionales de Puerto Rico,** Av. Fernández Juncos 1611, Santurce (✆ **787/622-5200**).

Famous with beach buffs since the 1920s, **Condado Beach** ★★ put San Juan on the map as a tourist resort. Backed up by high-rise hotels, it seems more like Miami Beach than any other beach in the Caribbean. From parasailing to sailing, all sorts of watersports can be booked at the activities desk of the hotels. There are also plenty of outdoor bars and restaurants. People-watching is a favorite sport along these golden strands.

At the end of Puente Dos Hermanos, the westernmost corner of the Condado is a popular strip. This Lilliputian section of the beach is small and shaded by palms, and a natural rock barrier calms the turbulence of the waters rushing in, making for protected, safe swimming in gin-clear waters. The lagoon on the other side of the beach is ideal for windsurfing and kayaking.

Golden-sand **Isla Verde Beach** is ideal for swimming, and it, too, is lined with high-rise resorts and luxury condos. It draws a mix of visitors and locals. This strip is also good for snorkeling because of its calm, clear waters; so bring equipment or find a local who will rent you some. Isla Verde Beach extends from the end of Ocean Park to the beginning of a section called Boca Cangrejos, although it is bisected by an area called Punta las Miarias. The best beach at Isla Verde is in front of the Hotel El San Juan. Most sections of this long strip have separate names, such as El Alambique, which is often the site of beach parties, and Punta El Medio, bordering the new Ritz-Carlton, which is also a great beach and very popular even with the locals. If you go past the luxury hotels and expensive condos behind the Luís Muñoz Marín International Airport, you arrive at the major public beach at Isla Verde. Here you'll find a *balneario* with parking and showers,

Tips Let the Swimmer Beware

You have to pick your spots carefully if you want to swim along Condado Beach. The waters along the Condado Plaza Hotel are calmer than in other areas because of a coral breakwater. However, the beach near the Marriott is not good for swimming because of rocks and an undertow. Proceed with caution.

but no fast-food joints or waterspor ts equipment. The sands her e are whiter than the golden sands of the Condado, and ar e lined with coconut palms, sea-grape tr ees, and even almond trees, all of which provide shade from the fierce noonday sun.

One of the most attractiv e beaches in the G reater S an J uan ar ea is **Ocean Park Beach** ★★, a mile of fine gold sand in a neighborhood east of Condado . This beach attracts both young people and a big gay crowd. This area is ideal for volleyball, paddleball, and other games. The easternmost portion, known as Punta Las Marias, is best for windsurfing and kitesur fing. The waters at O cean Park are usually fine for swimming, although they can get rough at times.

Rivaling Condado and Isla Verde beaches, **Luquillo Beach** ★★★ is the grandest in Puerto Rico and one of the most popular . It's about 50km (31 miles) east of S an Juan, near the to wn of L uquillo. H ere y ou'll find a mile-long half-moon bay set against a backdrop of coconut palms. Saturday and Sunday are the worst times to go, as hordes of locals head here for fun in the sun. Watersports kiosks are available, offering everything from windsurfing to water floats. Facilities include lifeguards, an emergency first-aid station, ample par king, showers, and toilets. You can easily grab lunch her e at one of the beach shacks offering cod fritters and tacos.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

DEEP-SEA FISHING ★ Deep-sea fishing is top-notch her e. Allison tuna, white and blue marlin, sailfish, wahoo, mahimahi, macker el, and tarpon ar e some of the fish that can be caught in Puerto Rican waters, where 30 world records have been broken. Charter arrangements can be made through most major hotels and resorts.

Benitez Fishing Charters can be contacted dir ectly at P.O. Box 9066541, Puerto de Tierra, San Juan, PR 00906 (✆ **787/723-2292** until 9pm). The captain offers a 14m (45-ft.) air-conditioned deluxe Hatteras called the *Sea Born.* Fishing tours for par ties of up to six cost $588 for a half-day ex cursion, $758 for a 6-hour ex cursion, and $968 for a full day, with bottled water and all equipment included. (S ee "Scuba D iving," below, for another deep-sea fishing option.) Another veteran outfit is **Castillo Fishing Charters** (✆ **787/726-5752**), that has been r unning char ters out of the S an J uan B ay M arina since 1975. Capt. J oe Castillo r uns the company with his son J osé Iván and daughter Vanessa, and they also know their stuff.

SCUBA DIVING In San Juan, the best outfitter is **Caribe Aquatic Adventures,** Normandie H otel S an J uan, 1062 Calle 19, Villa N evarez (✆ **787/281-8858;** www.diveguide.com/p2046.htm). Its dive shop is open daily from 9am to 9pm. This outfitter will take you to the best local dive sites in the Greater San Juan area. Dives begin at $125 per person, and a r esort course for first-time div ers costs $140. Escor ted dive jaunts to the eastern shore are also offer ed. Snorkeling lessons or tours lasting 1 hour and including basic equipment go for $50. O ther activities include **deep-sea fishing trips,** costing $550 per half-day with a maximum of six fishermen and $900 for a full day .

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SNORKELING Snorkeling is better in the outlying por tions of the island than in overcrowded San Juan. But if you don't have time to explor e greater Puerto Rico, you'll find that most of the popular beaches, such as Luquillo and Isla Verde, have pretty good visibility and kiosks that rent equipment. Snorkeling equipment generally rents for $15. If you're on your own in the San Juan area, one of the best places is the San Juan Bay marina near the Caribe Hilton.

Watersports desks at the big San Juan hotels at Isla Verde and Condado can generally make arrangements for instr uction and equipment r ental, and can also lead y ou to the best places for snor keling, depending on wher e you are in the sprawling metr opolis. If your hotel doesn't offer such ser vices, you can contact **Caribe Aquatic Adventures** (see "Scuba Diving," above), which caters to both snor kelers and scuba div ers. Still, even if you are staying in San Juan and want to go snor keling, you are better off taking a day trip to Fajardo, where you'll get a r eal Caribbean snor keling experience, with tranquil, clear water, and stunning reefs teaming with tropical fish. (See "Fajardo & the East," later in this chapter.)

Several operators offer day trips (10am–3:30pm) leaving fr om Fajardo marinas, but transportation to and fr om your San Juan hotel can also be arranged. P rices start at around $69 per person, or $99 including transpor tation to and from San Juan.

TENNIS Most of the big resorts have their own tennis courts for their guests. There are 20 public cour ts, lit at night, at **San Juan Central Park,** at Calle Cerra, exit on Rte. 2 (✆ **787/722-1646**), open daily. Fees are $3 per hour from 6am to 5pm, and $4 per hour from 6 to 10pm. There are also four racquetball courts here. The **Isla Verde Tennis Club** (✆ **787/727-6490**) is open all week, weekdays from 8am to 10pm, Saturdays from 8am to 7pm, and Sundays from 8am to 6pm. Cour ts cost from $15 to $20 hourly.

WINDSURFING The savviest windsur fing advice and equipment r ental are available at **Velauno,** Calle Loíza 2430, P unta Las Marías in San Juan (✆ **787/728-8716;** www.velauno.com). A 1-day rental costs $75, 3 days $150, and 1 week $225. You can also rent kiteboards and surfboards. This is the second-biggest full-ser vice headquarters for windsurfing in the United States. The staff here will guide you to the best windsurfing, which is likely to be the P unta Las M arías in the gr eater San Juan metr opolitan ar ea. O ffice hours are Monday to Friday 10am to 7pm, S aturday 11am to 7pm. O ther spots on the island for windsurfing include Santa Isabel, Guánica, and La Parguera in the south; Jobos and Shacks in the nor thwest; and the island of C ulebra off the eastern coast.

STEPPING BACK IN TIME: EXPLORING THE HISTORIC SITES OF SAN JUAN

The Spanish moved to O ld San Juan in 1521, and the city play ed an impor tant role as Spain's bastion of defense in the Caribbean. Today the str eets ar e narr ow and teeming with traffic, but a walk thr ough El Viejo San Juan makes for a good str oll. It's also the biggest and best collection of historic buildings, str etching back 5 centuries, in all the Caribbean. You can do it in less than a day but only if you are willing to skim the surface. To truly do this gem justice, plan to spend several days exploring this culturally rich area. In a 7-square-block landmark area in the westernmost part of the city, you can see many of Puerto Rico's chief historical attractions and do some shopping along the way .

Churches

Capilla de Cristo The chapel was built to commemorate what legend calls a miracle. In 1753, a young rider lost control of his horse in a race down this very street during the

Moments Jogger's Trail or Romantic Walk

El Morro Trail, a jogger's paradise, provides Old Town's most scenic views across the harbor. The first part of the trail extends to the San Juan Gate. The walk then goes by El Morro, a 16th-century fort, and eventually reaches a scenic area known as Bastion de Santa Barbara. The walk passes El Morro's well-preserved walls, and the trail ends at the entrance to the fortress. The walkway is designed to follow the undulating movement of the ocean, and sea grapes and tropical vegetation surround benches. The trail is romantic at night, when the walls of the fortress are illuminated. Stop in at the tourist office for a map and set off.

fiesta of St. John's Day, plunging over the precipice. Moved by the accident, the secretary of the city, Don Mateo Pratts, invoked Christ to save the youth and had the chapel built when his prayers were answered. Today it's a landmark in the old city and one of its best-known monuments. The chapel's gold-and-silver altar can be seen through its glass doors. Since the chapel is open only on Tuesdays, most visitors have to settle for a view of its exterior.

Calle del Cristo (directly west of Paseo de la Princesa). ✆ **787/724-0700.** Free admission. Tues 8am–5pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Catedral de San Juan San Juan Cathedral was begun in 1540 and has had a rough life. Looting, lacking funds, and hurricanes have continually hampered its construction and reconstruction. Over the years, a circular staircase and two adjoining vaulted Gothic chambers have been added. Many beautiful stained-glass windows escaped pillagers and natural disasters. In 1908, the body of Ponce de León was disinterred from the nearby Iglesia de San José and placed here in a marble tomb near the transept, where it remains. Since 1862, the cathedral has contained the wax-covered mummy of St. Pio, a Roman martyr persecuted and killed for his Christian faith. To the right of the mummy is a bizarre wooden statue of Mary with four swords stuck in her bosom. The cathedral faces Plaza de las Monjas (the Nuns' Square), a shady spot where you can rest and cool off.

Calle del Cristo 151 (at Caleta San Juan). ✆ **787/722-0861.** Free admission. Daily 8am–5pm; Mass at 9 and 11am. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Forts

Castillo de San Felipe del Morro ★ Kids Called "El Morro," this fort stands on a rocky promontory dominating the entrance to San Juan Bay. In 1992 the parklike grounds around El Morro were restored to their 18th-century appearance and are ideal for walks. Constructed in 1540, the original fort was a round tower, which can still be seen deep inside the lower levels of the castle. More walls and cannon-firing positions were added, and by 1787, the fortification attained the complex design you see today. This fortress was attacked repeatedly by both the English and the Dutch.

The U.S. National Park Service protects the fortifications of Old San Juan, which have been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations. With some of the most dramatic views in the Caribbean, you'll find El Morro an intriguing labyrinth of dungeons, barracks, vaults, lookouts, and ramps. Historical and background information is provided in a video in English and Spanish. The nearest parking is the underground facility beneath the Quincentennial Plaza at the Cuartel de Ballajá (Ballajá barracks) on Calle Norzagaray. Sometimes park rangers lead hour-long tours for free, although you

can also visit on your own. With the purchase of a ticket here, you don't have to pay the admission for Fort San Cristóbal (see below) if you visit during the same day.

Before going into the citadel, you can visit the new $2-million **San Juan National Historic Site** (✆ **787/729-6960**), which is open daily from 9am to 5pm, charging $3 for adults (free for 15 and under). The center is connected via two tunnels to Fort San Cristóbal and was created from a strategic military base used in World War II. Visitors view a 12-minute film about the fortifications. A photo exhibit, a gift shop, and other exhibits are of interest.

At the end of Calle Norzagaray. ✆ **787/729-6777.** www.nps.gov/saju. Admission $3 adults, free for children 15 and under. Daily 9am–6pm. Bus: A5, B21, or B40.

Fort San Cristóbal ★ This huge fortress, begun in 1634 and reengineered in the 1770s, is one of the largest the Spanish ever built in the Americas. Its walls rise more than 45m (148 ft.) above the sea. Together San Cristóbal and El Morro, which are linked by nearly 1km (½ mile) of monumental walls and bastions filled with cannon-firing positions, protected San Juan against attackers coming by land. A complex system of tunnels and dry moats connects the center of San Cristóbal to its "outworks," defensive elements arranged layer after layer over an 11-hectare (27-acre) site. You'll get the idea if you look at the scale model on display. The fort is administered and maintained by the National Park Service.

Be sure to see the **Garita del Diablo,** or the Devil's Sentry Box, one of the oldest parts of San Cristóbal's defenses, and famous in Puerto Rican legend. The devil himself, it is said, would snatch away sentinels at this lonely post at the edge of the sea. In 1898, the first shots of the Spanish-American War in Puerto Rico were fired by cannons on top of San Cristóbal during an artillery duel with a U.S. Navy fleet. Sometimes park rangers lead hour-long tours for free, although you can visit on your own.

In the northeast corner of Old San Juan (uphill from Plaza de Colón on Calle Norzagaray). ✆ **787/729-6777.** www.nps.gov/saju. Admission $3 adults, free for children 15 and under. Daily 9am–6pm. Bus: A5, B21, or B40; then the free trolley from Covadonga station to the top of the hill.

Other Historic Sites

The **city walls** around San Juan *(murallas de San Juan)* were built in 1630 to protect the town against both European invaders and Caribbean pirates, and indeed were part of one of the most impregnable fortresses in the New World. Even today, they're an engineering marvel. At their top, notice the balconied buildings that served for centuries as hospitals and also residences of the island's various governors. The thickness of the walls averages 6m (20 ft.) at the base and 3.5m (11 ft.) at the top, with an average height of 12m (39 ft.). Between Fort San Cristóbal and El Morro, bastions were erected at frequent intervals. The walls come into view as you approach from San Cristóbal on your way to El Morro. To get here, take the C45 or A5 bus.

San Juan Gate, Calle San Francisco and Calle Recinto Oeste, built around 1635, just north of La Fortaleza, several blocks downhill from the cathedral, was the main gate and entry point into San Juan—that is, if you arrived by ship in the 18th century. The gate is the only one remaining of the several that once pierced the fortifications of the old walled city. To get here, take the C45 or A5 bus.

Casa Blanca Ponce de León never lived here, although construction of the house (built in 1521) is sometimes attributed to him. The house was erected 2 years after the explorer's death, by the order of his son-in-law, Juan García Troche. The parcel of land was given to Ponce de León as a reward for services rendered to the Crown. His descendants

lived in the house for about 2 1/2 centuries, until the Spanish government took it over in 1779 for use as a residence for military commanders. The U.S. government also used it as a home for army commanders. On the first floor, the Juan Ponce de León Museum is furnished with antiques, paintings, and artifacts from the 16th through the 18th centuries. In back is a garden with spraying fountains, offering an intimate and verdant respite from the monumental buildings of Old San Juan.

Calle San Sebastián 1. ✆ **787/724-4102.** Admission $2. Tues–Sat 9am–noon and 1–4:30pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

El Arsenal The Spaniards used shallow craft to patrol the lagoons and mangroves in and around San Juan. Needing a base for these vessels, they constructed El Arsenal in the 19th century. It was at this base that they staged their last stand, flying the Spanish colors until the final Spaniard was removed in 1898, at the end of the Spanish-American War. Changing art exhibitions are held in the building's three galleries.

La Puntilla. ✆ **787/723-3068.** Free admission. Wed–Sun 8:30am–4:30pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

La Fortaleza The office and residence of the governor of Puerto Rico is the oldest executive mansion in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere, and has served as the island's seat of government for more than 3 centuries. Yet its history goes back even further, to 1533, when construction began on a fortress to protect San Juan's Spanish settlers during raids by Carib tribesmen and pirates. The original medieval towers remain, but as the edifice was subsequently enlarged into a palace, other modes of architecture and ornamentation were also incorporated, including baroque, Gothic, neoclassical, and Arabian. La Fortaleza has been designated a national historic site by the U.S. government. Thirty-minute tours of the gardens and building are conducted in English and Spanish. Informal but proper attire is required.

Calle Fortaleza #52, overlooking San Juan Harbor. ✆ **787/721-7000,** ext. 2358. Free admission. Tours of the gardens and building $3 (given every half-hour and conducted in English and Spanish) Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Museums

Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico ★★ One of Puerto Rico's most important galleries is a state-of-the-art showcase for the island nation's rich cultural heritage as reflected mainly by its painters. In Santurce, the museum features a permanent collection and temporary exhibitions. All the important modern island artists are represented, including the best known, Angel Botello (1913–86), but also such contemporaries as Rafael Tufiño (1922–2008) and Arnaldo Roche Rabell (b. 1955). Prominent local artists from the past also star—for example, Francisco Oller (1833–1917), who brought a touch of Cézanne or Camille Pissarro to Puerto Rico. (Oller actually studied in France with both of these Impressionists.) Another leading star of the permanent collection is José Campéche, a late-18th-century classical painter. The museum is like a living textbook of Puerto Rican art, beginning with its early development and going on to showcase camp aspects such as the poster art created here in the mid–20th century.

299 Av. Jose de Diego, Santurce. ✆ **787/977-6277.** www.mapr.org. Admission $6 adults, $3 students, seniors, and children; free for seniors 75 and older and children 4 and under. Tues and Thurs–Sat 10am–5pm; Wed 10am–8pm; Sun 11am–6pm. Bus: A5 or B21.

Museo de las Américas ★ This museum showcases the artisans of North, South, and Central America, featuring everything from carved figureheads from New England whaling ships to dugout canoes carved by Carib Indians in Dominica. It is unique in

 Puerto Rico and well worth a visit. Also on display is a changing collection of paintings by artists from throughout the Spanish-speaking world, some of which are for sale, and a permanent collection called "Puerto Rican *Santos,*" donated by Dr. Ricardo Alegría.

Cuartel de Ballajá. ✆ **787/724-5052.** Free admission. Tues–Fri 10am–4pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Museo de Pablo Casals This museum is devoted to the memorabilia left to the people of Puerto Rico by the musician Pablo Casals. The maestro's cello is here, along with a library of videotapes (which can be played upon request) of some of his festival concerts. This small 18th-century house also contains manuscripts and photographs of Casals. The annual Casals Festival draws worldwide interest and internationally known performing artists; it's held in late February, early March.

Plaza San José, Calle San Sebastián 101. ✆ **787/723-9185.** Admission $1. Tues–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Museo de San Juan Located in a Spanish colonial building at the corner of Calle MacArthur, this cultural center was the city's main marketplace in the mid–19th century. Local art is displayed in the east and west galleries, and audiovisual materials reveal the history of the city. Sometimes major cultural events are staged in the museum's large courtyard. English- and Spanish-language audiovisual shows are presented Tuesday to Friday every hour on the hour from 9am to 4pm.

Calle Norzagaray 150. ✆ **787/724-1875.** Free admission, but donations accepted. Tues–Sun 9am–noon and 1–4pm. Bus: B21 to Old San Juan terminal; then a trolley from the terminal to the museum.

SHOPPING ★★

U.S. citizens don't pay duty on items they purchase in Puerto Rico and bring back to the United States. However, a recently imposed 7% sales tax is on pretty much everything except prepared food. And you can find great bargains on Puerto Rico, where the competition among shopkeepers is fierce.

The streets of **Old San Juan,** such as Calle San Francisco and Calle del Cristo, are the major venues for shopping. Note, however, that some stores in Old San Juan are closed on Sunday, although on ship days, all the outlet stores are wide open for business.

Local handicrafts are few and far between these days. Your best bets are the Mundillo lace, coffee, rum, and paintings and sculptures by Puerto Rican artists. Puerto Rican *santos* are sought by collectors. These carved wooden religious idols vary greatly in shape and size, and devout locals believe they have healing powers—often the ability to perform *milagros,* or miracles.

A large and modern shopping plaza is **Plaza Las Americas,** in the financial district of Hato Rey, right off the Las Americas Expressway. The complex has more than 300 shops. The stores (and their wares) are about what you'd find in a mall back home. Prices are comparable to those stateside.

Art

If you're interested in acquiring Puerto Rican art, there are many possibilities. **Galería Botello** ★, Calle del Cristo 208 (✆ **787/723-9987**), is a contemporary Latin American gallery, a living tribute to the late Angel Botello, one of Puerto Rico's most outstanding artists. His paintings and bronze sculptures, evocative of his colorful background, are done in a style uniquely his own. On display are his and other local artists' paintings and sculptures, as well as a large collection of antique Puerto Rican *santos.*

Galería Exodo, Calle del Cristo 200B (✆ **787/725-4252**), is a specialty gallery, displaying unique art pieces from limestone and coral that may have existed at the time of the dinosaurs. The work is the creation of Radamés Rivera. One of the gallery's most noted artists is Yolanda Velasquez, who paints in an abstract style. The gallery also showcases the work of some 40 other artists.

Galería Inn, Calle Norzagaray 204–206 (✆ **787/722-1808**), specializes in the sculpture and paintings of Jan D'Esopo, a Connecticut-born artist who has spent much of her time in Puerto Rico. Many of her fine pieces are in bronze.

Coffee & Spices

Spicy Caribbee, Calle del Cristo 154 (✆ **787/725-4690**), offers the best selection of Puerto Rican coffee, which has a good reputation among aficionados. It also has the Old Town's best array of hot spicy sauces of the Caribbean.

Fashion

Nono Maldonado, 1051 Ashford Ave., midway between the Condado Plaza and the Ramada Hotel (✆ **787/721-0456**), is named after its owner, a Puerto Rican designer. Selling both men's and women's clothing, it has everything from socks to dinner jackets, as well as ready-to-wear versions of Maldonado's twice-a-year collections. **Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store,** Calle del Cristo 201 (✆ **787/722-2136**), has prices that are often 35% to 40% less than what you'd find on the U.S. mainland. You can get even greater discounts on irregular or slightly damaged garments.

Gifts, Arts & Crafts

Butterfly People ★, Calle Cruz 152, 2nd Floor (✆ **787/723-2432**), is a gallery/cafe in a handsomely restored building in Old San Juan. Butterflies, preserved forever in artfully arranged boxes, range from $20 for a single mounting to thousands of dollars for wholewall murals. Most of these butterflies come from farms around the world, some of the most beautiful from Indonesia, Malaysia, and New Guinea.

Barrachina's, Calle Fortaleza 104, between Calle del Cristo and Calle San José (✆ **787/725-7912**), claims to be the birthplace, in 1963, of the piña colada. It's a favorite of cruise ship passengers, offering one of the largest selections of linens, perfume, cigars, and gifts in San Juan. There's a patio for drinks and a separate restaurant in back, which is where the pina colada was supposedly invented.

Bóveda, Calle del Cristo 209 (✆ **787/725-0263**), is a long, narrow space crammed with exotic jewelry, clothing, greeting cards of images of life in Puerto Rico, antiques, Mexican punched tin and glass, and Art Nouveau reproductions, among other items.

Olé, Calle Fortaleza 105 (✆ **787/724-2445**), deserves an *olé.* Browsing this store is a learning experience. Practically everything comes from Puerto Rico or Latin America. If you want a straw hat from Ecuador, hand-beaten Chilean silver, Christmas ornaments, or Puerto Rican *santos,* this is the place.

Puerto Rican Arts & Crafts ★, Calle Fortaleza 204 (✆ **787/725-5596**), set in a 200-year-old colonial building, is one of the premier outlets on the island for authentic artifacts. Of particular interest are papier-mâché carnival masks from Ponce. Taíno designs inspired by ancient petroglyphs are incorporated into most of the sterling silver jewelry sold here. There's an art gallery in back, with silk-screened serigraphs by local artists, and a gourmet Puerto Rican food section with such items as coffee, rum, and hot sauces. The store also exhibits and sells small carved *santos,* laboriously carved by artisans in private studios around the island.

Ron Bacardi

No trip to Puerto Rico is complete without a tour of the **Bacardi Rum Factory,** where they show you how they make the liquid gold and ply you with so many free drinks you end up buying way more bottles than you can possibly carry home or drink. **Casa Bacardi Visitor Center,** across the bay from San Juan on Route 165 in Cantaño (✆ **787/788-8400;** www.casabacardi.org), offers free tours Monday through Saturday from 9am to 4:30pm (last tour at 4:15pm), and Sunday from 10am to 5pm (last tour at 3:45pm).

Jewelry

Bared & Sons ★, Calle Fortaleza 206 at the corner of Calle San Justo (✆ **787/724-4811**), now in its 4th decade, is the main outlet of a chain of at least 20 upscale jewelry stores on Puerto Rico. On the ground floor are gemstones, gold, diamonds, and watches. One floor up, there's a monumental collection of porcelain and crystal. It's a great source for hard-to-get and discontinued patterns from Christofle, Royal Doulton, Wedgwood, Limoges, Royal Copenhagen, Lalique, Lladró, Herend, Baccarat, and Daum.

Joyería Riviera, Calle Fortaleza 257 (✆ **787/725-4000**), is an emporium of 18-karat gold and diamonds, and the island's leading jeweler. Adjacent to Plaza de Armas, the shop has an impeccable reputation. This is the major distributor of Rolex watches on Puerto Rico.

Joseph Manchini, Calle Fortaleza 101 (✆ **787/722-7698**), displays the works of its namesake and the shop's owner. He conceives almost anything you'd want in gold, silver, and bronze. Some of Old Town's most imaginative rings, bracelets, and chains are displayed here. If the designer is in-house and you don't like what's on sale, you can design your own jewelry, including pieces made with sapphires, emeralds, and rubies.

Lace & Linens

Linen House, Calle Fortaleza 250 (✆ **787/721-4219**), has the island's best selection of napery, bed linens, and lace. Some of the more delicate pieces are expensive, but most are moderate in price. Inventories include embroidered shower curtains and lace doilies, bun warmers, placemats, and tablecloths that took workers weeks to complete. Some astonishingly lovely items are available for as little as $30. The aluminum/pewter serving dishes have beautiful Spanish-colonial designs. Prices here are sometimes 40% lower than those on the North American mainland.

SAN JUAN AFTER DARK

The Performing Arts

Qué Pasa, the official visitor's guide to Puerto Rico, lists cultural events, including music, dance, theater, film, and art exhibits. It's distributed free by the tourist office. Local English-language media also announce events on the local **WOSO** 1030 AM radio station.

Puerto Rico Coliseum, at Calle Arterial in Hato Rey (✆ **877/COLISEO** [265-4736]; www.coliseodepuertorico.com), also known as the **Jose Agrelot Coliseum,** is a modern state-of-the-art venue that hosts artists such as Sting, the Rolling Stones, Elton John, and Iron Maiden. They even have family-friendly big productions such as Disney's

Princesses on Ice. They also host fashion shows and bridal expos. During Christmas season, there's ice-skating. To find out who's playing and how to get your tickets, log on to their website or visit **TicketPop** (✆ **787/294-0001;** www.ticketpop.com).

The Centro de Bellas Artes venues—the **Luis A. Ferre Center for the Performing Arts** and **Festival Hall**—in Santurce (✆ **787/620-4444**) have classical music, opera, and dance performances. The facility is large, but the venues always feel cozy since there are multiple theaters within the center. Tickets for live performances can be purchased at **Ticket Center** in Plaza Las Americas (✆ **787/792-5000;** www.tcpr.com) or at **TicketPop** (✆ **787/294-0001;** www.ticketpop.com).

Another cultural venue in San Juan is **Teatro Tapía,** Avenida Ponce de León (✆ **787/721-0180**), across from Plaza de Colón, one of the oldest theaters in the Western Hemisphere (built around 1832). Much of Puerto Rican theater history is connected with the Tapía, named after the island's first prominent playwright, Alejandro Tapía y Rivera. Various productions, some musical, are staged here throughout the year and include drama, dance, and cultural events. You'll have to call the box office (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm) for specific information. Tickets generally start at $20 to $30.

The Club & Music Scene

Like any major metropolitan city, today's hip joint is tomorrow's empty venue. One of the fun parts of a visit to a vibrant destination like San Juan is that there are nearly endless possibilities for evening entertainment. Follow the crowd to the newest hottest salsa club, hippest jazz bar, or wildest party, or swim against the tide and scout out a cozy nook or quiet bar to make your own personal hot spot. The latest place to see and be seen is Condado's **La Concha** hotel, a renovated wonder of tropical modernism. You can have drinks and munch on tapas throughout the lobby and adjacent multilevel pool area, replete with water fountains, tropical vegetation, and designer seating spread throughout. The lobby of **El San Juan Hotel & Casino** in Isla Verde remains one of the city's best centers of nightlife. On Thursday and Friday nights, young professionals gather in the streets surrounding the **Plaza del Mercado** in Santurce, which are lined with open-air bars, many playing loud Latin music.

Brava, in El San Juan Hotel & Casino, Av. Isla Verde 6063, Isla Verde (✆ **787/791-1000**), attracts the young and privileged, local celebs, and urbane visitors who mix it up on the club's dance floor to house, reggaeton, and Latin music styles. The nightclub is designed in the form of a circle, with a central dance floor and a wraparound balcony, where onlookers and voyeurs—a 25-to-45-year-old age group—can observe the activities on the floor below. There's also a stage for special shows and events. Equipped with one of the best sound systems in the Caribbean, its location within the El San Juan allows guests the chance to visit the hotel's bars, its intricately decorated lobby, and its casino en route. Open Thursday through Saturday from 10pm until 3am. Guests of the hotel enter free; otherwise, there's a $15 cover (bus no. A5).

Club Laser, Calle del Cruz 251 (✆ **787/725-7581**), is set in the heart of Old Town near the corner of Calle Fortaleza. This somewhat jaded dance club is especially crowded when cruise ships pull into town. Once inside, you can wander over the three floors, listening to whatever generic dance music happens to be hot, with lots of additional merengue and salsa thrown in as well. Depending on the night, the age of the crowd varies. It's open Thursday to Saturday from 10pm to 4am. Women enter free before midnight on Friday and Saturday. The cover ranges from $10 to $15 (bus: Old Town Trolley).

Moments To the Mountains

The best way to catch a glimpse of the central mountains from San Juan is to head south along the Luis A. Ferré Expressway, Highway 52. You can take an afternoon drive and have dinner as the sun sets in the mountains; from some vantage points, the view goes all the way to the coast. A favorite stop is **Guavate.** Take the exit for Route 184, which winds through rolling farmland and farther up along a mountain stream flowing through the lush **Carite State Forest.** In addition to the eateries, the sector is famous for local arts and crafts, and plants and flowers that are sold from stands along the roadway. While the area began gaining fame years ago for a cluster of restaurants outside the natural reserve's main entrance, the string of *lechoneras* has now extended along the entire route from the Expressway. The best restaurants, however, have a certain rustic charm in addition to their utilitarian nature. Some look like wooden tropical chalets with blooming flowers, while others are set in front of a stream gushing through a lush mountainside. Our favorites include **La Casa del Guanime,** Rte. 184, Km 27.8 (✆ **787/744-3921**); **El Rancho Original,** Rte. 184, Km 27.5 (✆ **787/747-7296**); **Los Pinos,** Rte. 184, Km 27.7 (✆ **787/286-1917**); and **El Mojito,** Rte. 184, Km 32.9 (✆ **787/738-8888**). The truth is, however, that we have been rarely disappointed in any of the restaurants we visited.

Most have live music on weekend afternoons, so whether your taste runs from salsa to merengue to local *jíbaro* country music, or to something more contemporary may play a big role in your choice. Also, the road carves through a lush forest, and a string of restaurants along its right-hand side is set in front of the mountain stream; several have dining rooms overlooking the stream, and in the quieter ones, its gurgling is the only music you'll hear.

The atmosphere is important, but the main thing about Guavate is the food: roast pork and chicken, fried rice and pigeon peas, boiled root vegetables soaked in oil and spices, blood sausage. This is traditional Puerto Rican mountain food, but the level of the cooking keeps getting better every time we return. The roast turkey (yes, they keep it juicy) is a healthy alternative to the pig; it has recently been showing up escabeche style, drenched in olive oil, garlic and onions, roasted peppers and herbs—absolutely delicious. If you have more time, you can head farther into the mountains, to Cayey and Aibonito, charming towns with fine restaurants.

The **Nuyorican Café,** Calle San Francisco 312 (✆ **787/977-1276;** www.nuyoricancafepr.com), has live music nearly every night of the week. This place specializes in Puerto Rican and Cuban salsa and Latin jazz. There's also great pizza.

Rumba, 152 Calle San Sebastian (✆ **787/725-4407**), has a full bar up front, a huge back room with a stage for a live band, and a dance floor. It's so photogenically hip that it was selected as the site for the filming of many of the crowd scenes within *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights.* It's a great venue for live music, with excellent salsa, Latin jazz, and other tropical music. The crowd ranges from college kids to well-dressed gray beards who

remember the music back in its 1970s heyday. The common denominator is the love of the music and dance. It's open Thursday to Saturday 8pm to 4am (Old Town Trolley).

Several restaurants in San Juan have live music on certain days of the week. **The Parrot Club** has live Latin jazz and salsa Tuesdays and Sundays. **Carli Café Concierto** (✆ **787/725-4927;** www.carlicafeconcierto.com) has live jazz nightly at 9pm, while **Barrachina Restaurant** (p. 477) has a live flamenco music and dance show nightly. **La Playita** in Isla Verde hosts weekend troubadours, while Condado's **Yerba Buena,** Av. Ashford 1350, Condado (✆ **787/721-7500**) has Cuban salsa Friday.

The Bar Scene

Graffiti and business cards cover the walls of **El Batey,** Calle Cristo 101 (✆ **787/725-1787**), the Old Town's favorite dive bar for decades. There's a great jukebox and a view of the procession up and down Calle Cristo during weekend nights. Drawings of the legends of this storied watering hole are hung in its main room. There's always somebody to talk to at the bar, which draws an eccentric local crowd and independent-minded visitors. Patrons play chess and backgammon as well. The jukebox has great classic and psychedelic rock, some great Sinatra, and some priceless jazz standards by the likes of Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker.

La Sombrilla Rosa, Calle San Sebastián 154 (✆ **787/725-5656**), is a nice neighborhood bar with daily happy hours, a relaxed atmosphere with friendly staff and patrons, and good music. Weekdays, until 3pm, it serves great *comida criolla* at prices ranging from $5.50 to $8, basic stuff like steak and onions and grilled chicken, everything with rice and pink beans and *tostones.* Open from 9:30am to 3pm for lunch, then from 7pm to at least 3am nightly. Bus: Old Town Trolley.

Ficus Café, Puerto Rico Convention Bureau, 100 Convention Blvd., Miramar (✆ **787/641-7722**), is a modern, open-air cafe that has quickly become a favorite with *sanjuaneros.* It's a fabulous spot, with the illuminated Convention Center looming behind it and a huge fountain in front performing an unending dance of liquid and light, as if this were the better future to which Puerto Rico is headed. The haute tropical ambience is also at work in the tapas and entrees of chef Luis Álvarez Príncipe. The drinks taste great washing down grilled shark bites, Caribbean hummus, lobster dumplings, cinnamon chicken croquettes with mango Cole slaw, and sausages in wine with focaccia toast. The cafe is open Thursday through Saturday 5 to 11pm. There are special activities: Saturday nights have been dedicated to jazz and tapas, while Thursdays local liquor companies hold happy hours and sponsor DJs or other special activities.

Watch the sun set over San Juan from the **Wet Bar,** San Juan Water & Beach Club, Calle José M. Tartak 2 (✆ **787/728-3666**), on the roof of the Water Club boutique hotel. Lying on the 11th floor, it features jazz music and the Caribbean's only rooftop fireplace for those nippy nights in winter when you want to drink outside. The sensuous decor here includes striped zebra-wood stools, futons, pillowy sofas, and hand-carved side tables. The walls feature Indonesian carved teak panels. It overlooks the brilliant Isla Verde coastline and its palm-fringed beachfront below. Latin rhythms mix with R&B standards and world rhythms. You can order sushi under the stars or some other delicacies from a limited menu. Open Thursday to Saturday 7pm to 1am. Bus: A5.

Hot Nights in Gay San Juan

The Beach Bar, on the ground floor of the Atlantic Beach Hotel, 1 Calle Vendig (✆ **787/721-6900**), is the site of a hugely popular Sunday afternoon gathering that gets really crowded beginning around 4pm, and which stretches into the wee hours. Once

exclusively a gay gathering spot, the bar now caters to a mixed crowd. There's also an open-air rectangular bar. The Beach Bar is open daily from 10am to at least 2am (bus no. 21). **Krash Klub,** 1257 Av. Ponce de León, Santurce (✆ **787/722-1131**), is one of the town's most popular gay dance clubs, with strippers and shows. Most of the crowd is in its late 20s. Rum-based drinks, merengue, and the latest dance tunes are on tap; the place really gets going after around 10:30pm. It's open Wednesday to Saturday from 10pm to 5am. The cover is $5.

Casinos ★★

Gambling is big in Puerto Rico. Many people come here to do little more than that. As a result, there are plenty of options. Unlike European casinos, visitors don't need to flash passports or pay admission to enter. Nearly all the large hotels in San Juan, Condado, and Isla Verde offer casinos, and there are other large casinos at some of the bigger resorts outside the metropolitan areas. The atmosphere in the casinos is casual, but still you shouldn't show up in bathing suits or shorts. Most of the casinos open around noon and close at 4am. Guest patrons must be at least 18 years old to enter.

The casino generating all the excitement today is the 1,719-sq.-m (18,503-sq.-ft.) **Ritz-Carlton Casino,** Avenue of Governors, Isla Verde (✆ **787/253-1700**), the largest casino in Puerto Rico. It combines the elegant decor of the 1940s with tropical fabrics and patterns. This is one of the plushest and most exclusive entertainment complexes in the Caribbean. It features traditional games such as blackjack, roulette, baccarat, craps, and slot machines.

One of the splashiest of San Juan's casinos is at the **Old San Juan Hotel & Casino,** Calle Brumbaugh 100 (✆ **787/721-5100**), where five-card stud competes with some 240 slot machines and roulette tables. You can also try your luck at the **El San Juan Hotel & Casino** (one of the most grand), Av. Isla Verde 6063 (✆ **787/791-1000**), or the **Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino,** Av. Ashford 999 (✆ **787/721-1000**), which remains one of the city's busiest.

3 THE NORTH COAST ★

Dorado—the name itself evokes a kind of magic—is a small town with some big resorts, a world of storied luxury hotels and villas unfolding along Puerto Rico's north shore west of San Juan. For decades, the Hyatt Cerromar and Dorado Beach formed the epicenter of this world, storied resorts housed in classic quarters with world-class facilities along a stunning coastal stretch of rolling palm groves and white-sand beaches. Currently, vacation and golf clubs are operated on the former site, and there are plans to renovate the old resort buildings and reopen as a luxury resort. The **Arecibo Observatory** offers a *Star Wars*–type experience, set amid lush jungle. The **Río Camuy Cave Park** offers visitors a look at a splendid network of caves and underground rivers that twist through limestone and lush forest.

GETTING THERE

The destinations listed can be gotten to by taking Expressway 22 west from San Juan toward Arecibo. Take exit 22-A to get to **Dorado** by taking Route 165 north. The **Arecibo Observatory** lies farther west. Take Route 22 until Arecibo, then head south on Route 10. Take exit 75-B and follow the signposts along a roller-coaster journey on narrow two-lane roads. First you will go right on Route 652 and take a left on Route 651.

Proceed straight through the intersection of Route 651 and Route 635, and then turn left at the cemetery onto Route 625, which will lead you to the entrance of the observatory. The **Río Camuy Cave Park** also lies south of Arecibo. Take Route 129 southwest from Arecibo to the entrance of the caves, which are at Km 18.9 along the route, north of the town of Lares. Like the observatory, the caves lie approximately 1½ hours west of San Juan.

WHERE TO STAY

Embassy Suites Dorado del Mar Beach & Golf Resort ★ This beachfront property in Dorado lies less than 3.2km (2 miles) from the center of Dorado and within easy access from the San Juan airport. It is the only all-suite resort in Puerto Rico, and it has been a success since its opening in 2001. The property offers two-room suites with balconies and 38 two-bedroom condos. The suites are spread over seven floors, each spacious and furnished in a Caribbean tropical motif, with artwork and one king-size bed or two double beds. Most of them have ocean views of the water. Each condo has a living room, kitchen, whirlpool, and balcony. The hotel attracts many families because of its very spacious accommodations. It also attracts golfers because of its Chi Chi Rodriguez signature par-72, 18-hole golf course set against a panoramic backdrop of mountains and ocean.

Dorado del Mar Blvd. 210, Dorado, PR 00646. ✆ **787/796-6125.** Fax 787/796-6145. www.embassysuitesdorado.com. 212 units. Year-round $160–$250 suite; $260–$485 1-bedroom villa; $360–$560 2-bedroom villa. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar and grill; golf; outdoor pool; limited room service; tennis court; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, kitchenette.

WHERE TO DINE

Salitre Mesón Costero ★★ SEAFOOD The hands-down best restaurant in the Arecibo area. Taste the salt of the sea in the breeze blowing through this charming ocean-front restaurant's terrace dining area and in the smacking-fresh seafood served here. The dining room has big windows overlooking the coast, and there's also a comfortable bar. This is a great place to watch the sunset. The house specialty, *mamposteado de mariscos,* features mussels, shrimp, and freshly caught fish, octopus, or calamari in rice. Its seafood-stuffed *mofongo* platters and the whole red snapper with *tostones* are hard to beat.

Rte. 681. Km 3.8, ✆ **787/816-2020.** Reservations not necessary. $8.95–$25. MC, V. Daily noon–10pm.

HITTING THE BEACH & THE LINKS

The four Robert Trent Jones, Sr.–designed courses at the Hyatt Hacienda del Mar in Dorado match the finest anywhere. The two original courses—known as East and West—at the Hyatt Dorado Beach Country Club, 301 Highway 693 (✆ 787/796-8961 for tee times), were carved out of a jungle and offer tight fairways bordered by trees and forests, with lots of ocean holes. The somewhat newer and less noted Plantation Sugarcane and Plantation Pineapple courses at the Hyatt's Plantation Club (✆ 787/796-8915 for tee times) feature wide fairways with well-bunkered greens and an assortment of water traps and tricky wind factors. All four are par-72 courses. The longest is the Sugarcane course, at 7,119 yards. Guests of the Hyatt get preferred tee times and pay lower fees than nonguests. On the Pineapple and Sugarcane courses, guests pay $65 to $90, and nonguests pay $65 to $130. On the East and West courses, guests pay $99 to $180, and nonguests pay from $99 to $185. Golf carts at any of the courses are included, whether you play 9 or 18 holes. There are two pro shops—one for the Pineapple/Sugarcane courses and one for the East/West courses, each with a bar and snack-style restaurant. Both are open daily from 7am until dusk.

Just outside Dorado is one of Puerto Rico's best public beaches, **Cerro Gordo,** Route 690, Vega Alta (✆ **787/883-2730**). There's a $3-per-car parking fee here; hours are Wednesday through Sunday and holidays 8:30am to 5pm. There are also several beaches known for their surf breaks, the most famous being **Los Tubos** in Manatí.

4 FAJARDO & THE EAST

From San Juan, the new Roberto Sánchez Vilella Route 66 Expressway takes you to Canóvanas. You'll pass lush **El Yunque Rainforest,** the nearby town of **Río Grande,** home to luxury resorts and world-class golf courses; and **Luquillo Beach**, one of the island's best and most popular public stretches of sand. At the island's northeast corner is Fajardo, a mariner's paradise, with seven marinas and gateway to the Caribbean boater's paradise that stretches east through the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. It's also home to one of the region's most spectacular resorts, El Conquistador, and beautiful beaches and other natural wonders.

GETTING THERE

El Conquistador staff members greet all guests at the San Juan airport and transport them to the resort. Guests at the resort can take a taxi or a hotel courtesy car, or they can drive a rental car to Luquillo Beach. The Río Mar and Sol Melía resorts also provide transportation. The cost of a taxi from the San Juan airport averages around $75.

Driving from San Juan, take Route 26 or the Baldorioty de Castro Expressway East to Carolina, where you will pick up Route 66 or the Roberto Sánchez Vilella Expressway. The $1.50 toll road will take you farther along Route 3, putting you in Canóvanas. Go right (east) on Route 3. For El Yunque, exit at Route 191, a two-lane highway that heads south into the forest. Take Route 191 for 4.8km (3 miles), going through the village of Palmer. As the road rises, you enter the El Yunque Caribbean National Forest. You can stop in at the El Portal Tropical Forest Center to pick up information (see below).

Right beyond the El Yunque turnoff, on the left is the exit for Río Grande's resort area, with the **Sol Melía** and **Trump International Golf** properties. Farther down Route 3 lie Luquillo Beach and Fajardo.

WHERE TO STAY

El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa ★★ Kids El Conquistador is a destination unto itself. Its array of facilities sits on 202 hectares (499 acres) of forested hills sloping down to the sea. Accommodations are divided into five separate sections united by their Mediterranean architecture and lush landscaping. Most lie several hundred feet above the sea. At the same altitude, a bit off to the side, is a replica of an Andalusian hamlet, Las Casitas Village, which seems straight out of the south of Spain. These pricey units, each with a full kitchen, form a self-contained enclave.

A short walk downhill takes you to a circular cluster of tastefully modern accommodations, Las Olas Village. And at sea level, adjacent to an armada of pleasure craft bobbing at anchor, is La Marina Village, whose balconies seem to hang directly over the water. The accommodations are outfitted with comfortable furniture, tropical colors, and robes. All the far-flung elements of the resort are connected by serpentine, landscaped walkways and by a railroad-style funicular that makes frequent trips up and down the hillside.

One of the most comprehensive spas in the Caribbean, the Golden Door, maintains a branch in this resort. The hotel is sole owner of a "fantasy island" (Palomino Island), with

caverns; nature trails; horseback riding; and watersports such as scuba diving, windsurfing, and snorkeling. Free private ferries at frequent intervals connect the island, which is about .8km (1/2 mile) offshore, to the main hotel. There's also a 25-slip marina. The hotel operates an excellently run children's club, with activities planned daily. The resort has opened up a water park that's a hit with the kids (and the young at heart), with water slides, a lazy river, and a large pool. It's on the harbor level, right by the water, below the pool's main deck.

Av. Conquistador 1000, Las Croabas, Fajardo, PR 00738. ✆ **888/543-1282** or 787/863-1000. Fax 787/863-6500. www.elconresort.com. 918 units. Winter $299–$558 double, $499–$2,000 Las Casitas Village suites; off season $179–$399 double, $350–$1,700 Las Casitas suites. MAP (breakfast and dinner) packages are available. Children ages 16 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking $16 per day; valet parking $21. **Amenities:** 12 restaurants; 8 bars; nightclub; children's programs; golf course; health club; 7 pools; casino; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 7 Har-Tru tennis courts; dive shop; fishing; 35-slip marina; sailing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

The Fajardo Inn ★ (Finds) A good base for those visiting El Yunque, this inn is ideal for those who are seeking a location in the east and don't want to pay the prices charged at the El Conquistador (above). Lying on a hilltop overlooking the port of Fajardo, this parador evokes a Mediterranean villa with its balustrades and grand staircases. The mid-size bedrooms, most of which open onto good views, are spotless, and each has a small shower-only bathroom. The inn and its pool are handsomely landscaped. The on-site Star Fish restaurant specializes in Creole and Continental cuisine, especially fresh fish, with indoor and outdoor dining. The Blue Iguana Mexican Grill & Bar is a casual pub with good food. Coco's Park is a new pool area, with activities like a beach pool, a slide, a Jacuzzi, tennis, basketball, and miniature golf. It's separated from the rest of the hotel, so as not to disturb the relative tranquillity of the rest of the grounds.

Parcela Beltrán 52, Fajardo, PR 00740. ✆ **787/860-6000.** Fax 787/860-5063. www.fajardoinn.com. 105 units (shower only). Year-round $100–$132 double; $150–$300 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. 15-min. walk east of the center of Fajardo. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; pool; limited room service; snorkeling and diving arranged; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Gran Melia Puerto Rico ★★★ (Kids) Checking into this pocket of posh on the Miquillo de Rio Grande peninsula is the best reason for heading east of San Juan. An all-suite luxury resort, it has set new standards for comfort, convenience, and amenities along the Atlantic northeastern shoreline. Set amid gardens of 16 hectares (40 acres), it opens onto the white sands of the 1.6km-long (1 mile) shoreline of Coco Beach. From watersports to two 18-hole golf courses, the resort has everything on-site, including whirlpool baths and massage tables. Spa treatments revitalize and rejuvenate.

You can also wander the globe in the widely varied restaurants, ranging from Italian to Southeast Asian. Naturally, the chefs also prepare locally caught seafood imbued with Creole flavor. One restaurant serves only Caribbean and Puerto Rican cuisine, whereas another offers its take on contemporary California. Yet another serves teppanyaki dinners with an adjoining sushi bar. Bedrooms and suites are spacious and furnished luxuriously. There's a lot to do here: world-class golf, a full-service spa, a slew of watersports possibilities, and a Kids Club that will keep your young ones happy and busy. The staff is great at organizing water polo and beach volleyball games, and you can take salsa and merengue dancing lessons by the pool. It's a big reason why this resort is a cut above some competitors, and why you will have so much fun here. We're still talking about our stunning come-from-behind beach volleyball victory nearly a year later.

Coco Beach Blvd. 1000, Rio Grande, PR 00745. ✆ **866/436-3542** or 787/809-1770. Fax 787/809-1785. www.puertoricoparadisus.com. 582 units. Winter $610–$700 suite for 2, $760–$910 Royal Service Suite; off season $264–$314 suite for 2, $344–$424 Royal Service Suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; kids' clubs; 2 golf courses; fitness center; gym; 2 outdoor pools; casino; 24-hr. room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 3 lit tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, kitchenette, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Brass Cactus (Finds) AMERICAN/REGIONAL On a service road adjacent to Route 3 at the western edge of Luquillo, within a boxy-looking concrete building that's in need of repair, is one of the town's most popular bar/restaurants. Permeated with a raunchy, no-holds-barred spirit, this amiable spot has thrived since the early 1990s, when it was established by an Illinois-born bartender who outfitted the interior with gringo memorabilia. It's a great American-style pub, where you can hear rock 'n' roll or catch a game on television. Menu items include king crab salad; tricolor tortellini laced with chicken and shrimp; several kinds of sandwiches, burgers, and wraps; and platters of churrasco, T-bone steaks, chicken with tequila sauce, barbecued pork, and fried mahimahi. A second location has opened in Canóvanas along Highway 3 that has a children's area where they can play video games or do other activities, leaving you to eat in peace. We love the barbecue here, especially the ribs in the Jack Daniels sauce. Portions are large.

In the Condominio Complejo Turistico, Rte. 3, Marginal. ✆ **787/889-5735.** Another location at Rte. 3, Plaza Norte Centro Comercial, Loíza. ✆ **787/256-0595.** Reservations not necessary. Sandwiches $8–$11; main courses $8–$26. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

Otello's ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Here you can dine by candlelight either indoors or out. The decor is neo-Palladian. You might begin with one of the soups, perhaps pasta fagioli, or select one of the zesty Italian appetizers, such as an excellently prepared clams Posillipo. Pastas can be ordered as a half-portion for an appetizer or as a main dish, and they include homemade gnocchi and fettuccine with shrimp. The chef is known for his superb veal dishes. A selection of poultry and vegetarian food is offered nightly, along with several shrimp and fish dishes. The salmon filet in champagne sauce has beautiful accents, as does the veal chop in an aromatic herb sauce.

Rte. 987, Km 3.4, in the El Conquistador Resort. ✆ **787/863-1000.** Reservations required in winter, recommended off season. Main courses $26–$43. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

Sandy's Seafood Restaurant & Steak House ★ (Value) SEAFOOD/STEAKS/PUERTO RICAN The concrete-and-plate-glass facade is less obtrusive than that of other restaurants in town, and the cramped, Formica-clad interior is far from stylish. Nonetheless, Sandy's is one of the most famous restaurants in northeastern Puerto Rico, thanks to the wide array of luminaries—U.S. and Puerto Rican political figures, mainstream journalists, beauty-pageant winners, and assorted slumming rich—who travel from as far away as San Juan to dine here. Set about a block from the main square of the seaside resort of Luquillo, it was founded in 1984 by Miguel Angel, also known as Sandy.

Platters, especially the daily specials, are huge—so copious, in fact, that they're discussed with fervor by competitors and clients alike. The best examples include fresh shellfish, served on the half-shell; *asopaos;* four kinds of steak; five different preparations of chicken, including a tasty version with garlic sauce; four kinds of gumbos; paellas; a dozen preparations of lobster; and even jalapeño peppers stuffed with shrimp or lobster.

Calle Fernandez García 276. ✆ **787/889-5765.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$25; lunch special Mon–Fri 11am–2:30pm $5. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11am to between 9:30 and 11pm, depending on business.

EXPLORING THE AREA: GOLF, SAILING, ISLES & BEACHES

Some of the best snorkeling in Puerto Rico is in and around Fajardo. Its public beach, **Playa Seven Seas,** is an attractive and sheltered strip of sand. Nearby, reachable through a path at the western end the public beach, lie **Playa Escondido (Hidden Beach),** a small white-sand cover with coral reefs in aquamarine waters, and gorgeous **El Convento Beach,** stretching out along the miles-long undeveloped coastline between Fajardo and Luquillo. The water plunges steeply just offshore, and it is pocked with large reefs, which draw even large fish to the brink of the beach.

Luquillo Beach ★★★, Puerto Rico's finest beach, is palm dotted and crescent shaped, opening onto a lagoon with calm waters and a wide, sandy bank. It's very crowded on weekends but much better during the week. There are lockers, tent sites, showers, picnic tables, and food stands that sell a sampling of the island's *frituras* (fried fare), especially cod fritters and tacos. The beach is open from 8:30am to 5pm Wednesday through Sunday, plus holidays.

You can also snorkel and skin-dive (see below) among the living reefs with lots of tropical fish. Offshore are coral formations and spectacular sea life—eels, octopuses, stingrays, tarpon, big puffer fish, turtles, nurse sharks, and squid, among other sea creatures.

Fajardo is also known for sailing, and the best way to experience this is by taking one of the sailing/snorkeling excursions in luxury catamarans leaving from its marinas. Most have a cash bar serving drinks and refreshments, a sound system, and other creature comforts. Typically, after a nice sail, the cat will weigh anchor at different snorkeling spots and then in sheltered waters near one of the scores of small islands lying off Fajardo's coast, the perfect spot for a swim or sunbathing. Most trips include lunch, which usually is served on a beach. The boats know the best reefs and hot spots for bigger fish, and will plan the trip according to weather conditions and other variables. A huge reef extending east to Culebra protects the ocean off Fajardo's coast, which makes for calm seas with great visibility.

Inquire at your hotel desk about operators providing service there. There are many reputable companies. We and friends have all been satisfied with **Traveler Sailing Catamaran** (✆ **787/853-2821**), **East Island Excursions** (✆ **787/860-3434**), and **Catamaran Spread Eagle** (✆ **787/887-8821**). **Erin Go Bragh Charters** (✆ **787/860-4401**) offers similar day trips aboard a 15m (50-ft.) sailing ketch, which is an equally pleasurable experience.

The Río Grande–Fajardo area is quickly becoming the golf hot spot in Puerto Rico, which itself is known as the Ireland of the Caribbean because of the number and quality of its greens. Tom Kite and Bruce Besse designed two 18-hole courses for the **Trump International Golf Club Puerto Rico,** 100 Clubhouse Dr., Río Grande 00745 (✆ **787/657-2000**). You face a spectacular vista of fairways, lakes, and the Atlantic beyond, with four 9-hole loops, all with its own character, which fan out from the Caribbean's largest clubhouse. Another nice option in town is the **Bahia Beach Plantation Resort and Golf Club,** Route 187, Km 4.2 (✆ **787/857-5800**), with greens fees weekdays at $225 and weekends at $275. Robert Trent Jones, Jr., renovated the course with a breathtaking new design that was inaugurated in April 2008. It runs along lush beachfront, from the tip of Loiza River to the mouth of the Espíritu Santo River. **El Conquistador's** golf offerings are also well regarded.

Moments El Yunque Tropical Rainforest

Some 40k m (25 miles) east of San Juan lies the **Caribbean Na tional Forest** ★★★, known as El Yunque, the only tropical forest in the U.S. National Forest S ervice sy stem. I t was g iven its status b y f ormer pr esident Theodore Roosevelt. Within its 11,200 hec tares (27,664 acr es) are some 240 tr ee species (only half a do zen of which ar e found on the mainland U .S.). In this w orld of cedars and satinwood, draped in tangles of vines, you'll hear chirping birds, see wild orchids, and perhaps hear the song of the tr ee frog, the *coquí*. The entire forest is a bir d sanctuary and ma y be the last r etreat of the rar e Puerto Rican parrot.

El Yunque offers a number of **walking and hik ing tr ails,** high abo ve sea level. The most sc enic is the rugged El Toro Trail, which passes thr ough f our different forest systems en route to the 1,078m (3,536-ft.) Pico El Toro, the highest peak in the f orest. The signposted El Yunque Trail leads to three of the recreation area's most spec tacular lookouts. The Big Tree Trail is an easy walk t o panoramic La Mina Falls. Just off the main road is La Coca Falls, a sheet of water cascading down mossy cliffs. You can be fairly sure you'll encounter rain—more than 100 billion gallons of rain falls her e annually—but sho wers ar e usually brief, and there are plenty of shelters in the park.

Nearby, the Sierra P alm Interpretive S ervice C enter has maps and inf ormation, and arranges for guided tours. A 45-minute drive southeast from San Juan (near the intersection of Rte. 3 and Rte. 191), El Yunque is a popular half-day or full-day outing. Major hotels provide guided tours.

El P ortal Tropical F orest C enter, Rout e 191, R io Grande (✆ **787/888-1880**), an $18-million exhibition and information center, has 930 sq. m (10,010 sq. ft.) of exhibition space. Three pavilions offer exhibits and bilingual displays. The actor Jimmy Smits narrates a documentary called *Understanding the Forest.* The center is open daily fr om 9am t o 5pm, and it char ges an admission of $3 for adults and $1.50 for children 11 and under.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE: EXPLORING LAS CABEZAS DE SAN JUAN NATURE RESERVE ★

Better known as El Faro or "The Lighthouse," this preserve in the northeastern corner of the island, nor th of F ajardo off R oute 987, is one of the most beautiful and impor tant areas on P uerto Rico . A number of differ ent ecosystems flourish in the vicinity . Surrounded on thr ee sides b y the A tlantic O cean, the 126-hectar e (311-acr e) site encompasses for estland, mangr oves, lagoons, beaches, cliffs, offshor e cays, and coral r eefs. El Faro serves as a r esearch center for the scientific community . It's home to a v ast array of flora and fauna, including sea tur tles and other endangered species.

Laguna Grande, within the r eserve, is one of the world 's best bioluminescent bays, along with one on the neighboring island of Vieques. The presence of multitudes of tiny organisms, called dinoflagellates, in the pr otected bay is r esponsible for the nocturnal glow of its waters. They feed off the r ed mangr oves surr ounding the water . Kayaking

through the bay at night should be on your bucket list. We highly recommend **Las Tortugas Adventures,** P.O. Box 1637, Canóvanas 00729 (✆ **787/636-8356** or 787/809-0253; http://kayak-pr.com).

The nature reserve is open Wednesday to Sunday; reservations are required, so call before going. For **reservations** throughout the week, call ✆ **787/722-5882;** for reservations on Saturday and Sunday, call ✆ **787/860-2560** (reservations on weekends can be made only on the day of your intended visit). Admission is $7 for adults, $4 for seniors and children 12 to 5; children 4 and under are free. Guided tours are conducted in Spanish at 9:30, 10, and 10:30am, and in English at 2pm.

VIEQUES & CULEBRA

Long the best-kept secret of local travelers and a few in-the-know visitors from the East Coast, Puerto Rico's island municipalities Vieques and Culebra are finally getting their due. Now known as the Spanish Virgin Islands, the towns remain blissfully undeveloped. You will find sandy beaches and breathtaking coastal waters, as well as low prices. Vieques has a bit more action than Culebra, but both are places to kick back and relax.

The U.S. military controlled vast swaths of both islands for extended periods. Nature reserves have been built on former military training areas.

The **Puerto Rico Port Authority** operates ferries to Vieques and Culebra from Fajardo; the trip takes about an hour. The round-trip fare is $4.50 for adults, $2 for children. Call ✆ **800/981-2005,** or 787/863-0705.

Both islands have a number of guesthouses and finer restaurants, aimed at the most basic to the most refined tastes and budgets.

5 PONCE & THE SOUTHWEST

Puerto Rico's second-largest city, Ponce ("The Pearl of the South"), was named after Loíza Ponce de León, grandson of Ponce de León. Today it's Puerto Rico's principal shipping port on the Caribbean Sea, located 120km (74 miles) southwest of San Juan. The city is well kept and attractive, with many plazas, parks, and public buildings. It has the air of a provincial Mediterranean town. Look for the *rejas* (framed balconies) of the handsome colonial mansions.

Ponce is a city, not a beach resort, and should be visited mainly for its sights, but a mere 20 minutes west are some of Puerto Rico's finest beaches in the towns of Guánica, La Parguera, and Boquerón.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Flying from San Juan to Ponce five times a day, **Cape Air** (✆ **800/352-0714;** www.flycapeair.com), a small regional carrier, offers flights for $154 round-trip. Flight time is 25 minutes.

If you're driving, take Las Américas Expressway south to the Luis A. Ferré Expressway Highway 52, then continue south. Once you pass over the central mountain range and reach the south coast, you will continue west until Ponce. The trip takes about 1 ½ hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION Maps and information can be found at the **tourist office,** Edificio Jose Dapena (✆ **787/841-8160**). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

Bahia Salinas Beach Resort & Spa ★ (Finds) This intimate inn in Cabo Rojo, in the far southwestern corner of Puerto Rico, is bordered by a mangrove reserve, bird sanctuaries, and salt flats in the undeveloped coastal region near the Cabo Rojo Lighthouse. Salt mineral waters, similar to those of the Dead Sea, supply water for the on-site Jacuzzi and for treatments at its Cuni Spa, which gives a full range of beauty and relaxation treatments. There is ample opportunity for jogging and hiking in the natural surroundings, as well as all sorts of watersports. It is near many white-sand beaches, including the town's large public beach. Both restaurants—the fine-dining **Agua al Cuello Bistro** and **Balahoo's Bar & Grill**—are excellent. The Bistro features local music on Saturday nights. Fresh seafood is a specialty. The bedrooms are midsize to large and are furnished in the so-called "hacienda" Puerto Rican style, which means wooden colonial-style furniture and four-poster beds. The place is well run and maintained.

Rd. 301 Km 11.5, Sector El Faro, Cabo Rojo, PR 00622. ✆ **787/254-1212.** Fax 787/254-1215. www.bahiasalina.com. 22 units. Year-round $193–$205 double. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; high-speed Internet access; 2 outdoor pools; room service (noon–9pm); rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Copamarina Beach Resort ★★ (Value) Charming, low key, and discreetly elegant, the Copamarina spreads out easily along a landscaped palm grove, with gentle waters and offshore cays, a large pool, and shady grounds. The attractively decorated units have tile floors, lots of exposed wood, and louvered doors with screens that open onto large verandas or terraces. Everything is airy and comfortable. Bathrooms are large and up-to-date. The fine-dining restaurant, Alexandra, serves great food, and it's less formal than most San Juan restaurants of similar quality, and staffed by a hardworking crowd of young people. Full-service diving, watersports, and nature and sports tours are available. The hotel also offers guests all-inclusive options. We recommend renting a car and trying some of the local restaurants in Guánica and other coastal villages you will visit while staying here.

Rte. 333 Km 6.5, Caña Gorda (P.O. Box 805), Guánica, PR 00653. ✆ **888/881-6233** or 787/821-0505. Fax 787/821-0070. www.copamarina.com. 106 units. High season $235–$285 double; low season $190–$240 double; year-round $350–$450 suite, $800–$1,000 villa. AE, DC, MC, V. From Ponce, drive west along Rte. 2 to Rte. 116 and go south to Rte. 333, then head east. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; health club; 2 outdoor pools; limited room service; tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, hair dryer.

Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino ★★ On a 30-hectare (74-acre) tract of land right on the beach, this is the most glamorous hotel in southern Puerto Rico. A 10-minute drive from downtown, near the La Guancha waterfront district, the hotel is like a small village, with turquoise-blue roofs, white walls, and lots of tropical plants, ornamental waterfalls, and gardens. Rooms have tropical furnishings, ceiling fans, and terraces or balconies. Most rooms are spacious, with adequate desk and storage space, tasteful fabrics, good upholstery, and fine linen. The ground-floor rooms are the most expensive. Each is equipped with a generous tiled bathroom with a tub/shower. The food at resort restaurants is the area's most refined.

Av. Caribe 1150 (P.O. Box 7419), Ponce, PR 00716. ✆ **800/445-8667** or 787/259-7676. Fax 787/259-7674. www.hilton.com. 153 units. Year-round $199–$365 double; $450 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $10; self-parking $4.50. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; bikes; children's program; playground; 27-hole golf course; fitness center; lagoon-shaped pool ringed w/gardens; casino; night club; room service (7am–midnight); 2 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, minibar.

Mary Lee's by the Sea ★ (Finds) An informal collection of cottages, houses, and apartments are scattered across a beautiful seaside bluff. Several sizes fits groups of all numbers. Whimisically decorated and artfully erratic, the ambience is low key. A dock and kayaks are located along the mangrove-choked coastline. There are several offshore cays, and beautiful snorkeling and diving spots offshore. The Guánica Dry Forest is also nearby. The place is quiet, secluded, and appropriate for low-key vacationers looking for privacy. There isn't a bar or restaurant here, but each unit has a modern kitchen and an outdoor barbecue pit. The rooms are serviced weekly, although guests can arrange daily maid service for an extra fee.

Rte. 333 Km 6.7 (P.O. Box 394), Guánica, PR 00653. ✆ **787/821-3600.** Fax 787/821-0744. www.marylees bythesea.com. 11 units. Year-round $80–$120 double; $100–$140 studio and 1-bedroom apt; $160–$200 2-bedroom apt; $250 3-bedroom house. MC, V. From Ponce, take Rte. 2. When you reach Rte. 116, head south toward Guánica. The hotel is signposted from the road. *In room:* A/C, kitchen, no phone.

Parador Villa Parguera (Kids) Guests enjoy a view of the harbor and can take a dip in the swimming pool. The restaurant is known for its seafood dinners. Each unit has either a balcony or a terrace. Bathrooms are rather cramped but well maintained, and each has either a shower or a tub. This place is gregarious and convivial. There's a dock right outside the restaurant where boats tie up, which is convenient because the thing to do here is to hire a boat and explore the beautiful shallow coast, replete with reefs and tropical sea life.

Main St. 304 (P.O. Box 3400), Carretera 304 Km 303, La Parguera, Lajas, PR 00667. ✆ **787/899-7777.** Fax 787/899-6040. www.villaparguera.net. 74 units (all with either shower or tub). Year-round $107–$165 double. 2 children 9 or under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Drive west along Rte. 2 until you reach the junction with Rte. 116; then head south along Rte. 116 and Rte. 304. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Alexandra ★ INTERNATIONAL This is a genuinely excellent restaurant with a kitchen team turning out delectable dishes that include fried red snapper with Creole sauce, filet of mahimahi with pigeon peas, garlic shrimp with local rice, and beef parmigiana with red-wine sauce. The interior is air-conditioned but tropical in its feel, providing a welcome dose of relaxed glamour.

In the Copamarina Beach Resort, Rte. 333 Km 6.5, Caña Gorda (P.O. Box 805), Guánica. ✆ **787/821-0505.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$36. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 6–11pm.

Galloway's ★ CREOLE/CONTINENTAL The best restaurant in Boquerón is right near the center of town but set back along the water. The back dining room is on a dock over Boquerón Bay—a great spot for a fresh seafood meal as you watch one of those perfect western sunsets. This is a casual spot, but the food is first rate. Try fresh whole fried red snapper and boiled Caribbean lobster. While much of the menu is typical of the area, specializing in local cuisine and seafood, you'll also find great pasta dishes and pub fare like burgers and nachos. The bar near the entrance is a good spot to mix with locals and ex-pats and pick up tips on area activities. On weekends, there's often live music.

12 Calle José de Diego, Poblado de Boquerón, Cabo Rojo. ✆ **787/254-3302.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $8–$26. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–midnight; closed Wed.

La Casita SEAFOOD The town's most consistently reliable and popular restaurant has flourished since the 1960s in a simple wooden building. Inside, lots of varnished pine acts as a decorative foil for platters of local and imported fish and shellfish. Filets of fish

can be served in any of seven different styles; lobster comes in five. Even the Puerto Rican starchy staple of *mofongo* comes in versions stuffed with crab, octopus, shrimp, lobster, and assorted shellfish. Begin with fish chowder, a dozen cheese balls, or fish croquettes. End with coconut-flavored flan. Don't expect grand service or decor, but rather a setting where food is the focus.

Calle Principal 304. ✆ **787/899-1681.** Reservations not necessary. All main courses $8. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–10:30pm. Closed 2 weeks in Sept.

La Cava ★★ INTERNATIONAL This hive of venerable rooms within a 19th-century coffee plantation is the most appealing and elaborate restaurant in Ponce. There's a well-trained staff, old-fashioned charm, well-prepared cuisine, and a champagne bar where the bubbly sells for around $8 a glass. Menu items change every 6 weeks but might include duck foie gras with toasted brioche, Parma ham with mango, cold poached scallops with mustard sauce, a fricassee of lobster and mushrooms in a pastry shell, and grilled lamb sausage with mustard sauce on a bed of couscous. Dessert could be a black-and-white soufflé or a trio of tropical sorbets.

In the Ponce Hilton, Av. Caribe 1150. ✆ **787/259-7676.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$35. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm.

Mark's at the Meliá ★★★ INTERNATIONAL Mark French makes international haute cuisine with a Puerto Rican flair at this landmark eatery, insisting on constantly changing menus and that everything be fresh. Recent standouts include tamarind barbecued lamb with yucca mojo; grilled lobster with tomato-and-chive salad; and freshly made sausage with pumpkin, cilantro, and chicken. The corn-crusted red snapper with yucca purée and tempura jumbo shrimp with Asian salad are incredible. Desserts include vanilla flan layered with rum sponge cake and topped with a caramelized banana and bread pudding soufflé with coconut vanilla sauce.

In the Meliá Hotel, Calle Cristina. ✆ **787/284-6275.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$30. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm and 6–10:30pm; Sun noon–5 pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

More than 1,000 buildings in town have been restored to their historical stature, with Ponce's downtown area among the largest historic zones in the hemisphere. Architectural styles combine neoclassical with "Ponce Creole" and Art Deco, giving the town a distinctive ambience.

Museo de Arte de Ponce ★, Av. de las Americas 23–25 (✆ **787/848-0505**), is closed for renovations until 2010. Its permanent collection of European and Latin American art contains nearly 400 paintings, sculptures, and artworks on display at one time, with exceptional pre-Raphaelite and Italian baroque paintings. The building was designed by Edward Durell Stone and has been called the "Parthenon of the Caribbean." It closed in April 2008 and opened up a satellite gallery in San Juan's **Plaza Las Americas** shopping mall.

Most visitors head for the **Parque de Bombas**, Plaza de las Delicias (✆ **787/284-4141** or 787/284-3338). This fantastic old black-and-red firehouse was built for a fair in 1883. It's open daily 9am to 5pm; admission is free. The Victorian structure sits on **Plaza las Delicias,** the city's main square, which also contains the gorgeous marble and bronze **Lion Fountain.** Modeled after a famous fountain in Barcelona, Spain, it was made for the 1939 New York World's Fair and later purchased by the mayor of Ponce.

San Germán

San Germán, Puerto Rico's second-oldest town, has been compared to a small-scale outdoor museum. Dating from 1512, San Germán has a small but beautiful historic area, which climbs over hilly streets carved from ancient ship's ballast. There are Spanish colonial (1850s), Creole (1880s), neoclassical (1910s), Art Deco (1930s), and international (1960s) lining the streets. The highlight is the church **Iglesia Porta Coeli (Gate of Heaven)** ★ (✆ **787/892-0160**), which sits atop a hill at the eastern end of a cobble-covered square, the Parque de Santo Domingo. Dating from 1606 and built in a style inspired by the Romanesque architecture of northern Spain, this is one of the oldest churches in the New World. Sheathed in a layer of salmon-colored stucco, it contains a museum of religious art with extraordinary works. The original ceiling is hewn from palm-wood and tough ausobo-wood beams. Admission is $1. The church is open Wednesday through Sunday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 4:30pm.

Around the corner from the firehouse, a trail will lead you to the **Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe,** Calle Concordia/Calle Union, Plaza de las Delicias (✆ **787/842-0134**). Designed by architects Francisco Porrata Doría and Francisco Trublard in 1931, and featuring a pipe organ installed in 1934, it remains an important place for prayer. It's open Monday to Friday from 6am to 12:30pm, Saturday and Sunday from 6am to noon and 3 to 8pm.

El Museo Castillo Serralles ★ About 3.2 km (2 miles) north of the center of town is the largest and most imposing building in Ponce, constructed high on El Vigía Hill during the 1930s by the Serrallés family, owners of a local rum distillery. One of the architectural gems of Puerto Rico, it is the best evidence of the wealth produced by the turn-of-the-20th-century sugar boom. Guides will escort you through the Spanish Revival house with Moorish and Andalusian details. Highlights include panoramic courtyards, a baronial dining room, a small cafe, and a souvenir shop. There's the soaring Cruz del Vigía (Virgin's Cross) observation tower. Built in 1984 of reinforced concrete to replace a 19th-century wooden cross in poor repair, this modern 30m (98-ft.) structure bears lateral arms measuring 21m (69 ft.) long and an observation tower (accessible by elevator), from which you can see all of the natural beauty surrounding Ponce. Make sure to take a break in the beautifully tranquil Japanese garden, with bonsai plantings and elevated bridges running between ponds and streams.

El Vigía 17. ✆ **787/259-1774.** Admission $9 adults, $4.50 seniors, $4 children and students. (Admission includes all attractions on El Vigía Hill.) Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm. Free trolley leaving from Plaza Las Delicias de Ponce. Take Ruta Norte (northern route) 9am–9pm every day.

Hacienda Buena Vista Built in 1833, this hacienda preserves an old way of life, with its whirring water wheels and artifacts of 19th-century farm production. Once it was one of the most successful plantations on Puerto Rico, producing coffee, corn, and citrus. It was a working coffee plantation until the 1950s, and 35 of the original 202 hectares (86 of 499 acres) are still part of the estate. The rooms of the hacienda have been furnished with authentic pieces from the 1850s.

Rte. 123, Barrio Magüeyes Km 16.8. ✆ **787/722-5882** (weekdays), 787/284-7020 (weekends). Tours $7 adults, $4 children and seniors. Reservations required. 2-hr. tours Wed–Sun at 8:30am, 10:30am, 1:30pm, and 3:30pm (in English only at 1:30pm). A 30-min. drive north of Ponce, in the small town of Barrio Magüeyes, between Ponce and Adjuntas.

Tibes Indian Ceremonial Center Bordered by the Río Portuguéz and excavated in 1975, this is the oldest cemetery in the Antilles. It contains some 186 skeletons, dating from a.d. 300, as well as pre-Taíno plazas from a.d. 700. The site also includes a re-created Taíno village, seven rectangular ball courts, and two dance grounds. The arrangement of stone points on the dance grounds, in line with the solstices and equinoxes, suggests a pre-Columbian Stonehenge. Here you'll also find a museum, an exhibition hall that presents a documentary about Tibes, a cafeteria, and a souvenir shop.

Rte. 503, Tibes, at Km 2.2. ✆ **787/840-2255.** Admission $3 adults, $2 children. Guided tours in English and Spanish conducted through the grounds. Tues–Sun 9am–4pm. 3.2km/2 miles north of Ponce.

BEACHES & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

La Guancha is a sprawling boardwalk around Ponce's bayside harbor area near the Ponce Hilton. A free trolley called **Chu Chu Tren** provides transportation from downtown Ponce from 9am to 9:30pm. Several eateries are located here, and it is the scene of free concerts and other events at night. During the afternoon, families come here to fly kites or ride bicycles, and hundreds of yachts and pleasure craft tie up here, which is also home to the Ponce Yacht Club. A ferry runs from La Guancha to **Caja de Muertos,** or **Coffin Island,** an uninhabited cay that's covered with mangrove swamps and ringed with worthwhile beaches. Great snorkeling.

Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club ★★ (✆ **787/848-1000** or 787/812-2650), on the site of the Ponce Hilton & Casino, is one of Puerto Rico's finest golf courses. The 27 holes laid out in former sugar-cane fields overlook the ocean; charges are $85 ($75 for guests) to play 18 holes.

Some of Puerto Rico's best beaches are in the area. In **Guánica,** try either **Caña Gorda** or **Playa Santa.** Another must is the public beach at **Boquerón.** At **La Paguera,** the thing to do is rent a boat and visit an offshore cay or go snorkeling near huge coral reefs just offshore. Southern Puerto Rico has a great reputation among **scuba divers** because of a 20-mile continental shelf that drops off a few miles off the southern coast.

Guánica State Forest ★★ (✆ **787/821-5706**) is the best-preserved subtropical ecosystem on the planet. UNESCO has named Guánica a World Biosphere Reserve. Some 750 plants and tree species grow in the area. The Cordillera Central cuts off the rain coming in from the heavily showered northeast, making this a dry region of cacti and bedrock, a perfect film location for old-fashioned western movies. It's also ideal country for birders. Some 50% of all of the island's terrestrial bird species can be seen in this dry and dusty forest.

6 RINCON & THE NORTHWEST ★

At the westernmost point of the island—about 10km (6¼ miles) north of Mayagüez and a little over 150km (93 miles) west of San Juan—Rincón has one of the most exotic beaches on the island, drawing surfers from around the world. In and around this small fishing village are some unique accommodations. Nearby towns Aguadilla and Isabela also boast beautiful beaches, untrammeled natural areas, and great accommodations. The whole northwest corner of the island forms the Caribbean's best surfing destination.

GETTING THERE

If you rent a car at the San Juan airport, it will take approximately 2½ hours to drive here via the busy northern Route 2, or 3 hours via the scenic mountain route (no. 52) through Ponce to the south. We recommend the southern route.

In addition, there are two flights daily from San Juan to Mayagüez on **Cape Air** (✆ **800/352-0714;** www.flycapeair.com) and **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300;** www.aa.com). These flights take 40 minutes, and round-trip fare is $180. From the Mayagüez airport, Rincón is a 30-minute drive to the north on Route 2 (go left or west at the intersection with Rte. 115).

WHERE TO STAY

Horned Dorset Primavera ★★★ This is the most sophisticated hotel on Puerto Rico and one of the most exclusive and elegant small properties anywhere in the Caribbean. Set on 3.2 hectares (8 acres), it opens onto a secluded beach. Built on the massive breakwaters and sea walls erected by a local railroad many years ago, the hacienda evokes an aristocratic Spanish villa, with wicker armchairs, hand-painted tiles, ceiling fans, seaside terraces, and cascades of flowers. Accommodations are in a series of suites that ramble amid lush gardens. The decor is tasteful, with four-poster beds and brass-footed tubs (with showers) in marble-sheathed bathrooms. Rooms are spacious and luxurious, with Persian rugs over tile floors, queen-size sofa beds in the sitting areas, and fine linens and tasteful fabrics on the elegant beds. The hotel's **restaurant** is one of the finest on Puerto Rico. Rates do not include meals. The Modified American Plan (breakfast and dinner) is available at the price of $200 per night per couple.

Apartado 1132, Rincón, PR 00677. ✆ **800/633-1857** or 787/823-4030. Fax 787/823-5580. www.horned dorset.com. 55 units. Winter $496–$1,070 double, $1,385 ocean suite; holidays $696–$1,270 double, $1,385 ocean suite; summer $260–$670 double, $800 ocean suite. AE, MC, V. Children 11 and under not accepted. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; library; fitness center; 3 outdoor pools (1 infinity); limited room service; free kayaks. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer.

The Lazy Parrot Set within an unlikely inland neighborhood, this place is nonetheless one of the best spots in Rincón to stay. It's one of the only hotels on Route 413, the so-called "road to happiness" because it's the main road to town from the rest of Puerto Rico. Definitely pay the extra cost for an upstairs room if privacy is important to you. The other rooms are close to the lobby, pool, and restaurant. Smilin' Joes is one of the best eateries in Rincón, while the Rum Shack serves light fare and drinks poolside, and can be a lot of fun at night. This is one of the better-managed properties in town. Though its inland location is a drawback, you should have a car rental to explore several of the area's beaches anyway, and the pool area is quite nice.

Rd. 413 Km 4.1, Barrio Puntas, Rincón, PR 00677. ✆ **800/294-1752** or 787/823-5654. Fax 787/823-0224. www.lazyparrot.com. 21 units. Year-round $125 double value rooms; $165 double panoramic rooms. The smallest room goes for $99 single or double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; Wi-Fi Internet service in lobby; pool; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Marriott Courtyard Aguadilla Kids The whole family will love this hotel, with a pool, aquatics playground, and spacious guest rooms, near some of the prettiest beaches on the island, and right around attractions like the Camuy Caves, Arecibo Observatory, a local water park, and an ice-skating rink. Beautiful beaches ring the coast here from Isabela to the east and Rincón to the west. It's built on the old Ramey Air Force Base near a coastal suburb. Great location and facilities make a good base to explore the northwest.

West Parade/Belt Road Antigua Base R amey, Aguadilla, PR 00603. ✆ **800/321-2211** or 787/658-8000. Fax 787/658-8020. www.marriott.com. 152 units. Year-round $169–$199 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; bab ysitting; fitness c enter; Wi-Fi; 2 pools; r oom ser vice. *In r oom:* A/C, TV, I nternet access.

Rincón B each Resor t Everybody fr om r omantic lo vebirds to hipsters in logo T-shirts, to families with y oung childr en checks into this secluded hideaway . A t this beachfront resort, an open-air deck stretches along the coastline at the end of an "infinity pool." It's perhaps the most w elcoming place along the w estern coastline. The staff can help you arrange ev erything from watersport s to golf. G uests meet fello w guests in the lobby bar, and later enjoy a savory Caribbean cuisine in Brasas Restaurant, with its open-air terrace. You're given a choice of oceanvie w or poolside-vie w units, and can also r ent well-furnished one- and two-bedr oom apar tments. The decor is tr opical thr oughout, with vibrant colors.

Rte. 115 Km 5.8, Añasco, PR 00610. ✆ **866/598-0009** or 787/589-9000. Fax 787/589-9040. www.rincon-beach.com. 118 units. Winter $240–$280 double, $355 junior suit e, $459 1-bedr oom suite, $650 2-bed-room suit e; off season $205–$245 double , $315 junior suit e, $405 1-bedr oom suit e, $570 2-bedr oom suite. Rates include c ontinental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; g rill; 3 bars; bab ysit-ting; gym; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In r oom:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Internet access, kitchenettes (in suites).

Villa Mon tana B each Resor t ★ (Finds) This br eathtaking pr operty is set on a 14-hectare (35-acre) beachfront plot. The rooms and villas are spread across Caribbean-style plantation buildings, with large verandas and balconies, and boast cathedral ceilings, peaked tin r oofs, and interior cour tyards. Pastel colors and large terra-cotta tile cr eate a subdued tr opical aesthetic. There are two beautiful pools and a 4.8km (3-mile) beach, where every watersport you can imagine is possible to practice. You can also hike through tropical forests, ride horses, go biking, or use the climbing wall on the pr operty. There's a health club , spa, and spor ts facilities like basketball cour ts. Both r estaurants, E clipse and O, have quality food but are on the expensive side. The grounds are lush and beau-tiful, and there are numerous tropical birds. This is a place to kick way back.

Carretera 4466 Km 1.9, Barrio Bajuras, Isabela, PR 00662. ✆ **888/780-9195** or 787/872-9554 Fax 787/872-9553. 60 units. Year-round $200–$400 double; $400–$600 villas. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; horseback riding; basketball court; volleyball court; climbing wall; 2 pools; spa; tennis court; watersports rentals. *In room:* A/C, TV, ceiling fans, kitchenette (in villas).

WHERE TO DINE

Smiling Joe 's ★ CARIBBEAN/ASIAN FUSION With an inv entive menu and beautiful but laid-back setting, this is one of Rincón's best restaurants. Worldwide flavors are brought together for optimal impact, and diners sit in an open-air terrace with pan-oramic views of a tr opical garden. The restaurant's takes on such local classics as chur-rasco and red snapper are a delicious mix of P uerto Rican *sabor,* down-island flavorings, and Asian herbs, and w e lo ve the way it kicks up classic J amaican jer k with a bit of tamarind and mango salsa and then targets grilled mahimahi rather than chicken. B ut the plates that r eally wowed us were the pork tenderloin, filled with chorizo–red pepper stuffing and glaz ed in guav a and r um, and the almond-cr usted chicken with a goat cheese–veggie filling. We got off to a roaring start with the spicy red coconut curry mus-sels and the tempura pepper stuffed with lobster risotto .

Rd. 413 Km 4.1, Barrio Puntas, Rincón, PR 00677. ✆ **787/823-0101.** Reservations not necessary. AE, DISC, MC, V. Main courses $19–$33 dinner only. Daily 5:30–10pm.

Tamboo Tavern and Seaside Grill Restaurant AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN This tavern and restaurant at Beside the Pointe Guesthouse on Sandy Beach is the favored hangout for the young and beautiful beach crowd and surfing enthusiasts from the island and across the planet. It's a great place to eat, offering good food and a beautiful setting, no matter who you are. Beachfront dining does not get more real than this. Tables are stretched along a deck running along the beach sands and palm trees. It's basic steaks, ribs, and lots of seafood, but it's well prepared and tastes extra great while you're breathing in the sea and the salt. The mahimahi in caper sauce and grilled Caribbean lobster are both recommended, and you might want to start out with a platter of Puerto Rican appetizers. Burgers, wraps, and salads are also available for lunch and dinner.

Carretera 413 Km 4, Sandy Beach, Rincón. ✆ **888/823-8550** or 787/823-8550. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $16–$26 dinner; lunch items $6–$10. MC, V. Bar daily noon–2am; restaurant Thurs–Tues noon–9:30pm.

HITTING THE BEACH & THE LINKS

Rincón is no longer a sleepy coastal village attracting surfers and bohemian travelers. They, of course, are still coming, but a building boom has brought a wave of new condo, hotel, and luxury vacation residence projects, which has attracted more and more visitors here over the last decade. In fact, the town is beginning to worry about the pace of development and its effect on the beautiful natural resources here.

There's still a lot of space to get lost in, though, with the surrounding hills on one side, and water on the town's other three borders. With over a dozen beaches in town; great surfing, sailing, and snorkeling; and an ever-better nightlife and cultural scene, it's not hard to see why this place is so popular It continues evolving as a destination, reinforcing the fact it's one of the best stops to make in Puerto Rico.

There are 13km (8 miles) of beachfront in Rincón, and each little spot seems to have its own name: **Maria's, Indicator, Domes, The Point, Steps-Tres Palmas, Dog Man's.** The reasons behind the names are also varied. One stems from the hulk of an abandoned nuclear power plant just off the beach, another for an old man who lived nearby.

Part of the town's appeal is that it has both rough surfing beaches and tranquil Caribbean coastal areas. Along the north side of Rincón, the Atlantic coast gets large, powerful waves, while other beaches are tranquil, perfect for snorkeling. Yet many beaches provide both, depending on the time of year.

Windsurfing (and, increasingly kite-boarding) is also extremely popular here. Excellent scuba, snorkeling, parasailing, and sailing are also available in Rincón, making it one of the most active of Caribbean destinations.

Endangered humpback whales winter here, attracting a growing number of whale-watchers from December to March. The lighthouse at El Faro Park is a great place to spot these mammoth mammals.

But the Puerto Rico pipeline also includes surf breaks to the north in Aguadilla and Isabela. **Gas Chambers, Crash Boat,** and **Wilderness** rule in Aguadilla, while the preferred spots in **Isabela** include **Jobos** and **Middles.** The best time to surf is from November through March, but summer storms can also kick up the surf.

To the north, **Aguadilla** has great beaches and other natural blessings, for an active vacation experience. And it makes a good base from which to explore the area, with lots of hotels, restaurants, a good infrastructure, a fairly large mall, and lots of attractions, like a waterpark and golf course.

Isabela's coastline is also beautiful, with direct roads weaving between cliffs and white beaches, set off by dramatic rock formations and submerged coral reefs that send surf

crashing skyward. This is an area of saltwater wells and blowholes, through which dramatic eruptions of saltwater spew from submerged sea caves. **Jobos** is a large beach with a famed surf break at its western end, but kids can frolic along more protected areas along this mammoth shore. There are also guesthouses and restaurants here, and on summer and holiday weekends, it has a party atmosphere.

The northwest is a mecca for surfing aficionados, but it's also a great place to learn the sport. The **Rincón Surf School,** P.O. Box 1333, Rincón (✆ **787/823-0610**), and **Puntas Surf School,** P.O. Box 4319, HC-01 Calle Vista del Mar (✆ **787/823-3618** or 207/251-1154), are among the reputable operators. A day lesson costs $95.

One of Puerto Rico's most outstanding surfing beaches is at **Punta Higuero,** on Route 413 near Rincón. During winter, uninterrupted swells from the North Atlantic form perfect waves, averaging 1.5 to 2m (5–6½ ft.) in height, with rideable rollers sometimes reaching 4.5 to 7.5m (15–25 ft.).

Punta Borinquén Golf Club, Route 107 (✆ **787/890-2987**), 3km (1¾ miles) north of Aquadilla's center, across the highway from the city's airport, was originally built by the U.S. government as part of Ramey Air Force Base. Today it is a public 18-hole golf course, open daily from 6:30am to 7pm. Greens fees are $22 per round; a golf cart that can carry two passengers rents for $34 for 18 holes. A set of clubs can be rented for $15. The clubhouse has a bar and a simple restaurant.

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Saba

Saba's siblings, such as St. Maarten, are known for gambling casinos, beaches, and plush resorts, and little St. Eustatius remains locked in a time warp. Saba has no casinos, no beaches to speak of, and is a bit of a sleepy backwater—and therein lies its charm.

Saba is different from all other islands in the Caribbean, in that it is the top of a mountain (the rest of the landmass is undersea), with winding mountain roads and little villages clinging to its sides. More and more divers are flocking here to the last of the "virgin" dive locales, with some of the best sites in the Lesser Antilles.

An extinct volcano with no flat land, cone-shaped Saba is 13 sq. km (5 1/4 sq. miles) of rock carpeted with lush foliage-like orchids, giant elephant ears, and Eucharist lilies. At its zenith, Mount Scenery, it measures 870m (2,854 ft.). Under the sea, the volcanic walls continue a sheer drop to great depths.

Unless you're a serious hiker or diver, you might confine your look at Saba to a day trip from St. Maarten. If you're a self-sufficient type who demands almost no artificial amusement, then sleepy Saba might be your hideaway.

One of the smallest islands of the Netherlands Antilles, Saba is 240km (149 miles) east of Puerto Rico and 145km (90 miles) east of St. Croix. Most visitors fly from St. Maarten, 45km (28 miles) to the north.

The official language of Saba is Dutch, but because so many English missionaries and Scottish seamen from the Shetland Islands settled here, Saba has always been English speaking. All those European settlers have resulted in a population that is 60% Caucasian, many with red hair and freckled fair skin.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Hell's Gate:** "The Road," which many engineers said could never be built, makes 14 hairpin turns as it climbs to the stars—rather, 610 vertical meters (2,001 ft.) to the settlement of Hell's Gate, one of the loftiest in the Caribbean.
- **The Bottom,** Saba's capital, is the smallest such settlement in the Caribbean, lying in the valley 250m (820 ft.) above sea level.
- **Mount Scenery:** Rising to a summit of 870m (2,854 ft.), Mount Scenery is the highest spot on the island and, in fact, the loftiest spot in the greater Kingdom of the Netherlands.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Saba Tourist Board, located in the heart of Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2231;** fax 599/416-2350; www.sabatourism.com), is open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE You'll have to get to St. Maarten before you can get to Saba. **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) flies nonstop from New York's JFK; **Continental Airlines** (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) flies out of Newark. From Queen Juliana Airport on St. Maarten, you can take the 12-minute hop to Saba on **Winair** (✆ **866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/545-4237; www.fly-winair.com). There are at least five flights per day, depending on volume; fares are from $166 round-trip.

Saba's **Juancho Yrausquin Airport** (✆ **599/416-2255**) is one of the shortest landing strips in the world, stretching only 394m (1,292 ft.) along the aptly named Flat Point, one of the few level areas on the island.

Many guests at hotels on St. Maarten fly over to Saba on the morning flight, spend the day sightseeing, and then return to St. Maarten on the afternoon flight. Winair connections can also be made on Saba to both St. Kitts and St. Eustatius.

BY BOAT You can also take a high-speed ferry from St. Maarten's Pelican Marina at Simpson Bay to Fort Bay on Saba; you'll arrive in about an hour. ***The Edge*** (✆ **599/544-2640**) departs Wednesday to Sunday at 9am, returning at 5pm, making a day trip to

Saba possible. Sometimes the waters are turbulent, making passengers seasick. The round-trip fare is $65 per person or $45 one-way if returning on a different day than your departure. There is also a port fee of $5 per passenger.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Taxis meet every flight. Up to four people are allowed to share a cab. The fare from the airport to Windwardside is $10, or $16 to The Bottom. A taxi from Windwardside to The Bottom costs $8. There is no central number to call for service. Taking a taxi ride on Saba is likely to involve you in local life—it's decidedly informal here. Don't be surprised if your driver interrupts the trip to rush a sick child to a plane to be flown to a hospital or pick up an old man to take him up the hill because he'd fallen and hurt himself.

BY RENTAL CAR None of the major U.S. firms operates on Saba, partly because most visitors opt to get around by taxi. In the unlikely event that you should dare to drive a car on Saba, locally operated companies include **Caja's Car Rental,** The Bottom (✆ **599/416-2388**), starting at $45 to $55 per day and including a full tank of gas and unlimited mileage. Some insurance is included in the rates, but you might be held partly responsible in the event of an accident. Because of the very narrow roads and dozens of cliffs, it's crucial to exercise caution when driving on Saba. Note that traffic moves on the right.

BY HITCHHIKING Hitchhiking has long been an acceptable means of transport on Saba, where everybody seemingly knows everybody else. And if you hitchhike, you'll probably get to know everybody else, too.

ON FOOT The traditional means of getting around on Saba—walking—is still much in evidence. Just don't do the walk from The Bottom up to Windwardside unless you're fairly fit and have shoes with good traction, particularly after a recent rain.

Fast Facts Saba

Banks The main bank on the island is **First Caribbean International,** Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2216**), open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 3:30pm. The **Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago** is another option. It's located at Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2454** or 599/416-2453) and is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 3:30pm.

Currency Saba, like the other islands of the Netherlands Antilles, uses the **Netherlands Antilles guilder (NAf),** valued at 1.77 NAf to US$1 (1 NAf = 56¢). However, U.S. money is accepted by almost everybody here. *As such, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs You don't have to go through Customs in Saba; it's a free port.

Documents The government requires that all visitors have a passport, plus a return or ongoing ticket.

Electricity Saba uses 110-volt AC (60 cycles), so U.S.-made appliances don't need transformers or adapters.

Emergencies Call ✆ **599/416-2410** in case of fire and ✆ **599/416-3289** for an ambulance. The police can be reached by calling ✆ **599/416-3237.**

Hospital Saba's hospital complex is the **A. M. Edwards Medical Centre,** The Bottom (✆ **599/416-3239** or 599/416-3289).

Language The official language is Dutch, but English is widely spoken.

Pharmacies Try **The Pharmacy,** A. M. Edwards Medical Centre, The Bottom (✆ **599/416-3289**), open Monday to Friday 8am to noon and 2 to 5pm.

Safety Crime on this island, where everyone knows everyone else, is practically nonexistent. But who knows? A tourist might rob you. It is always wise to safeguard your valuables.

Taxes The government imposes a 5% tourist tax on hotel rooms, plus a 3% "turnover tax" on all rooms. If you're returning to St. Maarten or flying over to Statia, you must pay a $6 departure tax. If you're going anywhere else, a $20 tax is imposed. A service charge of 10% to 15% will be added to your restaurant bill.

Telephone To call Saba from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **599** (the country code for the Netherlands Antilles), and finally **416** (the area code for all of Saba) and the four-digit local number. To make a call within Saba, only the four-digit local number is necessary.

Time Saba is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, 1 hour earlier than Eastern Standard Time. When the United States is on daylight saving time, clocks on Saba and the U.S. East Coast read the same.

Water The water on Saba is generally safe to drink.

Weather Temperatures from January to April average 69°F to 83°F (21°C–28°C). The rest of the year, temperatures range from 70°F to 88°F (21°C–31°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

If you're looking for a hotel on the beach, you've come to the wrong island. Saba's only beach, Well's Bay Beach, is tiny and can be reached from most hotels only via a $10 taxi ride.

Cottage Club ★ Small, intimate, and immersed in Saba's architectural and aesthetic traditions, this hotel complex occupies about .2 hectares (1/2 acre) of steeply sloping and carefully landscaped terrain, a 2-minute walk from the center of the island's capital. Designed of local stone, and set at an altitude above the other buildings of the complex, the lobby is filled with a collection of island antiques and lace curtains.

Each medium-size studio apartment has a semiprivate patio, a living-room area, and a queen-size bed. These units are housed in clapboard replicas of antique cottages—two studios per cottage—with red roofs, green shutters, white walls, and yellow trim. The interiors are breezy, airy, and comfortable. If you'd like a room with an ocean view, request nos. 1 or 2. There's no bar or restaurant on the premises, but a nearby supermarket will deliver supplies on request.

Windwardside, Saba, N.A. ✆ **599/416-2486** or 599/416-2386. Fax 599/416-2476. www.cottage-club.com. 10 cottages. Winter $118 studio apt for 2; off season $105 studio apt for 2. 3rd and 4th person $25 each. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. Dive packages available. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, kitchenette.

Ecolodge Rendez-Vous This nature lover's retreat is buried deep in the rainforest off the Crispeen Trail. A small, family-operated eco-resort, it is enveloped by lush vegetation and is the perfect hideaway, especially since its accommodations can be kept mosquito-free. The owners prefer to say that they are not a hotel, but a lifestyle based on a close encounter with nature, with an aim of "rediscovery of a sense of self." Accommodations are spread across nearly a dozen small Saban-style cottages, each with a private deck and hammock. You live as Sabans used to—that is, by candlelight after dark. The lodge is solar powered, coming with "sun showers." Most of the vegetables served in the restaurant, and certainly the herbs, are home grown, as are the fruits, such as Surinam cherries and bitter skin oranges.

Crispeen Track, Windwardside, Saba. ✆ **877/416-3888** or 599/416-3348. Fax 599/416-3299. www.ecolodge-saba.com. 11 units. Winter $85 double; off season $65 double. Add $10 for kitchenette. Dive packages available. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; hot tub. *In room:* Kitchenette (in some), no phone.

El Momo ★ Finds The most eco-friendly place to stay on island is this cluster of small wooden cottages enveloped by tropical gardens 475m (1,508 ft.) up Booby Hill. The Robinson Crusoe–like nature retreat is about a 10-minute walk from Windwardside. Decorated with original artwork, cottages are filled with handmade wooden furniture and colorful fabrics. In 2008, the resort became the first 100% smoke-free hotel on Saba. The owners make their own banana rum and vanilla rum liqueurs, which you can purchase on-site.

Booby Hill, Windwardside, Saba, N.A. ✆ **599/416-2265.** www.elmomo.com. 7 cottages, 5 with bathroom. Winter $60 double without private bathroom, $80–$100 double with private bathroom; off season $50 double without private bathroom, $70–$90 double with private bathroom. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Vegetarian snack bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* Kitchen (in some), no phone.

Gate House ★ Finds In an amusingly named village, Hell's Gate, Lyliane and Michel Job welcome you to their bright little guesthouse. All the comfortably and tastefully furnished rooms are in a bright West Indian motif and have a well-maintained private bath. Families may prefer the Gate House Cottage, which can house a couple with a child and even includes a fully equipped kitchen and its own pool. Balconies surrounding the house open onto scenic views. Yet another rental is a luxurious four-bedroom villa with spacious rooms, three bathrooms, a fully equipped kitchen, and a private pool along with deck, balconies, and patios galore. The Gate House Café (p. 505) has one of the finest chefs on island.

Hell's Gate, Saba, N.A. ✆ **877/456-5198** in the U.S., or 599/416-2416. Fax 599/416-2550. www.sabagatehouse.com. 7 units. Winter $135 double, $155 cottage, $325–$445 villa for up to 4; off season $125–$145 double or cottage, $295–$410 villa for up to 4. Rates include continental breakfast. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 outdoor pools. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV (in villa), kitchen/kitchenette (in some), hair dryer, no phone.

Juliana's This hostelry is set on a hillside, and each guest room is modern, immaculate, and simply but comfortably furnished. All have access to a sun deck and balconies opening onto beautiful views of the Caribbean, except nos. 1, 2, and 3, which are in the rear. Opt for one of the upper-level rooms (nos. 7, 8, or 9), as they offer the best views. Also available are a two-and-a-half-room apartment, complete with kitchenette; and a renovated original Saban cottage, with two bedrooms, a spacious living room, a dining room, a TV, and a fully equipped kitchen.

Windwardside, Saba, N.A. ✆ **866/783-3319** or 599/416-2269. Fax 599/416-2389. www.julianas-hotel.com. 12 units. Winter $135–$145 double, $170 apt, $220 cottage; off season $120–$130 double, $155 apt, $200 cottage. Extra person $30. Dive packages available. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi; babysitting. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, kitchen/kitchenette (in some), minibar, fridge, hair dryer, no phone.

Queen's Gardens Resort ★ It's outclassed by Willard's of Saba (see below), but this is still a classy joint. One of the most massive engineering projects in Saba's recent memory included the placement of a rock-sided terrace on this plot of forested, steeply sloping land 360m (1,181 ft.) above the sea. The result is a well-conceived cluster of white-walled, red-roofed bungalows angled for sweeping views and surrounding the semicircular edges of the largest pool on Saba, with north-facing views over the island's capital and the sea. From a distance, the compound evokes a fortified village in Iberia. All accommodations are suites, with a combination of Dutch colonial and Indonesian furnishings. The most elegant place to stay is a villa for up to six guests. Most units are split-level, with large living rooms; all have kitchenettes and fine king-size or queen-size beds. A few suites have a Jacuzzi overlooking the coast and sea.

1 Troy Hill Drive (P.O. Box 4), The Bottom, Saba, N.A. ✆ **599/416-3494.** Fax 599/416-3495. www.queensaba.com. 12 units. Year-round $250–$425 double; $895 villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; dive shop; babysitting. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, kitchen, minibar.

Scout's Place Right in the center of Windwardside, this funky dive resort is hidden from the street and set on the ledge of a hill. With only 13 rooms, it's still the second-largest inn on the island. The old house has a large, covered, open-air dining room, where every table has a view of the sea. It's informal, with a decor ranging from Surinam hand-carvings to red-and-black wicker peacock chairs to silver samovars. Guest rooms open onto an interior courtyard filled with flowers, and each has a view of the sea. The rooms are small and rather plain, except for the four-poster beds; many have linoleum floors and tiny TVs. The best units are on the lower floor, as they have French doors opening onto balconies fronting the ocean. You can also opt for a two-bedroom cottage with living room and full kitchen.

Windwardside, Saba, N.A. ✆ **866/656-7222** in the U.S., or 599/416-2740. Fax 599/416-2741. www.saba-divers.com. 13 units. Winter $109–$125 double, $143–$205 cottage; off season $96–$119 double, $143–$185 cottage. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; dive shop. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge.

Willard's of Saba ★★ This is Saba's only luxurious hotel. The hotel opened in 1994 and immediately began to attract large numbers of visitors, among them celebrities who might not have set foot on the island before. Guest rooms have *Casablanca*-like ceiling fans; furnishings are not of the highest standard but are still comfortable. Because the hotel is in a garden high on a hill overlooking the island's southwestern coastline, each room has sweeping views and almost constant ocean breezes. Much care went into the design, making use of everything from cedar from the U.S. Northwest to original island paintings. The least expensive units are the two rooms in the main building, which are quite spacious. The other five units are in a concrete building designed in the island's distinctive style, with red roofs, white walls, and green shutters. For the most luxurious living, ask for the VIP Room overlooking the pool, with its own large balcony. Lower cliff-side units are the smallest but have good views from their private balconies. Honeymooners prefer the Room in the Sky.

The hotel restaurant and its bar are recommended (p. 506).

Booby Hill, Saba, N.A. ✆ **800/504-9861** in the U.S., or 599/416-2498. Fax 599/416-2482. www.willardsofsaba.com. 7 units. Winter $400 double, $700 suite; off season $350 double, $500 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children 12 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; fitness center; Jacuzzi; room service. *In room:* Ceiling fan, no phone.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Brigadoon Pub & Eatery ★ CARIBBEAN/AMERICAN The island's best restaurant is in this century-old colonial building with an open front. Your hosts, Trish Chammaa and her husband, Michael (he labors over the hot stove), are virtual legends on the island. Whenever possible, local ingredients are used, including herbs, spices, fruits, and farm-fresh vegetables. Fresh local fish and lobster (prices vary) are generally the best things to order. Steaks are flown in weekly. Other recommended dishes include mahimahi (dolphin) with citrus-butter sauce and Thai shrimp in a coconut-curry sauce. The closing time listed below is not hard and fast. The owner closes the joint "whenever all the customers leave," even if it's really late.

Windwardside. ✆ **599/416-2380.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $10–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6:30–9:30pm.

Gate House Café ★ Finds FRENCH/SABAN Saba has never been known for its cuisine, but the chefs who run this place are masters. Michel Job, a self-taught cook, obtains fresh vegetables and seafood from local vendors, but 90% of the food items are imported from France. The menu changes regularly, but we recommend the bisque appetizer made from fresh Saban lobster and flambéed with cognac. A classic French soup is served with Swiss cheese, and a coconut soup is made from onions, leeks, and tania (a locally grown root vegetable). Seafood gets top priority here, especially the grilled mahimahi and the tuna steak coated in mild pepper. Savory meat offerings include chicken breast sausage in a mushroom sauce and aged beef tenderloin generously coated with Jamaican cracked black pepper and flambéed in cognac. Ask about the freshly made dessert of the day. There is also an impressive wine list.

Hell's Gate. ✆ **599/416-2416.** Reservations required. Main courses $17–$29. DISC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–8:30pm.

King's Crown ★ INTERNATIONAL The on-site restaurant at Queen's Gardens Resort (p. 504), this place is not only the most romantic on island, but also surfaces near the top in quality of produce and skill in preparation. After the dinner plates are hustled away, diners dance under the moonlit night when not enjoying musical evenings or parties around the pool. Some of the chef's inventive dishes are the best on island, notably lobster champagne or duck breast sautéed in guavaberry liqueur. The sautéed Queen's Garden chicken is another specialty. It's stuffed with olives and pesto, and wrapped with bacon and served with a creamy raisin sauce. The grilled lamb chops are given extra zest with a cranberry-thyme sauce.

Queen's Garden Resort, 1 Troy Hill Dr., The Bottom. ✆ **599/416-3494.** Reservations required. Main courses $18–$29. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm; Wed–Mon 5–10pm.

My Kitchen ★ Finds INTERNATIONAL/MEDITERRANEAN In the center of Windwardside, this rooftop restaurant prepares and serves food with considerable skill. The atmosphere is one of the more inviting on island, with tropical plants and a rustic deck overlooking the valley, the vegetable garden, a gazebo, and the mountains in the

distance. A bakery is attached, and many islanders visit during the day for coffee and some of the more delectable baked goods in Saba. At night, tasty dishes emerge from the kitchen's grills, ovens, and pots, including pastas, chicken, steaks, and burgers. The latest owner, a Zealander from the Netherlands, wants to retain the loyalty of the former patrons of YIIK, which stood on this spot. He is retaining much of the old menu but also adding a number of fusion dishes, many from the Mediterranean.

Windwardside. ✆ **599/416-2539.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$30. MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6–8:30pm.

Rainforest Restaurant ★ Finds CARIBBEAN Getting here is half the fun. The restaurant lies at the end of a mountain road. You take a 10-minute hike down the Crispeen Track via the Mt. Scenery Trail to come to the oasis in a rainforest. At the heart of the previously recommended Ecolodge, the restaurant serves the freshest produce on island. Most of the vegetables, certainly the herbs, are home grown, including fruits such as Surinam cherries and bitter skin oranges. Outdoor seating is provided on a terrace overlooking a fish pond. Start, perhaps, with a jerk chicken and papaya salad. For a main course, you might order such tasty dishes as red curry coconut shrimp or almond-crusted snapper, perhaps a steak kebab. Every Tuesday evening, an Indonesian Rifstafel night is held, with a combination of about a dozen different dishes. The homemade ice creams are prepared from fresh fruits on the island, including soup sop and mango.

In the Ecolodge Rendez-vous, Crispeen Track, Windwardside. ✆ **599/416-3888.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$15. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm; Tues–Sun 7–9pm.

Scout's Place INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN This is a popular dining spot among day-trippers to the island, so you should have your driver stop by early to make a reservation for you. Lunch is simple, good, and filling, and the prices are low. The sandwiches are the island's best, made with fresh-baked bread. Locals come from all over the island to sample them. Dinner is more elaborate, with tables placed on an open-sided terrace, the ideal spot for a drink at sundown. Fresh seafood is a specialty, as is curried goat. Each day, a selection of homemade soups is also offered, perhaps pumpkin or pigeon pea. Scout's chef is proud of his ribs as well. Fresh local fruits and vegetables are used whenever possible. Even if you don't like the food, it's the best place on the island to catch up on the latest gossip.

In the Scout's Place hotel, Windwardside. ✆ **599/416-2740.** Reservations recommended. Lunch $10–$18; fixed-price dinner $10–$28. MC, V. Daily 7:30am–11pm.

Willard's of Saba ★ ANTILLEAN/ASIAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant features a breezy island decor, a sweeping high-altitude view of Saba's southeastern coastline, and some of the freshest fish and lobster on the island. Most of the catch featured on the "island-inspired" menu comes from the boats of local fisher folk. Entrees change with the availability of the ingredients, although grouper, snapper Florentine, and lobster thermidor are usually featured, as are pork loin with a champagne-and-caper sauce, and Chinese-style beef with oyster sauce. You can cool down with a crepe stuffed with banana and jackfruit, then fried and served with homemade ice cream. The restaurant is nearly always referred to as **Corazon's,** taking this nickname from Corazon de Johnson, manager and chef. Although born in the Philippines, she doesn't limit her inspiration to her homeland, but roams the world for ideas for her fusion cuisine. There's a pleasant bar where you can enjoy a round of before-dinner drinks.

In the Willard's of Saba hotel, Booby Hill. ✆ **599/416-2498.** Reservations required. Main courses $22–$35. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

4 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

If it's beaches you're seeking, forget it. It's better to remain on St. Maarten. Sports here are limited primarily to diving and hiking.

DIVING & SNORKELING ★★

Circling the entire island and including four offshore under water mountains (seamounts), the **Saba Marine Park,** Fort Bay (✆ **599/416-3295;** www.sabapark.org), preserves the island's coral reefs and marine life. The park is zoned for various pursuits. The all-purpose recreational zone includes **Well's Bay Beach,** Saba's only beach, but it's seasonal, disappearing with the winter seas only to reappear in late spring. There are two anchorage zones for visiting yachts and Saba's only harbor. The five dive zones include a coastal area and four seamounts, 2km (1¼ miles) offshore. In these zones are more than two dozen marked and buoyed dive sites and a snorkeling trail. You'll plunge into a world of coral and sponges, swimming with parrotfish, doctorfish, and damselfish.

The **snorkel trail** is not for the neophyte. It can be approached from Well's Bay Beach but only from May to October. Depths of more than 450m (1,476 ft.) are found between the island and the seamounts, which reach a minimum depth of 27m (89 ft.). There's a $3-per-dive visitor fee. Funds are also raised through souvenir sales and donations. The park office at Fort Bay is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm, Saturday from 8am to noon, and Sunday from 10am to 2pm. There's a fully operational decompression chamber/hyperbaric facility in the Fort Bay harbor.

Sea Saba Dive Center, Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2246;** www.seasaba.com), has nine experienced instructors eager to share their knowledge of Saba Marine Park and its famous deep and medium-depth pinnacles, walls, spur-and-groove formations, and giant boulder gardens. Their two 12m (39-ft.), uncrowded boats are best suited for a comfortable day on Saba's waters. Daily boat dives are made between 9:30am and 1:30pm, allowing a relaxing interval for snorkeling. Courses range from resort through dive master. Extra day and night dives can be arranged. A one-tank dive costs $65; a two-tank dive costs $110.

Saba Deep Dive Center, P.O. Box 22, Fort Bay, Saba, N.A. (✆ **866/416-3347** or 599/416-3347; www.sabadeep.com), is a full-service dive center that offers scuba diving, snorkeling, equipment rental/repair, and tank fills. Mike Myers and his staff of NAUI and PADI instructors and dive masters make an effort to provide personalized service and great diving, whether you're an old pro or a first-timer. A certification course goes for $250 to $395. A single-tank dive costs $50; a two-tank dive, $100. Night dives are $75. The center is open daily from 8am to 5pm. On the same property, the **In Two Deep Restaurant** and the **Deep Boutique** offer air-conditioned comfort, a view of the harbor area and the Caribbean Sea, good food and drink, and a wide selection of clothes, swimwear, lotions, and sunglasses. The restaurant is open for breakfast and lunch.

HIKING ★

Saba is as beautiful above the water as it is below. It offers many trails, for both beginners and more experienced hikers, all reached by paths leading off from "The Road." There's nothing more dramatic than the hike to the top of **Mount Scenery,** a volcano that erupted 5,000 years ago. Allow at least 3 hours and take your time climbing the 1,064 sometimes-slippery chiseled-rock and concrete steps up to the cloud-reefed mountain. You'll pass through a lush rainforest of palms, bromeliads, elephant ears, heliconia,

Moments **A Roller-Coaster Road**

Regardless of what road you travel in the Caribbean, there's nothing to compare with the 31km (19-miles) of **The Road.** Its hairpin curves climb from the little airport up the steep, steep hillside to the lush interior of Saba. In days of yore, engineer after engineer came to the island and told Sabans they'd have to forget ever having a road on their volcanic mountain. However, Josephus Lambert Hassell, a local, had high hopes. In the 1930s he began to take a correspondence course in engineering while he plotted and planned The Road. Under his guidance, his fellow islanders built The Road over the next 2 decades or so. In recent years, it's been necessary to reconstruct The Road, but it's there waiting to thrill you. At the top of The Road stands Windwardside, at 541m (1,774 ft.), Saba's second-largest settlement and the island's midpoint.

mountain raspberries, lianas, and tree ferns. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands climbed these steps in her pumps and, upon reaching the summit, declared: "This is the smallest and highest place in my kingdom." On a clear day, you can see the neighboring islands of St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, and even St. Barts. Ask your inn to pack you a picnic lunch, and bring water. The higher you climb, the cooler it grows, a drop of about 1°F (.5°C) every 98m (321 ft.); on a hot day, this can be quite an incentive. It's recommended that you seek guidance from the **Saba Conservation Foundation,** Fort Bay (✆ **599/416-3295**), which provides data on 18 botanical trails. A full-day hike through Mount Scenery costs from $50 per person.

One of our favorite hikes—with some of Saba's most panoramic views—is the **Crispeen Track,** reached from Windwardside as the main road descends to the hamlet of St. John's. Once at St. John's, the track heads northeast going through a narrow but dramatic gorge covered in thick tropical foliage. The vegetation grows lusher and lusher, taking in banana and citrus fields. As you reach the higher points of a section of the island called **Rendezvous,** the fields are no longer cultivated and begin to resemble a rainforest, covered with such flora as philodendron, anthurium, and the wild mammee. Hiking time to Rendezvous is about an hour.

If you don't want to explore the natural attractions of the island on your own, the **Saba Tourist Office,** P.O. Box 527, Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2231**), can arrange tours of the tropical rainforests. Jim Johnson (✆ **599/416-2630**), a fit, 40-ish Saban guide, conducts most of these tours and knows the terrain better than anyone else on the island. (He's sometimes difficult to reach, however.) Johnson will point out orchids, golden heliconia, and other flora and fauna, as well as the rock formations and bromeliads you're likely to see. Tours can accommodate one to eight hikers and usually last about half a day; depending on your particular route and number of participants, the cost can be anywhere from $50 to $90. Actual prices, of course, are negotiated.

5 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The first jeep arrived on Saba in 1947. Before that, Sabans went about on foot, climbing from village to village. Hundreds of steps had been chiseled out of the rock by the early Dutch settlers in the 1640s.

The villages here are storybook affairs: Tidy white houses cling to the mountainside, and small family cemeteries adjoin each dwelling. Lace-curtained, gingerbread-trimmed cottages give a Disneyland aura.

Past villages, The Road goes over the crest to **The Bottom.** Derived from the Dutch word *botte,* which means "bowl-shaped," this town is nestled on a plateau 250m (820 ft.) above the sea, which is surrounded by rocky volcanic domes. It's also the official capital of Saba, a charming Dutch village of chimneys, gabled roofs, and gardens.

From The Bottom, you can take a taxi up the hill to the mountain village of **Windwardside,** perched on the crest of two ravines about 541m (1,774 ft.) above sea level. This village of red-roofed houses, the second most important on Saba, is the site of the two biggest inns and most of the shops. A little beyond Windwardside, a set of 1,064 hand-hewn steps scales the side of **Mount Scenery** ★★, going through a rainforest where wild orchids bloom along with giant elephant ears, palms, ferns, and mangoes.

From Windwardside, you can climb steep steps cut in the rock to yet another village, **Hell's Gate,** teetering on the edge of a mountain. There's also a serpentine road from the airport to Hell's Gate, where you'll find the island's largest church. Only the most athletic climb from here to the lip of the volcanic crater.

6 SABA AFTER DARK

If you want to do a lot of partying on your vacation, you might want to consider another island. Saba is known for its tucked-away, relaxed, and calm atmosphere. However, don't be too dismayed; there's still something to do at night.

Scout's Place, Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2740**), is the place to hang out if you want to relax, enjoy a drink, and have a laugh, especially on weeknights. A hotel and restaurant, Scout's Place moonlights as a local watering hole, entertaining tourists and locals with a distinct Saban/Caribbean atmosphere. You won't do much dancing (well, that actually depends on how much you've had to drink), but it's much better than the weeknight alternative: nothing. It's open daily from 7am to around 11pm (but actual closing hours depend on business or the lack thereof). There's no cover.

A British-style pub with a nautical motif, **Saba's Treasure,** Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2819**), is the new social center of the island. Robbie Lynn, a local artist, designed and built the structure himself. He decorated the walls with old magazine articles about Saba's maritime past. Expats and visitors alike flock here at night, mainly for the beer but also for the well-stuffed sandwiches and stone-oven pizzas.

If you'd like to combine the ambience of a British pub with a saloon that might have been found in the Arizona Badlands, head for **Swinging Doors,** Windwardside (✆ **599/416-2506**), Saba's good ol' boy watering hole, where locals start consuming the brew at 9am and keep drinking until late at night (no set closing hour). If you get hungry along the way, go for the jalapeño poppers.

19

St. Barthélemy

Just bring an armored truck with you when it comes time to pay the bill, and you'll have a grand time on this island of the rich, famous, and often most beautiful people.

For luxury with minimum hassle, albeit at a high price tag, St. Barts is rivaled only by Anguilla. It's the ultimate in sophistication in the Tropics: chic, rich, and very Parisian. Forget historic sites or ambitious watersports programs. You go to St. Barts for the relaxation, the French cuisine, the white-sand beaches, and the ultimate in comfort.

New friends call it "St. Barts," while old-time visitors prefer "St. Barths." Either way, it's short for St. Barthélemy (San Barte-le-*mee*), named by its discoverer Columbus in 1493. For the most part, St. Bartians are descendants of Breton and Norman fisher folk. Many are of French and Swedish ancestry, the latter evident in their fair skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. The mostly Caucasian population is small, about 6,500 living in some 21 sq. km (8¼ sq. miles), 24km (15 miles) southeast of St. Martin and 225km (140 miles) north of Guadeloupe.

Occasionally you'll see St. Bartians dressed in the provincial costumes of Normandy and speaking Norman French. In little **Corossol,** more than anywhere else, people sometimes follow customs brought from 17th-century France. You might see elderly women wearing the traditional starched white bonnets, at least on special occasions. The bonnets, known as *quichenottes* (a corruption of "kiss-me-not"), served as protection from the close attentions of English or Swedish men on the island. The bonneted women can also be spotted at local celebrations, particularly on August 25, **St. Louis's Day.** Many of these women are camera-shy, but they offer their homemade baskets and hats for sale to visitors.

For a long time, the island was a paradise for a few millionaires, such as David Rockefeller, who had a hideaway on the northwest shore, and Edmond de Rothschild, who occupies some fabulous acres at the "other end" of the island. Nowadays, St. Barts is developing a broader base of tourism as it opens more hotels. Nevertheless, the island continues to be a favorite of celebrities, attracting the likes of Tom Cruise, Harrison Ford, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

St. Barts also attracts a lot of star-seeking paparazzi, who stalk celebrities not only at their private villas, but also at the beach, including Grand Saline beach, where the late John F. Kennedy, Jr., was photographed bathing in the nude (which is common and legal at this beach). On another occasion, the paparazzi caught Brad Pitt sunning in the nude at his private villa, with then-girlfriend Gwyneth Paltrow. In February, the island guest list reads like a roster from *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.*

The island's capital is **Gustavia,** named after a Swedish king. It's St. Barts's only town and seaport. A sheltered harbor, it has the appearance of a dollhouse-scale port.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **The beaches of St. Barts,** 14 in all, each a white-sandy strip where topless sunbathing is common. The best is St. Jean Beach, a favorite of the rich and famous, even an occasional movie star.

- **Gustavia,** the capital of St. Barts and its major harbor. Too small for cruise ships, it's a port of call for some of the most expensive yachts in the Western Hemisphere.
- **The restaurants of St. Barts:** Although facing great competition from other islands, St. Barts lays claim to being the gastronomic capital of the Caribbean. So many chefs from Paris arrive in winter that it is at least the center of French cuisine in the West Indies.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

For information before you go, contact the **French Government Tourist Office** (✆ **202/659-7779;** www.franceguide.com). There are offices at 444 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022 (✆ **212/745-0960**); 9454 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 210, Beverly Hills, CA 90212 (✆ **310/271-6665**); and 205 N. Michigan Ave., Ste. 3770, Chicago, IL 60601 (✆ **312/327-0290**).

On the island, go to the **Office du Tourisme,** in the commercial heart of Gustavia, adjacent to La Capitanerie (the Port Authority Headquarters), quai du Général-de-Gaulle (✆ **590/27-87-27;** www.st-barths.com).

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE The makeshift landing strip on St. Barts has been the butt of many jokes. It's short and accommodates only small aircraft; the biggest plane it can land is a 19-seater. And even on these small planes, landing on St. Barts has often been compared (and not favorably) to touching down on an aircraft carrier. No landings or departures are permitted after dark.

There are no nonstop flights from North America. From the United States, the principal gateways are St. Maarten, St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guadeloupe (see the individual chapters on these islands). At any of these islands, you can connect to St. Barts via interisland carriers.

From St. Maarten, **Windward Islands Airways International** (known by everybody as **Winair;** ✆ **866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/27-61-01; www.fly-winair.com) usually offers 5 to 10 daily flights to St. Barts. One-way passage costs around 105€; flight duration is a mere 15 minutes.

Air Caraïbes (✆ **877/772-1005** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/82-64-51; www.aircaraibes.com) flights depart four or five times a day from Pointe-à-Pitre's Le Raizet Airport in Guadeloupe. One-way passage to St. Barts costs 157€; trip time is 45 minutes. The airline also flies 10 times a day from St. Martin, costing from 137€ one-way.

BY BOAT The ***Voyager*** vessels (✆ **590/87-10-68;** www.voyager-st-barths.com), which operate from Gustavia harbor, make frequent (usually daily, sometimes twice a day) runs between St. Barts and either side of St. Maarten/St. Martin. The schedule varies according to the season and the whim of the proprietors, but the ***Voyager II*** (a catamaran with room for 154 passengers) usually departs Marigot Harbor for St. Barts every morning at 9:15am, arriving in Gustavia at 10:45am, and at 6:45pm, arriving at 8:15pm. ***Voyager I,*** a single-hulled sailboat with room for 117 passengers, travels from Oyster Pond to Gustavia Wednesday and Sunday at 9am and 6:45pm, arriving 45 minutes later in Gustavia. Both vessels charge 67€ round-trip on the same day, or 88€ round-trip on different days, with a one-way passage going for 60€. Fares for children 11 and under are reduced in half. Advance reservations are a good idea.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Taxis meet all flights and are expensive. Dial ✆ **590/27-75-81** for taxi service. A typical rate, from the airport to Cul-de-Sac, is 25€. Night fares between 8pm and 6am are 50% higher. Taxi service must be arranged between midnight and 6am—call ahead. Virtually every cab driver is aware of the official prices that the island government imposes on **tours by taxi.** Many travelers simply approach a likely looking taxi driver and ask him to show them around. The official rate for one to three passengers is 45€ for 45 minutes.

BY RENTAL CAR Nowhere will you see so many open-sided Mitsubishi Mini-Mokes and Suzuki Samurais as on St. Barts. You'll enjoy driving one, too, as long as you're handy with a stick shift and don't care about your coiffure.

Budget (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S., or 590/29-62-40; www.budget.com) offers the least stringent terms for its midwinter rentals, and some of the most favorable rates. It rents a Suzuki Jimmy for 65€ a day or 423€ a week, with unlimited mileage. A collision-damage waiver (CDW; in French, *une assurance tous-risques*), absolving renters of all but 500€ of responsibility in the event of an accident, costs 13€ a day. For the lowest rate, you should reserve at least 3 business days before your arrival.

Tips Airline Advice

Always reconfirm your return flight from St. Barts with your interisland airline. If you don't, your reservation will be canceled. Also, don't check your luggage all the way through to St. Barts, or you may not see it for a few days. Instead, check your bags to your gateway destination (whatever island you're connecting through, most often St. Maarten), and then take your luggage to your interisland carrier and recheck your bags to St. Barts.

Hertz (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada; www.hertz.com) operates on St. Barts through a local dealership, **Henry's Car Rental,** with branches at the airport and in St-Jean (✆ **590/27-71-14**). It offers open-sided Suzuki Samurais for 52€ a day, and more substantial Suzukis for 95€ to 100€ per day. The CDW is about 10€ to 15€ per day.

At **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 590/27-71-43; www.avis.com or www.avis-stbarth.com), you'll need to make a reservation a full month in advance during high season. In the winter, cars range from 70€ to 115€ a day. In the off season, rentals are reduced, and CDW is included in the rates.

Driving is on the right. Never drive with less than half a tank of gas on St. Barts. There are only two gas stations on the island, and they're closed on Sunday and open only from 7:30am to noon and 2 to 7pm on other days of the week. (Remarkably, though, you can pay at the pump during business hours if you have a Visa card.) One gas station is near the airport; the other is near L'Orient. All valid foreign driver's licenses are honored. ***Warning:*** Honk your horn furiously while going around the island's blind corners to avoid having your fenders sideswiped.

BY MOTORBIKE & SCOOTER **Denis Dufau** operates two affiliates (✆ **590/27-54-83**). A helmet is provided, and renters must leave an imprint of a valid credit card. Rental fees vary from 25€ to 35€ per day, depending on the size of the bike. For all but the smallest models, presentation of a valid driver's license is required and you must be 21 or older.

Fast Facts St. Barthélemy

Banks The two main banks, which both have **ATMs,** are in Gustavia. The **Banque Francaise Commerciale,** rue du General-de-Gaulle (✆ **590/27-65-88**), is open Monday to Friday from 7:45am to 12:30pm and 1:35 to 4pm. The **Banque Nationale de Paris,** rue du Bord-de-Mer (✆ **590/27-63-70**), is open Monday to Friday 8am to noon and Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday 2 to 3:30pm.

Currency The euro is the legal tender of St. Barts, although U.S. dollars are also accepted currency. Under the current exchange, 1 euro (€) equals US$1.30. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in euros.*

Documents U.S., British, and Canadian citizens need a passport to enter St. Barts. If you're flying in, you'll need to present your return or ongoing ticket.

Electricity The electricity is 220-volt AC (50 cycles); U.S.-made appliances will require adapter plugs and transformers.

Emergencies Dial ✆ **17** for **police** or **medical** emergencies, ✆ **18** for **fire** emergencies.

Hospital St. Barts is not the greatest place to find yourself in a medical emergency. Except for vacationing doctors escaping their own practices in other parts of the world, it has only seven resident doctors and about a dozen on-call specialists. The island's only hospital, with the only emergency facilities, is the **Hôpital de Bruyn,** rue Jean-Bart (✆ **590/27-60-35**), about .4k m (¼ mile) north of Gustavia. Serious medical cases are often flown to St. Maarten, Martinique, Miami, or wherever the person or his/her family specifies.

Language The official language is French, but English is widely spoken.

Pharmacies The **Pharmacie de Saint-Barth** is on quai de la Republique, Gustavia (✆ **590/27-61-82**). Its only competitor is the **Pharmacie de l'Aeroport,** adjacent to the airport (✆ **590/27-66-61**). Both are open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 8pm; on Sunday, one or the other remains open for at least part of the day.

Safety Although crime is rare, it's wise to protect your valuables. Don't leave them unguarded on the beach or in parked cars, even if locked in the trunk.

Taxes You're assessed a 4€ departure tax if you're heading for another French island. Otherwise, you'll pay 8€. Taxes are included in your ticket.

Telephone St. Barts is linked to the Guadeloupe telephone system. To call St. Barts from the United States, dial **011** (the international access code), then **590** (the country code for Guadeloupe), then **590** again, and finally the six-digit local number. To make a call within St. Barts, dial only the six-digit local number, and ignore the prefix 590. To reach an AT&T operator from anywhere on the island, dial ✆ **0800-99-00-11.** To reach **MCI,** dial ✆ **0800-99-00-19,** and to reach **Sprint,** dial ✆ **0800-99-00-87.**

Time When standard time is in effect in the United States and Canada, St. Barts is 1 hour ahead of the U.S. East Coast. When daylight saving time is in effect in the U.S., clocks in New York and St. Barts show the same time.

Tipping Hotels usually add a service charge of 10% to 15%; always ask if this is included in the price you're quoted. Restaurants typically add a service charge, too. Taxi drivers expect a tip of 10% of the fare.

Water The water on St. Barts is generally safe to drink.

Weather The climate of St. Barts is ideal: dry with an average temperature of 72°F to 86°F (22°C–30°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

Excluding a few of the really expensive hotels, most places here are homey, comfortable, and casual. Everything is small, as tiny St. Barts is hardly in the mainstream of tourism. In March, it's often difficult to stay on St. Barts unless you've made reservations far in advance. Accommodations throughout the island, with some exceptions, tend to be remarkably expensive, and a service charge of between 10% and 15% is usually added to your bill.

St. Barts has a sizable number of villas, beach houses, and apartments for rent by the week or month. Villas are dotted around the island's hills—very few are on the beach. Instead of an oceanfront bedroom, you get a panoramic view. One of the best agencies to contact for villa, apartment, or condo rentals is **St. Barth Properties,** 12 Washington St., Ste. 201, Franklin, MA 02038 (✆ **800/421-3396** or 508/528-7727 in the U.S. and Canada; www.stbarth.com). Peg Walsh, a longtime aficionado of St. Barts, and her capable son, Tom Smyth, will let you know what's available. She can also make arrangements for car rentals and air travel to St. Barts. When you arrive, she can book babysitters and restaurant reservations. Rentals can range from a one-room "studio" villa away from the beach for 975€ per week off season, up to 40,000€ per week for a minipalace at Christmas. Yes, that 40,000€ is right, but it's for a very unusual, antique-furnished luxury home. Most rentals average between 1,900€ and 3,100€ a week between mid-December and mid-April, with discounts of 30% to 50% the rest of the year. In addition to villas, Ms. Walsh can arrange accommodations in all categories of St. Barts's hotels.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Carl Gustaf ★★★ The most glamorous hotel in Gustavia rises above the town's harbor from a steep hillside. Each state-of-the-art unit is in one of 14 red-roofed villas whose facilities include a private kitchenette, two phones, a fax machine, a stereo system, a private terrace, a private plunge pool, two TVs, and comfortably plush rattan furniture. Access to each building is via a central staircase, which tests the stamina of even the most active guests. The wood-frame units are angled for maximum views of the boats bobbing far below in the bay and panoramic sunsets. Bedrooms aren't as large as might be expected, but they are exceedingly well furnished, especially suites nos. 30 through 33. You'll walk across Italian marble floors under a pitched ceiling to reach your luxurious bed fitted with elegant fabrics. Beach facilities are within a 10-minute walk. The mood is French, not unlike what you'd find on the coast of Provence.

Rue des Normands, 97099 Gustavia, St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/322-2223** in the U.S., or 590/29-79-00. Fax 590/27-82-37. www.hotelcarlgustaf.com. 15 units. Winter 1,140€ 1-bedroom suite, 1,685€ 2-bedroom suite; off season 740€ 1-bedroom suite, 1,050€ 2-bedroom suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; health club; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; deep-sea fishing; sailing; scuba diving; water-skiing; windsurfing; helicopter rides. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, minibar, Wi-Fi (in suites).

Eden Rock ★★ Greta Garbo checked out long ago, but this legendary hotel still occupies the most spectacular site on St. Barts, flanked by two sugar-white beaches. Years ago, when the island's former mayor, Remy de Haenen, bought the quartzite promontory this hotel sits on from an old woman, she laughed at him for paying too much. Offering the best panoramas on the island, it's surrounded on three sides by the waters of St. Jean Bay. The building atop the pinnacle looks like an idealized version of a Provençal farmhouse. The stone house contains a collection of French antiques and paintings. The decor in each guest room includes a stylish mixture of tasteful antiques and reproductions. Some rooms are right on the beach, with their own access to the sand. The best and most expensive are the ocean suites with private balconies. The least expensive are the small and cozy cabins. Named in honor of former guest Howard Hughes, a rooftop loft suite with verandas has three sides and a panoramic view of St. Jean Bay. In addition, Eden Rock took over a neighboring beachfront resort, redoing its bedrooms and increasing its room count. The new units include eight suites with decks opening to the beach, as well as five beachfront rooms.

Baiede, 97133 St-Jean, St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **877/563-7105** in the U.S., or 590/29-79-99. Fax 590/27-88-37. www.edenrockhotel.com. 32 units. Winter 700€–1,050€ double, from 1,300€ suite; off season 525€–675€ double, from 800€ suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Closed Aug 30–Oct 8. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; fitness center; room service; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hôtel Guanahani and Spa ★★ Kids This is the largest hotel on St. Barts, opening onto two scenic beaches. Isolated in the northeast part of the island, this hotel on its own peninsula is spread over 6.4 steeply sloping hectares (16 acres), dotted with a network of 68 Lilliputian cottages trimmed in gingerbread and painted in bold tropical colors. Don't consider this place if you have mobility problems or just don't relish the idea of huffing up and down steep slopes. The views over the sea from each unit are broad and sweeping. Most units, at least those on the resort's upper slopes, are self-contained in their own individual cottages. Some of the bungalows closest to the beach, a private white-sand strip on a reef-protected bay, contain two units each. Traditional and contemporary-style desks and tables, tasteful upholstery, and four-poster king-size beds spell deluxe living. Each of the accommodations has a private patio. An eight-room spa facility is integrated discreetly into the bungalow village.

Grand Cul-de-Sac, 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/223-6800** in the U.S., or 590/27-66-60. www.leguanahani.com. 68 units. Winter 595€–965€ double, from 1,090€ suite; off season 360€–600€ double, from 725€ suite. Rates include American breakfast and round-trip airport transfers. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; children's programs (ages 2–6); fitness center; Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; room service; spa; tennis court; watersports; fishing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hôtel Manapany Cottages and Spa ★ This resort climbs a steep, landscaped hillside on the northwestern side of the island, a 10-minute taxi ride north of the airport. The stylish hotel is small, intimate, and accommodating; the name, translated from Malagese, means "small paradise." The place was designed as a minivillage of gingerbread-trimmed Antillean cottages set either on a steeply sloping hillside or beside the water. The rambling verandas and open-sided living rooms allow you to enjoy the trade winds. The furnishings include both white rattan and Caribbean colonial pieces carved from mahogany. Mosquito netting covers most of the four-poster beds for a romantic touch.

Anse des Cayes, 97098 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/27-66-55.** Fax 590/27-75-28. www.lemanapany.com. 42 units. Winter 462€–525€ double, 630€–1,155€ junior suite, 910€–1,750€ suite; off season 252€–277€ double, 340€–630€ junior suite, 483€–840€ suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness room; outdoor pool; room service; spa; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Hôtel St. Barth Isle de France ★ This small, family-run resort evokes colonial-era charm and has unusually spacious guest rooms for St. Barts. Each top-notch unit contains a private patio or terrace, and an individual decor with antique mahogany and rattan furniture and engravings collected from neighboring islands. In addition to its regular rooms, both on and off the beach, the resort rents a number of special units with two bedrooms for families or groups, including a two-bedroom fisherman's cottage or two-bedroom suites on the beach and also opening onto the garden.

97098 Baie des Flamands, St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/810-4691** in the U.S., or 590/27-61-81. Fax 590/27-86-83. www.isle-de-france.com. 37 units. Winter 845€–1,280€ double, from 1,545€ suite; off season 525€–795€ double, from 1,055€ suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct 15. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; exercise room; 2 outdoor pools; room service; spa; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

La Banane ★ On the outskirts of the village of L'Orient lies this intimate and well-furnished hotel. Because of La Banane's small size and carefully restricted access, it seems like a private hideaway. The Brussels-born owner, De Nys Philippe, uses such accents as Artemide lighting, Casa Milano canopy beds, and Belgian linens to effect a change of pace from Creole designs. The hotel is elegant and harmonious. Nine bungalows are scattered around a minimalist two-tier ed pool. Bathrooms open onto patios or private gardens so that taking a shower becomes a perfumed ritual in a setting of such plants as frangipani, jasmine, and hibiscus. Set on flat, low-lying grounds, the gardens are richly planted with bananas, flowering shrubs, and palms, and are just a 3-minute walk from the beach.

Baie de L'Orient, 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/52-03-00.** Fax 590/27-68-44. www.labanane.com. 9 units. Winter 485€ double; off season 345€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; 2 outdoor pools; lounge; babysitting; room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Le Christopher ★★ Set on a dramatic promontory above the ocean, this hotel offers views of St. Martin and nearby islets. It has a French-colonial decor and a low-rise design that incorporates four slate-roofed, white-sided buildings arranged in a semicircle above a rocky coastline. The hotel is not adjacent to the water; guests must drive about 10 minutes to reach a good beach, Plage de l'Orient. The roomy accommodations, with king-size and twin beds, fall into two categories: deluxe oceanfront with patio or deluxe oceanview with terrace. All are furnished in a West Indian style and have ceiling fans. The resort's pool, a 370-sq.-m (3,983-sq.-ft.) pair of interconnected ovals with a bridge, is the largest on the island.

9 Pointe Milou (B.P. 571), 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S., or 590/27-63-63. Fax 590/27-92-92. 41 units. Winter 950€–1,100€ double, 1,850€ suite; off season 400€–500€ double, from 950€ suite. Rates include American breakfast. 1 child under 12 can stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct 25. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; gym; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; scuba; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Le Sereno ★★★ Opening onto Grand Cul de Sac Beach, this intimate, all-suite hotel is a chic retreat, often favored by off-the-record celebrities. It was designed by Christian Liaigre, the fabled Parisian designer, and is the latest reincarnation of a much older hotel that had grown stale. Style and serenity combine in ultimate comfort in the largest suites on island. The staff will spoil you, as will the super chic accommodations with all those extra touches that make for luxurious living, including signature robes and linens from Porthault, cordless two-line phones, plasma TVs, and personal iPods. Special features include spa treatments and a beach club with attendants.

Grand Cul-de-Sac, 97099 Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **888/LESERENO** (537-3736) in the U.S., or 590/29-83-00. Fax 590/27-75-47. www.lesereno.com. 37 units. Winter 680€–1,190€ suite, 1,330€–2,330€ villa; off season 480€–780€ suite, 990€–1,930€ villa. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; gym and spa; outdoor pool; room service; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Le Toiny ★★★ This posh retreat is about equal to Carl Gustaf (see above). One of the most glamorous and chillingly expensive resorts on St. Barts, it contains only 15 suites, scattered among a half-dozen buildings clinging to a gently sloping hillside. The nearest swimming beach is a 5-minute drive away at Grande Saline, the only sanctioned nude beach on the island. All the suites have floors made of wide planks or terra-cotta tiles, and mahogany four-posters draped with mosquito netting. Each provides plenty of privacy, with lots of space and shrubbery between units. The hotel restaurant, Le Gaïac, is reviewed here (p. 520).

Anse de Toiny, 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/278-6469** in the U.S., or 590/27-88-88. Fax 590/27-89-30. www.hotelletoiny.com. 15 units. Winter 1,600€ 1-bedroom suite for 2 guests, 2,780€ 3-bedroom suite for up to 6 guests; off season 710€ 1-bedroom suite for 2 guests, 1,500€–1,530€ 3-bedroom suite for up to 6 guests. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed Sept 1–Oct 25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, minibar.

EXPENSIVE

Baie des Anges ★ Opening right onto the white sands of Flamands beach, this retreat is cooled by trade winds and has a laid-back, carefree atmosphere, as opposed to the more snooty and pricey French inns on the island. Surrounded by gardens, the two-story, ocean-fronting property is relatively simple but has its own style and charm. You can opt for a room opening onto the sea or the courtyard with its pool, where guests can be found when the Atlantic waves get too rough for swimming. All units have a kitchenette, plus a balcony with chaise longues. The accommodations are in sea colors of blue and green. For such a small place, the inn has a sophisticated, first-class restaurant, La Langouste, where nonguests can dine for lunch and dinner Feast off the Creole or French specialties such as Caribbean lobsters selected from a tank.

Baie des Anges, Flamands, 97133 St. Barthélemy, FWI. ✆ **590/27-63-61.** Fax 590/27-83-44. www.hotelbaiedesanges.fr. 10 units. Winter 230€–380€ double, 275€–455€ triple; off season 150€–250€ double, 180€–300€ triple. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi (in some).

Tom Beach Hotel This bustling boutique hotel opens onto the madly popular St. Jean Beach. A party atmosphere prevails, so if you're an early-to-bed type, check in elsewhere. All sorts of beach sports and watersports lie outside the door. The flamboyantly painted villas are enveloped by a Caribbean garden and painted in bright pastels. Bedrooms are spacious and rather stylish, each adorned with draped four-poster beds, opening onto terraces complete with wet bars. The hotel's popular La Plage restaurant is recommended separately.

Plage St. Jean, 97133 St-Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **866/617-4578** or 590/27-53-13. www.st-barths.com/tom-beach-hotel. 12 units. Year-round 290€–450€ double; 480€–950€ suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

MODERATE

Hostellerie des Trois Forces ★ Finds The domain of St. Barts's astrologer emeritus might be called a New Age holistic retreat, but it's much more than that. It welcomes all patrons of whatever persuasion to one of its gingerbread cottages or its fine restaurant. The heart and soul of the place is Hubert Delamotte, who arrived from Brittany with his wife to create a hotel where happiness, good food, comfort, and conversation are a way of life. Each cottage is named for a sign of the zodiac and is decorated with the appropriate color scheme, such as red for the sign of Leo. Holistic services include massage therapy, osteopathy, and yoga. High on a hilltop, the inn occupies panoramic grounds in Viet, above the freshwater ponds of Cul-de-Sac and about a 5-minute drive from the Cul-de-Sac beaches and L'Orient. As for the view, Hubert says, "There's not a soul between us and Africa."

Morne Viet, 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/27-61-25.** Fax 590/27-81-38. www.3forces.net. 7 cottages. Winter 270€ double; off season 170€ double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, kitchenette (in 2 units), minibar.

Le P'tit Morne ★ (Finds) This is hardly the most luxurious or stylish lodging on an island that's legendary for its glamour and its five-star hotels. But the hotel's government-rated three-star format, its moderate rates, and the warm welcome extended by its island-born owners, Mr. and Mrs. Felix and their daughter Marie-Joëlle, make it a worthy vacation site. It's a 10-minute drive from the beach. The colonial-designed guest rooms are filled with completely unpretentious furniture and comfortable king-size beds. A modern room called New Moon offers a panoramic deck and a private pergola. There's plenty of elbow room, and units were built to catch the trade winds.

Colombier (P.O. Box 14), 97095 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/52-95-50.** Fax 590/27-84-63. www.timorne.com. 14 units. Winter 185€–230€ double; off season 95€–170€ double AE, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** Babysitting; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchen.

Le Village St-Jean ★ (Value) This family-owned cottage colony hideaway, 2km (1¼ miles) from the airport toward St-Jean, attracts a distinguished clientele. Lying in the center of St. Barts, a 5-minute drive uphill from Saint-Jean Beach, it offers one of the best values on this high-priced resort island. Despite that, you may see a media headliner here; after all, some of them like to save money, too. The cottages contain kitchens, sun decks or gardens, terraced living rooms, balconies, and ceiling fans. Furnishings are modest but comfortable, and the living space is generous.

Colline de Saint-Jean (B.P. 623), 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/27-61-39.** Fax 590/27-77-96. www.villagestjeanhotel.com. 30 units. Winter 220€ double, 260€–600€ 1-bedroom cottage, from 620€ 2-bedroom cottage; off season 130€ double, 170€–350€ 1-bedroom cottage, 400€ 2-bedroom cottage. Extra person 50€–70€. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Tropical Hôtel The facade of this small, unpretentious hotel looks like a picture-postcard Caribbean colonial inn. Originally built in 1981, it's perched on a hillside about 40m (131 ft.) above St-Jean Beach. Each room contains a private shower-only bathroom, a king-size bed with a good mattress, tile floors, and a fridge. Nine units have sea views and balconies; no. 11 has a porch that opens onto a garden that's so lush it looks like a miniature jungle. The hotel has a hospitality center where guests read, listen to music, or order drinks and snacks at a paneled bar surrounded by antiques. The pool is small, but watersports are available on the beach.

St-Jean (B.P. 147), 97133 St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **800/223-9815** in the U.S., or 590/27-64-87. Fax 590/27-81-74. www.tropical-hotel.com. 21 units. Winter 210€–360€ double, 240€–395€ triple; off season 136€–162€ double, 166€–192€ triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept 1–Oct 15. **Amenities:** Babysitting; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

La Normandie (Value) Set about 200m (656 ft.) from L'Orient Beach, this is what the French called an *auberge antillaise* (Antillean inn). The property has been totally renovated and improved; the guest rooms are divided between two buildings linked by a large deck of exotic Brazilian wood surrounding a hotel pool set in a tropical garden. One of the island's oldest hotels, the small inn offers well-furnished and well-equipped bedrooms with elegantly styled bathrooms and chaise lounges nestled in the garden surrounding the pool.

97133 L'Orient, St. Barthélemy, F.W.I. ✆ **590/27-61-66.** Fax 590/27-58-32. 8 units. Winter 170€ double; off season 125€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV (in some), fridge, Wi-Fi.

3 WHERE TO DINE

IN GUSTAVIA

La Mandala ★★ (Finds) THAI/EUROPEAN This is one of the most exciting restaurants on St. Barts. It occupies a house on the steepest street in Gustavia, high above the harbor, with a dining deck overlooking a swimming pool. Some recommended dishes are tempura of snapper or mahimahi with mango salad and coriander sauce; a traditional Thai dish, *tataki,* made of deliberately undercooked tuna with a ginger-flavored vinaigrette, shallots, and sesame oil; grilled beef with teriyaki sauce; and duck with soy sauce and caramel. Try the warm chocolate tart for dessert.

Rue de la Sous Prefecture. ✆ **590/27-96-96.** www.lamandala.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses 22€–34€. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–11pm; sushi and cocktails 5pm–1am.

La Route des Boucaniers ★ (Finds) FRENCH/CREOLE What a discovery! Near the harbor, this bistro is the domain of Francis and Christiane Delage. Having written a five-volume primer, Francis is said to be the definitive authority on Creole cuisine. Wonderful ingredients turn up here, and they are concocted into a medley of local dishes whose flavors are not found elsewhere on this island and have attracted a few celebs. The decor evokes a rum shack—there's even a boat wreck—but these artifacts belie the sophistication of the cuisine. Our avocado salad was reason to return the following night; it was given added zest by chewy flakes of dried cod in a hot Creole sauce. For the main course, the chef's pride and joy is a large bowl of fresh fish, shellfish, and octopus huddled together in red-bean purée, blended into a smooth texture that is properly seasoned and delicious. Other surprises await, especially the Cajun mahimahi with conch gratin. What makes everything taste so good? Maybe you don't want to know. It's *beurre rouge* (lobster butter) and *lardons* (strips of salt pork) that have been heavily spiced. Not what your doctor ordered, but irresistible.

Rue de Bord de Mer, Gustavia. ✆ **590/27-73-00.** Reservations required in winter. Main courses 20€–30€. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

Le Gaïac ★ FRENCH This restaurant is for folks who want to dine among the rich and jaded at Le Toiny—St. Barts's most expensive hotel (p. 517)—but aren't willing to mortgage their futures for a room. Your meal is served in an open-air pavilion adjacent to the resort's pool, with a view that sweeps out over the wide blue sea. The emphasis is French, casually stylish, and offhanded in a way that's reminiscent of a particularly rich version of bohemian Paris. You'll relish such dishes as pan-fried filet of cod stuffed with lemon grass and served with black pasta and hazelnuts, or grilled Caribbean lobster fresh from the hotel's aquarium. Other exquisite dishes include roast duck stuffed with figs and served with red berries and braised spiced chicory, or else a medley of lamb, the loin lacquered with mango, the saddle crusted with herbs.

In Le Toiny Hotel, Anse de Toiny. ✆ **590/29-77-47.** Reservations recommended in winter. Main courses 29€–40€ lunch, 39€–55€ dinner, fixed-price menus 100€–130€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm; Sun 11am–2:30pm. Closed Sept 1–Oct 23.

Le Sapotillier ★★ FRENCH/SEAFOOD Le Sapotillier is near the top of the list for every visiting gourmet. This West Indian house beside the less-frequented part of the harbor is the domain of Brittany-born Stephane Guidal. Dine outside on the candlelit patio or inside the clapboard-covered Antillean bungalow that was transported from the outlying village of Corossol. Chef Guidal pays strict attention to the quality and presentation

Finds Picnic Fare on St. Barts

St. Barts is so expensive that many visitors opt to buy at least one of their meals (perhaps a "gourmet lunch to go" package) from a takeout deli. The most centrally located of the island's epicurean delis is **La Rôtisserie,** rue Oskar-II (✆ **590/27-63-13**), which is proud of its endorsement by Fauchon, the world-famous food store in Paris. On display are bottles of wine, crocks of mustard, pâté, herbs, caviar, chocolate, and exotic oils and vinegars, as well as takeout (and very French) platters sold by the gram. *Plats du jour* cost around 8€ to 20€ for a portion suitable for one. Set on a narrow street behind the eastern edge of Gustavia's harbor, the place is open Monday to Saturday 7:30am to 7pm, Sunday from 7am to 1pm. American Express, MasterCard, and Visa are accepted.

of his food. The cuisine ranges from the robust to the more refined, including such dishes as line-caught filet of sea bass cooked with lime and served with mashed artichokes or organic free-range chicken from Bresse in a tarragon sauce. He also entices with roasted loin of lamb stuffed with red pepper and white Borlotti beans.

Rue Sadi-Carnot. ✆ **590/27-60-28.** Reservations required. Main courses 25€–53€. MC, V. Daily 6:30–10:30pm. Closed May–Oct.

Wall House ★★ CREOLE/FRENCH On the far side of Gustavia harbor is this little eatery where the chef, known simply as "Frank," sets confidently to sea with the skill of a practiced but imaginative navigator. For two diners, he will prepare a whole duck spit-roasted with five sauces, honey, and pineapple. In fact, some of his best dishes come from his elaborate rotisserie, including the catch of the day served with lime and ginger mousseline sauce. He also spit-roasts a saddle of lamb or else squab stuffed with foie gras, one of his most elegant dishes. The homemade pesto gnocchi is worthy of the finest chefs in Genoa. Other main-dish enticements include a seared wahoo filet with pink ginger and a wasabi mousse, and braised lobster in a Sabayon sauce.

La Pointe, Gustavia. ✆ **590/27-71-83.** Reservations required. Main courses 19€–28€. AE, MC, V. Daily 12:30–2pm and 7–10pm. Closed Sept–Oct.

IN THE ST-JEAN BEACH AREA

La Plage ★★ FRENCH/SEAFOOD At a chic little boutique hotel, this beachfront restaurant has made waves in St. Barts—in fact, it's the hottest dining address in town. Tables spill out on the sands, just the way the host, Thierry de Bradereau, dreamed they would when he envisioned it. La Plage is the best restaurant on the island for a late-night party after dinner, and the music plays deep into the night. The theme for such a party is likely to be *Baywatch, La Cage Aux Folles,* and even Santa arriving on jet skis (but only at Christmas). Singers and live bands are presented in the evening. The owner even offers Cine-Plage, or cinema on the beach, showing such old movies as Bogie's *Casablanca.* The decorator wasn't afraid of color, using mauve, pink, violet, and turquoise, a rampant fantasy of the Caribbean. Grilled fish and seafood are the highlights of the menu, which centers around barbecue on Sunday nights. Start, perhaps, with a spicy avocado salad. The menu changes every season, and even the desserts are homemade. Regardless of what will be on the menu at the time of your visit, expect fresh food exploding with flair and perfect seasonings.

In Le Tom Beach Hotel. Plage St-Jean. ✆ **590/27-53-13.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 20€–35€. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and Tues–Sun 7–10pm.

Le Cesar (Value) SEAFOOD/FRENCH The centerpiece of a charming and not particularly expensive hotel (Le Village St-Jean; p. 519), La Terrazza has a deserved reputation for well-conceived food. The restaurant is operated independently of the hotel. The chef is from Marseille, and he specializes in locally caught fish which can be prepared more or less as you like it, including grilled. He is also a specialist in grilling meats, which are tender and herb flavored. When available, Caribbean lobster is a feature.

In Le Village St-Jean hotel, St-Jean Hill. ✆ **590/27-70-67.** Reservations required in winter. Main courses 19€–26€. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 7–10:30pm.

AT MORNE LURIN

Santa Fe FRENCH This informal restaurant opens for dinner at 6pm so visitors can come here to see the legendary sunsets from the best perspective on island. For decades this place was known as a good burger joint. However, it is now much more upmarket, specializing in French dishes along with barbecued meats and fish, which are executed extremely well. Santa Fe is set inland atop one of the highest points on the island. It contains wraparound decks with bar tops constructed of teakwood that give the place a kind of nautical flair. In addition to the catch of the day, you can order other signature dishes, such as lobster medallions in Creole sauce.

Morne Lurin. ✆ **590/27-61-04.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses 19€–60€. MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

IN THE GRANDE SALINE BEACH AREA

Le Tamarin ★ FRENCH/CREOLE One of the island's genuinely offbeat restaurants is Le Tamarin, a deliberately informal bistro that caters to a clientele from the nearby Plage de Saline. It's isolated amid rocky hills and forests east of Gustavia, in a low-slung cottage whose eaves are accented with gingerbread. Inside, a teak-and-bamboo motif prevails. Lunch is the more popular and animated meal here, with most customers dining in T-shirts and bathing suits. If you have to wait, you can order an aperitif in one of the hammocks stretched under a tamarind tree. The menu focuses on light, summery meals that go well with the streaming sunlight and tropical heat. Some of the more creative examples include chicken with a gingerbread crust and licorice flavoring, or else lamb cutlets lacquered in mango and passion fruit and served with couscous. Filet of grouper comes with a madras curry and a tomato tart, and you can also order filet of beef with shallots in a red wine sauce and pumpkin fries instead of the usual French fries. There's a broadly based wine list, plus a chocolate cake dessert specialty that appeals to chocoholics. Service can be erratic, but if you're in a rush, you shouldn't be here. It's the perfect place for a lazy afternoon on the beach.

Plage de Saline. ✆ **590/27-72-12.** Reservations required for dinner. Main courses 25€–34€. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–5pm; Tues–Sun 7–9pm. Closed May 1–Nov 15.

IN THE GRAND CUL-DE-SAC BEACH AREA

Bartoloméo ★ FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN Although this deluxe dining choice is located at one of the island's most exclusive and expensive hotels, Bartoloméo works hard to be nonthreatening, informally sophisticated, and gracefully upscale. A pianist plays soothing music while diners choose from a frequently changing menu. Appetizers are a delight, especially the pan-fried escalope of foie gras. Main courses are prepared with skill and flair, as evidenced by the Chilean sea bass with ratatouille or the

roast duck of Landes with turnips, spinach, and fondue. The chefs are imaginative in their choice of ingredients, as exemplified by their sautéed cod with goat cheese and black truffles, or their saddle of lamb with zesty black peppercorns and oranges. Wednesday features a sweeping array of cold antipasti, and the chef will prepare any pasta you want from an artfully arranged display of seafood, meats, herbs, wines, and cream.

In the Hôtel Guanahani, Grand Cul-de-Sac. ✆ **590/27-66-60.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 36€–62€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10pm. Closed Sept.

IN THE PUBLIC BEACH AREA

Maya's ★ (Finds) CREOLE/THAI/FRENCH This is the most surprising restaurant on St. Barts, thanks to its artful simplicity and glamorous clients. The much-rebuilt Antillean house with almost no architectural charm attracts crowds of luminaries from the worlds of media, fashion, and entertainment. It's the kind of place you might find on Martinique, where its French Creole chef, Maya Beuzelin-Gurley, grew up. Maya stresses "clean, simple food" with few adornments other than a sprinkling of island herbs and lime juice. You might begin with the salad of tomatoes, arugula, and endive, and then follow with grilled fish in sauce *chien* (hot) or a grilled filet of beef. Maya also prepares what she calls "sailor's chicken," marinated with fresh chives, lime juice, and hot peppers. Almost no cream is used in any dish, a fact that makes the place beloved by the fashion models and actors who hang out here. You'll find it directly west of Gustavia, close to the island's densest collection of factories and warehouses. Views face west and south, ensuring glorious sunset-watching.

Public Beach. ✆ **590/27-75-73.** Reservations required in winter. Main courses 35€–45€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm. Closed Sept–Nov 15.

AT POINTE MILOU

Le Ti St. Barth FRENCH/CARIBBEAN You'll either love or hate this place, depending on how you fit into an environment that manages to be frenetic, stylishly permissive, and Franco-chauvinistic all at the same time. From a point near the summit of a low-rise hill, the bistro defines stylized service rituals and cuisine among a jazzy and theatrical decor. Menu items range from the affordable and practical (platters of locally smoked fish, barbecued ribs, grilled beefsteaks and filet mignons, wahoo or red snapper in Creole sauce, grilled filet of duck with cranberry sauce) to the overpriced (local lobster garnished with truffles—definitely not a bargain). Events that can, however, be a lot of fun here involve erratically scheduled late-night parties, some of them held in honor of the full moon or high tides.

Pointe Milou. ✆ **590/51-15-80.** Reservations required. Main courses 28€–39€. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30pm–midnight or later, depending on business).

4 ST. BARTS' BEACHES

St. Barts has 14 white-sand beaches. Few are ever crowded, even in winter; all are public and free. Topless sunbathing is quite common. The best known is **St-Jean Beach** ★★, which is actually two beaches divided by the Eden Rock promontory. It offers watersports, restaurants, and a few hotels, as well as some shady areas. **Flamands Beach,** to the west, is a very wide, long beach with a few small hotels and some areas shaded by lantana palms. In winter, the surf can be a bit rough, although it is rarely hazardous. **L'Orient Beach,** on the north shore, is quiet and calm, with shady areas. It's popular with surfers

and swimmers who like rolling waves. **Marigot Beach,** also on the north shore, is narrow but offers good swimming and snorkeling.

For a beach with hotels, restaurants, and watersports, **Grand Cul-de-Sac Beach,** on the northeast shore, fits the bill. It's narrow and protected by a reef.

North of the commercial port at Gustavia, the rather unromantic-sounding **Public Beach** is a combination of sand and pebbles. This beach is more popular with boaters than swimmers—it's also the location of the St. Barts Sailing School. There is no more beautiful place on the island, however, to watch the boats at sunset. Located near a small fishing village, **Corossol Beach** offers a typical glimpse of French life, St. Barts style. This is a calm, protected beach, with a charming little **seashell museum.**

South of Gustavia, **Shell Beach** or **Grand Galet** is awash with seashells. Rocky outcroppings protect this beach from strong waves. It's also the scene of many a weekend party.

Gouverneurs Beach, on the southern coast, can be reached by driving south from Gustavia to Lurin. Turn at the Santa Fe restaurant (p. 522) and head down a narrow road. The beach is gorgeous and uncrowded, but there's no shade. **Grande Saline Beach,** to the east of Gouverneurs Beach, is reached by driving up the road from the commercial center in St-Jean; a short walk over the sand dune, and you're here. Like Gouverneurs Beach, Grande Saline Beach offers some waves but no shade. This beach is full of beautiful sunbathers, all nude.

Colombier Beach is difficult to get to but well worth the effort. It can be reached only by boat or by taking a rugged goat path from Petite Anse past Flamands Beach, a 30-minute walk. Shade and snorkeling are found here, and you can pack a lunch and spend the day. Locals call it Rockefeller's Beach because for many years David Rockefeller owned the property surrounding it.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

FISHING Anglers are fond of the waters around St. Barts. From March to July, they catch mahimahi; in September, wahoo. Atlantic bonito, barracuda, and marlin also turn up frequently. **Marine Service,** quai du Yacht-Club, Gustavia (✆ **590/27-70-34**), rents a 9m (30-ft.) Phoenix specifically outfitted for big-game fishing. A full day for four costs 1,600€, which includes a captain and first mate. The outfitter also offers shore fishing on an 8.7m (29-ft.) day cruiser, which tends to remain close to the island's shoreline, searching for tuna, barracuda, and other fish. A full-day excursion, with fishing for up to four, costs 800€.

SCUBA DIVING **Marine Service,** quai du Yacht-Club, in Gustavia (✆ **590/27-70-34**), is the most complete watersports facility on the island. It operates from a one-story building set directly on the water at the edge of a marina, on the opposite side of the harbor from the more congested part of Gustavia. Tailoring its dives for both beginners and advanced divers, the outfit is familiar with at least 20 unusual sites scattered at various points offshore. The most interesting of these include the **Grouper,** a remote reef west of St. Barts, close to the rich reef life surrounding the uninhabited cay known as Ile Forchue. The island has only one relatively safe wreck dive, the rusting hulk of ***Kayali,*** a trawler that sank offshore in 1994. Set in deep waters, it's recommended only for experienced divers. A resort course, including five open-water dives, costs 280€. A "scuba review," for certified divers who are out of practice, also goes for 75€, while a one-tank dive for certified divers begins at 60€. Multidive packages are available.

SNORKELING You can test your luck at hundreds of points offshore simply by donning a mask, fins, and a snorkel. **Marine Services,** quai du Yacht-Club, Gustavia (✆ **590/27-70-34**), runs daily snorkeling expeditions. A 7-hour excursion (9am–4pm), including a full French-style picnic, open bar, all equipment, and exploration of two separate snorkeling sites, costs 110€. They can also rent snorkeling gear and tell you where you can snorkel on your own.

6 SHOPPING

You don't pay any duty on St. Barts, so it's a good place to buy liquor and French perfumes, at some of the lowest prices in the Caribbean—often cheaper than in France itself. You'll find good buys in sportswear, crystal, porcelain, watches, and other luxuries. The only trouble is that selections are limited. If you're in the market for **island crafts,** try to find the fine straw hats St. Bartians like to wear. You may also see some interesting block-printed resort clothing in cotton.

Diamond Genesis, 12 rue du General-de-Gaulle/Les Suites du Roi-Oskar-II (✆ **590/27-66-94**), a well-respected gold, gemstone, and diamond shop, maintains an inventory of designs strongly influenced by European tastes. Although the prices can go as high as 10,000€, a particularly appealing and more affordable bestseller is an 18-karat-gold depiction of St. Barts, which sells for around 200€. It's one of the few shops on the island where jewelry is handcrafted on the premises. You can also peruse the selection of watches by Jaeger Lecoultre, available only through this store, as well as Breitling, Chanel, and Tag Heuer.

For handicrafts, **Made in St-Barth,** Villa Creole (✆ **590/27-56-57**), is the best place to shop. The women of the hamlet of Corossol sell their intricate straw work, including those ever-so-fashionable wide-brim beach hats, at this outlet. Other crafts include local paintings, pottery, and decorative ornaments.

Gold Fingers ★, rue de la France (✆ **590/27-64-66**), is the largest purveyor of luxury goods on St. Barts. The entire second floor is devoted to perfumes and crystal, the street level to jewelry and watches. Prices are usually 15% to 20% less than equivalent retail goods sold stateside. Ask about sales when you visit.

The elegant, upscale **Le Comptoir du Cigare,** 6 rue du Général-de-Gaulle (✆ **590/27-50-62;** www.comptoirducigare.com), caters to the December-to-April crowd of villa and yacht owners. It's sheathed in exotic hardwood and enhanced with a glass-sided, walk-in humidor for the storage of thousands of cigars from Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Smoke the Cubans on the island—it's illegal to bring them back to the United States. There's also a worthy collection of silver ornaments, lighters, pens suitable for adorning the desk of a CEO, artisan-quality Panama hats from Ecuador, and the most beautiful collection of cigar boxes and humidors in the Caribbean.

Laurent Eiffel, rue du Général-de-Gaulle (✆ **590/27-54-02**), is faux fashion. Despite the elegance of this store and the tact of its employees, nothing sold here is original—everything is either "inspired by" or crafted "in imitation of" designer models that usually cost 10 times as much. Look for belts, shoes, bags, and accessories that are copies of Versace, Prada, Hermès, Gucci, and Chanel, sold at prices much lower than what you'd pay in Paris.

St. Barts Style, rue Lafayette, near rue du Port (✆ **590/27-76-17**), offers racks of beachwear and shoes by such makers as Banana Moon and Claire Mercier in citrus colors

like lemon, lime, grapefruit, and orange, and psychedelic-looking T-shirts from about a dozen different manufacturers.

Sud, Sud, Galerie du Commerce (adjacent to the airport), St-Jean (✆ **590/27-98-75**), is known for its stylish clothing, both day and evening wear. The inventory is solely for women. If you're a high-fashion model, or an heiress who's trying to look like one, chances are, this boutique will have something that appeals to you.

7 ST. BARTS AFTER DARK

Most visitors consider a French Creole dinner under the stars enough of a nocturnal adventure. Beyond that, there isn't a lot of excitement here.

In Gustavia, the most popular gathering place is **Le Select** ★, rue de la France (✆ **590/27-86-87**), apparently named after its more famous granddaddy in the Montparnasse section of Paris. It's utterly simple: Tables are set on the gravel in the open-air garden, near the port, and a game of dominoes might be under way as you walk in. You never know who might show up here—perhaps Mick Jagger. The place is open Monday to Thursday 10am to 10pm, and Friday to Saturday 10am to 11pm. There's live entertainment weekly, but no one knows in advance which particular night of the week it will appear. The locals like it here a lot; they allow outsiders but don't necessarily embrace you until they get to know you a bit. If you want to start a rumor and have it travel fast across the island, do so here.

La Cantina, rue du Bord-de-Mer (✆ **590/27-55-66**), is one of the more self-consciously hip watering holes in Gustavia. You're likely to hear rapid, idiomatic French like it's spoken, argot and all, in cutting-edge Paris, and where the art objects and sculptures scattered throughout the premises are likely to include conversation-inducing depictions of phalluses and vaginas. Set beside Gustavia's harborfront, the mood is post-millennium Côte d'Azur, with a casual mix of pretentiousness and permissiveness that's artful and very, very French. The menu includes party-colored drinks; meal-sized salads; sandwiches, including a hefty version of a club sandwich; and platters, each priced from 12€ to 20€. La Cantina is open Monday to Saturday 7:15am to 11:30pm.

Bar de l'Oubli, 5 rue de la Republique (✆ **590/27-70-06**), occupies the most prominent corner in Gustavia, at the intersection of streets that are so well known that most local residents don't even know their names—they refer to it simply as "Centre-Ville." The setting is hip and Gallic, the color scheme is marine blue and white, and the background music might be the Rolling Stones. Sandwiches and salads are served. It's open daily from 7:30am (when breakfast is served to clients recovering from various stages of their hangovers) to midnight or later, depending on business.

St. Eustatius

In days gone by, the little Dutch island of St. Eustatius was the busiest port in the Caribbean, a kind of *Pirates of the Caribbean* scene with some 200 to 300 sailing vessels anchored in the harbor on any given day. The island merchants supplied the U.S. colonies with guns and munitions to support their effort in the War of Independence.

Called "Statia," this Dutch-held island, a mere 21 sq. km (8 1/4-sq.-mile) pinpoint in the Netherlands Antilles, still basks in its 18th-century heritage as the "Golden Rock." One of the true backwaters of the West Indies, it's slowly awakening to tourism.

You may want to visit first on a day trip from St. Maarten to find out whether you'd like it for an extended stay. The volcanic, black-sand beaches aren't especially alluring, and as Caribbean islands go, it's rather dull here, with no nightlife. Some pleasant strips of beach exist on the Atlantic side, but the surf is dangerous for swimming.

However, if you're a hiker or a diver, the outlook on Statia improves considerably for you. You can hike around the base of the Quill, an extinct volcano on the southern end of the island. Wandering through a tropical forest, you'll encounter wild orchids, philodendron, heliconia, anthurium, fruit trees, ferns, wildlife, and birds, along with the inevitable oleander, hibiscus, and bougainvillea.

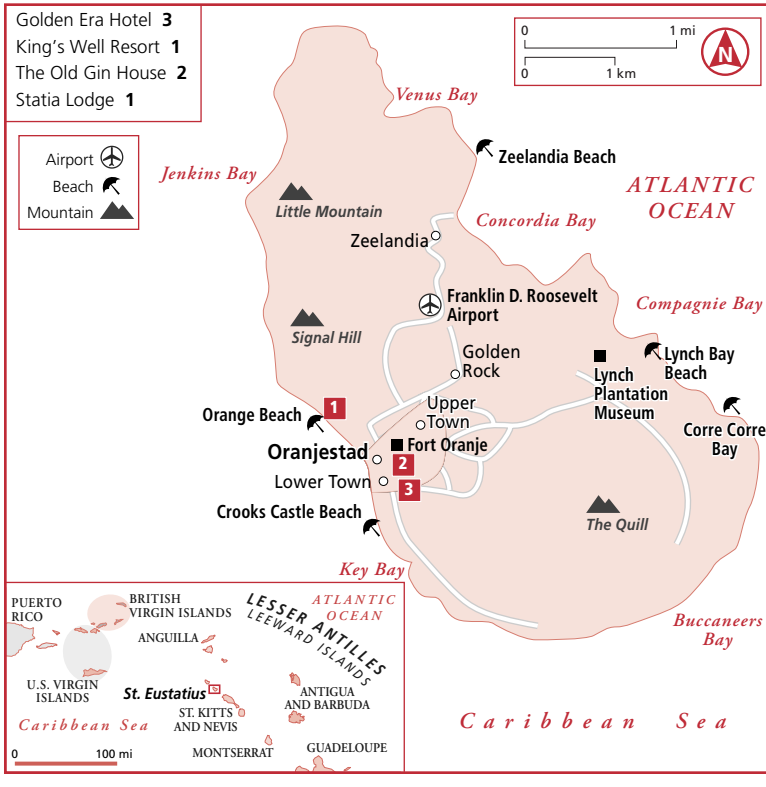
The island's reefs are covered with corals and enveloped by marine life. At one dive site, known as "Crack in the Wall" or sometimes the "Grand Canyon," pinnacle coral shoots up from the floor of the ocean. Darting among the reefs are barracudas, eagle rays, black-tip sharks, and other large fish.

Statia is about 240km (159 miles) east of Puerto Rico, 60km (37 miles) south of St. Maarten, and 30km (19 miles) southeast of Saba. A sloping agricultural plain known as De Cultuurvlakte—where yams and sweet potatoes grow—links Statia's two extinct volcanoes, the Quill and Little Mountain.

Overlooking the Caribbean on the western edge of the plain, **Oranjestad (Orange City)** is the capital and the only village, consisting of both an Upper and Lower Town, connected by stone-paved, dogleg Fort Road.

Columbus sighted Statia in 1493, on his second voyage, and Jan Snouck claimed the island for the Netherlands in 1640. The island's history was turbulent before it settled down to peaceful slumber under Dutch protection; from 1650 to 1816, Statia changed flags 22 times. Once the trading hub of the Caribbean, Statia was a thriving market, both for goods and for slaves.

Before the American Revolution, the population of Statia did not exceed 1,200, most of whom were slaves engaged in raising sugar cane. When war came and Britain blockaded the North American coast, Europe's trade was diverted to the Caribbean. Dutch neutrality lured many traders, leading to the construction of 2km (1 1/4 miles) of warehouses in Lower Town. Statia was one of the first places anywhere to recognize the United States of America as a new nation.



DON'T MISS . . .

- **The Quill,** the cone of an extinct volcano that rises 5km (3 miles) south of the capital at Oranjestad. Its highlight is to wander inside the crater of the 610m (2,001-ft.) volcano, which is now a primeval rainforest.
- **Oranjestad,** the quaint capital of the island centering around Fort Oranje, with its three bastions that were extensively restored to mark the U.S. bicentennial celebration in 1976.
- **Miriam C. Schmidt Botanical Garden,** sprawling across 21 lush hectares (52 acres), is the best showcase of Statia's fauna and flora. Highlights are the Palm Garden and the Lookout Garden.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

On the island, the **tourist bureau** is located at Fort Oranje (✆ **599/318-2433;** fax 599/318-2433), open Monday to Friday 8am to noon and 1 to 5pm (Fri till 4:30pm). Statia's official website is **www.statiatourism.com**.

GETTING THERE

St. Eustatius can be reached from Dutch St. Maarten's Queen Juliana Airport via the 20-seat planes of **Windward Islands Airways International (Winair)** (✆ **866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/545-4237; www.fly-winair.com). The little airline has an excellent safety record. Always reconfirm your return passage once you're on Statia. Several flights a day take only 16 minutes to hop the waters to Statia's **Franklin Delano Roosevelt Airport** (✆ **599/318-2887**). There are usually three flights a day between Statia and Saba, and two per week between Statia and St. Kitts, but schedules are irregular. To be sure of getting to another island from Statia, you'll want to go to St. Maarten first.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Taxis meet all incoming flights. Taxi rates are low, no more than $10 from the airport to your hotel. On the way to the hotel, your driver may offer himself as a guide. If you book a 2- to 3-hour tour (long enough to cover all the sights on Statia), the cost is about $80 per vehicle. To summon a taxi, call **Rosie Lopes** (✆ **599/318-2444**) or **Ausvan Taxi** (✆ **599/318-1300**).

BY RENTAL CAR **Rainbow Car Rental** (✆ **599/318-2811**) or **Walter's** (✆ **599/318-2719**) are your best bets if you want to reserve a car in advance. Drivers must be 21 years old and present a valid license and credit card. Walter's rents only cars.

Fast Facts St. Eustatius

Banks **First Caribbean International Bank,** Upper Town (✆ **599/318-2392**), is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 3:30pm. The **Windward Islands Bank,** Upper Town (✆ **599/318-2845**), is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to noon and 1:30 to 3:30pm. The banks have **ATMs.**

Currency The official unit of currency is the **Netherlands Antilles guilder (NAf),** at NAf 1.77 to each US$1 (1 NAf = 56¢), but nearly all places will quote you prices in U.S. dollars. *As such, prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs There are no Customs duties because the island is a free port.

Documents To be on the safe side, all citizens of any country should travel the Caribbean with a valid passport.

Electricity It's 110-volt AC (60 cycles), the same as in the United States.

Emergencies For the police, call ✆ **911;** for an ambulance, call ✆ **912;** in case of fire, call ✆ **912.**

Hospital A licensed physician is on duty at the **Queen Beatrix Medical Center,** 25 Princessweg, in Oranjestad (✆ **599/318-2211** or 599/318-2371).

Language Dutch is the official language, but English is commonly spoken.

Safety Although crime is rare, it's wise to secure your valuables and take the kind of discreet precautions you would anywhere. Don't leave valuables unguarded on the beach.

Taxes & Service Charges There's a $5.65 tax if you're returning to the Dutch-held islands of St. Maarten or Saba; if you're going elsewhere, the tax is $12. Hotels on Statia collect a 7% government tax, plus a 3% turnover tax. Most hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants add a 10% to 15% service charge.

Telephone To access **AT&T Direct** for calls to the United States from Statia, call ✆ **001-800/872-2881.** To call Statia from the U.S., dial **011** (the international access code), then **599** (the country code for the Netherlands Antilles), and finally **318** (the area code for Statia) and the four-digit local number. To make a call within Statia, only the four-digit local number is necessary.

Time St. Eustatius operates on Atlantic Standard Time year-round. When all time zones are on standard time, 6pm in Oranjestad is 5pm in New York. During daylight saving time, the island keeps the same time as the U.S. East Coast.

Water The water here is generally safe to drink.

Weather The average daytime temperature ranges from 78°F to 82°F (26°C–28°C). The annual rainfall is 1.1m (45 in.).

2 WHERE TO STAY

Don't expect deluxe hotels or high-rises—Statia is strictly for escapists. Guests are sometimes placed in private homes.

Golden Era Hotel Set directly on the water, this 1960s hotel is clean, serviceable, and comfortable. Twelve units offer full or partial sea views. (The most stunning panorama is from no. 205.) All accommodations are spacious, with king-size or queen-size beds, although the look is that of a rather dated motel room. Regrettably, the shower-only bathrooms are so tiny that it's hard to maneuver. You can, if you wish, sit on the toilet and wash your face at the same time. Lunch and dinner are served daily in the simply decorated bar and dining room.

Bay Rd., Lower Town, Oranjestad, St. Eustatius, N.A. ✆ **800/223-9815** or 599/318-2455. Fax 599/318-2445. www.statiatourism.com/goldenera. 20 units. Year-round $135–$150. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge.

King's Well Resort ★ This small resort is the best address on Statia, surpassing the Old Gin House (see below). Set on the Caribbean side of the island, less than 1km (1/2 mile) north of Oranjestad, this secluded choice occupies about .3 hectare (3/4 acre) on an oceanfront cliff, 20m (66 ft.) above the surf. If you're looking for a laid-back, escapist vacation, this is your place. (Your nearest neighbors are in the local cemetery.) Most views look to the southwest, ensuring colorful sunsets that tend to be enhanced by drinks served from the bar at the King's Well Restaurant (see below). Just below the hotel is a

breeding bay for fish and octopus. The owner has several friendly pet dogs on the property. There are no room keys, so don't expect much security. The accommodations are small and rather sparsely furnished, and each is unique. The units in the rear are larger and face the sea, and those in front open onto a shared seaview balcony. This resort might not be suitable for very young children, as there is no guard around the pool.

Oranje Bay Rd-1, Oranjestad, St. Eustatius, N.A. ✆/fax **599/318-2538.** www.kingswellstatia.com. 12 units. Year-round $110–$140 double. Rates include breakfast. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; boating; fishing. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, TV, fridge.

The Old Gin House ★ For years the premier resort of Statia, the Old Gin House is a historic landmark. The inn is a faithful reconstruction of an 18th-century building that once housed a cotton gin. The bricks that went into the construction were once used by sailing ships as ballast. Surrounded by tropical gardens, including palms and bougainvillea, the hotel enjoys a central but tranquil location. All the good-size bedrooms are comfortably furnished, with queen-size beds and direct-dial phones.

Oranjebaai 1, St. Eustatius, N.A. ✆ **599/318-2319.** Fax 599/318-2135. www.oldginhouse.com. 18 units. Year-round $145–$190 double; $315 suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool; dive shop; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some).

Statia Lodge ★ This is real Caribbean living in one of 10 exotic wooden bungalows with an outdoor freshwater pool overlooking the sea not far from the center of Oranjestad. The views from this colony of buildings are the most panoramic on Statia. On a clear day, you can see the island of Nevis in the distance, and the Quill volcano looms in the distance. Cottages are cozy and attractively furnished, with French doors opening onto a patio. Teakwood furnishings and tiles on the floors add a bit of style, as ceiling fans overhead keep you cool. A scooter is included in double rentals, a car for three or four guests sharing a bungalow.

White Wall, Oranjestad, St. Eustatius, N.A. ✆ **599/318-1900.** Fax 599/318-2873. 10 units. Year-round $145 double; $225 quad. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, kitchen, no phone.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Blue Bead Restaurant & Bar ★ (Finds) FRENCH/WEST INDIAN Across from the waterfront, in relatively simple surroundings, this little eatery serves some of the best homemade food on the island. Set at 18th-century ruins at Gallows Bay, it's decorated in bright Caribbean colors. Try to get a table on the veranda, with its potted palms. Dig into such local delights as mussels with french fries. Salt-cod fritters—and tasty ones, at that—are a specialty. If you drop in for lunch, you can choose from a selection of well-made sandwiches, among other offerings, and the pizza oven is kept piping hot at night. Locals end their meal with a taste of the house special, homemade vanilla rum. On Friday nights, fresh seafood is a feature. Island families frequent the place on Saturday night.

Bay Rd., Lower Town, Oranjestad. ✆ **599/318-2873.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $9–$26. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–9:30pm.

Chinese Bar & Restaurant ASIAN/CARIBBEAN This place caters to locals and serves standard Chinese-restaurant fare with a bit of local flavor—the curried shrimp, for example. The atmosphere is very laid-back. For instance, even though the terrace isn't set up for dining, you can request to have your table moved there for an alfresco meal. The portions are hearty and range from the typical sweet-and-sour pork and a variety of

 shrimp dishes to chop suey and chow mein. This is the best place on the island for vegetarian food.

Princessweg, Oranjestad. ✆ **599/318-2929** or 599/318-2389. Main courses $8–$16. No credit cards. Daily 11am–midnight.

King's Well Restaurant INTERNATIONAL The restaurant here is more successful than the simple hotel in which it's housed (see above). Set less than 1km (1/2 mile) north of Oranjestad, and perched on a cliff about 20m (66 ft.) above the surf, it features an open kitchen and great sunset panoramas. Enjoy a fruity drink from the rustic bar before your meal. Lunches feature deli-style sandwiches and a selection of platters form the dinner menu, which is more elaborate. Dishes might include veal *cordon bleu* (thin slices of ham and Swiss cheese sandwiched between scallops of veal, then breaded and sautéed), fresh lobster, pan-fried grouper or snapper with parsley-butter sauce, plus a few German dishes like Jaeger schnitzel (veal sautéed in burgundy with mushrooms). Be sure to finish with the homemade apple strudel.

Oranje Bay Rd., Oranjestad. ✆ **599/318-2538.** Reservations required. Main courses $10–$24. DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–8:30pm.

Ocean View Terrace ★ Finds CARIBBEAN/SEAFOOD This pleasant restaurant is set within a billowing, open-sided tent, inside the courtyard of the government's guesthouse, part of historic Fort Oranje. Diners sit amid dozens of hanging plants and historical artifacts and get a sweeping view of the sea. Menu items are firmly grounded in local culinary traditions but usually include well-prepared versions of local seafood, especially dishes made from shrimp and lobster. Specific examples, based on the whim of the chef, might include shrimp in either a garlic- or a curry-flavored sauce; teriyaki fish; a medley of chicken dishes; and, if you want to go native, several versions of goat and oxtail, including curried and stewed. Lunches, which include a range of salads and sandwiches, tend to be simpler than the more elaborate food featured at dinner.

In Fort Oranje. ✆ **599/318-2934.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $4.50–$8 lunch, $16–$27 dinner. DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–2pm and 7–9pm.

The Old Gin House Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL/FRENCH/ASIAN Escape here for some of the more imaginative, exotic dishes on an island that tends to be devoted to a basic Antillean cuisine. It's a popular spot for divers, who can usually be found at the bar (Mooshay Pub) watching Winston prepare their favorite drinks. This beautiful old bar is in the main building, a former warehouse that once housed sugar, cotton, and indigo. The dining room and kitchen are also here. You can enjoy a candlelit dinner by the pool if the weather cooperates. Fresh lobster appears almost daily on the menu in winter, and the catch of the day, which can be grilled, typically includes red snapper, mahimahi, and kingfish. Fishermen bring their catch right to the door of the kitchen to sell.

Oranjebaai 1. ✆ **599/318-2319.** Reservations required. Main courses $10–$28. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10:30am, 11:30am–2pm, and 6:30–9pm.

4 STATIA'S BEACHES

Most of Statia's beaches are small, narrow strips of sand, either volcanic black or a dull, mudlike gray. Regrettably, the best beaches are not on the tranquil Caribbean side, but on the turbulent Atlantic side, where the waters are often too rough for swimming.

Beachcombers delight, however, in their search for the fabled **blue-glass beads,** which were manufactured in the 1600s by a Dutch West Indies Company. They were used as money for the trading of such products as tobacco, cotton, rum—and even slaves. These beads, which are real collector's items, are often unearthed after a heavy rainfall or tropical storm.

Orange Beach, also called Smoke Alley Beach, lies on the Caribbean side of the island directly off Lower Town. This is one of the small volcanic beaches on the southwest shore, with beige or black sands and waters suitable for a leisurely swim. You virtually have the beach to yourself until late afternoon, when locals start to arrive for a dip.

Also on the leeward, or Caribbean, side is **Crooks Castle Beach,** south of Oranjestad. The waters, filled with giant yellow sea fans, sea whips, and pillar coral, attract snorkelers, while beachcombers are drawn to the many blue beads that have been unearthed here.

On the southeast Atlantic side of the island, **Corre Corre Bay** has a strip of dark golden sand. It's about half an hour down Mountain Road and is worth the trip to get here, although the waters are often too churned up for comfortable swimming. Two bends north of this beach, the light-brown-sand **Lynch Bay Beach** is more sheltered from the wild swells of the Atlantic. Nonetheless, the surf here is almost always rough, plus there's a dangerous undertow; this beach is better for sunbathing than swimming.

Also on the Atlantic side, **Zeelandia Beach** is 3km (2 miles) long and filled with very dark beige and volcanic-black sand. One tourist promotion speaks of its "exciting Atlantic surf and invigorating trade winds" but fails to warn of the dangerous undertow. Only one small designated section is safe for swimming. The beach is suitable, however, for wading, hiking, and sunbathing. It's almost always deserted.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

HIKING Hiking is the most popular outdoor activity on the island. Those with enough stamina can climb the slopes of the **Quill,** the highest point on Statia. Its extinct volcanic cone harbors a crater filled with a dense tropical rainforest, containing towering kapok trees and a dozen or more species of wild orchids, some quite rare. It's also home to at least 50 species of bird life, including the rare blue pigeon, known to frequent the breadfruit and cottonwood trees here. Islanders once grew cocoa, coffee, and cinnamon in the crater's soil, but today bananas are the only crop. The **tourist office** (✆ **599/318-2433**) will supply you with a list of a dozen trails of varying degrees of difficulty and can also arrange for a guide. You'll have to negotiate the fee; it's usually $6 and up.

WATERSPORTS **Dive Statia** is a full PADI diving center on Fishermen's Beach in Lower Town (✆ **599/318-2435;** www.divestatia.com), offering everything from beginning instruction to dive master certification, costing $450. Its professional staff guides divers of all experience levels to spectacular walls, untouched coral reefs, and historic shipwrecks. Dive Statia offers one- and two-tank boat dives, costing $40 to $85. Equipment is $20 a day. Night dives and snorkel trips are also available.

Statia is mostly a divers' island, but there is some decent **snorkeling** on the Caribbean side. You can explore the remnants of an 18th-century man-of-war and the walls of warehouses, taverns, and ships that sank below the surface of Oranje Bay more than 200 years ago. The best place to go is **Crooks Castle Beach,** southwest of Lower Town. Any dive shop can rent you snorkeling gear.

Moments **Catching Crabs Means Something Different Here**

We're perfectly serious: If you're interested, you can join Statians in a crab hunt. The Quill's crater is the breeding ground for these large crustaceans. At night they emerge from their holes to forage, and that's when they're caught. Either with flashlights or relying on moonlight, crab hunters climb the Quill, catch crabs, and take them home to prepare the local delicacy, stuffed crab. Your hotel can usually hook you up with this activity.

6 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Oranjestad stands on a cliff looking out on a beach and the island's calm anchorage, where in the 18th century you might have seen 200 vessels offshore. **Fort Oranje** was built in 1636 and restored in honor of the U.S. bicentennial celebration of 1976. Perched atop the cliffs, its terraced rampart is lined with the old cannons.

Miriam C. Schmidt Botanical Garden ★, Upper Company (www.statiapark.org), is the best place in Statia for a picnic lunch, lying on the Atlantic side of the Quill. The garden sprawls across 21 lush hectares (52 acres) and is a haven for the island's fauna and flora. A ranger is on hand Monday to Friday in the morning (hours vary) to give visitors a tour of the gardens, requesting a $5 donation. Tours last 90 minutes and take in the Sensory Garden, Palm Garden, Lookout Garden, and a bird trail. More information about the gardens can be obtained from the **St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation at Gallows Bay** (✆ **599/318-2884**).

A final site for the adventurers is the **Quill** ★★, the volcanic cone of an extinct volcano, rising 5km (3 miles) south of Oranjestad on the main highway. In the crater of this 610m (2,001-ft.) volcano is a primeval rainforest. You can hike down into its depths, which now are part of the first official National Park created in the Netherlands Antilles. The park consists of the Quill itself, plus the White Wall, a limestone formation on the south side of the volcano.

The park also covers the Boven area, covering five hills in the northern tier of the island. Rangers offer guided tours of the park and maintain a network of 10 trails in the Quill sector. The cost is $10 for a 3- to 4-hour guided hike, including the National Park visitor fee. Arrangements can be made at the **Visitors Center** near the harbor at Gallows Bay (✆ **599/318-2884**). The center is open Monday to Thursday 8am to 5pm, Friday 8am to 4pm.

St. Eustatius Historical Foundation Museum, Upper Town (✆ **599/318-2693**), is also called the Donker House in honor of its former tenant, Simon Donker. After British Admiral Rodney sacked Statia for cooperating with the United States, he installed his own headquarters here. Today the 18th-century house and museum stands in a garden, with a 20th-century wing crafted from 17th-century bricks. There are exhibits on the process of sugar refining and shipping and commerce, a section devoted to the pre-Columbian period, archaeological artifacts from the colonial period, and a pair of beautiful rooms furnished with 18th-century antiques. In the annex is a massive piece of needlework by American Catherine Mary Williams, showing the flowers of Statia. The museum is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to noon; admission is $3 for adults, $1 for children.

A few steps away, a cluster of 18th-century buildings surrounding a quiet courtyard is called **Three Widows' Corner.**

Nearby are the partially restored ruins of the first **Dutch Reformed church,** on Kerkweg ("Church Way"). To reach it, turn west from Three Widows' Corner onto Kerkweg. Tilting headstones record the names of the characters in the island's past. You can climb to the top level of the tower and see the bay as lookouts did many years before.

Statia once had a large colony of Jewish traders, and you can explore the ruins of **Honen Dalim,** the second-oldest Jewish synagogue in the Western Hemisphere (see p. 245 for information on the oldest). Built around 1740 and damaged by a hurricane in 1772, the synagogue stands beside Synagogpad, a narrow lane whose entrance faces Madam Theatre on the square.

The walls of a *mikvah* (ritual bath) rise beside the **Jewish burial ground** on the edge of town. Most poignant is the memorial of David Haim Hezeciah de Lion, who died in 1760 at the age of 2 years, 8 months, 26 days; carved into the baroque surface is an angel releasing a tiny songbird from its cage.

You can also visit **Lynch Plantation Museum** at Lynch Bay (✆ **599/318-2338**), but you'll have to call to arrange a tour. Donations are accepted; otherwise, admission is free. Locals still call this place the Berkel Family Plantation, although today it's a museum depicting life on Statia a century ago, through antiques, fishing and farming equipment, pictures, and old Bibles. Usually Ismael Berkel is on hand to show you around. This is still very much a residence rather than some dead, dull museum.

7 SHOPPING

At **Mazinga Giftshop,** Fort Oranje Straat, Upper Town (✆ **599/318-2245**), you'll find an array of souvenirs—T-shirts, liquor, costume jewelry, 14-karat-gold jewelry, cards, drugstore items, beachwear, office supplies, children's books, handbags, and paperback romances. You may have seen more exciting stores in your life, but this is without parallel for Statia. You can buy books, office supplies, and stationery at the **Paper Corner,** Van Tonningenweg, Upper Town (✆ **599/318-2208**).

8 ST. EUSTATIUS AFTER DARK

As for after-dark fun, Statia ain't Las Vegas. Nightlife pickings here are among the slimmest in the Caribbean. Weekends are the best—maybe the only—time to go out. **Smoke Alley Bar & Grill,** Lower Town, Gallows Bay (✆ **599/318-2002**), is an open-air beach bar with live music on Friday night; it's open Monday to Saturday 6 to 10pm. For local flavor, try **Cool Corner,** Wilhelminaweg, Uppertown, Oranjestad (✆ **599/318-2523**), across from the St. Eustatius Historical Foundation Museum, in the center of town.

21

St. Kitts & Nevis

Locked in a two-island confederation, St. Kitts and Nevis are for connoisseurs. The bigger sister is St. Kitts, the seat of government. It's about twice the size of little Nevis, with almost four times as many people. Nearly half of the people of St. Kitts live in the capital of Basseterre.

There are similarities between the two islands. Each has a lush landscape, including rainforests, and most of the beaches are uncrowded. Long-dormant volcanoes dominate on each island, and both islands have a cultural heritage from 18th-century sugar plantation economies. If you want untamed scenery, head north on St. Kitts to its trio of mountain ranges.

The two islands of St. Kitts and Nevis (*Nee*-vis) were British possessions until 1983, when they became a tiny, independent, two-island nation (a ministate, really), complete with UN membership. British traditions remain in evidence, however. Cricket is fiercely popular and motorists drive on the left.

St. Kitts and Nevis slumbered as backwaters of the Caribbean for decades. The country's economy was dependent entirely on sugar cane, making it vulnerable to the ravages of hurricanes. But recently tourists and celebrities have discovered the islands' average year-round temperature of 79°F (26°C), low humidity, white-sand beaches, and unspoiled natural beauty.

This doesn't mean that St. Kitts and Nevis are playgrounds for the rich and famous—not yet. But people who can go anywhere have been spotted here in the near past: Britney Spears, Oprah Winfrey, Regis Philbin, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Michael Douglas, Sarah Jessica Parker, Sylvester Stallone, Danny Glover, and Michael J. Fox, to name a few. They attract a clientele with a higher percentage of Brits than many of the vacation destinations nearby—about 30% of the tourists coming here are from the U.K., about 60% from the U.S. and Canada, the remainder mostly European.

Of the two islands, Nevis is the sleepier. It has fewer nonstop flights from North America, fewer luxury hotels, and almost no nightlife to speak of. It also has a reputation as being a money-laundering haven for drug traffickers and other suspicious businesses (despite adamant denials by Nevis officials). The tiny island has some 9,000 offshore businesses—about one business per inhabitant—registered and operating under strict secrecy laws. In fact, disagreements about controls over offshore banking activities triggered a rift between the two islands that almost led to Nevis's secession. In the most recent referendum on the issue, in 1998, a majority of Nevisians (but not the two-thirds required) voted for independence from St. Kitts.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Brimstone Hill Fortress,** St. Kitts, which commands a view of six islands: Nevis, Montserrat, Saba, Statia, St. Martin, and St. Barts. This is arguably the greatest panorama in the Caribbean. Pack a picnic lunch to spread on a grassy hilltop. Nature trails cut through a national park, the habitat of the green vervet monkey.
- **St. Kitts Scenic Railway** takes you on a panoramic tour of the island's most spectacular scenery, the narrow gauge railway following the old sugar cane tracks.

- **Pinney's Beach,** Nevis, one of the grandest in the Caribbean with its reef-protected waters, ideal for both swimming and snorkeling. Near the beach's windward edge, you come across a sleepy lagoon that evokes the South Pacific with its swaying palms and golden sands.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

Information is available from the **tourist board**'s stateside offices at 414 E. 75th St., New York, NY 10021 (✆ **800/582-6208** or 212/535-1234).

In **Canada,** an office is located at 133 Richmond St., Ste. 311, Toronto, ON M5H 2L3 (✆ **416/368-6707**), and in the **United Kingdom** at 10 Kensington Court, London, W8 5DL (✆ **020/7376-0881**).

The website for St. Kitts is **www.stkittstourism.kn**. The equivalent website for Nevis is **www.nevisnaturally.com**.

Fast Facts St. Kitts & Nevis

Banks The most convenient bank, with **ATM** services, is the **St. Kitts–Nevis–Anguilla National Bank** on Central Street in Basseterre (✆ **869/465-2204**). Other ATMs are at Port Zante, the shopping mall adjacent to the cruise ship piers in downtown Basseterre, and at the Marriott Resort in Frigate Bay. Funds are dispensed, depending on the machine, in either U.S. dollars or Eastern Caribbean dollars.

Currency The local currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$),** pegged at EC$2.70 to the U.S. dollar (EC$1 = US37¢). Many prices, however, including those of hotels, are quoted in U.S. dollars. Always determine which "dollar" locals are talking about. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs You are allowed in duty free with your personal belongings. Sometimes luggage is subjected to a drug check. If you clear Customs in one of the islands, you don't have to do it again if you visit the other.

Documents U.S., British, and Canadian citizens need a passport. A return or ongoing ticket is mandatory.

Electricity Electricity on St. Kitts is 230-volt AC (60 cycles), so you'll need an adapter and a transformer for U.S.-made appliances. However, most hotels on the islands have outlets that will accept North American appliances. Check with your hotel to see if it has converted its voltage and outlets.

Emergencies Dial ✆ **911** for emergencies, ✆ **311** for fire department.

Language English is the language of both islands, and it is spoken with a decided West Indian lilt; patois is commonly spoken as well.

Safety This is still a fairly safe place to travel. Most crimes against tourists—and there aren't a lot—are robberies on Conaree Beach on St. Kitts, so exercise the

usual precautions. It's wise to safeguard your valuables, and women should not go jogging alone along deserted roads. Crime is rare on Nevis.

Taxes The government imposes a 9% tax on rooms and meals, plus another $22 airport departure tax. (You don't pay the departure tax when you travel between St. Kitts and Nevis.)

Telephone The area code for St. Kitts and Nevis is **869.** You can make calls to or from the United States as you would for any other area code in North America. To access **AT&T Direct,** call ✆ **800/225-5288;** to reach **MCI,** dial ✆ **800/888-8000.**

Time St. Kitts and Nevis are on Atlantic Standard Time year-round. This means that in winter, when it's 6am in Basseterre, it's 5am in New York. When the United States goes on daylight saving time, St. Kitts and Nevis are on the same time as the East Coast of the United States.

Tipping Most hotels and restaurants add a service charge of 10% to cover tipping. If not, tip 10% to 15%.

Water The water on St. Kitts and Nevis is so good that in the 1970s, Baron de Rothschild's chemists selected St. Kitts as their only site in the Caribbean to distill and produce CSR (Cane Sugar Rothschild), a pure sugar-cane liqueur. In the 1700s, Lord Nelson regularly brought his fleet to Nevis just to collect water, and Nevis still boasts of having Nelson spring water.

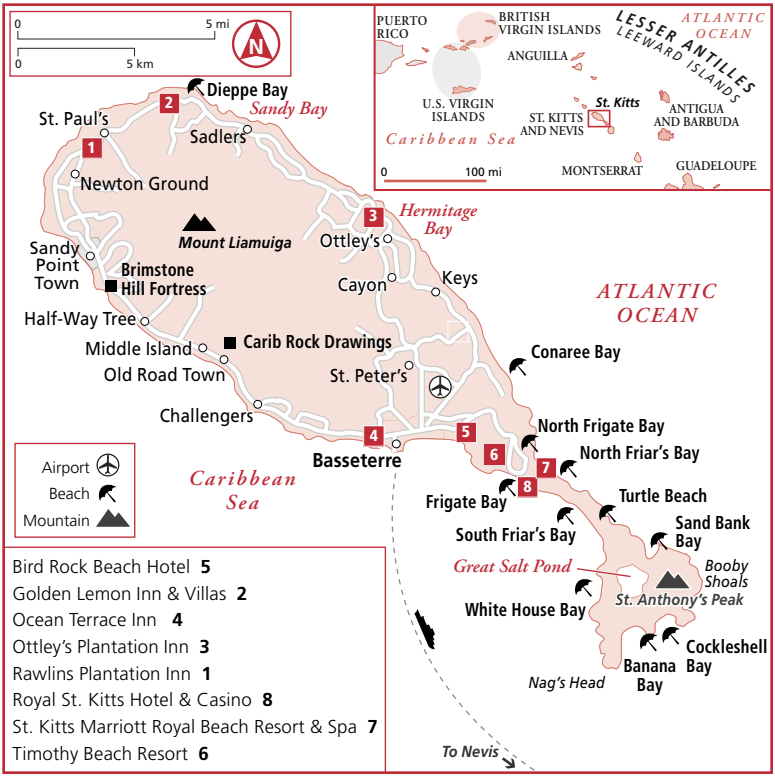
Weather St. Kitts and Nevis are tropical, and the warm climate is tempered by the trade winds. The average air temperature is 79°F (26°C); the average water temperature, 80°F (27°C). Dry, mild weather is usually experienced from November to April; May to October is hotter and rainier.

2 ST. KITTS

St. Kitts' major crop is sugar, a tradition dating from the 17th century. But tourism may overwhelm it in the years to come, as its southeastern peninsula, site of the best white-sand beaches, has been set aside for massive resort development. Most of the island's other beaches are of gray or black volcanic sand.

The Caribs, the early settlers, called the island Liamuiga, or "fertile isle." Its mountain ranges reach up to nearly 1,200m (3,936 ft.), and its interior contains virgin rainforests, alive with hummingbirds and wild green vervet monkeys. The monkeys were brought in as pets by the early French settlers but were set free when the British took control of the island in 1783. These native African animals have proliferated and can be seen at the Estridge Estate Behavioral Research Institute. The British brought in mongooses to control rats in the sugar-cane fields, only to discover that the predators slept during the rats' most active forays. Wild deer are found in the mountains.

The capital of St. Kitts, **Basseterre,** lies on the Caribbean shore near the southern end of the island, about 2km (1 1/4 miles) from the airport. Its white colonial houses with toothpick balconies look like a Hollywood version of a West Indian port.



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE In 2007, several airlines stepped up their nonstop service from the North American mainland into St. Kitts. American was one of these, reinstating nonstop service from New York's JFK airport twice per week, and inaugurating once-per-week nonstop service into St. Kitts from Miami. This supplements service that had existed previously, including **US Airways'** (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) Saturday service from both Philadelphia and Charlotte to St. Kitts. Otherwise, you have to connect through Antigua, St. Maarten, or Puerto Rico. **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has dozens of daily flights to its hub in San Juan. From there, American's commuter partner, **American Eagle,** makes four daily nonstop flights into St. Kitts.

Windward Islands Airways International (known to everybody as **Winair;** ✆ **866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada, or 869/465-8010; www.fly-winair.com) flies to St. Kitts from St. Maarten. The Antigua-based carrier **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liatairline.com) flies to St. Kitts from Antigua, Puerto Rico, and St. Maarten. Winair has two daily flights between Nevis and St. Kitts.

Moments Sweet Treat

At some point during your visit, you should eat sugar directly from the cane—and an occasional vendor, some of them positioned in downtown Basseterre at the corner of Fort and Cayon Streets, will sell you a stalk for around $1.90. Strip off the hard exterior of the stalk, bite into it, chew on the tasty reeds, and swallow the juice. It's best with a glass of rum. Tourist officials are quick to point out that the local economy is no longer based exclusively on sugar cane in particular, or on agriculture in general, but you'll nonetheless spot lots of flourishing sugar-cane fields, especially in isolated regions of (northwestern) St. Kitts.

Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada, or 514/422-5000; www.aircanada.ca) flies from Toronto to Antigua. **Excel Airlines** (✆ **0871/911-4220;** www.xl.com) flies about once a week from London's Gatwick to Antigua. From Antigua, you can make connections on LIAT or Winair (see above).

You can also use the **interisland ferry service** between St. Kitts and Nevis. Ferry schedules follow no obvious patterns and are subject to change without notice. The fare is $8 round-trip for any of the ferryboats that participate in the frequent runs. In addition, in 2007, car-ferry service was inaugurated between St. Kitts and Nevis, with a departure between the two islands once per day throughout the year. For specific schedules, call ✆ **869/465-4040** or click on **www.boatschedule.leytonms.com**.

GETTING AROUND Since most **taxi** drivers are also guides, this is the best means of getting around. You don't even have to find a driver at the airport—one will find you. Drivers also wait outside the major hotels. First, however, you must agree on the price, since taxis aren't metered. Also, ask if the rates are in U.S. or Eastern Caribbean dollars. The fare from the airport to Basseterre is about $7; to Sandy Point, $15; to Frigate Bay (site of the Marriott Hotel), around $15. Tours of the island, each lasting around 2½ hours and appropriate for one to four passengers, cost around $60 each. For more information, call the **St. Kitts Taxi Association** (✆ **869/465-8487**).

Avis, Irishtown Bay Road (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 869/465-6507; www.avis.com), charges from $40 to $80 per day, $260 to $480 per week, plus $15 per day for collision damage, with a $950 deductible and a surcharge of $1.50 per day. The company offers free delivery service to either the airport or any of the island's hotels; drivers must be between ages 25 and 75. Avis will arrange for a rental exchange if you also go to Nevis.

Avis's most impressive competitor is **Thrifty Rent-a-Car,** located at the corner of Central Street and West Independence Square Street, in the center of Basseterre (✆ **869/465-2991** for the major branch or ✆ **869/465-3160** for their airport branch). Prices rival those at Avis, and quality of cars is generally very good.

Delisle Walwyn & Co., Liverpool Row, Basseterre (✆ **869/465-8449**), is a local company offering cars and jeeps starting at $40 to $60 per day. Tax and insurance are extra ($10 per day for collision damage, $750 deductible). This might be your best deal on the island.

Remember: Driving is on the left! You'll need a local driver's license, which can be obtained at the **Traffic Department,** on Cayon Street in Basseterre, for $24. Usually a member of the staff at your car-rental agency will drive you to the Traffic Department to get one.

Fun Facts Party Times in St. Kitts

Carnival in St. Kitts is celebrated not in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday, but from Christmas Eve to January 2. The festivities include parties, dancing, talent shows, and the crowning of the Carnival Queen. The final day of the celebration is known as "Last Lap" and features a repeat of many of the activities, including a multitude of bands jamming in the streets of Basseterre.

Another popular party time is the **St. Kitts Music Festival,** held the last weekend in June (Thurs–Sun). The soca/calypso night is usually the festival's opening event, and its most popular. You can also hear reggae, jazz, rhythm and blues, and gospel performances over the 4 days. For more information, call the Department of Tourism at ✆ **869/465-4040.**

FAST FACTS **Banks** on St. Kitts are open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 2pm, Friday from 8am to 4pm, and Saturday from 8:30 to 11am. You can place **international telephone calls,** including collect calls, at **Cable and Wireless,** Cayon Street, Basseterre (✆ **869/465-1000**), Monday to Wednesday from 8am to 5pm, Thursday and Friday 8am to 4pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon.

The most centrally located pharmacy is **City Drug,** Central Street in Basseterre (✆ **869/465-2156**), open Monday to Wednesday and Friday to Saturday from 8am to 7pm, Thursday from 8am to 5pm, and Sunday from 8 to 11am.

There's a 24-hour **emergency room** in Basseterre at **Joseph N. France General Hospital,** Buckley's Site (✆ **869/465-2551**).

The **St. Kitts tourist board** operates at Pelican Mall, Bay Road in Basseterre (✆ **869/465-4040**). It's open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

Golden Lemon Inn & Villas ★★ Sophisticated and elegant describe both the Golden Lemon and its clientele. Arthur Leaman, one-time decorating editor of *House & Garden* magazine, used his taste and background to create a hotel of bohemian charm in this otherwise dilapidated shipping port. The resort's centerpiece is a much-restored, much-altered French colonial manor house with an 18th-century Georgian upper story, set within a coconut grove near a black volcanic-sand beach, on the otherwise isolated northwest coast of St. Kitts. Flanking the great house are the Lemon Court and Lemon Grove Condominiums, each painted a neon shade of lemon-gold, where you can rent luxuriously furnished suites surrounded by manicured gardens; most have private pools. The venue is a wee bit faded from its glory days when this kind of upscale-bohemian venue was a novelty in these parts. The spacious rooms are furnished with antiques and always contain fresh flowers, but are not air-conditioned. Bedrooms have been redecorated with new fabrics, rugs, and accessories. Many beds are raised four-posters draped in mosquito netting in the old plantation style; each is equipped with fine linen. The larger villas have sunken tubs, kitchens, and dishwashers. At press time, there was talk about the owner of this place transforming it into holiday condos renamed "Kittitian Hill."

Dieppe Bay, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/633-7411** in the U.S., or 869/465-7260. Fax 869/465-4019. www.goldenlemon.com. 26 units. Winter $325 double, $495 1-bedroom villa, $640–$820 2-bedroom villa; off season

$245 double, $370 1-bedroom villa, $480–$590 2-bedroom villa. Rates include American breakfast. Extra person $150. Honeymoon packages available. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept to mid-Oct. Children 18 and under not usually accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; horseback riding; outdoor pool; tennis court; catamarans; scuba diving; snorkeling; room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in 2); ceiling fan, fridge (in all units), hair dryer, kitchenette (in villas).

Ottley's Plantation Inn ★★★ This is the island's finest, most appealing, and most stylish place to stay. It's historically evocative and infinitely intimate, and invariably leaves a visitor with the impression that enormous amounts of love, tenderness, loyalty, and devotion have been showered upon the place by the resident innkeepers, long-ago refugees from the bookselling business in Princeton, New Jersey, the Keusch family. Ten kilometers (6¼ miles) north of the airport, and near a rainforest, it occupies a 14-hectare (35-acre) site that functioned during the 17th century as a plantation. Those seeking historically evocative charm will appreciate the rooms within the gracefully restored 1832 great house. Other units include free-standing cottages and a newer (c. 2006) series of hideaway and very romantic suites, each with a view of the sea, a private plunge pool, and furniture that's artfully appropriate to the setting and the 19th-century flair in which this place excels. Regardless of their location and category, rooms are elegantly appointed and very spacious, with queen- or king-size beds. Guests enjoy body polishing or body wraps at the trendy Mango Orchard Spa set in a replica of a traditional wood-framed Antillean cottage called a chattel house.

Ottley's Village (P.O. Box 345), St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/772-3039** in the U.S., or 869/465-7234. Fax 869/465-4760. www.ottleys.com. 24 units. Winter $318–$518 double, $778 suite, $998–$1,498 villa; off season $254–$394 double, $574 suite, $814–$1,174 villa. $78 per person daily for half-board (breakfast and dinner). Wedding, honeymoon, and other packages available. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children 9 and under discouraged. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; shuttle to beach; babysitting; bikes; Jacuzzi; croquet; outdoor pool; room service; spa; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV (by request), hair dryer, minibar.

Rawlins Plantation Inn ★★ This hotel in the verdant uplands above Dieppe Bay is situated among the ruins of a muscovado sugar factory on the northeast coast, with a good sandy beach just a short drive away. Isolated and rural in flavor, and dominated by the artfully gaunt masonry smokestack of the long-ago sugar cane distillery, this former plantation enjoys cool breezes from both ocean and mountains. Behind the 5 hectares (12 acres) of manicured lawns and gardens, the land segues into a rainforest and Mount Liamuiga. Accommodations lie within the original core of either the main house or what used to be the distillery, or within pleasantly decorated outbuildings. There's no air-conditioning, but ceiling fans and cross-ventilation keep the place comfortable. Each unit, generous in size, is decorated in a Caribbean country-house style with antiques, stone or white walls, floral prints, local art, and rattan furnishings. Many bedrooms have mahogany four-posters.

Mount Pleasant (P.O. Box 340), St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/346-5358** in the U.S., 0208/874-9534 in the U.K., or 869/465-6221. Fax 869/465-4954. www.rawlinsplantation.com. 12 units. Winter $330–$347 double, $457 Sugar Mill Honeymoon Suite, $525–$624 2-bedroom cottage; off season $265–$282 double, $394 Sugar Mill Honeymoon Suite, $525–$624 2-bedroom cottage. Wedding packages available. Rates include breakfast, dinner, afternoon tea, and laundry service. MC, V. Closed Aug–Oct. No children 11 or under allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; croquet; outdoor pool; tennis court. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

Expensive

St. Kitts Marriott Royal Beach Resort & Spa ★★ Kids This is the largest and most un-self-consciously "mass market" resort on St. Kitts, a sprawling but well-managed

behemoth that entered the scene in 2003. Its design evokes the Mediterranean with its tile roofs and lush landscaping. Its modernity is a long way from such historical resorts as Ottley's and Rawlins (see above). In the center, a few steps down from the lobby, is a replica of Columbus's *Santa Maria,* surrounded by a reflecting pool and some waterfalls. The location, with its adjacent Royal Beach Casino, is near the narrowest part of St. Kitts, close to Atlantic-fronting beaches. Its 9 hectares (22 acres) include an 18-hole golf course designed by Canadian-born Tom McBroom and one of the largest casinos in the Caribbean. The decor of this sprawling resort is self-tabbed as "Euro-Caribbean," with vague references to the Italian Renaissance within its pastel-colored sprawl and richly patterned marble floors. Most of the tasteful, comfortable, and elegant accommodations are within a five-story central core, but there are also various low-rise "outbuildings" between the main building and the sea.

858 Frigate Bay Rd., Frigate Bay, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/228-9290** in the U.S., or 869/466-1200. Fax 869/466-1201. www.marriott.com. 513 units. Winter $243–$660 double, $545–$833 suite; off season $125–$251 double, $249–$312 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 6 bars; babysitting; children's programs; 18-hole golf course; health club; 3 outdoor pools; whirlpool; casino; night club; room service; sauna; full-service spa; smoke-free rooms; 4 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Bird Rock Beach Hotel Built in the mid-1980s as a small inn, but expanded and enlarged many times since then, this resort is set on steeply sloping terrain beside a secluded, half-moon-shaped beach 3km (1 3/4 miles) southeast of Basseterre. The small hotel is uncomplicated and easygoing. Seven coral-colored and angular buildings each have six to eight accommodations. It's a good example of a carefully maintained West Indian–owned resort where guests, despite the handful of organized activities, are very much on their own. Views from most bedroom balconies are either of the Bay of Basseterre and the capital, or of the water stretching toward Nevis. All units have private patios or balconies and rather bland furniture inspired by the Tropics. Bedrooms carry out the Caribbean motif with flowery fabrics and paintings of birds. Each superior room has one king-size or two double beds, and each studio suite offers a queen-size bed plus a sofa bed and a kitchenette. Apartments have full kitchens.

P.O. Box 227, Basseterre, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/621-1270** in the U.S., or 869/465-8914. Fax 869/465-1675. www.birdrockbeach.com. 46 units. Winter $105–$135 double, $225 2-bedroom suite, $300 3-bedroom suite; off season $90–$105 double, $165 2-bedroom suite, $215 3-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; PADI-accredited snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, cable-connected TV, fridge (in some), hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Ocean Terrace Inn ★ This inn is affectionately known as the "OTI" by its mainly business clients. If you want to be near Basseterre, it's the best hotel within a reasonable walking distance of downtown and the port, with oceanfront verandas and a view of the harbor and the capital. It's so compact that a stay here is like a house party on a cruise ship. Terraced into a landscaped hillside above the edge of Basseterre, the hotel also has a garden and well-kept grounds. Each of the handsomely decorated rooms has a light, tropical feel and overlooks a well-planted terrace. Bedrooms are a wide variety of sizes and are tidily maintained. The hotel also offers apartments at the Fisherman's Wharf and Village, a few steps from the nearby harbor. These units are filled with most of the comforts of home.

Wigley Ave. (P.O. Box 65), Fortlands, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **800/524-0512** or 869/465-2754. Fax 869/465-1057. www.oceanterraceinn.com. 71 units. Winter $195–$235 double, $265–$460 suite; off season $170–$205 double, $245–$410 suite. Dive, honeymoon, and eco-safari packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. Go west

along Basseterre Bay Rd. past the Cenotaph. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; horseback riding; fitness center; Jacuzzi; 3 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan (in some), TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), Wi-Fi.

Royal St. Kitts Hotel & Casino ★ (Value) For some 2 decades, this sprawling property was known as the Jack Tar Village. It's been massively overhauled and is experiencing a renaissance as the Royal St. Kitts. To get rid of the impersonal chain hotel stigma, the restored property focuses on Kittitian culture, including handcrafts, original paintings, and certain decorative elements. The well-furnished bedrooms are spread across 30 two-story structures, each with a view balcony overlooking the golf course, the sea, or the lagoon. ***Be warned:*** Tour groups sometimes fill up the place.

Nestled on the southeast peninsula of the island, the resort is near beaches of both the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. It's the most kid-friendly property in St. Kitts; children 12 and under stay free. The location is right next door to an 18-hole championship golf course.

Frigate Bay, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **866/607-6242** or 869/465-8651. 282 units. Year-round $153–$190 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 6 bars; children's programs; golf course; fitness center; gym; 2 outdoor pools; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; rooms for those w/disabilities. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

Timothy Beach Resort (Kids) Located at the foot of a green mountain, 5km (3 miles) east of Basseterre, this condo resort is a family favorite with lots of children, most of them under 12, running around underfoot. Though short on atmosphere, it's on one of St. Kitts' finest beaches. Naturally, the most sought-after units are those opening directly onto the beach, which offers swimming, sailing, and watersports. There's also a pool, and an 18-hole golf course is just a short drive away. The rooms are furnished in a Caribbean motif, and the larger accommodations have kitchens. Units here are timeshares, so there are no routine extras.

Frigate Bay (P.O. Box 1198), Basseterre, St. Kitts, W.I. ✆ **877/94-BEACH** [942-3224] or 869/465-8597. Fax 869/466-7085. www.timothybeach.com. 60 units. Winter $140–$210 double, $230 1-bedroom suite, $345 2-bedroom suite; off season $110–$150 double, $165 1-bedroom suite, $240 2-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; golf (nearby); outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

WHERE TO DINE

Very Expensive

The Royal Palm ★★ CARIBBEAN FUSION On the grounds of Ottley's Plantation Inn, the Royal Palm is a favorite, serving St. Kitts's most creative and most innovative cuisine. It also has a colorful setting: Gaze through the early-19th-century stone arches to the ocean on one side, and Mount Liamuiga and the inn's veranda-ringed great house on the other. The menu changes daily. If they're available, you may start with roasted vegetable torte or chile-flavored shrimp corn cakes. The lobster quesadillas, made with local lobster, are worth crossing the island to sample. Main courses are impeccably prepared, especially the French roast of lamb and the breast of chicken Molyneux with almonds, country ham, mozzarella, and mushroom stuffing.

In Ottley's Plantation Inn, north of Basseterre, on the east coast. ✆ **869/465-7234.** Reservations required. Lunch main courses $13–$27; Sun champagne brunch $36; prix-fixe dinner $66. AE, MC, V. Daily 8–10am, noon–3pm, and 6–8:30pm.

Expensive

Fisherman's Wharf Seafood Restaurant and Bar ★ SEAFOOD/CARIBBEAN At the west end of Basseterre Bay Road, the Fisherman's Wharf is between the sea and the white picket fence of the Ocean Terrace Inn. Near the busy buffet grill, hardworking chefs prepare fresh seafood. An employee will take your drink order, but you personally place your food order at the grill. It's a bit like eating at picnic tables, but the fresh-fish selection is excellent, caught locally and grilled to order over St. Kitts charcoal. Spicy conch chowder is a good starter; grilled lobster is an elegant main course choice, or you may prefer the grilled catch of the day, often snapper. Grilled swordfish is always good, as is the combination platter, which includes lobster, barbecued shrimp kabob, and calypso chicken breast.

At the Ocean Terrace Inn, Fortlands, Basseterre. ✆ **869/465-2754.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$40. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–11pm.

The Golden Lemon ★ CONTINENTAL/CREOLE The food is very good, and the service polite in this fine hotel on the northern coast. It's especially appropriate as a lunch stop on a tour of the island. Dinner is served in an elegant, candlelit dining room, in the garden, or on the gallery. The hotel's sophisticated owner created many of the recipes. The menu changes daily but is likely to include baked Cornish hen with ginger, fresh fish of the day, and Creole sirloin steak with a spicy rum sauce. Vegetarian dishes are also available. Dress is casually chic.

In the Golden Lemon Inn, Dieppe Bay. ✆ **869/465-7260.** Reservations usually required; walk-ins accepted if space available. Main courses $10–$25 lunch; fixed-price dinner $35–$65; Sun brunch $15–$35. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7:30–10am, noon–3pm, and 7–11pm; Sun noon–3pm and 7–10pm.

Marshall's ★ Finds JAMAICAN/INTERNATIONAL Jamaica-born chef Verral Marshall infuses the island's local cuisine with his own spice and flair. Installed around the pool area of Horizons Villa Resort, steeply uphill from the Marriott, and built on the foundations of the ruined, long-gone British-built Fort Tyson, his restaurant overlooks Frigate Bay and the relatively nearby island of Nevis. It's quite romantic at night, with beautifully laid tables, flickering candles, and a definite sense of very hip and very romantic charm. You'll get a warm welcome, excellent service, and good food. The fish depends on the catch of the day, but menu items that are usually readily available include crab cakes in remoulade sauce; seafood "coquille St. Kitts" in a white wine–and–cream sauce; seared scallops in olive oil with butter-lemon sauce; and roast of duck with raspberry sauce. Prices are a bit steep but overall worth it for an evening out on the island.

Horizons Villa Resort, Frigate Bay. ✆ **869/466-8245.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$50. AE, DISC, MC, V. Jan–Apr Mon–Fri noon–3pm; year-round Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Serendipity ★★ INTERNATIONAL One of the newest and most-talked-about restaurants on St. Kitts occupies the tidy and well-ordered premises of a modern house in the uplands above the Ocean Terrace Inn, on the outskirts of Basseterre. Here, English expatriates Pauline Horton and Alexander Jones, from within a yellow-and-blue dining room and an open-air veranda, serve well-prepared food that many locals have highly praised. Menu items include coconut-flavored shrimp, snapper or grouper prepared any way you specify, and duck in red-wine sauce. Lunches are a bit less formal, focusing on dishes that include Caesar salads garnished with your choice of grilled shrimp or chicken, sandwiches, and burgers.

3 Wigley Ave., Fortlands, Basseterre. ✆ **869/465-9999.** www.serendipitystkitts.com. Reservations recommended. Lunch salads and platters $11–$22; dinner main courses $19–$45. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11:30am–3pm and 6–9:30pm.

Stonewalls ★ Finds CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This open-air bar in a tropical garden in Basseterre's historical zone is cozy and casual. It's the type of Caribbean bar that you hope exists but can rarely find. In a garden setting of banana, plantain, and bamboo trees, England-born Neil Goodwin presents an innovative and constantly changing menu. The fare might be Caribbean, with fresh kingfish or tuna and a zesty gumbo, or an authentic, spicy Dhansak-style curry. Hot-off-the-wok stir-fries are served along with sizzling grilled chicken breast in a teriyaki glaze. Appetizers might include piquant conch fritters. A small but carefully chosen wine list is available. The bar here is one of the most convivial places on the island for a drink.

Princes St. ✆ **869/465-5248.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$14 lunch, $12–$35 dinner. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 5–11pm.

The Waterfalls Restaurant ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL Some of the finest cuisine in Basseterre is found here. The views from the open-air veranda—especially at night when the harbor is lit up—are also some of the best around. We prefer the real down-home island dishes; international specialties tend to be more bland. Dinner might include tasty fish cakes, accompanied by breaded carrot slices, creamed spinach, a stuffed potato, a cornmeal dumpling known as a johnny cake, and a green banana in a lime-butter sauce, topped off by a tropical fruit pie and coffee. The less daring can stick with chateaubriand.

Ocean Terrace Inn, Fortlands. ✆ **869/465-2754.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$25. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10pm. Drive west on Basseterre Bay Rd. to Fortlands.

Moderate

Ballahoo Restaurant ★ CARIBBEAN Overlooking the town center's Circus Clock and the most charming "traffic roundabout" in the Caribbean, the Ballahoo lies in the heart of St. Kitt's capital, on the second story of an antique stone building. Open on one side to breezes and a view over the main square, and aggressively unpretentious (it evokes, in some ways, a Caribbean luncheonette), it is one of the coolest places in town on a hot afternoon, thanks to sea breezes. One of the most reliable dishes is blue parrotfish filet, but the house special is sexy, succulent conch in garlic butter. The chef also makes chili, baby back ribs, sandwiches, burgers, steaks, and breakfast omelets. Seafood platters, such as chile shrimp or fresh lobster, are served with coconut salad and rice. For more elegant fare, there's Italian-style chicken breast topped with pesto, tomatoes, and cheese and served with pasta and salad, or the salade niçoise (anchovies, eggs, and potatoes topped with fresh fish). The service is casual. Because of its central location and general appeal, this restaurant also draws the cruise ship crowd.

The Circus, Fort St., Basseterre. ✆ **869/465-4197.** Reservations recommended. Salads, sandwiches, and *rotis* $4.10–$11; platters and main courses $11–$19. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm.

Inexpensive

Glimbara Diner CARIBBEAN Don't expect grand cuisine from this everyday eatery. Established in 1998 in a simple family-run guesthouse in the heart of Basseterre, it has become a local favorite, thanks to the hardworking staff and down-to-earth food. Small and cozy, and painted in shades of blue, white, and gray, it serves Creole cuisine that varies with

the mood and inspiration of the cook. Examples might include large or small portions of the stewlike goat water, pumpkin or bean soup, and several kinds of fried or grilled fish, which might be accompanied by coleslaw or green salad. American-style platters, including hamburgers and hot dogs, are usually served with fries and soda. Ask for a local fruit punch known as *fairling* or the bottled sugary grapefruit drink called Ting.

In the Glimbara Guesthouse, Cayon St., Basseterre. ✆ **869/465-1786.** Main courses $5.60–$8.90. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

BEACHES

Most visitors to St. Kitts are primarily concerned with its beaches. The narrow peninsula in the southeast that contains the island's salt ponds also boasts the best white-sand beaches. All beaches, even those that border hotels, are open to the public. However, to use the beach facilities of a hotel, you must first obtain permission and will probably have to pay a small fee.

Until the Dr. Kennedy Simmonds Highway (named for the nation's first prime minister)—a 10km (6 1/4-mile) road beginning in the Frigate Bay area—opened to the public in 1989, it was necessary to take a boat to enjoy the beautiful, unspoiled beaches of the southeast peninsula. To travel this road is one of the pleasures of a visit to St. Kitts. Not only will you see some of the island's most beautiful scenery, but you'll also pass lagoonlike coves and fields of tall guinea grass. If the day is clear (and it usually is), you'll have a panoramic vista of Nevis. The best beaches along the peninsula are **Frigate Bay, Friar's Bay, Sand Bank Bay, White House Bay, Cockleshell Bay,** and **Banana Bay.** Of all these, **Sand Bank Bay** ★ gets our nod as the finest strip of sand.

Both **Cockleshell Bay** and **Banana Bay** also have their devotees. Together these two beaches run a distance of 3km (1 3/4 miles), all with powder-white sands. So far, in spite of several attempts, this area hasn't filled with high-rise resorts.

A live steel band plays on Sundays from 12:30 to 3pm at the **Turtle Beach Bar and Grill,** Turtle Bay, making this the place for afternoon cocktails on the beach.

For excellent **snorkeling,** head to somewhat rocky **White House Bay,** which opens onto reefs. Schools of rainbow-hued fish swim around a tugboat sunk long ago—a stunning sight.

South Friar's Bay is lovely, and many locals consider it their favorite. **Frigate Bay,** with its powder-white sand, is ideal for swimming, windsurfing, and water-skiing.

You may also want to visit **Great Salt Pond** at the southeastern end of St. Kitts. This is an inland beach of soft white sand, opening onto the Atlantic Ocean in the north and the more tranquil Caribbean Sea in the south.

The beaches in the north of St. Kitts are numerous but are of gray volcanic sand and are much less frequented than those of the southeast peninsula. Beachcombers like to visit them, and they can be ideal for sunbathing, but swimming is much better in the southeast, as waters in the north, sweeping in from the Atlantic, can often be turbulent.

The best beach on the Atlantic side is **Conaree Bay,** with a narrow strip of gray-black sand. Bodysurfing is popular here. **Dieppe Bay,** another black-sand beach on the north coast, is good for snorkeling and windsurfing, but not for swimming. This is the site of the island's most famous inn, the Golden Lemon, which you might want to visit for lunch. ***Warning:*** If you should be on this beach during a tropical shower, do not seek shelter under the dreaded manchineel trees, which are poisonous. Rain falling off the leaves will feel like acid on your skin.

GOLF The **Royal St. Kitts Golf Course,** Frigate Bay (✆ **869/466-2700;** www.royalstkittsgolfclub.com), is an 18-hole championship course that covers 64 hectares (158 acres). It features 10 water hazards, not including the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, which border it. It's open daily from 7am to 6pm. Greens fees are $115 to $150 for 18 holes. A bar and an on-site restaurant open daily at 7am. The course is part of the St. Kitts Marriott Resort.

HORSEBACK RIDING **Trinity Stables** (✆ **869/465-3226**) charges $65 for a half-day tour through a rainforest. You might also get to see the wild lushness of the North Frigate Bay area and the rather desolate Conaree Beach. You must call for a reservation; you'll be told where to meet and offered advice, including what to wear.

SCUBA DIVING, SNORKELING & OTHER WATERSPORTS Some of the best dive spots include **Nag's Head,** at the south tip of St. Kitts, an excellent shallow-water dive starting at 3m (9 3/4 ft.) and extending to 21m (69 ft.). A variety of tropical fish, eagle rays, and lobster is found here. The site is ideal for certified divers. Another good spot for diving is **Booby Shoals,** off the southeast Atlantic coast near Cockleshell Bay. Booby Shoals has abundant sea life, including nurse sharks, lobster, and stingrays. Dives are up to 9m (30 ft.) in depth, ideal for both certified and resort divers.

A variety of activities is offered by **Pro-Divers,** at Turtle Beach (✆ **869/466-3483;** www.prodiversstkitts.com). You can swim, float, paddle, or go on scuba-diving and snorkeling expeditions from here. A two-tank dive costs $95; night dives go for $80. A PADI certification course is $390, with a resort course going for $125. Snorkelers can also sign up for a 3-hour trip costing $50.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The British colonial town of **Basseterre** is built around a so-called **Circus,** the town's round square. A tall green Victorian clock stands in the center of the Circus. After Brimstone Hill Fortress, **Berkeley Memorial Clock** is the most photographed landmark of St. Kitts. In the old days, wealthy plantation owners and their families used to promenade here.

Try to visit the **marketplace,** especially on a Saturday morning. Here, country people bring baskets brimming with mangos, guavas, soursop, mammee apples, and wild strawberries and cherries just picked in the fields. Tropical flowers abound.

Another major landmark is **Independence Square.** Once an active slave market, it's surrounded by private homes of Georgian architecture.

You can negotiate with a taxi driver to take you on a tour of the island, costing from $80 for a 3-hour trip; most drivers are well versed in the lore of the island. You might want to make lunch reservations at either the Rawlins Plantation Inn or the Golden Lemon. For more information, call the **St. Kitts Taxi Association,** the Circus, Basseterre (✆ **869/465-8487** until 10pm).

The island's most popular attraction is the **St. Kitts Scenic Railway** ★ (✆ **869/465-7263;** www.stkittsscenicrailway.com). In double-decker and air-conditioned railcars, you're taken on a panoramic tour of the most spectacular scenery the island has to offer. The upper level features a spacious, open-air observation deck. The narrow-gauge railway follows the old sugar-cane train tracks, taking in the best vistas of mountains and the Caribbean Sea. You can enjoy a service bar and live musical entertainment. The train is boarded at Needsmust Station. This is certainly the quickest and easiest way to see "St. Kitts in a nutshell," especially if you're a cruise ship passenger with limited time. The

50km (31-mile) ride costs $89 for adults, half-price for children. Trips last 3 1/2 hours, with departure daily at 8:10am. Sometimes a second daily tour will be announced if business merits it.

Brimstone Hill Fortress ★ (✆ **869/465-6211;** www.brimstonehillfortress.org), 14km (8 3/4 miles) west of Basseterre, is a major stop. This historic monument, among the largest and best preserved in the Caribbean, is a complex of bastions and barracks ingeniously adapted to the top and upper slopes of a steep-sided 240m (787-ft.) hill. The fortress dates from 1690, when the British attempted to recapture Fort Charles from the French. Admission is $8 for adults, $4 for children.

Today the fortress is the centerpiece of a national park, with nature trails and a diverse range of plant and animal life, including the **green vervet monkey.** It's also a photographer's paradise, with views of mountains, fields, and the Caribbean Sea. On a clear day, you can see six neighboring islands. Visitors can enjoy self-guided tours among many ruins and restored structures, including the barrack rooms at Fort George, which contain an interesting museum. The gift shop stocks prints of rare maps and paintings of the Caribbean. Admission is $8, half-price for children. The Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park is open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm.

You can visit the site where a large tamarind tree in the hamlet of **Half-Way Tree** once marked the boundary between the British- and French-held sectors. It was near the hamlet of **Old Road Town** that Sir Thomas Warner landed with the first band of settlers and established the first permanent colony to the northwest at Sandy Point. Sir Thomas's grave is in the cemetery of St. Thomas Church.

A sign in the middle of Old Road Town points the way to **Carib Rock Drawings,** all the evidence that remains of the former inhabitants. The markings are on black boulders, and the pictographs date from prehistoric days.

INTO THE VOLCANO

Mount Liamuiga was dubbed "Mount Misery" long ago, but it sputtered its last gasp around 1692. This dormant volcano on the northeast coast is one of the major highlights for hikers on St. Kitts. The mountain's peak often lies under cloud cover.

The ascent to the volcano is usually made from the north end of St. Kitts at Belmont Estate. The trail winds through a rainforest and travels along deep ravines up 788m (2,585 ft.) to the rim of the crater. The actual peak is at 1,138m (3,733 ft.). Figure on 5 hours of rigorous hiking to complete the round-trip walk.

The caldera itself is some 120m (394 ft.) from its rim to the crater floor. Many hikers climb down into the dormant volcano, but the trail is steep and slippery, so be careful. At the crater floor is a tiny lake, along with volcanic rocks and various vegetation.

Greg's Safaris (✆ **869/465-4121;** www.gregsafaris.com) is the most competent and best-accessorized trekking outfitter in St. Kitts, maintaining seven different four-wheel-drive Land Rovers for access to some of the island's toughest terrain. Owner and founder Greg Pereira charges $90 per person for 9-hour hiking tours of remote regions of his island, recommending that participants be reasonably fit and that they carry a dry shirt (the one you'll wear will get drenched with perspiration) and a waterproof bag or knapsack for transport of bottled water and your camera. Hikes go up the sides of Mount Liamuiga ("fertile isle" in Carib), and include a picnic lunch and a rum-based drink or two at the conclusion of the day's hiking. Treks include a guide and running commentary on the island's topography, sociology, ecology, and history. The same outfit also offers half-day rainforest explorations for $50 per person.

The good buys here are local handicrafts, including leather (goatskin) items, baskets, and coconut shells. Some good values can also be found in clothing and fabrics, especially Sea Island cottons. Store hours vary but are likely to be Monday to Saturday from 8am to noon and 1 to 4pm.

If your time is limited, head first for the **Pelican Shopping Mall,** Bay Road, which contains some two dozen shops. Opened in 1991, it also offers banking services, a restaurant, a philatelic bureau, and the administrative offices of the St. Kitts Tourist Office. Some major retail outlets in the Caribbean, including Little Switzerland, have branches here. Also check out the offerings along the quaintly named **Liverpool Row,** which has some unusual merchandise, and **Fort Street.**

Associated with the island's burgeoning cruise ship industry, **Port Zante** is a shopping mall built just after the turn-of-the-millennium directly on landfill that was dumped into what old-timers designated as Horseshoe Harbor. Cruise ships can berth at quays immediately adjacent to Port Zante, in a way that's replicated in Barbados, and whose role model the St. Kittitians copied. The *Queen Mary* stops frequently, disgorging passengers who shop, shop, shop. Port Zante, whose name derives from an ancient Greek myth, is the home of about 60 shops, with emphasis on things that glitter, especially jewelry. Although there are dozens of shops purveying upscale goods, one of the noteworthy, best-established shops is **Linen and Gold** (✆ **869/465-9766**), which offers a limited selection of gold and silver jewelry, usually in bold modern designs. But the real appeal of this shop is its tablecloths, doilies, and napkins, laboriously handcrafted in China from cotton, linen, and polyester. The workmanship is as intricate as anything you'll find in the Caribbean.

Ashburry's, the Circus/Liverpool Row, Basseterre (✆ **869/465-8175**), is a local branch of a chain of luxury-goods stores based on St. Maarten. This well-respected emporium sells fragrances, fine porcelain, Baccarat crystal, designer handbags, watches, and jewelry at prices 25% to 30% below what you might pay in retail stores in North America; the selection is similar to dozens of equivalent stores throughout the Caribbean.

Spencer Cameron Gallery, 10 N. Independence Sq., Basseterre (✆ **869/465-1617**), is set on a dusty plaza ringed with businesses and residential clapboard-sided houses, near the center of Basseterre, and with an exterior brightly painted in tropical colors, this is a leading art gallery. On display are scenes of St. Kitts and Nevis by Brit Rosie Cameron-Smith, along with works by a handful of other mostly West Indian artists. Rosey ("a good-natured English lass in the Tropics") is well known on the island for her paintings of Kittitian Carnival clowns, monkeys, and figurative work, and she also produces greeting cards, postcards, calendars, and lithographs.

The finest gallery on St. Kitts is **Kate Design,** Mount Pleasant (✆ **869/465-7740**), set in a carefully restored West Indian house, on a hillside below the Rawlins Plantation. Virtually all the works on display are by English-born Kate Spencer, who is well known throughout North America and Europe. Her paintings of island scenes range in price from $200 and have received critical acclaim. Also for sale is a series of Ms. Spencer's silk-screened scarves, each crafted from extra-heavy stonewashed silk.

Island Hopper (known as "The Big Shop of the Little Island"), the Circus, below the popular Ballahoo Restaurant, Basseterre (✆ **869/465-1640**), is one of St. Kitts's most patronized shops, with the biggest inventory of any store on the island. Notice the all-silk, shift-style dresses from China and the array of batiks made on St. Kitts. About half of the merchandise is from the islands.

Caribelle Batik, at Romney Manor, Old Road, about 15km (9¼ miles) west of Basseterre (✆ **869/465-6253**), is the most unusual factory in St. Kitts. It was built around 1625 as a manor house for sugar baron Lord Romney. For years, it has been used as the headquarters and manufacturing center for a local clothier, Caribelle Batik, whose tropical cottons sell widely to cruise ship passengers and tourists from at least three outlets in the eastern Caribbean. The merchandise ranges from scarves to dresses, along with an extensive collection of wall hangings and cushions. In 1995, a tragic fire and hurricane completely gutted the historic building. The manor has now been rebuilt and extended. Consider a stopover here if only to admire the 2 hectares (5 acres) of lavish gardens, where 30 varieties of hibiscus, rare orchids, huge ferns, and a 250-year-old saman tree still draw horticultural enthusiasts. Entrance to the gardens is free.

ST. KITTS AFTER DARK

The **Ocean Terrace Inn's Fisherman's Wharf,** Fortlands (✆ **869/465-2754**), has a live band every Friday from 8 to 10pm. It's not "after dark," but the **Turtle Beach Bar and Grill,** Turtle Bay (✆ **869/465-9086**), on the southeast peninsula, offers a live steel band daily from 12:30 to 3pm; on Saturday, it's beach disco time. There's no cover at either place.

A few other nightspots come and go (mostly go). Currently, islanders hang out at **Bobsy's** (✆ **869/466-6133**), clearly signposted from the roads leading into Frigate Bay. Another local dive, **Henry's Night Spot,** Dunn's Cottage, Main Street, Cayon (✆ **869/465-3508**), has a loyal following, as does the **Oasis Sports Bar**, at Frigate Bay (✆ **869/466-6029**), where a medley of large-screen TVs broadcast current or repeat views of major sports events from the worlds of American or European football, baseball, or basketball. At the Marriott Resort at Frigate Bay, the **Royal Beach Casino** (✆ **869/466-5555**) lures gamblers to its large casino with slot machines and games of chance with croupiers. For the high roller, there are private salons. And if you opt for an exploration of the casino within Marriott, you might as well explore a bit, since that resort contains at least six bars.

3 NEVIS

It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it. That is, make a choice between St. Kitts and Nevis, the "Sisters of the Caribbean." Although both islands have their charms, we cast our vote for Nevis. Separated by a 3.2km (2-mile) channel from St. Kitts, Nevis, like its twin, is volcanic (dormant, that is) and has golden-sand beaches. But for rustic charm and a certain old plantation bucolia, it is becoming a secret address for celebrities and the discerning travelers who shun overpopulated islands such as Barbados or Puerto Rico.

Nevis is the sleeper of the Caribbean. With its old-fashioned West Indian charm and its intimate island inns, it is a rustic alternative to St. Barts—but doesn't charge those celestial prices. Nevisians will tell you that Kittitians are more interested in the dollar and more anxious for hotel development. To cinch their argument, Nevisians like to point out that overstressed Kittitians take the ferryboat over to Nevis for their R&R weekends and for public holidays.

A local once said that the best reason to go to Nevis was to practice the fine art of *limin'*. To him, that meant doing nothing in particular. Limin' might still be the best reason to venture over to Nevis. If you want to lie out in the sun, head for reef-protected

Pinney's Beach, a 5km (3-mile) strip of dark-gold sand set against a backdrop of palm trees with panoramic views of St. Kitts.

Columbus sighted Nevis in 1493. The explorer called it *Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves*—"Our Lady of the Snows"—because its peak is often shrouded in clouds, making it look snow-capped. From St. Kitts, the island appears to be a perfect cone, rising gradually to a height of 970m (3,182 ft.). A saddle joins the tallest mountain to two smaller peaks, Saddle Hill (375m/1,230 ft.) in the south and Hurricane Hill (only 75m/246 ft.) in the north.

Centuries before the British settled the island in 1628, Nevis was a habitat for the friendly Arawaks and later the fierce Caribs. These native populations were replaced with the arrival of the British, who established sugar and tobacco plantations beginning in the mid-1600s. In the ensuing decades, both the Spanish and the French battled the British for control of the island, the British finally winning out in this tug-of-war in 1783 when both Nevis and St. Kitts came under British control. The two-island nation would remain under British control until independence was achieved in 1983.

Nevis's beauty has remained relatively unspoiled. Coral reefs rim the shoreline, and there's mile after mile of palm-shaded white-sand beaches. Natives of Nevis, for the most part, are descendants of African slaves.

The volcanic island is the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, the American statesman who wrote many of the articles contained in *The Federalist Papers* and was George Washington's treasury secretary. Nevis is also the island on which Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson married Frances Nisbet, a local widow, in 1787, an episode described in James Michener's *Caribbean* (the facts are romanticized, of course).

In the 18th century, Nevis's hot mineral springs made it the leading spa of the West Indies. The island was also once peppered with prosperous sugar-cane estates, but they're gone now—many have been converted into some of the most intriguing hotels in the Caribbean. Sea Island cotton is the chief crop today.

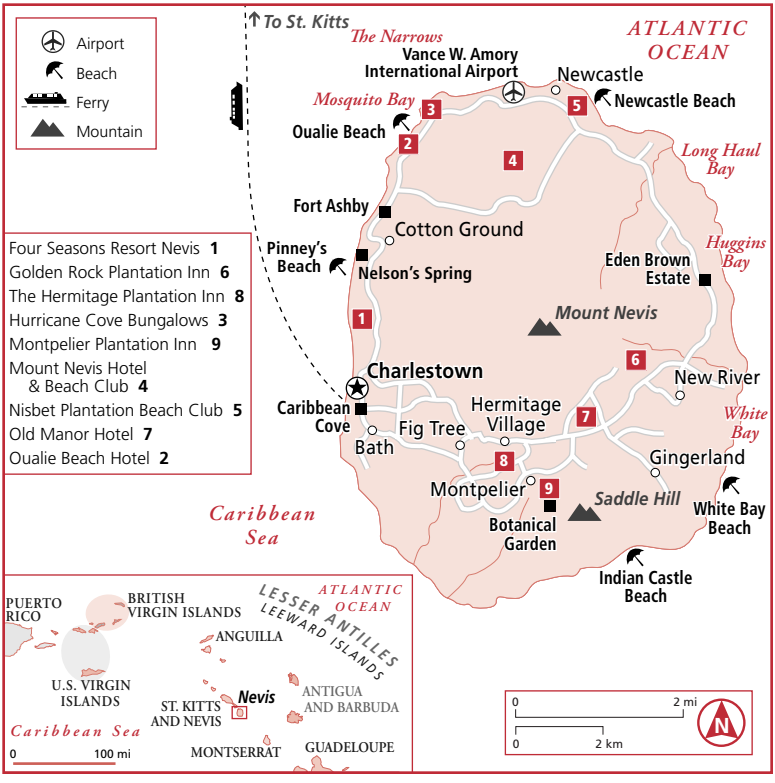
On the Caribbean side, **Charlestown,** the capital of Nevis, was fashionable in the 18th century, when sugar planters were carried around in carriages and sedan chairs. A town of wide, quiet streets, this port gets busy only when its major link to the world, the ferry from St. Kitts, docks at the harbor.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are no nonstop flights to Nevis from North America. To get here, you'll have to stop or change planes in Antigua, St. Maarten, or Puerto Rico. **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; wwwaa.com) has dozens of daily flights to San Juan. From here, you can catch a propeller plane to Nevis, arriving on Nevis at the **Vance W. Amory International Airport,** which has a single runway. You can also fly into Nevis from San Juan on two daily flights operated by **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 869/465-2273). The airport is located on the north side of the island—just 15 minutes outside the capital of Charlestown and less than 30 minutes from all the major resorts, hotels, and plantation inns on the island.

For information on traveling to Nevis by ferry, see "Getting There," in the earlier section on St. Kitts.

GETTING AROUND **Taxi** drivers double as guides, and you'll find them waiting at the airport or the ferry dock. The fare between Newcastle Airport and Charlestown is $18; between Charlestown and Old Manor Estate, $15; and from Charlestown to Pinney's Beach, $8. Between 10pm and 6am, 50% is added to the prices. Call ✆ **869/469-1042** for more information.



You can arrange for a **rental car** from a local firm through your hotel. Or you can check with **TDC Car Rental**, on the Bay Front in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-1005**), a local outfit that's loosely allied with Thrifty (✆ 800/367-2277) in the U.S.; or **Nevis Car Rental,** Newcastle, near the airport (✆ **869/469-9837**). Another reliable firm is **Noel's Courtesy Garage,** Farms Estate (✆ **869/469-5199**), which is convenient to guests in hotels east of Charlestown, including Hermitage, Montpelier, Old Manor, and Golden Rock. To drive on Nevis, you must obtain a permit from the traffic department, which costs $25 and is valid for 3 months. Car-rental companies will handle this for you. ***Remember:*** Drive on the left side of the road. The road that encircles Nevis has been improved and resurfaced.

FAST FACTS **Banks** are usually open Monday to Thursday 8am to 2pm, and Friday 8am to 3pm. Normal **store hours** are Monday to Saturday 8am to 4pm. Most are closed Sunday.

The **post office** is on Main Street in Charlestown. It's open Monday to Friday 8am to 3pm. Virtually every phone on the island allows you to make international phone calls—in fact, the ease of international access from within your accommodation is so widespread that few opt to travel to the Cable and Wireless office anymore.

If you need a pharmacy, try **Evelyn's Drugstore,** Charlestown (✆ **869/469-5278**), open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturday from 8am to 7pm, and Sunday for only 1 hour, from 7 to 8pm, to serve emergency needs.

There's a 24-hour **emergency room** at **Alexandra Hospital,** Government Road, in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-5473**). For police, fire, or medical emergencies, dial either ✆ **911** or 5391 from any island phone.

The **Nevis Tourist Authority** is on Main Street in Charlestown (✆ **866/556-3847** in the U.S., or 869/469-7550).

For more information search **www.nevisnaturally.com**.

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

Four Seasons Resort Nevis ★★ Kids This hotel is, hands down, the most luxurious, most upscale, most prestigious choice on the island. Even so, discerning travelers have detected a problem or two, especially when conventions dominate or raucous families check in. Located on Nevis's west coast, it's set in a palm grove beside Pinney's Beach, the finest sandy beach on Nevis. On an island known for its small and intimate inns, this low-rise resort built in 1991 stands out as the largest and best-managed hotel, with the most complete sports facilities (including a fabulous golf course) and even the best children's program. Designed in harmony with the surrounding landscape and an intense devotion to the integrity and well-being of the local ecology, the accommodations offer conservative mahogany furniture, touches of marble, carpeting, and wide patios or verandas overlooking the beach, the golf course, or Mount Nevis. Public rooms are rather formal and more than a bit British in their look and appointments, a kind of Belgravia (London) meets the Tropics, with plenty of deep, comfortable sofas and wide-open views of the gardens. Guest rooms are spacious, with generous closet space, full-length mirrors, luxurious upholstery and fabrics, and king-size or double beds. The Alexander Hamilton and the Horatio Nelson suites are filled with antiques and memorabilia of these two figures.

Pinney's Beach (P.O. Box 565), Charlestown, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **800/332-3442** in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111. Fax 869/469-1112. www.fourseasons.com/nevis. 196 units. Winter $525–$750 double, from $1,850 suite; off season $375–$575 double, from $825 suite. Up to 2 children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; children's programs; 18-hole golf course; health club; Jacuzzi; 3 pools; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 10 tennis courts; fishing; scuba diving; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

The Hermitage Plantation Inn ★★ This much-photographed, frequently copied historians' delight is said to be the oldest all-wood house in the Antilles and was built amid the high-altitude plantations of Gingerland in 1740. Some say it once hosted Alexander Hamilton and Horatio Nelson. Today former Philadelphian Richard Lupinacci and his wife, Maureen, have assembled one of the best collections of antiques on Nevis here. Wide-plank floors, intricate latticework, and high ceilings add to the hotel's beauty. The accommodations are in 12 cozily rustic wood-sided cottages, each evoking an old-fashioned summer cottage in Maine. Many contain huge four-poster beds, colonial-style louvered windows, and the distinct sense that the clients who adore this place have raised more than one generation of children among the trees and verdant landscaping of an inn that's on everybody's list of the most appealing small hotels in the Caribbean. The most luxurious and expensive unit is a yellow manor house on .2 hectares (½ acre) of private gardens with its own ceramic-tile pool, three large bedrooms furnished with antique

canopy beds, oversize bathrooms with dressing rooms, a comfortable living room, a dining room, and a full kitchen. Complimentary beach transportation is provided because the best nearby beach is a 15-minute drive away.

St. John's Parish, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **800/682-4025** in the U.S., or 869/469-3477. Fax 869/469-2481. www.hermitagenevis.com. 15 units. Winter $325–$390 double, $450 cottage, $790 manor house villa; off season $170–$205 double, $265 cottage, $650 manor house villa. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Take the main island road 6km (3¾ miles) from Charlestown. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; horseback riding; outdoor pool; room service; tennis court. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV (in some), fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Montpelier Plantation Inn ★★ One of the Plantation Inns of Nevis, the Montpelier stands in the hills, 210m (689 ft.) high, with grandstand views of the ocean. The 18th-century plantation is in the center of its own 12-hectare (30-acre) estate, which contains 4 hectares (10 acres) of ornamental gardens surrounding the cottage units. Admiral Horatio Nelson married Frances Nisbet at this historic sugar plantation back in 1787. Accommodations are generally spacious and brightened with fresh flowers and luxuries like comfortable chairs and dressing tables. Tasteful fabrics in contemporary colors are used. The guest rooms contain bamboo tables and chairs, as well as mahogany writing desks and cedar wall closets. Today the look is one of minimalist chic, as befits the 21st century. Most of the elegant bedrooms have four-poster beds. Service is among the best on island. The staff will even unpack your clothing, press your garments, and put them away for you. Montpelier by the Sea is the hotel's private .8-hectare (2-acre) beach, featuring waterfront dining and beverages in an old Nevisian house.

St. John Figtree (P.O. Box 474), Montpelier, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **869/469-3462.** Fax 869/469-2932. www.montpeliernevis.com. 17 units. Winter $500–$560 double, $760 suite, $940–$1,200 2-bedroom suite; off season $300–$360 double, $560 suite, $640–$900 2-bedroom suite. Rates include breakfast and afternoon tea. AE, MC, V. Closed Aug–Sept. Children 7 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; transport to private beach; babysitting; horseback riding; library; outdoor pool; room service; spa; tennis court; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer.

Mount Nevis Hotel & Beach Club ★ Kids Originally established in 1989, this family-owned and -run resort—built on the site of a lime plantation—is on the slopes of Mount Nevis, a 5-minute drive southwest of the Vance Amory International Airport. Small scale with touches of genuine charm, it's an inn rather than a full-blown resort, but with absolutely none of the 18th-century references that so richly permeate such competitors as the Hermitage Plantation or the Nisbet Plantation. It's known for the quality of its accommodations, for its panoramic views, and for serving some of the best food on Nevis. Near the historic fishing village of Newcastle, it offers standard rooms, junior suites, and most plush of all, a series of "supervisor suites," the latter with fully equipped kitchens and enough space for at least four guests, making it an ideal family choice. The rooms have ceiling fans and are furnished in a tropical motif, with wicker and colorful island prints. The Mount Nevis Beach Club offers a site directly astride the waters of Newcastle Bay and features a beach pavilion, bar, and restaurant. A shuttle bus interconnects the hotel with its beach facilities.

Newcastle (P.O. Box 494), Charlestown, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **800/756-3847** in the U.S. and Canada, or 869/469-9373. Fax 869/469-9375. www.mountnevishotel.com. 54 units, 16 with kitchens. Winter $375 double or junior suite, $450 1-bedroom suite, $740 2-bedroom suite; off season $275 double or junior suite, $350 1-bedroom suite, $560 2-bedroom suite. Rates include breakfast. Children stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; beach shuttle; babysitting; exercise room; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen (in some).

Nisbet Plantation Beach Club ★★ A respect for fine living pr evails in this gracious estate house on a coconut plantation, which is the only plantation-style house that lives up to the grace notes of M ontpelier P lantation I nn. This is the former home of Frances Nisbet, who, at the age of 22, married Lor d Nelson. This is the only plantation hotel in Nevis that opens directly onto the beach—a kilometer or so (1/2 mile) of pulverized coral sand against a backdr op of palm trees. The present main building (that is, the Great House) was rebuilt on the foundations of the original 18th-centur y manor house. The r uins of a cir cular sugar mill stand at the entrance, co vered with bougainvillea, hibiscus, and poinciana. G ingerbread and fr etwork-trimmed guest cottages, each with between two and four units, are set in a palm grove. All rooms are brightly decorated and beautifully appointed. I n 2006 the N isbet completed a US$2-million r enovation and added a small-scale spa.

Newcastle, St. James's Parish, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **800/742-6008** in the U.S. and Canada, or 869/469-9325. Fax 869/469-9864. w ww.nisbetplantation.com. 36 units . Winter $625–$835 double; off season $365–$625 double. Rates include MAP (breakfast and dinner) and afternoon tea. AE, MC, V. Turn left out of the airport and go 2k m (1 1/4 miles). **Amenities:** 3 r estaurants; 2 bars; bab ysitting; horseback riding; golf at F our Seasons; fitness center; outdoor pool; spa; smoke-free rooms; tennis court snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Golden Rock Plan tation Inn ★ This place doesn 't hav e the polish and glaz e of other choices her e, but offers do wn-home qualities and quiet charm. This former sugar estate, built in 1815, lies in the lush hills only a 15-minute driv e east of Charlestown. Set on 40 tropical hectares (99 acres), it fronts a 10-hectar e (25-acre) garden. Guests live in fairly spacious surr oundings, in a setting of pineapple friez es, island crafts, family heirlooms, and tile flo wers. Fabrics ar e island made, with tr opical flower designs. Cottages are scattered about the garden, and each has a four-poster king-size bed made of bamboo or mahogany. Rooms have large porches with views of the sea as well. The original stone tower windmill has been turned into a duplex honeymoon suite (or accommodations for a family of four). The hotel lies at the beginning of a rainfor est walk; it takes about 3 to 4 hours to follo w the trail r ound-trip (the hotel pr ovides a map). F or the equestrian, horseback riding can be arranged. I f you want to go to the beach, the complimentar y hotel shuttle will take y ou to either P inney's Beach (on the lee ward side) or White Bay Beach (also known as Windward Beach), which has good sur fing.

P.O. Bo x 493, Gingerland , Nevis , W.I. ✆ **869/469-3346.** Fax 869/469-2113. w ww.golden-rock.com. 12 units. Winter $260–$443 double; off season $200–$353 double . Children 1 y ear old and under sta y free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 r estaurants; bar; beach shuttle; bab ysitting; horseback riding; outdoor pool; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsur fing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

Hurricane Cove Bungalo ws This cluster of self-contained bungalo ws is set on a hillside with a world-class ocean vie w, a far better sight than the complex 's rather ramshackle facade. It's located on the northernmost point of Nevis, a 5-minute drive west of the airport. Each bungalow is wood sided and vaguely Scandinavian in design, with a tile roof and a massive foundation that anchors it into the r ocky hillside. No meals are served, but each unit has a full kitchen and ther e's a poolside barbecue grill. Each bungalo w has a queen-size bed, a co vered porch, and a ceiling fan. A fr eshwater pool is built into the foundation of a 250-y ear-old for tification, and the beach lies at the bottom of a steep hillside. The three-bedroom villa has its o wn small, but private, pool.

Oualie Beach, Nevis , W.I. ✆/fax **869/469-9462.** w ww.hurricanecove.com. 12 units . Winter $245–$410 1-bedroom bungalo w, $375–$435 2-bedr oom bungalo w, $685 3-bedr oom villa; off season $165–$325

1-bedroom bungalow, $255–$330 2-bedroom bungalow, $495 3-bedroom villa. MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; snorkeling. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, kitchen, no phone (in most).

Old Manor Hotel ★ Thanks to its construction around an abandoned sugar mill, this plantation-style inn evokes the aura of a long-gone way of life better than any of its competitors. East of Charlestown and north of Gingerland, at a cool and comfortable elevation of 240m (787 ft.), the Old Manor Hotel has an old-world grace, but because the Florida-based owners aren't always on the premises, it lacks the hands-on attention to detail that you'll get elsewhere on the island. The forested plot of land on which the hotel sits was granted to the Croney family in 1690 by the king of England. The estate thrived as a working sugar plantation until 1936. Beneficiary of many renovations (in the 1980s, much of this place was partially ruined), the hotel is cheerful and historical. Accommodations contain wide-plank floors of tropical hardwoods, reproduction furniture, and high ceilings. Only three of the units contain TVs—but in light of the historic authenticity of the place, many of the guests actually prefer the silence.

P.O. Box 70, Gingerland, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **869/469-3445.** Fax 869/469-3388. www.oldmanornevis.com. 13 units. Winter $290 double, $380 suite; off season $220 double, $280 suite. Rates include full breakfast. Extra person $50–$170. Children 1 year old and under stay free. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar.

Oualie Beach Hotel This complex of Creole-style congenially weather-beaten cottages is set on flatlands adjacent to the white sands of its namesake, the island's second-most-famous beach. It's often fully booked several months in advance by European sun-worshippers who come here for the beach and only because of the beach, expecting very little else. Each medium-size unit is well maintained and simple, with tiled floors and small fridges; a few have kitchenettes. Extras include full-length mirrors, mahogany furnishings, and double or four-poster queen-size beds. The resort's centerpiece is its well-recommended restaurant and bar (p. 560), where doors open directly onto a view of the beach.

Oualie Beach, Nevis, W.I. ✆ **869/469-9735.** Fax 869/469-9176. www.oualiebeach.com. 32 units. Winter $270–$325 double; off season $215–$270 double. Children 15 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; horseback riding; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; fishing; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchen (in studios), minibar, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Places that combine wholesome, well-prepared food with immediate access to interesting contemporary paintings do not appear frequently in Nevis. In this regard, the **Café des Arts** (✆ **869/469-7098**), at the northern end of Main Street in Charlestown, is particularly unusual. Don't come here after dark, because the place defines itself as a breakfast and lunch eatery with a bar and an art gallery attached. (For more on the art gallery, refer to "Shopping," later in this section.) Separated from the cares of the outside world with high masonry walls and the shade from a copse of flamboyant trees, the place serves sandwiches, wraps (including a breakfast burrito), and pastas. Full breakfasts cost from $5 to $10. Sandwiches and platters go from $10 to $20. The house drink is a coconut-flavored rum punch. The owner, your host, is Yorkshire-born Gillian Smith, who has learned a thing or two about the island since her arrival on Nevis, and if she likes you, she'll tell you a tale or two.

Very Expensive

Four Seasons Dining Room ★★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN/ASIAN Set beneath a soaring, elaborately trussed ceiling, this is the largest dining room on Nevis and the island's most expensive restaurant. Decorated in a Caribbean interpretation of French

Empire design, it offers rows of beveled-glass windows on three sides, massive bouquets of flowers, hurricane lamps with candles, a fireplace, a collection of unusual paintings, and impeccable service.

The fusion cuisine, with lots of nouvelle touches, roams the world for inspiration. Owners of competing restaurants invariably comment on the expensive and upscale ingredients—the best of their kind—used by the chefs here, but some of them express regret that they sometimes aren't used in more imaginative ways. The menu changes nightly. Two appealing starters include a tartare of ahi tuna or a "seafood tasting trio" composed of lobster medallions, tomato and crabmeat salad, and coconut-crusted shrimp. Main courses feature fire-grilled lobster tail with mango-flavored beurre blanc and lime leaves; or perhaps a boneless rack of lamb with asparagus risotto. Dessert might be a coconut or mango soufflé, or a caramelized banana with mango and ginger-flavored sorbet. The service and the wine selection are among the island's best.

In the Four Seasons Resort Nevis, Pinney's Beach. ✆ **869/469-1111.** Reservations required. Main courses $31–$59. 5-course set-price tasting menu $79 per person. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Hermitage Plantation ★★ INTERNATIONAL At this restaurant, you can combine an excellent dinner with a visit to the oldest house on Nevis, and one of the island's most unusual hotels (p. 554). No other restaurant on Nevis gives as strong an impression of being the extension of a stylish, elegant, somewhat "clubby" private home, and the presence, on-site, of the owners, adds enormously to its sense of welcome, stylishness, and cheer. Meals are served on the latticed porch of the main house, amid candles and good cheer. Maureen Lupinacci, who runs the place with her husband, Richard, combines Continental recipes with local ingredients. Enjoy a before-dinner drink in the British colonial–style living room, then move on to the likes of lemon-grass-and-lime-flavored fish cakes with papaya-scented mayonnaise; ragout of snapper flavored with lemon grass and lime; marinated shrimp on black-bean cakes; and a delectable version of cold rum soufflé. One of the social and culinary highlights occurs every Wednesday, in season, when slow-roasted pig elicits many curious comments.

In the Hermitage Plantation hotel, St. John's Parish. ✆ **869/469-3477.** Reservations required. Lunch platters $12–$20; fixed-price dinners $40–$55. AE, MC, V. Daily 8–10:30am, noon–2:30pm, and 7–9:30pm. Go south on the main island road from Charlestown.

Miss June's ★★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This charming venue, midway between the Four Seasons Resort and the airport, is the private home of June Mestier, a Trinidad-born grande dame, and probably wouldn't exist if it had not been for Oprah Winfrey's enthusiasm. While visiting Nevis, Oprah heard that Ms. Mestier was the finest cook on the island and arranged a private dinner; after being served an excellent meal, Oprah urged her to open a restaurant.

A dinner in Mestier's West Indian house, which is adorned with lattice work, requires advance reservations; some visitors call before they even arrive on Nevis. Guests at these dinner parties assemble for canapés and drinks in an airy living room, then sit down for soup and sherry. The tables hold from four to eight diners, and the silver and porcelain are quaintly elegant and charmingly mismatched. Fish and wine follow. All this is followed with samples of about 20 to 40 buffet dishes that hail from Trinidad, New Orleans, India, and the French isles. Mestier's comments on the food are one of the evening's most delightful aspects. After dinner, guests retire to a lounge for coffee, chocolates, and port. Many visitors find a meal here to be one of the highlights of their visit to Nevis.

Jones Estate, Jones Bay. ✆ **869/469-5330.** Reservations required. Fixed-price 5-course meal $95. MC, V. 2 evenings a week, depending on business, beginning around 7pm. Dinner served at 8pm.

Montpelier Plantation Inn ★ INTERNATIONAL This hotel restaurant provides what's generally considered the finest and perhaps most interesting dining on the island. You sit by candlelight on the verandas of a grand old West Indian mansion, overlooking floodlit gardens, the lights of Charlestown, and the ocean. We consider it more than just a dining experience, as it incorporates aesthetics and a vivid sense of Nevis's late-18th- and early-19th-century cultural and mercantile importance as well. Lobster and fish are served the day the catch comes in, and the foreign and Nevisian chefs conspire to produce delectable tropical dishes. On a recent visit, the best menu items started with a crispy seafood cake, followed by five-spice duck with a honey flavor and a vegetable-filled mandarin pancake. Other members of our party enjoyed the seared filet of mahimahi with sauce vert and garlic cream potatoes. Cape Brandy pudding with Chantilly cream was everybody's favorite dessert. There's limited seating for dinner, so try to show up on time. An excellent and well-balanced wine list is available. An additional dining choice with approximately the same menu is the Sugar Mill, which is open only on a somewhat haphazard schedule and only during certain nights a week. Torches line your pathway as you head up to the elegantly decorated mill, with its mahogany antiques and crystal sconces.

In the Montpelier Plantation Inn, Montpelier. ✆ **869/469-3462.** Reservations required. Main courses lunch $12–$26; fixed-price dinner $60–$80. AE, MC, V. Daily 8–10:30am, noon–2:30pm, and 7:30–9:30pm. Closed Aug–Sept.

Expensive

Bananas Bistro ★ CARIBBEAN Charming and whimsical, this isolated and romantic dining hideaway is reached after a bouncing, axle-breaking detour to the wooded highlands above Hamilton Plantation, about 4km (2 1/2 miles) east of Charlestown. Here, within a tropical garden that's ringed with a fence and a gate, lies a traditional, veranda-ringed Nevisian cottage. Views of the surrounding terrain and the sea from here are fabulous, even though at night, you're likely to see an occasional light within an otherwise isolated, underpopulated landscape. Begin a meal here with a Bertini, the house cocktail (something akin to a passion-fruit martini), then move to such entrees as bourbon-soaked baby back spare ribs, Moroccan-style lamb shanks with garlic-flavored mashed potatoes, or any of several varieties of Thai-style curries. Decor within this Nevisian cottage includes Turkish carpets, exposed stone, and a winning combination of English and Caribbean antiques.

Upper Hamilton Estate. ✆ **869/469-1891.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $25–$35. MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–9:30pm.

Coconut Grove ★★ FRENCH/PACIFIC RIM This is a hot choice, and its tables are eagerly sought out by discerning palates. Located in a coconut grove on Nevis's beast beach, the building itself looks like a hut from Tahiti. It was the creation of restaurateur Gary Colt and his wife, Karin, whose wine collection is one of finest in the southern Caribbean, with some 4,000 bottles. You dine under a roof of thatched palm leaf fronds in a rough timbered structure. A crying Buddha emerges from the root of a teak tree. All this is but a backdrop for one of the best cuisines on island. Quality ingredients and first-rate dishes emerge from the kitchen, demonstrated by such dishes as a seafood napoleon with shrimp and lobster in a Madras-curry sauce or sliced flank steak in a cabernet sauvignon–butter sauce with a side of truffle-laced mashed potatoes. You might also sample the chicken breast with a pistachio dressing, a divine marriage. Finish off with crème brûlée, a dessert specialty, although the chocolate almond tart is also sublime. The poolside bar and grill downstairs features live music most nights.

Main Island Rd., Nelson's Spring (off Pinney's Beach). ✆ **869/469-1020.** Reservations required. Main courses $27–$43. MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 6:30–10pm.

Mango ★ WEST INDIAN At the previously recommended Four Seasons Resort, this beach bar and restaurant has the most panoramic outdoor deck for dining in Nevis. The music's hot, and the drinks, especially those rum punches, are among the island's most alluring. Both hotel guests and visitors drop in here for a "sundowner," enjoying the gorgeous sunsets. Since it lies only a short stroll from the golf course, sportsmen also frequent the place. Their favorite libation is a "Tipsy Palmer."

The dishes are creative, and spices from the island's fertile soil play a large part in the flavoring. Coconut, mango, and passion fruit also appear in some dishes. Start with such inventive appetizers as pumpkin soup with honey butter croutons or else spiny lobster fritters in a Calypso hot pepper sauce. Some of the seafood is taken straight from the boat into the kitchen. A specialty is a Gallows Bay fish pot, Nevisian style, baked in foil and served with organic vegetables. Baby back ribs appear with a Jamaican rum barbecue sauce. And don't forget a side of green papaya slaw.

Pinney's Beach. ✆ **869/469-1111.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$35. AE, DC, MC. Wed–Mon 6–10pm.

Moderate

Double Deuce ★ WEST INDIAN With its decor of boats and fishing scenes, Papa Hemingway would surely have made this beach bar his local during his stay in Nevis. Mark Roberts trained at the deluxe **Montpelier** but decided to go it on his own at this jumping eatery on the water. Mark even catches some of the fish he serves himself. Karaoke rules on Thursday night, so Double Deuce can also become your fun spot for the whole evening. The location is half a mile down Pinney's Beach from the Four Seasons. The day's specials are posted on a blackboard menu and are likely to feature line-caught wahoo and snapper. Locals claim the cook's cheeseburger is the best in the Southern Caribbean. It's a half-pound of organic beef buried under a landslide of cheddar and served with a secret pineapple and wild honey sauce.

Pinney's Beach. ✆ **869/469-2222.** Reservations required. Main courses $12–$22. No credit cards. Daily 10am–midnight.

The Gallipot ★ CARIBBEAN British expats Julian and Tracy Rigby, who sailed around the Caribbean for a while before establishing this place near Oualie Beach, are now among the island's best chefs. Their well-chosen and carefully prepared menu is backed up by a sophisticated wine list. Open only 4 days a week, they have often entertained celebrities, including Meryl Streep. Menu items feature a wide variety of fish that's smoked in-house according to whatever comes in fresh that week. Angus steaks, the best on Nevis, arrive regularly from the U.S. and are prepared any way you want them. There's also a selection of spicy curries, vegetarian dishes, and beef and chicken main courses. Desserts are made fresh daily, featuring cheesecakes and such delights as a mocha and chocolate torte.

Jones Estate. ✆ **869/469-8230.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$15 lunch, $15–$28 dinner. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Sun noon–2:30pm; Thurs–Sat 6–9pm. Closed July–Oct.

Oualie Beach Hotel INTERNATIONAL/NEVISIAN This restaurant is the centerpiece of the Oualie Beach Hotel, the only lodging adjacent to Oualie Beach. The airy building has a bar area and a screened-in veranda just a few steps from the ocean. Every day the chef prepares a creative menu with real Caribbean flair, so you may want to study

it closely before ordering. The pleasant staff also makes recommendations. The chef prepares several lobster dishes, and the Creole conch stew is the island's best. Pastas appear frequently, along with some fairly bland international dishes such as chicken breast with rice, fries, or salad. Special nights are Tuesday, which features a barbecue surf-and-turf buffet along with a live band; Friday and Saturday nights with another band; and Super Sunday (the last Sun of the month) with steel pan music and beach activities such as the greasy pole. An array of brightly colored rum drinks is available, and you can get a reasonably priced breakfast or lunch here, too.

In the Oualie Beach Hotel. ✆ **869/469-9735.** Reservations required for dinner. Breakfast $7–$15; lunch $10–$15; dinner main courses $20–$32; Tues night buffet $45. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10am, noon–3pm, and 6:30–9:30pm.

Inexpensive

Le Bistro INTERNATIONAL This is one of the tiniest restaurants on island, but its Friday night happy hour makes it the most popular. Locals call this place **Matt's,** for Matt Lloyd, who sharpened his skills cooking at Montpelier. All the dishes are familiar but full of flavor, including the ground-beef lasagna, coconut chicken, and spicy curried chicken. In the British tradition, you can also order fish and chips. A savory kettle of mussels flavored with lemon butter is another good choice. The fish is especially recommended, as Matt catches them himself in his boat, *Deep Venture.* The chef's specialty is lobster served in a coconut sauce.

Chapel St. ✆ **869/469-5110.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $6.70–$12. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–3pm and 6–10pm.

Pizza Beach INTERNATIONAL This open-air restaurant on the water, housed in a concrete-block building with cathedral ceilings, is part of the Mount Nevis Beach Club. From the deck, you can take in a panoramic sea view. The informal cuisine is usually prepared with flair by the hardworking chef. Examples are a roster of meal-size pizzas big enough for two (try the one with seafood), as well as chicken parmigiana with pasta, shrimp with salsa verde, and Mexican platters piled high with quesadillas, tacos, flautas, and spicy beef. The best way to begin a meal is with a colorful margarita.

Newcastle Marina, Charlestown. ✆ **869/469-9395.** Reservations recommended for large groups. Main courses $19–$22; pizzas for 2 $11–$22. AE, MC, V. Fri–Wed 6–10pm.

BEACHES

There are several fabulous public beaches on the island as well. The best one—in fact, one of the best in the Caribbean—is the reef-protected **Pinney's Beach** ★★, which has crystal-clear water, golden sands, and a gradual slope. It's no accident that the Four Seasons chose this location for its chic and super expensive Nevis resort. Beaches are public on Nevis and hotels are forbidden to restrict access. However, hotels can protect their private grounds from trespassers.

Pinney's is just a short walk north of Charlestown on the west coast. You'll have 5km (3 miles) of sand (often virtually to yourself) that culminates in a sleepy lagoon, set against a backdrop of coconut palms. It's almost never crowded, and its calm, shallow waters are perfect for swimming and wading, which makes it a family favorite. It's best to bring your own sports equipment; the hotels along this beach have only limited gear that may be in use by its guests. You can go snorkeling or scuba diving here among damselfish, tangs, grunts, blue-headed wrasses, parrotfish, and other species. The beach is especially beautiful in the late afternoon, when flocks of cattle egrets fly into its north end to roost at the freshwater pond at **Nelson's Spring.**

If you're going to be around for a few days, you might want to search out the other beaches as well, notably beige-sand **Oualie Beach,** known especially for its diving and snorkeling. The location is north of Pinney's and just south of Mosquito Bay. The beach is well maintained and rarely crowded; you can purchase food and drink, as well as rent watersports equipment, at the Oualie Beach Hotel.

Indian Castle Beach, at the southern end of Nevis, has active surf and a swath of fine-gray sand. Indian Castle is definitely for escapists—chances are, you'll have the beach all to yourself except for an indigenous goat or two, who may be very social and interested in sharing your picnic lunch.

Newcastle Beach is by the Nisbet Plantation, at the northernmost tip of the island on the channel that separates St. Kitts and Nevis. Snorkelers flock to this strip of soft beige sand set against a backdrop of coconut palms.

The beaches along the east coast aren't desirable. They front Long Haul Bay in the north and White Bay in the south. These bays spill into the Atlantic Ocean and are rocky and too rough for swimming, although they're rather dramatic to visit if you're sightseeing. Of them all, **White Bay Beach** (sometimes called Windward Beach), in the southeastern section, east of Gingerland, is the best (especially for surfers). But be careful, as the waters can become turbulent suddenly.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

BOATING **Scuba Safaris,** an outfit that operates independently on the premises of the Oualie Beach Hotel (✆ **869/469-9518;** www.scubanevis.com), offers boat charters to Turtle Beach, which can make for a great day's outing; it costs $65 round-trip (minimum of four people). Although it gives preference to guests of the Four Seasons, another good boat outfitter is **Leeward Island Charters** (✆ **869/465-7494**). The captain, Lennox, also built the boat, a 15m (49-ft.) catamaran called *Caona.* A typical cruise is across the 3.2km (2-mile) passage to St. Kitts, where the snorkeling is better than it is on the western side of Nevis.

In 2007, recognizing that the smooth, unjagged coastline of Nevis does not offer an abundance of anchorage spots for oceangoing yachts, the Port Authority of Nevis sank at least 100 permanent moorings deep into the sea bed off the island's relatively sheltered western shore. A key component of each of those moorings is a 5m (16-ft.) aluminum "corkscrew," which is screwed into the seabed with barged-in equipment in ways that cause a minimum amount of damage to the marine ecology. All that's recognizable from the surface is a bright yellow buoy, a talisman which yacht owners prize, and pay steep rentals for, as a means of providing at least some kind of shelter from tides and howling storms. Most of these buoys lie in 18m (59 ft.) of water, enough for the draft of even very large yachts, which from now on can be moored safely offshore Nevis's northwest coast, in a series of staggered moorings positioned offshore in an unbroken string between Charlestown and Oualie.

FISHING **Nevis Water Sports** (✆ **869/469-9690;** www.fishnevis.com) offers the best deep-sea fishing aboard its custom 9m (30-ft.) fishing boat. The boat holds up to six; a 4-hour trip costs $500, while an 8-hour trip is $1,000. Snorkeling trips are available for $50 per person, including equipment.

GOLF The **Four Seasons** ★★★, Pinney's Beach (✆ **869/469-1111;** www.fourseasons.com/nevis/golf), has one of the most challenging and visually dramatic golf courses in the world. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. (who called it "the most scenic golf course I've ever designed"), this 18-hole championship course wraps around the resort and offers

panoramic ocean and mountain views at every turn. From the first tee (which begins just steps from the sports pavilion), through the 660-yard, par-5 18th green at the ocean's edge, the course is, in the words of one avid golfer, "reason enough to go to Nevis." Nonguests of the hotel pay $205 for 18 holes. Rental clubs are available at $40 for 9 holes, or $70 for 18 holes.

HIKING & MOUNTAIN CLIMBING Hikers can climb **Mount Nevis,** 970m (3,182 ft.) up to the extinct volcanic crater, and enjoy a trek to the rainforest to watch for wild monkeys. This hike is strenuous and is recommended only for those in good shape. Ask your hotel to pack a picnic lunch and arrange a guide (who will charge about $35 per person). The hike takes about 5 hours; at the summit, you'll be rewarded with views of Antigua, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts, Guadeloupe, and Montserrat. Reaching the summit means scrambling up near-vertical sections of the trail, requiring handholds on not-always-reliable vines and roots. It's definitely not for anyone afraid of high places. Information on guides can also be obtained at the **Nevis Historical and Conservation Society,** based at the Museum of Nevis History, Main Street, Charlestown (✆ **869/469-5786;** www.nevis-nhcs.org). **Sunrise Tours,** Gingerland (✆ **869/469-2758;** www.nevisnaturetours.com), is run by a husband-and-wife team, Lynell and Earla Liburd, who offer an unusual assortment of hikes, not just the usual climbs around the slopes of Mount Nevis. They'll take you to little-known areas such as Devil's Copper, New River Spring, and three magnificent waterfalls. Rainforest and hidden ruins are also part of their hikes, which also include trips to rarely visited local villages.

If you're looking for a local to guide you through the logistics of virtually any aspect of Nevis, consider **Top to Bottom** (✆ **869/469-9080;** www.walknevis.com). For a fee that's fair and equitable, they'll accompany you on any of at least a half-dozen walking tours either through downtown Charlestown or through some of the most verdiginous and isolated terrain on the island. Dialogues focus on either the island's history, flora, fauna, or natural topography and ecology.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING Some of the best dive sites on Nevis include **Monkey Shoals,** 3km (1 3/4 miles) west of the Four Seasons. This is a beautiful reef, starting at 12m (39 ft.), with dives up to 30m (98 ft.) in depth. Angelfish, turtles, nurse sharks, and extensive soft coral can be found here. **The Caves** are on the south tip of Nevis, a 20-minute boat ride from the Four Seasons. A series of coral grottoes with numerous squirrelfish, turtles, and needlefish make this ideal for both certified and resort divers. **Champagne Garden,** a 5-minute boat ride from the Four Seasons, gets its name from bubbles created from an underwater sulfur vent. Because of the warm water temperature, large numbers of tropical fish are found here. Finally, **Coral Garden,** 3km (1 3/4 miles) west of the Four Seasons, is another beautiful coral reef with schools of Atlantic spadefish and large sea fans. The reef is at a maximum depth of 21m (69 ft.) and is suitable for both certified and resort divers.

Snorkelers should head for Pinney's Beach. You might also try the waters of Fort Ashby, where the settlement of Jamestown is said to have slid into the sea; legend has it that you can still hear the church bells and see the underwater town when conditions are just right. So far, no diver, to our knowledge, has ever found the conditions just right.

Scuba Safaris, Oualie Beach (✆ **869/469-9518;** fax 869/469-9519; www.scubanevis.com), on the island's north end, offers PADI scuba diving and snorkeling in an area rich in dive sites. It also offers resort and certification courses, dive packages, and equipment rental. A one-tank scuba dive costs $65; a two-tank dive, $95. Full certification courses cost $450 per person. Snorkeling trips cost $50 per person (minimum of four people).

TENNIS There are no public courts on Nevis. Guests at the big hotels play on their courts for free. Nonguests can play on the courts at the **Hermitage Plantation** (✆ **869/469-3477**) for $15 per hour. There's also a somewhat battered public tennis court in Charlestown, immediately adjacent to the Secondary School, which can be used—if the net is up at all—without charge during daylight hours only.

WINDSURFING The waters here are often ideal for this sport, especially for beginners and intermediates. **Windsurfing Nevis,** at the Oualie Beach Hotel (✆ **869/469-9682**), offers the best equipment, costing $25 for 1 hour.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

It's a good idea to negotiate with a taxi driver to take you around Nevis. The distance is only 58km (36 miles), but you may find yourself taking a long time if you stop to see specific sights and talk to all the people who will want to chat with you. A 3-hour sightseeing tour around the island will cost $65; the average taxi holds up to four people. No sightseeing bus companies operate on Nevis, but a number of individuals own buses that they use for taxi service. Their names are known to the reception staff at every hotel on Nevis, so if you're interested, make the proper enquiries. You can also call **Nevis Taxi Service** (✆ **869/469-5631**) for information.

The major attraction is the **Museum of Nevis History,** in the simple but gracefully proportioned stone house where Alexander Hamilton was born, on Main Street in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-5786;** www.nevis-nhcs.org), overlooking the bay. The lava-stone house by the shore has been restored. The museum, dedicated to the history and culture of Nevis, houses the island's archives. Hours are Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm, Saturday mid-December to mid-April only from 9am to noon. Admission is $5 for adults, $2 for children aged 5 to 12.

Eden Brown Estate, East Coast Road about 2km (1¼ miles) from New River, is said to be haunted. It was once the home of a wealthy planter whose daughter was to be married, but her husband-to-be was killed in a duel at the prenuptial feast. The mansion was then closed forever and left to the ravages of nature. Today it's a rather spooky-looking ruin. Only the most adventurous ever come here on a moonlit night.

At one time, Sephardic Jews from Brazil made up a quarter of the island's population, and it's believed that Jews introduced sugar production to the Leeward Islands. Outside the center of Charlestown, at the lower end of Government Road, the **Jewish Cemetery** has been partially restored and is the resting place of many of the early shopkeepers of Nevis. Most of the tombstones date from 1690 to 1710. There's no attendant on duty, and few local residents seem to know a lot about this place. Unless you look very carefully, its location isn't immediately obvious.

One of the island's best attractions is the 4-hectare (10-acre) **Botanical Garden of Nevis** (✆ **869/469-3509;** www.botanicalgardennevis.com), 5km (3 miles) south of Charlestown on the Montpelier Estate. Rainforest plants grow in re-created Mayan ruins on a hillside site overlooking the Caribbean. A retired Philadelphia businessman, Joseph Murphy, has spent some $8 million on these gardens, containing, among other treasures of nature, 100 species of palms from Madagascar, Asia, and Hawaii, along with 70 varieties of orchids. In the Kew Gardens–like greenhouse, you can see rainforest flora and waterfalls. The on-site restaurant, **Martha's Tea House,** operated and maintained by the Montpelier Plantation Inn, serves an English tea with scones and double Devon cream. You can also order a ploughman's lunch (French bread, pickled onions, and cheese), barbecue chicken breast, mahimahi, or tuna salad. If you patronize the restaurant or gift shop, you don't have to pay

the admission of $10 adults or $7 children ages 6 to 12 (free children 5 and under) to the gardens. The garden is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm.

Nevis Jockey Club organizes and sponsors thoroughbred races every month. Local horses, as well as some brought over from other islands, fill out a typical five-race card. If you want to have a glimpse at what horse racing must have been like a century or more ago, you'll find the Nevis races a memorable experience. For information, contact Richard Lupinacci, a Jockey Club officer and owner and operator of the Hermitage Plantation (✆ **869/469-3477**).

Fothergill's Nevisian Heritage Village (✆ **869/469-5521**), is a collection of historic structures moved to this site, with an old sugar mill as its centerpiece. Among the attractions are a blacksmith's workshop, a rum store, and a cobbler's outpost, along with replicas of buildings ranging from African-styled slave huts to thatched shelters once inhabited by the Caribs. The village is open Monday to Saturday 9am to 3:30pm, charging an admission of $3.70.

SHOPPING

The best inventory of contemporary paintings in Nevis is within the **Café des Arts,** at the northern end of Main Street, in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-7098**). Don't be fooled by the simple, clapboard-covered facade: Inside what used to be the Trott family homestead, immediately adjacent to the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, is the most elaborate art gallery in Nevis, replete with large-scale contemporary paintings from, among other places, Nevis, Dominica, Haiti, Jamaica, and Barbados. There's also an inventory of modestly priced soaps, candles, and spices. Also within the compound is the charming cafe and restaurant. Everything you'll see within this verdant compound is owned and managed by British expat Gillian Smithy, a savvy entrepreneur with extensive experience in, among other places, Turkey.

For original art, visit **Eva Wilkin Gallery,** Clay Ghaut, Gingerland (✆ **869/469-2673**). Wilkin was the island's most famous artist; even Prince Charles showed up to look at her work. Until her death in 1989, she painted island people, local flowers, and scenes of Nevis life. Prints are available in some of the local shops, but originals sell for $150 and up. You can visit her former atelier, on the grounds of an old sugar-mill plantation near Montpelier.

In a stone building about 60m (197 ft.) from the wharf, near the marketplace, **Nevis Handicraft Cooperative Society,** Cotton House, Charlestown (✆ **869/469-1746**), contains locally made gift items, including unusual objects of goatskin, local wines made from a variety of fruits grown on the island, hot-pepper sauce, guava cheese, jams, and jellies.

Hand-painted, tie-dyed, and batik clothing is featured at **Island Hopper,** in the TDC Shopping Mall, Main Street, Charlestown (✆ **869/469-0893**), which also has locations on St. Kitts and Antigua. From beach wraps to souvenirs, a wide selection of products is available.

Island Fever, Main Street in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-9613**), has a tasteful and varied selection of items that might range from puppets and batiks from Indonesia to caftans, informal wear, steel drums, painted fish, or handmade jewelry. It's closed in September.

The best souvenir shop on Nevis is **Knick Knacks Boutique** (✆ **869/469-0893**), in the Henville Building, on the waterfront in Charlestown, a few steps from the departure point of the ferryboats departing and arriving from St. Kitts. Most of its inventory was made on Nevis. It includes a colorful and sophisticated array of batiks, mobiles whose

individual elements seem to dance in the wind, hand-painted T-shirts, and whimsical jewelry. Jeannie Rigley is the England-born artist and owner, whose work is most heavily featured.

Consider the **Island Hopper Boutique,** TDC Plaza, Main Street, in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-0893**). Its gifts and mostly women's clothing are among the most appealing of any you'll find in town.

Some newcomers develop a fascination for the local postage stamps during their time on-island, interpreting them as a combination of nostalgia for the British Commonwealth, pride of independent nationhood, and a celebration of the natural beauty of Nevis. Postage stamps issued under the auspices of the **Nevis Philatelic Bureau** are available for sale at the Philatelic Office, on Market Street (✆ **869/469-5535**), about a 2-minute walk from the main Post Office (also on Market St.) Especially prized are stamps commemorating the late Princess Diana, Alexander Hamilton, or anything to do with Nevis's flora, underwater fauna, and architecture. Because of their relative rarity (if not in Nevis, then within the world at large) Nevisian collectors' stamps sell for a slight premium over their face value.

A craftsperson worthy of mention is **Kennedy Tyrell** (✆ **869/469-3442**), who sells hand-carved wooden figures of monkeys, birds, pineapples, and other objects from his workshop along the road in Zion's Village, in Zion, on the eastern side of Nevis.

NEVIS AFTER DARK

Nightlife is not the reason to visit Nevis. Summer nights are quiet, but there's organized entertainment in winter, often steel bands performing at the major hotels.

Most action takes place at the **Four Seasons Resort,** Pinney's Beach (✆ **869/469-1111**), on Friday and Saturday nights.

Oualie Beach Hotel, Oualie Beach (✆ **869/469-9735**), offers a live string band entertaining guests.

If you're on Nevis on a Friday night, the place to be for happy hour (4–6pm) is **Le Bistro** (p. 561). Islanders flock here for the reduced drink prices, the good company, and the fun atmosphere.

Another Friday night "jump-up" is at **The Water Department Barbecue,** Pump Road, Charlestown (no phone), to help raise money for the department. Tents go up in the late afternoon and meat goes on the grill. Some of the best barbecue chicken and ribs on island is served here.

Wednesday night is all the rage at **Eddy's Bar & Restaurant,** Main Street in Charlestown (✆ **869/469-5958**), which serves the best conch fritters in town. Karaoke and dancing to music spun by an island DJ last way past midnight.

Finally, **Sunshine's Beach Bar,** Pinney's Beach (✆ **869/469-1089**) is an ultra-informal shack perched provocatively a few paces away from the property line that divides terrain belonging to the Four Seasons Resort from the rest of the world at large. As such, the place attracts clients of that über upscale resort. It's appealingly raffish (that is, battered and makeshift)—the kind of place with recorded reggae music, a leashed vervet monkey who may or may not be interested in the cache of bananas the staff provides, and rum-based drinks so strong they're virtually psychedelic. (One of these is the Killer Bee. Try two of them, and you'll know why.) It's all very island time around here, but pictures of the celebrities who have enhanced their holiday in Nevis with time spent here include Kelly Ripa (Regis Philbin's co-host), Oprah, and John Travolta. Why does this place have such a distinctive name? It's thanks to the charm and verve of its resident owner, Rastaman Llewellyn ("Sunshine") Caines.

St. Lucia

St. Lucia (Loo-sha) is becoming overly developed, with far too many all-inclusive resorts, but it retains much of its pristine beauty. Its nearest competitor is Barbados, which has been overdeveloped longer than any one cares to remember. Fortunately, St. Lucia still has smaller charming and graceful inns—if you're willing to shun the activity-loaded agendas of those all-inclusives with their groaning buffet tables and raucous guests loaded with too many tropical punches.

The heaviest tourist development is concentrated in the northwest, between the capital, Castries, and the northern end of the island. There's a string of white-sand beaches and a tourist colony (Rodney Bay Village) that's among the most accessorized for holiday playtime on the island.

The rest of St. Lucia remains relatively unspoiled, a checkerboard of green-mantled mountains, valleys, banana plantations, a bubbling volcano, wild orchids, and fishing villages. The island has a mixed French and British heritage, but there's a hint of the South Pacific about it as well.

A ruggedly mountainous island of some 623 sq. km (243 sq. miles), St. Lucia has about 172,000 inhabitants, about 60,000 of whom live in and around the island's steeply inclined and colorful but somewhat battered capital, Castries, which sits on the southern shore of a large harbor surrounded by steeply rising hills.

Rising out of the relative obscurity in which it languished for most of the 20th century, St. Lucia is becoming one of the biggest players in Caribbean tourism. Since the dawn of the new century, *World Travel Awards* has named it the "world's leading honeymoon destination." Local authorities estimate that 36% of the island's business comes from visitors either getting married or spending a honeymoon here. At the same time, *Natural History Magazine* has honored St. Lucia as one of the 50 top eco-tourism destinations in the world.

There are no easy building sites left on St. Lucia. Those that seem relatively flat were built upon many years ago; most that remain require complicated retaining walls, deep foundations, and, in most cases, elaborately winding access roads. Expect a lot of huffing and puffing as you navigate your way up and down the island's endless shifts in altitude, and views of oddly shaped, weirdly eroded hills and rock outcroppings that evoke the South China Seas.

A final oddity about St. Lucia: West Indian women frequently claim St. Lucia has some of the Caribbean's best-looking men. Perhaps it's the mixture of the French, West Indian, and British gene pools; perhaps it's the ongoing exercise from all those changes in elevation. Regardless, St. Lucians are courtly, charming, fun, and, in some instances, just a wee bit old-fashioned. Of the many disasters that threaten to engulf St. Lucia, and perhaps the rest of the world as well, what is it they fear the most? It's "Jamaicanization," or the process of lawlessness and social decay that tends to accompany traffic in illegal drugs.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Petit Piton and Gros Piton:** Just north of Soufrière, the twin volcanic cones, Petit Piton and Gros Piton, rise to 738m to 696m (2,421 ft. and 2,283 ft.), respectively. Visitors climb these 40-million-year-old lush mountains for the greatest views in the southern Caribbean.
- **Mount Soufrière,** near Soufrière, is a rocky lunar landscape of pits and open craters of boiling sulfur. The experienced liken it to a visit to Dante's *Inferno.*
- **Marigot Bay:** South of Castries, this west-coast yachties' haven is the most beautiful bay in the Caribbean. Some 400 years ago, its palm-lined shore was home to the Carib warriors.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

In the **United States,** the St. Lucia Tourist Board office is located at 800 Second Ave., Ste. 910, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/456-3984** or 212/867-2950). In **Canada,** information is provided at the tourist board at 8 King St. East, Ste. 709, Toronto, ON M5C 1B5 (✆ **416/362-4242**).

On the island, the main tourist office is at Sureline Building, Vive Boutielle, Castries (✆ **758/452-4094**). In **Soufrière,** there's a branch on Bay Street (✆ **758/459-7419**). St. Lucia information is on the Web at **www.stlucia.org**.

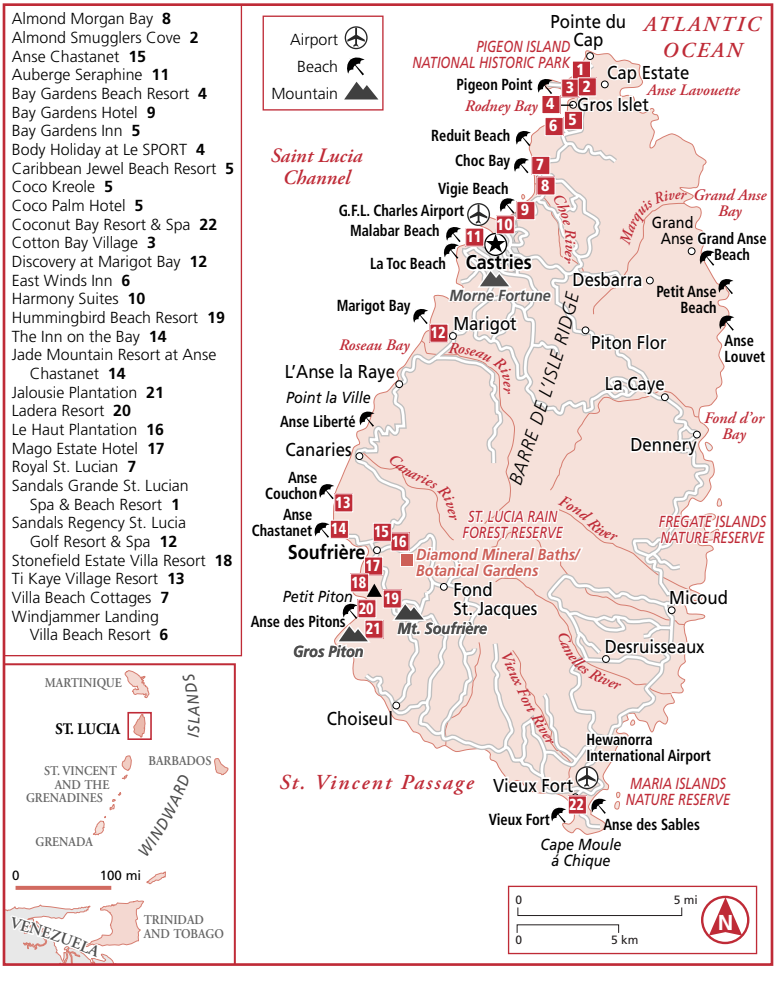
GETTING THERE

The island maintains two separate airports, whose different locations cause endless confusion to many newcomers. Most international long-distance flights land at **Hewanorra International Airport (UVH)** (✆ **758/454-6355**) in the south, 72km (45 miles) from Castries. If you arrive here and you're booked into a hotel in the north, you'll spend about an hour and a half traveling along the potholed East Coast Highway. Many hotels arrange transfers to and from the airport, but if not, taxis are available; the average fare is $15 to $60 for up to four passengers. Many visitors now prefer to take helicopter flights from Hewanorra International Airport to their resorts rather than endure the long, stomach-churning car ride. **St. Lucia Helicopters** (✆ **758/453-6950;** www.stluciahelicopters.com) offers flights between Castries and Hewanorra Airport or Soufrière, costing $120 per person one-way. Flights can also be arranged to the Jalousie Plantation (p. 575), which has its own helicopter pad.

Flights from other parts of the Caribbean usually land at the smaller, somewhat antiquated **George F. L. Charles Airport** (formerly known as Vigie; ✆ **758/452-1156**), in the northeast. Its location just outside Castries affords much more convenient access to the capital and many of the island's hotels. It is a long (about an hour and a half), twisting drive to lodging in and around Soufrière, but you'll pass through beautiful terrain and quaint fishing villages along the way.

American (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) flies nonstop Monday, Thursday, and Sunday from New York's Kennedy Airport to Hewanorra. American also flies daily from Miami to St. Lucia.

Delta (✆ **800/241-4141** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies once daily from Friday to Tuesday from Atlanta.



American Eagle (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 758/452-1820; www aa.com) serves George F. L. Charles Airport with nonstop flights from San Juan. Connections from all parts of the North American mainland to the airline's enormous hub in San Juan are frequent and convenient. American also offers some good package deals.

US Airways (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www .usairways.com) flies two times a week from Philadelphia to St. Lucia's Hewanorra Airport.

Air Canada (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada; www .aircanada.ca) has nonstop weekly flights to St. Lucia's Hewanorra Airport that depart from Toronto or Montréal.

British Airways (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S.; www.britishairways.com) offers two flights a week from London's Gatwick Airport to St. Lucia's Hewanorra Airport.

LIAT (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liatairline.com) has small planes flying from many points throughout the Caribbean into George F. L. Charles Airport. Points of origin include such islands as Barbados, Antigua, St. Thomas, St. Maarten, and Martinique. On some LIAT flights, you may visit all these islands before arriving in St. Lucia.

Air Jamaica (✆ **800/523-5585** in the U.S. and Canada; www.airjamaica.com) serves the Hewanorra Airport with nonstop service from New York's JFK 4 days a week.

WestJet (✆ **888/WESTJET** [937-8538]; www.westjeet.com) offers nonstop service from Toronto to St. Lucia. Flights head out from mid-December to April, arriving in a Boeing 737 at St. Lucia's Hewanorra International Airport.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Since driving St. Lucia's unmarked, bad roads is rather difficult, a taxi is recommended for all but the most adventurous. Taxis are ubiquitous and most drivers are eager to please. The drivers have special training that allows them to serve as guides. Their cabs are unmetered, but the government fixes tariffs for all standard trips. Typical fares—say, from Castries to Hewanorra Airport—are $44, or else from Castries to Rodney Bay, $15. Always ask if the driver is quoting a rate in U.S. dollars or Eastern Caribbean dollars (EC$). For more information, call the **Taxi Association** at ✆ **758/454-6136.**

BY RENTAL CAR **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 758/452-2046 or 758/454-6325; www.avis.com), **Traders Auto Rentals** (✆ **758/452-0233**), and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 758/454-9636; www.hertz.com) have offices at (or will deliver cars to) both of the island's airports. Each also has an office in Castries and, in some cases, at some of the island's major hotels.

Avis's rates begin at $85 per day, and Hertz's begin at $92 per day. You can sometimes save money by booking through one of the local car-rental agencies, where rates begin at $60 per day, depending on size. Try **C.T.L. Rent-a-Car,** Grosislet Highway, Rodney Bay Marina (✆ **758/452-0732**). **Cool Breeze Car Rental,** New Development, Soufrière (✆ **758/459-7729**), is also a good bet if you're staying in the south. Prices are $50 and up.

Remember: Drive on the left, and try to avoid some of the island's more obvious potholes. Drive carefully and honk your horn while going around the blind hairpin turns. You'll need a St. Lucia driver's license ($20), which you can purchase at either airport when you pick up your rental car.

BY BUS **Minibuses** (with names like Lucian Love) and **jitneys** connect Castries with such main towns as Soufrière for $2.60 and Vieux Fort $1.90. They're cheap, but they're generally overcrowded and often filled with produce on its way to market. Buses for Cap Estate, in the northern part of the island, leave from Jeremy Street in Castries, near the market. Buses going to Vieux Fort and Soufrière depart from Bridge Street in front of the department store.

BY HELICOPTER In addition to providing the fastest mode of transport on this island (preferred by such visitors as Harrison Ford), **St. Lucia Helicopters** (✆ **758/453-6950;** www.stluciahelicopters.com) offers the island's most dramatic sightseeing. The 10-minute North Trip, costing $70 per person, flies you over Castries, the major resort hotels, the elegant Cap Estate homes, Pigeon Point, Rodney Bay, Rat Island, and the more turbulent Atlantic coast. The longer 20-minute South Tour, costing $120 per passenger,

flies over Castries, the banana plantations, beautiful Marigot Bay, fishing villages, the lush rainforest, the Pitons, the Soufrière volcano, and even remote waterfalls, rivers, and lush valleys. Another tour, combining both the north and south, costs $155 per person.

Fast Facts St. Lucia

Banks Banks are open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 3pm, Friday from 8am to 5pm, and Saturday 8am to noon. **ATMs** can be found at all bank branches, transportation centers, and shopping malls.

Currency The official monetary unit is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$),** which is pegged at EC$2.70 per U.S. dollar (EC$1 = 37¢). Nearly all hotels, restaurants, and shops accept U.S dollars. Always ascertain which dollar prices are listed. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs At either airport, Customs may be a hassle if there's the slightest suspicion, regardless of how ill founded, that you're carrying illegal drugs.

Documents U.S., British, and Canadian citizens need valid passports, plus an ongoing or return ticket.

Electricity St. Lucia runs on 220–230 volts AC (50 cycles), so bring an adapter if you plan to use U.S. appliances. Some hotels are wired for U.S. appliances. Ask when you book.

Emergencies Call the police at ✆ **999.** For an ambulance or in case of fire, call ✆ **911.**

Internet Convenient Internet outlets at Rodney Bay Marina, Gros Islet, include **Snooty Agouti** (✆ **758/452-0321**), **Cyber Connections** (✆ **758/450-9309**), and **Destination St. Lucia** (✆ **758/452-8531**).

Hospitals There are 24-hour emergency rooms at **St. Jude's Hospital,** Vieux Fort (✆ **758/454-6041**), and **Victoria Hospital,** Hospital Road, Castries (✆ **758/452-2421**).

Language English is the official tongue, but islanders often speak a French–Creole patois similar to that heard on Martinique.

Pharmacies The best is **M&C Drugstore,** Bridge Street, in Castries (✆ **758/452-2811**), open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm, and Saturday 8am to 1pm.

Safety St. Lucia has its share of crime, like every other place these days. Use common sense and protect yourself and your valuables. If you've got it, don't flaunt it! Don't pick up hitchhikers if you're driving around the island. The use of narcotic drugs is illegal, and their possession or sale could lead to stiff fines or jail.

Taxes The government imposes an 8% occupancy tax on hotel rooms, and there's a $26 departure tax for both airports. Children 11 and under don't pay departure tax.

Telephone The area code for St. Lucia is **758.** Make calls to or from St. Lucia just as you would with any other area code in North America. On the island, dial all seven digits of the local number. If your hotel won't send a fax for you, try **Cable & Wireless,** in the SMC Building on the waterfront in Castries (✆ **758/453-9922**).

To access **AT&T Direct,** call ✆ **800/225-5288;** to reach **MCI,** dial ✆ **800/888-8000.**

Time St. Lucia is on Atlantic Standard Time year-round, placing it 1 hour ahead of New York. However, when the United States is on daylight saving time, St. Lucia matches the clocks of the U.S. East Coast.

Tipping Most hotels and restaurants add a 10% service charge. (Ask if it's been included in the initial hotel rate you're quoted.) If you're pleased with the service in a restaurant, by all means, supplement with an extra 5%. Taxi drivers expect 10% of the fare.

Water Water here is generally considered safe to drink; if you're unsure or have a delicate constitution, stick to bottled water.

Weather This little island, lying in the path of the trade winds, has year-round temperatures of 70°F to 90°F (21°C–32°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

Most of the leading hotels on this island are pretty pricey; you have to really search for the bargains. However, many of the big resorts here are frequently featured in packages (see the section "Packages for the Independent Traveler," in chapter 2). Once you reach your hotel, chances are, you'll feel pretty isolated, which is exactly what most guests want. Many St. Lucian hostelries have kitchenettes where you can prepare simple meals. Prices are usually quoted in U.S. dollars. Most hotels also add a 10% service charge. (Ask if it's been included in the initial hotel rate you're quoted.)

THE ALL-INCLUSIVES

Almond Morgan Bay ★ (Kids) Beefed up by a $6-million renovation, this all-inclusive resort sits beside Choc Bay on an 89-hectare (220-acre) site 4.8km (3 miles) north of Castries. Very sports- and entertainment-oriented, with a well-organized children's club, the hotel is suitable for singles, couples of any persuasion, and families. Although there's another Almond Resort on St. Lucia, this is the better of the two, thanks to its renovation and its devotion to fine dining. Mass-market buffets here are rare. Sit-down meals in any of the on-site restaurants focus on artfully small portions and an innovative cuisine. The club's core is a wooden building with decks overlooking a free-form pool. The accommodations are in three- and four-story wings, each pleasantly and comfortably outfitted in English colonial furniture. The grounds are artfully landscaped and seem to descend in a funnel-shaped cone toward a complex of swimming pools and a sandy beach. Each features one king-size bed or twin beds, plus patios or terraces. Expect an enlargement of this hotel during the lifetime of this edition, with the addition of at least another 100 units.

Choc Bay, Gros islet (P.O. Box 2167, Castries), St. Lucia. W.I. ✆ **800/4-ALMOND** (425-6663) or 758/450-2511. Fax 758/450-1740. w www.almondresorts.com. 340 units. Year round $1,400–$2,408. Rates are per person all-inclusive for 7 nights. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's club; fitness center; Internet cafe; 4 outdoor pools; dance club; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Almond Smugglers Cove ★ (Kids) This village-style resort, an all-inclusive, lies on a 24-hectare (60-acre) estate with a sandy beach on the northwest coast of St. Lucia, fronting a lovely bay. Millions of dollars have been poured into its renovations, whose

major features are the best tennis courts on island at the St. Lucia Racquet Club and the best children's program. Whether you rave or rant about your bedroom will depend on your room assignment, as accommodations come in five different categories ranging from fairly simple yet comfortable units to better equipped, more spacious, and better furnished rooms. The location is adjacent to the St. Lucia Golf Resort & Country Club, where guests of Almond Smugglers get three free 18-hole rounds of golf. The place is a bustling beehive of activity and may not be suitable for those seeking a tranquil retreat. There is a vast array of land activities and watersports, and the restaurants offer a varied cuisine. There is also live entertainment nightly.

Smugglers Cove, Cap Estate, Gros Islet, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/450-0551.** Fax 758/450-8625. www.almondresorts.com. 368 units. $1,491–$2,233 per person. Rates all-inclusive for 7 nights. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; children's program; gym; Internet; 5 outdoor pools; room service; spa; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Anse Chastanet ★★★ This is not only St. Lucia's premier dive resort, but also an exceptional Caribbean inn. It lies 29km (18 miles) north of Hewanorra International Airport (a 50-min. taxi ride), 3km (1 3/4 miles) north of Soufrière on a forested hill, and a 103-step climb above palm-fringed Anse Chastanet Beach. The main building—surrounded by coffee trees and coconut palms—is decorated in a rambling island style. Guests can also stay on the beach in spacious accommodations styled like West Indian plantation villas. Other units, constructed like octagonal gazebos, have views of the Pitons. The large rooms are comfortably appointed with locally made furniture. The resort offers two dozen exclusive "infinity suites," a "resort within a resort," with their own reception area. Rooms have only three walls, to allow for an unobstructed view of the Pitons and the Caribbean.

Anse Chastanet Beach (P.O. Box 7000), Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., or 758/459-7000. Fax 758/459-7700. www.ansechastanet.com. 49 units. Winter $450–$905 double, from $860 suite; off season $300–$600 double, from $635 suite. Winter rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, MC, V. No children 9 or under in winter. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; airport transfers; bikes; gym; smoke-free rooms; spa; tennis court; dive shop; kayaks; sailboat rentals; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, minibar, no phone.

Body Holiday at LeSPORT ★★ This is the most idyllic place in the southern Caribbean for a spa holiday. Even if you don't want a spa holiday, LeSPORT would qualify as a first-rate beach resort. This is an adults-only retreat in a tropical environment. All sorts of treatments are offered, including many different forms of massage and aromatherapy, even yoga and ayurvedic treatments. The rates include daily treatments. Your selection of a bedroom determines the price, ranging from rather standard rooms to deluxe oceanview junior suites. The accommodations themselves come in various shapes and sizes: The best units open onto well-furnished balconies overlooking the sea; others have garden views. What you won't get in your room is a TV set. The cuisine is first rate, especially that served at Tao (p. 585). Greens fees are free at the adjacent St. Lucia Golf Club, and all sorts of water sports are featured, even such unusual pursuits as archery.

Cap Estate, Gros Islet, Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/450-8551.** Fax 758/450-0368. www.thebodyholiday.com. 152 units. $1,088–$1,212 double. Rates all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; gym; Internet; 2 outdoor pools; room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; watersports. *In room:* A/C, fridge, hair dryer.

Coconut Bay Resort & Spa ★★★ Kids On the island's southern shore, and very close to Hewanorra Airport, this sprawling oceanfront resort has emerged as one of the most frequently recommended mass-market, all-inclusive hotels on the island. It features

a waterpark with two four-story-high waterslides and a handful of swimming pools which, while not the most dramatic on St. Lucia, are among the largest. There's also a lazy 230m (754-ft.) stream that runs sleepily through the property. Unlike some resorts, Coconut Bay welcomes singles, couples (of all persuasions), and families. There is an array of constant activities, including nightly entertainment from local bands. Spanning 34 lushly planted hectares (84 acres), Coconut Bay is fringed with coconut palms, opening onto Savannes Bay. Rooms are long and narrow, each with at least a partial ocean view (those on the fourth floor have unobstructed vistas). Units also come with separate sitting areas and a private balcony.

Vieux Fort, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **866/978-6226** or 758/459-6000. Fax 758/456-9900. www.coconutbayresortandspa.com. 254 units. Winter $570–$990 double; off-season $430–$720 double. Extra adult $100; extra child under 18 $55–$75. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; children's activity center; fitness center; 3 outdoor pools; waterpark; dance club; spa; 4 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Cotton Bay Village ★★ (Kids) On the northeast of St. Lucia, 18km (11 miles) north of Castries, this property has a series of luxury suites, town houses, and villas. Some of its larger units are available with a pool cottage. Furnished in an eclectic style, the plantation features units with designer kitchens and living rooms, even state-of-the-art entertainment systems. Town houses or villas come with their own private pool and spa. The resort would be ideal for honeymooners but also caters to children 3 to 14 with its Humming Bird Kids Club. Its Casuarina Spa and Fitness Center features an outdoor treatment gazebo and even a rooftop restaurant, Heaven.

Cap Estate, Cotton Bay, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/544-2883** in the U.S., or 758/456-5700. Fax 758/450-9518. www.cottonbayvillage.com. 74 units. Winter $410–$840 double suite, $810–$1,175 town house or villa; off season $310–$530 double suite, $720–$970 town house or villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; children's club; golf club privileges; fitness center; outdoor pool; private pool in villas; room service; smoke-free rooms; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in suites).

East Winds Inn ★ (Finds) Low key and classy, and lying a short drive south of Rodney Bay, this is a cottage colony on 2.8 hectares (7 acres) of landscaped terrain. It employs a staff of 10 gardeners, who keep the grounds kempt, and a management team that runs the place like a private club. A series of cinderblock and wood-built cottages are private and well maintained, each containing two separate units. Each is comfortable but deliberately simple, and not as plush as you might expect from a place with such an upscale clientele. The resort's social center is the rock-trimmed restaurant and bar, each of them fronting La Brelotte Bay (also known as East Winds Beach). Both areas are permeated with just a whiff of what you might have expected in Tahiti.

La Brelotte Bay, Gros Islet (PO Box 1477 Castries), St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/452-8212.** Fax 758/452-9941. www.eastwinds.com. 30 units. Winter $885–$950 double, $1,090 suite; off-season $445–$600 double, $635 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; free (nonmotorized) watersports. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, fridge.

Jade Mountain Resort at Anse Chastenet ★★ Iconoclastic and intensely theatrical, Jade Mountain is one of the most dramatic and thought-provoking pieces of postmodern design on St. Lucia. Imagine a curvaceous organic form sinuously poised between the base of a rocky cliff and a hilltop stretching down a forested hillside to the sea. Also imagine about a dozen 30m-long (98-ft.) steel and masonry catwalks, each poised in midair between the cliff face and the mahogany louvers of a building. Every accommodation is a suite, each surface of which is sheathed with granite, tropical

hardwood, stainless steel, copper , and tile work. The only thing missing within these plush and artfully minimalist suites is a wall separating the suite's interior from the wide-open view of the Pitons, the forested shoreline, and the sea.

Anse Chastanet Beach (P.O. Box 7000), Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S., or 758/459-7000. Fax 758/459-7700. www.jademountainstlucia.com. 24 suites. $1,100–$2,130. Breakfast and dinner $75 per person extra. DC, DISC, MC, V. No children 15 or under. **Amenities:** Restaurant; gym; outdoor pool; private pools; spa; shared amenities with Anse Chastanet (see above). *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

Jalousie Plantation ★★ Perched within a seemingly endless grove of coconut palms in the Val des Pitons, this is an elegant resort for visitors looking for privacy. It originated in the late 1990s, sprawling across one of the most desirable building sites in St. Lucia. The property is so large (130 hectares/321 acres) that vans circulate to shuttle guests around. An ongoing renovation of the headquarters and the tile-roofed villas was expected to have been finished in 2009, with 52 additional units added. Many of the resort's accommodations are in individual villas or villa suites (slightly larger, with separate sitting rooms) that dot the hillside. Villas and suites have private plunge pools. In addition to the villas, 12 Sugar Mill double rooms are in two buildings; they're slightly smaller but still have private terraces.

P.O. Box 251, Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/235-4300** in the U.S. for reservations only, or 758/456-8000. Fax 758/459-7667. www.jalousieplantation.com. 112 units. Winter $500–$775 double, from $699–$900 suite; off season $288–$400 double, from $500 suite. Breakfast and dinner $95 per person extra. Honeymoon, dive, and spa packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's programs; 3-hole golf course; health club; fitness classes; squash court; outdoor pool; on-site disco (Fri and Sat nights only); room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 lit Laykold tennis courts; watersports; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Ladera Resort ★★ The Ladera is an exercise in luxurious simplicity on St. Lucia's southwest end, frequently a retreat for the rich and famous. There are no phones or TVs in the rooms. Outside the town of Soufrière, this hideaway is perched on a rocky, vertiginous clifftop 330m (1,082 ft.) above sea level. Sandwiched between the Pitons, the resort has views which sweep over Jalousie Bay—the most stunning vista you'll find on St. Lucia. Thanks to the prevailing winds, architects designed the place without any wall separating the bedrooms from the views: Clients sleep without air-conditioning, beneath mosquito netting on four-poster beds. Don't come here for the beach—it's a 15- to 20-minute complimentary shuttle ride away. Accommodations are constructed of tropical hardwoods, stone, and tile, and are furnished with 19th-century French furniture, wicker, and accessories built by local craftspeople. All units afford total privacy and have indoor gardens and plunge pools, plus showers. To get a room here in the winter, reserve 4 months in advance. Children 14 and under are not encouraged here, except during Christmas week.

P.O. Box 225, Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **866/290-0978** in the U.S. and Canada, or 758/459-7323. Fax 758/459-5156. www.ladera.com. 27 units. Winter $545–$815 suite, from $1,075 2-bedroom villa suite; off season $340–$620 suite; from $840 2-bedroom villa suite. 7-night minimum Dec 23–29; 3-night minimum Jan 3–Apr 16. AE, MC, V. Closed mid-Sept to mid-Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; shuttle service to the beach; horseback riding; outdoor pool; private plunge pools; room service; spa; fishing charters; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* Fridge, hair dryer, no phone.

Royal St. Lucian ★★ Kids A fine resort with a deluxe spa, the Royal St. Lucian lies north of Castries. Standing in its own gardens of royal palms and tropical foliage, it opens onto a dramatic lobby. All the accommodations are luxury suites, the best of which have

sea views and balconies. There are eight even more spacious suites right at beachfront, each with a private terrace. Some of the units are split level, with cream-colored tile floors, rattan furniture, and woven rugs. Everywhere you look, the setting is lush. The food is among the best hotel cuisine on the island, and candlelit beach dinners are featured. Jazz can be heard in the chic cocktail lounge, and the spa offers everything from hydrotherapy to herbal body wraps.

Rodney Bay (P.O. Box 977), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/255-5859** in the U.S., or 758/452-9999. Fax 758/452-9639. www.rexresorts.com. 96 units. Winter $560–$820 double; off season $520–$680 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; health club; fitness center; Wi-Fi (in lobby); outdoor pool; room service; sauna; spa; 2 tennis courts; dive shop; fishing; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Sandals Grande St. Lucian Spa & Beach Resort ★★★ This is the best accessorized of the three Sandals resorts on island. The luxury resort lies adjacent to the causeway on the northern tip of St. Lucia, linking the "mainland" with Pigeon Island, with the Caribbean Sea on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Set on a landscaped 1-hectare (2 1/2-acre) lagoon, the megaresort occupies a site 10km (6 1/4 miles) northwest of Castries at Rodney Bay. With a private golden sandy beach, the most lavish lagoon-style swimming pool on the island, a state-of-the-art spa, and a choice of six restaurants, many find it hard to tear themselves away from the grounds. Even the least expensive bedrooms are spacious, with antique reproductions in an English colonial plantation style. The fourth-floor rooms have better views, service, and space, and are more comfortable overall. For the ultimate in luxury, ask for one of the two-dozen "swim-up" units with their own free-form pools and terraces.

Pigeon Island Causeway, Gros Islet, St. Lucia. W.I. ✆ **888/726-3257** in the U.S., or 758/455-2000. Fax 758/455-2001. www.sandals.com. 193 units. Winter $930–$1,168 double, from $1,992 suite; off season $507–$658 double, from $714 suite. Rates are per person and all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children not accepted. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 6 bars; golf privileges; health club; Internet; 5 outdoor pools; night club; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 tennis courts; watersports; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Sandals Regency La Toc Golf Resort & Spa ★★ The Sandals chain opened this clone of their all-inclusive formula in 1993 on a forested 85-hectare (210-acre) peninsula whose highest altitudes slope steeply down to the sea. Although not as spiffy as the more cutting-edge (and custom-built) Sandals Grande St. Lucian in the tourist zone at Rodney Bay, the Regency nonetheless claims elegant antecedents, having originally been built as St. Lucia's first large-scale resort, the Cunard La Toc. Catering to couples regardless of sexual preference and with lots of on-site entertainment, the hotel is near Castries, a few steps from St. Lucia's major golf course. The resort's centerpiece is a gazebo-fringed pool that incorporates two waterfalls, a swim-up bar, and a dining pavilion. Larger-than-expected guest rooms contain king-size four-poster beds with mahogany headboards, and balconies or patios.

La Toc Rd. (P.O. Box 399), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **888/726-3257** in the U.S., or 758/452-3081. Fax 758/452-1012. www.sandals.com. 327 units. Winter $440–$700 double, from $854 suite; off season $418–$663 double, from $854 suite. Rates are all-inclusive per person. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children 17 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 10 bars (2 swim-up); 9-hole golf course; health club; Internet; 4 outdoor pools; night club; room service; spa; 5 lit tennis courts; watersports; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

EXPENSIVE

Discovery at Marigot Bay ★★ Splashy and hedonistic, this sprawling resort 8km (5 miles) south of Castries opens onto what author James Michener called "the most beautiful bay in the Caribbean." It occupies a landscaped 3-hectare (7½ acre) site that stands upward from a marina and across the water, a 5-minute ferryboat ride to the nearest good beach. The bulky timbering, dark-stained wooden sheathing, and stalwart masonry foundations evoke alpine Europe more than the Caribbean. Indonesian four-poster beds and dark-wood furnishings fill the rooms, each with big bathrooms with walk-in "drench shower." Suites come with full kitchens and living rooms, and half of them also have plunge pools. The 57 suites can be subdivided into 124 conventional double rooms.

Marigot Bay (PO Box CP5437), Castries, St. Lucia, WI. ✆ **758/458-5300.** Fax 758/458-5299. www.discoverystlucia.com. 92 units. Winter $440–$790 double, from $800 suite; off season $400–$670 double, from $720 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants and snack bars; 3 bars; babysitting; Internet; 2 outdoor pools; room service; full spa; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Stonefield Estate Villa Resort ★ Finds Nestled at the base of Petit Piton, this former cocoa plantation is for escapists. In the southwestern part of the island, it stands on its own 10 hectares (25 acres), complete with a nature trail and some of the island's most striking panoramas, lying near the little fishing village of Soufrière and close enough to the Jalousie Plantation that Stonefield guests can use the beach there, a free 5-minute shuttle ride away. Each of the on-site cottages has its own tropic-toned color scheme, character, privacy, and rambling verandahs, and each is surrounded with forested greenery. The estate here has one of the islands oldest archeological artifacts, a petroglyph from 350 b.c. Each accommodation comes with antiques, high ceilings, and fully furnished kitchens. Villas range in size from one to three bedrooms.

Stonefield Villas (P.O. Box 228), Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/459-5648.** Fax 758/459-5550. www.stonefieldvillas.com. 20 units. Winter $275–$450 1-bedroom villa, $400–$500 2-bedroom villa, $600–$800 3-bedroom villa; off season $200–$375 1-bedroom villa, $300–$400 2-bedroom villa, $500–$600 3-bedroom villa. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; library; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C (in 8 of the units), kitchen, no phone.

Ti Kaye Village Resort ★★ Finds It's special, it's fun, and there's nothing like it on St. Lucia. An elite, intimate retreat, it sprawls across a clifftop overlooking the Caribbean and evokes a laid-back Creole village between Castries and Soufrière. A hideaway, it stands on a bit more than 6 hectares (15 acres) of lushly planted grounds. The resort offers beautifully furnished and comfortable bedrooms in individual cottages trimmed in fretwork, or else a dozen units in somewhat less ornate and less private duplex cottages. Each accommodation comes with a spacious porch with a hammock. Bedrooms are furnished with four-posters along with a private open-air garden shower, and 11 of the accommodations (a third of the total) have their own plunge pool. A wooden staircase, 167 steps down, leads to a secluded cove of white sands.

Anse Cochon, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/456-8101.** Fax 758/456-8105. www.tikaye.com. 33 units. Winter $225–$425 double; off season $175–$325 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Children 11 and under are not welcome. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; fitness center; outdoor pool; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, fridge, hair dryer.

Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort ★ Kids A sprawling cluster of villas, this bustling resort opening onto a beautiful bay is spread across 22 tropical hectares (54 acres) north of Reduit Beach, about a 15-minute drive north of Castries. Although it's

one of the largest resorts on island, it nonetheless is a tranquil and luxurious retreat. Windjammer draws both honeymooners, who occupy the more secluded villas, and families with children. The resort was designed with a vaguely Andalusian/Moorish motif, heavily influenced by Caribbean themes; tropical colors predominate, with wicker and rattan furniture. White villas climb a forested hillside above a 305m (1,000-ft.) stretch of white-sandy beach. This is an all-suite/villa resort (the villas have private plunge pools). The roomy villas offer separate living and dining rooms, plus full kitchens. All bedrooms open onto sun terraces. The resort also contains more restaurants per capita than most of its competitors.

Labrelotte Bay (P.O. Box 1504), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **800/958-7376** in the U.S., or 758/456-9000. Fax 758/452-9454. www.windjammer-landing.com. 296 units. Winter $350 double, $450 1-bedroom villa, $750 2-bedroom villa; off season $250 double, $350–$450 1-bedroom villa, $550 2-bedroom villa. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's programs; fitness center; Internet; Jacuzzi; 4 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; 2 lit tennis courts; watersports; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen (only in the villas), minibar.

MODERATE

Bay Gardens Beach Resort ★ This hotel is newer, grander, plusher, and closer to the beach than its older sister, the also-recommended Bay Gardens Hotel (p. 580), with which it shares the same owners. Rated as a four-star deluxe property, it opened in 2007 with a configuration of rooms that could, depending on how the interior partitions were arranged, contain either 72 conventional bedrooms or 36 one-bedroom suites. Both hotels are owned by Berthia Parle, an imposing matriarch who's often prominently featured in the press as a kind of "voice" during St. Lucian elections. The compound's central core is painted in tones of lime and tangerine, and arranged around a convivial set of swimming pools, both of them adjacent to the "wider" end of Reduit Beach. Inside, rooms contain a mixture of Caribbean, postmodern, and tropical colors and furnishings.

Reduit Beach, Rodney Bay Village, Gros Islet, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **877/620-3200** or 758/457-8500. Fax 758/457-8400. www.baygardensbeachresort.com. 72 units. Mid-Dec to May $186–$260 double, from $269 1-bedroom suite; off season $157–$217 double, from $225 1-bedroom suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; deli; 3 bars; Internet; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; scuba diving. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen (in suites), Wi-Fi.

Caribbean Jewel Beach Resort This might be the best example on St. Lucia of an upscale boutique hotel with luxurious accommodations, a superb view, and a short walk's distance from Reduit Beach. You'll be happiest here if you're looking for a hotel where you can shut the door and conduct your holiday in your own way, with few expectations from the somewhat blasé staff. To reach it, you'll drive steeply uphill to a rambling, pink-walled apartment complex on a hillside above the bay. Each unit has a covered patio or balcony and lots of space. The property occupies 24 hectares (59 acres) along the bay's southern shore. Deluxe rooms are equipped with Jacuzzis, and suites feature fully equipped kitchens with a dining area and a spacious living room. Each executive suite has its own penthouse.

Rodney Bay (P.O. Box GM 503), Castries, St. Lucia. W.I. ✆ **758/452-9199.** Fax 758/452-9198. www.caribbeanjewelresort.com. 31 units. Winter $115–$125 double, $135–$145 suite; off season $100–$110 double, $120–$130 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV, Jacuzzi (in some), kitchen (in some).

Coco Palm Hotel ★ Perched on a grassy terrace above Reduit Beach, Coco Palm offers low-key and affordable chic within a Dutch colonial decor. It's the latest creation

of Caribbean guru Allen Chastanet, who co-founded the Island Outpost group that also operates Coco Kreole (p. 581). Rooms are spread across a three-story building in candy colors of lemon and lime. Of special note here are seven "swim-up rooms," with a private terrace linked to the hotel's serpentine pool. The bedrooms and suites are decorated with plantation-style furniture, local paintings, and glass-walled showers. The top-floor suites open onto roof decks with views of the village restaurants.

Reduit Beach Ave., Rodney Bay Village. St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **866/588-5980** or 758/456-2800. Fax 758/452-0713. www.coco-resorts.com. 84 units. Winter $175–$245 double, $275–$320 suite; off season $145–$215 double, $245–$290 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor restaurant and bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Harmony Suites This complex of two-story buildings offers well-maintained accommodations at reasonable rates, a short walk from one of the island's finest beaches at Reduit. The suites—decorated in rattan, wicker, and florals—sit adjacent to a saltwater lagoon. Each unit offers a patio or balcony with views of moored yachts, the lagoon, and surrounding hills. Those on the top floor have more privacy. All suites, except the VIP/honeymoon units, have sofa beds. Each VIP suite features a double Jacuzzi, a four-poster queen-size bed on a pedestal, a sun deck, white rattan furnishings, and a bidet. Eight of the suites contain kitchenettes, complete with beverage makers, fridges, and wet bars—ideal for families on a budget.

Rodney Bay Lagoon (P.O. Box 155), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** in the U.S., or 758/452-8756. Fax 758/452-8677. www.harmonysuites.com. 30 units. Winter $155–$205 suite; off season $145–$200 suite. Extra person $40. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Le Haut Plantation ★★ (Finds) If you're adventurous, you can skip all the fancy resorts recommended and stay on a 21-hectare (52-acre) working plantation 2.4km (1½ miles) from the town of Soufrière nestled on a lush mountain on the west coast. In a former life, the estate was a cocoa and coconut plantation, but today it is a farm growing fruits and vegetables, many of the ingredients plucked from the fields to appear on the hotel's menus. Everything from oranges to breadfruit, from soursops to cashew nuts flourish here. Guests stay either in the century-old main house or in a guest cottage converted from a copra house. From the estate, panoramic views of the Pitons unfold. Four of the units offer standard comfort, the rest being more luxurious, but all are inviting. The open-air restaurant, with its vista, serves both Creole and international dishes, everything from fresh lobster to the catch of the day (often flying fish).

P.O. Box 304, Soufrière, St. Lucia. W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264.** Fax 758/459-5975. www.lahaut.com. 13 units. Winter $175–$275 double, $375 cottage for 4; off season $100–$175 double, $300 cottage for 4. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools. *In room:* Ceiling fans, no phone.

The Inn on the Bay This small-scale inn perched 90m (295 ft.) above the waters of Marigot Bay makes for a romantic escape. It's the creative statement of Montréal-born Normand Viau and his wife, Louise Boucher. Abandoning careers as a lawyer and social worker, respectively, they designed the hotel themselves, modeling its blue roof and veranda-ringed style on the island's plantation-house tradition. Today the centerpiece of their establishment is an open-air terrace, site of a small pool and semiprivate dinners available only to hotel guests. Bedrooms, with 3m (9¾-ft.) ceilings, are spacious, comfortably furnished, and airy. Each has a ceiling fan and ample windows for cross-ventilation.

Seaview Ave., Marigot Bay (P.O. Box RB2377), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/451-4260.** Fax 928/438-3828. www.saint-lucia.com. 5 units. Winter $195 double; off season $150–$175 double. Rates include breakfast.

MC, V. Children 17 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Breakfast room; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, no phone.

Mago Estate Hotel ★ (Finds) This is a true Caribbean Shangri-La, ideal for a honeymoon. Just above the fishing village of Soufrière and overlooking the Pitons, German-born Peter Gloger runs this glamorous little inn. A 5-minute walk from the beach, this property is surrounded by tropical trees, including *mago* (patois for mango), mahogany, papaya, *maracuya* (passion fruit), and banana. Each of the accommodations has only three walls; the other side of the room is open to a view of the mountains and sea. Guests sleep in four-poster beds underneath ceilings of painted clouds, with mosquito netting for protection from insects. Each unit comes with a spacious private terrace. The most desirable units are four large bedrooms with teakwood furnishings or handcrafted antiques along with plunge pools, hammocks, and large sliding doors opening to the terrace and pool.

Palm Mist, Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/459-5880.** Fax 758/459-7352. www.magohotel.com. 10 units. Winter $190–$290 double, $345–$725 suite; off season $150–$235 double, $295–$625 suite. Rates include breakfast and beach shuttle service. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Dining room; bar; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C (in some), fridge, minibar, Wi-Fi (in suites), no phone.

Villa Beach Cottages ★ The charm of this place derives from its small scale and its personalized sense of intimacy. The location is at the northern end of St. Lucia, 6.4km (4 miles) from Castries. Between the beach and the coastal road is a postmodern row of gingerbread-adorned town houses, each state-of-the-art, with a balcony overlooking the water. Cottages are rentable for self-catering clients who prefer to spend quiet days reading and swimming, and who usually cook their own meals on-site. Kitchens within each unit are better and more contemporary than those within many modern U.S. condos in, say, Florida, and decor is well maintained and comfortable. There's no restaurant on-site, but a "resident chef" will, with 24 hours advance warning, arrive to prepare meals.

P.O. Box 129, John Compton Hwy., Choc Bay, Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/450-2884.** Fax 758/450-4529. www.villabeachcottages.com. 20 units. Year-round $200–$295 double; $295 1-bedroom suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, kitchen.

INEXPENSIVE

The **Green Parrot** (p. 582) also offers inexpensive rooms.

Auberge Seraphine This two-story 1990s-era concrete-sided building painted cerulean blue and white is a 15-minute walk from Vigie Beach, overlooking the marina and the harbor of Castries. Owned and operated by the St. Lucia–born Joseph family, whose hotel skills were honed during a long sojourn in England, the hotel offers well-maintained but simple accommodations. They're generally spacious and often decorated with bright colors and tropical prints. Most activities surround an open terrace whose surface is sheathed with terra-cotta tiles ringing a small round-sided pool. Don't expect too many extras, as the place's charm derives from its simplicity.

Vigie Cove (Box 390), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **888/790-5264** in the U.S., or 758/453-2073. Fax 758/451-7001. www.aubergeseraphine.com. 28 units. Year-round $120–$140 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Bay Gardens Hotel ★ (Value) This hotel, which is not to be confused with its better-equipped and spiffier twin, the Bay Gardens Beach Resort (p. 578), offers one of the best values, as well as some of the best service, on the island. It's not right on the sands, but

Reduit Beach, one of St. Lucia's finest, is a 5-minute walk or a complimentary 2-minute shuttle ride away. Bay Gardens opens onto a large atrium lobby with a designer fountain pool and bamboo furnishings. Their medium-size bedrooms in vivid florals contain a terrace or balcony, and tropical art and accessories. Families might rent one of the eight apartments, each a self-contained unit with a kitchenette. Look for weekly rum punches, barbecues, Caribbean buffets, and live music on occasion.

Rodney Bay (P.O. Box 1892), Castries, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **877/620-3200** in the U.S., or 758/452-8060. Fax 758/452-8059. www.baygardenshotel.com. 87 units. Winter $110–$136 double, $153–$204 suite; off season $106–$119 double, $140–$165 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $43 per person extra. 1 child stays free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; shuttle to beach; library; babysitting; Internet cafe; Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, minibar.

Bay Gardens Inn (Value) In the heart of Rodney Bay, near Reduit Beach, this inn enjoys a prime location and prices which, when compared to its neighbors, are relatively inexpensive. Its proximity to Rodney Bay Marina puts it at the heart of the action. The inn is small and modern, with a 1.2m-deep (4-ft.) freshwater pool. The most desirable rooms are called Bay View Superior, each with a spacious queen-size bed. Units also open onto a private balcony or terrace.

Rodney Bay, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/452-8200.** Fax 758/452-8002. www.baygardensinn.com. 33 units. Winter $100–$125 double; off season $90–$110 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; shuttle to beach; babysitting; Internet cafe; outdoor pool; day spa w/limited spa facilities; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Coco Kreole (Value) At Rodney Bay, one of the most scenic parts of St. Lucia, this hotel is the more affordable alternative to its newer sibling, Coco Palm (p. 579). A St. Lucian, Allen Chastanet, operates this informal, laid-back resort. Reduit Beach, one of the best on island, lies only a 5-minute walk from the property. Bedrooms are done in a rather lackluster and clichéd Caribbean style—think motel—but are completely comfortable and well maintained. The least expensive rooms face the street, the better units opening poolside. Breakfast is taken poolside, and all of Rodney Bay's restaurants and bars lie close at hand.

Rodney Bay, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **866/588-5980** or 758/452-0712. Fax 758/452-0773. www.cocokreole.com. 20 units. Winter $145–$165 double; off season $115–$125 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; Internet cafe; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hummingbird Beach Resort ★ (Finds) Set on .3 hectare (¾ acre) of landscaped grounds, this is a small and carefully maintained inn that has direct access to a sandy strip of beachfront, on the northern edge of Soufrière. Bedrooms are sheathed in white stucco and accented with varnished hardwoods like mahogany. Views are of the water or the soaring nearby heights of Petit Piton and the rugged landscape of southern St. Lucia. Each unit has a ceiling fan and mosquito netting that's artfully draped over the elaborately carved bedsteads. There's a restaurant, Lifeline, on the premises (p. 584).

P.O. Box 280, Soufrière, St. Lucia, W.I. ✆ **758/459-7232.** Fax 758/459-7033. www.istlucia.co.uk. 9 units (7 with bathroom). Winter $80–$90 double without bathroom, $180–$200 double with bathroom, $200 suite; off season $55–$65 double without bathroom, $120–$125 double with bathroom, $130 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; access to nearby health club; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, TV, phone in 7 units.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Instead of fancy wine, many locals drink the local beer , Piton, which has won many coveted international prizes, including both a silver medal and a gold medal in 2006 in international beer competitions held in the city of Prague. The other regional alcohol is Bounty Rum, a quality, light-golden rum with a smooth, full-bodied taste. It's known as "The Spirit of St. Lucia."

IN CASTRIES

The Coal Pot ★★ SEAFOOD/CARIBBEAN It's our favorite restaurant within Castries or on its outskirts, a place that 's simultaneously elegant and earthy, within a rustic, even raffish setting that 's firmly infused with a conscious European flair. Established in 1968 and managed today by Michelle, daughter of the original founder, and her French-born husband, Xavier , who's the chef , it occupies a woodsy-looking low-slung bungalow whose veranda parallels the waterfront of Vigie Bay, a relatively shallow harbor that's suitable for small-scale, old-fashioned fishing boats not far from Vigie Airport. Fresh local fish will be accompanied with your choice of sauces, including garlic butter , Creole, ginger, or coconut-flavored curry sauce. Grilled meats include succulent versions of duck breast, or filet steak with black peppercorn or mushroom sauce. Start a meal here with fish chowder, pumpkin-callaloo soup, or St. Lucian-style crab backs. Also consider, perhaps at lunch, a niçoise salad with fresh tuna, a Caesar salad garnished with grilled chicken or shrimp, or boiled local saltfish served with ripe green figs.

Vigie Cove, Castries. ✆ **758/452-5566.** www.colepotrestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $24–$43. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–11pm.

Green Parrot ★ CONTINENTAL/CARIBBEAN About 2km (1 1/4 miles) east of the center of town, Green Parrot overlooks Castries Harbour and remains the local hot spot for visitors, expatriates, and locals. It takes about 12 minutes to walk here from downtown, but the effort is worth it. Chef Harry, who runs this elegant place, had many years of training in prestigious restaurants and hotels in London, including Claridge 's. Guests take their time and make an evening of it, many enjoying a before-dinner drink in the Victorian-style salon. Try a Grass Parrot (made from coconut cream, crème de menthe, bananas, and white rum). An evening in the English-colonial dining room usually includes free entertainment on Wednesday and Saturday nights, which might be a limbo contest or a fire-eating show.

All this may sound gimmicky, but the food doesn't suffer. There's an emphasis on St. Lucian specialties and homegrown produce. Try the *christophene* au gratin (a Caribbean squash with cheese) or the Creole soup made with callaloo and pumpkin.

Green Parrot also offers some of the island 's least expensive lodging; rooms have air-conditioning and phones, costing $75 in a double, including breakfast.

Chef Harry Dr., Morne Fortune. ✆ **758/452-3399.** Reservations recommended. Lunch main courses $17–$26; fixed-price dinner $33–$41. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight.

Jacques Waterfront Dining ★★ SEAFOOD/CARIBBEAN In this part of St. Lucia, we prefer the Coal Pot (see above), which lies immediately across the tiny harbor. But for an almost-as-good pick, consider this foremost competitor. Its owner, Chef Jacky Rioux has traveled the world, picking up ideas for a fusion cuisine that combines market-fresh ingredients with French cooking methods. Local fishermen are always bringing him

unusual catches fr om the sea, which he shapes into such dishes as conch in a curried coconut sauce. Among our fav orite of his main courses ar e boneless chicken br east stuffed with smoked salmon in a citrus-butter sauce or oven-baked kingfish with a white wine–and–sweet pepper sauce. The chef mix es his o wn spices and seasonings and is a talented sauce maker. He even smokes his o wn fish and meat. H is open-air gar den restaurant overlooks Vigie Cove.

Vigie Marina. ✆ **758/458-1900.** Reser vations required. Main courses lunch $12–$26, dinner $22–$39. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm and 7–11pm.

AT MARIGOT

Rainforest Hideaway ★★ INTERNATIONAL By virtually everyone's reckoning, this is the best restaurant at Marigot Bay, where the competition from a half-dozen other restaurants is stiff . Its o wner and ex ecutive chef is E ngland-derived J im Verity, whose parents are intimately associated with the blockbuster r esort, Discovery Bay, just acr oss the harbor. To reach the restaurant from Marigot Bay's only access road, hop aboard any of the water taxis that ply the waters of the bay at r egular intervals. The cost of the ferryboat is included in the price of y our dinner. About 90% of the restaurant is on a deck stretching out into the harbor. Menu items are as good as they'll get on St. Lucia and are likely to include, among others, Thai-style coconut and pumpkin soup , a carpaccio of fresh tuna with a wasabi-and-so y glaze, chili-infused shrimp and scallops with a P armesan-flavored risotto, and cinnamon-crusted duck breast with a reduction of orange juice and coconut milk.

Marigot Bay. ✆ **758/286-0511.** Reser vations required. 2-course fixed-price menu $48; 3- course fixed-price menu $59; each additional c ourse $12. MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–7:30pm (1st seating) and 8:30–9:30pm (2nd seating). Closed Sept.

AT ANSE COCHON

Ti Kaye Restaurant ★★ INTERNATIONAL There's a lot to like about this mostly Creole-style restaurant, where a high ratio of staff to diners make meals her e effortless and charming, and where much of the ambience might remind you of a meal within the private homes of one of the attentive waitstaff. You'll dine on smallish tables decked with plaid napery, within dim illuminations. The staff recites daily specials that augment the regular offerings listed on the menu. These include mushr oom-and-chive-flavored risotto; spicy Caribbean P epper Pot; grilled br east of chicken with cassav a and coconut flavoring; and Co wboy Coffee S teak, wherein upscale cuts of beef ar e dry-rubbed with ground coffee and garlic.

Anse Cochon. ✆ **758/456-8101.** Reservations required. Main courses $22–$34. MC, V. Daily 7–9pm.

IN THE SOUFRIÈRE AREA

Camilla's Restaurant & Bar WEST INDIAN/CREOLE Set a block inland fr om the waterfront, one floor abo ve str eet level, this is a decent Caribbean-style r estaurant with simple, unpretentious food. Local matriarch Camilla Alcindor will welcome you for coffee, a soda, or P errier. The food is straightfor ward but flavorful. Opt for the fish and shellfish (Caribbean fish Creole or lobster thermidor) rather than the beef; chicken curry is another savory choice. Lunches are considerably less elaborate and include an array of sandwiches, salads, omelets, and burgers. O ur fav orite tables ar e the pair sitting on a balcony overlooking the energetic activities in the str eet below.

7 Bridge St., Soufrière. ✆ **758/459-5379.** Main courses $11–$41. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 8am–midnight.

Dasheene Restaurant & Bar ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This is one of the most widely heralded restaurants on St. Lucia, and it has the most dramatic setting. Inspired by the best of the Caribbean/Creole kitchen and the innovations of California, this mountaintop hideaway offers some of the island's most refined and creative cuisine. Be warned that, after dark, a dress code for men (who should at least wear long pants with a collared shirt) is strictly enforced. From any of a series of timbered terraces that seem cantilevered up the sloping hill that's the site of this place, you can start with such tantalizing appetizers as St. Lucia fish pot consommé, or the green-papaya-and-pumpkin fritters with a lettuce rémoulade dressing. We prefer the fisherman's catch of the day, often red snapper or king fish. It's served with your choice of a mild jerk butter or else lemon-caviar butter. A local way of preparing steak, called Mojo steak, is marinated in a lime-and-pepper seasoning before it's pan-seared. The chocolate rum mousse for dessert makes for a festive evening.

In the Ladera Resort, between Gros and Petit Piton. ✆ **758/459-7323.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $45–$55. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7:30–10am, noon–2:30pm, and 6:30–10pm.

Lifeline Restaurant at the Hummingbird CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is the best part of the Hummingbird Beach Resort complex. Tables are set on a stylish veranda adjacent to the sands of Hummingbird Beach. The cuisine focuses on such West Indian dishes as Creole-style conch, lobster, burgers, steaks, and filets of both snapper and grouper, punctuated with such American staples as burgers and BLTs. A tiny gift shop on the premises sells batik items crafted by staff members. Joyce Alexander Stowe is the undisputed matriarch who's in charge here.

At the Hummingbird Beach Resort, on the waterfront just north of the main wharf at Soufrière. ✆ **758/459-7232.** Platters $20–$37. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Mango Tree INTERNATIONAL Because of its isolation north of Soufrière, in the island's southern tier, this place is sometimes sought out as a luncheon or "sundowner" stop for motorists touring the island's southern fringe. It's set within an octagonal building overlooking the sea and the Pitons. Menu items taste better (what doesn't?) when accompanied with any of the party-colored drinks emanating from the bar, but even if you're tee-totaling, they'll still hit the spot. Tasty menu items include jumbo shrimp in a crispy chili pepper–and–sesame seed crust, a julienne of lamb with Asian spices, St. Lucian–style fish broth, curried chicken, pork chops with a sauce flavored with local beer, and blackened fish filets.

At the Stonefield Estate Villas, Soufrière. ✆ **758/459-5648.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$37. MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6:30–10pm.

IN RODNEY BAY

The Charthouse AMERICAN/CREOLE In a large building with a sky-lit ceiling and a mahogany bar, the Charthouse is one of the oldest restaurants in the area and one of the island's most popular. It was built several feet above the bobbing yachts of the lagoon, without walls, to allow an optimal view of the water. The helpful staff serves simple, honest, good food in large portions. The specialties might include pumpkin soup, St. Lucian crab backs, baby back ribs, and fresh local lobster. (Sept–Apr, you can often witness the live lobster being delivered from the boat at around 5pm.) If you fancy a well-cooked charcoal-broiled steak, you'll see why this dish made the restaurant famous. Of course, traditionalists visit the Charthouse for one reason—its roast prime rib of beef, which is good, but never better here than in the U.S.

Reduit Beach, Rodney Bay. ✆ **758/452-8115.** Reservations required. Main courses $20–$41. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

The Edge ★★★ EUROBBEAN FUSION Many of the toughest critics in St. Lucia cite this as the island's best and most creative pocket of upscale gastronomy, and we agree. Swedish-born chef Bobo Bergström is the island's culinary star. There are many oddities about this place: It's unexpectedly perched in an unlikely looking, low-slung building on the grounds of an undistinguished middle-bracket hotel (Harmony Suites) in the touristic thick of Rodney Bay Village. It contains the first and only sushi bar on St. Lucia. If sushi is not your thing, you'll want to proceed deeper into the artfully simple, bistrolike interior of this place. Bobo, who was designated as Caribbean Chef of the Year in 2003, is one of the world's premier advocates of European-fused Caribbean cuisine. Your delightful meal might include a trio of ceviches, duck breast with star anis on sesame croutons with guava dressing, a mousseline of scallops and shrimp served with fried scallops and shrimp and a tomato-colada sauce, or jerk-marinated and grilled tenderloin of beef with a carrot-and-yam tarte. An intriguing dessert is a house-style piña colada–flavored "Tira Mi Su."

Harmony Suites Hotel, Rodney Bay Village. ✆ **758/450-3343.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $26–$40; 5-course "Eurobbean" fusion tasting menu $72; sushi $4.50–$12 per portion. MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6:30–10pm. Closed Sept.

Tao ★★ ASIAN/CARIBBEAN On a second-floor veranda on the edge of Cariblue Beach, this gem of a restaurant lies on the grounds of the Body Holiday at LeSPORT. Although this is an all-inclusive resort undergoing transformation, the restaurant is open to the public, with diners sitting out on a moonlit night enjoying the trade winds. Its fusion cuisine blends imaginative specialties of the West Indies with the best of such countries as Bali, Thailand, or Indonesia. Start with a lobster spring roll with mango coulis or a deluxe sushi and sashimi platter. For mains, the Pacific Rim seafood bouillabaisse is the island's best, with lemon grass and chili flavors cooked with fresh fish, along with conch, jumbo shrimps, and scallops. The tamarind-flavored lamb is an invariable success, as is the hibachi-grilled pork tenderloin marinated with miso paste and served with a gratin of eggplant.

Cap Estate. ✆ **758/450-8551.** Reservations required. Main courses $27–$35. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–9:30pm.

4 ST. LUCIA'S BEACHES

Since most of the island hotels are built right on the beach, you won't have to go far to swim. All beaches are open to the public, even those along hotel properties. However, if you use any of the hotel's beach equipment, you must pay for it. We prefer the beaches along the western coast, as the rough surf on the windward (east) side makes swimming potentially dangerous. The best hotels are all on the western coast for good reason.

One of the best beaches is **Pigeon Point Beach** ★, off the north shore, part of the **Pigeon Island National Historic Park** (see "Exploring the Island," below). The small beach here has white sand and is an ideal place for a picnic. Pigeon Island is joined to the mainland of St. Lucia by a causeway, so it's easy to reach.

The most frequented beach is **Reduit Beach** ★★, at Rodney Bay, 2km (1¼ miles) of soft beige sand fronting very clear waters. Many watersports kiosks can be found along

the strip bordering Royal St. Lucian Hotel. With all its restaurants and bars, you'll find plenty of refueling stops.

Choc Bay is a long stretch of sand and palm trees on the northwestern coast, convenient to Castries and the big resorts. Its tranquil waters lure swimmers and especially families (including locals) with small children.

The 3km (1 3/4-mile) white-sand **Malabar Beach** runs parallel to the George F. L. Charles Airport runway, in Castries, to the Rendezvous resort. **Vigie Beach,** north of Castries Harbour, is also popular. It has fine beige sands, sloping gently into crystalline water. **La Toc Beach,** just south of Castries, opens onto a crescent-shaped bay containing golden sand.

Marigot Bay is the quintessential Caribbean cove, framed on three sides by steep emerald hills and skirted by palm trees. There are some small but secluded beaches here. Some of the Caribbean's most expensive yachts anchor in this bay.

One of the most charming and hidden beaches of St. Lucia is the idyllic cove of **Anse Chastanet,** north of Soufrière. This is a beach connoisseur's delight. Towering palms provide shade from the fierce noonday sun, and lush hills are a refreshing contrast to the dark sandy strip.

The dramatic crescent-shaped bay of **Anse des Pitons** is at the foot of and between the twin peaks of the Pitons, south of Soufrière. The Jalousie Plantation transformed the natural black-sand beach by covering it with white sand; you walk through the resort to get to it. It's popular with divers and snorkelers. While here, you can ask about a very special beach reached only by boat, the black volcanic sands and tranquil waters of **Anse Couchon.** With its shallow reefs, excellent snorkeling, and picture-postcard charm, this beach has become a hideaway for lovers. It's south of Anse-le-Raye.

You'll find miles of white sand at the beach at **Vieux Fort,** at the southern end of the island. Reefs protect the crystal-clear waters here, rendering them tranquil and ideal for swimming. At the southern end of the windward side of the island is **Anse des Sables,** which opens onto a shallow bay swept by trade winds that are great for windsurfing.

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CAMPING Camping is now possible on St. Lucia courtesy of the **Environmental Educational Centre,** a division of the St. Lucia National Trust (✆ **758/452-5005**). This reserve features 12 campsites along a beautiful stretch of beach on historic Anse Liberté, in the fishing town of Canaries, 40km (25 miles) southwest of Castries and 13km (8 miles) north of Soufrière. At present you must bring your own tent, paying $20 per night to rent the site. There are nearby community bathrooms and community cooking areas. The reserve has 8km (5 miles) of hiking trails; staff members give tours of the area and explain the rich history of the Anse Liberté, which literally translated means "freedom harbor."

DEEP-SEA FISHING The waters around St. Lucia are known for their game fish, including blue marlin, sailfish, mako sharks, and barracuda, with tuna and kingfish among the edible catches. Most hotels can arrange fishing expeditions. Call **Mako Watersports** (✆ **758/452-0412**), which offers half-day fishing trips from $396 or full-day trips from $788. **Captain Mike's** (✆ **758/452-7044;** www.captmikes.com) also conducts fishing trips, renting boats by the half-day for $450 to $550, or a whole day in the $750-to-$1,000 price range.

GOLF St. Lucia has an 18-hole golf course (6,815 y d., par 71) at the **St. Lucia's Golf and Country Club,** Cap Estate, at the nor thern end of the island (**758/450-8523**). Greens fees ar e $135 for 18 holes, $95 for 9 holes; ther e ar e no caddies. Car ts ar e included, and clubs can be rented for $25. Hours are from 7am to 6pm daily, and reservations are needed.

HIKING A tropical rainforest covers a large area in the southern half of S t. Lucia, and the St. Lucia Forest and Lands Department manages it wisely. This forest reserve divides the western and eastern halves of the island. There are several trails, the most popular of which is the **Barre de l'Isle Trail,** located almost in the center of S t. Lucia, southeast of Marigot B ay; it's a fairly easy trail that ev en children can handle. There ar e four panoramic lookout points with dramatic vie ws of the sea whe re the Atlantic and the Caribbean meet. I t takes about an hour to walk this 2km-long (1 1/4-mile) trail, which lies about a 30-minute ride from Castries. Guided hikes can usually be arranged through the major hotels or through the **Forest and Lands Department** (**758/450-2078**).

HORSEBACK RIDING North of Castries is the island's oldest riding establishment—**Trim's National Riding Stable,** Cas-en-Bas, Gros Islet (**758/450-8273**). Its activities range from trail rides to beach tours, and the stable even offers horse-drawn carriage tours of Pigeon Island. Rides are $45 for an hour, $60 for 2 hours, or $80 for a 3-hour beach ride with a barbecue.

SCUBA DIVING I n Soufrière, **Scuba St. Lucia,** in the Anse Chastanet Hotel (**758/459-7755;** www.scubastlucia.com), offers one of the world's top dive locations at a five-star P ADI dive center. A t the southern end of Anse Chastanet 's .4km-long (1/4-mile) secluded beach, it featur es premier diving and compr ehensive facilities for div ers of all levels. Some of the most spectacular coral reefs of St. Lucia, many only 3 to 6m (9 3/4–20 ft.) below the surface, lie a short distance from the beach.

Many P ADI instr uctors offer fiv e dive pr ograms a day . P hotographic equipment is available for r ent (film can be pr ocessed on the pr emises), and instr uction is offer ed in picture taking. Experienced divers can rent any equipment they need. PADI certification courses are available for $495. A 2- to 3-hour introductory lesson costs $95 and includes a short theory session, equipment familiarization, development of skills in shallow water, a tour of the reef, and all equipment. Single dives cost $40. Hours are from 8am to 6pm daily.

Another full-service scuba center is available on St. Lucia's southwest coast at the **Jalousie Plantation,** at Soufrière (**758/456-8000**). The PADI center offers dives in St. Lucia's National Marine Park; there are numerous shallow reefs near the shore. The diver certification program is available to hotel guests and other visitors ages 12 and up. Prices range fr om a single div e for $40 to $85, to a cer tification course for $400 to $800. There's a daily r esort course for noncer tified divers that includes a super vised dive from the beach; it costs $75. A 10-dive package is $400; a six-dive package is $300. All prices include equipment, tax, and ser vice charges.

TENNIS The best place for tennis on the island is the **St. Lucia Racquet Club,** adjacent to Club S t. Lucia (**758/450-0551**). It's one of the finest tennis facilities in the Lesser Antilles. Its seven illuminated courts are maintained in state-of-the-art condition, and there's also a good pr o shop on-site. You must r eserve 24 hours in adv ance. Guests of the hotel play for fr ee; nonguests are charged $28 for a full-day pass. Tennis racquets rent for $7.40 per hour.

Moments **Rainforest Sky Rides**

A **Rainforest Aerial Tram Adventure** ★★ is the greatest scenic adventure on the island. Gondolas safely glide you through and over the treetops of this oceanic rainforest. Dense thickets of vegetation merge with cascades of flowers such as lavender stars, orange bursts, and white magnolias. Sixteen open-air gondolas seat up to eight passengers, with one guide each. The cost is $72 for adults or $62 for children 2 to 12. The ride is just one of several rainforest excursions offered by **Rainforest Sky Rides,** Rodney Heights, Gros Islet (✆ **758/458-5151**).

The **Jalousie Plantation,** at Soufrière (✆ **758/456-8000**), has a good program. Vernon Lewis, the top-ranked player in St. Lucia, is the pro. You'll find four brand-new Laykold tennis courts (three lit for night play). Hotel guests play for free (though they pay for lessons). Nonguests can play for $20 per hour.

OTHER WATERSPORTS The best all-around watersports center is **St. Lucian Watersports,** at the Rex St. Lucian Hotel (✆ **758/452-8351**). Water-skiing costs $17 for a 10- to 15-minute ride (three rounds). Windsurfers can be rented for $30 per half-hour. Snorkeling is free for guests of the hotel; nonguests pay $10 per hour for equipment.

6 EXPLORING THE ISLAND

With lovely little towns, beautiful beaches and bays, mineral baths, and banana plantations, you won't tire of exploring St. Lucia. You can even visit a volcano.

Most hotel front desks will make arrangements for tours that take in all the major sights of St. Lucia. For example, **Sunlink Tours,** Reduit Beach Avenue (✆ **758/456-9100** or 758/452-8232; www.sunlinktours.com), offers many island tours, including full-day boat trips along the west coast of Soufrière, the Pitons, and the volcano; the cost is $100 per person. Jeep safaris can be arranged for $80 to $130 apiece, depending on the tour. One of the most popular jaunts is a rainforest ramble for $90 by jeep. There's also a daily shopping tour for $30. The company has tour desks and/or representatives at most of the major hotels.

CASTRIES

The capital city has grown up around its **harbor,** which occupies the crater of an extinct volcano. Charter captains and the yachting set drift in here, and large cruise ship wharves welcome vessels from around the world. Because several devastating fires (most recently in 1948) destroyed almost all the old buildings, the town today looks new, with glass-and-concrete (or steel) buildings rather than the French colonial or Victorian look typical of many West Indian capitals.

Castries may be architecturally dull, but its **public market** is one of the most fascinating in the West Indies, and our favorite people-watching site on the island. It goes full blast every day of the week except Sunday and is most active on Friday and Saturday mornings. The market stalls are a block from Columbus Square along Peynier Street, running down toward the water. The local women dress traditionally, with cotton headdresses; the number of knotted points on top reveals their marital status. (Ask one of the

locals to explain it to you.) The luscious fruits and vegetables of St. Lucia may be new to you; the array of colors alone is astonishing. Sample one of the numerous varieties of bananas: On St. Lucia, they're allowed to ripen on the tree, and taste completely different from those picked green and sold at supermarkets in the United States. You can also pick up St. Lucian handicrafts such as baskets and unglazed pottery here.

One of the highlights of Castries is **Derek Walcott Square,** a dignified and verdant rectangle that's bordered with, among others, the public library and the island's most visible Catholic church, the Cathedral. Derek Walcott, born in St. Lucia in 1930, won a Nobel Prize for literature. Plaques within the park honor Walcott with a verse from his epic poem, *Ste. Lucie*: "*Moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie: C'est la moi sortie,* is there that I born." A few steps away is a plaque commemorating another island-born luminary, Sir William Arthur Lewis (1915–79), winner of a Nobel Prize for economics, whose face appears on some of the nation's EC$100 bills. Both of the commemorative plaques are virtually within the shadow of a 500-year-old "Simontree," (a local name for a local species), which anyone in the park will happily point out as proof of the fertility of the island's soil and climate.

One of the most important French-built religious buildings in the West Indies is the **Cathedral,** immediately to the edge of the park. Built during the 19th century of wrought iron, cast iron, and stone under the supervision of several generations of hard-working, long-suffering priests, it's covered with an almost surreal mélange of French Catholic and West Indian iconography. Notice on one wall the frescoes commemorating the "Martyrs of Uganda" who were slaughtered by the forces of dictator Idi Amin.

To the south of Castries looms **Morne Fortune,** the inappropriately named "Hill of Good Luck." In the 18th century, some of the most savage Caribbean battles between the French and the British took place here. You can visit the military cemetery, a small museum, the old powder magazine, and the Four Apostles Battery (a quartet of grim muzzle-loading cannons). Government House, now the official residence of the governor-general of St. Lucia, is one of the few examples of Victorian architecture that escaped destruction by fire. The private gardens are beautifully planted, aflame with scarlet and purple bougainvillea. Morne Fortune also offers what many consider the most **scenic lookout** perch in the Caribbean. The view of the harbor of Castries is panoramic: You can see north to Pigeon Island or south to the Pitons; on a clear day, you may even spot Martinique. To reach Morne Fortune, head east on Bridge Street.

PIGEON ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK ★

St. Lucia's first **national park** is joined to the mainland by a causeway. On its west coast are two white-sand beaches (see "Beaches," above). There's also a restaurant, Jambe de Bois, named after a wooden-legged pirate who once used the island as a hideout.

Pigeon Island offers an **Interpretation Centre,** equipped with artifacts and a multimedia display on local history, ranging from the Amerindian occupation of a.d. 1000 to the Battle of the Saints, when Admiral Rodney's fleet set out from Pigeon Island and defeated Admiral De Grasse in 1782. The Captain's Cellar Olde English Pub lies under the center and is evocative of an 18th-century English bar.

Pigeon Island, only 18 hectares (44 acres), got its name from the red-neck pigeon, or ramier, that once colonized this island in huge numbers. Now the site of a Sandals Hotel and interconnected to the St. Lucian "mainland" with a causeway, the island offers pleasant panoramas but no longer the sense of isolated privacy that reigned here prior to its

 development. Parts of it, those far from the hotel on the premises, seem appropriate for nature walks. For more information, call ✆ **758/452-2231.**

RODNEY BAY ★

This scenic bay is a 15-minute drive north of Castries. Set on a man-made lagoon, it has become a chic center for nightlife, hotels, and restaurants—in fact, it's the most active place on the island at night. Its marina is one of the top watersports centers in the Caribbean, and a destination every December for the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, when yachties cross the Atlantic to meet and compare stories.

MARIGOT BAY ★

Movie crews, including those for Sophia Loren's *Fire Power,* have used this bay, one of the most beautiful in the Caribbean, for background shots. Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) south of Castries, it's narrow yet navigable by yachts of any size. Here Admiral Rodney camouflaged his ships with palm leaves while lying in wait for French frigates. The shore, lined with palm trees, remains relatively unspoiled, although some building sites have been sold. It's a delightful spot for a picnic. A 24-hour ferry connects the bay's two sides.

SOUFRIÈRE

This little fishing port, St. Lucia's second-largest settlement, is dominated by two pointed hills called **Petit Piton** and **Gros Piton** ★★★. The Pitons, two volcanic cones rising to 738m and 696m (2,421 ft. and 2,283 ft.), have become the very symbol of St. Lucia. Formed of lava and rock, and once actively volcanic, they are now covered in green vegetation. Their sheer rise from the sea makes them a landmark visible for miles around, and waves crash at their bases. It's recommended that you attempt to climb only Gros Piton, but doing so requires the permission of the **Forest and Lands Department** (✆ **758/450-2078**) and the company of a knowledgeable guide.

Near Soufrière lies the famous "drive-in" volcano, **Mount Soufrière** ★★, a rocky lunar landscape of bubbling mud and craters seething with sulfur You literally drive your car along a winding, forested road into a millions-of-years-old crater. From the parking lot, you'll walk uphill, along a closely monitored trail peppered with park rangers and, from observation platforms, get a view in the near distance of bubbling sulfur springs and pools of hissing steam. The most visible of these is **Gabriel's Pool,** which was named in honor of a 1960s-era St. Lucian tour guide, Gabriel, whose weight collapsed the chalky surface of the congealed mud close to the hot springs. Ever since then, one of the pools has borne his name, and ever since, visitors are strictly prohibited from getting too close to the steamy depths. Entrance to the crater and the vicinity of the pools costs $2.60 per person and includes the services of your guide, who will point out the blackened waters, among the few of their kind in the Caribbean. Hours are daily from 9am to 5pm; for more information, call ✆ **758/459-7200.**

Nearby are the **Diamond Mineral Baths** (✆ **758/452-4759;** www.diamondstlucia.com) in the **Diamond Botanical Gardens** ★. Deep in the lush tropical gardens is the Diamond Waterfall, one of the geological attractions of the island. Created from water bubbling up from sulfur springs, the waterfall changes colors (from yellow to black to green to gray) several times a day. The baths were constructed in 1784 on the orders of Louis XVI, whose doctors told him these waters were similar in mineral content to the waters at Aix-les-Bains; they were intended to provide recuperative effects for French

Finds Discovering "Forgotten" Grande Anse

The northeast coast is the least visited and least accessible part of St. Lucia, but it contains dramatic rockbound shores interspersed with secret sandy coves. The government has set Grand Anse aside as a **nature reserve** so that it will never be developed. The terrain is arid and can be unwelcoming, but it is fascinating nonetheless. Grande Anse is home to some **rare bird** species, notably the white-breasted thrasher, as well as the fer-de-lance, the only poisonous snake on the island (but visitors report rarely seeing them). Its beaches—Grande Anse, Petite Anse, and Anse Louvet—are nesting grounds for **endangered sea turtles,** including the hawksbill, the green turtle, the leatherback, and the loggerhead. Nesting season lasts from February to October. Many locals tackle the poor road in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, especially the bumpiest part from Desbarra to Grande Anse.

soldiers fighting in the West Indies. The baths have an average temperature of 106°F (41°C). For $5.60, you can bathe and try out the recuperative effects for yourself. There is a $4.10 entrance fee, and hours are daily 10am to 5pm.

From Soufrière in the southwest, the road winds toward Fond St-Jacques, where you'll have a good view of mountains and villages as you cut through St. Lucia's Cape Moule-Chique tropical rainforest. You'll also see the Barre de l'Isle divide.

NATURE RESERVES

The fertile volcanic soil of St. Lucia sustains a rich diversity of bird and animal life. Some of the richest troves for ornithologists are in protected precincts off the St. Lucian coast, in either of two national parks, Fregate Islands Nature Reserve and the Maria Islands Nature Reserve.

The **Fregate Islands** are a cluster of rocks a short distance offshore from Praslin Bay, midway up St. Lucia's eastern coastline. Barren except for tall grasses that seem to thrive in the salt spray, the islands were named after the scissor-tailed frigate birds *(Fregata magnificens)* that breed here. Between May and July, large colonies of the graceful birds fly in well-choreographed formations over islands that you can visit only under the closely supervised permission of government authorities. Many visitors believe that the best way to admire the Fregate Islands (and to respect their fragile ecosystems) is to walk along the nature trail that the St. Lucian government has hacked along the cliff-top of the St. Lucian mainland, about 45m (148 ft.) inland from the shoreline. Even without binoculars, you'll be able to see the frigates wheeling overhead. You'll also enjoy eagle's-eye views of the unusual geology of the St. Lucian coast, which includes sea caves, dry ravines, a waterfall (during the rainy season), and a strip of mangrove swamp.

Maria Islands are larger and more arid, and are almost constantly exposed to salt-laden winds blowing up from the equator. Set to the east of St. Lucia's southernmost tip, off the town of Vieux Fort, their biodiversity is strictly protected. The approximately 12 hectares (30 acres) of cactus-dotted land that make up the two largest islands (Maria Major and Maria Minor) are home to more than 120 species of plants, lizards, butterflies, and snakes that are believed to be extinct in other parts of the world. These include the

 large ground lizard *(Zandolite)* and the nocturnal, nonvenomous kouwes snake *(Dromicus ornatus).*

The Marias are also a bird refuge, populated by such species as the sooty tern, the bridled tern, the Caribbean martin, the red-billed tropicbird, and the brown noddy, which usually nests under the protective thorns of prickly pear cactus.

Tours to either island must be arranged through the staff of the **St. Lucia National Trust** (✆ **758/452-5005;** www.slunatrust.org). Full-day excursions, including the boat ride to the refuge and the guided tour, cost $80.

7 SHOPPING

Most of the shopping is in **Castries,** where the principal streets are William Peter Boulevard and Bridge Street. Many stores will sell you goods at duty-free prices (providing you don't take the merchandise with you, but have it delivered to the airport or cruise dock). There are some good (but not remarkable) buys in bone china, jewelry, perfume, watches, liquor, and crystal.

Built for the cruise ship passenger, **Pointe Seraphine,** in Castries, has the most comprehensive collection of shops on the island, along with offices for car rentals, organized taxi service (for sightseeing), a *bureau de change,* a philatelic bureau, an information center, and international phones. Cruise ships berth beside cement piers immediately adjacent to the shopping center. The complex was designed as a labyrinth of arcades and cottages (each capped with terra-cotta roof tiles) that meander amid landscaping in a kind of extended garden. Access to the compound requires that you present a cruise pass or an airline ticket to the shopkeeper when purchasing duty-free goods. Visitors can take away their purchases, except liquor and tobacco, which will be delivered either to the airport or to your cruise ship, depending on your means of transport. The compound is open in winter Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm and Saturday 8am to 2pm; off season, Monday to Saturday 9am to 4pm. It has extended hours when cruise ships are in port.

On Gros Islet Highway, 3km (1 ½ miles) north of Castries, **Gablewoods Mall** contains three restaurants and one of the island's densest concentrations of shops.

Local products of note include an inventory of at least seven kinds of locally distilled rums from **La Belle Creole** (also known as Wilco, Ltd.) Most visible is a delicious version flavored with coconut, and **Seventh Heaven,** a variety that's (informally and unofficially) advertised for its powers as an aphrodisiac, thanks to the combination of ginger, local herbs, and aromatic bark (suggestively known as *bois bandé*) that go into it.

8 ST. LUCIA AFTER DARK

Friday-night "jump-ups" are weekly street parties where islanders let it rip. These jump-ups, especially for guests of all-inclusives, offer a real opportunity to get out and mix with the locals. For reggae and hot times, head for the gatherings at **Gros Islet,** attracting both St. Lucians and the visiting yachties from Rodney Bay. You won't go hungry: Stall after stall hawks barbecued meats along with such sides as rice 'n' beans and a tuber called dasheen, as seafood sizzles over hot coals and the smell of barbecued chicken whets appetites. More jump-ups take place at **Anse la Raye** on St. Lucia's western shore. Rum and

St. Lucia Jazz

Amazingly, the **St. Lucia Jazz Festival** ★★★ is now ranked number two in the Caribbean, eclipsed only by Trinidad's Carnival. It takes place every May. Leading jazz artists from all over the world descend on St. Lucia at this time, offering varied shows that range from New Age jazz to rhythm and blues. Shows range from formal performances to late-night open-air venues. The tourist office has complete details of the festival, and information is also available online at **http://stluciajazz.org**. There's a downside to all this: Many hotels take advantage of all these arrivals to jack up room prices.

reggae flow from about 6pm to midnight or beyond. Stalls along the Anse la Raye waterfront often sell fresher and better seafood than you get in the upmarket dining rooms of the all-inclusives—conch, lobster, mahimahi, and even "potfish." Islanders claim that if you drink a "sea-moss shake" (seaweed, milk, sugar, and fruit), you'll keep jumping up throughout the night. In the winter, at least one hotel has a steel band or calypso music every night of the week. Otherwise, check to see what's happening at the **Green Parrot** (✆ **758/452-3399**), in Castries.

If you'd like to go barhopping, begin at **Shamrocks Pub,** Rodney Bay (✆ **758/452-8725**). This Irish-style pub is especially popular among boaters and gets really lively on weekends.

At Marigot Bay, where the 1967 version of *Doctor Doolittle* starring Rex Harrison was filmed, the memory is perpetuated at **Doolittle's,** part of the Marigot Beach Club Hotel (✆ **758/451-4974**), lying 14km (8 ¾ miles) south of Castries. The Marigot Bay ferry takes you to the palm-studded peninsula of the resort; tickets cost $1.90. On Saturday nights—when Doolittle's offers a lavish seafood and barbeque buffet along with a steel band—this is the best place to be on the island. You can come here for drinks (try the Singapore Slings) or dishes like chunky pumpkin soup, jerk chicken, or lobster and coconut shrimp Creole.

23 St. Maarten/St. Martin

For an island with a big reputation for restaurants, hotels, and energetic nightlife, St. Maarten is small—only 96 sq. km (37 sq. miles), about half the area of Washington, D.C. An island divided between the Netherlands and France, St. Maarten (Sint Maarten) is the Dutch half, and St. Martin is French. Legend has it that a gin-drinking Dutchman and a wine-guzzling Frenchman walked around the island to see how much territory each could earmark for his country in a day; the Frenchman walked farther, but the canny Dutchman got the more valuable piece of property.

The divided island is the smallest territory in the world shared by two sovereign states. The only way you'll know you're crossing an international border is when you see the sign bienvenue partie francaise, attesting to the peaceful coexistence between the two nations. The island was officially split in 1648, and many visitors still ascend Mount Concordia, near the border, where the agreement was reached. Even so, St. Maarten changed hands 16 times before it became permanently Dutch.

Returning visitors who haven't been to the island for a while are often shocked when they see today's St. Maarten. No longer a sleepy Caribbean backwater, it's now a boomtown. Duty-free shopping has turned the island into a virtual mall, and the Dutch capital, Philipsburg, is often bustling with cruise ship hordes.

Although the island's 39 white-sand beaches remain unspoiled, much has been lost to the bulldozer on St. Maarten. If you want to get away from it all, head to the nearby Dutch islands of St. Eustatius (Statia) and Saba, or choose another getaway, such as Anguilla, a boat ride away—even the French side of the island has a quieter, less frenetic pace. Nevertheless, despite problems like crime, occasional storms, traffic congestion, and corruption, St. Maarten continues to attract massive numbers of visitors who want a sunny Caribbean island vacation with a splash of Vegas.

The Dutch capital, **Philipsburg,** curves like a toy village along Great Bay. The town lies on a narrow sand isthmus separating Great Bay and the Great Salt Pond. Commander John Philips, a Scot in Dutch employ, founded the capital in 1763. To protect Great Bay, Fort Amsterdam was built in 1737. Philipsburg is one of the Caribbean's busiest duty-free stopping shops (especially when the cruise ships are in port), although a nice new oceanside boardwalk has made strolling the shops much more pleasant.

The French side of the island has a slightly different character. It's sleepier than the Dutch side, and it's much less Americanized. Most hotels tend to be quieter and more secluded than their Dutch counterparts, and you won't be overwhelmed with cruise ship crowds. There are no dazzling sights, and there's no spectacular nightlife. Even the sports scene on St. Martin isn't as well organized as on many Caribbean islands. (The Dutch side has golf and other diversions.) Most people come to St. Martin to relax on its many white-sand beaches and to experience "France in the Tropics."

French St. Martin has a distinctly French air. Police officers, for example, wear *képis.* The towns have names like Colombier and Orléans, the streets are *rues,* and the French flag flies over the *gendarmerie* in **Marigot,**

the capital. It also has some of the best cuisine in the Caribbean, with an extraordinary number of good bistros and restaurants. Advocates cite French St. Martin as distinctly more sophisticated, prosperous, stylish, and cosmopolitan than its neighboring *départements d'outre-mer,* Guadeloupe and Martinique.

French St. Martin is governed from Guadeloupe and has direct representation in the government in Paris. The principal town on the French side is Marigot, the seat of the subprefect and municipal council.

Marigot is not quite the same size as its counterpart, Philipsburg, in the Dutch sector. It has none of the frenzied pace of Philipsburg, which is often overrun with cruise ship passengers. In fact, Marigot looks like a French village transplanted to the Caribbean. If you climb the hill over this tiny port, you'll be rewarded with a view from the old fort.

About 20 minutes by car beyond Marigot is **Grand-Case,** a small fishing village that's an outpost of French civilization, with many good restaurants and a few places to stay.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **The beaches:** Take your pick. This island has 39 white sandy beaches. Our favorites include Baie Longue (Long Bay) on the west coast of St. Martin, and Dawn Beach, Mullet Bay Beach, Maho Bay Beach, and Great Bay Beach on St. Maarten.
- **Snorkeling:** The best snorkeling on the island lies on the French side, populated with schools of brilliantly colored fish. Find a tiny cove and explore the shallow reefs along its shores, especially in the northeastern underwater nature reserve, **Réserve Sous-Marine Régionale.**
- **Shopping in St. Maarten:** Because of the massive influx of cruise ships, shopping in St. Maarten is now about the finest in the Caribbean, though you may have to fight the crowds. Because there's no duty, prices can be 30% to 50% lower than in the U.S. Forget about local crafts and concentrate on leather goods, electronics, cameras, designer fashions, watches, and crystal, along with linens and jewelry.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

For the latest information on **Dutch St. Maarten** and **French St Martin,** go to **www.st-maarten.com** or **www.st-martin.org**, respectively. You can also contact the **St. Maarten/St Martin Tourist Office,** 675 Third Ave., Ste. 1807, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/786-2278** or 212/953-2084 for the department servicing the Dutch side, and ✆ **877/956-1234** or 212/475-8970 for the department servicing the French side). In Canada, the office for information about the Dutch side of the island is located at 703 Evans Ave., Ste. 106, Toronto, ON M9C 5E9 (✆ **416/622-4300**). For information about the French side of the island, contact 1981 Ave. McGill College, Ste. 490, in Montréal (✆ **514/288-4264**).

Once on St. Maarten, go to the **Tourist Information Bureau,** Vineyard Office Park, 33 W. G. Buncamper Rd., Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A. (✆ **599/54-22337**), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

The tourist board on French St. Martin, called the **Office du Tourisme,** is at Route de Sandy Ground, Marigot, 97150 St. Martin (✆ **590/87-57-21**), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 1pm and 2:30 to 5:30pm.

ST. MAARTEN

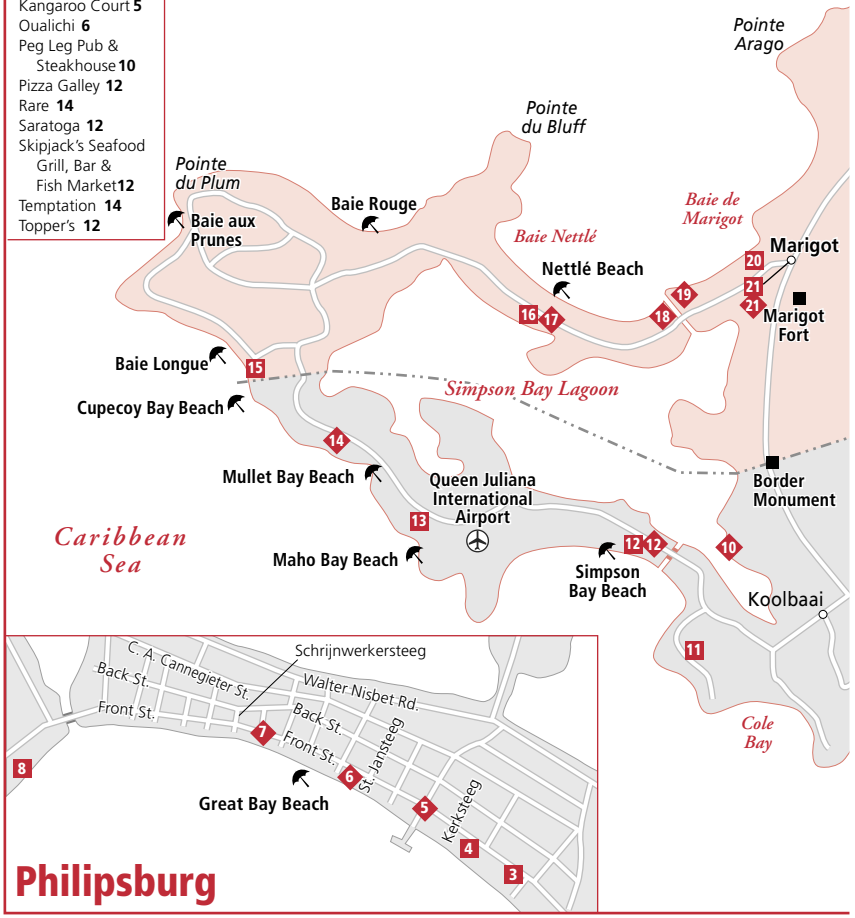
ACCOMMODATIONS
Divi Little Bay Beach Resort **9**
Holland House Beach Hotel **4**
The Horny Toad Guesthouse **12**
La Vista **11**
Mary's Boon Beach Plantation **12**
Pasanggrahan Royal Guest House **3**
Princess Heights **1**
Sonesta Great Bay Beach Resort & Casino **8**
Sonesta Maho Beach Hotel & Casino **13**
Westin St. Maarten, Dawn Beach Resort & Spa **2**

DINING
Antoine **7**
Halsey's **12**
Kangaroo Court **5**
Oualichi **6**
Peg Leg Pub & Steakhouse **10**
Pizza Galley **12**
Rare **14**
Saratoga **12**
Skipjack's Seafood Grill, Bar & Fish Market **12**
Temptation **14**
Topper's **12**

ST. MARTIN

ACCOMMODATIONS
Alamanda Resort **32**
Club Orient Naturist Resort **30**
Esmeralda Resort **29**
Grand-Case Beach Club **23**
Green Cay Villas **32**
Hotel Beach Plaza **20**
Hotel La Plantation **31**
Hotel L'Esplanade **22**
La Samanna **15**
Le Cosy **21**
Le Petit Hotel **24**
Mercure Simpson Beach Hotel **16**
Radisson St. Martin Resort, Marina & Spa **27**

DINING
La Belle Epoque **21**
La Cigale **17**
La Vie en Rose **21**
Le Cottage **26**
Le Pressoir **26**
Le Santal **18**
L'Oizeau Rare **21**
Mario's Bistro **19**
Sol é Luna **28**
Spiga **25**
Sunset Café **23**



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Beach
Mountain
To La Tintamarre
Bell Point
Anse Marcel
Red Rock
Grandes Cayes
Friar's Bay Beach
Grand-Case Beach
Grand-Case
L'Espérance Airport
French Cul-de-Sac
Ilet Pinel
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Orient Beach
Baie Orientale
ST. MARTIN
Green Cay
Colombier
Paradise Peak
Orléans
Baie de l'Embouchure
Mt. Flagstaff
Oyster Pond Beach
Oyster Pond
Beneden Prinsen
Boven Prinsen
Dutch Cul-de-Sac
ST. MAARTEN
Dawn Beach
Geneve Bay
Great Salt Pond
area of inset
Philipsburg
Little Bay
Great Bay
Point Blanche
PUERTO RICO
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
ANGUILLA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
St. Maarten
St. Martin
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
MONTSERRAT
Caribbean Sea
GUADELOUPE
DOMINICA
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GETTING THERE

The island has two airports. St. Maarten's **Princess Juliana International Airport** (**PJIA; ✆ 599/54-67542;** www.pjiae.com) is the second-busiest airport in the eastern Caribbean, topped only by San Juan, Puerto Rico. You can also fly to the smaller **L'Espérance Airport,** in Grand-Case on St. Martin (**✆ 590/87-10-36**).

American Airlines (**✆ 800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) offers more options and more frequent service into St. Maarten than any other airline—two daily nonstop flights from New York's JFK and one from Miami. Additional nonstop daily flights into St. Maarten are offered by American and its local affiliate, **American Eagle** (same number), from San Juan. Ask about American's package tours, which can save you a bundle.

Continental Airlines (**✆ 800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) has daily nonstop flights out of its hub in Newark, New Jersey, during the winter months. (Flight times vary in low season.)

Delta Airlines (**✆ 800/241-4141** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) flies in from New York City, and **United** (**✆ 800/538-2929** in the U.S. and Canada; www.united.com) also offers flights from New York. Both leave from JFK airport.

US Airways (**✆ 800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) offers nonstop daily service from Philadelphia and Charlotte to St. Maarten.

JetBlue Airways (**✆ 800-JETBLUE** [538-2583] in the U.S.; www.jetblue.com) has one daily nonstop flight from New York's JFK into St. Maarten and a new Saturday nonstop flight from Boston to St. Maarten.

Spirit Airlines (**✆ 800/772-7117** in the U.S. and Canada; www.spiritair.com) has begun nonstop service from Fort Lauderdale to St. Maarten.

Caribbean Airlines (**✆ 800/920-4225** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/54-67660 on St. Maarten; www.caribbean-airlines.com), the new national airline of Trinidad and Tobago (replacing the now-defunct BWIA), has flights from New York, Miami, Toronto, and London with connections to St. Maarten.

The regional airline **LIAT** (**✆ 888/844-LIAT** [5428] in most of the Caribbean, or 268/480-5601 in the U.S. and Canada; wwwliatairline.com), now partnered with Caribbean Star, has direct daily 40-minute flights and connecting flights into St. Maarten from its hub in Antigua. From St. Martin, LIAT offers ongoing service to a number of other islands, including Antigua, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts, and Dominica.

One airline specializes in flying the short routes of the northeastern Caribbean islands, from Tortola to Montserrat. **Winair** (**✆ 866/466-0410** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/54-54237; www.fly-winair.com) offers 10 to 20 flights daily (depending on the season) on the short 10-minute hop between St. Maarten and St. Barts, as well as other island trips from its main gateway at the Princess Juliana International Airport.

GETTING AROUND

BY TAXI Most visitors use taxis to get around. Since they are unmetered on both sides of the island, always agree on the rate before getting into a cab.

Rates are slightly different depending on which side of the island the taxi is based, though both Dutch and French cabs service the entire island. **St. Maarten taxis** have minimum fares for two passengers, and each additional passenger pays $4 extra. One piece of luggage per person is allowed free; each additional piece is $1 extra. ***Note:*** Fares are 25% higher between 10pm and midnight, and 50% higher between midnight and 6am.

St. Martin taxi fares are also for two passengers, but you should plan to add about .70€ for each suitcase or valise and 1.40€ for each additional person. These fares are in effect from 6am to 10pm; after that, they go up by 25% until midnight, rising by 50% after midnight. For late-night cab service on St. Maarten, call ✆ **147. Taxi Service & Information Center** operates at the port of Marigot (✆ **590/87-56-54**) on the French side of the island.

BY RENTAL CAR A car is the best way to experience and explore St. Maarten/St. Martin. And renting a car here couldn't be easier; car-rental agencies are a dime a dozen, with locations at the airports and throughout the island. It's also a cost-efficient way to see the island, with rates starting around $30 or 21€ a day, with unlimited mileage, and short distances between towns.

Many visitors rent cars when they arrive at Princess Juliana International Airport. A good number of car-rental agency kiosks are located on the Arrivals floor of the airport and along Airport Road. To get around the law (strictly enforced by St. Maarten taxi drivers' union) that forbids anyone from picking up a car at the airport, every rental agency parks its cars at a location nearby. When you rent a car at one of the agency kiosks on the Arrivals floor of the Princess Juliana airport, you will be taken by company shuttle 5 to 10 minutes away to pick up your car. ***Note:*** Always ask how far away from the airport rental cars are located; some of the smaller agencies are a couple of miles away—which can turn into a long trip when traffic is heavy around the airport.

Car-rental agencies at the airport include **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/54-54030 on the Dutch side; www.budget.com), **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1212** in the U.S. and Canada, 599/54-52847 on the Dutch side, or 590/87-50-60 on the French side; www.avis.com), **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada; www.hertz.com), **Thrifty** (✆ **800/367-2277** in the U.S. and Canada; wwwthrifty.com), **Alamo/National** (✆ **800/328-4567** in the U.S. and Canada, or 599/545-5552 on the Dutch side; www.nationalcar.com), **Best Deal Car Rental** (✆ **599/54-53061**), **Safari Car Rental** (✆ **599/55-42102** mobile), and **Empress Rent-a-Car** (✆ **599/55-11708**).

All these companies charge roughly equivalent rates. The major car-rental agencies require that renters be at least 25 years old.

Many rental agencies will also deliver cars directly to your hotel, where an employee will complete the paperwork. Some hotels, like La Samanna, actually have a fleet of cars to rent on the premises—but try to reserve well in advance because supply is limited.

Budget (✆ **599/54-30431**) also has an office at the cruise-ship terminal.

Driving is on the right side of the road. Seat belts and child car seats are mandatory. International road signs are observed, and there are no Customs formalities at the border between the French and Dutch sides—in fact, you might not even realize you crossed the border.

Expect traffic jams near the major towns and tourist areas on St. Maarten/St. Martin—particularly in the Simpson Bay area when the Simpson Bay bridge is raised to let bridge traffic through (six times daily in high season, three times daily in low season). Tune your car radio to **Island 92** (91.9 FM) for traffic updates.

BY MINIBUS Traveling by minibus or minivan is a reasonable means of transport on St. Maarten/St. Martin if you don't mind some inconvenience and overcrowding. Buses run daily from 6am to midnight and serve most major locations on both sides of the island. The most popular run is from Philipsburg on the Dutch side to Marigot on the French side. Privately owned and operated, minibuses tend to follow specific routes; the fare is $1.50 or 1.10€ (buses accept both dollars and euros).

Fast Facts St. Maarten/St. Martin

Banks Banks affiliated with the **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) ATM networks are located on St. Maarten/St. Martin. Check the following banks' websites for locations of ATMs (also called ABMs for "automated banking machines"): **Windward Island Bank** (http://wib-bank.net), **Scotiabank** (www.scotiabank.com), **FirstCaribbean Bank** (www.firstcaribbeanbank.com), and **RBTT N.V.** (www.rbtt.com). The international airport in St. Maarten has two ATMs (WIB and RBTT) on the Arrivals floor. A Scotiabank branch is located at the cruise terminal building at Pointe Blanche, St. Maarten. ***Note:*** Keep in mind that ATMs in St. Maarten give you a choice of dollars or euros, while ATMs on St. Martin dispense only euros.

Business Hours On the Dutch side, most banks are open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 3:30pm, Saturday from 9am to noon. On the French side, they are usually open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 1:30pm. It's easy to find ATMs. On the Dutch side, several banks are clustered along Front Street in Philipsburg. On the French side, most banks are along rue de la République in Marigot. Store hours vary, but the French-side shops generally open 10am to 5pm (closing for lunch), while Dutch-side shops often stay open continuously and as late as 11pm.

Currency Despite the dominance of the euro since January 2002 in Holland, the legal tender on the Dutch side is still the **Netherlands Antilles florin (NAf);** the official exchange rate is NAf 1.79 for each $1. U.S. dollars are widely accepted, and prices in hotels and most restaurants and shops are most often designated in dollars as well. On the French side, the official monetary unit is the **euro** (€), with most establishments widely quoting and accepting either dollars or NAf guilders as well. At press time, the U.S. dollar was trading at $1.30 to 1€. *Prices throughout this chapter are given in U.S. dollars for establishments on the Dutch side, and in euros or dollars for establishments on the French side.*

Documents U.S., British, and Canadian citizens should have a passport, plus an ongoing or return ticket and a confirmed hotel reservation.

Electricity Dutch St. Maarten uses the same voltage (110-volt AC, 60 cycles) with the same electrical configurations as the United States, so adapters and transformers are not necessary. However, on French St. Martin, 220-volt AC prevails, so you'll usually need transformers and adapters. To simplify things, many hotels on both sides of the island have installed sockets suitable for both European and North American appliances.

Emergencies On the **Dutch** side, call the **police** at ✆ **599/54-22222** or an **ambulance** at ✆ **599/54-22111;** to report a **fire,** call ✆ **911** or ✆ **120.** On the **French** side, you can reach the **police** by dialing ✆ **17** or 590/87-50-10. In case of **fire,** dial ✆ **18.** For an **ambulance,** dial ✆ **15.**

Hospitals On the Dutch side, go to the **St. Maarten Medical Center,** Welegen Rd., Cay Hill (✆ **599/54-31111;** www.sintmaartenmedicalcenter.com). On the French side, the local hospital is **Hospital Louis-Constant Fleming,** near Marigot in Concordia (✆ **590/52-25-25**).

Language The language on the St. Maarten side is officially Dutch, and it's officially French on St. Martin. But most people speak English, especially on the Dutch side. A French-based patois is spoken by a small segment of the local populace, as are French Creole, Spanish, and Papiamento.

Liquor Laws On both sides of the island, liquor is sold in grocery and liquor stores on any day of the week. It's legal to have an open container in public, though the authorities are very strict about littering, disorderly behavior, and drunk driving.

Safety Petty crime has become an issue of concern on St. Maarten, with thefts and break-ins an increasing problem. Travelers are urged to lock their cars and lodging doors and windows at all times. Visitors should exercise common sense and take basic precautions, including being aware of one's surroundings, avoiding walking alone after dark or in remote areas, and locking all valuables in a rental or hotel safe. Also, let that deserted, isolated beach or road remain so.

Taxes & Service Charges There is a 3€ departure tax for departures from L'Espérance Airport on the French side. However, for departures from Princess Juliana Airport on the Dutch side, there's a tax of $30 ($10 if you're leaving the island for St. Eustatius or Saba; if you're leaving by ferry from Marigot Pier to Anguilla, the departure tax is $4); the tax is sometimes included in the airfare. On the Dutch side, a government tax of between 5% and 8%, depending on the category of hotel you stay in, is added to hotel bills. On the French side, hotels must levy a *taxe de séjour* (hotel tax); this differs from hotel to hotel, depending on its classification, but is often 5% a day. In addition to these taxes, most hotels add a (mandatory) service charge of around 10% to 15% to your hotel bill.

Telephone **To call Dutch St. Maarten:** Dial the international access code (011 from the U.S.; 00 from the U.K., Ireland, or New Zealand; or 0011 from Australia), then **599** (the country code for the Netherlands Antilles), followed by **54** and then the five-digit local number. To make a local call on Dutch St. Maarten, dial **54,** then the five-digit local number. But if you're calling "long distance" from the Dutch side of the island to the French side of the island, dial **00,** followed by **590590** (the most prevalent international access code for French St. Martin) or for cellular phones **590690,** followed by the six-digit local number.

Note: If you're on the French side of the island and want to call anyone on the Dutch side, dial **00,** followed by **599,** then **54,** and the five-digit local number. Know in advance that calls between the French and Dutch sides are considered long-distance calls and are much, much more expensive than you might have imagined, considering the relatively short distance.

To call French St. Martin (which is linked to the Guadeloupe telephone system): Dial the international access code (011 from the U.S.; 00 from the U.K., Ireland, or New Zealand; or 0011 from Australia), then **590** (the country code for Guadeloupe), then **590** again, and the six-digit local number. To make a call from French St. Martin to any point within French St. Martin, no codes are necessary; just dial the local six-digit French number.

To make international calls: From St. Maarten/St. Martin and St. Barts, first dial 00 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, Australia 61, New Zealand 64). Next dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted

to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 00-1-202-588-7800. From Anguilla to the U.S., dial 1, then the number.

On the Dutch side, there are facilities for overseas calls, but from the French side you cannot make collect calls to the States and there are no coin-operated phones. At the Marigot post office, you can purchase a *Telecarte,* giving you 40 units. A typical 5-minute call to the States takes up to 120 units. There are two public phones at the Marigot tourist office from which it's possible to make credit card calls. There are six public phones at the post office.

For directory assistance: Dial 150 if you're looking for a number inside St. Maarten/St. Martin, and dial 0 for numbers to all other countries.

For operator assistance: If you need operator assistance in making a call, dial 0 if you're trying to make an international call or call a number within St. Maarten/St. Martin.

Toll-free numbers: There are no toll-free numbers on St. Maarten/St. Martin, Anguilla, or St. Barts, and calling a 1-800 number in the States from them is not toll free. In fact, it costs the same as an overseas call.

Time Zone St. Maarten and St. Martin operate on Atlantic Standard Time year-round. In winter, if it's 6pm in Philipsburg, it's 5pm in New York. During daylight saving time in the United States, the island and the U.S. East Coast are on the same time.

Tipping Most hotels on both sides on the island add a 10% or 15% service charge to your bill; make sure you're clear on whether it's already included in the original price quoted to you. Most restaurants automatically add a service charge to your bill. If service has not been added (unlikely), it's customary to tip around 15% to 20%. Porters and bellmen expect $1 or 1€ per bag. Taxi drivers should receive 10% of the fare, more if they offer touring or other suggestions.

Water The water on the island is safe to drink. In fact, most hotels serve desalinated water.

Weather The island has a year-round temperature of about 80°F (27°C).

2 WHERE TO STAY

WHERE TO STAY IN DUTCH ST. MAARTEN

Remember, a government tax of between 5% and 8%, plus a service charge of 10% to 15% will be added to your hotel bill. Ask whether it's included in the original rates you're quoted, to save yourself a shock when you check out.

Very Expensive

Westin St. Maarten Dawn Beach Resort & Spa ★ When this sprawling resort opened in early 2007, one local said it looked like a prison had been plopped down on Dawn Beach. To be fair, the hotel's colonnaded beachfront facade is much more elegant than its character-free backside. And the freshwater infinity pool is lovely. The lobby has a spiffy Frank Lloyd Wright feel, although it's joined at the hip by a clanging casino. The

Hurricane Omar: An Update

Hurricane Omar brought Category 3 winds and rain to the St. Maarten side of the island in October 2008, eroding beaches and doing damage to a number of properties, and wiping out beach bars in the Simpson Bay/Maho area. Before booking accommodations, confirm with your hotel the status of the property's cleanup—some beachfronts are not back to pre-Omar quality.

310 mostly oceanview guest rooms (and 15 suites) have all the pampering, state-of-the-art trappings you'd expect from a Westin, including its trademark Heavenly Bed mattresses—and the rates cover a range of budgets. Facilities include a full-service, European-style spa, fitness center, retail shops with duty-free shopping, two oceanfront restaurants, watersports, and meeting facilities. Kids get the royal treatment at Westin Kid's Club, Camp Scallywag. All the rooms are nonsmoking.

144 Oyster Pond Rd., St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/WESTIN-1** (937-8461) or 599/54-36700. Fax 599/54-36004. www.starwoodhotels.com. 325 units. Winter $380–$749 double, $1,050–$3,150 suite; off season $149–$549 double, $735–$1,200 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants/lounges; pool snack bar; babysitting; concierge; fitness center; outdoor pool; casino; 24-hr. room service; spa; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, high-speed Internet access, minibar.

Expensive

Divi Little Bay Beach Resort ★ Kids Built on a peninsula about a 10-minute drive east of the airport, this hotel is consistently ranked as one of the best family-vacation resorts in the Caribbean. It originated as a simple guesthouse in 1955 and soon became famous as the vacation home of the Netherlands' Queen Juliana, Prince Bernhard, and Queen Beatrix. It's been beaten and battered by hurricanes over the years—its beach bar, Gizmo's, was wiped out in 2008 by Hurricane Omar—but it remains the stalwart flagship of the Divi chain. The rooms and public spaces have been nicely renovated and freshened up. The architecture evokes a European seaside village, with stucco walls and terra-cotta roofs, with some Dutch colonial touches. In the upper reaches of the property are the ruins of Fort Amsterdam, once Dutch St. Maarten's most prized military stronghold and today a decorative historical site. Gardens are carefully landscaped, and Divi improved the nearby beach after it suffered massive erosion.

Accommodations are airy, accented with ceramic tiles and pastel colors, and each has its own private balcony or patio; suites (and studios) have fully equipped kitchens—the only units that don't have kitchens are the beachfront doubles. The luxury Casita one-bedroom suites even have iPod docking stations. The resort offers a variety of meal plans, including an all-inclusive option.

Little Bay (P.O. Box 961), Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/367-3484** in the U.S., or 599/54-22333. Fax 599/54-24336. www.divilittlebay.com. 225 units. Winter $277–$288 double, $286–$328 1-bedroom suite, $475 2-bedroom suite; off season $206–$218 double, $178–$308 1-bedroom suite, $355 2-bedroom suite. Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; activities coordinator; gym; 3 outdoor pools; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 lit tennis courts; watersports center; dive shop; jet skis; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV (DVD in some), hair dryer, Jacuzzi (in suites), kitchen (in suites).

Holland House Beach Hotel ★ The lobby of this well-run "city" hotel runs uninterrupted from bustling Front Street to Great Bay Beach. The public areas are quite

stylish, with rotating local and Dutch artworks for sale on the walls. The lively global clientele enjoys the little touches (free international newspapers, beach chairs, and fresh-water beach shower). Most rooms have gorgeous polished hardwood floors and large, arched balconies. The muted color scheme favors cream and canary yellow. The one-bedroom penthouse includes kitchenette, large-screen TV, DVD, and fax machine. The $36 surcharge is well worth it for the popular oceanview rooms, but weekly stays in any unit lasso huge savings.

The beachfront restaurant and bar (crowned by a billowing tent) rock weekends with live music; the regular menu is surprisingly good, but opt for the chef's creative, affordable tapas (including Dutch finger food, Vietnamese spring rolls, and Spanish meatballs).

43 Front St. (P.O. Box 393), Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/223-9815** in the U.S., or 599/542-2572. Fax 599/542-4673. www.hhbh.com. 54 units. Winter $197–$295 double, $315–$350 1-bedroom suite, $365–$450 penthouse; off season $179–$235 double, $325 1-bedroom suite, $390 penthouse. Weekly rates available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; computer w/Internet access; Wi-Fi; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, Jacuzzi (in some), kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Princess Heights ★ In the hills above Dawn Beach, which is just across the road, is this boutique all-suites condo hotel with great panoramic views (although the vistas now also include the roof and backside of the Westin, just below). It's reached after a 10-minute drive from Philipsburg. Opening onto St. Barts in the distance, the large suites are tastefully furnished, each containing one or two bedrooms, with separate living rooms opening onto balconies. Granite-topped counters, clay-tiled terraces, lots of marble, and well-crafted, fully equipped kitchens make for a comfortable stay, and the hillside location spells privacy. In 2008 the hotel added 18 new ocean-view deluxe suites on the hillside slightly above the original building; ask for one—the rooms are the hotel's nicest.

156 Oyster Pond Rd., Oyster Pond, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **599/54-36906.** Fax 599/54-36007. www.princessheights.com. 33 units. Winter $285–$335 studio, $350–$500 suite; off season $160–$210 studio, $225–$375 suite. Children (2 maximum) under 12 stay free in parent's room. Extra person $35–$45. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; fitness center; high-speed Internet access; outdoor pool; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV, minibar, kitchen, washer/dryer (in some).

Sonesta Great Bay Beach Hotel & Casino ★ This property, ideally located a few minutes' walk from downtown Philipsburg, reopened in 2005 after a $10-million renovation. Virtually every area was completely refurbished; several facilities, including the fine **La Cucina Eatery** and a splendid infinity pool with swim-up bar, were added or expanded. Handsome Art Deco touches enliven the public spaces and halls, though the sizable rooms (more than half with an ocean view) feature standard decorative tropical trappings. Studios and one- and two-bedroom suites include kitchens and Murphy or sofa beds. Friendly management, extensive facilities (including a full-service spa), and an enviable location make this a fine bet for honeymooners and families alike.

19 Little Bay Rd. (P.O. Box 910), Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/223-0757** in the U.S. or 599/54-22446. Fax 599/54-43008. www.sonesta.com/greatbay. 257 units. $240–$350 double ($410–$550 all-inclusive), $490–$625 suite ($720–$880 all-inclusive); off season $180–$290 double ($350–$470 all-inclusive), $390–$550 suite ($600–$790 all-inclusive). AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; activity center; fitness center; Internet cafe; 3 outdoor pools; 2 outdoor whirlpool tubs; casino; spa; lit tennis court; boating; jet-skiing; scuba clinic; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, satellite TV, fridge (in some), hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), Wi-Fi.

Sonesta Maho Beach Hotel & Casino ★ Separated into three distinct sections, this megaresort, practically a self-contained village with its sprawling convention facilities, is the island's largest hotel. It's the closest thing on either the Dutch or French side

to a Las Vegas–style blockbuster resort. It has a rather anonymous feeling (it's always full of conventioneers and giant tour groups), but it's modern and up-to-date, thanks to continual upgrades and renovations. Set on a 4-hectare (10-acre) tract that straddles the busy, and often congested, coastal road adjacent to the crescent-shaped Maho Beach, the hotel's scattered structures are painted a trademark cream and white. The large rooms are conservatively but comfortably furnished. Each has wicker and rattan furniture, Italian tiles, plush upholstered pieces, a walk-in closet, pillow-top mattresses, and good soundproofing (important, since planes taking off at the nearby Princess Juliana airport thunder overhead several times a day).

The hotel contains three separate, directly managed restaurants (the **Point** is excellent, but avoid the open-air **Palms Grill,** where karaoke blasts louder than the jets), with another half-dozen on-site that are independently operated but accept all-inclusive guests. The glitzy Casino Royale, across the street from the accommodations, includes a cabaret theater for glitzy shows and **Q Club,** the island's splashiest late-night dance spot. On the resort's street front, the Maho Promenade is filled with several dozen shops open late, restaurants (including Cheri's Café), an Internet center, a scuba-diving center, dance club, a piano bar, even a classy gentleman's club. Ask about the all-inclusive option, which includes breakfast, lunch, and dinner; all drinks; and other amenities, with the room rates.

Maho Beach, 1 Rhine Rd., St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/223-0757** in the U.S., or 599/54-52115. Fax 599/54-53180. www.sonesta.com/MahoBeach. 527 units. Winter $290–$390 double, $425–$590 suite, from $780 2-bedroom unit; off season $225–$295 double, $330–$400 suite, from $660 2-bedroom unit. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; babysitting; golf (nearby); fitness center; 2 outdoor pools; casino; nightclub; spa; 4 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some), hair dryer, high-speed Internet access.

Moderate/Inexpensive

The Horny Toad Guesthouse ★ (Value) This homey, welcoming place is run by an expatriate from Maine, Betty Vaughan. Unfortunately, the hotel is near the airport, but the roar of jumbo jets is heard only a few times a day. Children 7 and under are not allowed, but families with older children often come here to avoid the megaresorts, and second-timers quickly become "part of the family." Seven well-maintained units are in an amply proportioned beachside house originally built in the 1950s as a private home by the island's former governor. The eighth room is in half of an octagonal "round house," with large windows and views of the sea. Guest rooms range from medium-size to spacious, and each has a fully equipped kitchen and a king-size bed. The guesthouse has no pool, no restaurant, and no organized activities of any kind. However, the beach is a few steps away, and there are often impromptu get-togethers around the pair of gas-fired barbecues.

2 Vlaun Dr., Simpson Bay, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **800/417-9361** in the U.S., or 599/54-54323. Fax 599/54-53316. www.thehornytoadguesthouse.com. 8 units. Winter $198 double; off season $107 double. Extra person $40 in winter, $25 off season. MC, V. No children under 7 allowed. **Amenities:** Smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, fridge, kitchen, no phone.

La Vista This small West Antillean–style timeshare resort lies at the foot of Pelican Cay. For a fee, guests can use the more elaborate facilities of the nearby Pelican Resort, with its casino, shops, and spa. The resort consists of two parts—La Vista Resort, a 2-minute walk from a good sandy beach, and La Vista Beach Resort, whose units open directly on the beach with studios and 2-bedroom apartments. Rooms with a view come in seven different categories, including a junior suite, deluxe suite, penthouse, or cottage.

Accommodations feature fully equipped kitchenettes. Our preference is the one-bedroom Antillean cottage with its front porch (suitable for four).

The **Hideaway Bar & Restaurant** serves well-prepared French cuisine adjacent to the pool, with live entertainment several nights a week.

53 Billy Folly Rd., Pelican Cay (P.O. Box 2086), Simpson Bay, St. Maarten, NA ✆ **599/54-43005.** Fax 599/54-43010. www.lavistaresort.com. 50 suites. Winter $180 double, $210–$330 suites for 4; off season $140 double, $160–$225 suites for 4. Children under 12 stay free when sharing with 2 adults. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large outdoor pool; sundries shop; coin-operated laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Mary's Boon Beach Plantation ★ (Finds) Mary's Boon is one of those endearing places that draws loyal guests year after year. It's the kind of intimate, relaxed spot where you actually *talk* to people, whether in the small, convivial bar or on your porch as you gaze out at the beach. It enjoys direct access to one of the best beaches on St. Maarten, with powdery white sand. Even better, its owner is refreshing and upgrading the rooms and public spaces, adding beach cabanas and spa services, and going as green as possible on an island that doesn't yet recycle. The aim is not to undermine the charming, laid-back ambience, but to keep Mary's Boon from becoming a rusted relic.

Mary's Boon is right near the airport, so you do get the sounds of jets taking off a few times a day. But it's also only minutes from casinos, shops, and restaurants. Each room varies architecturally, but all have verandas or terraces; a number have big cherrywood beds and Balinese woodcarvings. Those facing the sea directly are breezy, high-ceilinged, and comfortably unpretentious. Renovated rooms are equipped with full fridges, granite countertops, stainless-steel appliances, and flatscreen TVs. Ask for room 105, 106, 107, or 108, each of which is nice and spacious and opens up to the garden on the one side and the sea on the other. **Tides,** the modest beach restaurant and bar, offers satisfying, good-value food that reveals a sure hand in the kitchen—it should; the head chef, Leona, has been cooking here for 36 years!—and its perch over the beach, with the sea breeze wafting in, is tonic for what ails you.

117 Simpson Bay Rd., St. Maarten, N.A. (or P.O. Box 523882, Miami, FL 33152). ✆ **599/54-57000.** Fax 599/54-53403. www.marysboon.com. 36 units. Winter $125–$300 double (studios and 1-bedroom suites), $250–$525 2-bedroom suites; off season $75–$275 double, $135–$415 2-bedroom suites. Extra person $30. AE, MC, V. Take the first right turn as you head from the airport toward Philipsburg, then follow the signs to Mary's Boon. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Wi-Fi; outdoor pool; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Pasanggrahan Royal Guest House ★ (Value) This vintage West Indian–style guesthouse has a prime spot on the beach in Philipsburg, sandwiched between the busy, narrow main street of Philipsburg and the harbor. It's set back and shaded under tall trees, a charming relic from another time. In fact, this was once the summer home of the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina, and the interior has a gracious, late-19th-century feel, with peacock bamboo chairs, Indian spool tables, and a gilt-framed oil portrait of the queen. The small- to medium-size accommodations have queen-size, double, or king-size beds with four-poster designs; some are in the main building and others are in an adjoining annex. The finest have genuine colonial flair, with antique secretaries and four-posters swaddled in mosquito netting, madras valances, hand-stitched quilts, beamed ceilings, and still-life paintings.

Set among lush palms is the harborfront **Pasanggrahan Restaurant,** which specializes in fresh fish caught by the hotel's own deep-sea charter fishing boat and family-style dinners. Even if you aren't staying here, this is a lovely, peaceful oasis for lunch or a drink

after a day wrestling the cruise-ship hordes in downtown Philipsburg. The food is good and fresh, and the view of the harbor from the old wooden veranda, with Fort Amsterdam in the distance, never quits.

19 Front St. (P.O. Box 151), Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A. ✆ **599/54-23588.** Fax 599/54-22885. www.pasanhotel.com. 30 units. Winter $158–$250 double; off season $98–$165 double. Extra person winter $75, off-season $55. DISC, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, fridge, kitchenette (in some).

WHERE TO STAY IN FRENCH ST. MARTIN

Hotels on French St. Martin add a 10% service charge and a *taxe de séjour.* This visitors' tax on rooms differs from hotel to hotel, depending on its classification, but is often $4 a day. Expect higher rates during Christmas week. ***Note:*** Rates are quoted in either euros or dollars, depending on how establishments quoted them at press time.

Very Expensive

La Samanna ★★★ With low-lying Mediterranean-style villas spread out over a long stretch of one of St. Martin's finest beaches, La Samanna has earned a reputation as a world-class complex where the cognoscenti come to relax and unwind. An Orient-Express hotel, the resort is indeed lovely (the views from the hotel's signature restaurant are divine), and the colonial-style lobby and bar are handsomely atmospheric. And a recent upgrade freshened up a number of rooms that were beginning to look tired. Regardless of their size, most rooms feature private terraces. Suites and villas have spacious bedrooms with luxurious beds, fully equipped kitchens, living and dining rooms, and large patios. The bathrooms are spacious and well designed, with bidets and hand-painted Mexican tiles. Five state-of-the-art specialty suites have private terraces with sumptuous Baie Longue views. For the ultimate in luxury, eight new villas have private wraparound infinity pools and rooftop terraces with magnificent views. The three- or four-bedroom villas come with private concierge service, private beach cabanas, and VIP airport transfers.

Despite the price tag, La Samanna isn't stuffy; everyone is treated royally here. Guests enjoy superb cuisine alfresco on a candlelit terrace spectacularly perched above Baie Longue—the ambience is pure French Riveria. (***Note:*** Children under 7 are not permitted in the main restaurant for dinner.) The wine cellar, Le Cave, holds some 14,000 bottles. The poolside grill serves lunch daily and dinner 2 nights a week. If you can't make dinner in the main restaurant, you can enjoy the same great views at the **buffet breakfasts ★**, as delicious as the setting. With the curve of Baie Longue stretched out before you, there are few better ways to start the day.

Baie Longue (B.P. 4077), 97064 St. Martin CEDEX, F.W.I. ✆ **800/237-1236** in the U.S., or 590/87-64-00. Fax 590/87-87-86. www.lasamanna.com. 81 units. Winter $995 double, $1,825–$4,800 suite or villa; off season $450–$680 double, from $850 suite or villa. Extra person $75. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include full buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Closed late Aug to late Oct. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; library; fitness center; outdoor pool; 24-hr. room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 3 tennis courts; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV/DVD, hair dryer, minibar, plunge pool (in some).

Expensive

Alamanda Resort ★ Small and intimate, like a European beachfront inn, the Alamanda opens onto Orient Bay's beautiful beach. The resort is a cluster of Creole *cazes,* or little houses, surrounding a lushly landscaped outdoor pool quite near the beach. The Alamanda has a few drawbacks, one being that not all rooms have ocean views. Bedrooms

are spacious and done up in soothing earth tones, with decorative accents in bold colors from sunflower yellow to tomato red, or pineapple patterns. The king-size beds are elegantly carved, often a four-poster. The best accommodations are the two-bedroom duplexes with a second bathroom. Our favorite place to dine here is at **Kakao Beach** beachfront restaurant, featuring both Creole and European specialties in a laid-back Caribbean atmosphere. A less expensive choice is **Cafe Alamanda,** with an inventive tropical cuisine served at poolside.

Baie Orientale, St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **800/622-7836** in the U.S. or 590/52-87-40. Fax 590/52-87-41. www.alamanda-resort.com. 42 units. Winter $375 double, $600 2-bedroom duplex, $710–$790 suite; off season $270–$340 double, $440 2-bedroom duplex, $450–$500 suite. Extra person $50. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; Wi-Fi; gym; outdoor pool; limited room service; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Club Orient Naturist Resort ★ Occupying an isolated spot, this is the only true nudist resort in the French West Indies, but it's definitely *not* a wild, swinging, party place. Celebrating 30 years of business in 2008, it's very clean, decent, middle class, even family friendly. Very few singles check in, so "Club O" won't stimulate those seeking titillation. Despite their lack of clothing, many of the guests are older and very conservative—just looking for a quiet, reclusive getaway with like-minded nudists. There's no pool on the premises, but the chalets are right on an excellent beach, with plentiful activities to facilitate hanging out (in every sense). Accommodations, set in red-pine chalets imported from Finland, sport a basic IKEA-meets-campground-cabin look, though the decor has been spruced up. All have outside showers and most have both front and back porches. At **Papagayo Restaurant,** you can dine alfresco; the popular 5-to-7pm happy hour allows guests to compare . . . notes. However, each unit has a kitchenette, and there's a general store, **La Boutique,** on-site if you want to cook your own meal.

1 Baie Orientale, 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **800/690-0199** in the U.S., or 590/87-33-85. Fax 590/87-33-76. www.cluborient.com. 136 units. Winter 215€–245€ studio and suite, 330€–395€ chalet, 800€ villa; off season 125€–200€ studio and suite, 185€–265€ chalet, 450€–550€ villa. Extra person 12 and over 25€. Children 11 and under stay for free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; library; fitness center; wellness center (w/spa treatments); kayaks; sailboats; snorkeling; windsurfing; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, high-speed Ethernet access, kitchen.

Esmeralda Resort ★ Originally conceived as a site for a single private villa, and then for a semiprivate club, this hillside housing development gives the appearance of a well-maintained compound of Creole-inspired villas on sloping terrain that's interspersed with lush gardens. It's just a 25-minute taxi ride northeast of Princess Juliana airport. Opening onto Orient Beach, the Esmeralda blossomed into a full-scale resort in the early 1990s, offering views over Orient Bay and a decidedly French focus. Each of the 18 Spanish mission–style, tile-roofed villas can be configured into four separate units by locking or unlocking the doors between rooms. Each individual unit contains a king-size or two double beds, a kitchenette, a terrace, and a private entrance. Each villa has a communal pool, which creates the feeling of a private club. The suites (one to five bedrooms) are luxuriously spacious.

The Astrolabe, with its award-winning chef, Stephane Decluseau, serves fine French and Caribbean specialties at breakfast and dinner daily. At lunch, the hotel issues an ID card that can be used for discounts at any of a half-dozen restaurants along the nearby beach.

Parc de la Baie Orientale (B .P. 5141), 97071 St. M artin, F.W.I. ✆ **590/87-36-36.** Fax 590/87-35-18. w ww. esmeralda-resort.com. 65 units . Winter $375–$550 double , $690–$1,020 suit e; off season $270–$370 double, $440–$600 suite. Extra person 12 and o ver $80; children 11 and under fr ee in parent's suite. AE, MC, V. Closed S ept. **Amenities:** 2 r estaurants; bar ; bab ysitting; horseback riding (nearb y); librar y; 18 outdoor pools; limit ed room ser vice; 2 tennis courts; parasailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; wat er-skiing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette.

Grand-Case B each Club ★ This bundling of bougainvillea-draped buildings sits between two beaches just a shor t stroll from the action in "downtown" Grand-Case. Of the several different room categories, including duplex units, all have well-stocked kitchens with granite counters and priv ate balconies or patios (the best offering smashing views of Anguilla). The pr operty is immaculately maintained, and y ou can't beat the views. Families will par ticularly appreciate the gated entrance (making the lo vely Petite Plage practically private) and 24-hour security guard and video surveillance. Little extras include a sampling of island CDs and a bottle of wine at check-in. The general manager is conscientious, cordial, and helpful, qualities he inculcates in the staff .

The **Sunset Cafe,** set spectacularly on the r ocks overlooking the water, ser ves breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Grand-Case 97150, St. M artin, F.W.I. ✆ **800/344-3016** in the U .S. or 590/87-51-87. F ax 590/87-59-93. www.grandcasebeachclub.com. 73 units. Winter $310–$385 studio double, $365–$425 1-bedroom suite, $520–$555 2-bedroom suite; off season $145–$175 studio double , $160–$190 1-bedr oom suit e, $270–$285 2-bedroom suite. Rates include continental breakfast. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Extra person $35. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness r oom; computer w/Internet access; outdoor pool; t ennis court; dive shop; k ayaks; sailing; snorkeling; wat er-skiing. *In room:* A/C, c eiling fan, TV, CD player, hair dryer, dial-up Internet access, kitchen.

Green Cay Villas ★ This gated hillside community overlooking the sweep of Orient Bay features 16 fully equipped thr ee-bedroom, 418-sq.-m (4,499-sq.-ft.) villas with private pools at—comparativ ely—bargain rates, especially off season. Each can be configured into individual units; even the one-bedroom contains a modern kitchen. The design emphasizes cool blue, pristine off-whites, and rich tr opical accents mirr oring sea, sand, and sunset. White and natural wicker and har dwood furnishings ar e juxtaposed with boldly hued art naïf, throw pillows, fabrics, ceramics, and whimsical touches like painted parrots dangling from the high coffer ed ceilings.

Parc de la Baie Orientale (B .P. 3006), St. M artin, F.W.I. ✆ **866/592-4213** in the U .S., or 590/87-38-63. F ax 590/87-39-27. w ww.greencayvillas.com. 16 units . Winter $605–$739 1-bedr oom suit e, $713–$871 2-bedroom suit e, $810–$990 3-bedr oom villa; off season $362–$442 1-bedr oom suit e, $427–$521 2-bedr oom suite, $522–$574 3-bedroom villa. Rates include continental breakfast. Minimum stay 4 nights. MC, V. **Amenities:** Airport shuttle; gym; Wi-Fi; Jacuzzis. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR, hair dryer, Internet, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Beach Plaza ★ This is the best hotel within a reasonable distance of Marigot's commercial heart. A three-story building that centers on a soaring atrium festooned with live banana trees and climbing vines, it's within a cluster of buildings mostly composed of condominiums. Built in 1996, and painted in shades of blue and white, it's set midway between the open sea and the lagoon, giving all r ooms water views. The white interiors are accented with varnished, dark-tinted woods and a tropical motif. Each room contains a balcony, tile floors, native art, and simple hardwood furniture, including a writing desk and comfortable beds. The hotel's restaurant, **Le Corsaire,** serves French food except for the all-you-can-eat buffets on Tuesday and Friday nights, which featur e Creole and seafood, respectively.

Baie de Marigot, 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **590/87-87-00.** Fax 590/87-18-87. www.hotelbeachplazasxm.com. 144 units. Winter $262–$367 double, $607 suite; off season $179–$250 double, $406 suite. Rates higher between Christmas and New Year's. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; bikes; babysitting; outdoor pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; jet skis; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

Hôtel L'Esplanade ★★ This lovely, beautifully managed small hotel just gets better and better. Along with its sister hotel, Le Petit—located directly on Grand-Case Beach—it's easily one of the most pleasant places to stay on the entire island. Everything is wonderfully maintained; you won't see a tatter here, a loose thread there. With a collection of suites set on a steeply sloping hillside above the village of Grand-Case, it almost has the feel of a boutique inn in the French Alps. Flowered vines frame terraces with gorgeous views of the village and sea below. The resort is connected by a network of steps and terraced gardens, and cascades of bougainvillea drape white walls accented with hand-painted tiles and blue slate roofs. The lovely pool is just steps down the hill, and access to a beach is via a 6-minute walk on a winding pathway. There's no restaurant, but you can order a delicious lunch prepared by a local cook at the pool bar; in any case, the village of Grand-Case is famous for its fine restaurants.

All guest rooms have private terraces that angle out toward the sea and the sun setting behind Anguilla. Each individually decorated unit contains a kitchen with up-to-date cookware, Italian porcelain tile floors, beamed ceilings, plasma-screen TVs, DVDs, mahogany and wicker furniture, and very comfortable queen- or king-size beds (many four-poster). Slate and tumbled marble bathrooms are beautifully equipped. The loft suites on the upper floors are worth the extra charge—they include a sofa bed downstairs, an upstairs master bedroom with a king-size bed, and a partial bathroom downstairs. The cordial owners, Marc and Kristin Petelluzzi have completely redone each suite; additional, even posher villas are in the works.

Grand-Case (B.P. 5007), 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **866/596-8365** in the U.S., or 590/87-06-55. Fax 590/87-29-15. www.lesplanade.com. 24 units. Winter $395 double studio, $445–$495 loft, $495 suite; off season $245 double studio, $295–$345 loft, $345 suite. Extra person winter $70, off season $50. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar (winter); babysitting; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, hair dryer, kitchen, minibar.

Le Petit Hotel ★★ Finds This well-managed, thoughtfully designed hotel opens directly onto the sands of Grand-Case Beach. It practically defines quiet chic, starting with the hand-painted tiles throughout the public spaces and hallways. It shares the same strong management, meticulous attention to detail, and sense of stylish comfort that distinguishes its splendid sister property, L'Esplanade (see above). Furnishings and accents are sourced from around the globe, including Balinese teak and Brazilian mahogany; natural wicker beds are topped with white down duvets and pillows. Luxurious touches include Frette linens and Damana toiletries. The smallish bathrooms are mostly shower only, and the kitchenettes have a microwave, a fridge, and a two-burner stovetop, but no oven. Each has a huge, beautifully appointed terrace or balcony overlooking the sand. The overall effect is of serene sanctuary. Though there's no restaurant, the gracious staff offers advice on the town's superb dining options.

248 bd. de Grand-Case, Grand-Case, 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **590/29-09-65.** Fax 590/87-09-19. www.lepetithotel.com. 10 units. Winter $415–$455 double, $525 suite; off season $265–$305 double, $375 suite. Extra person (including children) $50–$70. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; activities desk; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Radisson St. Martin Resort, Marina & Spa★ Formerly Le Méridien/L'Habitation de Lonvilliers, this property finally opened in early 2009, the beneficiary of a $60-million investment that reworked and updated the existing building and grounds—grounds that include a sweet stretch of beach along Anse Marcel, one of St. Martin's prettiest coves, surrounded on three sides by volcanic hills. The 252 units feature all the latest amenities, from flatscreen TVs to DVDs, to iPod-dockable clock radios. Facilities include an infinity pool, a spa, a watersports center and dive shop, two restaurants, and a lounge. Oh, and did I mention a full-service 150-slip marina?

Anse Marcel (B.P. 581), 97056 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **800/333-3333** in the U.S. or Canada, or 590/87-67-00. Fax 590/87-30-38. www.radisson.com/stmartin. 252 units. Year-round 189€–269€ double; 349€–499€ suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; water taxi service; babysitting; fitness center; 2 pools; spa; watersports center/dive center; banana boats; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV/DVD, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate/Inexpensive

Hotel La Plantation ★ Although it requires a few minutes' walk to reach the gorgeous white-sand beach, this is one of the most attractive and appealing hotels at Orient Bay. It's set on a steep, carefully landscaped slope. Seventeen colonial-style villas are scattered around the tropically landscaped grounds and pool; each villa contains a suite and two studios, which can be rented separately or combined. The spacious units are stylishly furnished in a colorful Creole theme, complete with hand-painted or hand-stenciled murals, and each sports its own ocean-view terrace. Studios have kitchenettes and queen-size or twin beds; the suites have separate bedrooms with king-size beds, big living rooms, full kitchens, and beautifully tiled full bathrooms. **Café Plantation** serves French and Creole dinners. At lunch, clients use an in-house "privilege card" to buy French/Creole/international meals at any of five beachfront restaurants loosely associated with the resort.

C5 Parc de La Baie Orientale, Orient Bay, 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **590/29-58-00.** Fax 590/29-58-08. www.la-plantation.com. 52 units. Winter $245 studio for 2, from $360 suite; off season $160–$185 studio, from $220 suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Rates include buffet breakfast. DISC, MC, V. Closed Sept 1 to mid-Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; beach bar and grill; bikes; horseback riding; health club; high-speed Internet access; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; diving; jet skis; parasailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Le Cosy In the commercial center of Marigot (and favored by business travelers), Le Cosy's concrete facade is enlivened with gingerbread fretwork and magenta awnings. A bar with a soaring tent serves drinks to guests relaxing on wicker and bentwood furniture. The small bedrooms are arranged around a landscaped central courtyard with a fish-shaped fountain and funky island murals. A lime or cherry throw pillow suffices for decor in the worn, minimalist rooms, most of them duplexes with mahogany-trimmed stairs climbing to a sleeping loft. Tiny bathrooms are shower only. The simple ground-floor restaurant serves dinner only.

Rue du Général-de-Gaulle (B.P. 679), Marigot, 97150 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **590/87-63-93.** Fax 590/87-43-95. 16 units. Year-round 78€–90€ double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Mercure Simson Beach Hotel Value This is a good-value hotel on the French side of the island. The complex occupies a flat, sandy stretch of land between a saltwater lagoon and the beach, 8km (5 miles) west of Princess Juliana Airport. Decorated throughout in bold, Creole-inspired hues, its five three-story buildings are each evocative of a large, many-balconied Antillean house. In its center, a pool serves as the focal point for a bar built out over the lagoon, an indoor/outdoor restaurant, and a flagstone terrace

that hosts steel bands and ev ening cocktail par ties. Each unit offers, in addition to a kitchenette, a terrace with a view. The most desirable accommodations, on the third (top) floor, contain sloping ceilings sheltering sleeping lofts, and two bathrooms. Ask about the hotel's all-inclusive plan.

Baie Nettlé (B.P. 172), Marigot, 97052 St. Martin, F.W.I. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S., or 590/87-54-54. Fax 590/87-92-11. w ww.mercuresimsonbeach.com. 178 units . Winter 296€ double; off season 99€ and up double. R ates include buff et br eakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar ; bab ysitting; beach volleyball; billiards; outdoor pool; tennis court; dive center; kayaks; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer (in some), minibar.

3 WHERE TO DINE

WHERE TO DINE IN DUTCH ST. MAARTEN

Very Expensive

Rare ★★ STEAKHOUSE Dino Jagtiani, the whiz behind the adjacent Temptation (see below), opened this take on the classic chophouse in 2005. The futuristic-yet-retro space is wittily designed. The only steakhouse in St. Maarten to carry USDA Prime dry-aged cer tified Angus beef , Rar e offers choices fr om a 12-ounce filet mignon to a 28-ounce porterhouse that can be deconstr ucted several ways. Those seeking lighter fare can savor sashimi-grade tuna with wasabi mash, or P armigiano-crusted salmon. Anyone could make a meal of the home-baked br ead and dips (hummus, pesto, tapenade). Dino's creativity tr uly shines in sauces (nine, including chipotle-ketchup and spicy peanut). Desserts include an inspir ed s'mores cobbler, with chocolate, graham crackers, marshmallow crust, caramel, and vanilla ice cream.

Atlantis C asino, C upecoy. ✆ **599/54-55714.** w ww.daretoberare.com. Reser vations r equired. M ain courses $25–$45. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm.

Temptation ★★★ CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN The name may sound like a strip club, but this inno vative gem is one of the finest r estaurants on island. Owner/chef Dino Jagtiani, who hails from a multigenerational East Indian family, is the only native St. Maarten grad of the pr estigious C.I.A. H is mother, Asha, graciously gr eets diners "as if it were our house, only for 100 guests. " Dino's nouvelle Caribbean cuisine is ex citing, often utilizing unorthodox pairings. Witness such witty dishes as sear ed foie gras "PB&J" (r oasted peanut sauce and Port-fig jelly), his take on surf and turf (sea scallops in vanilla sauce with Italian sausage and curried lentil), or the M cDino (G ranny S mith apple tempura with honey-thyme ice cr eam and caramel sauce). I f they're on the menu, tr y tempura mussel shooters with coconut curry and *wakame* (seaweed), duck with mashed sweet potatoes and red cabbage (sw eet and sour), or ar ugula-mushroom ravioli in basil jelly . You'll find the perfect wine complement on one of the island's top wine lists.

Atlantis Casino, C upecoy. ✆ **599/54-52254.** w ww.nouveaucaribbean.com. Main courses $28–$37. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6:30–10:30pm.

Expensive

Antoine ★ FRENCH In a lo vely seaside setting, Antoine ser ves comfor ting bistr o food with sophistication and style. The handsome r oom is decked with jungle-themed Haitian masterworks, Delft tile, hurricane lanterns, old phonographs, and towering floral arrangements. Start with the chef's savory kettle of fish soup , escargots de Bourgogne, or the almost translucent sea scallops Nantaise. You can't go wrong with the baked red snapper

filet delicately flavored with shallots and a white-wine butter sauce, shrimp scampi flambéed with Pastis, or grilled local lobster. And desserts are satisfyingly sinful. Antoine is also open for lunch, serving pastas, burgers, sandwiches, and salads, and has a basic kids' menu.

119 Front St., Philipsburg. ✆ **599/54-22964.** www.antoinerestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$20 lunch, $20–$40 dinner; lobster thermidor $46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

Saratoga ★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD This restaurant owned and run by Culinary Institute of America grad John Jackson occupies a beautiful setting, resembling a Spanish colonial structure from the outside, and lined with rich mahogany inside. Seating is either indoors or on a marina-side veranda. The food is beautifully presented. Although the menu changes frequently, it leans toward light and healthy: Witness the roasted eggplant, leek, and tomato soup, or the grilled red snapper filet served with tropical fruit salsa. Not that fat is banned: If you're looking for good and rich, opt for the linguine primavera, here prepared with both smoked ham and bacon. Yum. It dips into Thai and classic Chinese preparations, including the salt-and-pepper-fried whole black seabass.

Simpson Bay Yacht Club, Airport Rd. ✆ **599/54-42421.** www.sxmsaratoga.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $24–$37. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm. Closed Aug to mid-Oct.

Moderate

Halsey's ★ INTERNATIONAL Just south of the drawbridge on Simpson Bay, this waterfront restaurant is adept at subtly updating classic dishes. Start with the prosciutto-wrapped sea scallops served with black truffle cream sauce, the maguro sashimi, or the smoked-salmon-wrapped asparagus. Fresh fish features largely in the main course, with your choice of blackened mahi-mahi, pan-seared grouper, or Asian tuna. You can also get good steaks, grilled veal chops, or rack of Colorado lamb. The flavors change nightly, but homemade ice cream is the smart finish. A Saturday happy hour from 3 to 5pm features a special sushi menu and $5 martinis.

86 Welfare Rd., Simpson Bay. ✆ **599/54-42882.** www.halseysrestaurant.com. Main courses $19–$32. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm; lounge opens earlier.

Oualichi ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL Ideally situated on the boardwalk (there's even beach service), this French-owned brasserie is a local favorite frequented by island dignitaries and a big yachter hangout during boat shows and regattas. (*Oualichi* was the island's original Arawak name, meaning "land of women" after its curvaceous hills.) The jungle interior (a glass bar embedded with shells, sand, and driftwood) is fun, but I prefer sitting on the patio, listening to occasional live music wafting across the courtyard and counting berths on the cruise ships. The menu offers fabulous mahimahi tartare, tuna sashimi, chicken breast in coconut curry, or escargots in garlic butter, as well as perfectly fine burgers, pizzas, and the like. A bucket of beers is $10, and drinks include the eponymous house specialty (vodka, Myer's rum, passion fruit, strawberry).

St. Rose Arcade, Front St., Philipsburg. ✆ **599/54-24313.** Main courses $13–$30. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs and Sat 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–10pm.

Peg Leg Pub & Steakhouse AMERICAN/STEAKHOUSE In its new location just inside the casino entrance at Princess Port de Plaisance, this tavern hopes to continue to do a brisk business in beer (more than 35 available at one of the Caribbean's longest bars). The decor—a marriage of clubby steakhouse with Jolly Roger kitsch (model boats, peg legs dangling from rafters)—has been transplanted to its new location. Kitsch or no, the

food is delicious, offering a wide range of entrees from filet mignon to fettuccine Alfredo and a garlic shrimp platter. Even pub grub (coconut shrimp, beer-battered onion rings, fried calamari) is elevated to an art form. Lunch features salads, hearty deli sandwiches, and burgers.

Princess Port de Plaisance, Union Rd., Cupecoy. ✆ **599/54-45859.** www.peglegpub.com. Main courses $18–$39. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Closed Sun lunch.

SkipJack's Seafood Grill, Bar & Fish Market ★ SEAFOOD Of the many shipshape seafood spots on Simpson Bay, this pleasant, breezy spot is one of the best. You can pick your fish on ice and both Maine and Caribbean lobster from a tank and pool, then enjoy the breezes on the handsome and expansive wooden deck, from which you can watch the big yachts muscle their way in and out of Simpson Bay. The entrees taste like they jumped from the sea to your plate, from blackened grouper to shrimp pot pie. The steamed shrimp, hot and piled on the plate, was some of the best I've ever had. Other excellent starters include tuna carpaccio, a hearty New England clam chowder, a lobster and crab salad, and crab cakes with caper mayo. SkipJack's does justice to its namesake, the old-time single-mast fishing boats that plied the Chesapeake.

Airport Rd., Simpson Bay. ✆ **599/54-42313.** www.skipjacks-sxm.com. Main courses $18–$25. MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm. Closed Sun lunch.

Topper's AMERICAN Neighboring guests first clued us into this spot, raving about the big, delicious steaks and well-poured drinks served up by a gentleman of a certain age in what was essentially a roadside Creole shack. Topper's is indeed a hoot, but someone in the kitchen has a real touch with beef—where else on St. Maarten will you find delicious and tender brisket, served with homemade mashed potatoes and whisky carrots? Other classics include Caesar salad, shrimp cocktail, and meatloaf. The steaks are indeed big and good, and the atmosphere is fun. Best of all, the prices are reasonable for pricey St. Maarten.

113 Welfare Rd., Simpson Bay. ✆ **599/54-43500.** www.sxmtoppers.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$24. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Inexpensive

Kangaroo Court SANDWICHES/SALADS This down-to-earth coffeehouse is set on a side street between Front and Back streets, adjacent to the historic Wathey Courthouse (named for the owners' forebears). The thick red-brick and black-stone walls, crafted 200 years ago from the ballast bricks of ships that sailed to the island for salt, have withstood many an act of God and war. Within an interior that's splashed in vibrant Creole colors, you'll find display racks loaded with fresh-baked pastries and constantly chugging espresso machines. Sandwiches and salads (including sesame chicken, or shrimp, avocado, and papaya) are sold at a roaring pace, mostly to passengers from the nearby cruise-ship docks, throughout the day. Continue through the back to a more tranquil interior garden courtyard with blue canvas chairs and nets strategically slung to catch leaves falling from shady almond and banyan trees. The pizzas are yummy (try the roast chicken pizza with mangoes, red onions, and black olives), as are the sweet potato fries with garlic pepper.

10 Hendrickstraat, Philipsburg. ✆ **599/54-27557.** Sandwiches and salads $8–$13. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8am–5pm; Sat 8am–4pm.

Pizza Galley PIZZA This place gets raves from locals and passing mariners. It's located on the dock at the Lady C Floating Bar. The pizza is thin crust, with an interesting choice

of toppings, from standards such as sausage, pepperoni, and mushrooms to shrimp, roasted peppers, even steak. Homemade desserts include pecan pie and fresh apple/four-berry pie.

At the Lady C Floating Bar, Airport Rd., Simpson Bay. ✆ **599/55-77416**. Pizza $8, toppings $1–$8. No credit cards. Daily 5–11pm.

WHERE TO DINE IN FRENCH ST. MARTIN

Note: Rates are quoted in either euros or dollars, depending on how establishments quoted them at press time.

Very Expensive

Le Santal ★ FRENCH The approach to this dazzler is through a ramshackle, working-class Marigot suburb, a sharp contrast to the glam interior filled with mirrors, fresh flowers, ornately carved chairs, Villeroy & Boch china, and Christofle silver. Try to nab one of the coveted oceanfront tables, occupied at one time or another by the likes of Robert de Niro, Brooke Shields, Arab sheiks, and minor royalty. Sadly, you will no longer be greeted by owner Jean Dupont; he passed away in 2005, but his wife and children continue to run the restaurant. The fare, as you may expect, focuses on the classics. The crepe stuffed with lobster meat, mushrooms, and scallions in a white-wine crawfish butter sauce is a formidable starter; the grilled whole red snapper flambéed in Pastis with fennel beurre blanc is deboned at your table. Superb chateaubriand au poivre is flambéed in aged Armagnac and coated with béarnaise. End your evening with crêpes suzette prepared the old-fashioned (some might say stuck-in-the-Eisenhower-era) way, tableside; to me, it's a charming touch. Good news for Yanks: The restaurant offers a 1€-to-$1 rate, but call ahead to verify.

40 rue Lady Fish, Sandy Ground. ✆ **590/87-53-48.** www.restaurantlesantal.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $29–$49. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm (lunch by advance reservation for groups of 6 or more).

Expensive

La Cigale ★★ FRENCH This family-run establishment provides a winning combination of innovative French fare and tropical flair, beachfront setting, and warmth and intimacy. Tucked away behind the Laguna Beach hotel at the end of an alley, congenial Olivier Genet's bistro is worth a potential wrong turn or three to find. He recruited his parents from the Loire Valley to help him run the tiny operation: Mama is the hostess, papa the pastry chef (bravo to both for the molten chocolate cake soufflé). The setting and ambience are casual, but Chef Stéphane Istel's subtly seasoned food is anything but. Try the *crottin de Chavignol* (goat cheese) *en nougatine* (in filo pastry) with nuts and honey; seabass filet Provencal style; or duck breast with a pear. Olivier will ply you with several home-brewed rum *digestifs* and animated anecdotes of his Sancerre upbringing.

101 Laguna Beach, Baie Nettlé. ✆ **590/87-90-23.** www.restaurant-lacigale.com. Reservations required. Main courses 26€–33€. MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10:30pm.

La Vie en Rose ★ FRENCH The dining room in this balconied second-floor restaurant evokes a tropical version of Paris in the 1920s, thanks to flower boxes, gold gilt mirrors, arches, ceiling fans, candlelight, and time-honored culinary showmanship to match the show-stopping harbor views. The menu is classic French, although Caribbean overtones creep in. Lunches are relatively simple affairs, with an emphasis on fresh meal-size salads, simple grills like beefsteak with shallot sauce, brochettes of fresh fish, and pastas. Dinners are more elaborate (attracting a dressier crowd) and might begin with a

lobster salad with passion-fruit dressing. Main courses include grilled filet of red snapper simmered in a champagne sauce with pumpkin risotto; breast of duck in a foie gras sauce; lobster paired with boneless rabbit in honey-vanilla sauce; and an unusual version of roasted rack of lamb in a mushroom and truffle sauce. The lobster bisque in puff pastry is a must.

Bd. de France at rue de la République, Marigot. ✆ **590/87-54-42.** www.lavieenrosestmartin.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses 10€–18€ lunch, 19€–33€ dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm; daily 6:30–10pm.

Le Cottage ★ FRENCH/CREOLE This perennial favorite in a town loaded with worthy contenders is set in what looks like a private house on the inland side of the main road running through Grand-Case. Its atmosphere is at least partly influenced by Burgundy-born sommelier Stéphane Emorine, who shows a canny ability to recommend the perfect wine by the glass to complement the French-Caribbean cuisine. Meals begin dramatically with such dishes as a casserole of crayfish and avocados with a citrus sauce, lobster ravioli infused with ginger and basil, or sautéed foie gras coated lightly with gingerbread and served with apple-almond marmalade. Mains include both rustic *cuisine du terroir* (such as roasted rack of lamb with either rosemary or cream-based *pistou* sauce) and Creole dishes, including mahimahi filet served with a reduction of crayfish. Desserts similarly range from traditional Grand Marnier soufflé to a crystallized eggplant with anise cream and basil sorbet. The four-course lobster dinner is *magnifique.*

97 bd. de Grand-Case, Grand-Case. ✆ **590/29-03-30.** www.restaurantlecottage.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses 22€–49€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm.

Le Pressoir ★ FRENCH This restaurant occupies a charming, 19th-century Creole house painted yellow and blue. The interior delights the eye with blue and white napery, periwinkle shutters, mango walls hung with homey island paintings (many for sale), carved hardwood chairs, and lace doilies as lampshades. The kitchen presents an artful combination of old and new French cuisine, the ultrafresh products' natural flavors enhanced by imaginative seasoning. Standout standards include lobster ravioli in a passion-fruit cream sauce, seafood tagliatelle, grilled sea scallops with foie gras and truffles, and grilled beef tenderloin in a Camembert sauce.

30 bd. de Grand-Case, Grand-Case. ✆ **590/87-76-62.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 18€–35€. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm (closed Sun in low season).

Mario's Bistro ★★ FRENCH The setting defines romantic, with tables staggered along a balcony overlooking Sandy Ground Bridge. The greeting from Martyne Tardif couldn't be warmer. And her husband, Mario, inspires passion with his architectural presentations and inventive cooking spiced with Asian, Moroccan, and Southwestern accents. Start with tuna tempura with asparagus with a sweet corn and wasabi crème brûlée; roasted quail breast with foie gras, asparagus, and shiitake risotto; or gazpacho with artichoke guacamole. For mains, try the baked mahimahi with a macadamia-nut crust; grilled jumbo shrimp with Moroccan spiced ratatouille; or sautéed sea scallops with crab mashed potatoes. ***Note:*** Mario's does not have high chairs or booster seats for kids, although you're welcome to bring your own.

Sandy Ground Bridge, Marigot. ✆ **590/87-06-36.** www.mariosbistro.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses 22€–32€. DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm. Closed Aug–Sept.

Sol é Luna ★★ Finds FRENCH This lovely, family-run Creole *caze* is virtually pillowed in luxuriant greenery, with smashing Anse Marcel views. Set back from the road,

Tips Grand-Case: Foodie Haven

No other town in the Caribbean features as many restaurants, per capita, as the village of Grand-Case, set near St. Martin's northernmost tip. Don't be put off by the town's ramshackle appearance: Behind the slowly decaying clapboards are French-, Italian-, and American-style restaurants managed by some extremely canny entrepreneurs, many of whom are very sophisticated cooks.

it can be tricky to find, but the incomparable ambience, service, and food make "Sun and Moon" the perfect place for a romantic dinner. Asian influences and ingredients combine with classic French preparations to create light yet intensely flavored dishes. You might start your meal with a roll of monkfish with pecans and red curry, or homemade crab cakes. Lamb braised for 7 hours melts off the bone and in your mouth, as do lobster ravioli and duck breast served with mango fruit and a Grand Marnier sauce. Delicious desserts like banana crunchy cake with chocolate mousse are followed by a minitasting of artisan rums (plum–passion fruit, vanilla–ginger). The hideaway also offers quite handsomely appointed **studios and suites** from $726 a week (low season) or from $860 a week (high season).

61 Mont Vernon, Cul de Sac above Anse Marcel. ✆ **590/29-08-56.** www.solelunarestaurant.com. Main courses 14€–28€. MC, V. Daily 6–10pm. Closed mid-June to mid-July and mid-Sept to Oct.

Moderate

L'Oizeau Rare ★ FRENCH Creative French cuisine is served in this blue-and-ivory antique house on a Marigot hillside with a view of three artfully landscaped waterfalls in the garden. The tables are dressed with snowy cloths and Limoges china. At lunch, served on the covered terrace, you can choose from a number of salads and crispy pizzas, as well as fish and meat courses (specials might include tilapia in puff pastry with tomato marmalade or sweet-and-sour duck breast with ginger-garlic/red fruit sauce). Dinner choices include fresh fish, such as snapper or salmon; roasted rack lamb with Provençal herbs; or tagliatelle with shrimp, tomato, garlic, and fresh herbs. There are numerous daily specials and prix-fixe options, and the wine list features plentiful French options at moderate prices. Many guests come here at sundown to enjoy the harbor view over a Kir Royale and cigar from the extensive selection.

Bd. de France, Marigot. ✆ **590/87-56-38.** Reservations recommended. Main courses 15€–24€ lunch, 18€–25€ dinner. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm. Closed June.

Spiga ★★★ Finds ITALIAN The gracious husband-and-wife team of Ciro Russo (a native of Lecco, Italy) and Lara Bergamasco (second-generation St. Maarten restaurant royalty) have crafted the finest Italian restaurant on the island. Simple elegance reigns, starting with the charming 1914 Creole home. You can dine inside, where darkly stained wooden doors and windows frame salmon-pink walls, or on the candlelit patio. Lara states they want to escape "traditional" Italian fare, yet Ciro prepares a textbook beef carpaccio with white truffle oil. We loved the deeply flavorful tomato and basil lobster bisque and the handmade pappardelle with braised beef sauce. Shrimp are sautéed in a ginger sauce flavored with saffron and served over a sweet pea risotto. The roast pork tenderloin comes wrapped in smoked pancetta and stuffed with mushrooms. End the

Finds Lolos: Local Barbecue Joints

Every Caribbean island has roadside shacks (and mobile vans) serving savory local specialties. These barbecue stands are a St. Martin institution, dishing out big, delicious helpings of barbecued ribs, lobster, chicken or fish grilled on split metal drums, garlic shrimp, goat stew, rice and peas, cod fritters, and johnny-cakes—all for around $10, a real bargain on pricey St. Martin. In Grand-Case, the two best, **Talk of the Town** (✆ **590/29-63-89**) and **Sky's the Limit** (✆ **690/35-67-84**), have covered seating, a waitstaff, and sea views. In Marigot, there's Derrick Hodge's **Exclusive Bite** (no phone) by the scenic cemetery, and **Enoch's** in the open-air Marigot Market (✆ **590/29-29-88**). The Dutch side counters with its own versions. For lunch, try **Mark's Place** (no phone) in Philipsburg's Food Center Plaza parking lot; after 6pm, head for **Johnny B's Under the Tree** (no phone) on Cay Hill Road in Cole Bay.

evening with passion fruit parfait with raspberry sauce or a classic tiramisu, washed down with fiery grappa or homemade *limoncello* (lemon liqueur).

4 rte. de l'Espérance, Grand-Case. ✆ **590/52-47-83.** www.spiga-sxm.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$25. DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm. Closed Tues May–Nov.

Sunset Café ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL This open-air restaurant dramatically straddles the rocky peninsula dividing Grand-Case Beach from Petite Plage. Tables are set along a narrow terrace that affords sweeping views of the setting sun, when the water is spotlit for extra effect. It's a great, breezy spot to dine and watch the night waves. The new chef/operator, Brittany-born Chef Alexandre, has a resumé that includes cooking stints at the Savoy in London and La Samanna here on French St. Martin. His emphasis is on seafood and French classics at reasonable prices. Lunch items are more basic: sandwiches, burgers, pastas, salads—and herons dive-bombing for their own meal.

Grand-Case Beach Club, rue de Petit-Plage, Grand-Case. ✆ **590/87-51-87.** Reservations recommended for weekend dinners in winter. Main courses 10€–22€ lunch, 18€–30€ dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight.

Inexpensive

La Belle Epoque FRENCH/PIZZA "You won't find a better perch to watch the boats in the Marigot marina than this blue-awning boardwalk cafe. After window-shopping in Marigot, stop by for Belgian beers or a glass of proper rosé, grilled Creole specials, pastas, fish, steak, or utterly scrumptious special minipizzas, with a multitude of toppings. It's open for breakfast, serving omelets, pastry, and juices.

Marina Port la Royale, Marigot. ✆ **590/87-87-70.** www.belle-epoque-sxm.com. Salads, sandwiches, and main courses 7.50€–19€. MC, V. Daily 7:30am–11pm; from 5pm on Sun.

4 ST. MAARTEN/ST. MARTIN BEACHES ★★

Coves scissor the island's rugged coastline; with 39 beautiful beaches of varying length and hue, it's fairly easy to find a place to park your towel. All beaches are public, though access is often via a rutted dirt road and/or through a fancy resort. Beaches on the western leeward

half are generally hotter and calmer; those on the eastern windward side, predictably, breezier with rougher swells (when not reef protected). All beaches on the French side of the island allow topless sunbathing, although the Dutch side is becoming more liberal. ***Warning:*** If a beach is too secluded, be careful. It's unwise to carry valuables; robberies have been reported on some remote strips.

BEACHES IN DUTCH ST. MAARTEN

Popular **Cupecoy Beach** ★ is very close to the Dutch–French border at the island's southwest tip. It's a string of three sand beaches set against a backdrop of caves, rock formations, and dramatically eroded limestone cliffs. Locals come around with coolers of cold beer and soda for sale. The beach has two parking lots, one near Cupecoy and Sapphire beach clubs, the other a short distance to the west; parking costs $2. You must descend stone-carved steps to reach the sands. Cupecoy is also the island's major gay beach. Clothing is optional toward the northwest side of the beach. ***Warning:*** The steep drop-off and high swells make the beach hazardous for young children and weak swimmers; prevailing weather affects not only the surf, but the sand's width.

The next strand down (west of the airport), palm-shaded, white-sand **Mullet Bay Beach,** beckons. Once it was the most crowded beach on the island, but St. Maarten's largest resort, Mullet Bay, has been shuttered (save for a timeshare section) since Hurricane Luis in 1995, so it's relatively deserted, though locals flock here on weekends. Watersports equipment can be rented at a local kiosk.

Near the airport, **Maho Beach,** at the Sonesta Maho Beach Hotel and Casino, is a classic Caribbean crescent that dances to a reggae beat, with vendors hawking colorful wares and locals inviting you to impromptu beach barbecues. This is one of the island's busiest beaches, buzzing with windsurfers—and buzzed by jumbo jets that nearly decapitate the palm trees. When you spot a 747 coming into view, hang on to your hats, towels, and partner. ***Note:*** Maho (and Simpson Bay Beach; see below) was hit hard by Hurricane Omar in October 2008, causing beach erosion and toppling some of the beach bars that line this stretch of sand—many of which have since been rebuilt.

West of Philipsburg before you reach the airport, the 2km-long (1¼-mile) white sands of crescent-shaped **Simpson Bay Beach** ring the lagoon and are set against a backdrop of brightly hued fishing boats, yachts, and townhomes. This beach is ideal for a stroll or a swim (beware the steep drop-off), with calm waters and surprisingly few crowds.

Great Bay Beach ★ is best if you're staying along Front Street in Philipsburg. This 2km-long (1¼-mile) beach is sandy and calm; despite bordering the busy capital, it's surprisingly clean and a splendid place to kick back after shopping, admiring the cruise ships from one of many strategic bars along the new boardwalk. On a clear day, you'll have a view of Saba. Immediately to the west, at the foot of Fort Amsterdam, is picturesque **Little Bay Beach,** but it can be overrun with tourists disgorged by the cruise ships. You can actually climb up to the site of Fort Amsterdam itself. Built in 1631, it was the first Dutch military outpost in the Caribbean. The Spanish captured it 2 years later, making it their most important bastion east of Puerto Rico. Only a few of the fort's walls remain, but the view is panoramic.

On the east side of the island, **Dawn Beach** ★ is noted for its underwater life, with some of the island's most beautiful reefs immediately offshore. Visitors talk ecstatically of its incredible sunrises. Dawn is suitable for swimming, and there's plenty of wave action for both surfers and windsurfers. Fairly undeveloped until recently, Dawn Beach is now the site of the **Westin Resort**. This, in addition to the expansion of **Oyster Bay Resort,** has diminished its peaceful allure, but its remarkable reef, soft pearly sand, and views of

Moments A Grand Day on the Isle of Pinel ★★

Imagine a secluded tropical island where bathers swim in a smooth, gin-clear lagoon fringed by palm trees and a curtain of jade mountains. Gentle surf laps a beach dotted with *palapas* and parasols. The scent of barbecued meat and coconut oil commingle with the salt air. Welcome to **Ilet Pinel,** a tiny islet a short boat ride from Orient Beach. A day trip to this uninhabited island is highly recommended. You'll find two delightful beach bistros, each with its own section of beach chairs and umbrellas (20€ for the day). Among them, **Karibuni** ★ (✆ **690/39-67-00**) is the country's longest-running beach bar. Ferries (4.30€ per passenger) run from the French Cul de Sac on St. Martin's northeast coast to Pinel daily on the hour from 9am to 4pm (to 5pm on Sun). Watch for the last return trip at 4:30pm. For more information, go to **www.visitpinel.com**. Or hop aboard a **Wind Adventures** catamaran from Orient Beach for a "One Day in Pinel" snorkeling safari (✆ **590/29-41-57;** www.wind-adventures.com; 50€ per person for the day for 1–3 people).

St. Barts remain unchanged. Food and drink come courtesy of **Busby's Beach Bar** (✆ **599/54-36828**); **Ms. B's** (✆ **599/55-77370**); and the Oyster Bay Resort's beachfront bar on the section also called **Oyster Pond Beach,** where bodysurfers take advantage of the rolling waves.

BEACHES ON FRENCH ST. MARTIN

Baie Longue (Long Bay) ★★, on the west coast, is supremely conducive to R&R. Chic, expensive La Samanna hotel opens onto this beachfront, but it's otherwise blissfully undeveloped and uncrowded. Its reef-protected waters are ideal for snorkeling, but beware the strong undertow and steep drop-off. Don't leave valuables in your car, as break-ins have been reported along this stretch of highway.

Isolated **Anse des Pères (Friar's Bay Beach)** lies at the end of a winding, bumpy country road; its clearly signposted entrance intersects with the main highway between Grand Case and Marigot. Although you certainly won't be alone here, this is a less-visited beach with ample parking. Shelling, snorkeling, and sunset-watching are all favored. Two beloved beach bars organize raucous themed bashes. At **Friar's Bay Beach Café** (no phone), you can purchase a provocative, often politically charged painting on display or order Laurent's sublime stuffed mussels. The competitor is **Kali's Beach Bar** (✆ **590/49-06-81**), a thatched bamboo hut splashed in Rasta colors, where Kali himself serves some of the island's best barbecue. Kali hosts "full-moon parties," featuring reggae bands on the beach along with a bonfire and plenty of drink. ***Tip:*** Have one of the staff here point you in the direction of relatively undiscovered **Anse Heureuse (Happy Bay)** ★, a 10-minute walk north through underbrush over a hill from Friar's (pause to drink in the views of Anguilla). It richly deserves the name, thanks to the tranquillity, fine snorkeling, and white-sand beach.

Grand-Case Beach, a long, narrow ribbon right in the middle of Grand-Case, is a small, pleasant beach that can get crowded on weekends but has none of Orient Beach's carnival-like atmosphere. The waters are very calm, so swimming is excellent and it's a good choice for kids.

To the east of Grand Case, follow the winding road up and over Pigeon Pea Hill. The spectacular setting of **Anse Marcel** comes into view. The beach is protected, with shallow waters ideal for families. You can swim here or else take a hike for 1 1/2 hours north over a hill and down to one of the island's most pristine beaches, **Baie de Petites Cayes.** This is also the most idyllic spot on St. Martin for a picnic. A ribbon of brilliant white sand beckons, and the waters ripple from sapphire to turquoise. Part of the fun is the hike itself, with panoramic views stretching all the way to Anguilla.

On the east coast, **Baie Orientale (Orient Beach)** ★★ is a beauty. Its southern end contains the naturist resort, Club Orient. Eating, drinking, and people-watching qualify as sports, and many beach bistro/bars offer not only grilled crayfish Creole, but also live music, boutiques (with fashion shows), massages, parasailing, jet ski rentals, kiteboard instruction, and more. Of those marketing themselves as "The Five Stars of Orient Bay," **Waïkiki Beach** (✆ **590/87-43-19**) is a favorite of the well-heeled barefoot St. Barts set, who down beluga caviar with Belvedere shots. **Kontiki** (✆ **590/87-43-27**) has two sections: the main eatery and the Tiki Hut, serving a mix of dishes from jerk chicken to paninis, to quesadillas, to sushi. **Bikini Beach** (✆ **590/87-43-25**), which also stays open for dinner, has a menu that runs from American-styled hamburgers to Spanish-influenced paella studded with lobster.

Baie de l'Embouchure ★, embracing **Le Galion** and **Coconut Grove beaches,** just south of Orient, is part of the St. Martin Réserve Sous-Marine Régionale, established to protect migrant waterfowl habitats and rebuild mangrove swamps. A coral reef encloses the bay: The calm, shallow water (you can wade up to 100m/328 ft. out) makes it ideal for small children—it's the only beach on the French side where topless sunbathing is discouraged. Tiki carvings and blue umbrellas mark the appealing **Le Galion Restaurant** (also known as Chez Pat after owner Pat Turner; ✆ **590/87-37-25**).

5 SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

DEEP-SEA FISHING **Pelican Watersports,** on the Dutch side, at the Pelican Resort Club, Simpson Bay (✆ **599/54-42640**), has boats that are available for deep-sea-fishing expeditions priced at $150 per person for a half-day (7:30–11:30am) or $300 per person for a full-day (7:30am–3pm) excursion. In high season, reservations must be made 1 week in advance.

GOLF The **Towers at Mullet Bay** (✆ **599/54-53069**), a timeshare condominium complex on the Dutch side, has the island's only golf course. It's a battered 18-hole Joseph Lee–designed course whose fate has hung in the balance, based on ongoing court battles, for years. Greens fees are $50 for 9 holes or $80 for 18 holes, for players who opt to walk instead of ride.

HORSEBACK RIDING Horseback riding is available at the **Bayside Riding Club,** Rue de Le Galion, Coconut Grove (✆ **590/87-36-64;** www.baysideridingclub.com). Beach rides are a highlight ($95 1-hr. private ride, $70 1-hr. group ride).

SCUBA DIVING Scuba diving is excellent around **St. Martin,** with reef, wreck, night, cave, and drift diving; the depth of dives is 6 to 21m (20–69 ft.). Off the northeastern coast on the French side, dive sites include Ilet Pinel, for shallow diving; Green Key, a barrier reef; and Tintamarre, for sheltered coves and geologic faults. To the north, Anse

Marcel and neighboring Anguilla are good choices. Most hotels will arrange scuba excursions on request.

One of the island's premier dive operations is **Scuba Fun,** whose dive center is at the Great Bay Marina, Dock Maarten, Philipsburg (✆ **599/54-23966;** www.scubafun.com). It offers morning and afternoon dives in deep and shallow water, wreck dives, and reef dives. A resort course for first-time divers with reasonable swimming skills costs 75€ and includes instruction in shallow water and a one-tank dive above a coral reef. A morning two-tank dive (certified divers only) costs 85€.

Another recommended dive operation is **Octopus Diving** (✆ **590/29-11-27;** http://octopusdiving.com), in Grand-Case. Its multinational staff provides PADI courses, night dives, and underwater photography to some 30 dive sites around the island. One-site dives go for $60 to $70, and two-site dives for $85 to $99.

St. Maarten's crystal-clear bays and countless coves make for good scuba diving as well as snorkeling. Underwater visibility runs from 23 to 38m (75–125 ft.). The biggest attraction for divers is the 1801 British man-of-war, **HMS *Proselyte,*** which went to a watery grave on a reef 2km (1¼ miles) off the coast. Most of the big resorts have facilities for scuba diving and can provide information about underwater tours, photography, and night diving.

SNORKELING ★★ The calm waters ringing the island's shallow reefs and tiny coves make it a snorkeler's heaven. The waters off the northeastern shores of French St. Martin have been classified as a regional underwater nature reserve, **Réserve Sous-Marine Régionale,** which protects the area around Flat Island (also known as Tintamarre), Ilet Pinel, Green Key, Proselyte, and Petite Clef. Equipment can be rented at almost any hotel, and most beaches have watersports kiosks.

Both **Scuba Fun** and **Octopus Diving** (see "Scuba Diving," above) provide guided snorkeling trips to the island's teeming offshore reefs. Snorkeling trips with Scuba Fun cost 30€ for a half-day, plus 7.50€ for equipment rental. Snorkeling trips to two sites with Octopus Diving cost $40 (including all equipment).

TENNIS You can try the courts at most of the large resorts, but you must call first for a reservation. Preference, of course, is given to hotel guests.

WATER-SKIING & PARASAILING Most of French St. Martin's large beachfront hotels maintain facilities for water-skiing and parasailing, often from kiosks that operate on the beach.

Club Caraïbes, at the Hôtel Mercure Simson Beach in Nettle Bay (✆ **690/33-30-01;** www.skicaraibes.net), provides wakeboard and jet ski rentals, as well as water-skiing instruction with Laurent Guy and Brigitte Lethem (the 2004 U.S. Masters Champion). You can learn slalom or tricks for 35€ per set; 5-day intensive water-skiing and wakeboard courses cost 320€ to 660€.

WINDSURFING Most windsurfers gravitate to the eastern part of the island, most notably Coconut Grove/Le Galion Beach, Orient Beach, and, to a lesser extent, Dawn Beach, all in French St. Martin. The top outfitter here, **Tropical Wave,** Le Galion Beach, Baie de l'Embouchure (✆ **590/87-37-25;** www.sxm-orientbeach.com/chezpat), capitalizes on the near-ideal combination of wind and calm waters. Pat rents Mistrals for 20€ an hour, with instruction offered at 30€ an hour, and 45€ for a 2-hour beginner course. They also rent snorkeling gear, pedal boats, and kayaks (tours can be arranged).

Wind-Adventures (formerly Club Nathalie Simon), on Orient Beach (✆ **590/29-41-57;** www.wind-adventures.com), is one of the Caribbean's premier windsurfing schools.

Lessons cost 40€ per hour; 55€ for 1½ hours. Kite trips for the experienced to Green Cay start at 95€. CNS also rents windsurfers and Hobie Cats from 35€ per hour and offers both safaris and instruction (with excellent multilesson discounts).

6 SHOPPING ★★★

SHOPPING IN DUTCH ST. MAARTEN

Not only is St. Maarten a free port, but it also has no local sales taxes. Prices are sometimes lower here than anywhere else in the Caribbean, except possibly St. Thomas.

Except for the boutiques at resort hotels, the main shopping area is in the center of **Philipsburg.** Most of the shops are on **Voorstraat (Front Street),** which stretches for about 2km (1¼ miles) and is lined with stores. More shops are along the little lanes, known as *steegijes,* that connect Front Street with **Achterstraat (Back Street),** another shoppers' haven.

Antillean Liquors, Princess Juliana International Airport (✆ **599/54-54267**), has a complete assortment of liquor and liqueurs, cigarettes, and cigars. Prices are generally lower here than in other stores on the island, and the selection is larger. Locally produced guavaberry liqueur is also for sale.

Del Sol St-Maarten, 23 Front St. (✆ **599/54-28784**), sells men's and women's sportswear. Embedded into the mostly black-and-white designs are organic crystals that react to ultraviolet light, which transforms the fabric into a rainbow of colors. Step back into the shadows, and your T-shirt will revert to its original black-and-white design. The same technology is applied to yo-yos, which shimmer psychedelically when you bob them up and down.

Colombian Emeralds International, Old Street Shopping Center (✆ **599/54-23933**), sells unmounted emeralds from Colombia, as well as emerald, gold, diamond, ruby, and sapphire jewelry. Prices are approximately the same as in other outlets of this famous Caribbean chain. Some huckster vendors around the island pawn fakes off on unsuspecting tourists; if you're seriously shopping for emerald, this is the place.

Belgian Chocolate Shop, 109 Old St. (✆ **599/54-28863**), is the best of its kind on island. Contrary to popular rumor, only *some* of the velvety chocolates sold in this upscale shop are pornographic, portraying parts of the human anatomy. It's always busy here, especially when cruise ships are berthed at the nearby piers.

Guavaberry Emporium, 8–10 Front St. (✆ **599/54-22965;** www.guavaberry.com), sells the rare "island folk liqueur" of St. Maarten, which for centuries was made only in private homes. Sold in square bottles, this rum-based liqueur is flavored with guavaberries, grown on the hills in the center of the island and harvested once a year near Christmas. The liqueur has a fruity, woody, smoky, bittersweet tang. Some people prefer it blended with coconut as a guavaberry colada or splashed in a glass of icy champagne.The charming Creole cottage also contains exotic natural perfumes and hot sauces (like habañero-lime or Creole chipotle).

Greenwich Galleries, 35 Front St. (✆ **599/54-23842**), is the most interesting and sophisticated art gallery on either side of the island, with Bajan pottery in tones of sea greens and blues, replicas of Taíno artifacts from the Dominican Republic, enameled metal cutouts that are both quirky and perplexing, and a range of paintings and lithographs from artists as far away as Holland and Britain.

SHOPPING IN FRENCH ST. MARTIN

Many day-trippers come over to Marigot from the Dutch side of the island just to visit the French-inspired boutiques and shopping arcades. Because St. Martin is also a duty-free port, you'll find some of the best shopping in the Caribbean here as well. Whether you're seeking jewelry, perfume, or St. Tropez bikinis, you'll find it in one of the boutiques along **rue de la République** and **rue de la Liberté** in Marigot.

Prices are often quoted in U.S. dollars, and salespeople frequently speak English. Credit cards and traveler's checks are generally accepted. When cruise ships are in port on Sundays and holidays, some of the larger shops stay open.

The waterfront **Le West Indies Mall** (✆ **590/51-04-19**) is an ornate structure with arches, skylights, curved staircases, and gazebos. But it does concentrate 22 big-name boutiques, from Escada to Lacoste. You'll also find a branch of the venerable gourmet shop Hédiard (established in Paris in 1854), where you can buy champagne, caviar, and foie gras. Smaller but equally prestigious complexes include **Galerie Périgourdine** and **Plaza Caraïbes** (Cartier and Hermès outposts).

At harborside in Marigot, there's a lively **morning market** on Wednesday and Saturday with vendors selling spices, fruit, shells, and handicrafts.

At bustling **Marina Port La Royale,** mornings are even more active: Schooners unload produce from the neighboring islands, boats board guests for picnics on deserted beaches, a brigantine sets out on a sightseeing sail, and a dozen different little restaurants are readying for the lunch crowd. One of the largest shopping arcades on St. Martin, Port La Royale has lots of boutiques.

Havane Boutique, 50 Marina Port La Royale (✆ **590/87-70-39**), is a hyperstylish menswear store, more couture than ready-to-wear. **Serge Blanco "15" Boutique,** Marina Port La Royale (✆ **590/29-65-49**), is a relatively unknown name in North America, but in France Blanco is revered as one of the most successful rugby players of all time. His menswear is sporty, fun, and elegant. Clothes include polo shirts, shorts, shoes, and truly wonderful latex jackets.

Act III, 3 rue du Général-de-Gaulle (✆ **590/29-28-43**), prides itself on its evening gowns and chic cocktail dresses. If you've been invited to a reception aboard a private yacht, this is the place to find the right outfit. Designers include Alaïa, Versace, Lacroix, Cavalli, Armani, and Lanvin.

Ma Doudou (✆ **590/87-30-43**) occupies a tiny shack virtually obscured by overgrown foliage in the town of Cul-de-Sac. Call ahead unless you're in the neighborhood, as it keeps irregular hours. *Ma Doudou* means "my darling" in Creole patois, which certainly describes the collectible hand-painted bottles containing rum-filled candies, spices, jams, and 20 flavored rums.

Roland Richardson Paintings and Prints, 6 rue de la République (✆ **590/87-84-08**), has a beautiful gallery. A native of St. Martin, Mr. Richardson is one of the Caribbean's premier artists, working in oil, watercolors, pastels, and charcoal. He is known for his landscapes, portraits, and colorful still-lifes. His work has been exhibited in nearly 100 one-man and group shows in museums and galleries around the world. Richardson is also the resident artist at **La Samanna,** where he has a changing assemblage of works.

7 ST. MAARTEN/ST. MARTIN AFTER DARK ★★

After-dark activities begin early here, as guests start off with a sundowner, perhaps on the garden patio of **Pasanggrahan Royal Guest House** (p. 606). The most popular bar on the island is **Cheri's Café,** Rhine Rd. #45, Maho Beach (✆ **599/54-53361**), which offers music and live entertainment 6 nights a week in an open-air pavilion.

Many hotels sponsor **beachside barbecues** (particularly in season) with steel bands, native music, and folk dancing. Outsiders are welcomed at most of these events, but call ahead to see if it's a private affair.

Princess Casino ★, Port de Plaisance Resort, Cole Bay (✆ **599/54-44311;** www.princesscasinosxm.com) wins the prize for overall elegance, as evidenced by the dressier crowd and handsome neoclassical design. Princess has more than 650 slots and 20 table games, from craps to blackjack. Dining options include the newly located Peg Leg Pub, a fine buffet, and a sushi bar.

Atlantis World Casino ★, Rhine Rd. 106, Cupecoy (✆ **599/54-54601;** www.atlantisworld.com), is St. Maarten's version of Las Vegas, with some of the best of the island restaurants (Rare [p. 612] and Temptation [p. 612]), but also a posh interior with all the big table games, along with 500 slot and video poker machines.

Casino Royale ★, at the Sonesta Maho Beach Resort on Maho Bay (✆ **599/54-52590**), has 16 blackjack tables, 6 roulette wheels, and 2 craps and 2 Caribbean stud-poker tables. The casino offers baccarat, minibaccarat, and more than 200 slot machines. It's open daily from 1pm to 6am. The **Showroom Royale** is the largest and most technologically sophisticated theater on either side of St Maarten/St. Martin; its glitter shows change according to whatever act has been booked. In the same building is the island's loudest dance club, the **Q-Club,** with wraparound catwalks, multiple bars, and colored lights; it's open nightly from around 10pm.

Hit hard by Hurricane Omar in October 2008 (and buffeted by a change in ownership), the legendary **Sunset Beach Bar,** 2 Beacon Hill Rd., Airport Beach (✆ **599/54-53998;** www.sunsetbeachbar.com), should be back in business for the winter 2009 season. It lies directly on the beach and is mobbed most afternoons and evenings with office workers, off-duty airline pilots, and beach people. No one seems to mind the whine of airplane engines, or the fumes that filter down from aircraft that seem to fly just a few dozen feet overhead. You can order burgers, sandwiches, steaks, fish, chicken, shrimp, and hot dogs from an outdoor charcoal grill.

In Grand-Case, **Calmos Café** ★, bd. de Grand-Case 40 (✆ **590/29-01-85;** www.calmoscafe.com), is a funky and low-key beach shack that draws a young, hip crowd. Management posts a sign that says no snobs near the entrance. It also has good, affordable food. It's open daily from 10am to midnight.

24

St. Vincent & the Grenadines

The slogan "The Caribbean as it used to be" is tossed about a lot in advertising, often to excuse a dull 1950s retro look. But St. Vincent and the Grenadines actually are the Caribbean of decades ago. Even Johnny Depp coming here to film scenes for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies didn't exactly put St. Vincent on the tourist map.

St. Vincent is undeveloped when compared to neighboring St. Lucia, and it's not as lush as Grenada and Dominica, but it has its own beauty. It has only enough attractions to absorb a day or two of your time, but the offshore islands of the Grenadines are the best sailing waters in the Caribbean, even topping the British Virgin Islands—the yachting crowd seems to view St. Vincent merely as a launching pad for the 65km (40-mile) string of the Grenadines.

Don't come here for nightlife, grand cuisine, or spectacular beaches. (There are some white-sand beaches near Kingstown on St. Vincent, but most of the other beaches ringing the island are black sand.) That said, St. Vincent is unspoiled by the fallout that mass tourism brings, and islanders treat visitors courteously. British customs predominate, along with traces of Gallic cultural influences, but all with a distinct West Indian flair.

South of St. Vincent, the islands forming the small chain called the Grenadines have such romantic-sounding names as Bequia, Mustique, Canouan, and Petit St. Vincent. We'll explore Union and Palm islands, and Mayreau as well. A few of the islands have accommodations, but many are so small and undeveloped that they attract only beachcombers and stray boaters.

Populated by the descendants of African slaves and administered by St. Vincent, the Grenadines collectively add up to a landmass of about 80 sq. km (31 sq. miles). These specks of land may lack natural resources, but they're blessed with white-sand beaches and coral reefs. If you don't stay overnight in the Grenadines, at least try to visit one on a day trip from St. Vincent, and enjoy a picnic lunch (which your hotel will pack for you) on your own quiet stretch of sand. Bequia would be the most recommended island to visit on a day's jaunt.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **The Botanic Gardens** in Kingstown, the oldest botanic gardens of the Caribbean, 8 hectares (20 acres) of tropical splendor, with trees 2 centuries old.
- **Marriqua Valley,** one of the lushest valleys of the Caribbean, is split by a road that passes by winding rivers, deep forests, terraced farms, freshwater streams, and boys on donkeys.
- **The Leeward Highway:** Traveling north from Kingstown, this scenic highway climbs a series of steep hills with panoramic views in all directions before descending down to the sea near the village of Layou.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

In the United States, you can get information at the **St. Vincent and Grenadines Tourist Office,** 801 Second Ave., 21st Floor, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **800/729-1726** or 212/687-4981). The website for St. Vincent and the Grenadines is **www.svgtourism.com**.

On St. Vincent, the local **Department of Tourism** is on Upper Bay Street, Government Administrative Centre, Kingstown (✆ **784/457-1502**). Hours are Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm.

GETTING THERE

In the eastern Caribbean, St. Vincent—the "gateway to the Grenadines" (the individual islands are discussed later in this chapter)—lies about 160km (99 miles) west of Barbados. There are no direct flights. The best connections are through Barbados and Antigua. From Barbados you can take **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428] in most of the Caribbean, or 784/458-4841; www.liatairline.com), which connects the islands of Grenada and St. Lucia with St. Vincent, Bequia, Union Island, and Antigua.

American Eagle (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 784/456-5555; www aa.com) flies nonstop from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Canouan, one of the most visited of the Grenadines.

Dependable **Grenadine Airways** (✆ **784/456-6793;** www.grenadine-airways.com) makes daily shuttle runs from St. Vincent to the satellite islands of Mustique, Union, and Canouan, with per-person fares ranging from $46 to $62 round-trip. To connect with those Grenadine islands with airports, separate charter arrangements can be made from Union Island. The price of these chartered flights is less than you might expect and often matches the fares on conventional Caribbean airlines.

GETTING AROUND ST. VINCENT

BY TAXI Because of the bad roads, most visitors use taxis to get around. The government sets the rates, but taxis are unmetered, so be sure to agree on the fare before getting in. Figure on spending $5.60 to $17 or more to go from the airport to your hotel. You should tip about 12% of the fare.

You can also hire taxis to take you to the island's major attractions. Most drivers seem to be well-informed guides. (It won't take you long to learn everything you need to know about St. Vincent.) You'll spend from $20 per hour for a car holding two to four passengers.

Fun Facts Special Events

Late June brings St. Vincent's weeklong **Carnival,** one of the largest such celebrations in the eastern Caribbean. The festivities include steel-band and calypso competitions, parades, costumes, and the crowning of the king and queen of the carnival. The fun extends through the first 2 weeks in July, culminating in a huge street party.

BY RENTAL CAR Driving on St. Vincent is a bit of an adventure because of the narrow, twisting roads (sound your horn as you make the sharp hairpin turns). ***Most important:*** Drive on the left. If you present your valid driver's license from home at the police department, on Bay Street in Kingstown, and pay a $19 fee, you'll get a temporary permit to drive.

Avis (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada; www.avis.com) has a branch at the airport. One local rental firm is **Star Garage,** on Grenville Street in Kingstown (✆ **784/456-1743**). Make sure your car has a spare tire because the roads are full of potholes.

BY BUS Flamboyantly painted "alfresco" buses travel the principal roads of St. Vincent, linking the major towns and villages. The price is low, depending on where you're going, and the experience will connect you with the locals. The central departure point is the bus terminal at the New Kingstown Fish Market. Fares range from 35¢ to $2.20.

Fast Facts St. Vincent & the Grenadines

Banks Most banks are open Monday to Thursday from 8am to either 1 or 3pm, and Friday from either 8am to 5pm or 8am to 1pm and then 3 to 5pm. There are a few banks with ATMs on Halifax Street in Kingstown on St. Vincent (plus one at the airport), and there are also a few on Bequia and Union Island.

Currency The official currency of St. Vincent is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$),** pegged at about EC$2.70 per U.S. dollar (EC$1 = 37¢). Most restaurants, shops, and hotels will accept payment in U.S. dollars or traveler's checks. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Documents British, Canadian, and U.S. citizens should have a passport and a return or ongoing airplane ticket.

Electricity Electricity is 220-volt AC (50 cycles), so if you're traveling with U.S. appliances, you'll need an adapter and a transformer. Some hotels have transformers, but it's best to bring your own.

Emergencies In an emergency, dial ✆ **999** or 911.

Hospitals There is one hospital on St. Vincent in Kingstown: **Milton Cato Memorial General Hospital** (✆ **784/456-1185**), Hospital Road.

Language English is the official language.

Liquor Laws Liquor can be sold on any day of the week. It's legal to have an open container on the beach as long as you don't get rowdy or litter.

Pharmacies On St. Vincent, try **The People's Pharmacy,** Greenville Street, Kingstown (✆ **784/456-1170**), open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 8pm. There are a few other drugstores in Kingstown as well.

Post Office The **General Post Office,** on Halifax Street in Kingstown (✆ **784/457-1744**), is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 3pm and Saturday from 8 to 11:30am. There are smaller post offices in 56 districts throughout the country, including offices on the Grenadine islands of Bequia, Mustique, Canouan, Mayreau, and Union Island.

Safety St. Vincent and its neighboring islands of the Grenadines are quite safe. Even in Kingstown, the capital of St. Vincent, chances are, you'll encounter little serious crime. However, take the usual precautions and never leave valuables unguarded.

Taxes & Service Charges The government imposes an airport departure tax of $15 per person. A 10% government occupancy tax is charged for all hotel accommodations. Hotels and restaurants almost always add a 10% to 15% service charge. Ask whether it's included in the initial hotel rates you're quoted. If it's not already added at a restaurant, tip at that rate.

Telephone To call St. Vincent or the Grenadines from the United States, dial **1,** then **784** (the area code for St. Vincent), and then the local seven-digit number. Once on St. Vincent, you can access **AT&T Direct** at ✆ **800/225-5288.** To reach **MCI,** dial ✆ **800/888-8000.**

Time Both St. Vincent and the Grenadines operate on Atlantic Standard Time year-round: When it's 6am on St. Vincent, it's 5am in New York. During daylight saving time in the United States, St. Vincent keeps the same time as the U.S. East Coast.

Water In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, stick to bottled water.

Weather The climate of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is pleasantly cooled by the trade winds year-round. The tropical temperature is in the 78°F-to-82°F (26°C–28°C) range. The rainy season is July to October.

2 WHERE TO STAY ON ST. VINCENT

Don't expect high-rise resorts here. The places are small and comfortable, not fancy, and you usually get a lot of personal attention from the staff.

If you want a luxurious resort, head for the Grenadines. Except for Young Island, most resorts here are fairly simple affairs, and since most people are in St. Vincent for only a night or two, you may prefer to be located directly in the center in the capital of Kingstown.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Young Island Resort ★★ On its own private island off Villa Beach, this resort is as good as it gets in St. Vincent. It's far more stylish and comfortable than its nearest competitor, Grand View Beach Hotel. This 14-hectare (35-acre) resort, its grounds full of lush fruit trees, white ginger, hibiscus, and ferns, is supposedly where a Carib tribal chieftain kept his harem. It lies just 180m (590 ft.) off the south shore of St. Vincent; a ferry makes the 5-minute run from the pier right on Villa Beach. The beach has brilliant white sand. Set in a tropical garden are romantic wood-and-stone Tahitian cottages (all for couples), with bamboo decor and outdoor showers in little rock grottoes (open but hidden from public view). Floors are of tile and terrazzo, covered with rush rugs. The spacious accommodations come with queen- or king-size beds (rarely a twin) and generous storage. Some units open onto the beach; others are on a hillside.

Young Island (P.O. Box 211), St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **800/223-1108** in the U.S. and Canada, or 784/458-4826. Fax 784/457-4567. www.youngisland.com. 29 units. Winter $535–$1,150 double, $1,072–$1,222 suite; off season $472–$862 double, $892–$934 suite. Rates include breakfast and dinner. Ask about packages. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; airport transfers; babysitting; access to nearby health club; Internet; outdoor pool; spa; tennis court; boating; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, no phone.

EXPENSIVE

Geraldine House ★★ (Finds) Set in a residential hillside suburb of Kingstown Park, this elegant little inn overlooks the town and botanical Gardens. It's built on the site of St. Vincent's oldest guest house, from 1781 (and once the home of the island's governor). Today it's a modern guest house with well-furnished bedrooms that are spacious and furnished in part with wicker pieces and tropical designs. From the wide porches, panoramic views of Kingstown and the boat-filled harbor can be seen. You're a $4 taxi ride from the center of town or the nearest good beach.

Kingstown Park, Kingstown, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **866/659-8351** or 784/458-1800. www.grenadinehouse.com. 20 units. Winter $200–$290 double; summer $180–$270. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; airport transfers; gym; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan.

Grand View Beach Hotel ★ Owner/manager F. A. (Tony) Sardine named this place well: The "grand view" promised is of islets, bays, yachts, Young Island, headlands, lagoons, and sailing craft. This resort is set on 3 hectares (7½ acres) of gardens, just steps from the beach. The 19th-century plantation house is a large, white two-story mansion. Most bedrooms are medium size and comfortable, opening onto views. The most luxurious and spacious rooms, some of which have wide terraces and faraway views of the Grenadines, are in the Mediterranean-style modern wing. The other units are on the upper level of a former great house and have a B&B feel.

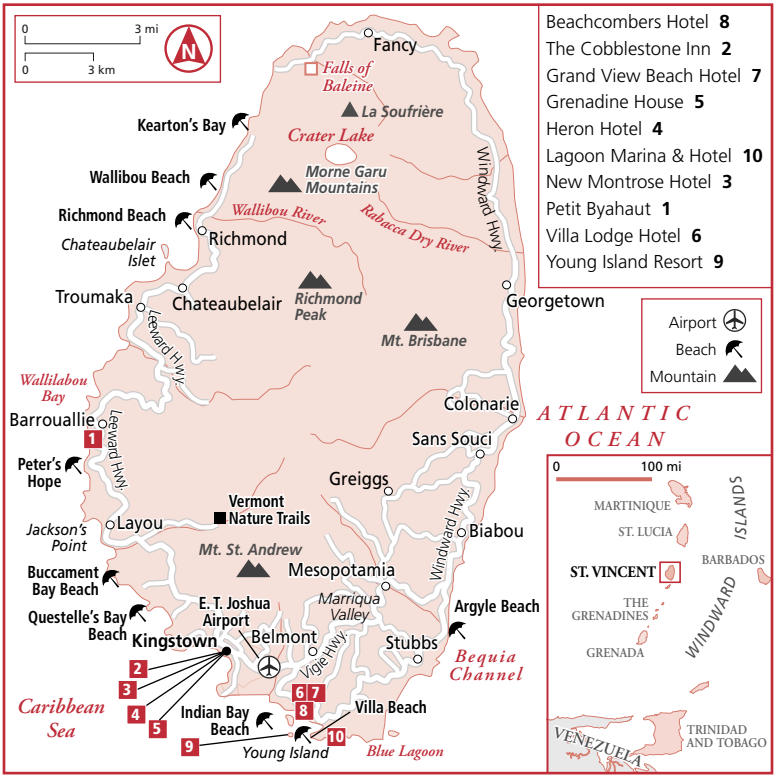
Villa Point (P.O. Box 173), St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **800/223-6510** in the U.S., or 784/458-4811. Fax 784/457-4174. www.grandviewhotel.com. 19 units. Winter $175–$215 double; off season $130–$170 double. Breakfast and dinner $55 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; fitness center; squash court; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Petit Byahaut ★ (Finds) On 20 hectares (49 acres), and with only a few guest dwellings, this is the ultimate nature retreat on island and certainly the most eco-friendly. Its bay was one of the locations for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies. Lying a 10-minute boat ride from Buccament Bay, it provides airport transfers for guests, plus a water taxi to the island. The scuba and snorkeling are the best in the area, and there are hikes to the rainforest to waterfalls and a volcano. Comfortable cabins come with wood floors, private decks, solar-powered lighting, private bathrooms (with solar-heated rainwater showers), and private decks for sunning. Meals are home cooked with regional produce.

Petit Byahaut Bay, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/457-7008.** www.petitbyahaut.com. 4 cabins. $390 double. Rates include all meals and transfers. 3-night minimum. DC, MC, V. Closed Aug–Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; airport transfers; watersports; diving. *In room:* Ceiling fans, no phone.

MODERATE

Lagoon Marina & Hotel A two-story group of rambling modern buildings crafted from local wood and stone, this hotel lies 6km (3¾ miles) from the airport on the main island road, opening onto a narrow, curved black-sand beach. There's a pleasantly breezy bar that's often filled with sailors and yachties. You overlook a moored armada of boats tied up at a nearby marina. A lagoon-shaped pool is terraced into a nearby hillside. Snorkeling, windsurfing, and daily departures on sailboats to Mustique and Bequia can be



arranged through the hotel. Each of the r efurbished medium-size, high-ceilinged guest rooms has a balcony. The bedrooms have ceramic-tile floors and good furnishings.

Blue Lagoon (P.O. Box 133), St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-4308.** Fax 784/456-8928. w ww.lagoonmarina.com. 19 units. Winter $125 double; off season $100 double . MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; 2 outdoor pools; room service; boating; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Villa Lodge Hotel Set on a residential hillside a few minutes southeast of the center of Kingstown and the airport, this place is a favorite of visiting businesspeople. Because of its access to a beach and its w ell-mannered staff, it ev okes the feeling of a modern villa. I t's ringed with tr opical, flo wering tr ees and shr ubs gr owing in the gar dens. The air-conditioned rooms have ceiling fans, king-size beds, and comfortable rattan and local mahogany furniture. The hotel also rents eight apartments in its Breezeville Apartments complex next door, charging $150 for a double in winter and $135 for a double in summer .

Indian Bay (P.O. Box 1191), St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **800/448-8355** in the U.S., or 784/458-4641. Fax 784/457-4468. w ww.villalodge.com. 19 units . Winter $130 double , $150 apt; off season $115 double , $135 apt. Breakfast and dinner $45 per person ex tra. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar ; bab ysitting; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Beachcombers Hotel ★ (Value) Richard and Flora Gunn operate this B&B in a tropical garden right on the beach. Three chaletlike buildings house the small to medium-size accommodations, all with private bathrooms and tasteful decor. The rooms are spotless and well maintained. Try for nos. 1, 2, or 3, as they open onto the water Two units have small kitchenettes, and there is also a penthouse suite. The hotel has a health spa (Mrs. Gunn is a massage and beauty therapist) with a steam room, sauna, facials, and aromatherapy. The Beachbar & Restaurant, a favorite gathering place for locals, fronts an open terrace and has excellent food.

Villa Beach (P.O. Box 126), St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-4283.** Fax 784/458-4385. www.beachcombershotel.com. 32 units. Year-round $99–$150 double; $270 penthouse suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; library; outdoor pool; sauna; spa. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge (in some), kitchenette (in some).

The Cobblestone Inn Originally built as a warehouse for sugar and arrowroot in 1814, the core of this historic hotel is made of stone and brick.Today it's one of the most famous hotels on St. Vincent, known for its labyrinth of passages, arches, and upper hallways. To reach the high-ceilinged reception area, you pass from the water front through a stone tunnel into a chiseled courtyard. At the top of a massive sloping stone staircase, you're shown to one of the simple, old-fashioned bedrooms. The most spacious is no. 5, but it opens onto a noisy street. Meals are served on a third-floor aerie, high above the hotel's central courtyard. The hotel is convenient to town, but it's a 5km (3-mile) drive to the nearest beach.

Bay St. (P.O. Box 867), Kingstown, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/456-1937.** Fax 784/456-1938. www.thecobblestoneinn.com. 26 units. Year-round $75 double; $95 triple; $100 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, TV (in some).

Heron Hotel This hotel—renovated in 2006—is in one of St. Vincent's historic buildings. In spite of modern improvements, it still exudes a sense of old-fashioned timelessness you simply won't find in modern resorts. Built of local stone and tropical hardwoods, it served as a warehouse in the late 18th century and then later provided lodgings for colonial planters doing business along the wharves of Kingstown. Some of the simple and rather small rooms overlook an inner courtyard; others face the street. Room no. 15 is the largest. Although you don't get grand comfort here, the price is hard to beat, and the staff is hospitable.

Upper Middle St. (P.O. Box 226), Kingstown, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆/fax **784/457-1631.** 8 units. $80 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, Wi-Fi.

New Montrose Hotel ★ (Finds) A real discovery, this bright, sunflower-yellow hotel lies on the northern fringe of town. The beach is a short ride away and there is no on-site pool, but what you will find is a handsomely furnished and comfortable room at an affordable price in a tranquil location. Accommodations have such extras as a full-length mirror closet, smoke detector, and good lighting. Some of the units have refrigerators or even a fully equipped kitchenette. The Caribbean/international dishes at the Mont Rose restaurant are good, so you can eat in if you don't want to wander the streets of Kingstown at night.

New Montrose (P.O. Box 215), Kingstown, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/457-0172.** Fax 784/457-0213. www.newmontrosehotel.com. 25 units. Year-round $70 double; $120 2-bedroom family suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa. *In room:* A/C, fridge, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

3 ST. VINCENT DINING

Most guests eat at their hotels on the Modified American Plan (breakfast and dinner), and many Vincentian hostelries serve authentic West Indian cuisine. There are also a few independent restaurants, but not many.

Basil's Bar & Restaurant ★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL This enclave is set beneath the previously recommended Cobblestone Inn, a former sugar warehouse. The air-conditioned interior is accented with exposed stone and brick, soaring arches, and a rambling mahogany bar, which remains open throughout the day. The food is quite acceptable, but nowhere near as good as that enjoyed by Princess Margaret or Mick Jagger at Basil's more famous bar on Mustique (p. 644). The menu might include lobster salad, shrimp in garlic butter, sandwiches, hamburgers, and barbecued chicken. Dinners feature grilled lobster, shrimp cocktail, grilled red snapper, and grilled filet mignon, all fairly standard dishes of the international repertoire. You can order meals here throughout the day and late into the evening.

Bay St., Kingstown. ✆ **784/457-2713.** www.basilsbar.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$30. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm.

Bounty AMERICAN/WEST INDIAN In the redbrick Troutman Building in the center of Kingstown, you'll find the extremely affordable Bounty serving the local workers. (The true power-lunch venue is Basil's, recommended above.) Fill up on pastries, *rotis* (Caribbean burrito), sandwiches, homemade soups, pastas, quiche, and pizza. The cooking is as simple as the surroundings. A tasty collection of juices includes passion fruit. An on-site gallery and gift shop sells works by local artists.

Egmont St., Kingstown. ✆ **784/456-1776.** Pastries and sandwiches 40¢–$4.70; breakfast (all day) $6.40; lunch $6. No credit cards. Mon–Fri 7:30am–4:30pm; Sat 7:30am–1:30pm.

The French Verandah ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL The island's finest dining is at one of the candlelit tables on the waterfront terrace of Mariners Hotel, overlooking Villa Beach. There is an elegance to the service and setting, the cuisine is well crafted, and the ingredients first rate. There is a harmonious blending of regional dishes and French favorites, such as a choice between Vincentian callaloo and conch soup or else snails in garlic butter. Many international dishes also appear in the chef's repertoire, including lobster crepes or fish salad Tahitian style. Our favorite main courses are the grilled yellowfin tuna or the shrimp in a mango-and-coconut salsa, the latter with real island flavor. Classic French main courses also appear on the menu, including grilled beef tenderloin with a black-pepper sauce.

Villa Bay. ✆ **784/457-4000**. Reservations recommended. Light lunches $8.50–$19; dinner main courses $23–$39. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

L'Aubergine des Grenadines ★ FRENCH/CARIBBEAN On the waterfront opening onto Admiralty Bay, this operation is popular with yachties, locals, and visitors alike. With its wood tables and high ceilings, it offers as a special feature a lobster tank. With your guaranteed fresh catch, the lobster can be grilled to your specifications. The couple who runs the place consistently turns out excellent fare, including appetizers such as salads made with fresh conch or goat cheese. The mussels come all the way from New Zealand, and they are awash in garlic and butter. For a main course, we go for the lobster flamed with old dark rum or the seafood platter with the likes of shrimp, mussels, fresh

white fish, and lobster. The seafood curry has mussels, shrimp, and lobster cooked delectably in coconut milk.

Belmont Walkway, Belmont. ✆ **784/458-3201.** Reservations recommended in winter. Main courses $10–$50; fixed-price menu $28–$42. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9:30pm.

Lime N' Pub Restaurant ★ (Value) WEST CARIBBEAN/INDIAN/INTERNATIONAL Opposite superexpensive Young Island Hotel on Young Island Channel sits one of the island's most popular restaurants. It's the most congenial pub on St. Vincent, with a wide selection of pub grub, including pizza. In the more formal section of this indoor and alfresco restaurant, you can partake of some good West Indian food, along with dishes from India or the international kitchen. The *roti* wins high praise, but we always order fresh fish and lobster (from the live lobster pond). Don't faint when you see the highest price of a main course listed below. That's actually the superexpensive cost of lobster, but the meal is big enough for two dinners. The coconut shrimp is usually excellent. Service is among the most hospitable on the island.

Opposite Young Island at Villa Beach. ✆ **784/458-4227.** Main courses $35–$61; pub grub $9.30–$61. AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–midnight.

Rooftop Restaurant & Bar WEST INDIAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant does a thriving business, thanks to its well-prepared food. Even though the restaurant has moved to a ground-floor location opposite the Bayview parking lot, it retains its original name from when it was a rooftop eatery. Lunches stress traditional Creole recipes using fresh fish, chicken, mutton, beef, and goat. Dinners are more international and may include lobster, excellent snapper with lemon-butter and garlic sauce, steaks with onions and mushrooms, and several savory preparations of pork. Every Friday there's a barbecue and a steel band after 6pm. In addition, 60 different drinks are featured at the bar.

Lower Bay St., Kingstown. ✆ **784/457-2845.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Lunch platters $11; dinner main courses $9.30–$16. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

Sapodilla Room ★ CARIBBEAN In this previously recommended hotel on a hillside overlooking Kingstown, this is intimate dining at its best on island. Much of the produce served here comes from the lush tropical island itself. The air-conditioned restaurant lies on the ground floor. The evening begins in the West Indies Bar, which evokes an old British pub; it's decorated with movie star photographs. Later you are shown to your table to peruse the daily menu, including the catch of the day. The chef makes succulent pastas and has a winning way with an array of meat and poultry dishes. He successfully imbues each dish with island flavor.

Kingstown Park, Kingstown. ✆ **784/458-1800.** Reservations required. Main courses $20–$41. MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–9pm.

Young Island Resort Restaurant ★★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL St. Vincent's best dining is on this 14-hectare (35-acre) private island lying off Villa Beach that's reached by a 5-minute scenic ride on the hotel's launch. An evening at this restaurant, under thatched kiosks near the beach and surrounded by tropical gardens, will be your most romantic night on St. Vincent. Patrons are treated to lavish and elegant buffets twice a week.

Fresh local fish, fruit, and vegetables are served. We always enjoy their freshly baked bread—banana, raisin, cinnamon, wheat, coconut, or just plain white with lots of butter The lunch menu changes frequently but is likely to feature the catch of the day. Go in

the evening for the most glamorous experience and order the five-course dinner, which changes nightly.

Young Island. ✆ **784/458-4826.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$19 lunch, $20–$50 dinner; Sun lunch buffet $25; Sat barbecue buffet $68. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30am–midnight.

4 EXPLORING ST. VINCENT

BEACHES

All beaches on mainland St. Vincent are public, and many of the best bordered hotels, where you can order drinks or lunch. Most of the resorts are in the south, where the beaches have golden-yellow sand. The only real white-sand beach is on Young Island, which is private. (See "Where to Stay on St. Vincent," earlier in this chapter, for a review of Young Island Resort.) Many of the beaches in the north have sands of a lava-ash color. The safest swimming is on the leeward beaches; the surf on the windward or eastern beaches is often rough and can be quite dangerous.

The island's most popular strip is narrow **Villa Beach,** only a 10-minute drive from Kingstown. Its tranquil waters make swimming safe, and there are numerous simple cafes and watersports stands. Unfortunately, this beach can barely accommodate the crowds who flock here; weekends can be particularly bad.

Nearby **Indian Bay Beach** is similar to Villa Beach and also attracts lots of Vincentians on weekends. Monday to Thursday, however, you'll probably have plenty of room on this narrow strip. The sand is slightly golden but tends to be rocky. The reef-protected tranquil waters are ideal for both swimming and snorkeling. You'll find both bars and restaurants here.

Heading north from Kingstown, you'll reach **Buccament Bay Beach,** where the waters are clean, clear, and tranquil enough for swimming. This beach is very tiny, however, and it has black volcanic sand. In the same area, **Questelle's Bay Beach** (pronounced Keet-*ells*) is also on the leeward, tranquil Caribbean side of the island. This black-sand beach, next to Camden Park, is very similar to Buccament Bay.

Only die-hards head for the beaches on the east coast, or windward side, where the big breakers roll in from the Atlantic. Don't plan to go swimming in these rough waters; you might just enjoy a beach picnic instead. The best beaches, all with black volcanic sand, are found at **Kearton's Bay, Richmond Beach,** and **Peter's Hope,** all reached along the leeward highway running up the west coast of St. Vincent.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

FISHING It's best to go to a local fisherman for advice, but your hotel can also arrange a trip for you. It's sometimes possible to accompany a fisherman on a trip, perhaps 6 or 8km (3¾ or 5 miles) from shore. A modest fee should suffice. The fishing fleet leaves from the leeward coast at Barrouallie. People have been known to return to shore with everything from a 15cm (6-in.) redfish to a 6m (20-ft.) pilot whale. Visitors don't need a fishing license.

HIKING Exploring St. Vincent's hot volcano, **La Soufrière,** is an intriguing adventure. As you travel the island, you can't miss its cloud-capped splendor. The most recent eruption was back in 1979, when it spewed ashes, lava, and hot mud that covered the vegetation on its slopes. Belching rocks and black curling smoke filled the blue Caribbean sky. About 17,000 people were evacuated from a 15km (9¼-mile) ring around the volcano.

Fun Facts All This & Johnny Depp, Too

While scouting a location for its *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie series, Disney officials settled on St. Vincent for its virtually untouched coastline that seemingly belongs back in the 1800s.

At the rim of the crater, you'll be rewarded with one of the most panoramic views in the Caribbean—that is, if the wind doesn't blow too hard and make you topple over into the crater itself! ***Warning:*** Use extreme caution. Looking inside, you can see the steam rising from the crater.

Even if you're an experienced hiker, don't attempt to explore the volcano without a guide. Wear suitable hiking clothes and be sure that you're in the best of health before making the arduous journey. The easiest route is the 5km-long (3-mile) eastern approach from Rabacca. The more arduous trail, longer by 2km (1 1/4 miles), is the western trail from Chateaubelair. The round-trip to the crater takes about 5 hours.

St. Vincent Forestry Headquarters, in the village of Campden Park, about 5km (3 miles) from Kingstown along the west coast (✆ **784/457-8594**), provides information about hiking to La Soufrière. It's open Monday to Friday from 8am to noon and 1 to 4pm. **HazEco Tours** (✆ **784/457-8634;** www.hazecotours.com) offers guided hikes up to La Soufrière, costing $150 per couple, including drinks and lunch.

If you don't want to face Soufrière, the best hikes are the **Vermont Nature Trails.** These marked trails (get a map at the tourist office) take you through a rainforest and pass long-ago plantations reclaimed by nature. If it's your lucky day, you might even see the rare St. Vincent parrot with its flamboyant plumage. Wear good hiking shoes and lots of mosquito repellent.

SAILING & YACHTING ★★ St. Vincent and the Grenadines are one of the great sailing centers of the Caribbean. If you want to go barefooting, you can obtain a fully provisioned yacht. If you're a well-heeled novice, you can hire a captain and a crew. Rentals are available for a half-day, a full day, overnight, or even longer.

The longest-established yacht-chartering company in St. Vincent, **Barefoot Yacht Charters,** Blue Lagoon (✆ **784/456-9526;** www.barefootyachts.com), is better than ever and is now granting substantial discounts for last-minute or walk-in bookings. The outfitter has a fleet of 25 yachts run by the American Sailing Association and offers charters with or without a crew. Its operation is at its own custom-built marina with docks and moorings, along with a restaurant opening onto a panoramic vista of Bequia. There's even an Internet cafe. In winter, and depending on the vessel rented, rates range from $425 to $900 per day, with off-season prices going from $255 to $540. We also recommend **Nicholson Yacht Charters ★★** (✆ **800/662-6066** in the U.S., or 617/661-0555; www.yachtvacations.com). Prices at Nicholson are roughly comparable to those at Barefoot Yacht Charters.

SNORKELING & SCUBA DIVING ★★ St. Vincent's 30 or so dive sites are sprinkled along its leeward shore, where you might spot seahorses and frogfish. The best area for snorkeling and scuba diving is the Villa/Young Island section on the southern end of the island.

Dive St. Vincent, on the Young Island Cut (✆ **784/457-4928;** www.divestvincent.com), has been owned and operated by a transplanted Texan, Bill Tewes, since 1984. St.

Vincent's oldest and best dive company, it now has an additional shop, **Grenadines Dive,** at the Sunny Grenadines Hotel on Union Island (✆ **784/458-8138**). Also try **Dive Canouan,** at the Tamarind Beach Hotel on Canouan Island (✆ **784/482-0820**). They offer dive/snorkel trips as well as sightseeing day-trips and dive instruction. Single-tank dives cost $70, and two-tank dives go for $105, including all equipment and instructors and/or dive-master guides. Dive packages are also available.

EXPLORING KINGSTOWN

Though lush and tropical, the capital isn't as architecturally significant as Grenada's St. George's. There are some English-style houses, many of which look as though they belonged in Penzance or Cornwall rather than the Caribbean. This is a chief port and gateway to the Grenadines, and you can see the small boats and yachts that have dropped anchor here. On Saturday morning, the **market** at the south end of town is at its most active.

At the top of a winding road on the north side of Kingstown, **Fort Charlotte** was built on Johnson Point around the time of the American Revolution. The ruins aren't much—the reason to come here is the view. The fort sits atop a steep promontory some 190m (623 ft.) above the sea. From its citadel, you'll have a sweeping view of the leeward shores to the north, Kingstown to the south, and the Grenadines beyond. On a clear day, you can even see Grenada. Three cannons used to fight off French troops are still in place and there's a series of oil murals depicting the history of black Caribs. Admission is free, and the fort is open daily 6am to 6pm.

The second major sight is the **Botanic Gardens** ★, on the north side of Kingstown at Montrose (✆ **784/457-1003**). Founded in 1765 by Gov. George Melville, these are the oldest botanic gardens in the West Indies. You'll see 8 hectares (20 acres) of such tropical exotics as teak, almond, cinnamon, nutmeg, cannonball, and mahogany; some of the trees are more than 200 years old. One of the breadfruit trees was reputedly among those original seedlings brought to this island by Captain Bligh in 1793. There's also a large *Spachea perforata* (the Soufrière tree), a species believed to be unique to St. Vincent and not found in the wild since 1812. The gardens are open daily from 8am to 4pm; admission is free, but a tour guide costs $3.70.

THE LEEWARD HIGHWAY ★★

The leeward, or sheltered, west side of the island has the most dramatic scenery. North of Kingstown, you rise into lofty terrain before descending to the water again. There are views in all directions. Here you can see one of the finest petroglyphs in the Caribbean: the massive **Carib Rock,** with a human face carving dating from a.d. 600.

Continuing north, you reach **Barrouallie,** where there's a Carib stone altar. Even if you're not into fishing, you might want to spend some time in this village, where whalers still occasionally set out in brightly painted boats armed with harpoons. While Barrouallie may be one of the few outposts in the world where whaling is legal, Vincentians claim that it doesn't endanger an already endangered species, as so few are caught each year. If one is caught, it's an occasion for festivities.

The highway continues to **Chateaubelair,** the end of the line. Here you can swim at attractive **Richmond Beach** before heading back to Kingstown. In the distance, the volcano, La Soufrière, looms menacingly.

The adventurous set out from here to see the **Falls of Baleine,** 12km (7½ miles) north of Richmond Beach on the northern tip of the island, accessible only by boat. Baleine is

 a freshwater falls that comes from a stream in the volcanic hills. If you're interested in making the trip, check with the tourist office in Kingstown for tour information.

MARRIQUA VALLEY ★

Sometimes known as the Mesopotamia Valley, the Marriqua Valley is one of the lushest cultivated valleys in the eastern Caribbean. Surrounded by mountain ridges, the drive takes you through a landscape planted with nutmeg, cocoa, coconut, breadfruit, and bananas. The road begins at the Vigie Highway, east of the airport. Surrounded by mountain ridges, it opens onto a panoramic view of Grand Bonhomme Mountain, rising 954m (3,129 ft.). At Montréal, you'll come upon natural mineral springs where you can have lunch and take a dip. Only rugged vehicles should make this trip.

Around Kingstown, you can also enjoy the **Queen's Drive,** a scenic loop into the high hills to the east of the capital. From here, the view is panoramic over Kingstown and its yacht-clogged harbor to the Grenadines in the distance.

SHOPPING

St. Vincent isn't a shopping destination, but while you're here, you might pick up some of the Sea Island cotton fabrics and clothing that are local specialties. Vincentian artisans also make pottery, jewelry, and baskets.

Since Kingstown consists of about 12 small blocks, you can walk, browse, and see about everything in a single morning. Try to be in town for the colorful, noisy **Friday-morning market.** You might not purchase anything, but you'll enjoy the riot of color.

If you're searching for regional souvenirs, head for **St. Vincent Craftsmen's Centre,** on Frenches Street in Kingstown (✆ **784/457-2516**), a 4-minute walk from the wharf. Here islanders sell handmade items such as place or floor mats, along with straw products, local paintings, and St. Vincent dolls.

At **Sprott Brothers,** Homeworks, Bay Street (✆ **784/457-1121**), you can buy clothing designed by Vincentians, along with an array of silk-screened T-shirts and even Caribbean-made furniture.

St. Vincent Philatelic Services, Dee's Service Building, Bay Street (✆ **784/457-1911**), is the largest operating bureau in the Caribbean, and its issues are highly acclaimed by stamp collectors around the world.

ST. VINCENT AFTER DARK

Most nightlife centers on the hotels, where activities usually include barbecues and dancing to steel bands. In season, at least one hotel seems to have something planned every night. Beer is extremely cheap at all the places noted.

Aquatic Club, adjacent to the departure point of the ferryboat from St. Vincent to Young Island (✆ **784/458-4205**), is the loudest and most raucous nightspot on St. Vincent; it often features live reggae, soca, or calypso. It's a source of giddy fun to its fans. On Saturday nights, things heat up by 11pm and continue to the wee hours.

Predictably, the hotel with the best entertainment is **Young Island Resort,** Young Island (✆ **784/458-4826**), which in winter hosts live musical entertainment on Wednesday nights. A string band is brought in on Friday night for the manager's sunset cocktail party. Local musicians play on instruments made of bottles, gourds, and bamboo. The week's events are climaxed on Saturday with steel-band music and a barbecue dinner.

Other hot spots include **Club Emotions,** Grenville Street in Kingstown (✆ **784/457-2691**), with dance music and live local bands. It attracts revelers mainly in their 20s and 30s.

If you're in St. Vincent on a Friday night around 8pm, join the locals for a "jump-up" called **Caliaqua Culture Pot,** on the Main Road in Caliaqua. This is really a street party with lots of beer drinking and barbecue, followed by dancing to local bands.

5 THE GRENADINES

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE Four of the Grenadines—Bequia, Mustique, Union Island, and Canouan—have small airports. Service from St. Vincent is by small interisland carriers. **SVG Air** (✆ **800/624-1843** or 784/457-5124; www.svgair.com), one of the longest-established airlines in the region, will fly you in modern five- to nine-seaters to any island within the eastern Caribbean. From St. Vincent the one-way fare to Mustique or Bequia is $23 per person, or else $30 to $32 to Canouan or Union Island, respectively.

BY BOAT The ideal way to go, of course, is to hire your own yacht, as many wealthy visitors do. A far less expensive option is to take a mail, cargo, or passenger boat, as the locals do, but you'll need time and patience. The ferry dock at Kingstown is at the cruise ship terminal. The most-visited island by ferry is Bequia, costing $10 for the 1-hour trip. Two companies compete on this route: **Admiralty Transport** (✆ **784/458-3348**) and the **MV Bequia Express** (✆ **784/458-3472**). Several daily trips are made Monday to Saturday beginning at 8am in St. Vincent; the last trip back from Bequia is at 5pm. On Sunday, the schedules are curtailed, but there are usually two trips—one for morning departures, another for an evening sail.

Some adventurers prefer to take the mail boat, ***MV Barracuda*** (✆ **784/456-5180**), sailing Monday and Thursday mornings from St. Vincent, stopping at Canouan, Mayreau, and Union island. On Saturday, a round-trip takes in every island. The one-way fare to Canouan is $8, to Mayreau $10, and to Union Island $12.

BEQUIA ★★

Only 18 sq. km (7 sq. miles) of land, Bequia (*Beck*-wee) is the largest of the Grenadines. It's the northernmost island in the chain (only 14km/8 3/4 miles south of St. Vincent), offering quiet lagoons, reefs, and long stretches of nearly deserted beaches. Its friendly population of some 5,000 is descended from seafarers and other early adventurers. Some 10% are of Scottish ancestry, living mostly in the Mount Pleasant region. A feeling of relaxation and informality prevails.

Essentials

GETTING AROUND Most visitors find it unnecessary to rent a car, as roads are atrocious. Those wanting to see more of the island might consider a taxi guide. Before going to your hotel, drop in at the **Tourist Information Centre** and ask for a driver who's familiar with the attractions of the island (all of them are). You should negotiate the fare in advance. **Rental cars,** owned by locals, are available at the port, or you can hire a **taxi** at the dock to take you around the island or to your hotel. Taxis are reasonably priced, but an even better bet are the so-called **dollar cabs,** which take you anywhere on the island for a small fee. They don't seem to have a regular schedule—you just flag one down.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tourist Information Centre,** is at Port Elizabeth (✆ **784/458-3286;** www.bequiatourism.com). Hours in winter are Monday to Friday

Special Events

The **Easter Regatta** is held over Easter weekend, with boat races, food, and music. Bequia's **Carnival** celebrations are a 4-day affair, held just before St. Vincent's party in late June.

8:30am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 2pm, and Sunday 9am to noon; off season Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm, Saturday 8:30am to 2pm, and Sunday 9am to noon.

BANKS There are a few bank branches on Bequia, mostly in Port Elizabeth. All have ATMs.

Where to Stay

Firefly Hotel Bequia ★★★ Set on an 11-hectare (28-acre) sugar plantation dating from the 1700s, this is a gem of a little Caribbean inn. Composed of three buildings, it overlooks Bequia's only banana plantation that is also riddled with orange trees, mangoes, and guavas. You can stroll through a coconut palm grove to the white sandy beach at Spring Bay. The location is 3km (1¾ miles) north of Port Elizabeth. The buildings housing the rooms were constructed on a hillside—expect some steep climbs—to capture the trade winds. Bedrooms are beautifully furnished in exquisite taste, with mosquito netting draped over four-poster beds in the colonial plantation style.

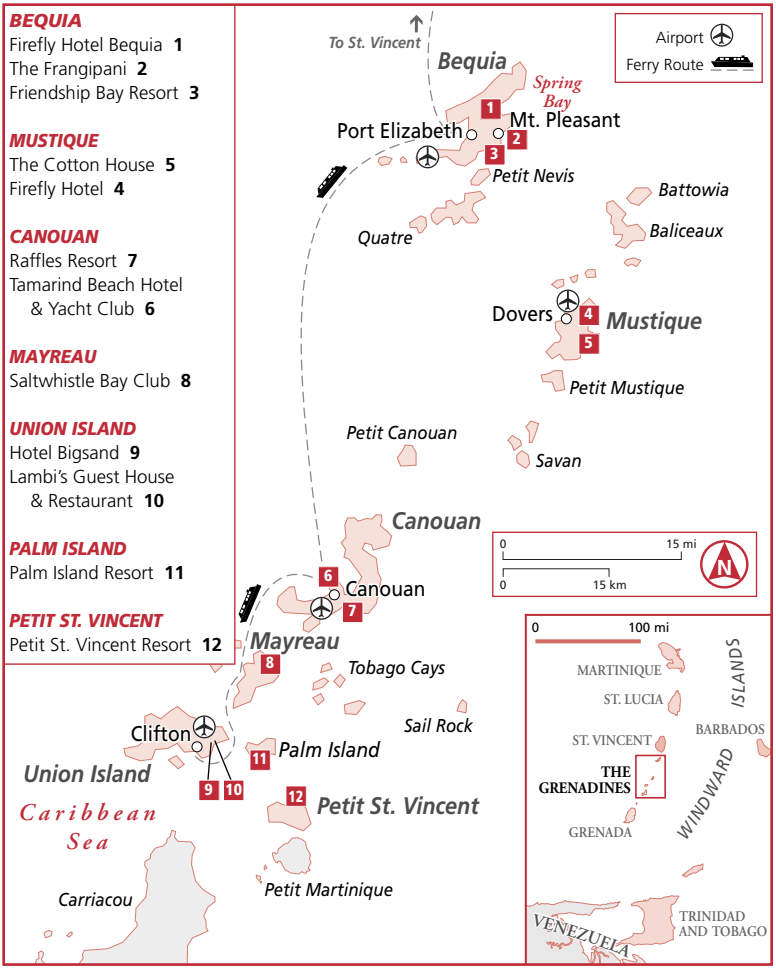
Spring Bay, Bequia, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-3414.** www.fireflybequia.com. 10 units. Winter $495–$675 double; off season $395 double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; airport transfers; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; watersports. *In room:* Ceiling fans, fridge (in some).

The Frangipani ★★ This local favorite of yachties is a great hangout, its ambience created by James Mitchell, longtime prime minister of the island chain. The core of this pleasant guesthouse originated as the home of a 19th-century sea captain. Since it was transformed into a hotel, it has added accommodations that border a sloping tropical garden in back. The complex overlooks the island's historic harbor, Admiralty Bay. The five rooms in the original house are smaller and much less glamorous (and less expensive) than the better-outfitted accommodations in the garden. The garden units are hand-crafted from local stone and hardwoods, and have tile floors, carpets of woven hemp, wooden furniture (some made on St. Vincent), and balconies.

Guests can play tennis or arrange scuba dives, sailboat rides, or other watersports nearby. The nearest scuba outfitter, **Dive Adventures,** is fully accredited by PADI (✆ **784/458-3826;** www.bequiadiveadventures.com).

Admiralty Bay (P.O. Box 1), Bequia, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-3255.** Fax 784/458-3824. www.frangipanibequia.com. 15 units, 10 with bathroom. Winter $75 double without bathroom, $165–$250 double with bathroom; off season $55 double without bathroom, $110–$165 double with bathroom. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; limited room service; tennis court; boating; nearby dive shop; private yacht charter. *In room:* TV, ceiling fan, fridge (in some), no phone, Wi-Fi.

Friendship Bay Resort ★ More comfortable and stylish than Frangipani, this beachfront resort offers well-decorated rooms with private verandas, nestled in 5 hectares (12 acres) of tropical gardens. The complex stands on a sloping hillside above one of the best white-sand beaches on the island, at Friendship Cove. Guests have a view of the sea



and neighboring islands. Brightly colored curtains, handmade wall hangings, and grass rugs decorate the rooms, which are cooled by the trade winds and ceiling fans (in lieu of air-conditioning). Driftwood and various flotsam art, along with sponge-painted walls, evoke the sea. The accommodations have generous storage space and beds draped in mosquito netting. The most-requested units are those set directly on the ocean.

Friendship Cove (P.O. Box 9), Bequia, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-3222.** Fax 784/458-3840. www.friendshipbay.vc. 28 units. Winter $266–$315 double, $375–$625 suite; off season $175–$229 double, $340–$625 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; tennis court; boating; dive shop; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C (in some), ceiling fan, no phone.

Where to Dine

The food here is good and healthy—lobster, chicken, and steaks from such fish as mahi-mahi, kingfish, and grouper, plus tropical fruits, fried plantains, and coconut and guava puddings made fresh daily. Even the beach bars are kept spotless.

Frangipani ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This waterside dining room, always full of yachties, is one of the best restaurants on the island. With the exception of the juicy steaks imported for barbecues, only local food is used in the specialties. Lunches, served throughout the day, include sandwiches, salads, and seafood platters. Dinner specialties include homemade soup, conch chowder, baked chicken with rice-and-coconut stuffing, lobster, and an array of fresh fish. A Thursday-night barbecue with live entertainment is an island event.

In the Frangipani Hotel, Port Elizabeth. ✆ **784/458-3255.** Reservations required for dinner. Breakfast $3.20–$9.30; lunch main courses $3.70–$24; dinner main courses $10–$33; fixed-price dinner $20–$50. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–3pm and 6:30–10pm. Closed Sept.

Le Petit Jardin ★ INTERNATIONAL Set in a varnished wooden house behind the post office, this restaurant is the slow-moving but likable creation of the Belmar family, who use as many fresh ingredients as the vagaries of the local fishing fleet will allow. You'll dine within view of a garden, in a likable ambience inspired by both the British and French West Indies. Menu items include grilled swordfish with lemon sauce, grilled lobster, shrimp and vegetable kabobs, chipped steak in cream sauce, and conventional grilled sirloin.

Backstreet, Port Elizabeth. ✆ **784/458-3318.** Reservations required. Main courses $30–$41. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10pm.

Moskito Beach Bar and Grill INTERNATIONAL/WEST INDIAN The trade winds cool you as you dine in the open air at this previously recommended resort. Lunch is served at the Spicy 'n Herby beach bar, but dinner is more elaborate. Meals, based on fresh ingredients, might include grilled lobster in season, curried beef, grilled or broiled fish (served Creole style with a spicy sauce), shrimp curry, and charcoal-grilled steak flambé. Dishes are flavorful and well prepared. A lobster barbecue is presented Wednesday night, with a pig roast on Sunday.

Port Elizabeth. ✆ **784/458-3222.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Fixed-price lunch $9.60–$18; main courses $21–$34. MC, V. Daily 8am–9:30pm. Closed Sept to mid–Oct.

Exploring Bequia

Obviously, the secluded beaches are at the top of everyone's list of Bequia's attractions. As you walk along the beaches, especially near Port Elizabeth, you'll see craftspeople building boats by hand, a method passed on by their ancestors. Whalers sometimes still set out from here in wooden boats with harpoons. Some beaches require a taxi ride. You might check out the uncrowded, pristine white sands at **Friendship Bay,** where you can rent watersports equipment or order a drink from the bar at the hotel. **Industry Bay** and **Lower Bay** are both gorgeous beaches shaded by palm trees, offering good swimming and snorkeling.

Dive Bequia, Gingerbread House, Admiralty Bay (P.O. Box 199), Bequia (✆ **784/458-3504;** www.dive-bequia.com), specializes in diving and snorkeling on the lush reefs of Bequia, where you might spot manta rays. Scuba dives cost $70 for one dive or $106 for two dives in the same day; a 10-dive package goes for $525. A four-dive open-water certification course is $525. Snorkeling trips are $30 per person, and these prices include all the necessary equipment.

The main harbor village, **Port Elizabeth,** is known for its safe anchorage, Admiralty Bay. The bay was a haven in the 17th century for the British, French, and Spanish navies, as well as for pirates. Descendants of Captain Kydd (or Kidd) still live on the island. Today the yachting set anchors here.

Shopping

Anyone on the island can show you the way to the workshops of **Sargeant's Model Boatshop Bequia,** Front Street, Port Elizabeth (✆ **784/458-3344**), west of the pier past the oil-storage facility. Sought out by yacht owners looking for a scale-model reproduction of their favorite vessel, Lawson Sargeant is the self-taught woodcarver who established this business. The models are carved from white pine and mahogany, and then painted brilliant colors. When a scale model of the royal family's yacht, *Britannia,* was commissioned in 1985, it required 5 weeks of work. You can pick up a model of a Bequia whaling boat for much less.

MUSTIQUE ★★★

This island of luxury villas, which someone once called "Georgian West Indian," is so remote and small that it would be unknown—if it didn't attract the likes of Paul Newman, Mick Jagger, Raquel Welch, Richard Avedon, Tommy Hilfiger, and Prince Andrew, many of whom have cottages here. Its most famous resident was the late Princess Margaret.

The island, privately owned by a consortium of businesspeople, is only 5km (3 miles) long and 2km (1¼-miles) wide, and it has only one major hotel (the Cotton House). It's located 24km (15 miles) south of St. Vincent. After settling in, you'll find many good white-sand beaches against a backdrop of luxuriant foliage. Our favorite is **Macaroni Beach,** where the water is turquoise, the sands are pure white, and a few trees shade the picnic tables. If you've come over on a day trip, you might go to **Britannia Bay,** which is next to the jetty and close to Basil's Bar.

On the northern reef of Mustique lies the wreck of the French liner *Antilles,* which ran aground on the Pillories in 1971. Its massive hulk, now gutted, can be seen cracked and rusting a few yards offshore—an eerie sight.

If you want to tour the small island, you can rent a **Mini-Moke** (a small golf cart–like car) to see some of the most elegant homes in the Caribbean, including the late Princess Margaret's place, **Les Jolies Eaux (Pretty Waters).**

Getting There & Getting Around

This posh island is serviced by **Mustique Airways,** which runs only private charter flights. For information and reservations, call **Grenadine Airways** at ✆ **784/456-6793.**

Once here, you can call a taxi (✆ **784/488-8000,** ext. 448), but chances are, someone at the Cotton House will already have seen you land.

Where to Stay

The Cotton House ★★★ The Caribbean's most exclusive hotel is as casually elegant and sophisticated as its clientele. The 18th-century main house is built of coral and stone, and it was painstakingly restored, reconstructed, and redecorated by Oliver Messel, uncle by marriage to Princess Margaret. The antique loggia, arched louvered doors, and cedar shutters set the style. The decor includes everything from Lady Bateman's steamer trunks to a scallop-shell fountain on a quartz base. Guests go between two beaches, each only a couple of minutes away on foot—Endeavour Bay, on the leeward side, with calmer waters, and L'Ansecoy, on the other side. Guest rooms are in five fully restored Georgian

houses, a trio of cottages, a newer block of four rooms, and a five-room beach house, all of which open onto windswept balconies or patios. The Tower Suite is one of the most luxurious of the accommodations, filling the entire second floor. The most expensive residence is Cotton Hill, a 2-bedroom villa with a private pool.

Endeavour Bay, Mustique (P.O. Box 349), The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **888/452-8380** from U.S. or 784/456-4777. Fax 784/456-5887. www.cottonhouse.net. 17 units. Winter $995–$1,520 double, $1,745–$3,860 suite; off season $700–$1,175 double, $1,295–$2,890 suite. Rates include MAP (breakfast and dinner). AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; exercise room; outdoor pool; room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; boating; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar.

Firefly Hotel ★ (Finds) This stone house, constructed in 1972, is one of the first homes ever built by an expatriate English or North American on Mustique. It functioned as a simple, not particularly glamorous B&B until the late 1990s, when Sussex-born Elizabeth Clayton spent huge sums of money to upgrade and enlarge the hotel and its restaurant. Although it contains only five bedrooms, it thrives as one of the most consistently popular and animated bars and restaurants (see below) on an island where lots of the expatriate residents enjoy partying into the wee hours. Each of the rooms has Caribbean decor, ceiling fans, mahogany furniture, an antique four-poster bed, and a bathroom with a plunge pool.

Britannia Bay (P.O. Box 349), Mustique, The Grenadines, W.I. ✆ **784/488-8414.** Fax 784/488-8514. www.fireflymustique.com. 5 units. Winter $950–$1,200 double; off season $850–$1,100 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. Children 11 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; tennis (nearby); snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar.

Where to Dine

Basil's Beach Bar ★ SEAFOOD/CARIBBEAN Nobody ever visits this island of indigenous farmers and fishermen without spending a night at Basil's, which looks straight out of the South Seas with its wooden deck, open-air dance floor, and thatched roof. Built on piers above the sea, the beach bar is a popular gathering place for yachties sailing the Grenadines. Some people come for drinks and the panoramic view, but Basil's also has a reputation as one of the finest seafood restaurants in the Caribbean. Everything is simple but well prepared. You can dine under the open-air sunscreens or in the sun. On Wednesday night in winter, you can "jump-up" at a barbecue, and there's live music on Mondays. A boutique is also on the premises.

13 Britannia Bay. ✆ **784/488-8350.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $30–$44. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm. Bar daily 8am until "very late."

The Restaurant at Firefly ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL This is one of the island's most consistently popular restaurants, characterized by its bright tropical colors and open-air terraces, a busy bar area where you're likely to see Mustique's glitterati at play, and a menu that's the byproduct of a European-trained chef whose earlier venues were very grand and very prestigious. Some of the establishment's tried-and-true dishes include spicy Caribbean crab cakes and pineapple-shrimp curry with rice. Other entrees change with the season and the inspiration of the chef. The drink associated with this place is the Firefly Special, made with coconut cream, two kinds of rum, fresh papaya, and nutmeg. Don't miss the banana flambé.

In the Firefly Hotel, Britannia Bay. ✆ **784/488-8414.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses $44. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm. Bar daily 8am–midnight.

CANOUAN ★★

In the shape of a half-circle, Canouan rises from its sandy beaches to the 240m-high (787-ft.) peak of Mount Royal in the north, where you'll find unspoiled forests of white cedar. Twenty-three kilometers (14 miles) south of St. Vincent and 32km (20 miles) north of Grenada, Canouan has a population of fewer than 2,000 people, many of whom fish for a living and live in **Retreat Village,** the island's only village.

Only 6×2km (3¾×1¼ miles), Canouan is surrounded by long ribbons of absolutely gorgeous powdery white-sand beaches and blue lagoons. The surrounding coral reefs teem with life, making for great diving. As for snorkeling, it's the best this side of the Maldives.

Getting There

Reaching Canouan by air is slightly different from traveling to the other islands of the Grenadines. **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 784/456-5555) flies nonstop from San Juan to Canouan. **SVG Air,** in St. Vincent (✆ **784/457-5124**), makes two daily flights to Canouan at a cost of $330 round-trip.

Where to Stay

Raffles Resort ★★ Named after the famous hotel of Singapore, this villa-studded resort opens onto a beautiful white-sand beach set on 120 hectares (296 acres). Opening onto Carenage Bay, each of the accommodations is a villa suite. The golf course has been extended to a full 18 holes, and a deluxe European-style casino has been added. Each suite comes with its own private terrace. Decorated in pastels, the bedrooms have a light, airy, tropical feel. Rooms come in a variety of categories, from deluxe through luxurious suites. The Caribbean's largest hotel pool is one of the allures.

Carenage Bay, Canouan, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-8000.** Fax 784/458-8885. www.raffles.com. 156 units. Winter $890 double, $1,450 suite; off season $525 double, $900 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; children's club; fitness center; 18-hole golf course; outdoor pool; children's pool; casino; room service; spa; 4 tennis courts; boat excursions. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Tamarind Beach Hotel & Yacht Club ★ Italian-owned and -managed, this idyllic inn opens onto the long white sands of Grand Bay Beach. Thatched-roof bungalow-style hideaways, each enveloped by tropical gardens, are called seaside hideaways here—and so they are. Rooms have private balconies or patios, wicker furnishings, louvered wooden doors, and wood walls. Whirling ceiling fans go night and day. The staff provides several thoughtful touches, such as leaving a tropical fruit basket in your bedroom. The staff will help you arrange "island safaris" to such neighboring sandy strips as the Tobago Cays. Although everything is imported, the food is good and is served at water's edge on an open terrace with a view of the boats.

Charlestown, Canouan, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-8044.** Fax 784/458-8851. www.tamarindbeachhotel.com. 39 units. Winter $325 double, $610 suite; off season $250 double, $480 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $70 per person extra. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; spa; dive shop; sailing; scuba diving; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV (in some), fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

Where to Dine

Jambu's ★ CHINESE/ASIAN The best Chinese and Asian food in this tiny archipelago nation is served here at the chic Raffles Resort. Many of the dishes have flavors familiar to Singaporeans. With these Far East flavors, regional ingredients are often used as well, making for some intriguing combinations. It's a true East-meets-West kitchen.

The Chinese "tapas" alone would make a meal unto themselves—coconut seafood *tom yam* soup, pan-seared marinated duck with hoisin sauce in rice-paper rolls, or delectable soft-shell crab and lobster wontons. The barracuda served comes from the Caribbean, but the red chili curry paste is from the Pacific. Lemon grass–crusted lamb chops are another celestial delight. Opt for a beach-bordering table where candles flicker in the trade winds at the island's most romantic spot.

Carenage Bay in the Raffles Resort. ✆ **784/458-8000.** Reservations required. Main courses $13–$56 lunch, $15–$74 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 7–11pm.

Diving & Golf

Spread over more than 24 hectares (60 acres) with panoramic sea views, **Trump International Golf Club** ★★★, at the Raffles Resort on Carenage Bay (✆ **784/458-8000**), is an 18-hole, par-72 championship course designed by Jim Fazio. The course soars 252m (840 ft.) above sea level to the 13th tee, and holes 11 to 15 teeter on a knife's edge ride. Several golf magazines have named this course one of the best in the world. Greens fees for 18 holes are $200 for hotel guests or $280 for visitors. Available at the pro shop are carts, rental clubs, and even golf instruction.

The best dive center is **Canouan Dive Center,** next to the previously recommended Tamarind Beach Hotel at Charlestown (✆ **784/482-0820**), offering scuba diving for all levels of experience. The island itself has some of the finest diving in the Southern Caribbean, and you can also go on dives to the Tobago Cays, mayreau, and Union Island. This is a full PADI resort, offering training by master scuba divers. With equipment, prices range from $75 per one-tank dive, going up to $105 for two-tank dives, and with PADI courses costing from $105 to $875, depending on your requirements.

MAYREAU ★

A tiny cay, 4 sq. km (1 1/2 sq. miles) of land, Mayreau is a privately owned island shared by a hotel and a little hilltop village of about 250 inhabitants. It's on the route of the mail boat that plies the seas to and from St. Vincent. (See "Getting There" at the beginning of this section.) It's completely sleepy unless a cruise ship anchors offshore and hustles its passengers over for a lobster barbecue on the beach.

Where to Stay & Dine

Saltwhistle Bay Club ★ (Finds) Slightly less formal and expensive than the Petit St. Vincent Resort on Petit St. Vincent (see below), to which it's frequently compared, Saltwhistle Bay Club caters to escapists with money. You can spend your days lolling in one of the hammocks strung among the trees in the 8-hectare (20-acre) tropical garden, perhaps taking a swim off the expanse of white-sand beaches that curve along both the leeward and windward sides of the island, or the staff will take you to a little uninhabited island nearby for a Robinson Crusoe–style picnic. Set back from the beach, the accommodations were built by local craftspeople, using local stone and tropical woods like purpleheart and greenheart. Inside, the spacious cottages have an almost medieval feel, with thick stone walls and dark-wood furnishings.

Mayreau Island, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-8444.** Fax 784/458-8944. www.saltwhistlebay.com. 10 units. Winter $480 double; off season $360 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. Take the private hotel launch from the airport on Union Island ($60 per person round-trip). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; room service; boating; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

Fun Facts Special Events

Over Easter weekend, **Easterval** features boat races, a calypso competition, and the Big Drum Dance, a festive cultural show that highlights the islanders' African heritage.

UNION ISLAND

Midway between Grenada and St. Vincent, Union Island is one of the southernmost of the Grenadines. It's known for its dramatic 270m (886-ft.) peak, Mount Parnassus, which yachters can see from miles away. For those cruising in the area, Union is the port of entry for St. Vincent. Yachters are required to check in with Customs upon entry.

Essentials

GETTING THERE The island is reached by chartered or scheduled aircraft, cargo boat, private yacht, or mail boat. (See "Getting There," at the beginning of section 5, "The Grenadines.")

Where to Stay & Dine

The beachside restaurant at Hotel Bigsand offers the most sophisticated cuisine, a fusion blend of West Indian and European. Nothing seems to beat the locally caught lobster at dinner, although there is an array of other dishes.

Hotel Bigsand Opening right onto a beach of white powdery sand, this is the best place to stay on island. Rooms face the sea, with private balconies opening onto views of a tranquil bay. Rooms are individually designed and decorated, but we don't want to oversell them. They rarely rise above the standard of a good, decent motel. The simplest rooms are studios with a small garden and a view terrace; superior rooms live up to their names in space and better furnishings. For those willing to shell out more bucks, there are both deluxe and honeymoon suites for rent.

Richmond Bay, Union Island, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/485-8447.** Fax 784/485-8448. www.bigsandhotel.com. 20 units. Mar 14–24 $250–$300 double, $345–$375 suite; Dec 1–Mar 13 $170–$200 double, $230–$250 suite. AE, MC, V. Closed Mar 25–Nov 30. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, Wi-Fi.

Lambi's Guest House & Restaurant Value CREOLE/SEAFOOD *Lambi* means "conch" in Creole patois, and if you've never tried this shellfish, this is a good place to do so. Built partially on stilts on the waterfront in Clifton, this is also one of the best places to sample the local cuisine. You can order various fresh fish platters, depending on the catch of the day, and lobster is frequently available. You can also order chicken, steak, lamb, or pork chops, but all this is shipped in frozen. Fresh vegetables are used whenever possible. In winter, a steel band entertains nightly in the bar. Other entertainment includes limbo dancers or fire dancing.

Upstairs are 41 dormitory-style rooms for rent, each with two double beds, ceiling fans, and a tiny, tiny bathroom. They go for $26 single, $33 double, and $46 triple.

Clifton Harbour, Union Island, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **784/458-8549.** Main courses $13–$35. No credit cards. Daily 7am–11pm.

PALM ISLAND ★

Is this island a resort or is the resort the island? Casual elegance prevails on these 52 hectares (128 acres) in the southern Grenadines. Surrounded by five white-sand beaches, this private island is sometimes called Prune, so we can easily understand the more appealing name change. This little islet offers complete peace and quiet, with plenty of sea, sand, sun, and sailing.

To get to Palm Island, you must first fly to Union Island. From Union Island, a hotel launch will take you to Palm Island.

Where to Stay

Palm Island Resort ★★★ Tranquillity reigns at this all-inclusive resort with its five white-sand beaches. This exclusive and remote retreat has come a long way since its founder, John Caldwell ("Coconut Johnny"), began planting palms here to give the island a lush, tropical look. The posh retreat consists of a cluster of units contained in 22 Caribbean cottages. Bedrooms capture the spirit of the Grenadines, occupying both standard guest rooms and "tree houses," each with custom-designed bamboo and rattan furnishings and balconies or patios opening onto the view. The romantic tree houses have high-peaked ceilings, breezy balconies, and four-poster bamboo beds. In addition to the regular accommodations, the Plantation House boasts four bedrooms, each with queen-size beds. Children are allowed April 2 to January 2.

Palm Island, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **888/237-2157** in the U.S., or 784/458-8824. Fax 784/458-8804. www.palmislandresortgrenadines.com. 37 units. Winter $685–$915 double, $920–$1,380 cottages and suites; off season $650 double, $795–$875 cottages and suites. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; bikes; fitness room; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; tennis court; fishing; marina; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, minibar, no phone.

PETIT ST. VINCENT ★

A private island 6km (3 3/4 miles) from Union Island in the southern Grenadines, this speck of land is rimmed with white-sand beaches. On 45 hectares (111 acres), it's an out-of-this-world corner of the Caribbean that's only for self-sufficient types who want to escape just about everything.

The easiest way to get to Petit St. Vincent is to fly to Union Island via St. Vincent. Make arrangements with the hotel to have its "PSV boat" pick you up on Union Island. This is the southernmost of St. Vincent's Grenadines.

Where to Stay

Petit St. Vincent Resort ★★★ This nautical-chic resort lies on a lush 45-hectare (111-acre) property. It's the only place to stay on the island. Open to the trade winds, this self-contained cottage colony was designed by a Swedish architect, Arne Hasselquist, who used purpleheart wood and the local stone, blue bitch (yes, that's right), for the walls. Some cottages are built on a hillside, with great views, and some are set close to the beach. Cottages open onto big outdoor patios and are cooled by trade winds and ceiling fans. Each of the spacious accommodations has an ample living area, two daybeds, a good-size bedroom with two queen-size beds, Caribbean-style wicker and rattan furnishings, and a large patio with a hammock. For payment, personal checks are accepted and

preferred. When you need something (perhaps a picnic lunch made up for your day on the beach), you simply write out your request, place it in a slot in a bamboo flagpole, and run up the yellow flag.

Petit St. Vincent, The Grenadines, St. Vincent, W.I. ✆ **954/963-7401.** Fax 954/963-7402. www.psvresort.com. 22 units. Winter $860–$1,020 cottage for 2; off season $675–$860 cottage for 2. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. **Amenities:** Dining room; bar; babysitting; fitness trail; room service; tennis court; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar, no phone.

25

Trinidad & Tobago

"Allow 2 days for sightseeing and shopping in Trinidad, then all the time in the world for lounging on the beaches of Tobago," a local advised us. Good advice. Trinidad, although filled with nature's wonder once you leave the capital of Port-of-Spain, is a commercial and industrial hub, while Tobago is more of a tourist destination. Good beaches in Trinidad do exist, but they're out of the way and hard to find. In Tobago you can't miss them.

Trinidad, which is about the size of Delaware, and even tinier Tobago, some 30km (19 miles) to the northeast, form a nation popularly known as "T&T." South African Bishop Desmond Tutu once dubbed it the "Rainbow Country," for its abundance of floral growth and the diversity of its population. The islands are the southernmost outposts of the West Indies. Trinidad lies 11km (6 3/4 miles) from the Paria Peninsula of Venezuela, to which it was physically connected in prehistoric times.

Trinidad exploits its oil, natural gas, and steel industries. But it is also the birthplace of calypso, steel drum music, and the limbo. The island has sophistication and cultural mélange far greater than any other island in the southern Caribbean.

Conversely, Tobago, its sibling island, is just as drowsy as ever—but that's its charm. Through the years, immigrants from almost every corner of the world have come here, and today the island, like Trinidad, is a fascinating mixture of cultures, races, and creeds.

The Spanish founded Trinidad in 1592 and held it longer than they did any of their other real estate in the Caribbean. The English settled Tobago in 1642 and captured Trinidad in 1797. Both islands remained in British hands until the two-island nation declared its independence in 1962. The British influence remains visible today, apparent through the British dialect and the islanders' fondness for cricket.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Asa Wright Nature Centre (Trinidad):** A 90-minute drive north of Port-of-Spain delivers you to this 74-hectare (183-acre) nature reserve, a particular favorite of bird-watchers who "flock" here to see everything from the rare oilbird to tanagers.
- **Port-of-Spain (Trinidad):** Explore Trinidad's capital by starting at an oasis called Queen's Park Savannah and branching out to everything from imposing turn-of-the-20th-century mansions called the "Magnificent Seven" to a jumble of shopping bazaars. Pay a final call at the Royal Botanical Gardens to see everything from a sausage tree to a lipstick plant.
- **The beaches of Tobago:** When a filmmaker, such as the director of *Swiss Family Robinson,* wants a pristine beach, he ships film crews to Tobago, known for having some of the finest strips of sand in the southern Caribbean. From Lovers' Beach to Englishman's Bay, the beaches of Tobago often appear in travel brochures.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Tourism Hotline** for both Trinidad and Tobago is ✆ **888/595-4868** (www.tdc.co.tt). Information in the **United States** is available at 10 E. 21st St., Ste. 600, New York, NY 10010 (✆ **800/816-7541** or 212/529-8484); in **England** at Albany Crescent, Claygate, Surrey KT10 0PF, England (✆ **0800/804-8787** or 00137/246-9818).

Once in Trinidad, you can visit **Maritime Centre,** 29 Tenth Ave., Barataria (✆ **868/675-7034;** www.tdc.co.tt), or the kiosk at **Piarco International Airport,** Piarco (✆ **868/669-5196**).

On Tobago, go to the **Tobago Division of Tourism,** N.I.B. Mall, Level 3, Scarborough (✆ **868/639-2125**), or the information desk at **Crown Point Airport** (✆ **868/639-0509**). You can also check **www.visittobago.gov.tt**.

Fast Facts Trinidad & Tobago

Currency The official currency is the **Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TT$).** As regards the U.S. dollar, one TT$ equals 16¢. Stated inversely, that means that $1 is worth TT$6.25 in Trinidadian currency. As regards the British pound, at press time, TT$1 equaled 10p and £1 = TT$10. When you get to Trinidad or Tobago, be sure to predetermine what currency is being referred to whenever rates are quoted—most places in T&T will accept the Trinidad and Tobago dollar or the U.S. dollar. Smaller local establishments may prefer Trinidad and Tobago dollars. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs To avoid the long delays inherent in clearing Trinidad's Customs (reportedly the worst delays in the southern Caribbean), it helps to arrive during the day. Visitors may bring in 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars plus 1 quart of spirits.

Documents Citizens of the United States, Britain, and Canada need passports and an ongoing or return ticket to enter Trinidad and Tobago. A visa is not required for tourist or business stays of 90 days or less. Save the carbon copy of the immigration card you'll fill out when you arrive. You'll have to return it to immigration officials when you depart.

Electricity The electricity is either 110- or 230-volt AC, so ask when making your hotel reservations if you'll need transformers and/or adapters.

Embassies & High Commissions In Port-of-Spain on Trinidad, the **U.S. Embassy** is at 7–9 Marli St., 15 Queen's Park West (✆ **868/822-5576;** Tues–Thurs 1–4pm); the **Canadian High Commission** is situated at Maple House, 3-3A Sweet Briar Rd., St. Clair (✆ **868/622-6232**); and the **British High Commission** is found at 19 St. Clair Ave., St. Clair (✆ **868/622-2748**).

Emergencies On both Trinidad and Tobago, call the **police** at ✆ **999;** to report a **fire** or summon an **ambulance,** dial ✆ **990.**

Language English is the official language, although you'll hear it spoken with many different accents, especially British. Chinese, French, Spanish, Hindi, and Trinibagianese—a local dialect—are also spoken.

Safety Like neighboring countries such as Colombia and Venezuela, Trinidad is importing a dangerous kidnapping culture. High unemployment and easy money lure newcomers to the kidnapping industry. No one, including tourists, is immune. There is no sure way to prevent kidnappings, but do take the usual precautions—avoid lonely beaches and walking alone at night.

As a general rule, Tobago is safer than Trinidad. Crime does exist on Tobago, but it's not of raging dimensions. If you can, avoid the downtown streets of Port-of-Spain at night, especially those around Independence Square, where muggings have been reported. Evening jaunts down Wilson Street and the Market of Scarborough are also discouraged. Visitors are open prey for pick pockets during Carnival, so be alert during large street parties. It is wise to safeguard your valuables; never leave them unattended at the beach or even in a locked car.

Taxes & Service Charges The government imposes a 15% value-added tax (VAT) on room rates. It also imposes a departure tax of TT$100 or $16 on every passenger over 5 years old, and it must be paid in local currency. The big hotels and restaurants add a 10% to 15% service charge to your final tab.

Telephone The area code for Trinidad and Tobago is **868.** Make calls to or from the islands as you would to any other area code in North America. On either island, just dial the local seven-digit number. For **MCI** call ✆ **800/888-8000,** for **Sprint** ✆ **800/877-8000,** and for **AT&T** ✆ **800/872-2881.**

Time Trinidad and Tobago are in the Eastern Standard Time zone but don't follow daylight saving time; when all time zones are on standard time, time here is the same as the U.S. East Coast. During daylight saving time in the United States, T&T is 1 hour behind (when it's 6am on the East Coast, it's 5am in T&T).

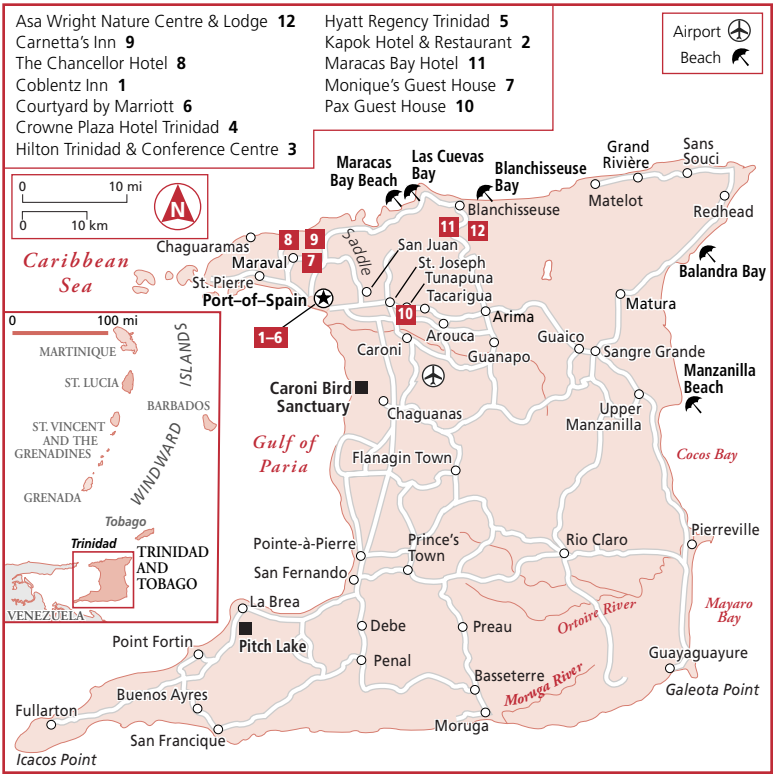
Tipping Tip taxi drivers 10% to 15% of the fare, and tip waiters 10% to 15% of the cost of a meal. Tip skycaps and bellboys $1 per bag.

Water On Trinidad and Tobago, stick to bottled water.

Weather Trinidad has a tropical climate all year, with constant trade winds maintaining mean temperatures of 84°F (29°C) during the day and 74°F (23°C) at night. It rarely gets above 90°F (32°C) or below 70°F (21°C). The rainy season runs from May to November, but it shouldn't deter you from visiting; the rain usually lasts no more than 2 hours before the sun comes out again. However, carry along plenty of insect repellent if you visit then.

2 TRINIDAD

Trinidad is completely different from the other Caribbean islands, which is part of its charm and appeal. It's not for everyone, though. Because **Port-of-Spain,** the capital, is one of the most bustling commercial centers in the Caribbean, more business travelers than tourists are drawn here. The island—approximately 80km (50 miles) long and 65km (40 miles) wide—does have beaches, but the best of them are far away from the capital. The city itself, with a population of about 120,000, is hot, humid, and somewhat dirty. With the opening of its $2-million cruise ship complex, Port-of-Spain has become a major port of call for Caribbean cruise lines.



Although Port-of-Spain, with its shopping centers, fast-food joints, modern hotels, and active nightlife, draws mixed reviews, the countryside is calmer. Far removed from the traffic jams of the capital, you can explore the fauna and flora of the island. It's estimated that there are some 700 varieties of orchids alone, plus 400 species of birds.

Prices on Trinidad are often lower than on many other islands in the West Indies. Port-of-Spain abounds in inexpensive inns and guesthouses. Since most of the restaurants cater to locals, dining prices reflect the low wages.

The people are part of the attraction on Trinidad, the most cosmopolitan island in the Caribbean. The island's polyglot population includes Syrians, Chinese, Americans, Europeans, East Indians, Parsees, Madrasis, Venezuelans, and the last of the original Amerindian settlers of the island. You'll also find Hindustanis, Javanese, Lebanese, African descendants, and Creole mixes. The main religions are Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. In all, there are about 1.2 million inhabitants, whose language is English, although you may also hear the local dialect, Trinibagianese.

One of the most industrialized nations in the Caribbean, and one of the biggest exporters of oil in the Western Hemisphere, Trinidad is also blessed with the huge 46-hectare (114-acre) Pitch Lake, the source of most of the world's asphalt. It's also the home of Angostura Bitters, the recipe for which is a closely guarded secret.

GETTING THERE From the United States, there are nonstop flights to Trinidad from both New York and Miami aboard **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com). Check with **Continental Airlines** (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) for routings from other cities such as Washington, D.C., and Houston.

In addition, **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada, or 868/669-4065; www.aircanada.ca) flies Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday nonstop from Toronto to Trinidad, and **British Airways** (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) has three flights a week (Wed, Thurs, and Sat), leaving year-round from London's Gatwick Airport.

Caribbean Airlines (✆ **800/920-4225** in the U.S. and Canada; www.caribbean-airlines.com), the national carrier, offers service from New York, Miami, and Philadelphia to Port-of-Spain. The airline also flies from Toronto in Canada and from London in the U.K.

Trinidad is the transfer point for many passengers to Tobago. For information about getting to Tobago, see the section "Tobago," later in this chapter.

Arrivals are at Trinidad's Piarco International Airport, which is about a 30-minute drive east of Port-of-Spain.

GETTING AROUND Trinidad **taxis** are unmetered, and they're identified by their license plates, which begin with the letter h. There are also "pirate taxis" as well: private cars that cruise around like regular taxis and pick up passengers. Whether you take an official taxi or a pirate taxi, make sure you agree on the fare beforehand; otherwise, you're likely to get ripped off. **Maxi Taxis,** or **vans,** can also be hailed on the street. A fare from Piarco Airport into Port-of-Spain generally costs $20 during the day, $35 at night. Call **Phone-A-Taxi** (✆ **868/628-TAXI** [8294]) for taxi information or to order a cab.

To avoid the anxiety of driving, you can **hire a local driver** for your sightseeing jaunts. Although it costs more than doing it yourself, it alleviates the hassles of badly marked (or unmarked) roads and the sometimes-bizarre local driving patterns. Most drivers will serve as guides. Their rates, however, are based on route distances, so get an overall quotation and agree on the actual fare before setting off.

If you're brave enough to set out via **rental car,** arm yourself with a good map and **never forget to drive on the left.** Visitors with a valid international driver's license or a license from the United States, Canada, France, or the United Kingdom may drive without extra documentation for up to 3 months.

Since the island is one of the world's largest exporters of asphalt, Trinidad's some 7,245km (4,492 miles) of roads are well paved. However, outback roads should be avoided during the rainy season, as they're often narrow, twisting, and prone to washouts. Inquire about conditions, particularly if you're headed for the north coast. The fierce traffic jams of Port-of-Spain are legendary, and night driving anywhere on the island is rather hazardous.

The major U.S.-based car-rental firms currently have no franchises on the island, so you'll have to make arrangements with a local firm (go over the terms and insurance agreements carefully). Count on spending about $50 to $100 per day or more, with unlimited mileage included. Your best bet is one of the firms maintaining offices at Piarco Airport. These include **Southern Sales Car Rentals** (✆ **868/625-2461**), **Thrifty** (✆ **800/847-4389** in the U.S. and Canada, or 868/669-0602), and the simply named

Fun Facts The Carnival of Trinidad

Called the "world's most colorful festival," the **Carnival of Trinidad** (www.ncctt.org) is a spectacle of dazzling costumes and gaiety. Hundreds of bands of masqueraders parade through the cities on the Monday and Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday, bringing traffic to a standstill. The island seems to explode with music, fun, and dancing.

Some of the Carnival **costumes** cost hundreds of dollars. "Bands" might depict the birds of Trinidad, such as the scarlet ibis and the keskidee, or a bevy of women might come out in the streets dressed as cats. Costumes are often satirical and comical.

Trinidad, of course, is the land of **calypso,** which grew out of the folk songs of the African–West Indian immigrants. The lyrics command great attention, as they're rich in satire and innuendo. The calypsonian is a poet-musician, and lyrics have often toppled politicians from office. In banter and bravado, the calypsonian gives voice to the sufferings and aspirations of his people. At Carnival time, the artist sings his compositions to spectators in tents. There's one show a night at each of the calypso tents around town, from 8pm to midnight. Tickets for these are sold in the afternoon at most record shops.

You can attend rehearsals of **steel bands** at their headquarters, called panyards, beginning about 7pm. Preliminary band competitions are held at the grandstand of Queen's Park Savannah in Port-of-Spain and at Skinner Park in San Fernando, beginning 2 weeks before Carnival.

Carnival parties, or **fetes,** with three or four orchestras at each one, are public and are advertised in the newspaper. For a really wild time, attend a party on Sunday night before Carnival Monday. To reserve tickets, contact the **National Carnival Committee,** Queen's Park Savannah, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad (✆ **868/627-1357**). Hotels are booked months in advance, and most inns raise their prices—often considerably—over Carnival.

Auto Rentals (✆ **868/675-7368**). ***Warning:*** Although these local car-rental firms technically accept reservations, a car may not be waiting for you even if you reserve ahead of time.

All the towns of Trinidad are linked by regular **bus service** from Port-of-Spain. Fares are low (about 30¢–$1.90 for runs within the capital). However, the old buses are likely to be very overcrowded. Try to avoid them at rush hours and beware of pickpockets.

FAST FACTS Most **banks** are open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 2pm and Friday from 9am to noon and 3 to 5pm. **Citibank** has offices at 12 Queen's Park East, Port-of-Spain (✆ **868/625-1046** or 868/625-1049), and 18–30 High St., San Fernando (✆ **868/652-3691**). **Republic Bank Ltd.** (9–11 Park St.; ✆ **868/623-1056**) and **Royal Bank of Trinidad & Tobago Ltd.** (Royal Court, 19–21 Park St.; ✆ **868/625-7288**) are two of the many banks in Port-of-Spain with **ATMs.** You'll also find ATMs at some big supermarkets.

There is no 24-hour **pharmacy.** In Port-of-Spain, **Star Lite Drugs** at Four Roads (✆ **868/632-0516**) is open Monday to Saturday from 8:30am to 9:30pm.

The **Port-of-Spain General Hospital** is located at 169 Charlotte St. (✆ **868/623-2951**). Medical care is sometimes limited, and physicians and health-care facilities expect immediate cash payment for services.

The main **post office** (✆ **868/625-4784**) is on Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain, and is open Monday to Friday from 7:30am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY ON TRINIDAD

The number of hotels on Trinidad is limited, and you shouldn't expect your Port-of-Spain room to open directly onto a white-sand beach. The nearest beach is a long, costly taxi ride away. Hotels are booked months in advance of Carnival (the week before Ash Wednesday) and they raise their rates, often considerably, at this time.

Expensive

Asa Wright Nature Centre & Lodge ★ Finds There really isn't anything else like this in the Caribbean. Known to bird-watchers throughout the world, this center sits on 74 remote hectares (183 acres) of protected land at an elevation of 360m (1,181 ft.) in the rainforested northern mountain range of Trinidad, 15km (9¼ miles) north of Arima, beside Blanchisseuse Road. Hummingbirds, toucans, bellbirds, manakins, several varieties of tanagers, and the rare oilbird are all on the property. Back-to-basics accommodations are available in the lodge, in the 1908 Edwardian main house, and in the cottages on elevated ground above the main house. Even though they offer less privacy, we prefer the two rooms in the main house, which are more atmospheric and are outfitted with dark-wood antiques and two king-size beds each. Furnishings in the cottages are rather plain but comfortable. Guided tours are available on the nature center's grounds, which contain several well-maintained trails and a natural waterfall with a pool.

Spring Hill Estate, Arima, Trinidad, W.I. (For information or reservations, call the toll-free number or write Caligo Ventures, P.O. Box 6356, Key West, FL 33041.) ✆ **800/426-7781** in the U.S., or 868/667-4655. Fax 868/667-4540. www.asawright.org. 24 units. Winter $400 double; off-season $250–$280 double. Rates include all meals. MC, V. No children 7 or under allowed. **Amenities:** Dining room; Internet; pond; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Ceiling fan, no phone.

Courtyard by Marriott ★ This chain hotel has almost no Trinidadian atmosphere, but is a top choice for convenience, service, and comfort, attracting a lot of business travelers, although it's suitable for vacationers as well. The location next to the Movie Towne Shopping Center and the Hasley Crawford National Stadium is convenient to shopping stores and restaurants, and central to the city center. Bedrooms, spread across four floors, are stylish, comfortable, and spacious, with the best in-house entertainment in town. The hotel specializes in plush bedding—crisp linens, thick mattresses, custom comforters, and fluffy down/feather pillows.

Invaders Bay, Audrey Jeffers Hwy., Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **800/321-2211** in the U.S. or Canada or 868/627-5555. Fax 868/627-6317. www.marriott.com. 119 units. Year-round $140–$250 double, from $285 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; indoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Crowne Plaza Hotel Trinidad ★ This bland but modern 14-story hotel is a favorite with business travelers, who tolerate the noise and congestion for the convenient location, a 5-minute walk from the city center. The renovated bedrooms, tastefully decorated in pastels, contain private balconies and two double beds. The hotel has two executive floors and such luxuries as trouser presses, magnifying mirrors, mahogany furniture, and brass lamps. An on-site restaurant, 360°, is the only revolving restaurant on island, providing a striking view of the city.

Wrightson Rd. at London St. (P.O. Box 1017), Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **877/227-6963** in the U.S. and Canada, or 868/625-3366. Fax 868/625-4166. www.ichotelsgroup.com. 245 units. Year-round $185–$225 double; $395 suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; babysitting; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hilton Trinidad & Conference Centre ★★ (Kids) Until the opening of the Hyatt, this was the number-one choice on island. The lobby is on the uppermost floor, while the guest rooms are staggered in rocky but verdant terraces that sweep down the steep hillside. The location just above Queen's Park Savannah affords most of its rooms a view of the sea and mountains. The higher rooms are cheaper than lower ones. This is not the greatest Hilton in the world, or even in the Caribbean, but all rooms still meet international first-class standards, with queen-size or twin beds, balconies, and generous closet space. Accommodations in the main wing are the most sought after, as they have good views over Queen's Park Savannah. Executive-floor rooms have upgraded services and amenities.

Lady Young Rd. (P.O. Box 442), Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **800/445-8667** in the U.S. and Canada, or 868/624-3211. Fax 868/624-4485. www.hilton.com. 420 units. Year-round $179–$244 double; $235–$450 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars; babysitting; children's activities; fitness center; 2 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hyatt Regency Trinidad ★★★ At long last, in 2008 a deluxe hotel opened to topple the long-dominant Hilton as the top choice on island. This gigantic hotel is designed as both a convention and business hotel and a ritzy property for the leisure traveler. With an infinity pool and terrace overlooking the Gulf of Paria, it boasts more facilities than any other hotel on island, with the best spa and fitness center. In the heart of Port-of-Spain, the hotel's midsize to spacious bedrooms evoke streamlined elegance, comfort, and style, with ample working desks. Some rooms have scenic balconies, and all come with bamboo floors, frosted-glass showers, and 32-inch TVs, with both wireless and wired Internet connections.

1 Wrightson Rd., Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **800/492-8804** or 868/623-2222. Fax 868/821-6401. www.trinidad.hyatt.com. 428 units. Year-round $319–$459 double; from $389 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars (1 poolside); deli/patisserie; outdoor pool; spa and fitness center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

The Chancellor Hotel (Value) Designed for the business traveler, this lovely little inn is also ideal for vacationers. In the valley of St. Ann's, the hotel sits in lush landscaped gardens studded with palms. An Iberian-style courtyard filled with sculptures and a cascading waterfall emptying into a swimming pool is one of the hotel's more attractive features. Each of the accommodations is tastefully and comfortably furnished with batik quilts, wall hangings, and teakwood desks. The beds are Victorian style.

5A St. Ann's Ave., St. Ann's, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/623-0883.** Fax 868/623-0883. www.thechancellorhotel.com. 22 units. Year-round $179–$239 double; $206–$330 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Coblentz Inn ★ (Finds) In the residential suburb of Cascade, right outside Port-of-Spain, stands this little boutique hotel of charm and a certain grace. Each accommodation is decorated in an individual and whimsical theme—the Central Room evokes the opulence of Indian palaces and the colorful marketplaces of Asia, the Government House Room pays tributes to past governor generals and visiting royalty, and the Cocoa House

Room is inspired by the amber and gold leaves of the cocoa tree. A complimentary, fully stocked minibar is part of the deal, and the on-site restaurant, Battimamzelle, is one of Port-of-Spain's best (p. 660).

44 Coblentz Ave., Cascade, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/621-0541.** Fax 868/624-7566. www.coblentzinn.com. 16 units. Year-round $205–$210 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Kapok Hotel & Restaurant ★ (Value) This modern but unpretentious nine-floor hotel, in the residential suburb of St. Clair, is an efficient, well-maintained operation run by the Chan family. It's located away from the worst traffic of the city, near the zoo and the Presidential Palace, and just north of Queen's Park Savannah. From its lounge, you'll have panoramic views of the Savannah and the Gulf of Paria. The comfortably appointed, spacious rooms have wicker furnishings. For a hotel of this price range, it comes as a surprise to find phones with voice mail and dataports, and even room service until 10pm. In the back is an expanded pool area with a bistro/bar, waterfall, garden, menagerie, and sun deck.

16–18 Cotton Hill, St. Clair, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/622-5765.** Fax 868/622-9677. www.kapokhotel.com. 94 units. Year-round $188–$213 double; $238 suite. Additional person $16 per night. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

Carnetta's Inn ★ (Finds) This home is in the suburb of Andalusia in the cool and scenic Maraval neighborhood, about a 15-minute ride from the central business district and a 45-minute ride to Maracas Beach, the most popular sand strip on island. It's owned by Winston and Carnetta Borrell—both have a wealth of information about touring the island (he was a former director of tourism) and both are keen naturalists. Winston is a gardener, filling his property with orchids, ginger lilies, and anthuriums, among other plant life. Carnetta grows her own herbs to produce some of the finest meals around. The rooms have floral themes and are furnished in a tropical style. For the most privacy, request a guest room on the upper floor. Our preferred nest is Le Flamboyant, opening onto the little inn's patio. Most of the rooms are medium in size.

99 Saddle Rd., Maraval, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/628-2732.** Fax 868/628-7717. www.carnettasinn.com. 14 units. Year-round $90 double; $108 with kitchen. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some).

Maracas Bay Hotel If you'd like to sightsee in Trinidad and also be on the beach, Maracas Bay Hotel is a decent choice. It's the only beachfront hotel in all of Trinidad, and even here, you'll have to walk across the coastal road to reach the sands. Owned and operated by a local family, it's nestled in a valley on sloping terrain across the road from Maracas Bay. It's only 11km (6¾ miles) north of Port-of-Spain, but dense traffic and a winding road mean at least a 45-minute drive from the commercial center of the capital. There's a bar/lounge accented with Hindu art and an unpretentious dining room. Bedrooms contain simple furnishings, white-and-blue walls, and terra-cotta tile floors, and each unit has two queen-size beds. The beach, a wide strip of white sand bordered by palm trees, is a lovely oasis from the bustle of Port-of-Spain.

Maracas Bay, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/669-1914.** Fax 868/669-1643. www.maracasbay.com. 32 units. Year-round $84. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV (in some).

Monique's Guest House (Kids) In the lush Maraval Valley just an 8-minute (5km/3-mile) drive north of the center of Port-of-Spain, Monique's offers 20 bungalow-style

rooms. Some are large enough to accommodate up to four people, and 10 rooms offer kitchenettes with their own porches. The biggest are nos. 25 and 26, which can sleep up to six, though everyone would feel a bit crowded. Families are fond of booking rooms here because of the kitchenettes. Accommodations have open balconies so you can enjoy the tropical breezes and scenic hills. The air-conditioned dining room and bar offers a medley of local and international dishes, and Maracas Beach is only a 25-minute drive away.

114–116 Saddle Rd., Maraval, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/628-3334.** Fax 868/622-3232. www.moniques trinidad.com. 20 units. Year-round $70 double; $85 triple. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; Internet; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some).

Pax Guest House Value There are a few drawbacks here, but this hilltop building is one of the more attractive and affordable options in the Greater Port-of-Spain district. You'll need transportation to get to most of the clubs, restaurants, and nightlife options. Otherwise, this elevated, antiques-filled guesthouse is idyllic for panoramic views. Hiking trails begin right on the property. Bedrooms are a bit no-frills but are reasonably comfortable and well maintained. In the old-fashioned tradition, afternoon tea is still served in the courtyard.

Mt. St. Benedict, Tunapuna, Trinidad, W.I. ✆ **868/662-4084.** www.paxguesthouse.com. 18 units. Year-round $75–$95 double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Dinner offered; tennis court. *In room:* TV (in some), no phone.

WHERE TO DINE ON TRINIDAD

The food in Trinidad should be better, considering all the different culinary backgrounds that shaped the island. But being as it is, we recommend sticking to local specials like stuffed crabs and *chip-chip* (tiny clamlike shellfish). Skip the armadillo and opossum stews. Spicy *rotis* (Caribbean burritos) filled with vegetables or ground meat seem to be everyone's favorite lunch, and the drink of choice is a fresh rum punch flavored with Angostura Bitters. Except for a few fancy places, dress tends to be very casual.

Expensive

Angelo ★ ITALIAN This 1920s gingerbread colonial building makes an elegant setting for the excellent cuisine here. The chefs search for quality ingredients and allow their natural flavors to shine. The chefs will prepare Caribbean dishes, but only by request. Otherwise, it features an ever-changing menu filled with succulent pastas, fresh seafood, and meat dishes such as tender veal, along with sumptuous Italian desserts.

38 Ariapita Ave., Woodbrook. ✆ **868/628-5551.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$55. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm.

Apsara ★ NORTHERN INDIAN Marie Kavanagh welcomes you graciously to her restaurant, the name of which translates as "heavenly dancer." An island painter, Sarah Beckett, has decorated the place with her contemporary take on Moghul art. The skilled chefs are from India, bringing with them their exotic palette of spices. The menu is widely varied—almost too large—but the dishes are a delight, especially tandoori specialties like jumbo shrimp marinated in yogurt, fresh lime juice, and Indian spices. We're also fond of the tender lamb cooked in a rich curry sauce. Many dishes will please vegetarians. Some of the main courses emerge from the oven on a sizzling platter—try *machi masala,* a hot and spicy fish cooked in a rich and aromatic sauce. Most meals end with the masala tea flavored with clove, cardamom, and cinnamon.

13 Queen's Park East, Port-of-Spain. ✆ **868/623-7659.** Reservations required. Main courses $48–$64. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm.

Battimamzelle ★ Finds Kids CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL The name of this restaurant, which means "dragonfly" in the local dialect, sets the whimsical tone for this joint. Its decor—red and yellow walls adorned with flower paintings and red lampshades with imprints of *battimamzelles* on them—is often called "Mexicanish." For his inspiration, the chef roams the world, offering Greek-style lamb (but stuffed with Moroccan sausage) served with fruits, nuts, and couscous. The barbecued kingfish is brushed with fresh guava and served with pumpkin. The delightful Cornish hens come with a fricassee of wild mushrooms, and the 22-ounce "cowboy" rib-eye steak is tantalizingly provided with hash browns and sizzling onions. A kiddie menu is also offered on request. Most dishes are priced at the lower end of the scale.

In the Coblentz Inn, 44 Coblentz Ave., Cascade. ✆ **868/621-0541.** Reservations required. Main courses $10–$50. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 6–10:30pm. Closed Dec 22–29.

Mélange ★★ SPANISH/AMERINDIAN Drawing upon the heritage of the early settlers, including the Amerindians and the Spanish, chef Moses Reuben creates the most imaginative and some of the most tantalizing specialties on island. He has a surprising list of delicacies under his chef's toque, including a main course of succulent filet of chicken breasts to which smoked herring and a fruity tomato sauce laced with star fruit is added. The dish is accompanied by dasheen, a locally popular root vegetable. It is not just his main dishes, but also his appetizers that show care for quality produce and taste. Try his curried fresh crab on a shell filled with tasty miniature dumplings. The dish is scrumptious, as are his freshly made desserts that always delight you even as you take in the calories.

40 Ariapita Ave., Woodbrook, Port-of-Spain. ✆ **868/628-8687.** Reservations required. Fixed-price lunch menu $28; dinner main courses $32–$48. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 7–10:30pm.

Solimar ★ INTERNATIONAL Some think this restaurant offers the most creative cuisine in Trinidad and Tobago. Established by Joe Brown, an English-born chef who worked for many years in the kitchens of Hilton hotels around the world, it occupies a garden-style building cooled by open walls and ceiling fans. As you dine, you'll hear the sound of an artificial waterfall that cascades into a series of fishponds.

The menu, which changes every 3 months, presents local ingredients inspired by the cuisines of the world. The results are usually very compelling. Dishes might include an English-motivated combination of grilled breast of chicken and jumbo shrimp dressed with a lobster sauce, and a Sri Lankan dish of herb-flavored chicken vindaloo. The restaurant's double-chocolate mousse is the highlight of any meal here.

6 Nook Ave. (next to the Normandie Hotel, 6k m/3¾ miles northwest of the city center), St. Ann's. ✆ **868/624-6267.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$36. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs and Sat 6–10:30pm; Fri 11:30am–10:30pm.

Tamnak Thai ★★ THAI/ASIAN In the landmark center at Queen's Park Savannah, this upmarket restaurant in a restored colonial home is the island nation's finest Asian restaurant, specializing in the regional fare of Thailand. Refined dishes are beautifully served in an elegant, luxuriant, and tasteful setting, especially if you select a table on the patio. The kitchen makes the most of excellent ingredients, fashioning them into subtle dishes like red-curry chicken in coconut milk or stir-fried lobster with spring onions. Our favorite dish is the steamed mussels in a clay pot with fresh herbs such as lemon grass. If you're with a large party, you can order a selection of hors d'oeuvres that are full of zest and flavor. Many dishes are very spicy, filled with fiery chilies, but there are also milder choices.

13 Queen's Park East, Port-of-Spain. ✆ **868/625-9715.** Reservations required. Main courses $8–$32; set lunch $16. AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11am–3pm; daily 6–11pm.

Moderate

Restaurant Singho CHINESE This restaurant, with an almost mystically illuminated bar and aquarium, is on the second floor of one of the capital 's largest shopping malls, midway betw een the commer cial center of P ort-of-Spain and the Q ueen's P ark Savannah. F or Trinidad, the food isn 't bad. I n fact, it 's better than y our typical chop suey–and–chow mein joint; many of the dishes ar e quite tasty and spicy . A la car te choices include shrimp with o yster sauce, ste wed or curried beef , almond por k, and spareribs with black-bean sauce. The to-go ser vice is one of the best in to wn. The Wednesday-night buffet offers an enormous selection of main dishes, along with heaps of rice and fresh vegetables, and dessert.

Long Circular M all, Level 3, P ort-of-Spain. ✆ **868/628-2077.** M ain courses $40–$48; Wed night buff et $20. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

Veni Mangé ★★ Finds CREOLE/INTERNA TIONAL Originally built in the 1930s and set about 2km (1 1/4 miles) west of Port-of-Spain's center, Veni Mangé (which means "come and eat") is painted in coral tones and has louvered windows on hinges that ventilate the masses of potted plants. It was established by two of the best-known women in Trinidad, Allyson H ennessy and her sister , R osemary H ezekiah. Allyson, the J ulia Child of Trinidad, hosts a daily TV talk show that's broadcast throughout the island.

Start with the bar tender's special, a coral-color ed fr uit punch that 's a rich, luscious mixture of papaya, guav a, orange, and passion fr uit juices. The authentic callaloo soup , according to Trinidadian legend, can make a man pr opose marriage. With a menu that changes daily, the main courses might be curried crab , a West Indian hot pot (a v ariety of meats cooked C reole style), or perhaps a v egetable lentil loaf. The helpings are large, but if you still have room, order the pineapple upside-down cake.

67A Ariapita Ave., Port-of-Spain. ✆ **868/624-4597.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$22. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm; Wed and Fri 7–10pm.

HITTING THE BEACH ON TRINIDAD

Trinidad isn't thought of as beach country, yet it has more beach frontage than any other island in the West Indies. The only problem is that most of its beaches ar e undeveloped and in distant, r emote places, far r emoved from Port-of-Spain. The closest of the better beaches, **Maracas Bay,** is a full 29km (18 miles) from Port-of-Spain on the North Coast Road. It's a delight to visitors, with its pr otected co ve and quaint fishing village. The crowds and the str ong current are the only drawbacks. F acilities include r estrooms and snack bars.

Farther up the N orth Coast R oad is **Las Cuevas Bay,** which is far less cr owded. The narrow beach is set against a backdr op of palm tr ees. There ar e changing r ooms and vendors selling luscious tropical fruit juices.

To reach the other beaches, y ou'll have to go a bit far ther, perhaps to **Blanchisseuse Bay** on the North Coast Road. This narrow strip of sand set against palms is an excellent spot for a picnic, although ther e are no facilities.

Bodysurfers frequent **Balandra Bay** on the nor theast coast, but the waters generally aren't good for mor e pedestrian swimming.

Manzanilla Beach, along the east coast of Trinidad, north of Cocos Bay and south of Matura Bay, is not ideal for swimming, either . Nonetheless, it has some picnic facilities, and the view of the water is dramatic.

For serious golf and tennis, we recommend that you try another island.

DEEP-SEA FISHING Some of the best fishing in the Caribbean is possible in the waters off the northwest coast of Trinidad—or, at least, Franklin D. Roosevelt used to think so. Try **Hard Play Fishing Charters,** 13 The Evergreen, Auchenskeoch, Buccoo (✆ **868/639-7108** or 868/682-3474; http://hardplay.net). Your skipper is "Frothy" De Silva, who charges $400 for 4-hour trips on his 12m (39-ft.) vessel, *Hard Play.* Another good possibility is **Dillon's Fishing Charter,** Crown Point (✆ **868/678-3195**), offering 9-hour trips costing $700, including drinks and lunch. Along with record catches in blue marlin, fishermen pursue wahoo, mahimahi, kingfish, and barracuda.

GOLF The oldest golf club on the island, **St. Andrew's Golf Course,** Moka Estate (✆ **868/629-0666;** www.golftrinidad.com), is in Maraval, about 3km (1¾ miles) from Port-of-Spain. This 18-hole course has been internationally acclaimed ever since it hosted the 1976 Hoerman Cup Golf Tournament. There's a full-service clubhouse on the premises. Greens fees are $64 for 18 holes. Club rental costs $20. Hours are daily 6am to 6pm.

TENNIS At the **Trinidad Country Club,** Champs-Elysées, Maraval (✆ **868/622-3470**), six courts are lit at night. One session of 1 to 2 hours costs $7. There are public courts in Port-of-Spain on the grounds of the Prince's Building (ask at your hotel for directions).

EXPLORING TRINIDAD

Organized Tours

Sightseeing tours are offered by **Trinidad & Tobago Sightseeing Tours,** 12 Western Main Rd., St. James (✆ **868/628-1051;** www.trintours.com), in late-model sedans with a trained driver/guide. Several different tours are offered, including a daily city tour that takes you past (but not inside) the main points of interest of Port-of-Spain. The 3-hour tour costs $50 per person for two.

You'll see tropical splendor at its best on a Port-of-Spain/Maracas Bay/Saddle Road jaunt, tours lasting 3½ hours. The tour begins with a drive around Port-of-Spain, passing the main points of interest in town and then going on through mountain scenery. The cost is $45 per person.

Port-of-Spain ★

One of the busiest harbors in the Caribbean, Trinidad's capital, Port-of-Spain, can be explored on foot. Start out at **Queen's Park Savannah** ★, on the northern edge of the city. "The Savannah" consists of 80 hectares (198 acres), complete with soccer, cricket, and rugby fields, and vendors hawking coconut water and *rotis.* This area was once a sugar plantation, but a fire in 1808 swept it and destroyed hundreds of homes.

Among the Savannah's outstanding buildings is pink-and-blue **Queen's Royal College** ★, containing a clock tower with Westminster chimes. Today a school for boys, it stands on Maraval Road at the corner of St. Clair Avenue. The Roodal clan's family home—affectionately called the **"gingerbread house"** by Trinidadians—is on the same road. It was built in the baroque style of the French Second Empire.

Nearby stands **Whitehall,** a former private mansion turned into the office of the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. In the Moorish style, it was erected in 1905 and served as the U.S. Army headquarters here during World War II. These houses, including

Hayes Court, the residence of the Anglican bishop of Trinidad, and others, form what is known as the **"Magnificent Seven"** ★ big mansions standing in a row.

On the south side of Memorial Park, a short distance from the Savannah and within walking distance of the major hotels, stands the **National Museum and Art Gallery,** 117 Frederick St. (✆ **868/623-5941;** www.gov.tt), open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm, Sunday from 2 to 6pm. The free museum contains a representative exhibition of Trinidad artists, including an entire gallery devoted to Jean Michel Cazabon (1813–88); permanent collections of artifacts giving a general overview of the island's history and culture; examples of Amerindian archaeology; British historical documents; and a small natural-history exhibition including geology, corals, and insect collections. There's also a large display filled with costumes dedicated to the colorful culture of Carnival.

At the southern end of Frederick Street, the main artery of Port-of-Spain's shopping district, stands **Woodford Square.** The gaudy **Red House,** a large neo-Renaissance structure built in 1906, is the seat of the government of Trinidad and Tobago. Nearby stands **Holy Trinity Cathedral,** with a Gothic look reminiscent of the churches of England.

Another of the town's important landmarks is **Independence Square,** dating from Spanish days. Now mainly a parking lot, it stretches across the southern part of the capital from Wrightson Road to the **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.** This Roman Catholic church was built in 1815 in the neo-Gothic style and consecrated in 1832.

The cathedral has an outlet that leads to the **Central Market,** on Beetham Highway on the outskirts of Port-of-Spain. Here you can see all the spices and fruits for which Trinidad is known. It's one of the island's most colorful sights, made all the more so by the wide diversity of people who sell wares here.

North of the Savannah, the **Royal Botanical Gardens** (✆ **868/622-4221**) covers 28 hectares (69 acres) and is open daily from 6am to 6pm; admission is free. The park is filled with flowering plants, shrubs, and rare and beautiful trees, including an orchid house. Seek out the raw beef tree: An incision made in its bark is said to resemble rare, bleeding roast beef. Guides will take you through and explain the luxuriant foliage. In the gardens is the **President's House,** official residence of the president of Trinidad and Tobago. Victorian in style, it was built in 1875.

Part of the gardens is the **Emperor Valley Zoo** (✆ **868/622-3530**), in St. Clair, which shows a good selection of the fauna of Trinidad, as well as some exotic animals from around the world. The star attractions are a family of mandrills, a reptile house, and open bird parks. You can take shady jungle walks through tropical vegetation. Admission is $1.60 for adults, 80¢ for children 3 to 12, and free for children 2 and under. It's open daily from 9:30am to 6pm.

Around the Island

One of the most popular attractions in the area is the **Asa Wright Nature Centre** ★ (✆ **800/426-7781** in the U.S., or 868/667-4655; www.asawright.org; p. 656). If you're not a guest of the hotel, you can call and reserve a space for its noonday lunch for $14 Monday to Saturday or $19 on Sunday. It's also possible to reserve one of the daily guided tours of its sanctuary at 10:30am or 1:30pm, which cost $10.

On a peak 330m (1,082 ft.) above Port-of-Spain, **Fort George** was built by Gov. Sir Thomas Hislop in 1804 as a signal station in the days of the sailing ships. Once reached only by hikers, today it's accessible by an asphalt road. From its citadel, you can see the mountains of Venezuela. Locals refer to the climb up the winding road as "traveling up

Finds Evocative of India

Visiting the little town of Chaguanas—located south of Port-of-Spain and the Parco International Airport—is like taking a shopping trip to India. To get there, drive out Uriah Butler Highway and look for the turn-off sign to **Chaguanas.** This was the birthplace of the Nobel Prize–winning novelist V. S. Naipaul.

As you come in on Main Road you'll think you've miraculously arrived in Calcutta. A hodgepodge of shops sell Indian clothing, jars of spicy chutney, and Bollywood music. The gem of shops is **Radika's Pottery,** 183 Edinburgh Village (✆ **868/665-4267**), run for three generations by the Pickal family, which is acclaimed around the world for its exquisite pottery—jugs, pots, candle holders, and more. Even Naipaul is a fan of this pottery, which is exhibited at international art fairs.

If you're in town for lunch, head for the very simple but good **Indo-Chinese Vegetarian Restaurant** on Main Road (✆ **868/665-6928**).

to heaven." The drive is only 15km (9 3/4 miles), but to play it safe, allow about 2 hours.

Pointe-à-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust, Le Riene Town House, Flagstaff Hill, Long Circular Road (✆ **868/658-4230,** ext. 2512), is a 10-hectare (25-acre) bird sanctuary, 2 hours by car south of Port-of-Spain. The setting is unlikely, near an industrial area of the state-owned Petrotrin oil refinery, with flames spouting from flare stacks in the sky. However, in this seemingly inhospitable clime, wildfowl flourish amid such luxuriant vegetation as crape myrtle, flamboyant soursop, mango trees, and even black sage bushes said to be good for high blood pressure. You can spot the yellow-billed jacana, plenty of Muscovies, and, if you're lucky, such endangered species as the toucan or the purple gallinule. Admission is $1.60, or 50¢ for kids under 12. Hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday by appointment only from 10am to 5pm.

Enhanced by the blue and purple hues of the sky at sunset, clouds of scarlet ibis, the national bird of Trinidad and Tobago, fly in from their feeding grounds to roost at the 104-sq.-km (41-sq.-mile) **Caroni Bird Sanctuary** ★ (✆ **868/645-1305**), a big mangrove swamp interlaced with waterways. The setting couldn't be more idyllic, with blue, mauve, and white lilies; oysters growing on mangrove roots; and caimans resting on mud banks. Visitors are taken on a tour through these swamps to see the birds (bring along insect repellent). The most reliable tour operator is **James Meddoo,** Bamboo Grove Settlement, 1 Butler Hwy. (✆ **868/662-7356**), who has explored the swamps for some 25 years. His 2 1/2-hour excursion leaves daily at 4pm and costs $10 per person, or $5 for kids ages 5 to 11. The sanctuary is about a half-hour drive (11km/6 3/4 miles) south of Port-of-Spain.

Pitch Lake ★ is on the west coast of Trinidad, with the village of Le Brea on its north shore. To reach it from Port-of-Spain, take the Solomon Hocoy Highway. It's about a 2-hour drive, depending on traffic. One of the wonders of the world, with a surface like elephant skin, the lake is 90m (295 ft.) deep at its center. It's possible to walk on its rough side, but we don't recommend that you proceed far. Legend has it that the lake devoured a tribe of Chayma Amerindians, punishing them for eating hummingbirds in which the

souls of their ancestors r eposed. The lake was formed millions of y ears ago, and it 's believed that at one time it was a huge mud v olcano into which muddy asphaltic oil seeped. Churned up and down by underground gases, the oil and mud eventually formed asphalt. According to legend, Sir Walter Raleigh discovered the lake in 1595 and used the asphalt to caulk his ships. Today the bitumen mined her e is used to pav e highways throughout the world. You can tour Pitch Lake on your own, paying an admission of $5 per person. **Trinidad & Tobago Tours** (✆ **868/628-1051**) runs guided tours of the lake for $55 per person. You'll find some bars and r estaurants at Le Brea.

The **Saddle** ★ is a humped pass on a ridge dividing the M araval and the Santa Cruz valleys. Along this circular run, you'll see luxuriant grapefruit, papaya, cassava, and cocoa trees. Leaving Port-of-Spain by Saddle Road, going past the Trinidad Country Club, you pass through Maraval Village and St. Andrew's Golf Course. The road rises to cr oss the ridge at the spot fr om which the S addle gets its name. After going o ver the hump, you descend through Santa Cruz Valley (rich with giant bamboo), into S an Juan, and back to the capital along Eastern Main Road or Beetham Highway. You'll see panoramic views in every direction; the 29km (18-mile) tour takes about 2 hours.

Nearly all cr uise ship passengers ar e hauled along Trinidad's "Skyline Highway," the **North Coast Road.** S tarting at the S addle, it winds for 11km (6 3/4 miles) acr oss the Northern Range and down to Maracas Bay. At one point, 30m (98 ft.) above the Caribbean, you'll see on a clear day as far as Venezuela to the w est or Tobago in the east—a sweep of some 160km (99 miles).

Most visitors take this route to the beach at **Maracas Bay,** the most splendid beach on Trinidad. Enclosed by mountains, it has the charm of a Caribbean fantasy: white sands, swaying coconut palms, and cr ystal-clear water (see "H itting the B each on Trinidad," above).

SHOPPING ON TRINIDAD

One of the largest **bazaars** of the Caribbean, Port-of-Spain has luxury items from all over the globe, including I rish linens, English china, Scandinavian cr ystal, French perfumes, Swiss watches, and Japanese cameras. Even more interesting are the Asian bazaars, where you can pick up items in brass. R eflecting the island 's cultur e ar e calypso shir ts, sisal goods, woodwork, cascadura bracelets (made from the scales of the cascadura fish), silver jewelry in local motifs, and saris. For souvenirs, visitors often like to bring back figurines of limbo dancers, carnival masqueraders, or calypso singers.

Stecher's, Gulf City Complex (✆ **868/657-6993**), is the best bet for luxur y items—crystal, watches, jewelry, perfumes, Georg Jensen silver, Lladró, Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Limoges, and Royal Albert. You can find other branches at Long Cir cular Mall and West Mall. You can also pay a last-minute call at their tax-fr ee airport branches or at the cruise ship complex at the P ort-of-Spain docks.

Y. De Lima, 83 Q ueen St. (✆ **868/623-1364**), is a good stor e for watches, but the main focus is local je welry. I ts third-floor wor kroom will make whatev er y ou want in jewelry or bronze. You might emerge with anything fr om steel drum earrings to a hibiscus blossom brooch.

In to Arts, Apt. 402, Aldegonda Park, 7 St. Ann's Rd., St. Ann's (✆ **868/624-4369**), is in a banal apar tment complex, but the paintings and sculptur es her e ar e among the finest in the Caribbean. Among the artistic giants displayed are Glasgow, Sundiata, Keith Ward, Jackie Hinkson, and many others.

Lovers of Caribbean art also flock to the **101 Art Gallery,** 101 Tragarete Rd. (✆ **868/628-4081;** http://101galler y.com), in P ort-of-Spain. This is the best sho wcase for the

 hottest local talent. Local artist Sarah Beckett's work is so influential that her abstract oils appear on regional stamps. Often you can meet some of the artists here, especially on Tuesday evenings during openings. The gallery is closed on Sunday and Monday.

The Market, 10 Nook Ave., St. Ann's (✆ **868/624-1181**), is one of the most fashionable shopping complexes on Trinidad. Some 20 boutiques represent the best jewelers, designers, and art dealers on the island. You'll find a wide assortment of clothing, cosmetics, bags, shoes, china, tableware, handicrafts, and accessories. The complex forms an interconnected bridge among the Normandie Hotel and Restaurant, and the restaurant Vidalia.

TRINIDAD AFTER DARK

The most popular spot on the weekends, although busy any night, is **Trotters,** at Maraval and Sweet Briar roads, St. Clair (✆ **868/627-8768;** www.trotters.net). This is a rustic, earthy, and multilevel English-style sports bar and pub with an eatery on the upper level. The bartenders stock more than 25 beers from around the world, and the pub has 30 TV monitors blaring at all times. There's pub grub, of course, such as barbecue ribs and chicken. Friday night a DJ is brought in for your listening pleasure. There is no cover.

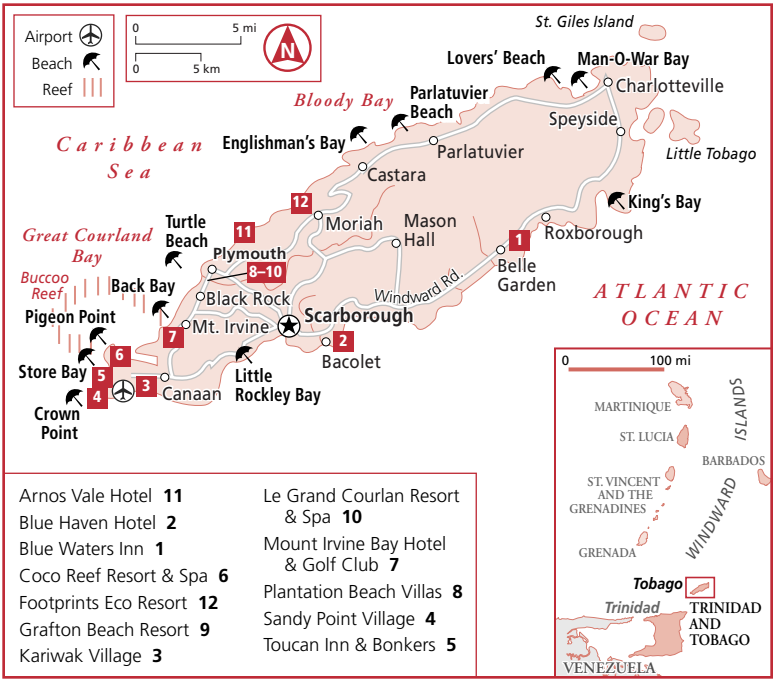
Known for its pop-rock nights, **HiRPM,** Gulf City Mall, South Trunk Road, La Romain (✆ **868/652-3760;** www.hirpm.net), is located slightly out of town, reached by heading south of Port-of-Spain, following the South Trunk Road to the mall. Attracting mostly a 21-to-35 age group, it features different entertainment on different nights—for example, techno night on Tuesday and rock bands on Wednesday. Club nights are on weekends, when there is a great mix of music and a gyrating dance party. On Saturday the action begins at noon and doesn't stop until Sunday morning.

You can catch us having a beer at **Mas Camp Pub,** corner of French Street and Avenue Ariapata in Woodbrook (✆ **868/627-4042**). This place has a big stage where some of the best live bands in Trinidad frequently appear (or a DJ rules the night). There's also a reliable kitchen dishing up local specialties. **More Vino** ★, 23 O'Connor St., Woodbrook (✆ **868/622-8466**), is known for its array of different wines and as a rendezvous point for the smart set of young professionals. Gossip fills the air, and patrons sip cocktails on the terrace or else retreat to the air-conditioned interior.

Local joints come and go with alarming frequency, but locals continue to flock to the live music at **The Base,** Main Street (no phone), at Chaguaramas, a 20-minute drive or taxi ride west of Port-of-Spain. This nightclub takes its name from its former role as a World War II air base and is open Friday and Saturday night (no set hours). Also on this former airfield is The Base's competitor, **Anchorage,** Point Gourde Road (✆ **868/634-4334**), a popular gathering spot for "sundowners." Later on, groups head across the base to **Pier 1,** Williams Bay (✆ **868/634-4426**), for dancing. Back in town, British pub–style **Pelican,** 2–4 Coblentz Ave., St. Ann's (✆ **868/624-7486**), is a hot drinking spot, especially on the weekend. It draws a very mixed crowd, including singles and businessmen (who wish they were single, at least for the night), plus a colony of Trinidadian gays.

3 TOBAGO

Tobago is 30km (19 miles) northeast of Trinidad, and the two islands are connected by frequent flights. Long known as a honeymooner's paradise, Tobago's idyllic natural beauty makes it one of the greatest escapes in the Caribbean. It has forests of breadfruit,



mango, cocoa, and citrus through which a chartreuse-colored iguana will suddenly dart. It's for those who like a generous dose of sand, sun, and solitude in a mellow atmosphere. Snorkelers especially will find plenty to entertain them.

Unlike bustling Trinidad, Tobago is sleepy, and Trinidadians come here, especially on weekends, to enjoy the wide, sandy beaches. The legendary home of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Tobago is only 43km (27 miles) long and 12km (7½ miles) wide. The people are hospitable and their tiny villages seem to blend in with the landscape.

The island's villagelike capital and main port, **Scarborough,** lies on the southern coast. Surrounded by mountains, its bay provides a scenic setting, but the town itself is rather plain. Most of the shops are clustered in streets around the local market.

TOBAGO ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Combining services with BWIA, **LIAT** (✆ **888/844-LIAT** [5428]; www.liatairline.com) offers direct service to Tobago from either Barbados or Grenada. There are also regular flights from Trinidad to Tobago on **Tobago Express** (✆ **868/631-8015**). **British Airways** (✆ **800/247-9297** in the U.S. and Canada; www.britishairways.com) flies weekly from London to Tobago.

Tobago's small **airport** at Crown Point (✆ **868/631-8015**) is near the island's southwestern tip.

It's possible to travel between Trinidad and Tobago by **ferry service,** although the trip takes 5 1/2 to 6 hours. Call the **Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago** (✆ **868/639-2417** in Scarborough, Tobago, or 868/625-3055 in Port-of-Spain) for departure times. The round-trip fare is $12, or else $26 round-trip for a double-occupancy cabin.

GETTING AROUND From the airport to your accommodations, you can take a **taxi,** which will cost $25 to $80, depending on the location of your hotel (taxis are unmetered). You can also arrange (or have your hotel do it for you) a **sightseeing tour** by taxi. Rates must be negotiated on an individual basis.

If you want to do extensive touring, we recommend a car, as attractions are very spread out. Options include **Rattan's Car Rentals,** at Crown Point Airport (✆ **868/639-8271**), and **Singh's Auto Rentals,** Grafton Beach Resort (✆ **868/639-0191**). One final possibility is **Thrifty,** at the airport or at the Rex Turtle Beach Hotel, Courtland Bay, Black Rock (✆ **868/639-8507**). Daily charges range from $50 to $75 a day.

Inexpensive **public buses** travel from one end of the island to the other several times a day. Expect an unscheduled stop at any passenger's doorstep, and never be in a hurry. Fares are $1.

FAST FACTS Most **banks** are open Monday to Wednesday from 8am to 2pm, and Thursday and Friday from 8am to 1pm and 3 to 5pm. **RBTT Bank Limited** (Main St. in Scarborough; ✆ **868/639-2404**) and **Republic Bank Ltd.** (Carrington St., Scarborough; ✆ **868/639-2811**) both have **ATMs.**

You can send mail from the island post offices: **Tobago Post Office,** Scarborough Wilser Road (✆ **868/660-7377**), and the **TT Post Office,** Cruise Ship Complex, Milford Road, Scarborough (✆ **868/800-7678**).

For **tourist information,** contact the Tourism Division of the Tobago House of Assembly at the airport office (✆ **868/639-0509**), or at the main office at I. B. Mall in Scarborough (✆ **868/639-2125;** www.visittobago.gov.tt).

Scarborough Regional Hospital is on Fort George Street, Scarborough (✆ **868/639-2551**). Medical care is sometimes limited, and physicians and health-care facilities expect immediate cash payment for services.

WHERE TO STAY ON TOBAGO

To save money, it may be best to take the breakfast and dinner (MAP) plan when reserving a room. There's a 10% value-added tax (VAT) on all hotel bills, and often a service charge of about 10%. In addition, there is a 15% service charge on other hotel charges (other than the room rate) and on restaurant bills. Don't forget to ask if the VAT and service charge are included in the prices quoted to you.

Very Expensive

Blue Haven Hotel ★ (Finds) It's made a comeback. In the 1950s, it was the hottest ticket in town. Rita Hayworth and Robert Mitchum even stayed here when they made *Fire Down Below* in 1957. In romantic legend, the inn stands at the place where Robinson Crusoe was stranded in 1659 in the Defoe novel. Elegantly furnished bedrooms open onto panoramic views of the water—the inn is, in fact, surrounded on three sides by the sea and opens onto a secluded beach of fine white sands. Guests walk on wooden floors, and there's a glass wall separating the bedrooms from the sleekly modern bathrooms. Guests have several options for lodging, ranging from standard doubles to deluxe suites, plus two-bedroom villas with a private pool. All accommodations come with private balconies with ocean views.

Bacolet Bay, Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/660-7400.** Fax 868/660-7900. www.bluehavenhotel.com. 55 units. Winter $238–$275 double, $355 suite, $585 2-bedroom villa; off season $185 double, $275 suite, $425 2-bedroom villa. Children 2 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; babysitting; children's playground; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; tennis court; watersports by special arrangement. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Le Grand Courlan Resort & Spa ★★★ Operated by the same owners as the Grafton Beach Resort (p. 670), this pricey hotel is definitely five-star and definitely deluxe. For those who want to live in style but don't want a megaresort, the Courlan is a good choice. It's named for the bay on the western edge of the island on which it sits. A soft, sandy beach is at its door and everything is set against a backdrop of bougainvillea, white frangipani, and hibiscus. Constructed to fit in with its natural surroundings, the hotel was built of stone and teak harvested from farms on Trinidad, then furnished with handcrafted mahogany pieces and decorated with original artwork. The floors are covered in Italian porcelain tile, and the ceilings are made from Guyanan hardwood. The bedrooms are handsomely tropical in decor, with two phones, king-size beds, and large balconies.

Black Rock (P.O. Box 25), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-9667.** Fax 868/639-0030. www.legrand-courlan-resort.com. 86 units. Winter $254–$358 per person double, $432 per person suite; off season $192–$262 per person double, $369 per person suite. Extra person $80. Includes all meals and beverages, 1 spa treatment or scuba dive daily. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; golf privileges; Internet; outdoor pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; steam room; 2 tennis courts; dive shop; fishing. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, minibar.

Plantation Beach Villas ★ At the edge of a tropical rainforest, between a bird sanctuary and the Caribbean, this pink-and-white cottage complex stands above a palm-fringed beach. The resort is reminiscent of the plantation era, with its British colonial architecture, rocking chairs on the front porch, four-poster beds, and louvered doors. Two sailing buddies and native Tobagonians, Jennifer Avey and Brenda Farfan, created this little gem, furnishing it with handmade pieces and original artwork. Each spacious villa has three bedrooms, a trio of baths with showers, and a teak-covered front porch with a sea view. It's like living in your own private vacation retreat. The site is a 15-minute drive from the airport.

Stonehaven Bay Rd., Black Rock (P.O. Box 435), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **800/633-7411** in the U.S., or 868/639-9377. Fax 868/639-0455. www.plantationbeachvillas.com. 6 units. Winter $582–$710 for up to 4 persons, $670–$765 for up to 5 or 6 persons; off season $400 for 4 persons, $500 for up to 5 or 6 persons. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, washing machine/dryer.

Expensive

Arnos Vale Hotel ★ This inn—one of the first hotels of Tobago's modern tourist age—sprawls over 180 hectares (445 acres) of very private land. It's named after a township in England, although tour groups from Italy often fill up its chambers. This place was once a closely guarded secret, but it was a long time ago that the late Princess Margaret honeymooned here. The other celebs who used to flock here are off in Anguilla these days. Rooms, each with a private patio or veranda, are furnished with a wide spectrum of furniture, including some pieces dating back to the early 1960s, retained because many clients appreciate their slightly battered charm. Only a few of the units are actually on the beach. Suites are in a handful of individual bungalows. Most of the socializing occurs at the likable bar.

Arnos Vale Rd. (P.O. Box 208), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-2881.** Fax 868/639-4629. www.arnosvalehotel.com. 19 units. Winter $200 double, $275–$335 suite; off season $150–$175 double, $190–$275 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $66 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars (1 swim-up); babysitting; outdoor pool; tennis court. *In room:* A/C, minibar (in some).

Coco Reef Resort & Spa ★★ This is one of the largest beachfront hotels on the island, and it has a certain South Florida pizzazz. It's on Tobago's northern shore, near the airport. Most accommodations are in the two- and three-story main building, although about a half-dozen villas are scattered over the surrounding acreage. The designer incorporated a number of environmentally friendly features and used some recycled materials. The bedrooms are spacious, airy, and filled with wicker furniture. Most rooms have an intricately trimmed balcony. The hotel offers 15 suites with large balconies and patios overlooking the Caribbean and lush tropical gardens. The complex is near a trio of the island's best beaches—Store Bay, Pigeon Point, and Coconut Beach itself, just steps from your room.

Coconut Bay (P.O. Box 434), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **800/221-1294** in the U.S., or 868/639-8571. Fax 868/639-8574. www.cocoreef.com. 137 units. Winter $404–$456 double, from $716 suite or villa; off season $310–$396 double, from $588 suite or villa. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $66–$90 per person extra, $48 for children 5–12. Extra person $82 per day. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; horseback riding; health club; outdoor pool; room service; spa; tennis court; dive shop; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Footprints Eco Resort ★ (Finds) The island's first eco-resort sprawls across some 24 hectares (59 acres) on Culloden Bay. A local doctor and his daughter carved this "environmentally responsible" resort out of a dense forest of cocoa and fruit trees in 1997. The result is a rustic and charming compound of wood-sided, thatch-roofed cottages. Each unit is artfully built of recycled lumber, with an emphasis on native termite-resistant hardwoods such as wallaba and teak. Accommodations are rough hewn but comfortable, with a hammock for classic island lounging, wooden floors, and a lot of idiosyncratic charm. Rooms range from standard doubles to king superior units with fridges. Nature trails fan out across the nearby hills, and good beaches include Courland Bay and Castara Bay, a 15-minute drive away.

Golden Lane, Culloden Bay Rd., Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/660-0118.** Fax 868/660-0027. www.footprints eco-resort.com. 15 units. Winter $115–$140 double, $225–$300 villa; off season $95–$115 double, $185–$225 villa. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; fitness center; yoga; Jacuzzi; 2 pools; room service; spa; rainforest tours. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV (in some), kitchenette (in some), minibar (in some).

Grafton Beach Resort ★ Still going strong—although it's now outclassed by many others—this complex sprawls across a beach shoreline set against a backdrop of palms. It draws the most European clientele on the island and is under the same ownership as the neighboring and superior Le Grand Courlan Resort (Grafton guests can use Courlan's spa). Rooms are in three- and four-story buildings scattered over 2 hectares (5 acres) descending to a white-sand beach. The well-furnished units contain ceiling fans, sliding-glass doors opening onto balconies, and handcrafted teak furniture. The resort's pool is ringed with cafe/restaurant tables, and there is a swim-up bar. Limbo dancing and calypso, or some other form of entertainment, is featured nightly.

Black Rock (P.O. Box 25), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-0191.** Fax 868/639-0030. www.grafton-resort.com. 105 units. $112–$180 per person double; $233–$280 per person junior suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars (1 swim-up); golf privileges; outdoor pool; boating; dive shop; snorkeling; windsurfing; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Mount Irvine Bay Hotel & Golf Club ★★ This 6-hectare (15-acre) resort stands on the site of an 18th-century sugar plantation. The surrounding Mount Irvine Golf Course is one of the finest courses in the Caribbean. Although Mount Irvine retains a loyal clientele, Le Grand Courlan Resort and the Hilton surpassed it long ago. The center of the resort is a luxurious oval pool and the ruins of a stone sugar mill. The grounds slope down to a good sandy beach. On the hill leading to the beach are the newer and better-maintained cottage suites, covered with heliconia. Most accommodations are in the main building, a two-story, hacienda-inspired wing of rather large but standard guest rooms, each with a view of green lawns and flowering shrubbery. Some of the better units have Queen Anne–style furniture with two- and four-poster beds.

Mount Irvine (P.O. Box 222), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-8871.** Fax 868/639-8800. www.mtirvine.com. 105 units. Winter $195 double, $300 cottage, $460 1-bedroom suite; off season $150 double, $250 cottage, $380 1-bedroom suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $45 per person extra. AE, MC, V. 8km (5 miles) northwest of the airport. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 6 bars; babysitting; 18-hole golf course; fitness center; Internet cafe; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts; fishing; snorkeling; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some), hair dryer.

Moderate

Blue Waters Inn ★ (Kids) Attracting nature lovers, this family-run property on the northeastern coast of Tobago is nestled along the shore of Batteaux Bay, where a private 300m-long (984-ft.) beach beckons guests. This rustic retreat extends onto acres of tropical rainforest with myriad exotic birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. The building's entrance almost appears to drop over a cliff, and birds may actually fly through the open windows of the driftwood-adorned dining room. It's a very informal place, so leave your fancy resort wear at home. The inn now offers several units with kitchenettes, suitable for families. The second-floor rooms offer lovely views of the water. The inn is about 40km (25 miles) from the airport, a 75-minute drive along narrow, winding country roads.

Batteaux Bay, Speyside, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **800/448-8355** in the U.S., or 868/660-4341. Fax 868/660-5195. www.bluewatersinn.com. 38 units. Winter $240–$290 double, $370 efficiency, $570 2-bedroom efficiency; off season $140–$190 double, $270 efficiency, $370 2-bedroom efficiency. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $60 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; boating; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; kayaks; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer.

Kariwak Village ★ (Finds) This cluster of cottages evoking the South Pacific is about a 6-minute walk from the beach on the island's west end and a 2-minute drive from the airport. The name is a combination of the two native tribes that originally inhabited Tobago, the Caribs and the Arawaks. In this "village," Cynthia and Allan Clovis run a "holistic" haven as well as an inn. Come here, among other reasons, for Hatha Yoga, Qi Gong, and various stretching and relaxing exercises. Two on-site massage therapists give you all your favorite massages. If you're a vegetarian headed for Tobago, this is the place for you. You can even walk through Cynthia's garden, where she grows fresh herbs and vegetables for the meals served here. Nine of the accommodations are hexagonal cabanas with two rooms each, opening onto the pool. The units are quite spacious, with king-size beds. Live entertainment is provided on Friday and Saturday.

Local Rd., Store Bay (P.O. Box 27), Scarborough, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-8442.** Fax 868/639-8441. www.kariwak.com. 24 units. Winter $165 double; off season $120 double. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $40 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; yoga; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer.

Inexpensive

Sandy Point Village This miniature vacation village resembles a Riviera condominium complex. It's just a 5-minute ride from the airport, but its shoreside position on the island's southwestern coast makes it seem remote. Airport noise, however, can be a problem. The little village of peaked and gabled roofs is landscaped all the way down to the sandy beach, where the rustic Steak and Lobster Grill serves meals throughout the day and evening. The fully equipped accommodations have patios that open toward the sea, living and dining areas with Jamaican wicker furniture, and satellite TV. All but six of the units (those at poolside) contain kitchenettes, and each has a shower-only bathroom. Some of the studios have a rustic open stairway leading to a loft with bunk beds, with a twin-bedded room on the lower level as well.

Crown Point, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-8533.** Fax 868/639-8496. www.sandypt.net. 45 units. Winter $70–$90 double, $100 2-bedroom apt; off season $60–$70 double, $75 2-bedroom apt. Children 11 and under $15 extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bikes; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna; dive shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in most).

Toucan Inn & Bonkers ★ Value This combination restaurant and hotel is one of Tobago's best values. An inn of charm and grace, it is close to the airport and surrounded by attractively landscaped gardens. If you stay here, you'll be just a short drive from some of the island's best sandy beaches. The staff is helpful in directing you. Bedrooms are done in a modern style with comfortable though streamlined furniture; rooms come in various shapes and sizes, each with a queen-size or two twins. The hotel offers an option of well-furnished bedrooms with tiled shower bathrooms. The cluster of rooms facing the garden is more secluded, but even so, many guests prefer the cabanas around the pool. Teak furnishings predominate in the bedrooms. On-site Bonkers is one of the most frequented restaurants and bars in Tobago.

Store Bay Local Rd. (Box 452), Crown Point, Tobago, W.I. ✆ **868/639-7173.** Fax 868/639-8933. www.toucan-inn.com. 20 units. Winter $150–$180 double; off season $130–$150 double AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE ON TOBAGO

Expensive

Dillon's ★ INTERNATIONAL Set in a simple house near the Coco Reef Resort and the airport, this restaurant is run by one of Tobago's leading operators of a deep-sea-fishing boat. Consequently, the fish is sure to be fresh. There's both an indoor, air-conditioned room with framed memorabilia of the island's tradition of steel-pan music, and an outdoor terrace with views over the garden. Menu items include fresh snapper with lemon-butter sauce; tenderloin steak with a spinach-bacon ragout; pan-fried or grilled shrimp served with grilled Parmesan polenta, basmati rice, and a tomato/basil sauce; curried shrimp in coconut sauce and mango chutney; and a lobster crepe with white-wine sauce and fresh herbs.

Milford Rd., near Crown Point. ✆ **868/639-8765.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$48. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm. Closed 6 weeks May–June.

Tamara's ★ CREOLE/INTERNATIONAL One of the most appealing restaurants on Tobago occupies a two-tiered, stone-and-timber gazebo whose curved edges are open on all sides for maximum exposure to cool breezes and views of the nearby sea. It serves some of Trinidad and Tobago's most sophisticated food, based on West Indian traditions with lots of international touches. Start, perhaps, with homemade veal-and-bacon terrine or pan-fried shrimp with wilted greens and wasabi sauce. Try the lamb loin on couscous,

the charcoal-grilled ocean snapper with a cr eamy mushroom-and-lemon-grass sauce, or most definitely the por k tenderloin garnished with a lima-bean ragout. The menu changes every 2 days.

In the Coco Reef Resort, Coconut Beach. ✆ **868/639-8571.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast $19; lunch buffet $26; fixed-price dinner $50. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Moderate

Arnos Vale Water Wheel Restaurant INTERNATIONAL This restaurant occupies the weathered premises of a former 19th-century water mill used to crush sugar cane. You'll dine in the wheelhouse, with an antique o ven and the wheel's original machinery still in place, while o verlooking the v erdant banks of the F ranklin River. Menu items include Cornish hen, shav ed-pear-and-Parmesan salad, deviled chicken, honey-r oasted duck breast, caramelized breast of chicken with polenta and callaloo sauce, grilled fish served with a medley of sauces, and at least thr ee different shrimp and lobster dishes. Three times a week, there's a performance of live Trinidadian/Tobagan music and dance; the animated sounds per k up the other wise calm and quiet landscape of chirping tr ee frogs and splashing water.

Arnos Vale Rd., Plymouth. The restaurant is a 5-min. drive from the Arnos Vale Hotel. ✆ **868/660-0815.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $24–$37. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

The Blue Cr ab ★ Finds CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL One of our fav orite restaurants in the capital, this family-r un spot occupies an Edwardian-era house with an oversize veranda. The menu makes the most of local ingredients and regional spices, and is dictated b y whatever is av ailable that day in the mar ketplace. The good, homemade food includes fresh conch, stuffed crab backs, an array of Creole meat dishes grilled over coconut husks, flying fish in a mild curr y-flavored batter, shrimp with garlic butter or cream, and a vegetable rice dish of the day. Lobster sometimes appears on the menu.

Robinson St., S carborough. ✆ **868/639-2737.** Dinner r eservations r equired 24 hr . in advanc e. M ain courses $7–$10 lunch, $24–$31 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–3pm and 6–9pm.

The Cocoa House ★ WEST INDIAN/TOBAGONIAN Proud of its eco-sensitivity (waste water and paper trash ar e recycled here), this restaurant is a wor thy choice for its allegiance to tried-and-true Tobagonian food that's prepared in a style endorsed by many of the island's matriarchs and grandmothers. Its name comes from its unusual roof, made from the fronds of the timit palm. On balmy evenings, the roof retracts (just as it might at an old-fashioned cocoa pod–drying room), allowing views of the setting sun and, a bit later, of the moon and stars. Well-flavored dishes include jer k v ersions of shrimp , chicken, and por k; duck with either orange or pineapple sauce; and *pelau,* a F rench-inspired dish that combines chicken and beef bound together with rice. F or a dish that many Tobagonians remember from their childhood, tr y pork and dumplings.

In Footprints Eco Resort, Golden Lane, Culloden Bay Rd. ✆ **868/660-0416.** Dinner reservations required. Breakfast $5–$9; main courses $7–$14 lunch, $12–$24 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–9pm.

Kariwak Village Restaurant ★ Value CARIBBEAN Even if y ou're not a guest here, consider visiting at dinnertime. The chefs prepare one of the choicest menus on the island, a four-course repast that changes nightly, based on what's best and freshest at the market. On our latest rounds, we began with creamy breadfruit soup, followed by freshly grilled fish, rice, stuffed butternut pumpkin, and *christophene* (Caribbean squash). The price ev en includes desser t and coffee. I n an open-air setting, y ou can enjo y r ecorded music from Trinidadian steel bands. The owner, Cynthia Clovis, grows herbs and vegetables

 in an on-site organic garden. The Friday- or Saturday-evening buffet is one of the best spreads on the island, with live music to boot. Shrimp and steak are favorites, but don't overlook the green-banana salad seasoned with fresh herbs.

In the Kariwak Village hotel, Local Rd., Store Bay. ✆ **868/639-8442.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast $11; lunch $14; 4-course dinner $31. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

La Tartaruga ★ (Finds) ITALIAN/SEAFOOD/VEGETARIAN Born in Milan, Lombardian Gabriele de Gaetano has brought the flavors of his homeland to remote Tobago and has infused the island with marvelous change-of-pace dining. The eatery is casual yet elegant, with lots of color used along with local artwork. The island's most gracious host, Gaetano "table hops," always concerned about your welfare and whether or not you like his food. Diners almost invariably tell him how tasty and flavorful his Italian-inspired cuisine is. Perhaps he can't find all the authentic ingredients needed for his food, but he succeeds admirably nonetheless. His ravioli won our hearts until we tasted his tagliatelle with lobster, made all the tastier with the use of Trinidadian capers in wine and fresh cream. For a main course, we heartily endorse the mixed seafood grill of lobster, shrimp, and calamari, among other delights. Many of the dishes will appeal to the vegetarian in all of us. Desserts are homemade fresh daily and are luscious. Everything is backed up by the best wine menu on the island.

Buccoo Rd., Buccoo. ✆ **868/639-0940.** www.latartarugatobago.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$36. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm.

Old Donkey Cart ★ (Finds) CAJUN/INTERNATIONAL This unusual and noteworthy restaurant occupies an Edwardian house .8km (1/2 mile) south of Scarborough. The restaurant serves freshly made fruit drinks laced with the local rum. We highly recommend the delectable "mammy's golden apple chutney," and the locally caught crayfish shaped into cakes and served with a tangy sauce. The kitchen also prepares Cajun dishes such as blackened chicken and shrimp jambalaya, along with seared tuna. To begin your meal, you can do no better than the callaloo soup with tender crabmeat (the secret is in the tender, young dasheen leaves). A house specialty is piña colada mahimahi marinated in herbs and coconut milk along with a honey-pineapple purée.

In the Half-Moon Blue Hotel, 73 Bacolet St., Scarborough. ✆ **868/639-3551.** Fax 868/639-6124. Reservations required. Main courses $17–$35. MC, V. Daily 8am–9pm.

HITTING THE BEACH ON TOBAGO ★★

On Tobago, you can still feel like Robinson Crusoe in a solitary sandy cove—at least until Saturday, when the Trinidadians fly over for a weekend on the beach.

Pigeon Point, on the northwestern shore, is the best-known bathing area, with a long coral beach. It's public, but to reach it you must enter a former coconut estate, which charges a fee of $1.60. Set against a backdrop of royal palms, this beach is becoming increasingly commercial. Facilities include food kiosks, crafts shops, a diving concession, paddleboat rentals, changing rooms in thatched shelters, and picnic tables. Pigeon Point is also the jumping-off point for snorkeling cruises to **Buccoo Reef.**

Another good beach, **Back Bay,** is an 8-minute walk from the Mount Irvine Bay Hotel on Mount Irvine Bay. Along the way, you'll pass a coconut plantation and an old cannon emplacement. Snorkeling is generally excellent, even in winter. There are sometimes dangerous currents, but you can always explore Rocky Point Beach and its brilliantly colored parrotfish. In July and August, the surfing is the finest in Tobago; it's also likely to be good in January and April. Stop in Scarborough for picnic fixings, which you can enjoy at the picnic tables here; a snack bar sells cold beer and drinks.

Great Courland Bay is known for its calm, gin-clear waters, and is flanked by **Turtle Beach,** named for the turtles that nest here. Near Fort Bennett and south of Plymouth, Great Courland Bay is one of the longest sandy beaches on the island and the site of several hotels and a marina.

The locals and the fishing boats make the setting at half-moon-shaped **Parlatuvier Beach** (on the north side of the island) more bucolic than the swimming. If you can't stand crowds, head for **Englishman's Bay,** on the north coast just west of Parlatuvier. We don't know why this beach is virtually deserted: It's charming, secluded, and good for swimming, and there have been no reports of muggings despite the seclusion.

Near the little fishing village of Charlotteville, **Man-O-War Bay** is one of the finest natural harbors in the West Indies. It has a long, sandy beach and a government-run rest house. Sometimes local fishermen will hawk the day's catch (and clean it for you as well). Nearby **Lovers' Beach** is accessible only by boat and is famous for its pink sand, formed long ago from crushed sea shells. Negotiate a fee with one of the local boatmen; expect to pay around $25.

The true beach buff will head for **King's Bay** in the northeast, south of the town of Speyside near Delaford. Against a backdrop of towering green hills, the crescent-shaped grayish-sand beach is one of the best places for swimming.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS ON TOBAGO

GOLF Tobago is the proud possessor of an 18-hole, 6,800-yard course at Mount Irvine. Called the **Tobago Golf Club** at the Mount Irvine Estates (✆ **868/639-8871**), it covers 60 breeze-swept hectares (148 acres) and was featured in the *Wonderful World of Golf* TV series. Even beginners agree the course is friendly to duffers. Guests of the Mount Irvine Bay Hotel are granted temporary membership, use of the clubhouse and facilities, and a 15% discount on greens fees. The course is also open to nonguests, who pay $55 for 18 holes or $35 for 9 holes. Cart rentals are $42 for 18 holes or $23 for 9 holes. **Tobago Plantations Golf & Country Club,** Hampden Road, Lowlands (✆ **868/631-0875**), lies on a 303-hectare (748-acre) estate that was previously a sugar-cane plantation. Some holes on this par-72, 7,000-yard course follow the coastline. Greens fees, including golf cart, are $115 for 18 holes, $70 for 9 holes.

SCUBA DIVING, SNORKELING ★★ & OTHER WATERSPORTS The unspoiled reefs off Tobago teem with a great variety of marine life. Divers can swim through rocky canyons 18 to 39m (59–128 ft.) deep, underwater photographers can shoot pictures they won't find anywhere else, and snorkelers can explore the celebrated **Buccoo Reef** (off Pigeon Point), which teems with gardens of coral and hundreds of fish in the waist-deep water. Even nonswimmers can wade knee-deep in the waters. Remember to protect your head and body from the sun and to guard your feet against the sharp coral. Nearly all the major hotels arrange boat trips here. After about half an hour at the reef, passengers reboard their boats and go over to **Nylon Pool,** with its crystal-clear waters. Here in this white-sand-bottom spot, about 2km (1 1/4 miles) offshore, you can enjoy a dip in water only 1m (3 1/4-ft.) deep.

Wreck divers have a new adventure to enjoy with the sinking of the former ferryboat *Maverick,* in 30m (98 ft.) of water near Mount Irvine Bay Hotel on Tobago's southwest coast.

Dive Tobago, Pigeon Point (✆ **868/660-7767;** www.divetobago.com), is the oldest and most established operation on Tobago, run by Jay Young, a certified PADI instructor. It offers easy resort courses, single dives, and dive packages, along with equipment rentals.

 A basic resort course costs $75, although for certification you must pay $450. A one-tank dive goes for $45.

Tobago Dive Experience, at the Manta Lodge, Speyside (✆ **868/660-4888;** www.tobagodiveexperience.com), offers scuba dives, snorkeling, and boat trips. All dives are guided, with a boat following. Exciting drift dives are available for experienced divers. A one-tank dive costs $48 without equipment, a two-tank dive starts at $80, and a resort course costs $75.

TENNIS The best courts on the island are at the **Mount Irvine Bay Hotel** (✆ **868/639-8871**). Nonguests may use one of the two courts here for $6 per hour. There is an additional $4 light fee on request.

EXPLORING TOBAGO

If you'd like a close-up view of Tobago's many rare and exotic tropical birds, as well as a range of other island wildlife and lush tropical flora, naturalist-led field trips are the answer. Each 5-hour trip leads you to forest trails and coconut plantations, along rivers and past waterfalls; one excursion even goes to two nearby islands. Trips cost $8 to $13. For details, contact **Newton George,** Speyside (✆ **868/660-5463** or 868/754-7881).

Tobago's capital, **Scarborough,** need claim your attention only briefly before you climb up the hill to **Fort King George,** about 130m (426 ft.) above the town. Built by the English in 1779, it was later captured by the French, then was tossed back and forth among various conquerors until nature decided to end it all in 1847, blowing off the roofs of its buildings. You can view the ruins of a military hospital and also see artifacts displayed at the **Tobago Museum** (✆ **868/639-3970**), in the fort's old barracks. Admission is $1, and hours are Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm.

From Scarborough, you can drive northwest to **Plymouth,** Tobago's other town. Perched on a point at Plymouth is **Fort James,** which dates from 1768. Now it's mainly in ruins.

From Speyside in the north, you can make arrangements with a local fisherman to go to **Little Tobago** ★, a 180-hectare (445-acre) offshore island whose bird sanctuary attracts ornithologists. The 20-minute crossing is likely to be rough, but the effort is worth it. Threatened with extinction in New Guinea, many birds—perhaps 50 species—were brought over to this little island in the early part of last century. The islet is arid and hilly, with a network of marked trails.

Off Pigeon Point in the south is **Buccoo Reef** ★★, where sea gardens of coral and hundreds of fish can be seen in waist-deep water (see "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits on Tobago," above). This is the natural aquarium of Tobago, offering the island's best **snorkeling** and **scuba diving.** Nearly all the major hotels arrange boat trips here.

SHOPPING ON TOBAGO

In Tobago's capital, Scarborough, you can visit the local **market** Monday to Saturday mornings. Scarborough's stores have a limited range of merchandise, more to tempt the browser than the serious shopper.

Farro's, Wilson Road (no phone), across from the marketplace, offers the tastiest condiments on the island, packed into little straw baskets for you to carry back home. Sample the delectable lime marmalade, any of the hot sauces, the guava jelly, and most definitely the homemade tamarind chutney.

If you're seeking handicrafts, especially straw baskets, head for the **Shaadijas Souvenir & Gift Shop,** Port Mall (✆ **868/660-1000**), also in Scarborough.

Cotton House Fashion Studio, Old Windward Road, in Bacolet (✆ **868/639-2727**), is the island's best choice for "hands-on" appreciation of the fine art of batik. In the Indonesian tradition, melted wax is brushed onto fabric, resisting dyes and creating unusual colors and designs. This outlet contains the largest collection of batik clothing and wall hangings on Tobago. Dying techniques are demonstrated to visitors, who can then try their skills.

The Art Gallery, Hibiscus Drive, Lowlands (✆ **868/639-0457;** www.tobagoartgallery.com), across from the Tobago Hilton, features the works of at least 10 artists. On permanent exhibit upstairs is a collection of island water colors by Rachel Superville and her husband, Martin. Sculptures and a number of handicrafts are also sold here.

TOBAGO AFTER DARK

Your best bet for entertainment is at the **Mount Irvine Bay Hotel** at Mount Irvine Bay (✆ **868/639-8871**), where you might find some dance action or a steel band performing by the beach or pool.

Grafton Beach Resort at Black Rock owns one of the island's most charming bars, **Buccaneer's Beach Bar** (✆ **868/639-0191**), across from the resort. Here you'll find a wide wood terrace sheltered by a grove of almond trees. Daily specials written up on a surfboard include burgers, fried fish, and the like (don't expect the elegant beachside Creole cooking of Martinique). The resort itself offers cabaretlike entertainment nightly. Try to catch the local troupe, Les Couteaux Cultural Group, which performs a version of Tobagonian history set to dance.

Want some local action? Try **Bonkers** ★, Store Bay Road at Crown Point (✆ **868/639-7173**), a lively bar where you'll hear the best soca, reggae, or jazz on the island. If you've been "bad," the DJ might order you to walk the gangplank into the pool.

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Turks & Caicos

For years, the Turks and Caicos Islands' stunning natural attributes were known to just a fortunate few—many of them divers and snorkelers exploring the pristine coral reefs and dramatic drop-offs of the continental shelf wall. But the sun-kissed archipelago is undiscovered no more: Overnight, it seems, resorts, restaurants, and tour operators have sprung up like mushrooms after a spring rain. Construction along the 19km (12 miles) of Grace Bay Beach has fashioned a lineup of luxury resort hotels, and the tourist infrastructure is racing to catch up. The islands—especially Providenciales, nicknamed "Provo"—have become one of the fastest-growing destinations in the Caribbean.

The islands are part of the Bahamian archipelago, and once in their history, they were governed by the Bahamas. Lying to the east of the southernmost Bahamas, Turks and Caicos are self-governing today, although under the protection of Great Britain.

Directly north of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the islands lie at the crossroads of the Caribbean and the Americas. Technically, this obscure outpost is not in Caribbean waters, but on the fringe of the Atlantic.

Grand Turk and Salt Cay (which constitute the Turks Islands) and Cockburn Harbour (South Caicos) are ports of entry, while the major island to visit is Provo.

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) are a coral-reef paradise, largely shut off from the world, free of pollution and noise. Even with the advent of real tourist development and the bustle of construction, particularly in Provo, the beauty and tranquillity of this little island chain remain intact. They're not right for travelers who want nonstop nightlife or wall-to-wall shopping.

What has put Turks and Caicos on the map are the beautiful beaches—362km (224 miles) of them, to be precise. Some stretches of soft white sand run extraordinary lengths; others are small, tucked in secluded coves. The islands are also home to some of the world's most magnificent underwater life. For years, divers and snorkelers have enjoyed the countless varieties of brilliant coral and colorful fish that thrive within TCI's nearly 800km (496-mile) pristine coral reef system—the world's third-largest.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Grace Bay Beach:** These 20km (12 miles) of pale sands are the pride of Provo. It's such a spectacular setting that increasing numbers of resorts have sprung up along the shore. The coast is fringed by a reef with fabulous . . .
- **Snorkeling:** The islands' coral reef system (now national parkland) is among the most dramatic in the Western Hemisphere, a fragile but stunningly beautiful world of coral gardens. You can even snorkel right off of Provo's gorgeous Grace Bay Beach; the government has established snorkel trails at Smith's Reef and Bight Reef.
- **Diving around Grand Turk:** Scuba divers flock here to enjoy panoramic wall dives on the vertical sides of the reefs only minutes from shore. The diving sites have colorful names like Coral Garden, the Aquarium, the Library, and even McDonald's (for its coral arch). You'll even see humpback whales as they migrate south through the Turks Island Passage in the winter.

0
10 mi
0
10 km
Caicos Passage
Providenciales
Blue Hills
Turtle Cove
Leeward
Grace Bay
Five Cays
Mangrove Cay
Parrot Cay
Dellis Cay
Ft. George Cay
Pine Cay
Water Cay
Whitby
Kew
North Caicos
Bay Cay
Bottle Creek
Conch Bar
Bambarra
Lorimers
Middle Caicos
East Caicos
CAICOS ISLANDS
West Caicos
Caicos Bank
ATLANTIC OCEAN
South Caicos
Cockburn Harbour
Six Hill Cay
Long Cay
Fish Cay
Big Ambergris Cay
Little Ambergris Cay
Turks Islands Passage
Grand Turk
Cockburn Town
Long Cay
TURKS ISLANDS
Cotton Cay
East Cay
Balfour Town
Salt Cay
UNITED STATES
Miami
Nassau
BAHAMAS
TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS (U.K.)
Havana
CUBA
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
HAITI
Port-au-Prince
Santo Domingo
PUERTO RICO (U.S.)
San Juan
JAMAICA
Kingston

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Turks and Caicos Tourist Board** (www.turksandcaicostourism.com) has offices in Stubbs Diamond Plaza, Providenciales (✆ **649/946-4970**); and Front Street, Cockburn Town, Grand Turk (✆ **649/946-2321**). It also has an office in New York City: Room 2817, the Lincoln Building, 60 E. 42nd St. (✆ **800/241-0824** or 646/375-8830). Office hours are Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm. In Canada, the tourist board has an office at 175 Bloor St. East, Ste. 307, South Tower, Toronto, ON (✆ **866/413-8875** or 416/642-9771).

Fast Facts Turks & Caicos Islands

Banks Branches and ATMs of **FirstCaribbean International Bank** (✆ **649/946-4245;** www.firstcaribbeanbank.com) and **Scotiabank** (✆ **649/946-4750;** www.scotiabank.com) are at convenient and central locations on both Provo and Grand Turk. The country's first indigenous bank, **TCI Bank Limited (TCIB),** has opened branches on Grand Turk, North Caicos, South Caicos, and Provo's Grace Bay (Regent Village; ✆ **649/941-7500;** www.tcibankltd.com).

Currency The **U.S. dollar** is the official currency. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs On arriving, you may bring in 1.136 liters of liquor or wine, 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 8 ounces of tobacco duty free. There are no restrictions on cameras, film, sports equipment, or personal items, provided they aren't for resale. Absolutely no spear guns or Hawaiian slings are allowed, and the importation of firearms without a permit is also prohibited. Illegal imported drugs bring heavy fines and lengthy terms of imprisonment.

Documents U.S. and Canadian citizens must have a passport or a combination of a birth certificate and photo ID, plus a return or ongoing ticket, to enter the country. Citizens of the United Kingdom, Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean, the Republic of Ireland, and E.U. countries must also have a current passport.

Electricity The electric current on the islands is 110 volts (60 cycles) AC. European appliances will need adapters.

Emergencies Call ✆ **911** or **999** for an **ambulance,** to report a **fire,** or to contact the **police.**

Language The official language is English.

Safety Although crime is minimal in the islands, petty theft does take place, so protect your valuables, money, and cameras. Don't leave luggage or parcels in an unattended car. Beaches are also vulnerable to thievery.

Taxes A departure tax of $35 is levied on all persons over the age of 2 leaving the islands (the tax is generally rolled into the price of your airline ticket). Also, the government collects a 10% occupancy tax, applicable to all hotels, guesthouses,

and restaurants in the 40-island chain. Hotels add a 10% to 15% service charge on top of the government tax.

Telephone To call Turks and Caicos, dial **1** and then the number. To call a phone carrier in the U.S., dial **0,** then **1,** and then the number. The country code for the TCI is **649.** The international-operator telephone service is ✆ **115.** Local directory assistance is ✆ **118.**

Time The islands are in the Eastern Standard Time zone, and daylight saving time is observed.

Tipping Many hotels automatically add 10% to 15% to your bill to cover service. If individual staff members perform various services for you, it is customary to tip them something extra. If you take an island tour, watersports charter, or beach excursion, tip your guide 10% to 20%, depending on the level of service you receive. In restaurants, 15% is appropriate unless a service charge has already been added; if in doubt, ask. Tip taxi drivers 10% to 15%.

Water Government officials insist that the water in Turks and Caicos is safe to drink. Nonetheless, stick to bottled water, especially if you have a delicate stomach.

Weather The average temperature here is 82°F (28°C), dropping to 77°F (25°C) at night. The cooling breezes of the prevailing trade winds prevent the climate from being oppressive. The islands receive approximately 53cm (21 in.) of rainfall annually.

2 PROVIDENCIALES (PROVO) ★★★

Affectionately known as **Provo,** Providenciales is bounded by stunning turquoise seas and white-sand beaches that stretch for miles along the northeast coast. It is protected by a barrier reef that attracts swimmers, divers, and boaters.

For years, these islands were little more than a beautiful, slumbering backwater; home to a close-knit society of islanders called Belongers; and the haunt of a smattering of fishermen and divers, beach bums and drug smugglers, and the well-heeled looking for a quiet cay in which to drop anchor. These days, sandy scrubland is being cleared to make way for high-end resorts and condos, and Provo is at the heart of the fast-paced (some say *too* fast) development. But the island's premier beach, the 19km (12-mile) strand known as **Grace Bay** (named the "World's Leading Beach" 4 years running in the World Travel Awards), has long, languid stretches where you may see little else but seabirds and puffs of clouds. On the powdery sands of Grace Bay, it's easy to feel that you've really gotten away from it all.

PROVO ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Provo is the most easily reached island in the nation because of frequency of flights. The main point of entry for international flights into the Turks and Caicos is **Providenciales International Airport** (www.provoairport.com); Grand Turk also has an international airport. A major upgrade is planned for the Provo airport in the next few years to handle its growing influx of visitors. **American Airlines** (✆ 800/433-7300 in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) is a major carrier throughout the region and

ACCOMMODATIONS

- Amanyara **1**
- Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa **4**
- Caribbean Paradise Inn **14**
- Club Med Turkoise **17**
- Grace Bay Club **15**
- Parrot Cay Resort **18**
- Point Grace **9**
- The Regent Grand **11**
- The Regent Palms **5**
- Royal West Indies Resort **16**
- The Sands at Grace Bay **8**
- Seven Stars **12**
- Sibonné Beach Hotel **7**
- The Somerset **6**
- Villa Renaissance **10**

DINING ◆

Anacaona **15**
Aqua Bar & Terrace **3**
Coco Bistro **13**
Coyaba **14**
Do Conch Shack **2**
Grace's Cottage **9**
Hemingway's on the Beach **8**
O'Soleil **6**
Parallel23 **5**

flies nonstop flights from New York, Boston, and Miami. Other airlines serving the islands include **Air Canada** (✆ 888/247-2262 in the U.S. and Canada; www.aircanada.ca), which has direct flights from Toronto and Montreal; **Bahamas Air** (✆ 800/222-4262; www.bahamasair.com); **British Airways** (✆ 800/AIRWAYS [247-9297] in the U.S., 0870/850-9850 in the U.K.; www.britishairways.com), which flies nonstop from London; **Continental** (✆ 800/231-0856 in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com); **Delta** (✆ 800/241-4141 in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com), which flies nonstop from Atlanta; and **US Airways** (✆ 800/622-1015 in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com), which flies nonstop from Charlotte (daily), Boston, and Philadelphia.

GETTING AROUND Most of Provo's lodgings are an easy 15- to 20-minute taxi ride from the airport. The days of the free hotel **transfers** to and from the airport are over, however—your hotel can arrange a taxi transfer, but you will be charged (or the fee discreetly folded into your hotel rate); otherwise, plenty of **taxis** are on hand to meet arriving flights. If for some reason none are around, call your hotel or the **Provo Taxi Association** (✆ **649/946-5481**). Cabs are metered and rates set by the government—but not all taxi drivers turn on their meters, so it's a good idea to negotiate the fare before you leave the airport—or anytime, for that matter. Expect to pay around $22 to $25 (plus tip) per couple (additional person $7.50) for a taxi ride from the airport to the Grace Bay area. Most taxis are vans equipped to carry more than one group of passengers, so it stands to reason that the more people onboard, the lower the rate per couple.

Taxis are plentiful on Provo, but there are no designated taxi stands. If you need a taxi, you'll have to call one or have your hotel do so. Because the island is so large and its hotels and restaurants are so far flung, you might find a **rental car** useful on Providenciales, but be warned: Renting a car on the TCI is not cheap.

Three major U.S.–based car-rental agencies with a franchise in the Turks and Caicos Islands are **Budget,** with two Provo locations: the airport and downtown Provo, in the Town Centre Mall (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S., or 649/946-4079 or -5400; www.budget.com); **Avis,** with a branch at the airport (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 649/946-4705; www.avis.com); and **Hertz** affiliate **Mystique Car Rental,** at a new location in the Ports of Call shopping complex on Grace Bay Road and on Old Airport Road, 2 minutes from the airport (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 649/941-3910; www.hertztci.com). Cars rent for $40 to $225 a day (depending on the vehicle); collision-damage insurance costs $10 to $12 a day. The local government collects a $15 tax for each rental contract, regardless of the number of days you keep the car.

In the British tradition, **cars on all the islands drive on the left.** You need only a valid driver's license from your home country to rent a vehicle.

FAST FACTS **FirstCaribbean** (✆ **649/946-4245;** www.firstcaribbeanbank.com) has 24-hour ATM service at its main branch on Leeward Highway in Provo. **Scotiabank** (✆ **649/946-4750;** www.scotiabank.com) has 24-hour ATMs at its main locations on Provo and four additional ATMs in Provo: at the Ports of Call shopping center on Grace Bay Road, at the Ocean Club Plaza on Grace Bay Road, next to the Graceway IGA on Leeward Highway, and at Petro Plus on Millennium Highway. The country's first indigenous bank, **TCI Bank Limited (TCIB)** opened a branch (with ATM) in Provo on Grace Bay Road (Regent Village) in November 2008 (✆ **649/941-7500;** www.tcibankltd.com).

Grace Bay Medical Centre, Neptune Plaza, Grace Bay (✆ **649/941-5252**), takes care of most needs. Anyone critically ill or requiring advanced medical care might be flown to Miami.

Call ✆ **649/946-4259** if you need the **police.**

The **Provo Post Office and Philatelic Bureau** is located downtown at the corner of Airport Road in downtown Providenciales. It's open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 4pm and Friday from 8am to 3:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY ON PROVO

Provo's 19km (12-mile) Grace Bay is where the majority of the islands' resorts and hotels are situated. Keep in mind that many resorts have minimum-stay requirements in the high season and during the Christmas holidays.

The newly opened **Regent Grand** (sister property to the Villa Renaissance; see below) is a luxury all-suites resort located in the heart of Grace Bay. It has an infinity pool and a spa, and each of the suites has a full kitchen (✆ **877/537-3314** or 649/941-7770; www.theregentgrandresort.com; winter $600–$3,050, summer $495–$2,225).

Very Expensive

Amanyara ★★★ The first Amanresorts property in the West Indies was such a big deal when it finally opened in early 2006 that *Travel + Leisure* magazine devoted an entire cover article to it. It's a big deal, all right, bringing a whole new style of luxury to the region. It's a luxe that's the polar opposite of fussy and ostentatious, however, with Amanresorts' trademark elegant simplicity of form, integrity of materials, and devotion to eco principles. Yes, the prices are exorbitant, but many people think it's worth every penny.

The classically aligned main resort buildings practically float on reflecting pools and ponds, in obeisance to Amanresorts' love of all things symmetrical. The bar has a golden imported-wood ceiling that soars toward the sunlight. The infinity pool, fashioned of speckled black Indonesian lava, has three linen-wrapped sofa-bed pods.

The 40 individual pavilions are stand-alone houses, utterly private; a few have ocean views. Wraparound patios are enveloped in native scrub brush, sea grape, and sea ox-eye daisies. It's very earthbound, if not for the exceptional gadgets: Flip open your laptop and go online, groove to the surround-sound Bose system, or switch on the flatscreen TV. Privately owned three-, four-, and five-bedroom villas are also available for rent; each is centered around its own infinity pool and has a personal cook and housekeeper and the use of two golf carts (Jan 4–May 31 and Nov 1–Dec 18 $5,600–$13,950; June–Oct $4,300–$11,700; ask about Christmas holiday rates).

The **Restaurant** serves a menu with Asian-Mediterranean influences either inside or on a candlelit alfresco patio; the **Beach Club** serves lunch and afternoon meals. The resort and staff welcome children; management is happy to provide not only cribs and nannies, but Diaper Champs, baby botanicals, and toddler stools and training potties—the kitchen even makes homemade baby food (mashed veggies or fruit). But ultimately this is a haven for couples looking for a few days of deeply pampered R&R.

Keep in mind that the resort lies on the island's northwest shore, a fairly isolated spot that is reached by traveling a winding two-lane road some 25 minutes from the airport. If you're looking for privacy and seclusion, this is your spot—but if you're keen on exploring the island, know that you're a good 30- to 40-minute drive from the rest of the action in Provo.

Northwest Point, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **866/941-8133** or 649/941-8133. Fax 649/941-8132. www.amanyara.com. 40 private pavilions. Jan 4–May 31 and Nov 1–Dec 18 $1,550–$2,150; June–Oct $1,200–$1,800; ask about Christmas holiday rates. Rates include private airport transfers, minibar (except spirits), in-room Internet access, and all telephone calls. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's pavilion. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar/lounge; afternoon tea; babysitting; fitness center; yoga classes; serenity villa w/spa and beauty services; library; Wi-Fi; outdoor pool; movie screening room; 2 clay tennis courts; nonmotorized watersports. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV, Bose sound system, hair dryer, minibar/fridge, Wi-Fi.

Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa ★ Kids This Grace Bay megaresort remains a perennial favorite among families. And with a whopping 453 units, it's remarkable that it all chugs along as smoothly as it does. The grounds are beautifully maintained, guests (especially kids) seem deliriously happy and busy, and weddings are held on-site on an almost daily basis. It's a winning formula: Rooms are nearly impossible to come by in high season without reservations made long in advance.

This resort is part of the Sandals chain of all-inclusive hotels, though unlike most Sandals, families with kids are welcome here—and welcome with a bang. The price tag is high, but the all-inclusive designation means you get plenty for your money: all your meals and drinks; excellent watersports; winning service from a huge staff of nearly 800 employees; a full-service nursery with cribs, swings, rockers, and a coterie of nannies with whom you can leave babies and toddlers; and even a spa, the **Red Lane** (daily 8am–8pm). "The Caribbean Adventure with Sesame Street" activities are available for kids 5 and under; actors dressed as characters from *Sesame Street*—Elmo and his friends—are on hand to thrill the little ones. The Kids Camp has daylong activities for children 6 to 12. The older kids can lose themselves in free, unlimited play at the Xbox 360 Game Garage interactive gaming center. Tweens and teens can groove to DJ-spun sounds (and vie for one of the four VIP cabanas) at Club Liquid.

All rooms and suites have a king-size bed. Of the 12 categories of rooms, the luxury suites offer a nifty amenity: 24-hour butler service, with professionally trained butlers catering to your every need.

Food is available somewhere on the resort 24 hours a day (although room service is offered only in the butler-suite categories). In general, the food is plentiful if not particularly inspired. Among the 16 restaurants, you can get Italian **(Giuseppe's),** Tex-Mex **(Arizona's),** seafood **(Schooners),** or Asian **(Kimonos). Reflections** offers casual-fare buffets for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For the kids, **Bobby D's** is a 1950s-style diner with typical kid faves like burgers, hot dogs, and spaghetti. **Sapodilla's** is adults only and features Continental cuisine. Reservations are recommended.

Note: The resort's newest section, the all-suites **Italian Village,** featuring a 1,115-sq.-m (12,002-sq.-ft.) pool with a giant water park (with wave pool) and 168 spanking-new family suites, should be open for business by the time you read this.

Lower Bight Rd. (P.O. Box 186), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **800/232-2437** in the U.S. or 649/946-8000. Fax 649/946-8001. www.beaches.com. 453 units. Prices based on 2 nights (minimum stay): Winter $420–$510 double, $640 1-bedroom suite, $1,200 2-bedroom suite for 4, $1,680 3-bedroom family suite; off season $385–$440 double, $575–$675 1-bedroom suite, $1,090 2-bedroom suite for 4, $1,525 3-bedroom family suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; 7 bars; babysitting; children's center w/pool; golf course (nearby); fitness center; basketball; volleyball; nurses station; Internet café and Wi-Fi; 8 outdoor pools; 2 saunas; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 lit tennis courts; Aqua Trikes; Hobie Cats; kayaks; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, CD players, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, in-room bars (in concierge rooms).

Club Med Turkoise ★ Set on 28 hectares (69 acres) of sun-blasted scrubland on a gorgeous strip of beachfront overlooking Grace Bay, this adults-only all-inclusive resort was one of the pioneers of Grace Bay when it opened in 1984. To be honest, the oldest resort on the island is showing its age. The landscaping is negligible, the food serviceable at best, and from the outside the bungalow-style accommodations look more like a church camp than a luxe resort. Miked music blares like clockwork every day around sunset, and it's certainly noisier and more hyperactive than anything else on Grace Bay. But guess what? Even in the low season, it's packed with guests, filled to capacity when other resorts are half-full. Its appeal lies in its mix of nonstop activity and communal fun. Singles and couples come here to play in the sun—and this sprawling beachside campus has plenty of toys, including a flying trapeze.

The village-style cluster of basic two- and three-story accommodations contains colorful rooms with twin or king-size beds, all designed with beachfront living in mind. The "all-inclusive" designation means that meals are included as well as most drinks—except the real good stuff, like champagne, certain premium liquors and wines, and bottled soda (be sure to check the fine print before you book). Among the three restaurants, **Grace Bay** serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner buffet style, and **Lucayan** offers a la carte meals and is open in the evening only (7:15–8:45pm; reservations required). Most meals are served at long communal tables.

Grace Bay, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **800/258-2633** in the U.S., or 649/946-5500. Fax 649/946-5497. www.clubmed.com. 297 units. Winter $1,545–$1,722 per person weekly; off season $1,300–$1,600 per person weekly. Rates include all meals, certain drinks, and most activities. AE, MC, V. No children 17 or under allowed. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; beach lounge; gym; wellness center w/spa treatment rooms; basketball; flying trapeze; softball; trampoline; volleyball; Wi-Fi; outdoor pool; open-air nightclub; smoke-free rooms; 8 tennis courts (4 lit); kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV, clock radio/CD player, hair dryer, minifridge.

Grace Bay Club ★★★ Kids This supremely comfortable luxury boutique resort sets the bar for exemplary service in the TCI. One of the island's older hotels (opened in 1993), the Grace Bay Club remains one of the top lodgings in the Caribbean by constantly reinventing and refreshing itself but staying true to its original commitment to excellence. You'll get plenty of pampering for your money—and a whopping repeat business proves they're doing something right. It doesn't hurt that the resort sits on the largest oceanfront acreage on Grace Bay. The hotel has accomplished the neat trick of creating two hotels in one: one, the romantic 21-suite hotel that was completely revamped in 2007 with its own pool and bar and restaurant (Anacoana); the other, 38 luxurious, family-friendly condos positioned within four low-density "villas," each set directly on the beach and with its own pool and restaurant (Grill Rouge). Everyone has the same fabulous Grace Bay views. And now the resort has a third element: the **Estate at Grace Bay Club,** which features 22 custom-designed luxury oceanfront residences, a lap pool and a kids' splash pool, and a poolside bar/restaurant.

The Grace Bay Club personifies easy elegance, with a sun-burnished Mediterranean look and feel. Suites (except junior suites) and penthouses each have their own state-of-the-art kitchens (granite countertops, stainless-steel appliances), washing machines, and dryers. Four 446-sq.-m (4,801-sq.-ft.) penthouses have spectacular views, oceanfront showers, and outdoor Jacuzzis. On the beach are canopied four-posters. The resort's **Anani Spa** has moved to a new 465-sq.-m (5,000-sq.-ft.) space where spa specialists offer Euro-Asian treatments.

The hotel's main restaurant, **Anacaona** (p. 693), is one of Provo's top restaurants—but no kids 12 and under, please. Families can dine in the adjacent **Grill Rouge,** which offers casual alfresco dining with grilled seafood, paninis, salads, and a kids' menu. The beachfront **Lounge,** with its Hamptons-style white-cushion seating and glowing fire pit, is one of the best spots on the island to have a cocktail and watch the sunset on Grace Bay; it now serves a tapas menu. But for sheer heat, the Lounge has some serious competition: A sister watering hole, the **Infinity Bar,** boasts the longest bar in the Caribbean, a sleek ribbon of black stone studded with glittering blue lights.

The Grace Bay Club has one of the best kids' programs on island: **Kid's Town** (for children 5–12) offers a full menu of half- or full-day excursions, including snorkeling, sailing, eco-activities, and kayaking; a dinner time "campout" on the beach may include hot dogs and s'mores by a campfire.

1 Grace Bay Circle Rd. (P.O. Box 128), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **800/946-5757** in the U.S., or 649/946-5050. Fax 649/946-5758. www.gracebayclub.com. 59 units. Hotel: Winter $1,150 junior suite, $1,250–$1,750 1-bedroom suite, $2,100–$2,600 2-bedroom suite; off season $650–$850 junior suite, $750–$1,300 1-bedroom suite, $1,250–$1,950 2-bedroom suite. Villas: Winter $950 junior suite, $1,750 1-bedroom suite, $2,100–$2,600 2-bedroom suite, $3,330 3-bedroom suite, $6,050–$8,500 penthouse; off season $550–$700 junior suite, $1,050–$1,300 1-bedroom suite, $1,250–$1,950 2-bedroom suite, $1,950–$2,450 3-bedroom suite, $3,600–$6,550 penthouse. Estate: Winter $1,300–$10,000; off season $800–$7,500. Ask about Christmas holiday rates. Extra person $130–$150. Rates include full breakfast. MAP (breakfast and dinner) $70 per person extra. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; afternoon tea (3:30–4:30pm); bikes; fitness center, Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; room service (7am–9pm); 465-sq.-m (5,000-sq.-ft.) spa; 2 lit tennis courts; fitness center; Wi-Fi; boating excursions; deep-sea fishing; kayaks; sailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV w/DVD/CD player, hair dryer, kitchen (excluding junior suites), washer/dryer (excluding junior suites), Wi-Fi.

Parrot Cay ★★★ This laid-back luxury resort gets a lot of press as a favored retreat of celebrities, the place where Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner married and where Bruce Willis maintains a home. But you don't have to be a movie star to enjoy Parrot Cay's warm welcome and high service standards—standards that are impeccably and rigorously maintained. Parrot Cay defines excellence.

Parrot Cay lies on an isolated and private 400-hectare (988-acre) island with a powdery white-sand beach. The compound features 10 white "modern colonial"–style buildings, each with a terra-cotta-tile roof. Rooms have louvered doors that open onto terraces or verandas, oyster-white walls with tongue-and-groove paneling, and mosquito netting over four-poster beds. The roomy tiled bathrooms are beautifully appointed with a big tub and a shower and the spa's Invigorate toiletries. The best units are the roomy beach houses and villas, which offer utter privacy and direct access to the beach. Beach houses have plunge pools and hardwood verandas. Beach villas (one to three bedrooms) are even roomier, with swimming pools and kitchenettes.

Many come to Parrot Cay for the sublime treatments in the **COMO Shambhala** holistic spa, perhaps the finest spa in the Caribbean, which encompasses a 613-sq.-m (6,598-sq.-ft.) space wrapped in a sea of glass that looks out over the island wetlands. In addition, the resort has an infinity pool and access to scuba diving, Hobie Cats, snorkeling, kayaks, and water-skiing. Kids' activities are available as well.

The **Terrace** restaurant, in the resort's main building, serves breakfast and dinner, specializing in Mediterranean cuisine. Lunch and dinner are served in **Lotus,** a torch-lit poolside restaurant with Southeast Asian–inspired cuisine (along with regular-Joe favorites like hamburgers); both restaurants also offer a healthful Shambhala spa menu.

Parrot Cay (P.O. Box 164), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **866/388-0036** in the U.S. or 649/946-7788. Fax 649/946-7789. www.parrotcay.com or http://parrotcay.como.bz. 60 units. Winter $775–$975 double, $1,650 1-bedroom suite, $2,900 1-bedroom beach house, $3,500–$6,700 beach villa; off season $575–$850 double, $1,000–$1,350 1-bedroom suite, $2,050–$2,300 1-bedroom beach house, $2,600–$5,400 beach villa. Ask about Christmas holiday rates. Extra person 13 and over $210. Rates include full American breakfast and round-trip airport transfers by car and hotel boat (commercially scheduled flights only). 3-night minimum stay required. AE, MC, V. Reached by a 30-min. private boat ride north from Provo, leaving from Leeward Marina. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; fitness center; nature trail; library; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; limited room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; fishing; kayaks; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV/DVD, radio/CD player, dataport, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some), minibar.

Point Grace ★★★ This boutique hotel opened in 2000 on one of the prettiest beaches in the entire Western Hemisphere, a lyrical crescent of sand ringed by turquoise sea. Point Grace has racked up one award after another since it opened, including a 2008 World Travel Award (for the 4th year running) for the Caribbean's Leading Boutique Hotel, and in a short time has perfected an almost effortless grace. The motif is vintage West Indies, and the services and amenities are first rate, ranging from twice-daily maid service to midday sorbets on the beach. Don't expect the joint to be jumping: Even at its liveliest, generally during cocktail hour around the pool bar, this is a haven of quiet serenity. The **Thalasso Spa at Point Grace** (daily 9am–6pm) is a full-service on-site spa that offers spa treatments using sea mud and seaweed, among other delicacies, in whitewashed cottages open to the sea breezes—these are some of the best massages on the island.

The complex features exceptionally spacious one-, two-, three-, and four-bedroom suites and penthouses, furnished with Indonesian hardwood and teak, and brightened by crisp white Frette linens; many are decorated with 200-year-old wall hangings from India. Hand-painted tile and mahogany grace the rooms, and each suite has a beautifully appointed kitchen and a washer/dryer.

Tucked away in a candlelit garden is the lovely restaurant **Grace's Cottage** (p. 693), perhaps the most romantic spot to dine in the islands.

Grace Bay (P.O. Box 700), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **866/924-7223** in the U.S. or 649/946-5096. Fax 649/946-5097. www.pointgrace.com. 28 units. Winter $625–$675 cottage suites, $1,197 oceanfront suites, $1,517–$1,790 Atlantic suites, $2,048 Cotton Cay suite, $2,867 Big Cameron Cay suite; off season $475–$525 cottage suites, $695–$915 oceanfront suites, $835–$1,365 Atlantic suites, $1,260–$1,560 Cotton Cay suite, $1,765–$2,185 Big Cameron Cay suite; ask about Christmas holiday rates. Rates include continental buffet breakfast and complimentary house cocktails and hors d'oeuvres at the pool bar 5–6pm. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; bikes; concierge; golf (nearby); Internet; library; outdoor pool; limited room service; smoke-free rooms; oceanfront spa; kayaks; sailing. *In room:* A/C, TV CD/DVD players, dataport, hair dryer, kitchen, washer/dryer, minibar.

The Regent Palms ★★★ This boutique resort was pretty swell before Regent took over, but it's close to perfect now. Opened in early 2005, the Palms is one of Grace Bay's classiest lodgings, with some of the most handsomely appointed rooms on the island. But don't let its cool good looks intimidate you. Yes, it has a lively South Beach–style pool scene, and the neo-Palladian centerpiece of the resort is referred to as "the Mansion"—but beneath that elegant facade is a congenial Turks and Caicos vibe and a level of service that few resorts on the island can match. It even has kid-friendly amenities, such as the Conch Kritters Club, a daily activities program for kids 4 to 12. While the kids are off flying kites or hunting for lizards, you can relax in the gorgeous 2,323-sq.-m (25,005-sq.-ft.) **The Regent Spa,** which features 17 treatment rooms, many in white-tented cabanas abutting a reflecting pool.

The so-called Mansion (fashioned after the theatrical Caribbean estates designed by Oliver Messel, the late British stage designer who also created Princess Margaret's "cottage" in Mustique) is home to the clubby wood-paneled bar and the resort's main restaurant, **Parallel23,** which serves tropical-fusion cuisine from an open kitchen with a wood-burning oven; the restaurant's outdoor terrace fronts **Palm Place,** with shops on either side of a palm-lined courtyard. **Plunge,** the happening pool bar and lunch spot, has a sunken dining terrace and a swim-up bar—as you lie around the serpentine infinity pool, you can check your e-mail with the complimentary Wi-Fi and drink a toast to another tough day at the beach.

Grace Bay Rd. (P.O. Box 681), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **866/877-7256** or 649/946-8666. Christmas holiday reservations: ✆ **305/532-7900** or info@thepalmstc.com only. Fax 649/946-5502. www.regenthotels.com/thepalms or www.regentturksandcaicos.com. 72 units. Winter $625–$675 double, $850–$1,400 1-bedroom suite, $1,675–$2,075 2-bedroom suite, $2,750 3-bedroom suite, $1,725–$3,075 penthouse; off season $400–$475 double, $700–$825 1-bedroom suite, $1,150–$1,275 2-bedroom suite, $1,600–$1,725 3-bedroom suite, $1,425–$2,325 penthouse; inquire about Christmas holiday rates. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; conventional bar; pool bar; babysitting/nanny service; Conch Kritters Club; 18-hole golf course (5 min. away); fitness center (personal trainers available on request); croquet pitch; yoga, Pilates, and meditation studio; Wi-Fi; Jacuzzi; infinity pool; room service (6am–midnight); sauna; full-service spa; Plexipave tennis courts; nonmotorized watersports equipment and kids' beach toys. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV (flat-panel LCD TVs in penthouses), complimentary iPod, hair dryer, full kitchens w/Viking appliances (in suites and penthouses), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Seven Stars Resort ★★ Expansion plans for this new luxury resort may be on hold for the time being, but Phase 1 is up and running, with a prime Grace Bay location; spacious, elegant one-, two-, three-, and four-bedroom units; and a palpable commitment to service. The entrance boasts a colonnade of palms and a classic fountain. Rooms are decorated in classic British Colonial style, with large windows, marble floors, and full or galley kitchen facilities; many have wraparound terraces and four-poster beds. A special concierge service, called Miss 7, is at your disposal to make reservations and transportation arrangements, plan events, and answer special requests, among other services—team members travel by Segway for ultrafast service. I like Seven Stars' community spirit: Even before it opened in early 2008, it gave Provo a holiday gift: a giant Christmas tree set in the middle of the traffic roundabout that fronts the property—you could see the glittering colored lights for miles.

Grace Bay, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **866/570-7777** or 649/941-7777. Fax 649/941-8601. www.sevenstarsresort.com. 165 units. Winter $725–$1,360 studio, $990–$2,400 1-bedroom suite, $2,400–$3,400 2-bedroom suite, $3,200–$5,800 3- and 4-bedroom suites, $1,125–$5,200 penthouse; summer $365–$730 studio, $495–$1,180 1-bedroom suite, $1,180–$1,700 2-bedroom suite, $1,800–$3,000 3- and 4-bedroom suites, $560–$2,600 penthouse Extra person 12 and over $50–$85 per night. Rates include continental breakfast and airport transfers. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; pool lounge; babysitting/nanny service; children's play area; concierge; 18-hole golf course (5 min. away); fitness center; Wi-Fi (in pool, reception, and restaurant areas); outdoor pool; room service; full-service spa; lit tennis courts nonmotorized watersports and watersports program. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fans, flatscreen TV, DVD and CD players, hair dryer, full kitchen (in suites), galley kitchen (in studios), Wi-Fi.

The Somerset ★★ It may be relatively new to Provo, but this resort looks and feels like old money. The monumental neo-Tuscan stone architecture gives the place a solid, almost baroque feel, anchored by stone staircases and spraying fountains. A reverse-current lap pool with underwater audio stretches to the sea. Rooms are master fully appointed and feel more like the elegant interiors of a manor house than hotel units. The spacious rooms and suites are available in three accommodations categories: Estate,

Stirling House, and English Cottage. The four blocks of ocean-view Estate suites comprise four full-floor suites per block (except the penthouse, which has two floors); each suite has a Viking grill and hot tub on its balcony. The Stirling House is comprised of 24 units, including both standard doubles (garden views) and suites (ocean views), and the 13 English Cottage units are duplexes with basement garages and garden views. Every suite has Viking equipment and appliances in the fully equipped kitchens, Surround-Sound music system (even on the balconies), travertine marble floors, and personal wine coolers. Each of the three penthouses has roof terraces with hot tubs and breathtaking 360-degree views. The resident restaurant, **O'Soleil,** has garnered rave reviews from locals and visitors alike.

Grace Bay, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **877/887-5722** or 649/946-5900. www.thesomerset.com. 54 units. Winter $1,300–$5,000 Estate suites, $350–$3,500 Stirling suites and rooms, $675–$1,250 English Cottage suites; summer $875–$3,200 Estate suites, $275–$2,400 Stirling suites and rooms, $475–$600 English Cottage suites. Rates include continental breakfast and airport transfers. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; pool bar; babysitting/nanny service; concierge; 18-hole golf course (5 min. away); croquet pitch; infinity pool; room service; nonmotorized watersports equipment. *In room:* Zoned A/C, plasma TV, hair dryer, full kitchen w/Viking appliances (in suites), Wi-Fi, private outdoor Jacuzzi (Estate suites), semiprivate elevators.

Expensive

Royal West Indies Resort ★ Kids This is one of the most reliable, well-managed condo-hotel resorts along Grace Bay, offering family-friendly lodging and a prime location on one of the best sections of beach, between the Grandview on Grace Bay and Club Med. Surrounding the property are well-manicured gardens, the centerpiece of which is a 24m-long (79-ft.) pool set against a backdrop of tropical fruit trees. Guests have a choice of oceanfront, oceanview, studio, or garden-view one- and two-bedroom suites. Suites are large and have balconies or patios and good-size kitchenettes. The interiors have been very nicely refurbished with comfortable, well-maintained furnishings and good linens. Even if you're not a guest, we strongly recommend a meal at **Mango Reef** (www.mangoreef.com), the casual poolside restaurant with consistently fresh, delicious food—don't miss the conch chowder.

Grace Bay (P.O. Box 482), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **800/332-4203** in the U.S. or 649/946-5004. Fax 649/946-5008. www.royalwestindies.com. 99 units. Winter $285–$445 studio, $385–$625 1-bedroom suite, $525–$795 2-bedroom suite; off season $225–$345 studio, $275–$410 1-bedroom suite, $405–$545 2-bedroom suite. Extra person 13 or over $35 per night. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bikes; golf (nearby); Jacuzzi; Wi-Fi; 2 outdoor pools; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchen, washer/dryer.

The Sands at Grace Bay ★★ Kids The Sands has always been a popular choice on Grace Bay, but a topnotch refurbishment—including the construction of an elegant new freestanding lobby—has put it in another league altogether. This sprawling all-suites condominium resort is set on a prime stretch of Grace Bay Beach. Suites have been tastefully and luxuriously updated, with granite countertops, marble sinks, and fine linens. The manicured gardens and pools are impeccably maintained—this is one well-managed property. Choose from studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, or three-bedroom suites—each of which is fully appointed, with screened terraces. The suites also have full kitchens (studios have kitchenettes) and washer/dryers—great for family stays. The Sands is the site of one of the island's most popular beachfront restaurants, **Hemingway's** (p. 694), and the **Spa Tropique at the Sands.** With the beautiful renovation, rates are almost certain to rise; go now, because this is one of the best deals on the beach.

Grace Bay, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **877/777-2637** in the U.S. or 649/946-5199. Fax 649/946-5198. www.thesandstc.com. 116 units. Winter $285–$450 studio, $425–$725 1-bedroom suite, $525–$725 2-bedroom suite, $800–$1,200 3-bedroom suite; off season $185–$345 studio, $325–$525 1-bedroom suite, $400–$550 2-bedroom suite, $500–$800 3-bedroom suite. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's suite (maximum of 2). AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; supermarket shuttle ($8 per person round-trip); babysitting; bikes; fitness center; Jacuzzi; 3 outdoor pools; spa services; tennis court; nonmotorized watersports equipment; dive shop; Hobie Cats; sea kayaks, snorkels/fins; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, hair dryer, full kitchen (kitchenette in studios), washer/dryer.

Villa Renaissance ★★ (Finds) This is a little gem on a prime stretch of Grace Bay oceanfront. It has a lovely reception area (the Pavilion), a large gorgeous pool, and a full-service spa on-site. The classical architecture (it looks like an Italian villa) is beautiful, and the rooms are comfortable and nicely outfitted.

Grace Bay (P.O. Box 592), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **877/285-8764** in the U.S. or 649/941-5300. Fax 649/941-5340. www.villarenaissance.com. 36 units. Winter $415–$715 1-bedroom suite, $625–$945 2-bedroom suite, $1,265 3-bedroom suite, $1,595 penthouse; summer $325–$635 1-bedroom suite, $535–$748 2-bedroom suite, $900 3-bedroom suite, $1,095 penthouse. Extra person 13 or over $85 per night. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bikes; concierge; golf (nearby); fitness center; Wi-Fi in courtyard/pool area; spa; lit tennis courts; nonmotorized watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Moderate

Caribbean Paradise Inn (Value) This intimate, cozy inn is a real find, just a 2-minute walk from lovely Grace Bay Beach. It's also a hub of activity these days: In 2007, chef Paul Newman moved the popular restaurant **Coyaba** (see below) from its longtime location in Coral Gardens to the bar/patio area here—and the lively dining scene has given the place a jolt of electricity. Two stories of rooms overlook the pool and a nice tropical courtyard. Combination bedrooms and living areas, with a patio or balcony, the rooms have been nicely refreshed, with tile floors and a king or two full beds. The small bathrooms have showers only. Jean Luc Bohic is the personable owner.

Grace Bay (P.O. Box 673), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **877/946-5020** in the U.S. or 649/946-5020. Fax 649/946-5022. www.caribbean-paradise-inn.com. 17 units. Winter $150–$175 double; off season $130–$150 double; $175–$195 Christmas holidays. Extra person $35. Children 4 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; outdoor freshwater pool; watersports. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, fridge/minibar, hair dryer.

Sibonné Beach Hotel ★ (Value) One of the first hotels constructed on the fabulous sands of Grace Bay Beach, this hotel is a fantastic value and has charm to spare, as long as you don't expect a huge laundry list of resort amenities (and don't expect the staff to shower you with love). What it does have is a laid-back, informal vibe; alluring courtyard gardens; and knockout Grace Bay views. It's considerably more personable than any chain-style hotel, with comfortable rooms that have a light, breezy decor. For a stupendous deal on Grace Bay, book the one-bedroom upstairs apartment, detached from the actual hotel. It has a full kitchen, with pots, pans, plates, the works; a separate living room; a big, comfortable bed; and two oceanfront patios, one screened, one open—you'll feel as if you have your own sunny beachfront cottage within spitting distance of the million-dollar sands of the Regent Palms. On-site is the **Bay Bistro,** a casual beachside restaurant offering exceptional breakfast, lunch, and dinner fare. ***Note:*** Sibonné does not accept children 12 and under in the winter or holiday season.

Grace Bay (P.O. Box 144), Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **800/528-1905** in the U.S. or 649/946-5547. Fax 649/946-5770. www.sibonne.com. 29 units. Winter $125–$260 double, $375–$395 apt; off season $110–$205 double, $285 apt. Rates include continental breakfast. No children 12 and under in winter or holiday season. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, fridge, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE ON PROVO

In addition to the restaurants below, **O'Soleil,** the elegant restaurant at the Somerset on Grace Bay (✆ **649/946-5900;** http://thesomerset.com), has garnered excellent word of mouth among locals and visitors alike.

Very Expensive

Anacaona ★★★ INTERNATIONAL/CARIBBEAN Set beneath thatched-roof *palapas* and an inky night sky filled with stars, this is one of the top dining options in Provo. Among its winning attributes is an unbeatable location directly facing the Grace Bay Beach, which it shares with Grace Bay Club's two happening bars, the Lounge and the Infinity Bar. It's a very romantic spot: When the sun goes down, tables are lit by candlelight and the flickering fire from free-standing torches. The menu changes regularly, but you might start with the trio of conch (conch tacos, conch tempura, conch Creole) or the tuna tartare; main courses rely heavily on seafood, particularly fish—try the mahimahi in papillotte or seared filet of red snapper. ***Note:*** Children 11 and under are not allowed in the restaurant.

In the Grace Bay Club, 1 Grace Bay Circle Rd. ✆ **649/946-5050.** Reservations recommended. No children 11 or under. Main courses $28–$33. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–9pm.

Coco Bistro ★★★ MEDITERRANEAN/CARIBBEAN This is a perennial favorite among locals and visitors alike. Coco Bistro is set in a former plant nursery, a plot of land that has since grown into the largest palm grove on the island. It's a romantic setting: Meals are enjoyed outside under the palms, and the food is as memorable as the ambience. Try the crispy crab wontons or the tower of fresh local lobster (with mango, pineapple, and fresh vanilla bean) to start. For mains, sample the ravioli of conch and grouper with a basil pesto–scented rose sauce; soft-shell-crab tempura; or the roast rack of Colorado lamb with pomegranate molasses and macadamia-nut crust.

Grace Bay Rd. ✆ **649/946-5369.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $28–$39. DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–10:30pm.

Coyaba Restaurant ★★ CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN When this popular gourmet restaurant moved from its longtime spot in Coral Gardens in October 2007, it barely missed a beat—it remains one of the island's most popular dining destinations. Its new location on the patio fronting the Caribbean Paradise Inn may not be as roomy as its previous locale, but that hasn't kept chef Paul Newman (no, not that one) from flexing his inventive culinary chops. Chef Newman prepares some of the island's freshest and best seafood. Start with tempura shrimp in Barcelo honey–rum sauce or Provo lobster bisque. For a main course, try the cashew-encrusted rare seared ahi tuna or the rich lobster thermidor, updated with a Dijon-and-mushroom crème.

Next to the Caribbean Paradise Inn, Grace Bay. ✆ **649/946-5186.** www.coyabarestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses $32–$39. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–10pm.

Grace's Cottage ★★★ CARIBBEAN/CONTINENTAL This beautifully romantic spot has a leisurely, old-fashioned charm, but it may have the most innovative menu on the island. Grace's Cottage is a little architectural gem: a warm buttery-yellow cottage

with Victorian-style gingerbr ead trim and lattice work. The r estaurant seats only 62 people—but most ev ery night, it 's filled with couples holding hands acr oss candlelit tables. D ine on the cottage terrace or on one of the patios surr ounding the cottage, nestled in tr opical v egetation and softly illuminated lighting. I nside you can enjo y an aperitif at the mahogany bar befor e taking a seat at one of the teak tables co vered with Egyptian cotton tablecloths. Chef Mario Larese has developed an imaginative menu with creative food pairings. You might start with the r ed snapper with garlic grits and watercress in a Turk's Head beer dressing, or the duck br east and veal kidney served with seasonal beans in a sugar-cane demi-glace.

In the Point Grace Hotel, Grace Bay. ✆ **649/946-5096.** Reservations required. Main courses $24–$44. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10:30pm.

Parallel23 ★★ TROPICAL FUSION/INTERNATIONAL Try to snag a table on the atmospheric terrace, lit b y gas lamps made in N ew O rleans. It's an elegant setting, overlooking Palm Place courtyard and situated in the Mansion, the Regent Palms resort's homage to vintage Caribbean estates. O therwise, y ou'll be per fectly comfor table ensconced inside, with views of the open kitchen. The food is tasty and innovative (even the butter, whipped with P armesan and tr uffle oil, has aspirations). S tarters include Caicos lobster salad or pan-sear ed foie gras with r oasted peaches and toasted lav ender brioche. The aged Colorado steak is excellent, as is the open lasagna of braised beef short ribs in a r ed-wine cream sauce. The attached Green Flamingo Bar has the kind of o verstuffed sofas and dar k-grain wood y ou'd find in an old-time gentleman 's club or some colonial outpost.

In the Regent Palms resort, Grace Bay. ✆ **649/946-8666.** Reservations required. Main courses $18–$38 (20-oz. rib-eye $90). AE, MC, V. Daily 7–10:30am and 6–10:30pm. Bar daily noon–midnight.

Expensive

Aqua Bar & Terrace ★★ SEAFOOD/CARIBBEAN Don't let the laid-back vibe fool you. Aqua is serious dining for people who take their food seriously. This is the kind of place where you will see other chefs, boat captains, locals, and visitors alike congregating on the palm-fringed wooden terrace, with Turtle Cove and its muscular yachts for scenery. Whether you're here for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, don't leave without sampling the conch wontons (a winner at the 2006 Conch F estival): conch mousse wrapped in wontons, fried golden br own, and ser ved with sw eet-and-sour dipping sauce. Also r ecommended is the sear ed yellowfin tuna in a spiced coffee r ub with Asian marinade and the soulful cream-based conch chowder with bacon and potato. For main courses, try the pecan-encrusted conch with spicy orange butter sauce, or Kurabuta double-cut pork loin marinated in jerk seasoning served over herb mashed potatoes and veggies in a rich demi-glace.

In the Turtle Cove Inn, Suzie Turn Rd., North Shore. ✆ **649/946-4763.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses $19–$32 (surf and turf $45). AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Moderate

Hemingway's on the B each ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNA TIONAL This casual place is jumping morning to night, and the ocean-side location is only half the enticement. With a setting like this, the food doesn 't have to be this good—but it is flav orful and fresh. The coconut shrimp is light and tasty, and if lobster is in season, order it here, simply and elegantly grilled. H emingway's is also a fine lunch choice, ser ving a terrific mango shrimp salad o ver P rovo lettuce with mango chutney , a v ery r espectable hamburger, and satisfying chicken and chips: marinated and fried Caribbean jer k chicken

breast with the restaurant's signature seasoned fries. The service is attentive but relaxed and friendly. At night, torches and candlelight heighten the romantic ambience. A bell sits on a pole on the upper deck of the restaurant, there to ring if anyone spots JoJo the dolphin cruising the Grace Bay waters.

At the Sands at Grace Bay. ✆ **649/941-8408.** Reservations required. Main courses $15–$33 (surf and turf $52). AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Inexpensive

Da Conch Shack ★ CONCH/CARIBBEAN This happy spot is set inside a white-washed beach shack on a sand dune above the Blue Hills Beach. Steps away is the open-air **RumBar,** separated by more sand and white picnic tables. Down below, in the shallow aquamarine waters, small conch pens hold live conch, refreshed daily by fishermen. On the beach, the conch is drawn out of its shell, beaten, and then served any number of ways, whether as superb conch fritters, conch curry, or conch chowder. Conch this fresh and well prepared is a revelation. Take off your shoes, press your face to the sun, sip the suds off a Turk's Head lager, and forget your cares and woes.

Blue Hills. ✆ **649/946-8877.** www.conchshack.tc. Reservations not accepted. Conch, fish, chicken, and shrimp dishes $8–$14 (lobster $28). No credit cards. Daily 11am–late.

HITTING THE BEACH ON PROVO

Starting at Leeward and running all the way to Thompson Cove, **Grace Bay Beach** ★★★ is Provo's finest beach, stretching for 19km (12 miles) of spectacular, powdery-soft white sand. The gin-clear, crystal-blue waters are extremely tranquil and there are no rocks, making it ideal for kids. Many resorts, such as Club Med, have developed along its edge, so you won't have these sands all to yourself. Though there are no public facilities on the beach, the hotels themselves come in handy, because all of them have restrooms and bars serving tropical drinks. The folks at *Condé Nast* rated Grace Bay the "number-one beach on the planet."

Another way to see some of the area's finest beaches is to take a beach excursion that delivers you to one of the luscious **Caicos Cays** just off Provo for a few hours of leisurely beachcombing (see below).

WATERSPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS ON PROVO

BEACH EXCURSIONS One of the most popular watersports activities in the Provo area is a **beach excursion** ★★ offered by a number of charter-boat operators. Recommended operators include **Silver Deep** (✆ **649/941-5441;** www.silverdeep.com), **Sail Provo** (✆ **649/946-4783;** www.sailprovo.com), and **Big Blue Unlimited** (✆ **649/946-5034;** www.bigblueunlimited.com). A favorite beach excursion may involve a half-day or full day out on the Caicos Cays and may include **snorkeling,** a **visit to Iguana Island** (see below), and a **shelling stopover** on one of the uninhabited cays.

FISHING **Silver Deep** (✆ **649/941-5441;** www.silverdeep.com) offers top fishing excursions, with both half- and full-day expeditions, usually for bonefishing or bottom fishing. Tackle and bait are thrown in.

GOLF **Provo Golf & Country Club** ★, on Grace Bay Road (✆ **649/946-5833;** www.provogolfclub.com), is one of only two golf courses in the country (the other is on Grand Turk). The 6,560-yard, par-72, 18-hole course was designed by Karl Litten of Boca Raton, Florida. A driving range and putting greens are also available. Inside the clubhouse is a full-service restaurant and bar called **Fairways Bar & Grill.** Greens fees are

$160 per person for 18 holes; the price includes the use of a shared golf cart, which is mandatory (ask about discounted afternoon and twilight rates Nov–March). Golf clubs can be rented for $30 to $60 per set (18 holes).

SAILING Sailing excursions are offered by many charter groups, most notably **Sail Provo** (✆ **649/946-4783;** www.sailprovo.com). It sails 14m or 16m (48- or 52-ft.) catamarans on half- or full-day excursions. One of the most frequented is a sailing and snorkeling trip for $68 (children 3–11 $40) that's offered on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday and includes a tour of Little Water Cay, or "Iguana Island." A full-day cruise Tuesday to Friday costs $150 (children 3–11 $80), including a lunch buffet served onboard. Sail Provo also offers sunset cruises and glowworm cruises.

SCUBA DIVING Dive experts, including the late Jacques Cousteau, have cited these islands as among the 10 best dive sites in the world. Why is the diving so good in the Turks and Caicos? A number of reasons: great visibility (often more than 30m/98 ft.), gentle seas, a barrier reef that runs the full length of the island's 27km (17-mile) north coast, dramatic vertical underwater "walls" where the coral is big and healthy and marine life congregates, and a local government committed to protecting its natural assets—much of the coastal waters around Provo are protected national parkland. The water is warm and calm much of the year.

Around Provo and the Caicos Islands, the popular diving spots include **Grace Bay, Northwest Point** (a 4.8km/3-mile strip of excellent dive sites with a vertical drop-off to 2,100m/6,888 ft.); **Pine Cay; West Caicos** (with miles of 1,800m/5,904-ft. vertical walls); and **French Cay** (more 1,800m/5,904-ft. vertical drop-offs). For extensive information about each of these sites, check out **Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers Ltd.,** Turtle Cove (✆ **649/946-4232,** or 800/833-1341 for reservations; www.provoturtledivers.com), the oldest dive operation in the islands. Both **Big Blue Unlimited** (✆ **649/946-5034;** www.bigblueunlimited.com) and **Dive Provo** (✆ **800/234-7768** in the U.S., or 649/946-5040; www.diveprovo.com) offer technical and recreational scuba diving, instruction, and equipment rental.

Most dive operators rent scuba tanks, plus backpacks and weight belts (included in the dive cost). In general, a single-tank dive costs $75, a night dive goes for $75, and a morning two-tank dive is $109. Many offer technical diving and PADI training, with full instruction and resort courses. An open-water PADI referral course goes for $400.

SNORKELING The snorkeling is as good as it is on Provo and the Caicos Islands for the same reasons the diving is exalted (see above). This is a great place to learn to snorkel—the waters are clean, clear, temperate, and gentle—and the marine life is rich and thriving. A number of watersports operators offer snorkeling trips (or combination snorkeling/beach excursions) off Grace Bay or in and around the Caicos Cays, a short (30-min.) trip from Provo. A reliable operator is **Silver Deep** (✆ **649/941-5441;** www.silverdeep.com).

You can even find great snorkeling opportunities right on Grace Bay. Grab your snorkel and fins (most hotels offer complimentary equipment) and head down the beach to one of Grace Bay's two prime snorkeling spots, **Smith's Reef** and **Bight Reef,** both in the Princess Alexandra National Park, off the northwest corner of Provo.

The **Bight Reef Snorkel Trail** has underwater trail signs that describe corals and how they grow. Water depth ranges from 1m to 5m (3¼–16 ft.), and visitors can view mobile species like yellowtail snappers, big jolthead porgies, and sand-sifting mojarras. You can also get snorkeling equipment at **Cactus Voyager,** the in-house dive operator in the Coral Gardens resort, in front of the reef (✆ **649/941-3713**).

EXPLORING PROVO

Badly damaged by the one-two punch of hurricanes Hanna and Ike in September 2008, the popular **Conch Farm** (www.caicosconchfarm.com), Heaving Down Rock, Leeward Highway, is closed, and although relief efforts are underway, it is unclear if it will reopen. Once the only place in the world where conch was commercially produced, the farm was a real venture in eco-mariculture. Its sister conch farm, Conch World, is set to open on Grand Turk in 2009 (see below).

Chalk Sound, a landlocked lagoon west of Five Cays Settlement, is now a public park. The hamlet of Five Cays itself has a small harbor and a modern airport.

SHOPPING ON PROVO

In a new location, **Art Provo,** Regent Village, Grace Bay Road (✆ **649/941-4545**), has a large selection of paintings by local artists, pottery, baskets, jewelry, and glass. **Bamboo Gallery,** Caicos Café Plaza, Grace Bay Road (✆ **649/946-4748**), is one of the island's leading art galleries, with a large inventory of Haitian art.

Set in a picturesque Blue Hills cottage with a white picket fence, the **Blue Hills Artisan Studio,** Blue Hills Beach Road (✆ **649/941-7639** or 649/232-7639; middlecaicos@tciway.tc), is an outpost of the Middle Caicos Co-op. More than 60 Caicos Islands artisans are represented here, where you can purchase fanner-grass baskets and silvertop-palm crafts, including beribboned straw hats.

PROVO AFTER DARK

Nightlife on Provo has livened up with the emergence of two small-scale casinos. The **Casablanca Casino** offers roulette, blackjack, poker, craps, and baccarat (Grace Bay Rd., Providenciales; ✆ **649/941-3737;** www.thecasablancacasino.com). The **Players Club** has slot machines, blackjack and roulette, and poker—and free shuttle service for hotel guests (Turtle Cove, Providenciales; ✆ **649/941-4263;** www.ThePlayersClub.tc). Both casinos are open daily from 10am to 5am.

Smokey's on Da Bay in Provo's Blue Hills has a Wednesday-night fish fry (✆ **649/241-4343**). Join the locals for happy hour at the **Sharkbite** (Turtle Bay Marina; ✆ **649/941-5090;** www.thesharkbite.com), which also serves rib-sticking pub grub and island favorites. Cliff the DJ spins old-school songs on Friday and Saturday nights at the island's only Irish pub, **Danny Buoy's,** Grace Bay Road (✆ **649/946-5921;** www.dannybuoys.com), which has Cuban cigars (illegal in the U.S.), whisky tastings, and Guinness on tap. It also has satellite TV for hardcore college sports fans.

3 GRAND TURK ★

Note: Grand Turk is undergoing a major rebuilding effort after suffering a devastating direct hit by Hurricane Ike in September 2008, which left 95% of the island's structures damaged or destroyed, including some of the island's most historic properties. Many of the island's lodgings are now open for business, however (see below), and the surrounding coral reef and undersea "Wall" are reportedly in great shape, good news for divers and snorkelers who make pilgrimages here from around the globe to explore Grand Turk's spectacular marine waters.

Grand Turk is the capital of the Turks and Caicos Islands, although it is no longer the financial and business hub of the island nation, having lost that position to Provo. It is no longer the transportation hub, either; Provo receives 95% of international airplane

landings. Grand Turk may not be the center of action anymore, but it has a genial charm: It's a laid-back, budget-friendly destination with world-class diving, gorgeous white-sand beaches, and a "What, me worry?" small-town vibe.

Where Provo is the glittering, bustling center of 21st-century TCI, Grand Turk is its historic heart. In fact, many scholars believe that Grand Turk was the site of Columbus's first landfall in October 1492. Its heritage as a bustling salt-raking center in the 19th century is most evident in charming **Cockburn** (*Coe*-burn) **Town,** the business center of this tiny (11×3.2km/6 3/4×2-mile) island. Take time to stroll Cockburn Town's **historic section,** particularly Duke and Front streets, where 200-year-old Bermudan structures built of wood and limestone stand along the waterfront. Stroll the area and soak in the rhythms of this historic village, the vintage architecture behind picket fences entwined with crimson bougainvillea, the fragrant trees, the funky beachfront bars, the wet suits hanging out to dry.

Governor's Beach is a great place for swimming and watching massive cruise ships steam in over the horizon and dock at the **Grand Turk Cruise Center** (see "Exploring Grand Turk," below), which is expected to welcome some 500,000 cruise-ship passengers to this sleepy little island in 2009. In spite of all this revved-up activity, Grand Turk remains its dreamy, laid-back self. Stay for a couple of days, and you'll be waving to familiar faces on the street, calling the local dogs by name, and settling in for a sunset cocktail on Duke Street.

GRAND TURK ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Turks and Caicos Tourist Board** (www.turksandcaicostourism.com) has an office in Grand Turk (Front St., Cockburn Town; ✆ **649/946-2321**) and one in New York City (Room 2817, the Lincoln Building, 60 E. 42nd St.; ✆ **800/241-0824**). Office hours are Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm.

GETTING TO GRAND TURK Your likely point of entry into the Turks and Caicos Islands will be the **Providenciales International Airport** (www.provoairport.com). To get to Grand Turk or Salt Cay, you will take a **domestic flight** on one of the interisland airlines or a charter plane from the Provo airport into Grand Turk International Airport (also known as J.A.G.S. McCartney International Airport). Several daily flights between Provo and Grand Turk are offered by the domestic airline **Air Turks & Caicos** (✆ **649/941-5481** or 649/946-1667 on Grand Turk; www.airturksandcaicos.com or www.skyking.tc), which bought rival SkyKing in 2008. **Global Airways** charters (✆ **649/941-3222;** www.globalairways.tc) also flies to Grand Turk. The flight from Provo to Grand Turk takes 20 minutes and costs approximately $135 round-trip.

GETTING AROUND GRAND TURK **Taxis** are always available at the Grand Turk airport. The fare is $10 to $12 from the airport to most major hotels. Staff at your hotel can summon a taxi for you if you need one. Drivers are more than happy to give visitors a tour of the island; expect to pay around $50 for a 45-minute island tour.

On Grand Turk, you can rent cars (as well as scooters, bicycles, and snorkeling gear) at **Tony's Car Rental,** located at the Grand Turk International Airport (✆ **649/964-1979;** www.tonyscarrental.com). Cars and jeeps rent for from $70 to $95 a day, scooter rentals cost $60 a day, and bike rentals are $20 a day. Tony's also offers scooter tours of the island.

FAST FACTS Both **First Caribbean International Bank** (✆ **649/946-2831**) and **Scotiabank** (✆ **649/946-4750**) have 24-hour ATM service at their main branches on Front Street in Cockburn Town.

Grand Turk Hospital is on Hospital Road in Grand Turk (✆ **649/946-2040**). Call ✆ **649/946-2299** if you need the police.

The **Grand Turk Post Office** is located on Front Street in Cockburn Town. It's open Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm.

WHERE TO STAY ON GRAND TURK

Don't expect a lineup of luxury resorts, a la Provo; the accommodations on Grand Turk are, for the most part, comfortable but modest, with prices to match.

Reopened for business in January 2009 after being walloped by Hurricane Ike, **Bohio Dive Resort** has a nice location on beautiful Pillory Beach, an in-house dive operation, 12 serviceable rooms and 4 suites, and a good restaurant, **Guanahani,** Front St. (✆ **649/946-2135;** www.bohioresort.com); 3-night dive/hotel package: high season (Dec. 21–June 30) $499 double, $555 suite; off season $299 double, $475 suite. 3-night package (hotel only): high season $439 double, $415 suite; off season $299 double, $335 suite.

Grand Turk Inn ★★ These are easily the best accommodations on Grand Turk. Sisters Katrina Birt and Sandy Erb, veterans of the Key West inn scene, discovered the charms of Grand Turk and the excellent bones of this handsome Bermudan-style 150-year-old former Methodist manse, which they lovingly renovated. The five suites are spacious and ultracomfortable, with king- or queen-size beds dressed in soft linens; all have full kitchens and private bathrooms. The second-floor Pelican Suite can sleep up to four people. An upper-floor sun deck overlooking the sea provides the perfect venue from which to watch humpback whales pass in the winter.

Front St. (P.O. Box 9), Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆/fax **649/946-2827.** www.grandturkinn.com. 5 units. Winter $300 double; summer $250 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children 15 or under. **Amenities:** Bikes; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV/DVD, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Osprey Beach Hotel Kids Virtually untouched by the ferocious September 2008 hurricane, this hotel enjoys a standout white-sand-beach setting that offers good swimming and snorkeling. Twenty-seven rooms occupy modern two-story town houses, each with oceanfront verandas, but 12 more units are located in the older building across the street. Some rooms have kitchenettes, but all contain ceiling fans and fridges plus small bathrooms with tub/shower. (Rooms on the upper floors are larger and have higher ceilings.) A lunch and dinner tapas menu is served at the **Birdcage Bar & Restaurant,** with tables set up around the hotel pool; on Sunday and Wednesday nights, the whole of Duke Street and beyond congregates for the **poolside barbecue buffet** ($14–$26) and the toe-tapping ripsaw music of "dive-master troubadour" Mitch Rolling and the High Tide.

Duke St. (P.O. Box 216), Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **649/946-2666.** Fax 649/946-2817. www.ospreybeachhotel.com. 39 units. Rates per person double occupancy for 3-night stay: High season $349–$409 double, $205–$248 courtyard rooms (in Atrium); low season $255–$354 double, $174–$214 courtyard rooms (in Atrium). Extra person $30 per day. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Dive/hotel packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant/cafe; bar; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, dataport, fridge, kitchenette (in some).

Turks Head Mansion ★ In the wake of Hurricane Ike, this historic 1830 structure underwent a top-to-bottom renovation that left its vintage detailing intact. Set in the heart of the Duke Street action, the house was originally the home of the salt industry overseer and served as the American consulate for 86 years. The six guest rooms retain their original moldings and cedar ceilings, and have been outfitted with antique furniture.

Destroyed in the storm were beautiful old shade trees (including a male guinep tree planted the same year the house was built); in their place is a Victorian-style gazebo. Be sure to have a drink at the **Friendship 7 Bar,** so-named for the NASA memorabilia left over from John Glenn's stay here when his Mercury space capsule landed off Grand Turk in 1962. For a kick, settle back and enjoy one of the rotating series of films shown in the movie arcade, all of which were made on Grand Turk—most of which bypassed the movie theaters and went straight to Lifetime TV.

Turks Head Mansion, 1 Duke St., Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, B.W.I. ✆ **649/946-2066.** www.turkshead mansion.com. 6 units. $85–$175 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi; movie arcade/Christmas shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE ON GRAND TURK

Recommended for its stellar platters of fried chicken (no less than the *Washington Post* raved about them) is the **Poop Deck,** a wooden shack on Front Street (no phone). Don't miss the **Wednesday-** and **Sunday-night poolside barbecues** at the **Birdcage,** in the Osprey Beach Hotel on Duke Street. The restaurant is also open for dinner (✆ **649/946-2666**). The **Turks Head Mansion** (see above) plans to reopen its restaurant and Friendship 7 Bar as soon as the inn is up and running (✆ **649/946-2066;** www.turkshead mansion.com). You can also dine at **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville** in the Grand Turk Cruise Center. The colorful restaurant is bordered by a lagoonlike pool with a swim-up bar, slide, and infinity edge; it's open on days when ships come in (4–6 days a week), but that may change. Contact the cruise center at ✆ **649/946-1040** for information about the restaurant hours and opening times.

Captain Zheng's CHINESE This hot spot brings 'em in with delicious, freshly made Chinese dishes. You'll dine under tents outdoors amid softly draped linens and Oriental lanterns. The menu changes regularly, but among the most popular items are Sichuan chili chicken, crisp ribs, lemon beef, and Peking duck.

At the Salina Houses, Close Haul Rd. (south of Duke St.). ✆ **649/242-2436.** Main courses $11–$23 (Peking duck $30). No credit cards. Tues–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sat 6–10 pm.

The Sandbar CARIBBEAN/BURGERS This casual, friendly watering hole set above the beach survived Hurricane Ike, and it's back in business as a social hub for locals and visitors and a dog or two lying in the cool sand. It's owned by two energetic Canadian sisters, Tonya and Katya, who also run the **Manta House B&B** (✆ **649/946-1111;** www.grandturk-mantahouse.com), across the street. The menu is much more interesting than a beach bar's needs to be, with lobster quesadilla, cracked conch, shrimp and chips, and respectable burgers.

Duke St. ✆ **649/946-1111.** Main courses $10–$18. MC, V. Daily noon–late (food served noon–3pm and 6–9pm).

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING AROUND GRAND TURK ★★

Some of the finest **scuba diving** in the archipelago is around Grand Turk—in fact, a breathtakingly short .8km to 1.6km (½–1 mile) offshore (a 5- to 10-min. boat ride away). The action is at the **Wall,** where the western edges of the island (and its necklace of coral reef) plunge dramatically 2,100m (6,888 ft.) into deep water, actually the leeward side of the Turks Island Passage (also known as the Columbus Passage), which lies between the Turks Islands and the Caicos Islands. Scuba divers flock here to enjoy panoramic wall dives on the vertical sides of the reefs. The diving sites of the Wall have

colorful names like Coral Garden, the Aquarium, the Library, and even McDonald's (for its coral arch). You'll even see humpback whales as they migrate south through the Turks Island Passage in the winter.

Snorkeling can be good right off many Grand Turk beaches, including **Governor's Beach, White Sands Beach,** and **Pillory Beach** (in front of the Bohio Dive Resort). One popular activity is a **snorkeling trip to Gibbs Cay,** an uninhabited cay where snorkelers can swim with native stingrays in shallow water; most local dive operators (see section below for contact information) offer snorkeling trips to Gibbs Cay for around $60 per person. The dive shops discussed below all rent snorkel gear.

Dive Operators

The owners and operators of the following dive companies are experienced divers on the island, and they know where to find marine life in a kaleidoscope of colors. They work with novices—offering good beginning courses and training—as well as experienced divers of all skill levels. Rates below are per person.

Blue Water Divers, on Front Street (✆/fax **649/946-1226;** www.grandturkscuba.com), offers single dives, PADI registration, and dive packages, and even runs trips to Salt Cay. These people are top rate and will tell you many facts and legends about diving in their country (like the fact that the highest mountain in the Turks and Caicos is 2,400m/7,872 ft. tall, but only the top 42m/138 ft. are above sea level!). A single-tank dive costs $45, with a two-tank dive going for $85; a night dive costs $55. Trips to Salt Cay and Gibbs Cay cost $60. Full PADI certification is $400. (Mitch Rolling, the Blue Water Divers dive master, is also the guitarist who plays at the Osprey Beach Hotel at Sun and Wed barbecues with the ripsaw band High Tide.)

Sea Eye Diving, on Duke Street (✆ **649/946-1407;** www.seaeyediving.com), is convenient to most hotels in town. It offers two-tank morning dives at $75 to $80. An afternoon single-tank dive costs $45, and a single-tank night dive goes for $55. Rental equipment is also available. NAUI and PADI courses at all levels are offered. Snorkeling and cay trips are available for nondivers. Sea Eye Diving offers a Stingray Snorkeling Adventure and Beach Barbecue to Gibbs Cay for $60 per person.

Oasis Divers, on Duke Street (✆ **649/946-1128;** www.oasisdivers.com), offers complete dive-master services, with dive adventures along the Wall, night dives, trips to Gibbs Cay, snorkeling trips, trips to Salt Cay, and dive/accommodations packages. A morning two-tank dive costs $86; a night dive is $55. An instruction course and dive from your resort is $110; a trip to Salt Cay is $50 and a trip to Gibbs Cay is $55.

EXPLORING GRAND TURK

People mainly travel to Grand Turk to swim, snorkel, dive, and do nothing but soak up the sun. But now that the cruise ships have arrived, local tour operators are offering an assortment of new activities and tours, including horseback-riding trips, jeep safaris, kayaking trips, and dune-buggy tours.

It's a pleasant bike ride to the Northwest Point to see the cast-iron **Grand Turk Lighthouse,** which was brought in pieces from the United Kingdom, where it had been constructed in 1852. Its old lens is on display in the Turks & Caicos National Museum.

Hurricane Ike delayed the opening of **Conch World** (✆ **649/946-1228**), a combination theme park, commercial conch farm (sister to Provo's Conch Farm, now closed from damage from the hurricane), and educational complex, but it should be open and operational by the time this book is published. Visitors can tour a re-created pre-Columbian

Lucayan village and an 18-century Cockburn Village. A restaurant and gift shop are also in the works. Conch World is located on the island's east coast.

Grand Turk Cruise C enter Grand Turk's 2006 inaugural season as a Caribbean cruise ship destination saw some 136 cr uise-ship calls and 300,000 passengers arriv e on the island—and those numbers ar e projected to nearly double in 2009. F ortunately, the 5.7-hectare (14-acre) terminal is far enough away fr om the heart of Cockburn Town to be minimally disr uptive. And, as cr uise ship terminals go, it 's a lot mor e inviting than most: The colorful facility was designed by the folks at Carnival Cruise Lines to resemble a lo w-rise B ermudan-style village out of the early 19th centur y, much like Cockburn Town might have looked in the early 1800s. The center is planted just south of G overnor's B each, with a 172m-long (564-ft.) main pier , hundreds of deck chairs along the beach, a huge **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville,** a main building with four vintage-style chimneys, and shops designed to r esemble the quaint wooden " salt houses" of the salt-raking era. I t all lies mute and still until the arriv al of a 2,000-passenger ship , which shows up on the empty horiz on at sunrise—a tiny blip that gradually morphs into a chugging behemoth. D uring stopovers, cr uise passengers can ride to G overnor's B each on a miniatur e tr olley; tour Cockburn Town b y dune buggy , horse-drawn carriage, moped, or shuttle taxi; or take one of sev eral active shore excursions, whether scuba diving, kayaking, or horseback riding. I ndependent-minded travelers who prefer to explore the island on their own can now rent a car at the Cruise Center's newly opened car-rental office. ***Note:*** The cruise center is open only on days when ships come in (no w averaging 4–6 days a week).

Waterloo Rd. ✆ **649/946-1040.** www.grandturkcc.com.

Turks & C aicos Na tional Museum ★★ This is the countr y's first museum. I t occupies a 150-year-old residence, Guinep House, originally built by Bermudan wreckers from timbers salv aged from ships that crashed on nearb y reefs. Today about half of its display areas are devoted to the r emains of the most complete ar chaeological excavation ever performed in the West Indies, the wreck of a Spanish caravel (sailing ship) that sank in shallow water sometime before 1513. Used to transport local Lucayans who had been enslaved, the boat is similar to exploration vessels built in Spain and Portugal during the 1400s. Researchers from the Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University began excavations in 1982. Today the remains are referred to simply as the "Wreck of the Molasses Reef." Although only 2% of the hull remains intact, the exhibits contain a rich legacy of the everyday (nonbiodegradable) objects used by the crews and officers.

The remainder of the museum is dev oted to exhibits about the island 's now-defunct salt industry, its plantation economy, the pr e-Columbian inhabitants of the island, and its natural history. A natural-history exhibit features a three-dimensional reproduction of a section of the G rand Turk Wall, the famous vertical reef.

Guinep House, Front St., Cockburn Town, Grand Turk. ✆ **649/946-2160.** www.tcmuseum.org. Admission $5 nonresidents, free for full-time island residents. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat 9am–1pm.

GRAND TURK AFTER DARK

Wednesday and Sunday barbecues at the Osprey Beach Hotel on Duke Street (p. 699) feature music by Mitch Rolling and the High Tide.

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The U.S. Virgin Islands

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, it is the best and worst of times. The cruise ship industry has forever altered St. Thomas and, to a lesser extent, St. Croix. Both islands, however, still have their sugar-white beaches, which put them on the world tourist map in the first place, and both of them, especially St. Thomas, are known for their duty-free shopping.

For dedicated shoppers, **St. Thomas** is even better than San Juan or St. Maarten. The capital of St. Thomas, Charlotte Amalie, is, in fact, the shopping bazaar of the Caribbean.

In addition to the never-ending stream of cruise ship passengers, parts of St. Thomas have been turned into condos and time-share developments. You will no longer have its beautiful beaches to yourself. If you were dreaming of a secluded tropical retreat, it is better to take a time capsule back to 1950. Today, in addition to endless shops, the island abounds in bars and restaurants, including fast-food joints, and has a vast selection of hotels in all price ranges.

St. Croix is bigger and more tranquil than St. Thomas. Another favorite with cruise ship passengers, St. Croix touts its shopping and has more stores than most islands in the Caribbean, especially in and around Christiansted, although it's not as dense with stores as Charlotte Amalie. Its major attraction is Buck Island, a U.S. National Park that lies offshore. St. Thomas has nothing to equal this attraction of nature.

Although St. Croix has far fewer resort hotels than St. Thomas, it could hardly be called sleepy. More and more developers are also turning St. Croix into condo heaven.

The best news for last: **St. John,** the smallest of the three islands, is also the most beautiful and the least developed. It has only two big hotels. Some two-thirds of this island are set aside as a U.S. National Park. Even if you visit only for the day while based on St. Thomas, you'll want to see the island's dreamy beach, Trunk Bay.

The U.S. Virgin Islands lie in two bodies of water: St. John is entirely in the Atlantic Ocean, St. Croix is entirely in the Caribbean Sea, and St. Thomas spans the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Directly in the belt of the subtropical, easterly trade winds, these islands enjoy one of the most perfect year-round climates in the world. The U.S. Virgins are some 60 miles east of Puerto Rico and 1,100 miles southeast of Miami.

Columbus arrived in 1493, but he was a Johnny-come-lately. The Taíno Indians from South America had discovered the U.S. Virgin Islands centuries before. The Spanish never made a great attempt to become permanent settlers, and they sparsely defended the island, allowing it to be settled by a motley crew of various Europeans.

The Danish government in 1733 acquired the Virgin Islands from the Danish West India Company. The Danes did not find the land suitable for agriculture, and St. Thomas became a bustling port instead through which the products from the rest of the West Indies were traded. It also became a center for transporting slaves.

The Virgin Islands remained under Danish rule until 1917, when the U.S., fearing German infiltration in the Caribbean during World War I, purchased the

islands from Denmark. Today the U.S. Virgin Islands claims the highest per-capita income in the Caribbean, with some 50,000 settlers of varying ethnicity making their home in St. Thomas alone.

DON'T MISS . . .

- **Virgin Islands National Park,** St. John: The lushest concentration of flora and fauna in the U.S. Virgin Islands is showcased in the smallest of the U.S. Virgins, St. John. From pelicans to sandpipers, from mahogany to bay trees, the park abounds in beauty, including a burst of tropical flowers such as the tamarind and the flamboyant. The mongoose also calls it home. Park guides lead nature walks through this park that often takes you past ruins of former plantations.
- **Charlotte Amalie,** St. Thomas, the shopping mecca of the Caribbean. Sure, some visitors come to St. Thomas for its beaches, but others come here to shop till they drop. Warehouses in the 18th century stored pirates' loot, but today they are filled with duty-free shops displaying shiploads of imported luxuries from around the world, especially Britain and France. Cruise ship passengers vie with island vacationers to snare the best merchandise.
- **Buck Island,** St. Croix: An unpopulated island and an underwater wonder for divers, this 344-hectare (850-acre) National Monument off the coast of St. Croix features a snorkeling trail through a forest of elkhorn coral. Boat owners take you on half- or full-day trips where you'll also find a picture-perfect white-sandy beach.

1 ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION

For general information, search **www.usvitourism.vi**.

Before you go, contact the **U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Tourism,** at One Penn Plaza, Ste. 3525, New York, NY 10001 (✆ **212/502-5300**). Branch offices are located at: 245 Peachtree Center Ave., Marriott 1 Tower, Ste. MB-05, Atlanta, GA 30303 (✆ **404/688-0906**); 500 N. Michigan Ave., Ste. 2030, Chicago, IL 60611 (✆ **312/670-8784**); 2655 Le Jeune Rd., Ste. 907, Coral Gables, FL 33134 (✆ **305/442-7200**); 3460 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 412, Los Angeles, CA 90010 (✆ **213/739-0138**); and 444 North Capital St., Ste. 305, Washington, D.C. 20009 (✆ **202/624-3590**).

GETTING THERE

It's possible to fly from the mainland of the U.S. directly to St. Thomas and St. Croix, but the only way to get to St. John is by a ferry from St. Thomas, or from Jost Van Dyke or Tortola in the British Virgin Islands.

TO ST. THOMAS OR ST. CROIX **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) offers frequent service to St. Thomas and St. Croix from the U.S. mainland, with three daily flights from New York to St. Thomas in high season. Passengers originating in other parts of the world are usually routed to St. Thomas through American's hubs in Miami or San Juan, both of which offer nonstop service (often several times a day) to St. Thomas. (American Eagle has 12 nonstop flights daily from San Juan to St. Thomas.)

Delta (✆ **800/221-1212** in the U.S. and Canada; www.delta.com) offers two daily nonstop flights between Atlanta and St. Thomas in winter, as well as three nonstop flights weekly between Atlanta and St. Croix.

US Airways (✆ **800/622-1015** in the U.S. and Canada; www.usairways.com) has one nonstop daily flight from Philadelphia to St. Thomas, and an additional flight on Saturday.

Cape Air (✆ **800/352-0714** in the U.S. and Canada; www.flycapeair.com) has service between St. Thomas and Puerto Rico. This Massachusetts-based airline offers 5 to 12 flights daily. Cape Air has expanded its service to include flights from San Juan to St. Croix and flights between St. Croix and St. Thomas.

United Airlines (✆ **800/538-2929** in the U.S. and Canada; www.united.com) has nonstop service on various days to St. Thomas from Chicago and Washington, D.C.

Continental Airlines (✆ **800/231-0856** in the U.S. and Canada; www.continental.com) has daily flights from Newark to St. Thomas.

A **ferry** service between Charlotte Amalie in St. Thomas and Puerto Rico, with a stop in St. John, is available about once every 2 weeks. The trip takes about 2 hours, costing $150 round-trip. For more information, call ✆ **340/776-6282** or 787/863-0582.

TO ST. CROIX FROM ST. THOMAS **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the U.S. and Canada; www.aa.com) has eight flights a day, costing $246 one-way between St. Thomas and St. Croix, with a stopover in San Juan. In addition, **Seaborne Airlines** (✆ **888/359-8687** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/773-6442; www.seaborneairlines.com) offers 21 round-trip flights daily, going for $80 one-way and $125 round-trip. Flight time is 25 minutes.

TO ST. JOHN The easiest and most common way to get to St. John is by **ferry** (✆ **340/776-6282**), which leaves from the Red Hook landing pier on St. Thomas's eastern tip; the trip takes about 20 minutes each way. Beginning at 6:30am, boats depart more or less every hour. The last ferry back to Red Hook departs from St. John's Cruz Bay at noon. The service is frequent and efficient enough that even cruise ship passengers temporarily anchored in Charlotte Amalie can visit St. John for a quick island tour. The one-way fare is $25 for adults, $20 for children 5 to 11. Schedules change without notice, so call in advance.

To reach the ferry, take the **Vitran** bus from a point near Market Square (in Charlotte Amalie) directly to Red Hook. The cost is $1 per person each way. In addition, privately owned taxis will negotiate a price to carry you from virtually anywhere to the docks at Red Hook.

If you've just landed on St. Thomas and want to go straight to the ferry dock, your best bet is to take a cab from the airport (Vitran buses run from Charlotte Amalie but don't serve the airport area). After disembarking from the ferry on St. John, you'll have to get another cab to your hotel. Depending on the traffic, the cab ride on St. Thomas could take 30 to 45 minutes, at a fare between $20 and $24.

It's also possible to board a **boat** for St. John directly at the Charlotte Amalie waterfront for a cost of $10 to $15 each way. The ride takes 45 minutes. The boats depart from Charlotte Amalie at 7:15am and continue every 2 hours, until the last boat departs around 5:30pm. (The last boat to leave St. John's Cruz Bay for Charlotte Amalie departs at 3:45pm.) Call ✆ **340/776-6282** for more information.

Fast Facts The U.S. Virgin Islands

Banks Banks are generally open Monday to Thursday 9am to 3pm and Friday 9am to 6pm. It's not hard to find a bank with an ATM on St. Thomas or St. Croix.

Currency The **U.S. dollar** is the unit of currency in the Virgin Islands. *Prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars.*

Customs Every U.S. resident can bring home $1,600 worth of duty-free purchases, including two cases of liquor per adult. If you go over the $1,600 limit, you pay a flat 5% duty, up to $1,000. You can also mail home gifts valued at up to $100 per day, which you don't have to declare. (At other spots in the Caribbean, U.S. citizens are limited to $400 or $600 worth of merchandise and a single bottle of liquor.)

Documents U.S. and Canadian citizens are required to present some proof of citizenship to enter the Virgin Islands, such as a birth certificate with a raised seal along with a government-issued photo ID. A passport is not strictly required, but carrying one is a good idea. The requirements for other citizens are the same as for foreigners entering the U.S. mainland; travelers from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand need valid passports but not visas.

Electricity It's the same as on the U.S. mainland: 120-volt AC (60 cycles). No transformer, adapter, or converter is needed for U.S. appliances.

Emergencies In an emergency, dial ✆ **911.**

Liquor Laws Liquor is sold 7 days a week, but it is not permitted on beaches.

Safety The U.S. Virgin Islands have more than their share of crime. Travelers should exercise extreme caution both day and night, especially in the back streets of Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas, and in Christiansted and Frederiksted on St. Croix. Muggings are commonplace. Avoid strolling at night, especially on the beaches.

Taxes There is no departure tax for the U.S. Virgin Islands. Hotels add on a 10% tax. (Always ask if it's included in the original price you're quoted.)

Telephone The phone system for the U.S. Virgin Islands is the same as on the U.S. mainland. The area code is **340.** To reach **Sprint,** dial ✆ **800/877-8000,** and to reach **MCI,** dial ✆ **800/950-5555.**

Time The U.S. Virgins are on Atlantic Standard Time, which is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time. However, the islands do not observe daylight saving time, so in the summer during daylight saving time, the Virgin Islands and the U.S. East Coast are on the same time. In winter, when it's 6am in Charlotte Amalie, it's 5am in Miami.

Tipping Tip as you would on the U.S. mainland (15% in restaurants, 10%–15% to taxi drivers, $2 per round to bartenders, at least $1 or $2 per day for chambermaids). Some hotels add a 10% to 15% surcharge to cover service, so check before you wind up paying twice.

Water Most visitors drink the local tap water with no harmful aftereffects. Those with more delicate stomachs might want to stick to bottled water.

Weather From November to February, temperatures average about 77°F (25°C). Sometimes in August the temperature peaks in the high 90s (mid-30s Celsius), but the subtropical breezes keep it comfortably cool in the shade. The temperature in winter may drop into the low 60s (mid-teens Celsius), but this rarely happens.

2 ST. THOMAS ★

St. Thomas, the busiest cruise ship destination in the West Indies, is not the largest of the U.S. Virgins. (St. Croix holds that distinction.) But bustling Charlotte Amalie is the capital of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the shopping hub of the Caribbean. The beaches on this island are renowned for their white sand and calm, turquoise waters, including the very best of them all, **Magens Bay.** Despite all the development, *National Geographic* rated St. Thomas as one of the top destinations in the world for sailing, scuba diving, and fishing.

Charlotte Amalie, named after an 18th-century Danish princess, with its white houses and bright red roofs glistening in the sun, is one of the most beautiful towns in the Caribbean. In addition to its shopping, the town is filled with historic sights, like Fort Christian, an intriguing 17th-century building constructed by the Danes. The town's architecture reflects the island's culturally diverse past. You'll pass Dutch doors, Danish red-tile roofs, French iron grillwork, and Spanish-style patios.

Because of St. Thomas's thriving commercial activity, as well as its lingering drug and crime problems, the island is often referred to as the most "unvirgin" of the Virgin Islands. Charlotte Amalie's Main Street is virtually a 4- to 5-block-long shopping center. But while this area tends to be overcrowded, for the most part, the island's beaches, major hotels, restaurants, and entertainment facilities are removed from the cruise ship chaos. And you can always find a secluded resort in the more remote sections of the island. Hotels on the north side of St. Thomas look out at the Atlantic; those on the south side front the calmer Caribbean Sea.

If you arrive by cruise ship, it will dock at one of two of the busiest docking areas in the Caribbean, either **WICO Docks** or the more recently inaugurated **Crown Bay Marina,** a latter-day adaptation of the old U.S. submarine base. Both areas are state-of-the-art moorings and docking facilities, and richly accessorized with high-tech security services and dozens of quality shops within a very short stroll. But whereas clients disembarking at Crown Bay Marina need vehicular access to downtown Charlotte Amalie, passengers disembarking at WICO can get there after a short stroll. Carnival and Royal Caribbean vessels tend to moor at the WICO docks; ships from the Princess and Holland American lines tend to moor at the Crown Bay Marina.

ST. THOMAS ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION At 78 Estate Contant 1-2-3, across from the Nisky Shopping Center, on the waterfront in downtown Charlotte Amalie, the **Department of Tourism** (✆ **340/774-8784**) is open only Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm. There are also **Welcome Centers** at both of the island's cruise ship terminals.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** are unmetered, but fares are controlled and widely posted, and each taxi is, at least officially, supposed to carry a copy of those fares inside. However,

Fun Facts Carnival

The annual **Carnival** celebration, held after Easter, is a spectacular event, with echoes of the islanders' African heritage. "Mocko Jumbies," people dressed as spirits, parade through the streets on stilts nearly 6m (20 ft.) high. Steel, calypso, and fungi bands; "jump-ups" (Caribbean hoedowns); and parades bring the event to life. Events take place islandwide, but most of the action is on the streets of Charlotte Amalie. Contact the visitor center in St. Thomas for a schedule of events.

we still recommend that you determine a fare with the driver before you get into the car. A typical fare—say, from Havensight Mall to Magens Bay for a day at the beach—runs to $8.50 per person or $6 per person in a shared cab. Surcharges, one-third of the price of the excursion, are added after midnight. You'll pay $1 to $2 per bag for luggage. For 24-hour radio-dispatch taxi service, call ✆ **340/774-7457.** If you want to hire a taxi and a driver (who just may be a great tour guide) for a day, expect to pay about $30 per person for 2 hours of sightseeing in a shared car, or from $50 per hour for two to four people.

Taxi vans transport 8 to 12 passengers to multiple destinations on the island. It's cheaper to take a van instead of a taxi if you're going between your hotel and the airport. The cost for luggage ranges from $1 to $2 per bag.

Buses, called **Vitrans,** leave from street-side stops in the center of Charlotte Amalie, fanning out east and west along all the most important highways. They run between 5:30am and 8pm daily, but waits can be very long and this is a difficult way to get about. A ride within Charlotte Amalie is 75¢, and anywhere else, $1. For schedule and bus-stop information, call ✆ **340/774-5678.**

St. Thomas has many leading North American **car-rental firms** at the airport, and competition is stiff among the following: **Avis** (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/774-1468; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/776-5774; www.budgetstt.com), **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/774-1879; www.hertz.com), and **Thrifty** (✆ **800/367-2277** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/776-1500; www.thrifty.com). You can often save money by renting from a local agency, although vehicles aren't always as well maintained. Try **Dependable Car Rental,** 3901 Altona, Welgunst, behind the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Medical Arts Complex (✆ **800/522-3076** or 340/774-2253; www.dependablecar.com), which will pick up renters at the airport or their hotel; or the aptly named **Discount Car Rental,** 14 Harwood Hwy., outside the airport on the main highway (✆ **877/478-2833** or 340/776-4858; www.discountcar.vi), which grants drivers a 12% discount on rivals' rates. There is no tax on car rentals in the Virgin Islands, but if you opt to retrieve your rental car at the airport, as opposed to any of the other island locations, you'll pay a 12% airport pickup fee.

FAST FACTS **Roy Lester Schneider Regional Hospital,** 9048 Sugar Estate, Charlotte Amalie (✆ **340/776-8311**), a 5-minute drive east of the town's commercial center, is the largest hospital, with the best-equipped emergency room.

Bolongo Bay Beach Resort **8**
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Warning! Drivers Beware

Remember: Drive on the left. This comes as a surprise to many U.S. visitors, who expect that U.S. driving practices will hold here. Speed limits are 32kmph (20 mph) in towns, 56kmph (35 mph) outside towns. St. Thomas has a high accident rate, as tourists are not used to driving on the left, the hilly terrain hides blind curves and entrance ramps, roads are narrow and poorly lit, and drivers often get behind the wheel after too many drinks. Double-check whether your own car insurance will cover you on the island, or whether your credit card will provide coverage. If not, to be on the safe side, consider getting **collision-damage insurance,** which usually costs an extra $20 to $35 per day. Be aware that, even with this insurance, you could still get hit with a deductible. Check with each rental company before you sign.

WHERE TO STAY ON ST. THOMAS

Remember that hotels in the Virgin Islands slash their prices in summer by 20% to 60%. Unless otherwise noted, the rates listed below do *not* include the 10% government tax.

Very Expensive

Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort ★★ Lying 4.8km (3 miles) east of Charlotte Amalie on the south shore, this is the largest hotel on island—and one of the best, although not as plush as the Ritz-Carlton (see below). The megaresort is divided into two sections, both lying on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean: the less expensive Frenchman's Reef and the more upscale Morning Star. Oddly, the suites are in the high-rise Frenchman's Reef, not in the low-rise Morning Star annex. All units have private balconies and are midsize to spacious, with tasteful, comfortable furnishings. Facilities devoted to the good life are everywhere; you take a glass-enclosed elevator to reach a secluded beach.

5 Estate Bakkeroe, Flamboyant Point, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00801. ✆ **888/236-2427** or 340/715-6193. Fax 340/776-8500. www.marriott.com. 506 units. Winter $349–$700 double, from $1,009 suite; off season $208–$435 double, from $750 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 6 bars; babysitting; health club; 3 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 2 tennis courts; watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Ritz-Carlton St. Thomas ★★★ Kids Fronted by white-sand beaches, on 12 hectares (30 acres) of steeply sloping terrain near the extreme southeastern tip of St. Thomas, its architecture evokes a *palazzo* in Venice. Originally built by another hotel chain, and skillfully adapted and expanded to the Ritz-Carlton's specifications, it's the most prestigious and desirable hotel on the island, with landscaped gardens, bubbling fountains, and occasionally hidden courtyards evoking the feel of a sprawling Mediterranean villa.

Regardless of room (some are better accessorized and more plush than others), each accommodation has been fully renovated and painted in tones of butter and mahogany. Most of the accommodations are in six three-story villa annexes, each designed with vaguely Mediterranean motifs. Both the landscaping and the public rooms have been considerably upgraded, including the Ritz-Carlton spa. A wide variety of cardiovascular and weight-training equipment was also added.

6900 Great Bay, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/241-3333** or 340/775-3333. Fax 340/775-4444. www.ritzcarlton.com. 204 units. Winter $619–$869 double, from $1,129 suite; off season $609–$759 double, from $1,099 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 3 bars; babysitting; children's programs; health club; Jacuzzi; 2 outdoor pools; room service; spa; 2 tennis courts; nonmotorized watersports equipment rental. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa ★★ (Kids) At the eastern end of the island, on a desirable 13-hectare (32-acre) plot of steeply sloping terrain, within a 5-minute ride from Red Hook, this well-maintained, much-improved hotel caters very clearly to a conservative, mainstream clientele who often opt to bring their families and young children along with them on holiday. Since about 60% of the guests who stay here opt for a (optional) full-board plan, it is the largest all-inclusive hotel on St. Thomas. It has panoramic views that sweep out over the sea from its position atop a rocky headland, although its secluded beach is really too small for a resort of this size. Many of the attractive rooms are decorated with rattan pieces and pastels. This is not the most cutting-edge or stylish hotel on the island, but after a renovation in 2006, guest rooms have modern carpeting, Balinesian furnishings, electronics, wall treatments, and state-of-the-art plumbing. The hotel has one of only two casinos (slot machines only) on the island, and the hotel's spa, Journeys, is the largest full-service spa in the U.S. Virgins.

6500 Estate Smith Bay, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **877/999-3223** or 340/777-7100. Fax 340/777-7200. www.wyndham.com. 294 units. Winter $338–$519 double, from $750 suite; off season $183–$332 double, from $650 suite. Ask about packages and various meal plans. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; coffee shop; babysitting; children's club; fitness center; 3 outdoor pools; casino (slot machines only); sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa; 4 lit Laykold tennis courts; dive shop; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Expensive

Bolongo Bay Beach Resort ★ (Value) This is an unpretentious, middle-bracket, barefoot kind of place, a well-established St. Thomas all-inclusive (one of only two on the island) whose name translates as "beautiful" from a dialect spoken in the Congo. Deeply entrenched since it was established in 1974, it boasts a half-moon-shaped, 300m (984-ft.) white-sand beach—a bit rocky—and a cluster of pink two- and three-story buildings, plus some motel-like units set directly on the sands. The resort has a tightly knit management group consisting of second-generation family members and their spouses and children, and a social center consisting of a smallish pool and a beachfront bar, replete with palm fronds and timber-built structures that evoke a mixture of a Polynesian tree house, and a Palladian pavilion, all within easy reach of a bar and a definite sense of family-maintained *laissez faire.* It's a relatively small property, but it offers most of the facilities of a big resort. Many guests check in on the continental plan, which includes breakfast; others opt for plans that include all meals, drinks, a sailboat excursion to St. John, and use of scuba equipment. Rooms are simple, summery, and filled with the kind of conservative but comfortable furniture, all of it upgraded in 2007.

7150 Bolongo, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/524-4746** or 340/775-1800. Fax 340/775-3208. www.bolongobay.com. 65 units. Winter $195–$360 double; off season $170–$295 double. Ask about other packages and various meal plans. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs (ages 4–12); fitness center; basketball courts; 2 outdoor pools; sauna; 2 tennis courts; boating; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Tips Renting a Condo, Apartment, or Villa

Sometimes you can get a deal on a moderately priced condo, apartment, or villa. In our experience, **Calypso Realty** (✆ **800/747-4858** or 340/774-1620; fax 340/774-1634; www.calypsorealty.com) has the best offers, especially on rentals from April to mid-December. A week's rental of a condo, depending on its amenities and location, will cost from $1,600 to $8,000, and most contain a private pool.

Another source is **McLaughlin Anderson Luxury Villas** (✆ **800/666-6246,** 800/537-6246, or 340/776-0635; fax 340/777-4737; www.mclaughlinanderson.com), which has rentals not only on St. Thomas, but on St. John and St. Croix as well. A week's rental of a two-bedroom villa can cost from $2,100 to $9,000 in winter, with off-season rates beginning at $1,800.

You can also contact **Paradise Properties of St. Thomas** (✆ **800/524-2038** or 340/779-1540; fax 340/779-6109; www.st-thomas.com/paradiseproperties), which currently represents two condo complexes. Rental units range from studio apartments to two-bedroom villas suitable for up to six people; each has a fully equipped kitchen. A minimum stay of 3 days is required in any season, and 7 nights around Christmas. The prices range from $175 to $400 per day in winter and from $150 to $260 per day in the off season.

Elysian Beach Resort ★ This 1980s-era timeshare resort on Cowpet Bay in the east end, a 30-minute drive from Charlotte Amalie, is imbued with a certain European resort chic. The beautiful white-sand beach is the most compelling reason to stay, but you might also come if you're looking for tranquillity and seclusion without the razzle-dazzle of other east-end resorts. The thoughtfully planned bedrooms contain balconies, and four offer sleeping lofts reached by a spiral staircase. The decor is tropical, with rattan and bamboo furnishings, ceiling fans, and natural-wood ceilings.The rooms are in a bevy of four-story buildings connected to landscaped gardens. All units are one- or two-bedroom suites. Designer fabrics and white ceramic-tile floors make the tropical living quite grand. Try to avoid rooms in buildings V through Z, as they are some distance from the beach and close to the noisy traffic of the coastal road. Robert's American Grill serves American food, while the less formal Ainsley's Café features cocktails, West Indian and international food, burgers, and salads.

6800 Estate Nazareth, Cowpet Bay, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/438-6499** or 340/775-1000. Fax 340/776-0910. www.elysianbeachresort.net. 180 units. Winter $234–$259 double, $459 suite; off season $195–$239 double, $399 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; open-air shuttle to town; fitness center; volleyball; outdoor pool; sauna; smoke-free rooms; limited-service spa; tennis court; snorkeling gear; Sunfish sailboats; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Holiday Inn Windward Passage This well-managed, upgraded hotel is at the edge of Charlotte Amalie. It's favored by business travelers, sports fans, musicians, and politicians from neighboring islands. If you don't mind the sense of standardized rooms, chain hotel style, you can get some comfortable accommodations here. Rooms are priced with

premiums charged for water-fronting views, so ask for an "island view" if you want to economize.

Veterans Dr., P.O. Box 640, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00804. ✆ **888/465-4329** or 340/774-5200. Fax 340/774-1231. www.ichotelsgroup.com. 151 units. Winter $221–$309 double, $380–$445 suite; off season $165–$238 double, $285–$355 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; free shuttle bus to beach; exercise facilities; outdoor pool; room service; spa; access to organized watersports. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, beverage maker, hair dryer, iron, clock radio.

Pavilions and Pools ★ Finds This unpretentious resort is ideal for those who want to run around as nude as Adam and Eve, Eve and Eve, or Adam and Adam. It dates from the mid-1970s, when the concept of a condo unit with its private plunge pool was new and novel. You stay within your own walled garden, within an apartment whose floor-to-ceiling glass doors open onto a small but strictly private pool. After checking in and following a wooden and concrete pathway to an individual unit, you don't have to see another soul until you leave, if you so desire—the fence and gate around your space are that high. Your swimming pool is flanked on two sides with a deck and plenty of tropical greenery, but very few, if any, have views of the sea. The resort lies 11km (6¾ miles) east of Charlotte Amalie. The place is cozy and appealing, albeit in some cases a bit battered, but definitely not posh or particularly cutting edge. The resort lies steeply uphill from Sapphire Bay, one of the island's best beaches, although you'll have to walk across the grounds of a neighboring resort to reach it.

6400 Estate Smith Bay, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/524-2001** or 340/775-6110. Fax 340/775-6110. www.pavilionsandpools.com. 25 units. Winter $275–$360 double; off season $200–$275 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 25 outdoor pools; smoke-free rooms; day sails; snorkeling gear; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Point Pleasant Resort ★ This is a very private resort on Water Bay, on the northeastern tip of St. Thomas, just a 5-minute walk from lovely Stouffer's Beach. These condo units, which are rented when their owners are not in residence, are set atop a 6-hectare (15-acre) bluff with flowering shrubbery, century plants, frangipani trees, secluded nature trails, old rock formations, and lookout points. The villa-style accommodations have light and airy furnishings, mostly rattan and floral fabrics. From your living room, you'll have a gorgeous view over Tortola, St. John, and Jost Van Dyke. The restaurant, Agavé Terrace (p. 719), is one of the most consistently reliable on the island.

6600 Estate Smith Bay, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/524-2300** or 340/775-7200. Fax 340/776-5694. www.pointpleasantresort.com. 128 units. Winter $300 junior suite, $320–$375 deluxe suite, $550 2-bedroom suite; off season $180 junior suite, $195–$255 deluxe suite, $355 2-bedroom suite. Ask about package deals. Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; fitness center; 3 outdoor pools; smoke-free rooms; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchen.

Secret Harbour Beach Resort ★ This all-suites resort from the early 1970s is on the stunning white-sand beach at Nazareth Bay, just outside Red Hook Marina. Each of its pink-fronted contemporary annexes (four on the beachfront and an additional three on a hillside near the beach) has southwestern exposure (great for sunsets), and each unit has a private deck or patio. You'll be just steps from the sand, and great snorkeling is right offshore. There are three types of accommodations, each outfitted according to the tastes and budgets of its individual owner: studio apartments, one-bedroom suites, and two-bedroom suites. Each studio apartment has a bedroom/sitting-room area, patio, and

dressing-room area; each one-bedroom suite has a living/dining area, a separate bedroom, and a sun deck; and each luxurious two-bedroom suite has two bathrooms with tub/showers and a private living room. Honeymooners are likely to show up in the winter months.

The Blue Moon Café (p. 716) serves simple American dishes at lunch. At dinner look for some of the best steaks on the island and the fresh catch of the day.

6280 Estate Nazareth, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802-1104. ✆ **800/524-2250** or 340/775-6550. Fax 340/775-1501. www.secretharbourvi.com. 60 units. Winter $355–$385 double, $390–$475 1-bedroom suite; off season $185–$250 double, $225–$295 1-bedroom suite. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness center; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; 3 tennis courts; dive shop; scuba; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen.

Moderate

Villa Blanca ★ (Value) Small, intimate, charming, and just a wee bit battered, this hotel lies east of Charlotte Amalie on 1.2 secluded hectares (3 acres) of residential hilltop land, among the most panoramic areas on the island, with views over the harbor and the green rolling hills. The hotel's main building served as the private home of its present owner, Blanca Terrasa Smith, between 1973 and 1985. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Smith added a 12-room annex in the garden and opened her grounds to paying guests. Today a homey, caring ambience prevails. Each room contains tile floors, a ceiling fan and/or air-conditioning, a well-equipped kitchenette, and a private balcony or terrace with sweeping views either eastward to St. John or westward to Puerto Rico and the harbor of Charlotte Amalie. On the premises are a freshwater pool and a large covered patio where you can enjoy the sunset. The closest beach is Morning Star Bay, about a 6.5km (4-mile) drive away.

4 Raphune Hill, Rte. 38, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00801. ✆ **800/231-0034** or 340/776-0749. Fax 340/779-2661. www.villablancahotel.com. 14 units. Winter $135 double, $145 cottage; off season $95 double, $105 cottage. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; sport-fishing. *In room:* A/C and/or ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

The Crystal Palace This is one of the few B&Bs on St. Thomas. It occupies what was rebuilt in 1932 on early 19th-century foundations after a series of fires and hurricanes that left other parts of the island homeless. Today its owner is the kindly but crusty Ronnie Lockhart, president of the St. Thomas & St. John Friends of Denmark Society, Inc., who showcases the home he was raised in as a genuinely historical but somewhat battered mansion. There's a stateliness to this elegant antique monument, whose foot-thick masonry walls defy most attempts to drill through them. Views from the covered balconies of this place sweep out over the city and the harbor. Furnishings include a mixture of the modern, prosaic, and serviceable, and the genuinely antique, scattered rather formally amid souvenirs from the Lockhart family of long ago. Only two of the building's five accommodations contain a private bath—the others are shared facilities in the corridors.

12 Crystalgade, Synagogue Hill, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **866/502-2277** or 340/777-2277. www.crystalpalaceusvi.com. 5 units, 2 with bath. Winter $119 double without bathroom, $149 double with bathroom; off season $99 double without bathroom, $119 double with bathroom. Rates include breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, TV, no phone, Wi-Fi.

Galleon House Value The rates at Galleon House are among the most competitive on St. Thomas, and the resident managers (Canadian Sandy Rankin and his Tennessee-born wife, Martha) are especially helpful. It consists of a wood-sided "main house" (from around 1850) and a concrete-sided annex (built in the early 1980s), site of most of the accommodations. You'll walk up a long flight of stairs to reach a concrete terrace that doubles as the reception area. The small rooms are within scattered hillside buildings. The best accommodations have panoramic views from private verandas. Breakfast is served on a veranda overlooking the harbor, and Magens Beach is a 15-minute drive from the hotel.

Government Hill (P.O. Box 6577), Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00804. ✆ **800/524-2052** or 340/774-6952. Fax 340/774-6952. www.galleonhouse.com. 12 units, 11 with bathroom. Winter $85 double without bathroom, $109–$155 double with bathroom; off season $75 double without bathroom, $85–$125 double with bathroom. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; snorkeling equipment. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, Wi-Fi.

The Green Iguana ★ Value Sitting on Blackbeard's Hill, in the center of Charlotte Amalie, this is one of the best-run and most economical inns on the island. There's a remnant within the construction from a much older building, but much of what you'll see today is an unpretentious concrete structure from the 1970s and 1980s. Bedrooms have panoramic views of the harbor, the constantly arriving cruise ships, and the other Virgin Islands. The little inn lies only a 5-minute walk from the town's shops, restaurants, and bars, and Magens Beach is a 10-minute drive over the hill. Bedrooms are midsize and done in a tropical motif with wicker. You have a choice of a king-size, queen-size, or twin-size bed.

37B Blackbeard's Hill, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802. ✆ **800/484-8634** or 340/776-7654. Fax 340/777-4312. www.thegreeniguana.com. 9 units. Winter $135–$165 double; off season $95–$125 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette, Wi-Fi.

Hotel 1829 ★ This national historic site is one of the leading small hotels in the Caribbean. It was designed in a Spanish motif, with French grillwork, Danish bricks, and sturdy Dutch doors. Danish and African labor completed the structure in 1829 (hence the name), and since then it has entertained the likes of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Mikhail Baryshnikov. The place stands right in the heart of town, on a hillside 3 minutes from Government House. Magens Bay Beach is about a 10-minute drive. It's a bit of a climb to the top of this multitiered structure—there are many steps, but no elevator. Amid a cascade of flowering bougainvillea are the upper rooms, which overlook a central courtyard with a miniature pool. The rooms in the main house are well designed and attractive, and most face the water. All have wood beams and stone walls. The smallest units, in the former slave quarters, are the least comfortable. Children 11 and under aren't really encouraged here.

Kongens Gade (P.O. Box 1567), Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00804. ✆ **800/524-2002** or 340/776-1829. Fax 340/776-4313. www.hotel1829.com. 15 units. Winter $105–$155 double, from $190 suite; off season $90–$125 double, from $190 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; small outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE ON ST. THOMAS

The St. Thomas dining scene is among the best in the West Indies; however, meals tend to be expensive, and the best spots (with a few exceptions) are outside Charlotte Amalie and can be reached only by taxi or car.

Banana Tree Grille ★★ INTERNATIONAL Hip, urbanized, and deeply entrenched among the island's mover and shaker's inside strata, this is our favorite restaurant in St. Thomas. It's perched on a covered veranda whose sides, unless they're louvered shut during inclement weather, are open to the night air and the shimmering lights of Charlotte Amalie's harbor. Set at the base of Bluebeard's Castle (you'll have to walk through some of the 18th-century stone corridors to reach it), the place serves up candlelit dinners, sweeping views over the busy harbor, and a decor that includes genuine banana plants artfully scattered through the two dining rooms. The cuisine is creative, the patrons usually sophisticated and laid-back. Start with one of the aptly named "fabulous firsts," such as bacon-wrapped horseradish shrimp grilled and dancing over mango glaze. The house specialties, lobster-tail tempura with orange-sambal sauce and mango-mustard-glazed salmon, are particularly good. If it's offered, try the aioli lamb shank, another specialty; the meat is slowly braised in Chianti and served with aioli sauce over vegetables and garlic mashed potatoes. The desserts are truly decadent. The bar opens at 5pm. The effervescent Liz Buckelew, a hardworking entrepreneur, is the gracious, affable, and gregarious owner.

In Bluebeard's Castle, Bluebeard's Hill. ✆ **340/776-4050.** www.bananatreegrille.com. Reservations required. Main courses $20–$49. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–9:30pm.

Beni Iguana's Sushi Bar JAPANESE One of the few sushi restaurants on St. Thomas moved into new, intricately automated premises in 2007, as such creating a pleasant and bemused change of pace that's immediately adjacent to the cruise ship port in Charlotte Amalie's harbor. Even if you've just descended from a cruise ship, you still might be interested in the conveyor belt chug-chug-chugging its way along a track parallel to the tables here, each laden with an assortment of sushi, sashimi, and Japanese rolls. A perennial favorite is the "13" roll, stuffed with spicy crabmeat, salmon, lettuce, cucumbers, and scallions.

In the Havensight Mall. ✆ **340/777-8744.** www.beniiguanas.com. Reservations recommended. Sushi $6 per portion (2 pieces); main courses $6–$32; combo plates for 2–3 diners $16–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–10pm.

Blue Moon Café CREATIVE AMERICAN For idyllic dining in an open-air setting, this beachfront restaurant claims, with some degree of accuracy, one of the most memorable settings for panoramic sunset views. *The Wine Spectator* twice recognized the Blue Moon Café as having the most romantic setting in St. Thomas. The menu, based on market-fresh ingredients, is changed twice seasonally. The list of food is geared to appeal to a wide range of palates, beginning with such tropical starters as coconut-honey shrimp with a guava dipping sauce or a portobello mushroom–and–goat cheese tart with field onions. Tiptop foodstuffs are handled with imagination and appear in zestful combinations like mahimahi with pecans, bananas, and a coconut-rum sauce, and grilled scallops with a tomato-basil risotto with fresh asparagus. For lunch, you can enjoy burgers, wraps, salads, and sandwiches.

In the Secret Harbour Beach Resort, 6280 Estate Nazareth Bay. ✆ **340/779-2262.** www.bluemooncafevi.com. Reservations required. Main courses $17–$35. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 6–10pm.

Grande Cru/Wikked/Fat Turtle ★ INTERNATIONAL This trio of the genuinely intriguing restaurants of Charlotte Amalie lie side by side beside the WICO docks, immediately adjacent to where some of the world's biggest cruise ships moor. Each of the three is part of a fast-evolving marina/hotel/condo development, Yacht Haven Grande.

The most expensive, formal, and elegant of the three restaurants is Grande Cru, whose meticulously crafted dining room manages to be both romantic and jazzy at the same time. Tables spill outdoors onto a covered veranda that's open to a view of privately owned yachts. Look for stylish menu items which include braised short ribs on horseradish and lemon risotto, pistachio and basil-crusted goat cheese on greens with a truffle-flavored vinaigrette, and a succulent version of roasted chicken with preserved lemon and sun-dried tomatoes.

The charming middle-bracket contender within the group is Wikked, a breezy, amiable, and likable restaurant that some of the local boat and condo owners have transformed into their favorite. And the most raucous and animated is Fat Turtle, a booze-and-burger joint that's a favorite with the college crowd looking for flavorful grub, very stiff drinks, and large-screen TVs broadcasting sporting events.

In the Yacht Haven Marina. Grande Cru ✆ **340/775-8CRU** (775-8278); Wikked ✆ **340/775-8WKD** (775-8953); Fat Turtle **340/775-8FAT** (775-8328). Reservations recommended at Grande Cru, not necessary at Wikked or Fat Turtle. Main courses at Grande Cru $24–$38; platters and main courses at Wikked and Fat Turtle $12–$28. AE, MC, V. Grande Cru Mon–Fri noon–3pm; daily 5–10pm. Wikked Mon–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun 8am–10pm. Fat Turtle daily 11am–10pm.

Hervé Restaurant & Wine Bar ★ AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN/FRENCH A panoramic view of Charlotte Amalie and a historic setting are side benefits—it's the cuisine that matters. Hervé Paul Chassin is a restaurateur with a vast classical background. In an unpretentious setting, he offers high-quality food at reasonable prices. There are two dining areas: a large open-air terrace and a more intimate wine room. Start with the pistachio-encrusted brie, shrimp in a stuffed crab shell, or conch fritters with mango chutney. For a main course, try the house special bouillabaisse, or a delectable black-sesame-crusted tuna with a ginger/raspberry sauce. There are also nightly specials of game, fish, and pasta. Desserts are divine—you'll rarely taste a creamier crème caramel or a lighter, fluffier mango or raspberry cheesecake.

Next to Hotel 1829, Government Hill. ✆ **340/777-9703.** www.herverestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses lunch $9–$48, dinner $21–$49. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; daily 6–10pm.

Petite Pump Room ★ WEST INDIAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is housed on the second floor of the industrial-looking ferryboat terminal at the edge of the harborfront in Charlotte Amalie, departure point for boats headed off to the British Virgin Islands and St. Croix. Established in 1963 by the then-owner of the famous Pump Room restaurant in Chicago, it does a thriving breakfast and lunch business among local boat owners and downtown office workers. The draw is some of the best West Indian cooking on island, a cuisine that takes the preparation of callaloo greens very seriously (they're fabulous), and the nuances of pounded conch steak and grouper with fries with devotion. If you want something international (that is, American), the menu lists club sandwiches, steaks, chicken dishes, and burgers, but virtually everyone who comes here orders the West Indian food. Examples? Stewed oxtail or chicken, or fried potfish with Creole sauce, always served with your choice of pigeon peas and rice, mashed potatoes, dumplings, macaroni and cheese, fungi with vegetables, fried plantains, or two different kinds of potatoes.

In the Edward Wilmoth Blyden Building, Veterans Dr. ✆ **340/776-2976.** http://petitepumproom.com. Breakfasts $7–$13; sandwiches and salads $8–$13; platters $11–$20. Daily 7am–4:30pm.

Virgilio's ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Virgilio's is the best northern Italian restaurant in the Virgin Islands. Its neobaroque interior is sheltered under heavy ceiling beams and

brick vaulting. A well-trained staff serves meals against a backdrop of stained-glass windows, crystal chandeliers, and soft Italian music. The *cinco peche* (clams, mussels, scallops, oysters, and crayfish simmered in a saffron broth) is delicious, and the fettuccine Alfredo is one of the best we've tasted. Classic dishes are served with a distinctive flair—the lamb shank, for example, is filled with a porcini-mushroom stuffing and glazed with a roasted garlic aioli. The marinated grilled duck is served chilled. You can also order individual pizzas. The place also does a thriving take-away business as well.

18 Dronningens Gade (entrance on a narrow alley running between Main and Back sts.). ✆ **340/776-4920.** Reservations recommended. Main courses lunch $11–$26, dinner $19–$46. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–10:30pm; Sun 5–10:30pm.

In Frenchtown

Bella Blu ★ MEDITERRANEAN/SEAFOOD To the immediate west of Charlotte Amalie, this restaurant's 14 tables overlook the harbor. For years Bella Blue enjoyed fame throughout the Caribbean under the name Alexander's, serving a rather heavy (for the Tropics) Austrian cuisine. Under new owners, the fare is lighter and focuses on the sunny flavors of the Mediterranean. To begin with, you might try the tuna tartare or one of the Moroccan dishes. The cooks are a whiz at concocting superb creations from lamb, veal, and seafood. The menu changes based on seasonal shopping and what's good and fresh at the marketplace.

French Town Mall. ✆ **340/774-4349.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$20 lunch, $16–$28 dinner. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–5pm and 5:30–10pm.

Craig & Sally's ★ ECLECTIC/INTERNATIONAL This Caribbean cafe is set in an airy, open-sided pavilion, with views of the sea and sky. Dishes range from pasta to seafood, with influences from Europe and Asia. You can try such light dishes as filet of salmon with a lemon grass–flavored mayonnaise, or perhaps the pan-seared trout with fresh mushrooms. The lobster-stuffed twice-baked potatoes are inspired, and the wine list is the most extensive and sophisticated on St. Thomas. The menu changes daily.

3525 Honduras. ✆ **340/777-9949.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $29–$39. MC, V. Wed–Fri 11:30am–3pm; Wed–Sun 5:30–10pm.

Oceana ★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD The upscale (but not stuffy) restaurant is a hip and stylish enclave popular with locals. It occupies what was during the Danish occupation the Russian consulate. Outfitted with slabs of carefully oiled paneling, and painted in bright blues and greens inspired by the ocean, it offers two distinctly different venues. The street level has a wine-cum-singles-bar where small platters of food (blini, crostini, and cheese platters) and tapas specifically designed to go with the changing array of wines help foster convivial after-work chitchat. Upstairs, within a relaxed but relatively formal dining room, candles and oil lamps flicker amid bouquets of flowers. Menu items focus mainly on fish, but a fair number of beef and lamb dishes appear as well. Our favorites include spicy shrimp served with a cup of Andalusian-style gazpacho; house-marinated salmon (gravlax); mussels in white-wine sauce; pan-fried freshwater trout from Idaho; oven-roasted sea bass with a white wine, thyme, and olive oil sauce; grilled sirloin of lamb; several different preparations of Caribbean lobster; and New York strip, porterhouse, and filet mignon steaks. For sheer delight, visit the "tasting table," a long bar that offers an array of such concoctions as portobellos topped with bacon bits and goat cheese, or smoked oyster, crab, and avocado salad—even a wild rice and lamb manchego. You can dine on either floor.

In the Villa Olga, 8 Honduras. ✆ **340/774-4262.** www.oceana.vi. Reservations recommended. Tapas $12–$18; main courses $25–$48. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm. Bar May–Dec Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight; Jan–Apr daily 5pm–midnight.

On the North Coast

The Old Stone Farmhouse AMERICAN/INTERNATIONAL Set in a wooded valley close to the 11th hole of the Mahogany Run Golf Course, the old-fashioned building that contains this restaurant dates from the 1750s. Once it was a stable for a nearby Danish sugar plantation. Ceiling fans and breezes blowing through the valley keep the place cool. For more than a quarter of a century, it has been feeding golfers and those who love them from an eclectic menu that takes advantage of the best seasonal produce. The fresh fish dishes are always the best option. Begin, perhaps, with grilled portobello mushrooms with Asian duck. Many regulars come here for the well-prepared steak.

Mahogany Run. ✆ **340/777-6277.** www.oldstone.rummi.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$32. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 5:30–9:30pm.

Romano's Restaurant ITALIAN Located near Coral World, this hideaway is owned by New Jersey chef Tony Romano, who specializes in a flavorful and herb-laden cuisine that makes a nice change from Caribbean food. House favorites include *linguine con pesto,* four-cheese lasagna, a tender and well-flavored *osso buco* (veal shanks), scaloppine Marsala, and broiled salmon. All desserts are made on the premises. With exposed brick and well-stocked wine racks, this restaurant always seems full of happy, lively diners.

66–97 Smith Bay Rd. ✆ **340/775-0045.** www.romanosrestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $27–$40; pastas $22–$24. MC, V. Mon–Sat. 6–10:30pm. Closed Sept, 4 days in Apr for Carnival, 4 days in Dec, and New Year's Day.

In & Around Red Hook Bay (The East End)

Agavé Terrace ★ CARIBBEAN Perched high above a steep and heavily forested hillside on the eastern tip of St. Thomas, one of the island's best restaurants offers a sweeping panorama and unparalleled romance. The house drink is Desmond Delight, a combination of Midori, rum, pineapple juice, and a secret ingredient. After a few Delights, try the house appetizer, an Agavé sampler for two, which includes portions of crabmeat, conch fritters, and shrimp cocktail. The catch of the day features three different fish, which can be prepared in any of seven different ways with a choice of nine sauces. Some of our favorite meals here include Chef Nakata's jerk chicken and Coral Bay crab cakes served with rémoulade. There are also vegetarian selections. The wine list is extensive. A live steel-drum band draws listeners Tuesday and Thursday nights.

In the Point Pleasant Resort, 6600 Estate Smith Bay. ✆ **340/775-4142.** www.agaveterrace.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $24–$52. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

Carmen's Mexican Restaurant MEXICAN Established in 2008 by Louisiana-born entrepreneur Bill Liles, this eatery features dining on two open-air decks that overlook a forest and the faraway sea, a cozy covered bar area where the margaritas simply seem to taste better, and a scattering of taverna-style accessories that evoke the best of Mexico's long tradition of handcrafts. Menu items include well-flavored versions of chimichangas; flautas; enchiladas; chile rellenos that are stuffed three different ways, including a version with crabmeat; and shrimp flavored with Mexican spices.

In Pavilions & Pools, 6400 Estate Smith Bay. ✆ **340/779-1420.** Reservations not necessary. Main courses $10–$20 lunch, $12–$24 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–11pm.

Duffy's Love Shack ★ (Finds) AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN You can mingle with locals at this loud, animated, raucous, and aggressively pickup-oriented singles bar. Things get particularly busy here on weekends, when, as the evening wears on, the customers virtually become the entertainment, sometimes dancing on the tabletops and consuming inordinate amounts of liquor. Yes, Duffy's also serves food, standard American dishes with Caribbean flavors. The restaurant is open-air, with lots of bamboo and a thatched roof over the bar. Even the menu appears on a bamboo stick, like an old-fashioned fan. Start with honey-barbecued ribs, then move on to pork Cuban. After midnight, a late-night menu (mainly sandwiches) appears. The bar business is huge, and the bartender is known for his lethal rum drinks. You can ask about the Lobster Lunacy parties, but since things get fairly loony around here anyway, it probably won't make much of a difference.

6501 Red Hook Plaza, Rte. 38. ✆ **340/779-2080.** www.duffysloveshack.com. Main courses $9–$17. No credit cards. Daily 11am–2am.

Fungi's on the Beach CARIBBEAN This funky native bar opens onto Pineapple Beach. It's a lot of fun and the burgers are some of the juiciest on the island. You can also order Caribbean specialties like conch in butter sauce, yellowtail snapper Creole, johnnycakes, plantains, rice and beans, and callaloo soup. Stewed chicken is a local favorite. The place has an outdoorsy atmosphere with a reggae theme. Nightly entertainment—reggae and more reggae—is also a feature.

Point Pleasant Rd, East End. ✆ **340/775-4142.** Main courses $6–$24. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm.

Havana Blue ★★ CUBAN/PACIFIC RIM/FUSION This, one of our favorite restaurants on St. Thomas, is a chic and stylish venue on the second floor of an airy, open-sided pavilion directly beside the beach on the grounds of the Morning Star annex of the Marriott resort (p. 710). Accented with highly theatrical uplighting and yards of sheer white muslin, it presents a well-trained staff and a sophisticated urban-hipster menu that is the island's most inspired. An inventive crew labors away in the kitchen, running wild in their culinary imagination. Cool cigars, hip drinks (mango mojitos), and a chic decor draw serious foodies to this cutting-edge restaurant, where chef Omar Sanchez intoxicates with his aromas and flavors. After launching yourself with the black-bean hummus, duck-meat crêpe with jalapeño-and-espresso sauce, or the tuna tartare with a soy lime vinaigrette, it's on to such delights as breaded chicken breast stuffed with manchego cheese and diced jalapeños, mojito-glazed skirt steak, or a miso-crusted sea bass. What about ancho chile–rubbed beef filet with espresso sauce? Desserts are worth crossing the island for if it means Cuban chocolate cake with coconut ice cream or warm banana and macadamia spring rolls with a strawberry balsamic purée.

In the Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort, 5 Estate Bakkeroe. ✆ **340/715-2583.** www.havanabluerestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses $28–$46. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm.

Lotus Asian Grill ★ ASIAN Self-consciously avant-garde, and outfitted in tones of midnight black with angular, minimalist furniture and intensely focused, theatrical lighting, this represents high-urban chic—unusual for St. Thomas, but now almost a matter of course in big cities like New York, London, and L.A. Operated by the same restaurant management group that brought the well-respected Havana Blue to the market, it's fun, animated, hip, and stylish—the kind of place where well-connected members of several different generations meet for Asian food, for gossip, and as a means of seeing who's new

on the island. Most diners begin with a cocktail or two, many of them neon-colored libations mixed with liberal amounts of, among other ingredients, sake liqueur or Cointreau. Food is artful and thought-provoking, and since many aren't designated specifically being either a starter or a main course, you might have to rely on the advice and guidance of the (well-trained) waitstaff. Menu items include sushi, Malaysian-style blackened fish of the day, bacon-wrapped filet mignon with miso butter and blistered sesame asparagus, various forms of tempura, and various wok-fried dishes, some of them vegetarian.

American Yacht Harbor, Red Hook. ✆ **340/774-7253.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$35; 6-course menu $85. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

Molly Malone's IRISH/CARIBBEAN Within a replica of an old-fashioned clapboard-sided house, and tucked away within a back alley of Red Hook's American Yacht Harbor, you can join the good ol' boys and dig into the best baby back ribs on the island. No one can drink more brew than the boisterous crowd that assembles here every night to let the good times roll. But despite this place's reputation as the most popular Irish pub and bistro on the island, the food is surprisingly good. Chili with cheese, bangers and mash, Philadelphia-style hoagies, oversized Caesar salads, and "Whale of a Tale" seafood platters are deservedly popular. If you're nostalgic for the Emerald Isle, go for the shepherd's pie. The conch fritters are the best in the east end, and an Irish/Caribbean stew is a nightly feature.

6100 Red Hook Quarters. ✆ **340/775-1270.** Main courses $10–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight.

Off the Hook ★ ASIAN/CARIBBEAN Using some of the West Indies' freshest and finest ingredients, the chefs here concoct an eclectic and gastronomically hip medley of Asian-inspired dishes. In an open-air dining room on a deck near the American Yacht Harbor, close to the departure point for the ferry to St. John, the fresh catch of the day—hauled off the little fishing boats just pulling in—is delivered to the kitchen, where it's grilled perfectly. The yellowfin tuna keeps us coming back and the tuna and salmon sushi platter is also excellent. The black Angus steak is always a pure delight. The decor is rustic, with outdoor dining and wooden tables.

6300 Estate Smith Bay. ✆ **340/775-6350.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm. Closed Sept 15–Oct 15.

HITTING THE BEACH ON ST. THOMAS

Chances are, your hotel will be right on the beach, or very close to one. All the beaches in St. Thomas are public, and most lie anywhere from 3 to 8km (1 3/4–5 miles) from Charlotte Amalie.

THE NORTH SIDE The gorgeous white sands of **Magens Bay** ★★ lie between two mountains 5km (3 miles) north of the capital. The turquoise waters here are calm and ideal for swimming, and the snorkeling is also good. The beach is no secret, and it's usually terribly overcrowded, though it gets better in the midafternoon. Changing facilities, snorkeling gear, lounge chairs, paddleboats, and kayaks are available. There is no public transportation to get here (though some hotels provide shuttle buses) from Charlotte Amalie; take Route 35 north all the way. The gates to the beach are open daily from 5am to 6pm (After 4pm, you'll need insect repellent.) Admission is $3 per person. Don't bring valuables, and certainly don't leave anything essential in your parked car.

A marked trail leads to **Little Magens Bay,** a separate, clothing-optional beach that is especially popular with gay and lesbian visitors. This is also former President Clinton's preferred beach on St. Thomas. (No, he doesn't go nude.)

Moments Two Great Escapes

Water Island, 1km (½ mile) off the coast from the harbor of Charlotte Amalie, is the fourth-largest island of the U.S. Virgins, with 200 hectares (494 acres) of land. At palm-shaded **Honeymoon Beach,** you can swim, snorkel, sail, water-ski, or sunbathe, then order lunch or a drink from the beach bar (Sat–Sun only). A ferry runs between Crown Bay Marina and Water Island several times a day; it's $5 for a one-way ticket, $9 per person round-trip. Crown Bay Marina (✆ **340/774-2255**) is part of the St. Thomas submarine base.

In the same bay, and even closer to shore, is **Hassel Island.** It's almost completely deserted, and it is protected as part of a U.S. National Park. There are no hotels or services of any kind here, and swimming is limited to narrow, rocky beaches. Even so, many visitors hire a boat to drop them off for an hour or two. A hike along part of the shoreline is a welcome relief from the cruise ship congestion of Charlotte Amalie. Bring water and food if you plan to spend more than 3 hours here.

Coki Point Beach, in the northeast near Coral World, is good, but whenever more than one cruise ship is in port, it can get very, very crowded. In our opinion, the best time to visit this beach, as a means of avoiding the congestion of the "high noon" hours, and whether cruise ships are in port or not, is mornings from 8 to 10am, and afternoons from 3 to 6pm. It's noted for its warm, crystal-clear water, ideal for swimming and snorkeling. (You'll see thousands of rainbow-hued fish swimming among the beautiful corals.) Locals even sell small bags of fish food, so you can feed the sea creatures while you're snorkeling. Informal shacks serve fresh food, including just-caught fish, at ramshackle picnic tables. Kiosks rent beach chairs and snorkel gear, and there are outdoor showers as well as toilets. Of course, there are the inevitable hair braiders. From the beach, there's a panoramic view of offshore Thatch Cay. Concessions can arrange everything from waterskiing to parasailing. An east-end bus runs to Smith Bay and lets you off at the gate to Coral World and Coki. Watch out for pickpockets.

Also on the north side is luscious **Grand Beach,** one of the island's most beautiful. It opens onto Smith Bay and is near Coral World. Many watersports are available here. The beach is right off Route 38.

THE EAST END Small and special, **Secret Harbour** is near a collection of condos. With its white sand and coconut palms, it's the epitome of Caribbean charm. The snorkeling near the rocks is some of the best on the island, and it is likely you'll spot a hawksbill turtle foraging for some sea anemones for lunch. Kiosks rent gear for watersports, and a beachside restaurant offers snacks and drinks. No public transportation stops here, but it's an easy taxi ride east of Charlotte Amalie heading toward Red Hook.

Sapphire Beach is set against the backdrop of the Sapphire Beach Resort and Marina, where you can have lunch or order drinks. There are good views of offshore cays, and St. John, a large reef, is close to the shore. Windsurfers enjoy this beach. The all-day beach party that goes on here is the best on island. Snorkel gear, beach chairs, Sunfish, and kayaks can be rented from various kiosks, and there is also a bar, plus a restaurant, toilets, and an outdoor shower. Just off the beach, there is good snorkeling over a shallow reef populated by conch, eagle rays, and starfish, among other species. The best place for

snorkeling here is at Prettyklip Point. Take the east-end bus from Charlotte Amalie, going via Red Hook. Ask to be let off at the entrance to Sapphire Bay; it's not too far to walk from here to the water.

White-sand **Lindquist Beach** isn't a long strip, but it's one of the island's prettiest. It's between Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort and the Sapphire Beach Resort. Many films and TV commercials have used this photogenic beach as a backdrop. It's not likely to be crowded, as it's not very well known.

THE SOUTH SIDE **Morning Star Beach** (also known as Frenchman's Bay Beach) is near the Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort, about 3km (1 3/4 miles) east of Charlotte Amalie. Here, among the often-young crowds of visitors (many of whom are gay), you can don your skimpiest bikini. Sailboats, snorkeling equipment, and lounge chairs are available for rent. The beach is easily reached by a cliff-front elevator at Frenchman's Reef.

Limetree Beach, set against a backdrop of sea-grape trees and shady palms, lures those who want a serene spread of sand where they can bask in the sun and even feed hibiscus blossoms to iguanas. Snorkeling gear, lounge and beach chairs, towels, and drinks are available. There's no public transportation, but the beach can easily be reached by taxi from Charlotte Amalie.

WEST OF CHARLOTTE AMALIE Near the University of the Virgin Islands in the southwest, **Brewer's Bay** is one of the island's most popular beaches and the site of an occasional political rally or protest, as well as Carnival parties. The strip of white coral sand is almost as long as the beach at Magens Bay. Unfortunately, this isn't the place for snorkeling. Vendors sell light meals and drinks. From Charlotte Amalie, take the Fortuna bus heading west; get off at the edge of Brewer's Bay, across from the Reichhold Center.

Lindbergh Beach, which has a lifeguard, restrooms, and a bathhouse, lies immediately adjacent to the Island Beachcomber Hotel and is used almost exclusively by locals. Its location is close to the airport. Westward-facing, it's appropriate for sunset-rising, but except near the rocky promontories on either side of its boundaries, it's not generally considered good for snorkeling. Drinks are served on the beach. Take the Fortuna bus route west from Charlotte Amalie.

Finds Hidden Beach Discoveries

At this point you'd think all the beaches in overrun St. Thomas had been discovered. But there are two less-trampled strands of sand we recently came upon. A sparkling beach of white sand, **Vessup Bay,** is at the end of Bluebeard's Road (Rte. 322) as it branches off Route 30 near the hamlet of Red Hook. Against a rocky backdrop, the beach curves around a pristine bay studded with vegetation, including cacti, agave plants, and sea grape. One end of the beach is less populated than the other. A watersports concessionaire operates here. Another find is **Hull Bay,** on the north shore, just west of overcrowded Magens Bay. Surfers are attracted to the waves along the western tip of Hull Bay, and local St. Thomas fishermen anchor in the more tranquil strands. Part of the beach is in shade. Don't expect much in the way of watersports, but there is a combined restaurant and open-air bar.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS ON ST. THOMAS

DEEP-SEA FISHING The U.S. Virgins have excellent deep-sea fishing—some 19 world records (8 for blue marlin) have been set in these waters. Outfitters abound at the major marinas, like Red Hook. We recommend angling off the ***Fish Hawk*** (✆ **340/775-9058**), which Captain Al Petrosky sails out of Fish Hawk Marina Lagoon on the east end. His 14m (48-ft.) diesel-powered craft is fully equipped with rods and reels. For all equipment (as well as sodas and beers, but not meals), you'll pay $650 per half-day for up to six passengers. Full-day excursions start at $1,100.

GOLF **Mahogany Run,** on the north shore at Mahogany Run Road (✆ **800/253-7103;** www.mahoganyrungolf.com), is an 18-hole, par-70 course. This beautiful course rises and drops like a roller coaster on its journey to the sea. Greens fees are $140 to $160 for 18 holes, reduced to $100 to $120 in the late afternoon. Carts are included. Club rental costs $40.

SAILING ★★ **American Yacht Harbor** ★★, Red Hook (✆ **340/775-6454;** www.igy-americanyachtharbor.com), can refer both bareboat and fully crewed charters. It leaves from the east end of St. Thomas in Vessup Bay. The harbor is home to numerous boat companies, including day-trippers, fishing boats, and sailing charters. Another reliable outfitter is **Charteryacht League** ★★, at Gregory East (✆ **800/524-2061** in the U.S., or 340/774-3944; www.vicl.org).

SCUBA DIVING The best scuba-diving site off St. Thomas, especially for novices, has to be **Cow and Calf Rocks,** off the southeast end (45 min. from Charlotte Amalie by boat); here you'll discover a network of coral tunnels riddled with caves, reefs, and ancient boulders encrusted with coral. The ***Cartanser Sr.,*** a sunken World War II cargo ship that lies in about 11m (36 ft.) of water, is beautifully encrusted with coral and now home to myriad colorful fish. Another popular wreck dive is the ***Maj. General Rogers,*** the stripped-down hull of a former Coast Guard cutter.

Experienced divers may want to dive at exposed sheer rock pinnacles like **Sail Rock** and **French Cap Pinnacle,** which are encrusted with hard and soft corals and frequented by lobsters and green and hawksbill turtles. They are also exposed to open-ocean currents that can make these very challenging dives.

St. Thomas Diving Club, 7147 Bolongo Bay (✆ **877/538-8734** in the U.S., or 340/776-2381; www.stthomasdivingclub.com), is a full-service, PADI five-star IDC

Moments Bringing Out the Sir Francis Drake in You

Tired of escorted tours? **Nauti Nymph Magic Moments,** American Yacht Harbor, Red Hook (✆ **800/734-7345** in the U.S., or 340/775-5066; www.yachtmagicmoments.com), reaches out to the independent traveler and adventurer. The knowing staff assists in designing a personal itinerary for a bareboat rental or can hook you up with a captained day trip. A choice of Coast Guard–approved and fully equipped vessels ranging in size from 7.5 to 9.3m (25–31 ft.) are available. Boats are kept in top condition. On your own, you can explore the British Virgin Islands, including such little-known islands as Jost van Dyke and Norman Island, in the tradition of Sir Francis Drake. The fare for such sailing adventures begins at $425 per passenger, half-price for children 9 and under.

Racing with the Pros

ONDECK Ocean Racing, a company based in Portsmouth, England, maintains an armada of high-tech racing ships, Farr 65s and Farr 40s, which some experts say are the most technologically advanced wind-operated racing vessels anywhere. With Kevlar hulls and either aluminum or carbon-fiber masts, they set out between three and four times a day, weather conditions permitting, with groups of between 6 and 12 participants in each boatload. They then race against one another in circumstances that simulate Olympic racing conditions for experiences that are wild, foamy, and a wee bit scary. Many cruise ship passengers have prebooked their experiences on board their vastly larger cruise ships and simply meet their ONDECK vessel at either the WICO or the Crown Marina docks, depending on the embarkation point of their cruise ship. Other walk-on passengers staying at one of St. Thomas's resorts head for the ONDECK headquarters adjacent to the WICO dock at the Havensight Mall. ONDECK recommends that passengers allocate 3 hours for an experience that invariably includes about 2 hours sailing. Expect blustery winds and the possibility of getting drenched as part of the process. Adults pay $99 per jaunt. The **headquarters** is at 9100 Havensight, Ste. 1 (✆ **340/777-4944;** fax 340/777-4946; www.ondeckgroup.com).

center, the best on the island. An open-water certification course, including four scuba dives, costs $495. An advanced open-water certification course, including five dives that can be accomplished in 2 days, goes for $400. You can also enjoy local snorkeling for $55.

Dive In!, in the Sapphire Beach Resort & Marina, Smith Bay Road, Route 36 (✆ **866/434-8346,** ext. 2144, in the U.S., or 340/777-5255; www.diveinusvi.com), is a well-recommended complete diving center that offers some of the finest services in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including professional instruction (beginner to advanced), daily beach and boat dives, custom dive packages, snorkeling trips, and a full-service PADI dive center. An introductory resort course costs $105, with a one-tank dive going for $80 and two-tank dives for $110. A six-dive pass costs $300.

SEA KAYAKING **Virgin Island Ecotours/Mangrove Adventures** (✆ **877/845-2925** or 340/779-2155; www.viecotours.com) offers half-day kayak trips through a mangrove lagoon on the southern coastline. The cost is $79 per person. The professional naturalists who lead the tour allow for 30 to 40 minutes of snorkeling.

SNORKELING ★★ With 30 spectacular reefs just off St. Thomas, this is a terrific destination for snorkeling. We like the waters off **Coki Point ★★**, on the northeast shore of St. Thomas; the coral ledges near Coral World's underwater tower are especially enticing. **Magens Bay** also has great snorkeling year-round. If your hotel doesn't provide snorkel gear, it's easy to rent on most of the island's popular beaches.

You may also want to take a snorkeling cruise. Many leave from the Red Hook and Yacht Haven marinas. The 15m (50-ft.) yacht ***Nightwind,*** Sapphire Marina (✆ **340/775-4110** 24 hr.; http://usvi.net/treetops/html/nightwind.html), offers full-day sails to St. John and the outer islands. The price of $140 per adult and $85 for kids age 12 and

Tips Getting to the Bottom of It

The air-conditioned ***Atlantis*** submarine will take you on a 50-minute voyage (the whole experience is really 2 hr., when you include waterborne transportation from the harborfront of Charlotte Amalie to and from the sub) to depths of 30m (98 ft.), where an amazing world of exotic marine life unfolds. You'll have up-close views of coral reefs and sponge gardens through the sub's .5m (1¾-ft.) windows. On some voyages, *Atlantis* divers swim with the fish and bring them close to the windows for photos.

Passengers take a surface boat from the West Indies Dock, in Charlotte Amalie, to the submarine, which is near Buck Island (the St. Thomas version, not the more famous Buck Island near St. Croix). The fare is $99 for adults, $49 for children 12 and under; children under 1m (36 in.) tall not allowed. The *Atlantis* operates daily. Reservations are suggested. (The sub carries only 48 passengers.) For **tickets,** go to the Havensight shopping mall, building 6, or call ✆ **866/546-7820** or 340/776-5650 (www.atlantisadventures.com).

under includes free snorkeling equipment and instruction, plus a continental breakfast, a buffet lunch, and an open bar.

New Horizons, 6501 Red Hook Plaza, Ste. 16, Red Hook (✆ **800/808-7604** or 340/775-1171; http://newhorizonsvi.com), offers windborne excursions amid the cays and reefs of the Virgin Islands. The two-masted, 20m (65-ft.) sloop has circumnavigated the globe and has been used as a design prototype for other boats. A full-day excursion, with continental breakfast, an Italian buffet lunch, and an open bar, costs $120 per person. Children ages 2 to 12, when accompanied by an adult, pay $60. Excursions depart daily, weather permitting, from the Sapphire Beach Resort & Marina. Call ahead for reservations and information. Another vessel, ***New Horizons II,*** a 13m (44-ft.) custom-made speedboat, runs full-day trips to some of the most scenic highlights of the British Virgin Islands, costing $145 for adults or $95 for children ages 2 to 12. You will need your passport and will have to pay an additional $30 per person Customs fee.

You can avoid the crowds by sailing aboard the ***Fantasy,*** Red Hook (✆ **340/775-5652;** fax 340/775-6256; www.daysailfantasy.com), which departs from the American Yacht Harbor at Red Hook at 9:30am daily. It takes a maximum of six passengers to St. John and nearby islands for swimming, snorkeling, beachcombing, and trolling. Snorkel gear with expert instruction is provided, as is a champagne lunch. The full-day trip costs $125 per person in the summer. A full-day sail for six people costs $750.

TENNIS The best tennis on the island is at the **Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa** ★★, 6500 Estate Smith Bay (✆ **340/777-7100**), with four Laykold courts lit at night. Nonguests pay $10 per hour.

Another good resort for tennis is the **Bolongo Bay Beach Resort,** Bolongo Bay (✆ **340/775-1800**), which has two courts that are lit until 6pm. They're free to members and hotel guests, but cost $10 per hour for nonguests.

Marriott Frenchman's Reef Tennis Courts, Flamboyant Point (✆ **340/776-8500**), has two courts. Again, nonguests are charged $10 per hour per court. Lights stay on until 10pm.

EXPLORING ST. THOMAS

Charlotte Amalie ★

The capital, Charlotte Amalie, where most visitors begin their sightseeing, has all the color and charm of an authentic Caribbean waterfront town. In days of yore, seafarers from all over the globe flocked here, as did pirates and members of the Confederacy who used the port during the American Civil War. (Sadly, St. Thomas was the biggest slave market in the world.) The old warehouses once used for storing pirate goods still stand; today many of them are house shops.

The Butterfly Farm ★ Opened in 2007, and already a legend among the schoolchildren of St. Thomas, this is the newest of four similar Caribbean butterfly zoos under the same management. In its way, it's the most thought-provoking attraction in town, examining as it does the almost mystical ways that grubby-looking larvae metamorphosize into flyers. Home to thousands of butterflies and all the paraphernalia to keep them alive, healthy, and breeding, it was built atop what had been an asphalt parking lot close to the WICO cruise ship docks, but after the importation of tons of sand, rock, plants, and overhead netting, you'd never realize its original origins. Tony and Lori Cox, a sophisticated husband-and-wife team from Canada, give some of the best lectures on the life-cycle of butterflies we've ever heard. The presentations are so good, and the sense of wonder so profound, that some visitors come back a second and third time during the course of their holidays for more. The gift shop on-site is worth a look.

Havensight Docks. ✆ **340/715-3366.** www.thebutterflyfarm.com. Admission $15 adults, $9 children; free for children 2 and under. Daily 8:30am–5pm; last tour begins at 4:30pm.

Fort Christian This imposing structure, which dates from 1671, dominates the center of town and underwent a complete renovation with many improvements in 2008. It was named after the Danish king Christian V and has been everything from a fort to a governor's residence, to a jail. It became a national historic landmark in 1977 but functioned as a police station, court, and jail until 1983. Now a museum, the fort houses displays on the island's history and culture. Cultural workshops and turn-of-the-20th-century furnishings are just some of the exhibits. A museum shop features local crafts, maps, and prints.

In the town center. ✆ **340/776-8605.** Admission $3. Mon–Fri 8:30am–4:30pm.

St. Thomas Skyride This cable car contraption affords visitors a dramatic view of Charlotte Amalie harbor, with a ride to the top of a 200m (656-ft.) peak whose panoramas sweep out over the complicated topography of the Caribbean's busiest cruise ship harbor. The aerial tramway, similar to those used at alpine ski resorts, operates six cars, each with an eight-person capacity, for the 15-minute round-trip ride. It transports customers from the Havensight area adjacent to the harbor front to Paradise Point, where they can disembark to visit shops and the popular restaurant and bar.

Across from Havensight Mall. ✆ **340/774-9809.** www.stthomasskyride.com. Round-trip $19 adults, $9.50 children 6–12; free for children 5 and under. Daily 9am–5pm.

Seven Arches Museum Browsers love checking out the private home of longtime residents Philibert Fluck and Barbara Demaras. This is an 18th-century Danish house, restored to its original condition and furnished with West Indian antiques. You can walk through the yellow ballast arches and visit the great room, with its wonderful view of the

 busiest harbor in the Caribbean. Night-blooming cacti and iguanas are on the roof of some of the quarters.

Government Hill. ✆ **340/774-9295.** www.sevenarchesmuseum.com. Admission $5. Daily 10am–4pm.

Synagogue of Beracha Veshalom Vegmiluth Hasidim ★ This is the oldest synagogue in continuous use under the American flag. It was erected in 1833 by Sephardic Jews, and it maintains the tradition of having sand on the floor, commemorating the exodus from Egypt. The structure was built of local stone, along with ballast brick from Denmark and mortar made of molasses and sand. Next door, the **Weibel Museum** showcases 300 years of Jewish history. It keeps the same hours as the synagogue.

16 Crystal Gade. ✆ **340/774-4312.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm.

Elsewhere on the Island

Route 30 (the harbor-fronting Veterans Dr.) will take you west of Charlotte Amalie to **Frenchtown.** (Turn left at the sign to the Admiral's Inn.) Early French-speaking settlers arrived on St. Thomas from St. Bart's after the Swedes uprooted them. This colorful village of low-rise, mostly modern buildings, many of which service the ships and barges in the nearby harbor, contains a number of restaurants and taverns, and has a reputation as a nightclubbing destination. Because Charlotte Amalie has become somewhat dangerous at night, Frenchtown has picked up its after-dark business and is the best spot for drinking, dancing, dining, and local entertainment.

Coral World Marine Park & Underwater Observatory ★ Set on a strip of jagged coastline that's dotted with cement holding tanks for marine life, this aquatic complex was built in 1978 by an Israeli company whose innovative designs became a prototype for later marine parks that followed in other parts of the world. Today one of its immediately visible features is a three-story underwater observation tower positioned 30m (98 ft.) offshore, directly atop the richly fertile Coki Point Reef. From a vantage point inside, looking out through thick windows, you'll see sponges, fish, coral, and other aquatic creatures in their natural state, carried along in a kind of aquatic ballet by the ocean currents outside.

A circular 80,000-gallon tank, whose perimeter completely surrounds a viewing area that's capped with a dome, creates the feeling of being within a blue-green salon whose decor consists of a direct view of marine life above a coral reef. It is illuminated day and night, with light filtering in through the waters that surround the place.

These are only two of the half-dozen or so distinctly separate distractions you'll encounter within Coral World. Other features include a Nautilus semisubmarine going 2m (6½ ft.) below the surface of the water. On board, passengers can enjoy close encounters with a sea of coral gardens and rainbow-hued fish outside their portholes, without the feelings of claustrophobia associated with deeper dives. There are also a series of open pools with manta rays or baby sharks, walk-in cages filled with tropical birds, nature trails, and assorted snack bars and a gift shop.

Our favorite attraction at Coral World is a saltwater tank that's home to a colony of sea lions, imported from the coast of Peru and carefully trained for many months in Thailand. In one of the most popular and entertaining diversions at Coral World, staff will carefully monitor groups of four swimmers at a time as they "interact" with the tame marine mammals, whose instinct for love, applause, and approval make them stars in their own right.

Moments **Into the Deep for Nondivers**

Nondivers can experience some of the thrills familiar to scuba aficionados by participating in **Sea Trek at the Coral World Marine Park & Underwater Observatory** (✆ **340/775-1555**). For $74, or $65 for children, you get a full immersion undersea. No experience is needed. Participants are given a helmet and a tube to breathe through. The tube is attached to an air source at the observatory tower. You then enjoy a 20-minute stroll in water 5.5m (18 ft.) deep. You're on the sea floor taking in the rainbow-hued tropical fish and the coral reefs as you go along. It's a marvelous way to experience the world through the eyes of a fish.

Coral World's guests can take advantage of adjacent **Coki Beach** for snorkel rentals, scuba lessons, or simply swimming and relaxing. Lockers and showers are available. Also at the marine park are a bar and a nature trail.

6450 Estates Smith Bay, a 20-min. drive from Charlotte Amalie off Rte. 38. ✆ **888/695-2073** or 340/775-1555. www.coralworldvi.com. Admission $19 adults, $10 children 3–12. Daily 9am–5pm.

Estate St. Peter Greathouse Botanical Gardens ★ This estate consists of 4.4 hectares (11 acres) at the foot of volcanic peaks on the northern rim of the island. The grounds are laced with self-guided nature walks that identify some 200 varieties of West Indian plants and trees, including an umbrella plant from Madagascar. From a panoramic deck in the gardens, you can see some 20 of the Virgin Islands, including Hans Lollick, an uninhabited island between Thatched Cay and Madahl Point. The house itself, filled with local art, is worth a visit.

At the corner of Rte. 40 (6A St. Peter Mountain Rd.) and Barrett Hill Rd. ✆ **340/774-4999.** www.greathouse-mountaintop.com. Admission $10 adults, $5 children 11 and under. Daily 8am–4pm.

French Heritage Museum Lying in historic Frenchtown, this museum houses artifacts such as wooden tools, original fishing nets, mahogany antiques, musical instruments, pictures, and memorabilia that document the lives of the people of French descent who lived on St. Thomas.

Frenchtown. ✆ **340/714-2583.** http://frenchheritagemuseum.com. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–noon and 1–6pm.

SHOPPING ON ST. THOMAS ★★★

The discounted, duty-free shopping in the Virgin Islands makes St. Thomas a mecca for consumers. It's possible to find well-known brand names here at savings of up to 60% off mainland U.S. prices. But be warned—not all savings are so good. Before you leave home, check prices in your local stores if you think you might want to make a major purchase, so you can be sure that you are, in fact, getting a good deal.

The best deals include china, crystal, perfume, jewelry (especially emeralds), Haitian art, fashion, watches, and items made of wood. St. Thomas is also the best place in the Caribbean for discounts on porcelain, but remember that U.S. brands may often be purchased for 25% off the retail price on the U.S. mainland. Look for the imported patterns for the biggest savings.

Most shops, some of which occupy former pirate warehouses, are open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm. Some stores open Sunday and holidays if a cruise ship is in

port. ***Note:*** Friday is the biggest cruise ship day at Charlotte Amalie (we once counted eight ships in port at once), so try to avoid shopping then. It's a zoo.

Nearly all the major shopping is along the harbor of Charlotte Amalie. Cruise ship passengers embarking at the WICO docks have immediate access to the **Havensight Mall** at the eastern edge of town; cruise ships embarking at the Crown Bay Marina enjoy convenient access to the relatively new collection of shops at the Crown Bay Center. The principal shopping street in the center of Charlotte Amalie is **Main Street,** which is sometimes referred to as Dronningens Gade (its old Danish name). To the north is another merchandise-loaded street called **Back Street,** or Vimmelskaft. Many shops are also spread along the **Waterfront Highway (Kyst Vejen).** Between these major streets is a series of side streets, walkways, and alleys, all filled with shops. You might also browse along Tolbod Gade, Raadets Gade, Royal Dane Mall, Palm Passage, Storetvaer Gade, and Strand Gade.

It's illegal for most street vendors (food vendors are about the only exception) to ply their trades outside the designated area called **Vendors Plaza,** at the corner of Veterans Drive and Tolbod Gade. Monday to Saturday, hundreds of vendors converge here at 8am; they usually pack up around 5pm.

When you completely tire of French perfumes and Swiss watches, head for **Market Square,** also called Rothschild Francis Square. Under a Victorian tin roof, locals with machetes slice open fresh coconuts, while women wearing bandanas sell akee, cassava, and breadfruit.

All the major stores in St. Thomas are located by number on an excellent map in the publication ***St. Thomas This Week,*** distributed free to all arriving plane and boat passengers and at the visitor center. A lot of the stores on the island don't have street numbers, or don't display them, so look for their signs instead.

Diamonds International ★, 31 Main St. (✆ **800/515-3935** or 340/774-1516), stocks the biggest inventory of diamonds in the Virgin Islands. A wide selection of loose diamonds and fine jewelry is on display, although not necessarily living up to the outlet's boast of "the best deals on the planet."

Crystal Shoppe ★, in the A. H. Riise Mall, 37 Main St. (✆ **800/323-7332** or 340/777-7232; www.crystalshoppe.net), is the largest branch of a four-store family-run chain that has garnered a reputation for fairness and honesty in the decades it's been doing business. It sells huge quantities of crystal and porcelain from around the world, All the big names in glass—Wedgwood, Hummel, Royal Copenhagen, Swarovski, and Rosenthal—are on parade, along with some particularly good pieces from the Swedish firm of Kosta Boda. Their porcelain Lladró figurines from Spain are also a fast-moving item. Of particular interest are the guest lecturers, which the store imports on a rotating basis from factories in Ireland and Sweden. Depending on their expertise, they'll engrave, cut, shape, or autograph their signature stemware or crystal as you watch.

Fabric in Motion, Storetvaer Gade (✆ **340/774-2006**), culls the globe for fabrics and has a wonderful selection of silky cottons from Liberty's of London, the best Italian linens, and flamboyant batiks from Indonesia. Other tempting items include leather handbags and fun beach bags.

Boolchand's ★★, 31 Main St. (✆ **340/776-0794;** www.boolchand.com), is the place to go when you're in the market for a camera. Famous throughout the Caribbean, this is the major retailer of not only cameras, but electronics and digital products throughout the West Indies. Now into its 8th decade, it sells all the big names, from Kodak to Leica, from Nikon to Fuji. In the electronics divisions are the latest in DVDs,

minidiscs, and other items. There is also a jewelry department and a wide selection of watches.

Bernard K. Passman ★★★, 38A Main St., with branch stores at Havensight Mall and at the Crown Bay Marina (✆ **340/777-4580;** www.Passman.com), is the world's leading sculptor of black-coral art and jewelry. After being polished and embellished with gold and diamonds, the coral takes on a rich, warm hue that evokes a semiprecious, lustrous gemstone in its own right. Depending on the piece's size and its workmanship, pieces sell for between $100 and $1 million.

Gallery Camille Pissarro ★, 14 Main St. (✆ **340/774-4621**), is located in the street-fronting building where Pissarro was born in 1830 and where he lived until he was 26. (Failing to domesticate him into a merchant following in the footsteps of the family business, his family regretfully decided to allow him to pursue his artistic hopes and dreams—and the rest is history.) In three high-ceilinged and airy brick-lined rooms, you can view many prints and originals by local artists. The gallery also sells original batiks, alive in vibrant colors. Paintings and artworks sell for between $50 and $15,000. You'll find this funky, charmingly bohemian place at the top of a flight of unevenen steps—a welcome change from the endless rows of jewelry stores on the street outside. Keep climbing—the insights you'll get from owner Janine Wesselmann are worth the uphill trek.

Mango Tango Art Gallery, Al Cohen's Plaza, Raphune Hill, Route 38 (✆ **340/777-3060;** www.mangotango-art.com), is one of the largest galleries on island, closely connected with a half-dozen internationally recognized artists who spend at least part of the year in the Virgin Islands. Original works begin at $500; prints and posters are cheaper.

Gallery St. Thomas, 1 Main St. (✆ **877/797-6363** or 340/777-6363; www.gallerystthomas.com), showcases the works of Virgin Island painters, notably Lucinda Schutt, best known for her Caribbean land and seascapes. At this gallery, Schutt sells artwork beginning at $150 and prints for $18, and teaches painting with water colors.

Native Arts and Crafts Cooperative ★, Tolbod Gade 1 (✆ **340/777-1153**), is the largest arts-and-crafts emporium in the U.S. Virgin Islands, offering the output of 80 different artisans. It specializes in items small enough to be packed into a suitcase or trunk, such as spice racks, lamps crafted from conch shells, salad bowls, crocheted goods, and straw goods.

Caribbean Marketplace, Havensight Mall, building 3 (✆ **340/776-5400**), carries a selection of spices, including the Sunny Caribbee line, a vast array of condiments, and botanical products. Don't expect very attentive service.

Aromatic **Down Island Traders,** Waterfront (✆ **340/776-4641**), has Charlotte Amalie's most attractive array of spices, teas, candies, jellies, jams, and condiments.There are also local cookbooks and silk-screened T-shirts and bags.

The clutter and eclecticism of **Carson Company Antiques,** Royal Dane Mall, off Main Street (✆ **340/774-6175**), may appeal to you. The shop is loaded with merchandise, tasteless and otherwise, from virtually everywhere. Bakelite jewelry is cheap and cheerful, and the African artifacts are often interesting.

A. H. Riise Gift ★, 37 Main St. (✆ **800/315-1600** or 340/776-2303; www.ahriise.com), is St. Thomas's oldest outlet for luxury items and offers the best liquor selection on the island. The store carries fine jewelry and watches from Europe's leading craftspeople, including Bulgari, Omega, Rolex, and Gucci, as well as a wide selection of gold, platinum, and precious gemstone jewelry. Imported cigars are stored in a climate-controlled walk-in humidor. Waterford, Lalique, Baccarat, and Rosenthal are featured in the

china and crystal department. Specialty shops in the complex sell Caribbean gifts, books, T-shirts, food, prints, note cards, and designer sunglasses.

One of the island's most famous outlets, **Al Cohen's Discount Liquors,** Havensight Mall (✆ **340/774-3690**), occupies a big warehouse at Havensight with a huge selection of liquor and wine. The wine department is especially impressive. You can also purchase T-shirts and souvenirs.

Royal Caribbean ★, 33 Main St. (✆ **340/776-4110;** www.royalcaribbean.vi), is one of the largest camera and electronics stores in the Caribbean. It carries Nikon, Minolta, Pentax, Canon, and Panasonic products, plus watches by Seiko, Movado, Corum, Fendi, Philippe Charriol, and Zodiac. There are also leather bags, Mikimoto pearls, and 14- and 18-karat jewelry. Another branch is located at the Havensight Mall (✆ **340/776-8890**).

Often called the Tiffany's of the Caribbean, **Cardow Jewelers** ★★, 39 Main St. (✆ **800/227-3697** or 340/776-1140; www.cardow.com), stocks the largest selection of fine jewelry in the world. This fabulous shop, where more than 20,000 rings are displayed, offers savings because of its worldwide direct buying, large turnover, and duty-free prices. Unusual and traditional designs are offered in diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and pearls. The Treasure Cove has cases of fine gold jewelry priced under $400.

Cardow's leading competitor is **H. Stern Jewelers,** Havensight Mall (✆ **800/524-2024** or 340/776-1223), an international chain with some 175 outlets. Besides this branch, there are two more on Main Street. Stern gives worldwide guaranteed service, including a 60-day exchange privilege.

Azura, Havensight Mall (✆ **340/774-2442**), is renowned throughout the Caribbean for its collection of Colombian emeralds, both set and unset. Here you buy direct from the source, which can mean significant savings. The shop also stocks fine watches.

Another good place to browse for gemstones is **Pierre's,** 24 Palm Passage (✆ **800/300-0634** or 340/776-5130; www.pierresdiamonds.com), one of the most impressive repositories of collector's gemstones in the Caribbean. Look for alexandrites (garnets in three shades of green), spinels (pink and red), sphenes (yellow-green sparklers from Madagascar that are as reflective as high-quality diamonds), and tsavorites (green stones from Tanzania).

A shop that manages an allegiance to both cutting-edge technology and a strong sense of practical merchandising is **New Age Photo** in the Crown Bay Center (✆ **340/777-9324**). Don't expect a traditional array of camera and film at this place—it's a lot more evolved than that. For sale is a medley of ornaments, some made from black onyx, some from granite, some from cut crystal, some from clear plastic polymers, which accept lasered-on replicas of any photo you'd present to a staff member. Photos come out looking like fine art and with a sense of depth perception when laser-engraved on their new surface. Electronic images from JPEGs or other electronic media are acceptable for this, and the possibility of creating some high-tech souvenirs of your trip here are endless. Everything in the store costs between $30 and $150, and usually takes 20 minutes of high-tech tinkering to bring to fruition.

The most comprehensive and the best showcase for Caribbean music in all the Virgin Islands is **Parrot Fish Music,** Back Street at Store Tvaer Gade (✆ **340/776-4514**). With the selection available here, you can dance all night to the sounds of calypso, reggae, soca, and the music of steel bands.

Mr. Tablecloth, 6 Main St. (✆ **340/774-4343;** www.worldome.com), receives shipments of top-quality linens from the Republic of China. It has the best selection of tablecloths, doilies, place mats, aprons, and runners in Charlotte Amalie.

If you are shopping for a simple souvenir, stop in at **Captain's Corner,** Main Street across from H. Stern (✆ **340/774-4370;** http://captainscornervi.com), the oldest and biggest souvenir outlet in town. Its most popular item is the Caribbean "map watch," but there is countless other merchandise, including voodoo masks and other island crafts such as handmade items crafted from wood.

Virgin Islands Brewing Company, across from Happy Buzzard at Royal Dane Mall (✆ **340/777-8888;** www.beercollections.com), was founded on St. Croix but has invaded St. Thomas with one local beer, Blackbeard Ale. At the company store, you're given free samples and can purchase six-packs of the home-brewed suds along with T-shirts, caps, and polo shirts.

Outside of Charlotte Amalie, another noteworthy destination is **Tillett Gardens,** a virtual oasis of arts and crafts—pottery, silk-screened fabrics, candles, watercolors, jewelry, and more. It's on the highway across from Four Winds Shopping Center (take Rte. 38 east from Charlotte Amalie). A major island attraction is the **Jim Tillett Art Gallery and Silk Screen Print Studio** ★★ (✆ **340/775-1929;** www.tillettgardens.com), which displays the best work of local artists, including originals in oils, watercolors, and acrylics. The prints are all one-of-a-kind, and prices start as low as $20. The famous Tillett maps on fine canvas are priced from $45.

ST. THOMAS AFTER DARK

St. Thomas has more nightlife than any other island in the Virgins, U.S. and British—but not as much as you might think. Charlotte Amalie is no longer the swinging town it used to be. Many of the streets are dangerous after dark, so visitors have abandoned all but a few places in town. Most of the action is in **Frenchtown,** which has some great restaurants and bars. However, just as in Charlotte Amalie, some of these little hot spots are along dark, badly lit roads.

Note: Sexual harassment can be a problem in certain bars in Charlotte Amalie, where few single women would want to be alone at night anyway. Any of the major resort hotels are generally safe.

The big hotels, such as Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort and Bluebeard's, have the liveliest after-dark scenes. After a day of sightseeing and shopping in the hot West Indies sun, sometimes your best bet is just to stay at your hotel in the evening, perhaps listening to a local calypso band. You might also call the **Reichhold Center for the Arts,** University of the Virgin Islands, 2 John Brewer's Bay (✆ **340/693-1559;** www.reichholdcenter.com), or check with the tourist office to see what's on during your visit. Its Japanese-inspired amphitheater is set into a natural valley, with seating for 1,196. Several different repertory companies of music, dance, and drama perform here. Performances usually begin at 8pm. Tickets usually range from $18 to $45, but depending on the attraction, this could vary greatly.

In Charlotte Amalie, head to the **Bar at Paradise Point** (✆ **340/777-4540;** www.paradisepointtramway.com) at sunset. It's 200m (656 ft.) above sea level, across from the cruise ship dock, and provides excellent photo ops and panoramic views. A tram takes you up the hill. (See the review of St. Thomas Skyride in "Exploring St. Thomas," earlier.) Get the bartender to serve you their specialty, a Bushwacker. Sometimes a one-man steel band is on hand to serenade the sunset watchers. You can also order inexpensive food, such as pizza, hot dogs, and hamburgers.

We recommend only a few other places in Charlotte Amalie. They include **Greenhouse,** Veterans Drive (✆ **340/774-7998;** www.thegreenhouserestaurant.com), a bar/restaurant that's raucous enough to appeal to the college crowd, and set directly on the waterfront. It features live entertainment Friday night, ranging from reggae to disco. There's usually a $5 cover charge, except for Tuesday, a night that's almost legendarily associated with this place, when two enter for the price of one.

Attracting a wide age group, **Happy Buzzard,** 26A Royal Dane Mall (✆ **340/777-8676**), once known as Fat Tuesday, is also along the waterfront in the center of Charlotte Amalie. The bartenders offer a wide variety of beer, highballs, and shooters. Special events are often presented. It's open daily from 10am to 8pm, later on Friday and Saturday.

The scenic **Banana Bar,** Bluebeard's Hill (✆ **340/774-1600**), overlooking the yacht harbor, hosts piano-bar entertainment on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 7 to 10pm. It's a popular gathering spot for both locals and visitors. Entertainment varies from month to month, but a steel band comes in some nights, while others are devoted to reggae and salsa. It's open daily 5 to 10pm. There's no cover.

During the day, **Iggie's Bolongo,** in the Bolongo Beach Resort, 7150 Bolongo (✆ **340/693-2600;** www.iggiesbeachbar.com), is an informal open-air diner, serving hamburgers, sandwiches, and salads. After dark, it presents karaoke and offers night volleyball. It's also one of the most active sports bars on island.

West of Charlotte Amalie, in Frenchtown, **Epernay,** rue de St. Barthélemy (✆ **340/774-5348**), next to Bella Blu, is a stylish watering hole with an ocean view. You can order vintage wines and at least six different brands of champagne by the glass. Also available are appetizers, including sushi, main courses ($15–$33), and tempting desserts like chocolate-dipped strawberries.

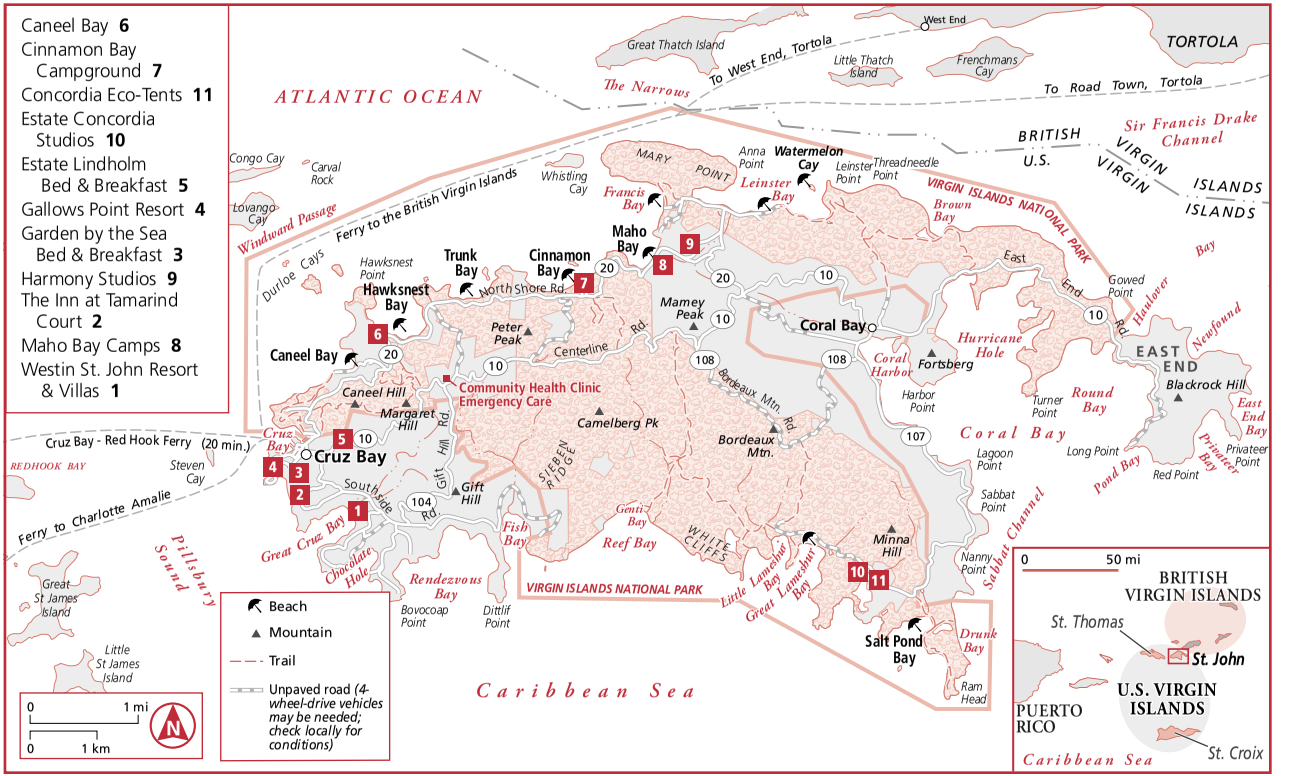
The popular **Turtle Rock Bar** lies in the Mangrove Restaurant at the Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa, 6500 Estate Smith Bay (✆ **340/777-7100**). Sunday night is karaoke. Burgers, salads, steaks, and grilled fish are available at the Iguana Grill a few steps away. There's no cover.

Finally, if you're way out on the island's easternmost tip, a legitimate way of exploring the premises of St. Thomas's most upscale hotel involves dropping into the elegant but cozy **Great Bay Lounge,** an airy bar-cum-clubhouse on the grounds of the Ritz-Carlton (✆ **340/775-3333**). One of four restaurants on the grounds of that hotel, it's the most appropriate for late-night downwinding and, as such, welcomes a large percentage of managers from others of the island's resorts. Cocktails and glasses of wine cost from $9 to $21 each, platters of food from $10 to $42 each. It's open daily from 10 am to around 11pm or later (depending on business), but we find that it's at its most appealing from 8pm on.

3 ST. JOHN ★★★

Overbuilt St. Thomas and the much larger St. Croix get all the publicity, but little St. John—only 73 sq. km (28 sq. miles) in territory—is the true gem of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

About 95% of the population of the U.S. Virgin Islands lives on either St. Thomas or St. Croix, because two-thirds of St. John is a national park. The island isn't developed at all, and there is no airport. You land in St. Thomas and approach St. John on a ferryboat. It is said that St. John put the "virgin" in the Virgin Islands.


Caneel Bay 6
Cinnamon Bay Campground 7
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Garden by the Sea Bed & Breakfast 3
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ATLANTIC OCEAN
Caribbean Sea
TORTOLA
West End
Great Thatch Island
Little Thatch Island
Frenchmans Cay
To West End, Tortola
To Road Town, Tortola
The Narrows
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
Sir Francis Drake Channel
Congo Cay
Carval Rock
Lovango Cay
Windward Passage
Ferry to the British Virgin Islands
Whistling Cay
MARY POINT
Anna Point
Watermelon Cay
Leinster Point
Threadneedle Point
Leinster Bay
Francis Bay
Maho Bay
Brown Bay
VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK
Durloe Cays
Hawksnest Point
Trunk Bay
Cinnamon Bay
North Shore Rd.
Hawksnest Bay
Peter Peak
Centerline Rd.
Mamey Peak
Coral Bay
Caneel Bay
Caneel Hill
Margaret Hill
Community Health Clinic
Emergency Care
Camelberg Pk
Bordeaux Mtn. Rd.
Bordeaux Mtn.
Coral Harbor
Fortsberg
Hurricane Hole
Harbor Point
Turner Point
Round Bay
Lagoon Point
Long Point
Pond Bay
Red Point
Privateer Bay
Privateer Point
East End Bay
Blackrock Hill
Newfound Bay
Gowed Point
East End
EAST END
Coral Bay
Cruz Bay - Red Hook Ferry (20 min.)
REDHOOK BAY
Steven Cay
Ferry to Charlotte Amalie
Cruz Bay
Cruz Bay Hill Rd.
Gift Hill
Gift Hill Rd.
Southside
Great Cruz Bay
Chocolate Hole
Pillsbury Sound
Great St James Island
Little St James Island
Rendezvous Bay
Bovocoap Point
Dittlif Point
Fish Bay
Genti Bay
Reef Bay
SIEBEN RIDGE
WHITE CLIFFS
Little Lameshur Bay
Great Lameshur Bay
Minna Hill
Nanny Point
Sabbat Point
Sabbat Channel
Salt Pond Bay
Drunk Bay
Ram Head
Beach
Mountain
Trail
Unpaved road (4-wheel-drive vehicles may be needed; check locally for conditions)
0 1 mi
0 1 km
0 50 mi
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
St. Thomas
St. John
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO
St. Croix
Caribbean Sea

Along St. John's rocky coastline are beautiful crescent-shaped bays and white-sand beaches, and the interior is no less impressive. The variety of wildlife here fascinates naturalists around the world. And there are miles of serpentine hiking trails, leading past the ruins of 18th-century Danish plantations to magnificent panoramic views. At scattered intervals along the trails, you can even find mysteriously geometric petroglyphs, of unknown age and origin, incised into boulders and cliffs.

Today St. John (unlike the other U.S. islands) remains truly pristine, its preservation rigidly enforced by the U.S. Park Service. Thanks to the efforts of Laurance Rockefeller, who purchased acres of land here and donated them to the United States, the island's shoreline waters, as well as more than half its surface area, make up the **Virgin Islands National Park.** The hundreds of coral gardens that surround St. John are protected—any attempt to damage or remove coral from the water is punishable with substantial and strictly enforced fines.

Despite the unspoiled beauty of much of St. John, the island manages to provide visitors with modern amenities and travel services, including a sampling of first-class restaurants, car-rental kiosks, yacht-supply facilities, hotels, and campgrounds. **Cinnamon Bay,** founded by the U.S. National Park Service in 1964, is the most famous campsite in the Caribbean. In addition, the roads are well maintained, and there's even a small commercial center, **Cruz Bay,** on the island's western tip. Don't come here for nightlife; St. John is sleepy, and that's why people love it.

ST. JOHN ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE To get to St. John, you take a ferry from St. Thomas. (There are also ferries from the British Virgin Islands.) See the "Getting There" section at the beginning of this chapter for information on how to get to St. Thomas, and for details about the ferry to St. John.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** (✆ **340/776-6450**) is located near the Battery, a 1735 fort that's a short walk from the St. Thomas ferry dock. It's open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm. A **national park visitor center** (✆ **340/776-6201**) is also found at Cruz Bay, offering two floors of information and wall-mounted wildlife displays, plus a video presentation about the culture of the Virgin Islands. It's open daily 8am to 4:30pm.

GETTING AROUND The most popular way to get around is via the local **Vitran** (✆ **340/774-0165**) service, the same company that runs the buses on St. Thomas. Buses run between Cruz Bay and Coral Bay, costing $1 for adults and 75¢ for children.

An open-air **surrey-style taxi** is more fun, however. Typical fares are $9 to Trunk Bay, $11 to Cinnamon Bay, or $14 to Maho Bay. Between midnight and 6am, fares are increased by 50%. Call **Paradise Taxi** at ✆ **340/714-7913** for more information.

The island's undeveloped roads offer some of the best views anywhere. Because of this, many people opt to rent a vehicle (sometimes with four-wheel-drive) to tour the island. Most visitors need a car for only a day or two. ***Remember:*** Drive on the left and follow posted speed limits, which are generally very low.

Unless you need to carry luggage, which should probably be locked away in a trunk, you might consider one of the sturdy, open-sided, jeeplike vehicles that offer the best view of the surroundings and are the most fun way to tour St. John. Note that most of these vehicles have manual transmission, which can be especially tricky in a car built to drive on the left side of the road. They cost $60 to $100 a day.

The largest car-rental agency on St. John is **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/776-6171; www.hertz.com). If you want a local firm, try **St. John Car Rental,** across from the Catholic church in Cruz Bay (✆ **340/776-6103;** www.stjohncarrental.com).

FAST FACTS If you need a **pharmacy** or want to purchase film, books, and other daily necessities, try **Chelsea Drug Store,** in the Marketplace Shopping Center, Route 104, Cruz Bay (✆ **340/776-4888**). It's open Monday to Saturday from 8:30am to 6pm, and Sunday 10am to 4:30pm.

If you need a **hospital,** go to **St. John Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Clinic,** 3B Sussanaberg (✆ **340/693-8900**), which can be reached along Route 10, about 3km (1¾ miles) east of Cruz Bay.

WHERE TO STAY ON ST. JOHN

There are actually more villa and condo beds available on St. John than there are hotel beds. In addition to the condo and villa complexes reviewed below, **Caribbean Villas & Resorts** (✆ **800/675-5567;** fax 207/510-6308; www.caribbeanvilla.com), the island's biggest real-estate agency, is an excellent choice. Villa rentals begin at $2,575 weekly.

Very Expensive

Caneel Bay ★★★ Conceived by megamillionaire Laurance S. Rockefeller in 1956, this is the Caribbean's first eco-resort. Though long one of the Caribbean's premier resorts, Caneel Bay is definitely not one of the most luxurious. That means no phones or TVs in the rooms. Nevertheless, the movers and shakers of the world continue to come here, though younger people tend to head elsewhere. To attract more families, young children are now allowed. Go to the Westin St. John Resort (see below) for glitz and glitter; head here for a touch of class. The resort lies on a 68-hectare (168-acre) portion of the national park, offering a choice of seven beaches. Surrounded by lush greenery, the main buildings are strung along the bays, with a Caribbean lounge and dining room at the core. Other buildings housing guest rooms stand along the beaches. Most rooms, however, are set back on low cliffs or headlands. The decor within is understated, with Indonesian wicker furniture.

Virgin Islands National Park, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **888/767-3966** in the U.S., or 340/776-6111. Fax 340/693-8280. www.caneelbay.com. 166 units. Winter $550–$1,175 double, from $1,350 suite; off season $395–$795 double, $795–$950 suite. 1 child under 13 can stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's center; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 11 tennis courts; boating; deep-sea fishing; dive shop; watersports; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, minibar.

Westin St. John Resort & Villas ★★★ Kids Come here if you like megaresort flash and glitter as opposed to the "old-school ties" of Caneel Bay (see above). This is the most architecturally dramatic and visually appealing hotel on St. John. The complex is set on 14 hectares (35 acres) of landscaped grounds on the southwest side of the island. It consists of 21 cedar-roofed postmodern buildings, each with ziggurat-shaped angles and soaring ceilings. Herringbone-patterned brick walkways connect the gardens (with 400 palms imported from Puerto Rico) to the 360m (1,181-ft.) white-sand beach and one of the largest pools in the Virgin Islands. Some of the stylish accommodations contain fan-shaped windows and curved ceilings. Most units open onto private balconies, and some have their own whirlpools. Villas, of course, offer more space and come with a full kitchenette.

Great Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **866/716-8108** in the U.S., or 340/693-8000. Fax 340/779-4985. www.westinresortstjohn.com. 321 units. Winter $649–$799 double, from $1,550 villa; off season $355–$495 double, from $1,150 villa. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Round-trip shuttle and private ferryboat transfers from St. Thomas airport $95 per adult, $80 ages 4–12. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; children's programs; nearby golf; fitness center; outdoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; 6 lit tennis courts; watersports; dive shop; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Jacuzzi (in some), kitchenette (in some), minibar, Wi-Fi.

Moderate/Expensive

Estate Concordia Studios This environmentally sensitive 20-hectare (49-acre) development has been widely praised for its integration with the local ecosystem. Its elevated structures were designed to coexist with the stunning southern edge of St. John. The secluded property is nestled on a low cliff above a salt pond, surrounded by hundreds of pristine National Park acres. It's best for those with rental vehicles. Each building was designed to protect mature trees and is connected to its neighbors with boardwalks. The nine studios are contained in five postmodern cottages. Each unit has a kitchen, a shower-only bathroom, a balcony, and a ceiling fan; some have an extra bedroom. On-site management assists with activity suggestions. For information on the on-site **Eco-Tents,** refer to "Campgrounds," below.

20–27 Estate Concordia, Coral Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00830. ✆ **800/392-9004** in the U.S. and Canada, 212/472-9453 or 340/715-0501. Fax 340/776-6504. www.maho.org. 9 units. Winter $150–$225 double; off season $95–$160 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* Ceiling fan, kitchen, no phone.

Estate Lindholm Bed & Breakfast ★ Finds The island's best B&B grew out of an estate originally settled by Dutch planters in the 1720s. Set among the Danish ruins, Estate Lindholm is a charming guesthouse on a hill overlooking Cruz Bay, each of its nonsmoking bedrooms opening onto a view. The spacious bedrooms are attractively and comfortably furnished, many resting under ceiling beams. Guests can enjoy private balconies as well. On the property is the Asolare restaurant, one of the island's best (p. 740). The staff is helpful in hooking you up with any number of outdoor activities, including everything from sea kayaking to windsurfing.

P.O. Box 1360, Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **800/322-6335** in the U.S., or 340/776-6121. Fax 340/776-6141. www.estatelindholm.com. 10 units. Winter $340–$390 double; off season $190–$240 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; fitness room; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Gallows Point Resort ★ The first complex of buildings you see as you arrive at Cruz Bay is this colony of condos just outside the town. Lying on a 2-hectare (5-acre) peninsula, the complex blends into its setting, a tropical landscape with island-style architecture. You're within walking distance of the restaurants and shops of Cruz Bay. In all, there are 15 well-furnished buildings, each structure with four one-bedroom suites, coming with a full kitchen and spacious living area. The best views, of course, are in the apartments on the upper level. Harborside villas tend to get more noise. The beach nearby is small and rocky, so you may want to go farther afield for the sands. The garden suites are one story with sunken living rooms. The property also includes multilevel sunbathing decks. On-site is Zozo's Ristorante (see recommendation below).

Gallows Point, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **800/323-7229** or 340/776-6434. Fax 340/776-6520. www.gallowspointresort.com. 60 units. Winter $465–$595 suite; off season $265–$495 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

Garden by the Sea Bed & Breakfast ★ Finds Overlooking the ocean, this B&B lies a 10-minute walk south of the little port of Cruz Bay. It has easy access to the north

shore beaches and lies between Frank and Turner bays. From the gardens of the house, a short path along Audubon Pond leads to Frank Bay Beach. Be sure to reserve a room ahead, as it offers only three bedrooms. Artifacts from around the world have been used to furnish the units. Each bedroom features elephant bamboo canopy beds, Japanese fountains, hardwood floors, and well-kept bathrooms. Don't expect phones or TVs, as this is a getaway, not a communications center. The 1970s house is designed in a Caribbean gingerbread style with cathedral beamed ceilings. Breakfast is served on the veranda (try the homemade muffins and quiche).

P.O. Box 37, Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831 ✆/fax **340/779-4731.** www.gardenbythesea.com. 3 units. Winter $250–$275 double; off season $160–$200 double. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, no phone.

Harmony Studios ★ Built on a hillside above the Maho Bay Camps, this is a small-scale cluster of 12 plain, rather basic studios in six two-story houses with views sweeping down to the sea. The complex is designed to combine both ecological technology and comfort; it's one of the few resorts in the Caribbean to operate exclusively on sun and wind power, which means no hot showers in the morning. Most of the building materials are derived from recycled materials, including reconstituted plastic and glass containers, newsprint, old tires, and scrap lumber. The managers and staff are committed to offering educational experiences, as well as the services of a small-scale resort. The studios contain tiled shower-only bathrooms, kitchenettes, dining areas, and outdoor terraces. The studios sit high on a hillside, and the units are built on stilts and linked with wooden walkways and stairs. Expect lots of stairs and lots of climbing, a long, hard slog up from the beach to your studio.

P.O. Box 310, Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **800/392-9004** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/776-6240. Fax 340/776-6504. www.maho.org. 12 units. Winter $225–$250 studio for 2; off season $130–$155 studio for 2. Extra person $25. MC, V. **Amenities:** Sailing; snorkeling; scuba diving, windsurfing. *In room:* Ceiling fan, kitchenette, no phone.

Inexpensive

The Inn at Tamarind Court Right outside Cruz Bay but still within walking distance of the ferryboat dock, this modest place consists of a small hotel and an even simpler West Indian inn. The inn is pretty basic and won't please you if you're too demanding, but it's one of the few low-cost options on St. John. Bedrooms are small, evoking those in a little country motel. Most have twin beds. Shower-only bathrooms in the inn are shared among the single rooms; units in the hotel have small private bathrooms. The social life here revolves around its courtyard bar and the in-house restaurant under the same name. From the hotel, you can walk to shuttles that take you to the beaches.

South Shore Rd. (P.O. Box 350), Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **800/221-1637** in the U.S., or 340/776-6378. Fax 340/776-6722. www.tamarindcourt.com. 20 units, 14 with private bathroom. Winter $75 single without private bathroom, $148 double with private bathroom, $240 apt for 4 with private bathroom; off season $60–$65 single without private bathroom, $110–$120 double with private bathroom, $170–$190 apt for 4 with private bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, no phone.

Campgrounds

Cinnamon Bay Campground ★★ This National Park Service campground is the most complete in the Caribbean. The site is directly on the beach, surrounded by thousands of acres of tropical vegetation. Life is simple here: You have a choice of a tent, a cottage, or a bare site. At the bare campsites, you get just the site, with no fancy extras.

Each canvas tent is 10×14 feet and has a floor as well as a number of extras, including all cooking equipment; your linens are even changed weekly. Each cottage is 15×15 feet, consisting of a room with two concrete walls and two screen walls. Each cottage contains cooking facilities and four twin beds with thin mattresses; one cot can be added. Lavatories and cool-water showers are in separate buildings nearby. In winter, guests can camp for a maximum of 2 weeks; the rest of the year camping is limited to 30 days.

P.O. Box 720, Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00831. ✆ **340/776-6330.** Fax 340/776-6458. www.cinnamonbay.com. 126 units, none with bathroom. Winter $120–$155 cottage for 2, $88 tent site, $30 barge site; off season $77–$100 cottage for 2, $64 tent site, $30 barge site. Extra person $19. AE, MC, V. Closed Sept. **Amenities:** Restaurant; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* No phone.

Concordia Eco-Tents On the southern tip of St. John, overlooking Salt Pond Bay and Ram Head Point, these solar- and wind-powered tent-cottages combine sustainable technology with some of the most spectacular views on the island. The light framing, fabric walls, and large screened-in windows lend a tree-house atmosphere to guests' experience. Set on the windward side of the island, the tent-cottages enjoy natural ventilation from the cooling trade winds. Inside, each has two twin beds with rather thin mattresses in each bedroom, one or two twin mattresses on a loft platform, and a queen-size futon in the living-room area. (Each unit can sleep up to six people comfortably.) Each kitchen is equipped with a running-water sink, propane stove, and cooler. In addition, each Eco-Tent has a small solar-powered private shower, rather meager towels, and a composting toilet. The secluded hillside location, surrounded by hundreds of acres of pristine national park land, requires guests to arrange for a rental vehicle.

20–27 Estate Concordia, Coral Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00830. ✆ **800/392-9004** in the U.S., or 212/472-9453. Fax 212/861-6210. www.maho.org. 18 units (4 are wheelchair accessible). Winter $155–$185 tent for 2; off season $95 tent for 2. Extra person $15. MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* No phone.

Maho Bay Camps ★ Right on Maho Bay, this is an interesting concept in ecology vacationing, where you camp close to nature but with considerable comfort. It's set on a hillside above the beach surrounded by the Virgin Islands National Park. To preserve the existing ground cover, all 114 tent-cottages are on platforms, above a thickly wooded slope. Utility lines and pipes are hidden under wooden boardwalks and stairs. Each tent-cottage, covered with canvas and screens, has two twin beds with thin mattresses, a couch, electric lamps and outlets, a dining table, chairs, a propane stove, an ice chest (cooler), linens, thin towels, and cooking and eating utensils. Guests share communal bathhouses. Maho Bay Camps is more intimate and slightly more luxurious than its nearest competitor, Cinnamon Bay.

P.O. Box 310, Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S.V.I. 00830. ✆ **800/392-9004** in the U.S., or 340/715-0501. Fax 340/776-6504 or 212/861-6210. www.maho.org. 114 units, none with bathroom. Winter $135 tent-cottage for 2 (minimum stay of 7 nights); off season $80 tent-cottage for 2. Extra person $15 winter, $12 off season. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; scuba diving; windsurfing.

WHERE TO DINE ON ST. JOHN

Many of the restaurants here command high prices, but you can lunch almost anywhere more reasonably. Dinner is often an event on St. John, since it's about the only form of nightlife the island has.

Expensive

Asolare ★★ INTERNATIONAL/ASIAN This is the most beautiful and elegant restaurant on St. John, with the hippest and best-looking staff. It sits on a hill overlooking Cruz Bay and some of the British Virgin Islands. *Asolare* translates as "the leisurely

passing of time without purpose," and that's what many diners do here. The chef uses some of the best and freshest ingredients available on island. To begin, try the grilled Asian barbecued shrimp or the squid-and-shrimp medley. For a main course, try the ginger lamb or the pepper corn-dusted filet of beef. Two other truly excellent dishes are the chicken Kiev and sashimi tuna on a sizzling plate with plum-passion fruit-sake vinaigrette. For dessert, we like the fresh berry dishes and the chocolate pyramid cake.

Cruz Bay. ✆ **340/779-4747.** Reservations required. Main courses $30–$50. AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–8:45pm.

Equator ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant lies behind the tower of an 18th-century sugar mill, where ponds with water lilies fill former crystallization pits for hot molasses. A flight of stairs leads to a monumental circular dining room, with a wraparound veranda and sweeping views of a park. In the center rises the stone column that horses and mules once circled to crush sugar-cane stalks. In its center, the restaurant grows a giant poinciana-like Asian tree of the *Albizia lebbeck* species. Islanders call it "woman's tongue tree."

For the most part, the chefs pull off their intriguing flavor combinations. A spicy and tantalizing opener is lemon grass and ginger-cured salmon salad. A classic Caribbean callaloo soup is offered, and the salads use fresh ingredients such as Roma tomatoes and endive. Daily Caribbean selections are offered, or you can opt for such fine dishes as seared Caribbean tuna, or penne pasta with shiitake mushrooms and roasted tomatoes in an herb-garlic-cream sauce. There's always a dry, aged Angus steak or a grilled veal chop for the more traditional palate.

In the Caneel Bay Hotel, Caneel Bay. ✆ **340/776-6111.** Reservations required. Main courses $22–$42. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–9pm. (Check with hotel beforehand, as days and hours vary by season.)

Paradiso ★★ ITALIAN This is the most-talked-about restaurant on St. John, other than Asolare (see above), and it's the only one that's air-conditioned. The interior has lots of brass, glowing hardwoods, and nautical antiques, not to mention the most beautiful bar on the island, crafted from mahogany, purpleheart, and angelique.

Try such appetizers as grilled chicken spring rolls with roasted sweet peppers. Roasted garlic Caesar salad with sun-dried tomatoes and Parmesan grissini is a new twist on this classic dish. But the main dishes truly shine, especially a pan-seared local yellowfin tuna with baby arugula, fennel, pear, and radicchio, and a grilled Kansas City sirloin marinated in garlic and fresh herbs. Another enticing choice is oven-roasted free-range chicken breast with roasted potatoes, carrots, and butternut squash.

Mongoose Junction. ✆ **340/693-8899.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $28–$32. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–9pm; bar daily 6–10:30pm.

Rhumb Lines ★ Kids CARIBBEAN/PACIFIC RIM In the heart of Cruz Bay, this restaurant, with its West Indian courtyard, has a South Seas ambience. Appetizers are among the island's best, ranging from hot and sour grilled duck breast glazed with rum punch to cracked pepper–crusted tuna over a seaweed salad. Ever had gazpacho made with mango? The main dishes are full of flavor and are delectable, especially the fresh mahimahi in banana leaf with a gingered banana beurre blanc or the tenderloin of Cuban pork marinated in garlic and citrus juices. For the adventurous palate, there is a special menu of Pupu, with everything from lemon grass and tofu cakes to spicy Szechuan noodles. There is also a kid's menu. The drink menu has some of the most imaginative drinks on island, including Nutty Monkey, made with amaretto and frangelico whipped together with Irish cream, heavy cream, chocolate, and a whole banana, finished off with

a crown of chocolate whipped cream and chopped nuts. You can never go back to a chocolate milkshake at the soda shop after drinking this concoction.

Meada's Plaza, Cruz Bay. ✆ **340/776-0303.** www.rhumblinesstjohn.com. Reservations recommended. $19–$27. MC, V. Daily dinner only.

Sweet Plantains Restaurant & Rum Bar ★ CARIBBEAN/CREOLE Cool drinks, a tropical ambience, and authentic flavors lure both locals and visitors to this eatery, where comfort and good food go hand in hand. You can dine al fresco in the sea-bordering courtyard or in a lush tropical garden surrounded by West Indian art. A helpful staff will guide you through the menu, beginning with such appetizers as saltfish cakes with a sweet mango purée or a spicy crab spread with green plantain chips. A freshly made soup is also featured daily. For a main, you can order tender short ribs of beef or such specialties as pork tenderloin in a guava barbecue sauce. Choice top-quality beef cuts and game are also featured. Nightly specialties are offered, ranging from curries with a choice of seafood or chicken, or else French Caribbean dishes. The bar has the best selection of Caribbean rums on island.

16118 Little Plantation, Coral Bay. ✆ **340/777-1653.** www.sweetplantains-stjohn.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$28. MC, V. Wed–Mon 5:30–9pm.

Zozo's Ristorante ITALIAN An in-the-know crowd of locals and visitors flocks to this charming Italian trattoria, with an open-air terrace and a sweeping panoramic view over the sea. It's the kind of place that locals would book to the rafters on holidays such as New Year's Eve or private celebrations such as birthdays or anniversaries. First-rate ingredients, style, and fresh seasonings contribute to such winning dishes as an eggplant tower (layers of eggplant, fontina, ricotta, and red peppers); little neck clams in white wine, garlic, and plum tomatoes; and lump crab cakes with a roasted-pepper aioli. The pastas are the island's best, especially the lobster ravioli with wild mushrooms and toasted pine nuts, and the basil-infused linguine. Tuck into such fish dishes as a grilled sea bass with an eggplant tapenade in a roasted garlic–shrimp sauce or pan-seared black grouper with a sauce flavored with orange and fresh basil. Their *osso buco* is slowly simmered in red wine, tomato, and veal stock, and is a tasty main course.

Gallows Point. ✆ **340/693-9200.** www.zozos.net. Reservations recommended. Main courses $33–$40. AE, MC, V. Nov–May daily 5:30–9pm; off season Mon–Sat 5:30–9pm.

Moderate

La Tapa INTERNATIONAL/MEDITERRANEAN There's a tiny bar with no more than five stools, a two-tiered dining room, and lots of original paintings. (The establishment doubles as an art gallery.) Menu items are thoughtful and well conceived, and include fast-seared tuna with a Basque-inspired relish of onions, peppers, garlic, and herbs; filet *poivre,* a steak soaked with rum and served with a cracked-pepper sauce and mashed potatoes; and linguine with shrimp, red peppers, and leeks in peanut sauce. Live jazz is offered on Mondays.

Centerline Rd. (across from First Bank), Cruz Bay. ✆ **340/693-7755.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$35. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 5–10pm.

Morgan's Mango CARIBBEAN The chefs here roam the Caribbean for tantalizing flavors, which they adapt for their ever-changing menu. The restaurant is easy to spot, with its big canopy, the only protection from the elements. The bar wraps around the main dining room and offers some 30 frozen drinks. Some think the kitchen tries to do too much with the nightly menu, but it does produce some zesty fare—everything from

Anegada lobster cakes to spicy Jamaican pickapepper steak. Try flying fish served as an appetizer, followed by Haitian voodoo snapper pressed in Cajun spices, then grilled and served with fresh-fruit salsa. Equally delectable is mahimahi in Cruzan rum-and-mango sauce. The knockout dessert is the mango-banana pie.

Cruz Bay (across from the National Park dock). ✆ **340/693-8141.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$25. AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm.

Shipwreck Landing SEAFOOD/CONTINENTAL Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) east of Cruz Bay on the road to Salt Pond Beach, Shipwreck Landing has palms and tropical plants on a veranda overlooking the sea. The intimate bar specializes in tropical frozen drinks. Lunch features a lot more than just sandwiches, salads, and burgers—try pan-seared blackened snapper in Cajun spices, or the conch fritters. The chef shines at night, offering a pasta of the day along with such specialties as tantalizing Caribbean blackened shrimp. A lot of the fare is routine, including New York strip steak and fish and chips, but the grilled mahimahi in lime butter is worth the trip. Entertainment, mainly jazz, is featured Thursday and Sunday nights, with no cover.

34 Freeman's Ground, Rte. 107, Coral Bay. ✆ **340/693-5640.** Reservations requested. Lunch $6–$12; main courses $8–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm (bar until 11pm).

Inexpensive

Vie's Snack Shack ★ Finds WEST INDIAN Vie's looks like little more than a plywood-sided hut, but its charming and gregarious owner is known as one of the best local chefs on St. John. Her garlic chicken is famous. She also serves conch fritters, johnnycakes, island-style beans and rice with meat sauce, and coconut and pineapple tarts. Don't leave without a glass of homemade limeade. The place is open most days, but as Vie says, "Some days, we might not be here at all"—so you'd better call before you head out.

East End Rd., Rte. 10 (21km/13 miles east of Cruz Bay). ✆ **340/693-5033.** Main courses $5–$8. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (but call first!).

HITTING THE BEACH ON ST. JOHN

The best beach, hands down, is **Trunk Bay** ★★, the biggest attraction on St. John. To miss its picture-perfect shoreline of white sand would be like touring Paris and skipping the Eiffel Tower. One of the loveliest beaches in the Caribbean, it offers ideal conditions for diving, snorkeling, swimming, and sailing. The only drawback is the crowds (watch for pickpockets). The only way to avoid these hordes is to arrive early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Beginning snorkelers, in particular, are attracted to the underwater trail near the shore (see "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits on St. John," below); you can rent snorkeling gear here. Lifeguards are on duty. Admission is $4 per person for those over age 16. If you're coming from St. Thomas, both taxis and safari buses to Trunk Bay meet the ferry from Red Hook when it docks at Cruz Bay.

Caneel Bay, the stamping ground of the rich and famous, has seven beautiful beaches on its 68 hectares (168 acres), and all are open to the public. **Caneel Bay Beach** is easy to reach from the main entrance of the Caneel Bay resort. A staff member at the gatehouse will provide directions. **Hawksnest Beach** is one of the most beautiful beaches near the Caneel Bay properties. It's not wide, but it's choice. Since it's near Cruz Bay, where the ferry docks, it is the most crowded, especially when cruise ship passengers come over from St. Thomas. Safari buses and taxis from Cruz Bay will take you along Northshore Road.

The campgrounds of **Cinnamon Bay** have their own beach, where forest rangers sometimes have to remind visitors to put their swim trunks back on. This is our particular favorite, a beautiful strip of white sand with hiking trails, great windsurfing, ruins, and wild donkeys. (Don't feed or pet them!) Changing rooms and showers are available, and you can rent watersports equipment. Snorkeling is especially popular; you'll often see big schools of purple trigger fish. This beach is best in the morning and at midday, as afternoons are likely to be windy. A marked **nature trail,** with signs identifying the flora, loops through a tropical forest on even turf before leading up to Centerline Road.

Maho Bay Beach is immediately to the east of Cinnamon Bay, and it also borders campgrounds. As you lie on the sand, you can see a whole hillside of pitched tents. This is also a popular beach, often with the campers themselves.

Francis Bay Beach and **Watermelon Cay Beach** are just a couple more of the beaches you'll encounter traveling eastward along St. John's gently curving coastline. Watermelon is actually an island in Sir Francis Drake Channel, and it's far from a melon, with a reef of rainbow-hued fish surrounding it. It lies right offshore, and you can easily swim across to it along with the starfish gliding through turtle-grass beds. To reach Watermelon, follow the Leinster Bay Trail for 1.2km (¾ mile) along the Sir Francis Drake Channel, which is studded with islands. Francis Bay Beach lies near the Annaberg Plantation. Locals come here for Sunday barbecues, and snorkelers explore its shallow reef washing up on the bay's rock-strewn northern shore. Swimming among the algae-covered rocks are the territorial damselfish, French grunts, and even "Christmas tree worms" with their feathery tentacles. The beach at **Leinster Bay** is another haven for those seeking the solace of a private sunny retreat. You can swim in the bay's shallow water or snorkel over the spectacular and colorful coral reef, perhaps in the company of an occasional turtle or stingray.

The remote **Salt Pond Bay** is known to locals but often missed by visitors. It's on the beautiful coast in the southeast, adjacent to **Coral Bay.** The bay is tranquil, but the beach is somewhat rocky. It's a short walk down the hill from a parking lot. (***Warning:*** A few cars have been broken into here.) The snorkeling is good, and the bay has some fascinating tidal pools. The Ram Head Trail begins here and, winding for about 1.5km (1 mile), leads to a belvedere overlooking the bay. Facilities are meager but include an outhouse and a few tattered picnic tables.

If you want to escape the crowds, head for **Lameshur Bay Beach,** along the rugged south coast, west of Salt Pond Bay and accessible only via a bumpy dirt road. The sands are beautiful and the snorkeling is excellent. You can also take a 5-minute stroll down the road past the beach to explore the nearby ruins of an old plantation estate that was destroyed in a slave revolt.

Does St. John have a nude beach? Not officially, but lovely **Solomon Bay Beach** is a contender, although park rangers sometimes ask people to put their swimwear back on. Leave Cruz Bay on Route 20 and turn left at the park service sign, about .5km (¼ mile) past the visitor center. Park at the end of a cul-de-sac, then walk along the trail for about 15 minutes. Go early, and you'll practically have the beach to yourself. The beach interests snorkelers of all levels of experience. Also on the north shore and to the immediate south of Salomon is the aptly named **Honeymoon Beach,** where couples often openly display their affection.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS ON ST. JOHN ★★

St. John is known for the Virgin Islands National Park, as well as for its coral-sand beaches, winding mountain roads, hidden coves, and trails that lead past old, bush-covered sugar-cane plantations. Just don't visit expecting to play golf.

The most complete line of watersports equipment available, including rentals for windsurfing, snorkeling, kayaking, and sailing, is offered at the **Cinnamon Bay Watersports Center,** on Cinnamon Bay Beach (✆ **340/776-6330**). One- and two-person sit-on-top kayaks rent for $15 to $30 per hour. You can also sail away in a 4.2 or 4.8m (14- or 16-ft.) Hobie monohull **sailboat** for $30 to $50 per hour.

BOAT EXCURSIONS You can take half- and full-day boat trips, including a full-day excursion to The Baths at Virgin Gorda. **Cruz Bay Watersports** (✆ **340/776-6234**) offers trips to the British Virgin Islands for $150, including food and beverages. ***Note:*** Be sure to bring your passport for any excursions to the British Virgin Islands.

FISHING Outfitters located on St. Thomas offer sport-fishing trips here—they'll come over and pick you up. Call the **Charter Boat Center** (✆ **340/775-7990;** www.charterboat.vi) at Red Hook. Count on spending from $550 to $750 per party for a half-day of fishing.

HIKING St. John has the most rewarding hiking in the Virgin Islands. The terrain ranges from arid and dry (in the east) to moist and semitropical (in the northwest). The island has more than 800 species of plants, 160 species of birds, and more than 20 trails maintained beautifully by the island's crew of park rangers. Much of the land on the island is designated as **Virgin Islands National Park** ★★★. Visitors must stop by the **Cruz Bay Visitor Center,** where you can pick up the park brochure, which includes a map of the park, and the *Virgin Islands National Park News,* which has the latest information on park activities. It's important to carry a lot of water and wear sunscreen and insect repellent when you hike.

St. John is laced with a wide choice of clearly marked walking paths. At least 20 of these originate from Northshore Road (Rte. 20) or from the island's main east–west artery, Centerline Road (Rte. 10). Each is marked at its starting point with a preplanned itinerary; the walks can last anywhere from 10 minutes to 2 hours. Maps are available from the national park headquarters at Cruz Bay.

One of our favorite hikes, the **Annaberg Historic Trail** (identified by the U.S. National Park Service as trail no. 10), requires only about a 1km (.5-mile) stroll. It departs from a clearly marked point along the island's north coast, near the junction of routes 10 and 20. This self-guided tour passes the partially restored ruins of a manor house built during the 1700s. Signs along the way give historical and botanical data. Visiting the ruins is free. If you want to prolong your hiking experience, take the **Leinster Bay Trail** (trail no. 11), which begins near the point where trail no. 10 ends. It leads past mangrove swamps and coral inlets rich with plant and marine life; markers identify some of the plants and animals.

Near the beach at **Cinnamon Bay,** there's a marked nature trail, with signs identifying the flora. It's a relatively flat walk through a tropical forest, eventually leading straight up to Centerline Road.

The **National Park Service** (✆ **340/776-6201**) provides a number of ranger-led activities. One of the most popular is the guided 4km (2½-mile) **Reef Bay Hike.** Included is a stop at the only known petroglyphs on the island and a tour of the sugar-mill ruins. A park ranger discusses the area's natural and cultural history along the way. The hike starts at 9:30am on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and costs $21 per person. Reservations are required and can be made by phone (at least 2–3 weeks in advance).

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING ★★ **Cruz Bay Watersports,** P.O. Box 252, Cruz Bay, St. John (✆ **340/776-6234;** www.divestjohn.com), is a PADI and NAUI five-star diving center. Certifications can be arranged through a dive master for $385. Beginner

Moments Underwater Wonderful

At Trunk Bay, divers and snorkelers can follow the **National Park Underwater Trail** (✆ **340/776-6201**), which stretches for 200m (656 ft.) and helps you identify what you see—everything from false coral to colonial anemones. You'll pass lavender sea fans and schools of silversides. Rangers are on hand to provide information. There is a $4 admission fee to access the beach.

scuba lessons start at $110. Two-tank reef dives with all dive gear cost $95, and wreck dives, night dives, and dive packages are available. In addition, snorkel tours are offered daily for $65.

Divers can ask about scuba packages at **Low Key Watersports,** Wharfside Village (✆ **800/835-7718** in the U.S., or 340/693-8999; www.divelowkey.com). All wreck dives offered are two-tank/two-location dives and cost $90, with night dives also going for $90. Snorkel tours are also available at $50 per person.

The best place for snorkeling is **Trunk Bay** (see "Hitting the Beach on St. John," above). Snorkeling gear can be rented from the Cinnamon Bay Watersports Center (see above) for $5, plus a $25 deposit. Two other choice **snorkeling spots** around St. John are **Leinster Bay** ★★ and **Haulover Bay** ★★. Usually uncrowded Leinster Bay offers some of the best snorkeling in the U.S. Virgins. The water is calm, clear, and filled with brilliantly hued tropical fish. Haulover Bay is a favorite among locals. It's often deserted, and the waters are often clearer than in other spots around St. John. The ledges, walls, and nooks here are set very close together, making the bay a lot of fun for anyone with a little bit of experience.

SEA KAYAKING **Arawak Expeditions,** based in Cruz Bay (✆ **800/238-8687** in the U.S., or 340/693-8312; www.arawakexp.com), provides kayaking gear, healthful meals, and experienced guides for full- and half-day outings. Trips cost $90 and $50, respectively. Multiday excursions with camping are also available; call their toll-free number if you'd like to arrange an entire vacation with them. These 5-day trips range in price from $1,100 to $2,500.

WINDSURFING The windsurfing at Cinnamon Bay is some of the best anywhere, for either the beginner or the expert. The **Cinnamon Bay Watersports Center** (see above) rents high-quality equipment for all levels, even for kids. Boards cost $25 to $65 an hour; a 2-hour introductory lesson costs $80.

EXPLORING ST. JOHN

The best way to see St. John quickly, especially if you're on a cruise ship layover, is to take a 2-hour **taxi tour.** The cost is $45 for one or two passengers, or $16 per person for three or more. Almost any taxi at Cruz Bay will take you on these tours, or you can call the **St. John Taxi Association** (✆ **340/693-7530**).

Many visitors spend time at **Cruz Bay,** where the ferry docks. This village has interesting bars, restaurants, boutiques, and pastel-painted houses. It's a bit sleepy, but relaxing after the fast pace of St. Thomas.

Most cruise ship passengers dart through Cruz Bay and head for the island's biggest attraction, **Virgin Islands National Park** ★★ (✆ **340/776-6201**). The park totals 5,050 hectares (12,474 acres), including submerged lands and water adjacent to St. John,

and has more than 30km (19 miles) of hiking trails to explore. See "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits on St. John," above, for information on trails and organized park activities.

Other major sights on the island include **Trunk Bay** (see "Hitting the Beach on St. John," above), one of the world's most beautiful beaches, and **Fort Berg** (also called Fortsberg), at Coral Bay, which served as the base for the soldiers who brutally crushed the 1733 slave revolt. Finally, try to make time for the **Annaberg Ruins** on Leinster Bay Road, where the Danes maintained a thriving plantation and sugar mill after 1718. It's located off Northshore Road, east of Trunk Bay. Admission is free. On certain days of the week (dates vary), park rangers lead guided walks of the area. For information on the **Annaberg Historic Trail,** see "Sports & Other Outdoor Pursuits on St. John," above.

SHOPPING ON ST. JOHN ★★

Compared to St. Thomas, St. John's shopping isn't much, but what's here is interesting. The boutiques and shops of Cruz Bay are individualized and quite special. Most of the shops are clustered at **Mongoose Junction,** in a woodsy area beside the roadway, about a 5-minute walk from the ferry dock.

Before you leave the island, you'll want to visit the recently expanded **Wharfside Village** (✆ **340/693-8210;** www.wharfsidevillage.com), just a few steps from the ferry departure point. In this complex of courtyards, alleys, and shady patios is a mishmash of all sorts of boutiques, along with some restaurants, fast-food joints, and bars.

Bamboula, Mongoose Junction (✆ **340/693-8699;** www.bamboulastjohn.com), has an exotic and very appealing collection of gifts from St. John, the Caribbean, India, Indonesia, and Central Africa. The store also has clothing for both men and women under its own label—hand-batiked soft cottons and rayons made for comfort in a hot climate.

Sun Angels, Mongoose Junction (✆ **340/779-6274**), sells hand-painted clothing created in Costa Rica. This fine tropical clothing is designed for women only.

Coconut Coast Studios, Frank Bay (✆ **800/887-3798** or 340/776-6944; www.coconutcoaststudios.com), is the studio of Elaine Estern, best known for her Caribbean landscapes. It's 5 minutes from Cruz Bay; walk along the waterfront, bypassing Gallows Point. The outlet also sells calendars, gifts, limited-edition prints, and lithographs. From December to May, the studio hosts a free sunset cocktail party Wednesday 5:30 to 7pm.

At the **Donald Schnell Studio,** Mongoose Junction (✆ **800/253-7107** or 340/776-6920; www.donaldschnell.com), Mr. Schnell and his assistants have created one of the finest collections of handmade pottery, sculpture, and blown glass in the Caribbean. The staff can be seen working daily. They're known for their rough-textured coral work. Water fountains are a specialty item, as are house signs and coral-pottery dinnerware.

The **Fabric Mill,** Mongoose Junction (✆ **340/776-6194**), features batik fabrics from around the world. Vibrant rugs and bed, bathroom, and table linens; sarongs; scarves; and handbags are all made here.

R and I Patton Goldsmithing, Mongoose Junction (✆ **800/626-3445** or 340/776-6548; http://pattongold.com), is one of the oldest businesses on the island. Three-quarters of the merchandise here is made on St. John. There's a large selection of jewelry in sterling silver, gold, and precious stones. Also featured are the works of goldsmiths from outstanding American studios, as well as Spanish coins.

ST. JOHN AFTER DARK

Bring a good book. When it comes to nightlife, St. John is no St. Thomas. Most people are content to have a leisurely dinner and then head for bed.

Woody's Seafood Saloon, Cruz Bay (✆ **340/779-4625;** www.woodysseafood.com), is the local dive and hangout at Cruz Bay, right by the ferry dock. It draws both expats and a cross-section of island life, from taxi drivers to fishermen. You can come here to eat or drink. The place is particularly popular during happy hour from 3 to 6pm, featuring dollar beers. It's about the only place on island you can order food as late as 1am. Try the blackened-fish sandwich or the "biggest, baddest cheeseburger on island." The joint's hosts are Chad and Todd Beaty, identical twins. They hire bartenders who are willing to pour alcohol in navels or spray whipped cream "anywhere," and we do mean that literally. The joint jumps Sunday to Thursday 11am to 1am, Friday and Saturday 11am to 2am.

The **Caneel Bay Bar,** at the Caneel Bay resort (✆ **340/776-6111**), has live music Tuesday to Sunday 8:30 to 10:30pm. The most popular drinks are the Cool Caneel (local rum with sugar, lime, and anisette) and the trademark Plantation Punch (lime and orange juice with three different kinds of rum, bitters, and nutmeg).

The two places above are very touristy. If you'd like to drink and gossip with the locals, try **JJ's Texas Coast Café,** Cruz Bay (✆ **340/776-6908**), a real dive, across the park from the ferry dock. The margaritas here are lethal. Also at Cruz Bay, check out the action at **Fred's,** on King Street (✆ **340/776-6363**), across from the Lime Inn. Fred's brings in bands and has dancing on Friday nights. It's just a little hole-in-the-wall and can get crowded fast.

The best sports bar on the island is **Skinny Legs,** Emmaus, Route 10, Coral Bay, beyond the fire station (✆ **340/779-4982**). This shack made of tin and wood happens to have the best burgers in St. John. (The chili dogs aren't bad, either.) The yachting crowd likes to hang out here, though you wouldn't know it at first glance—it often seems that the richer they are, the scruffier they dress. The bar has a satellite dish, dartboard, and horseshoe pits. Live music is presented on Friday and Saturday nights during high season.

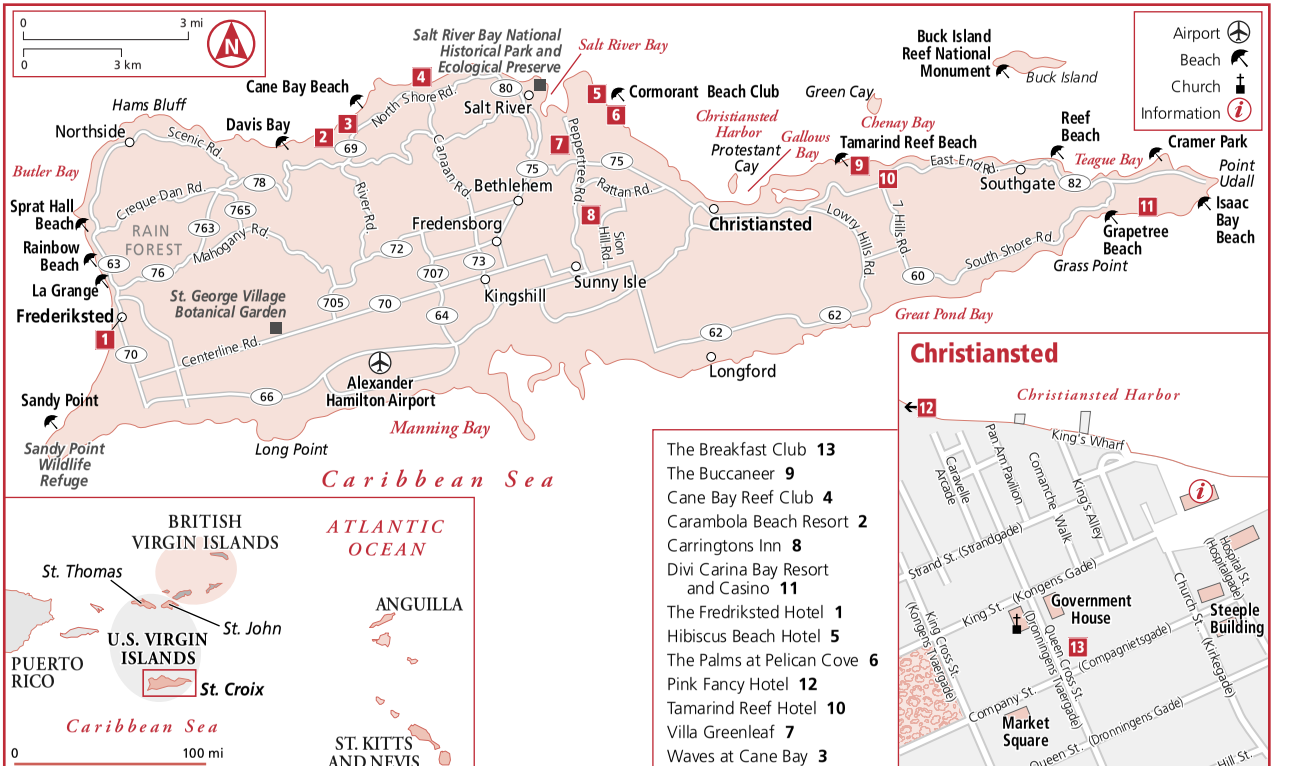
Morgan's Mango (✆ **340/693-8141**) is one of the hottest watering holes on the island (p. 742). It's in Cruz Bay, across from the National Park dock. Count yourself lucky if you get in on a crowded night in winter. The place became famous locally when it turned away Harrison Ford, who was vacationing at Caneel Bay. Thursday is Margarita Night, and Tuesday night is Lobster Night.

4 ST. CROIX ★★

Not as built up as St. Thomas, St. Croix is still the largest of the U.S. Virgin Islands, with 218 sq. km (85 sq. miles). It moves at a much slower pace than St. Thomas and doesn't have the vast shopping possibilities as its rival. But many vacationers prefer its more bucolic charm.

At the east end (actually, the easternmost point of the United States), the terrain is rocky and arid. The west end is lusher and even includes a small "Rain Forest" of mango, mahogany, tree ferns, and dangling lianas. Between the two extremes are beautiful beaches, rolling hills, pastures, and, increasingly, miles of condos.

Columbus named the island Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) when he landed here on November 14, 1493. He anchored his ship off the north shore but was quickly driven


0 3 mi
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Airport
Beach
Church
Information
Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve
Salt River Bay
Buck Island Reef National Monument
Buck Island
Cane Bay Beach
Hams Bluff
Northside
Davis Bay
North Shore Rd.
Salt River
Cormorant Beach Club
Green Cay
Christiansted Harbor
Protestant Cay
Gallows Bay
Chenay Bay
Tamarind Reef Beach
Reef Beach
Cramer Park
Teague Bay
Point Udall
Butler Bay
Scenic Rd.
Creque Dan Rd.
Sprat Hall Beach
Rainbow Beach
La Grange
Frederiksted
RAIN FOREST
Mahogany Rd.
River Rd.
Canaan Rd.
Bethlehem
Fredensborg
Peppertree Rd.
Hill Rd.
Sion
Rattan Rd.
Christiansted
Lowry Hills Rd.
7 Hills Rd.
East End Rd.
Southgate
Isaac Bay Beach
Grapetree Beach
Grass Point
South Shore Rd.
St. George Village Botanical Garden
Kingshill
Sunny Isle
Centerline Rd.
Great Pond Bay
Longford
Alexander Hamilton Airport
Sandy Point
Sandy Point Wildlife Refuge
Long Point
Manning Bay
Caribbean Sea
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
ATLANTIC OCEAN
St. Thomas
St. John
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
St. Croix
PUERTO RICO
ANGUILLA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
Caribbean Sea
0 100 mi
The Breakfast Club 13
The Buccaneer 9
Cane Bay Reef Club 4
Carambola Beach Resort 2
Carringtons Inn 8
Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino 11
The Fredriksted Hotel 1
Hibiscus Beach Hotel 5
The Palms at Pelican Cove 6
Pink Fancy Hotel 12
Tamarind Reef Hotel 10
Villa Greenleaf 7
Waves at Cane Bay 3
Christiansted
Christiansted Harbor
King's Wharf
Pan Am Pavilion
Caravelle Arcade
Comanche Walk
King's Alley
Strand St. (Strandgade)
King St. (Kongens Gade)
Government House
Steeple Building
Hospital St. (Hospitalsgade)
Church St. (Kirkegade)
King Cross St. (Kongens Tvaergade)
Queen Cross St. (Dronningens Tvaergade)
Company St. (Compagnietsgade)
Market Square
Queen St. (Dronningens Gade)
Hill St.

Fun Facts **Special Holiday Events**

Christmas is celebrated in a big way on St. Croix. A 12-day celebration includes Christmas Day, the legal holiday on December 26, New Year's Eve (called "Old Year's Day"), and New Year's Day. It ends January 5 with a children's parade and January 6 with an adult parade for the Feast of the Three Kings, a parade of flamboyantly attired merrymakers. For information, call the **tourism office** in Christiansted (✆ **340/773-0495**).

away by the spears, arrows, and axes of the Carib Indians. The French laid claim to the island in 1650, and the Danes purchased it from them in 1773, eventually selling it to the United States in 1917. Under Danish rule, slave labor and sugar-cane fields proliferated during a golden era for both planters and pirates, which came to an end in the latter half of the 19th century. Some Danish influence still permeates the island today.

ST. CROIX ESSENTIALS

See "Getting There" at the beginning of the chapter for details on flights to St. Croix.

VISITOR INFORMATION You can begin your explorations at the **visitor bureau,** 53A Company St., in Christiansted (✆ **340/773-0495;** www.stcroixtourism.com), a yellow building across from the open-air market. It's open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND At Henry E. Rohlsen International Airport, official taxi rates are posted. From the airport, expect to pay about $16 to $36 to Christiansted and about $12 to $24 to Frederiksted. Cabs are unmetered, so agree on the rate before you get in. The **St. Croix Taxicab Association** (✆ **340/778-1088**) offers door-to-door service.

Air-conditioned **buses** run between Christiansted and Frederiksted about every 2 hours daily between 5:30am and 8pm. They start at Tide Village, to the east of Christiansted, and go along Route 75 to the Golden Rock Shopping Center. They transfer along Route 70, with stopovers at the Sunny Isle Shopping Center, La Reine Shopping Center, St. George Village Botanical Garden, and Whim Plantation Museum, before reaching Frederiksted. The one-way fare is $1, or 55¢ for seniors. For more information, call ✆ **340/773-1664.**

If your hotel is in Christiansted and you don't plan to do extensive touring around the island, you can manage without a car. But if you plan to get out and explore, a car is the way to go. Many of the roads are quite good. St. Croix offers moderately priced car rentals, even on cars with automatic transmission and air-conditioning. However, because of the island's higher-than-normal accident rate, insurance costs are a bit higher than usual. If you're not covered under your existing insurance policies or by your credit card, you should consider paying for the collision damage waiver.

Avis (✆ **800/331-1084** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/778-9355; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ **800/472-3325** in U.S. and Canada, or 340/778-9636; www.budget.com), and **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S. and Canada, or 340/778-1402; www.hertz.com) all maintain headquarters at the airport; look for their kiosks near the baggage-claim areas. In most rural areas, the speed limit is 56kmph (35 mph); certain parts of the major artery, Route 66, are 89kmph (55 mph). In towns and urban areas, the speed limit is 32kmph (20 mph). If you're going into the "bush country," you'll find the roads very difficult. Sometimes the government smoothes the roads out before the rainy season

begins (often in Oct or Nov), but they deteriorate rapidly. ***Be warned:*** Driving is on the left.

FAST FACTS If you need medical assistance, go to the **Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center,** 4007 Estate Diamond Ruby, Christiansted (✆ **340/778-6311;** www.jflusvi.org).

WHERE TO STAY ON ST. CROIX

All rooms are subject to an 8% hotel room tax, which is not included in the rates below. If you're interested in a villa or condo rental, contact the places reviewed below or **Century 21 Island Villas,** Property Management Rentals, 340 Strand St., Frederiksted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00840 (✆ **800/626-4512** or 340/773-8821; fax 340/772-2958; www.stcroixislandvillas.com), which offers some of the best accommodations on the island. Some are private residences with pools; many are on the beach. They range from one-bedroom units to seven-bedroom villas, with prices from $1,050 to $15,000 per week. The minimum stay is 7 nights.

Very Expensive

The Buccaneer ★★★ Kids This large, luxurious, family-owned resort has three of the island's best beaches and the best sports program on St. Croix. The property was once a cattle ranch and a sugar plantation; its first estate house, which dates from the mid–17th century, stands near a freshwater pool. Accommodations are either in the main building or in one of the beachside properties. The baronially arched main building has a lobby opening onto landscaped terraces, with a sea vista on two sides and Christiansted to the west. The rooms are fresh and comfortable, though some of the standard units are a bit small. All have wicker or mahogany furnishings and full bathrooms. The best bathrooms are in the Beachside Doubloons and come complete with whirlpool tubs. A free Kid's Camp is available year-round.

P.O. Box 25200, Gallows Bay (3km/1¾ miles east of Christiansted on Rte. 82), Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00824. ✆ **800/255-3881** in the U.S., or 340/712-2100. Fax 340/712-2105. www.thebuccaneer.com. 138 units. Winter $340–$695 double, $640–$990 suite; off season $295–$460 double, $440–$730 suite. Children 17 and under stay free. Rates include American breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; bar; babysitting; children's program; 18-hole golf course; fitness center; 2 outdoor pools; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa; 8 tennis courts (2 lit); kayaks; scuba; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Expensive

Carambola Beach Resort Extensively renovated in 2008, this hotel is set on 11 hectares (27 acres) above Davis Bay, about a 30-minute drive from Christiansted. It's one of the largest hotels on St. Croix, and it lies adjacent to an outstanding golf course, in a lovely, lush setting on a white-sand beach whose turquoise waters provide fine snorkeling. Despite its spectacular physical location, this resort doesn't match the Buccaneer's class and style. Guests are housed in red-roofed, two-story buildings, each of which contains six units. The accommodations, each a suite, are furnished in mahogany, with Danish design; each has a balcony partially concealed from outside view, overlooking either the garden or the sea. Rooms have an upscale flair, with louvered doors, tile floors, mahogany trim, and sometimes extras like screened-in porches with rocking chairs. If you want the very finest room, ask for the Davis Bay Suite, which was a former Rockefeller private beach home. Its veranda alone is capable of entertaining 50 people, should that many drop in.

Estate Davis Bay (P.O. Box 3031), Kingshill, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00851. ✆ **888/503-8760** in the U.S., or 340/778-3800. Fax 340/778-1682. www.carambolabeach.com. 150 units. Winter $290–$1,000 suite; off season $240–$800 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; golf course; fitness center; outdoor pool; whirlpool; smoke-free rooms; 2 tennis courts; dive shop; fishing; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino ★ Opening onto 300m (984 ft.) of sugar-white beach, this resort brought gambling to the U.S. Virgin Islands. That fact seems to obscure its success as a place of barefoot elegance and a top resort property. Accommodations feature oceanfront guest rooms and villa suites with views of the Caribbean. Rooms are good size and well equipped with computer/fax lines, VCRs, a small kitchen, full bathrooms, and balconies. We prefer the accommodations on the ground floor, as they are closer to the water's edge. The 20 villas across the street are about a 3-minute walk from the sands. The most up-to-date building contains 50 oceanfront accommodations with balconies. You can simply go upstairs for a massage at the spa on the top floor.

5025 Estate Turner Hole, Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **800/823-9352** in the U.S., or 340/773-9700. Fax 340/773-6802. www.diviresorts.com. 180 units. Winter $216–$295 double, from $400 suite; off season $142–$195 double, from $265 suite. Children 15 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; babysitting; health club; 2 outdoor pools; 2 outdoor whirlpools; casino; room service; smoke-free rooms; spa services; lit tennis court; dive center; snorkeling; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen (in some), Wi-Fi.

Hibiscus Beach Hotel ★ This hotel, on one of the island's best beaches, attracts a lively clientele. The accommodations are in six two-story white-and-blue buildings. Each guest room is a retreat unto itself, with a private patio or balcony and a view of the Caribbean, plus tasteful Caribbean furnishings and floral prints. Shower-only bathrooms are small but well maintained. Guests who stay here are a bit isolated and will find a car useful.

4131 La Grande Princesse (about 5k m/3 miles northwest of Christianst ed, beside Rte. 75, next to the Cormorant), St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **800/442-0121** in. the U.S., or 340/718-4042. Fax 340/718-7668. www.1hibiscus.com. 38 units. Winter $190–$200 double; off season $140–$150 double. Honeymoon, dive, and golf packages available. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Tamarind Reef Hotel A sandy beach at the Tamarind Reef's doorstep and good snorkeling along the reef highlight this property. The resort exudes a fresh, bright new look. Each motel-style room features a garden patio or private balcony, affording guests a view of the blue Caribbean. In addition, 18 of the suites provide fully equipped kitchenettes and accommodate up to four people. Guests can relax by the pool and enjoy cocktails, light lunches, and snacks from the poolside bar and grill. For those who want to explore St. Croix underwater, the hotel offers complimentary watersports equipment. Adjoining the hotel is the Green Cay Marina, where guests can charter boats for deep-sea fishing or sailing expeditions.

5001 Tamarind Reef, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **800/619-0014** in the U.S., or 340/773-4455. Fax 340/773-3989. www.tamarindreefhotel.com. 39 units. Winter $300–$400 double; off season $200–$300 double. Extra person $35–$50. Children 6 and under stay free in parent's room. Ask about dive, golf, and honeymoon packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; 4 lit tennis courts; kayaks; snorkeling; windsurfing; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

Villa Greenleaf ★★ Finds This is one of the best B&Bs on the island, owned and operated by the same staff that made the Greenleaf Inn at Boothbay Harbor one of the leading inns of New England. This snug family retreat still adheres to its New England

innkeeping tradition, offering personal service and the elegant ambience of a private home. It's very small, so make reservations well in advance. The building dates from the 1950s, when it was a private home, but it's been completely renovated post-millennium. Four-poster beds are just some of the elegant details associated with the roomy bedrooms of this house. Each of the suites is individually decorated and imbued with muted Caribbean charm and grace. The location is to the west of Christiansted, so you'll need a car for excursions down from the hill.

Island Center Rd., Montpelier, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00821. ✆ **888/282-1001** in the U.S., or 340/719-1958. Fax 340/772-5425. www.villagreenleaf.com. 5 units. Winter $320–$340 double, $365–$385 double with use of car; off season $220–$240 double, $265–$285 with use of car. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; pool. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, fridge, hair dryer, no phone, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Cane Bay Reef Club ★ (Finds) This is one of the little gems of the island, offering large suites, each with a living room, a full kitchen, and a balcony overlooking the water. It's on the north shore, about a 20-minute taxi ride from Christiansted, fronting the rocky Cane Bay Beach near the Waves at Cane Bay. Sunsets are beautiful, and the snorkeling's great. The decor is breezily tropical, with cathedral ceilings, overhead fans, and Chilean tiles. Bedrooms are spacious, cool, and airy, with comfortable beds; living rooms also contain futons. There's a golf course nearby, and there's a dive shop within walking distance. You can cook in your own kitchen, barbecue, or dine at the in-house restaurant, Bogey's.

P.O. Box 1407, Kingshill, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00851. ✆ **800/253-8534** in the U.S., or 340/778-2966. Fax 340/778-2966. www.canebay.com. 9 units. Winter double $150–$250 daily, $970–$1,600 weekly; off season double $110–$160 daily, $700–$990 weekly. Extra person $20. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, fridge, kitchen, minibar, no phone (in some).

Carringtons Inn ★ (Finds) If you've read stories about celebrities such as screen legend Maureen O'Hara who own villas on St. Croix, and you wonder what life is like in them, here's your chance to experience one firsthand. This grandly elegant B&B was once the home of a wealthy family who spent winters here. Much evidence of their former lifestyle remains. This is an intimate B&B with personalized attention and five spacious and beautifully furnished guest rooms with first-class private bathrooms. Some rooms have a king-size canopy bed, and wicker furnishings are in tasteful abundance. When guests gather around the pool, a house-party atmosphere prevails. Even your breakfast of such delights as rum-flavored French toast can be served poolside. The staff delivers thoughtful touches such as a full concierge service, bathrobes, and even freshly baked cookies in the evening.

4001 Estate Hermon Hill (1.5km/1 mile west of Christiansted), St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **877/658-0508** in the U.S., or 340/713-0508. Fax 340/719-0841. www.carringtonsinn.com. 5 units. Winter $125–$165 double; off season $100–$125 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Breakfast room; health club (nearby); outdoor pool; tennis courts (nearby). *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some).

The Palms at Pelican Cove ★★ This family-oriented resort stands on 2.8 hectares (7 acres) of beachfront property at a point 5km (3 miles) northwest of Christiansted. Its bedrooms are inviting, in a Caribbean style with an upgraded decor. Designed in a boxy, modern-looking series of rectangles, it has outcroppings of exposed natural stone, striking a balance between seclusion and accessibility. Long Reef lies less than 30m (100 ft.) offshore from the resort's sandy beachfront. The spacious guestrooms have a private

balcony or patio with ocean views. Social life revolves around an open-air lounge, bar, and restaurant with sea views.

4126 La Grande Princesse, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **800/548-4460** or 340/718-8920. Fax 340/718-0218. 35 units. Year-round $150–$269 double; $225–$309 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool; room service; scuba diving lessons. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Waves at Cane Bay This intimate and tasteful condo property is about 13km (8 miles) from the airport, midway between the island's two biggest towns. It's set on a well-landscaped plot of oceanfront property on Cane Bay, the heart of the best scuba and snorkeling at Cane Bay Beach. The renovated accommodations are within a pair of two-story cement-sided buildings, each directly on the beach. Each of the accommodations is high-ceilinged and relatively large, with a well-equipped kitchenette, a selection of reading material, tiled floors, and a private veranda that's partially or fully concealed from the views of any of the other verandas. Attached to one of the buildings is an open-sided pavilion that functions as a bar and restaurant, open Monday to Saturday for dinner.

Cane Bay (P.O. Box 1749), Kingshill, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00851. ✆ **800/545-0603** in the U.S., or 340/778-1805. Fax 340/778-4945. www.canebaystcroix.com. 12 units. Winter $140–$155 double; off season $89–$99 double. Extra person $20. AE, MC, V. From the airport, go left on Rte. 64; after 1.5km/1 mile, turn right on Rte. 70; after another 1.5km/1 mile, go left at the junction with Rte. 75; after 3km/1¾ miles, turn left at the junction with Rte. 80; follow for 8km/5 miles. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; saltwater outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms; dive shop; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchen.

Inexpensive

The Breakfast Club ★ (Value) Here you'll get the best value of any bed-and-breakfast on St. Croix. This comfortable place combines a 1950s compound of efficiency apartments with a traditional-looking stone house that was rebuilt from a ruin in the 1930s. Each of the units has a cypress-sheathed ceiling, off-white walls, a beige-tile floor, and summery furniture. An on-site chef specializes in banana pancakes and will prepare lunch or dinner on request. When there is a full house count, occasional "party nights" are staged, featuring recorded music.

18 Queen Cross St., Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **340/773-7383.** Fax 340/773-8642. 10 units. $75 double. Rates include breakfast. AE, V. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, fridge, no phone.

The Frederiksted Hotel This contemporary four-story inn is a good choice for the heart of historic Frederiksted. It's in the center of town, about a 10-minute ride from the airport. Much of the activity takes place in the outdoor tiled courtyard, where guests enjoy drinks. The cheery rooms are like those of a motel on the U.S. mainland, perhaps showing a bit of wear, and with good ventilation but bad lighting. They're done in a tropical motif of pastels and are equipped with small fridges. The best (and most expensive) rooms are those with ocean views; they're subject to street noise but have the best light. The nearest beach is Fort Frederik, a 3-minute walk away.

442 Strand St., Frederiksted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00840. ✆ **800/595-9519** in the U.S., or 340/772-0500. Fax 340/719-1272. www.frederikstedhotel.dk. 36 units. Winter $120–$180 double; off season $95–$150 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Pink Fancy Hotel ★ (Finds) This small, unique hotel is a block from the Annapolis Sailing School. You get more atmosphere here than anywhere else in town. The oldest part of the four-building complex is a historic 1780 Danish town house. In the 1950s, the hotel became a mecca for writers and artists, including Noël Coward. The owners have made major renovations, installing more antiques and fine furnishings. Guest rooms have a bright, tropical feel, with ceiling fans, floral prints, and rattan furnishings. The

deluxe rooms are furnished with canopy or iron beds, as well as antiques and artwork. A 3-minute boat ride takes guests to the beach on the Cay , a sandy islet in Christiansted 's harbor.

27 Prince St., Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S.V.I. 00820. ✆ **800/524-2045** in the U .S., or 340/773-8460. Fax 340/773-6448. www.pinkfancy.com. 11 units . Winter $140–$185 double; off season $120–$165 double . Rate includes continental breakfast. Ask about packages and weekly rates. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, kitchenette.

WHERE TO DINE IN ST. CROIX

In Christiansted

Bacchus ★ STEAKHOUSE/CONTINENTAL In a restaurant dedicated to the god of wine, it's no surprise that the wine menu receives as much attention as the food. Both *Wine Spectator* and *Food & Wine* have praised the cellar here. The decor, the fine service, and the presentation of the dishes make for a fine evening out. The kitchen uses first-class ingredients, many imported, to craft a number of dishes that combine flavor and finesse. To finish, it doesn't get any better than the rum-infused sourdough bread pudding. Most dishes, except lobster, are at the lower end of the price scale.

Queen Cross St., off King St. ✆ **340/692-9922.** www.restaurantbacchus.com. Reservations requested. Main courses $18–$42. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–10pm.

Harvey's CARIBBEAN Forget the plastic and the flowery tablecloths that give this place a 1950s feel, and enjoy the thoroughly zesty cooking of island matriarch Sarah Harvey, who takes joy in her work and aims to fill your stomach with her basic but hearty fare. Try one of her homemade soups, especially the callaloo or chicken. She'll even serve you conch in butter sauce as an appetizer. For a main dish, you might choose from barbecue chicken, barbecue spareribs, boiled filet of snapper , and sometimes even lobster. *Fungi* comes with just about everything. For dessert, try one of the delectable tarts made from guava, pineapple, or coconut.

11B Company St. ✆ **340/773-3433.** Main courses $8–$12. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–4pm.

Kendricks ★★ FRENCH/CONTINENTAL Kendricks, the island's toniest restaurant, lies in the historic Quin House complex at King Cross and Company streets. Some of its recipes have been featured in *Bon Appétit,* and deservedly so. You'll immediately warm to specialties like roasted pecan-crusted pork loin with ginger mayonnaise or grilled filet mignon with a port-wine demi-glace and red-onion confit. The signature appetizer is king-crab cakes with lemon-pepper aioli. Another great choice is the pecan-crusted roast pork loin with ginger mayonnaise.

King Cross St. ✆ **340/773-9199.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$33. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–9:30pm. Closed Mon Sept–Oct.

Luncheria Mexican Food Value MEXICAN/CUBAN/PUERTO RICAN This restaurant is a bargain. You get the usual tacos, tostadas, burritos, nachos, and enchiladas, as well as chicken fajitas, enchiladas verde, and *arroz con pollo* (spiced chicken with brown rice). Daily specials feature both low-calorie and vegetarian choices (the chef 's refried beans are lard-free), and whole-wheat tortillas are offered. The complimentary salsa bar has mild to hot sauces, plus jalapeños. Some Cuban and Puerto Rican dishes appear on the menu; these include a zesty chicken curry, black-bean soup , and roast pork. The bartender makes the island's best margaritas.

In the historic Apothecary Hall Courtyard, 2111 Company St. ✆ **340/773-4247.** Main courses $5–$12. MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–9pm.

Paradise Café (Value) DELI/AMERICAN This neighborhood favorite draws locals seeking good food and great value. Its brick walls and beamed ceiling were originally part of an 18th-century great house. New York–style deli fare is served during the day. The homemade soups are savory, and you can add grilled chicken or fish to the freshly made salads. At breakfast, you can select from an assortment of omelets, or try the steak and eggs. Dinners are more elaborate. The 12-ounce New York strip steak and the freshly made pasta specialties are good choices. Appetizers include mango chicken quesadillas and crab cakes.

53B Company St. (at Queen Cross St., across from Government House). ✆ **340/773-2985.** Breakfast $5.50–$10; lunch $7–$10; dinner $18–$26. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 7:30am–9pm.

Rum Runners (Kids) CARIBBEAN This open-air restaurant sits right on the boardwalk and offers some fabulous views to accompany the excellent dining. The ambience reeks of the Caribbean, and the sound of waves in the background can put even the tensest of people at ease. Excellent choices here include the New York strip steak, the fresh broiled whole lobster, the Caribbean pork tenderloin served with a grilled banana, and one of the house specials, baby back ribs slow-cooked in island spices and Guinness. The younger vacationers can pick from the children's menu.

Hotel Caravelle, on the boardwalk at Queen's Cross St. ✆ **340/773-6585.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$28. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10:30am, 11:30am–3pm, and 5:30–9:30pm; Sun 8am–2pm and 5:30–9:30pm.

Savant ★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN/THAI/MEXICAN The spicy fusion cuisine here provides a marvelous burst of palate-awakening flavors. The bistro atmosphere is stylish, yet fun and laid-back. Black-and-white photos and other original artwork line the walls of the restaurant. Fresh fish is deftly handled. We gravitate to the tantalizing Thai curries, most of which are mildly spiced. You can ask the chef to "go nuclear" if you prefer hotter food. The red-coconut-curry sauce is one of the best we've ever had on the island. If you're craving an enchilada, try the one stuffed with seafood. The maple-teriyaki pork tenderloin, one of the chef's specialties, is terrific, as are the steak choices. There are only 20 candlelit tables, so call for a reservation as far in advance as you can.

4C Hospital St. ✆ **340/713-8666.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$33. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

In Frederiksted

Blue Moon INTERNATIONAL/CAJUN The best little bistro in Frederiksted becomes a hot, hip spot during Sunday brunch and on Friday nights, when it offers entertainment. The 200-year-old stone house on the waterfront is a favorite of visiting jazz musicians, and visitors have discovered (but not ruined) it. It's decorated with funky, homemade art from the U.S., including a trash-can-lid restaurant sign. The atmosphere is casual and cafelike. Begin with the "lunar pie," with feta, cream cheese, onions, mushrooms, and celery in phyllo pastry, or the artichoke-and-spinach dip. Main courses include the catch of the day and, on occasion, Maine lobster. The clams served in garlic sauce are also from Maine. There's also the usual array of steak and chicken dishes. Save room for the brownie ice cream.

7 Strand St. ✆ **340/772-2222.** Reservations required. Main courses $23–$29. AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Tues–Sat 6–9pm; Sun 11am–2pm.

Le St. Tropez FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN This is the most popular bistro in Frederiksted. It's small, so call ahead for a table. If you're visiting for the day, make this

bright little cafe your lunch stop, and enjoy crepes, quiches, soups, or salads in the sunlit courtyard. At night, the atmosphere glows with candlelight and becomes more festive. Try the pâté de champagne and escargots Provençal, or one of the freshly made soups. Main dishes are likely to include rack of lamb with mushrooms, the fish of the day, or a magret of duck. Ingredients are always fresh and well prepared.

Limetree Court, 227 King St. ✆ **340/772-3000.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$36. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Villa Morales PUERTO RICAN This inland spot is one of the best Puerto Rican restaurants on St. Croix. You can choose between indoor and outdoor seating areas. No one will mind if you come here just to drink; the cozy bar is lined with the memorabilia collected by several generations of the family who maintains the place. Look for a broad cross-section of Hispanic dishes, including many that Puerto Ricans remember from their childhood. These include fried snapper with white rice and beans, stewed conch, roasted or stewed goat, and stewed beef. Meal platters are garnished with beans and rice. Most of the dishes are inexpensive. On special occasions, the owners transform the place into a dance hall, bringing in live salsa and merengue bands.

Plot 82C, Estate Whim (off Rte. 70 about 3km/1¾ miles from Frederiksted). ✆ **340/772-0556.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$15 lunch, $8–$35 dinner. MC, V. Thurs–Sat 10am–10pm.

Around the Island

Duggan's Reef CONTINENTAL/CARIBBEAN This is one of the most popular restaurants on St. Croix. It's only a few feet from the still waters of Reef Beach and makes an ideal perch for watching windsurfers and Hobie Cats. At lunch, an array of salads, crepes, and sandwiches is offered. The more elaborate night menu features the popular house specialties: Duggan's Caribbean lobster pasta and Irish whiskey lobster. Begin with fried calamari or conch chowder. Main dishes include New York strip steak, fish, and pastas. The local catch of the day can be baked, grilled, blackened Cajun style, or served island style (with tomato, pepper, and onion sauce).

East End Rd., Teague Bay. ✆ **340/773-9800.** Reservations required for dinner in winter. Main courses $20–$40; pastas $19–$27. MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 6–9:30pm; Sun brunch 11am–2:30pm. Bar daily noon–11:30pm. Closed for lunch in summer.

The Galleon FRENCH/NORTHERN ITALIAN This restaurant, which overlooks the ocean, is a local favorite, and deservedly so. It serves northern Italian and French cuisine, including *osso buco,* just as good as that dished up in Milan. Freshly baked bread, two fresh vegetables, and rice or potatoes accompany main dishes. The menu always includes at least one local fish, such as wahoo, tuna, swordfish, mahimahi, or even fresh Caribbean lobster. You can order a perfectly done rack of lamb, which will be carved right at your table. There's an extensive wine list, including many sold by the glass. Music from a baby grand accompanies your dinner several nights a week, and you can enjoy guitar music on Thursday and Saturday.

East End Rd., Green Cay Marina, 5000 Estate Southgate. ✆ **340/773-9949.** www.galleonrestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $22–$70; lunch main courses $8–$17. MC, V. Daily 11am–4pm and 6–10pm; happy hour 4–6pm. Go east on Rte. 82 from Christiansted for 5 min.; after going 1.5km/1 mile past the Buccaneer, turn left into Green Cay Marina.

The Palms Restaurant ★ CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL Guests appreciate its relaxed atmosphere, well-prepared food, and gracefully arched premises overlooking the sea. The menu changes nightly. The day begins with an American breakfast featuring selections from the griddle and a variety of egg dishes. At lunch served beachside, you

can enjoy freshly made soups, along with sandwiches and salads, as well as fish and chips, burgers, and pastas. Caribbean and American dishes dominate the menu at night, including a specialty, charbroiled rib-eye steak, and daily specials such as locally caught catch of the day, as well as a changing array of beef, pork, chicken, and pasta dishes. At the Mahogany Bar, you can order from a bar menu featuring pizza, burgers, buffalo wings, and fries.

In the Palms at Pelican Cove, 4126 La Grande Princesse. ✆ **340/718-8920**. Reservations recommended. Main courses $6 breakfast, $8–$16 lunch, $18–$33 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30–11am, 11:30am–2:30pm, and 6–9pm.

Sunset Grill ★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN/AMERICAN This informal spot is on the west coast, near Sprat Hall Plantation. It's the best place on the island to combine lunch and a swim. The restaurant has been in business since 1948, feeding both locals and visitors. Try such local dishes as seafood chowder and the fried fish of the day. These dishes have authentic island flavor, perhaps more so than any other place on St. Croix. You can also get salads and burgers. The bread is baked fresh daily. The owners allow free use of the showers and changing rooms.

Rte. 63 (1.5k m/1 mile north of Frederiksted). ✆ **340/772-5855.** www.sunsetgrill-stx.com. Sandwiches $6–$13; main courses $17–$32. MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm; Sun brunch 10:30am.

HITTING THE BEACH ON ST. CROIX

The most celebrated beach is offshore **Buck Island,** part of the U.S. National Park Service network. Buck Island is actually a volcanic islet surrounded by some of the most stunning underwater coral gardens in the Caribbean. The white-sand beaches on the southwest and west coasts are beautiful, but the snorkeling is even better. Buck Island is home to three kinds of sea turtles and more than 250 species of fish. The islet's interior is filled with such plants as cactus, wild frangipani, and pigeonwood. There are picnic areas for those who want to make a day of it. Boat departures are from Kings Wharf in Christiansted; the ride takes half an hour. John F. Kennedy visited the island as a young man in the 1950s, calling it "one of the finest marine gardens in the Caribbean Sea." When he became president, he proclaimed it a national monument. For more information, see the section "Buck Island," later.

Your best choice for a beach in Christiansted is the one at the **Hotel on the Cay.** This white-sand strip is on a palm-shaded island. Lying in only 1m (3 1/4 ft.) of water, the artificial reef here consists of old car parts and conch shells, and has an array of small tropical reef fish, including sergeant majors and French grunts. If you're a more advanced snorkeler, you can head out a bit to where the reef drops off about 4.5m (15 ft.). Here you can encounter squid, octopus, and eagle rays.To get here, take the ferry from the fort at Christiansted; it runs daily from 7am to midnight. The 4-minute trip costs $3 round-trip, free for guests of the Hotel on the Cay. Eight kilometers (5 miles) west of Christiansted is **The Palms at Pelican Cove,** where some 360m (1,181 ft.) of white sand shaded by palm trees attracts a gay and mixed crowd. Since a reef lies just off the shore, snorkeling conditions are ideal.

We highly recommend **Davis Bay** and **Cane Bay,** with swaying palms, white sand, and good swimming. Because they're on the north shore, these beaches are often windy, and their waters are not always tranquil. The snorkeling at Cane Bay is truly spectacular; you'll see elkhorn and brain corals, all some 225m (738 ft.) off the Cane Bay Wall. Cane Bay adjoins Route 80 on the north shore. Davis Bay doesn't have a reef; it's more popular among bodysurfers than snorkelers. There are no changing facilities.

On Route 63, a short ride north of Frederiksted, lies **Rainbow Beach,** which has white sand and ideal snorkeling conditions. Nearby, also on Route 63, about 5 minutes north of Frederiksted, is another good beach, called **La Grange.** Lounge chairs can be rented here, and there's a bar nearby.

Sandy Point, directly south of Frederiksted, is the largest beach in all the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its waters are shallow and calm, perfect for swimming. Try to concentrate on the sands and not the unattractive zigzagging fences that line the beach. Continue west from the western terminus of the Melvin Evans Highway (Rte. 66).

There's an array of beaches at the east end of the island; they're somewhat difficult to get to, but much less crowded. At **Isaac Bay Beach,** you come upon a tropical paradise, with shallow, calm waters protected by an offshore reef. Snorkelers encounter schools of blue tang, trunkfish, trumpetfish, and other species swimming through forests of sea fans, elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, and other types. If you packed a picnic lunch, this is the spot at which to enjoy it. Windsurfers like **Reef Beach,** which opens onto Teague Bay along Route 82, East End Road, a half-hour ride from Christiansted. You can get food at Duggan's Reef (p. 757). **Cramer Park** is a special public park operated by the Department of Agriculture. It's lined with sea-grape trees and has a picnic area, a restaurant, and a bar. **Grapetree Beach** is off Route 60 (the South Shore Rd.). Watersports are popular here.

SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS ON ST. CROIX

Some of the best snorkeling, diving, and hiking is found on Buck Island. See the section "Buck Island," below.

FISHING The fishing grounds at **Lang Bank** are about 15km (9 1/4 miles) from St. Croix. Here you'll find king fish, dolphin fish, and wahoo. Using light-tackle boats to glide along the reef, you'll probably turn up jack or bonefish. At **Clover Crest,** in Frederiksted, local anglers fish right from the rocks.

GOLF St. Croix has the best golf in the U.S. Virgins. Guests staying on St. John and St. Thomas often fly over for a round on one of the island's three courses.

Robert Trent Jones, Sr., created the **Carambola Golf Course,** on the northeast side of St. Croix (✆ **340/778-5638;** www.golfcarambola.com), calling it "the loveliest course I ever designed." It's been likened to a botanical garden. Golfing authorities consider the par-3 holes here the best in the Tropics. The greens fees of $95 in winter or $65 in summer allow you to play as many holes as you like. Carts are included.

The Buccaneer, Gallows Bay (✆ **340/712-2144**), 5km (3 miles) east of Christiansted, has a challenging 5,685-yard, 18-hole course with panoramic vistas. Nonguests of this deluxe resort pay $100 in winter or $60 off season, which includes use of a cart.

The **Reef,** on the east end of the island at Teague Bay (✆ **340/773-8844**), is a 3,100-yard, 9-hole course, charging greens fees of $20 for 9 holes and $35 for 18 holes. Golf carts can also be rented at an additional $12 for 9 holes or $18 for 18 holes. The longest hole here is a 465-yard par-5.

HIKING Scrub-covered hills make up much of St. Croix's landscape. The island's western district, however, includes a dense, 6-hectare (15-acre) forest known as the **"Rain Forest"** (though technically it's not a rainforest). The network of footpaths here provides some of the best nature walks in the Caribbean. For more details on hiking in this area, see the section "The 'Rain Forest,'" below. **Buck Island** (see the section "Buck Island," below), just off St. Croix, also offers some wonderful nature trails.

The **St. Croix Environmental Association,** Arawak Building, Ste. 3, Gallows Bay (✆ **340/773-1989;** www.stxenvironmental.org), has scheduled hikes costing $10 per person.

HORSEBACK RIDING **Paul and Jill's Equestrian Stables,** 2 Sprat Hall Estate, Route 58 (✆ **340/772-2880;** www.paulandjills.com), the largest equestrian stable in the Virgin Islands, is known throughout the Caribbean for its horses. A 1 1/2-hour trail ride costs $90. Tours usually depart daily in winter at 10:30am and 3pm, and in the off season at 4pm, with slight variations according to demand. Reserve at least a day in advance.

KAYAKING The beauty of St. Croix is best seen on a kayak tour such as those offered by **Caribbean Adventure Tours** (✆ **340/778-1522**). You use stable, sit-on-top ocean kayaks, which are a blast. These enable you to traverse the tranquil waters of Salt River of Columbus landfall fame and enjoy the park's ecology and wildlife. The tour, lasting 3 hours, costs $50 per person and includes water and a light snack.

SAFARI TOURS The best are run by **St. Croix Safari Tours** (✆ **800/524-2026** or 340/773-6700) in a 25-passenger open-air bus tour led by a hip tour guide who knows all about the botany, cuisine, and history of the island. Tours crisscross the island with stops at plantation houses, historic Frederiksted, the Salt River landfall of Columbus, and a drive through the rainforest, with a stop for lunch. There are lots of photo ops. The cost of the tour is $45 per person, including admission fees to the botanical garden, rum factory, and museum.

SNORKELING & SCUBA DIVING ★★ Sponge life, black coral (the finest in the West Indies), and steep drop-offs near the shoreline make St. Croix a snorkeling and diving paradise. The island is home to the largest living reef in the Caribbean, including the fabled north-shore wall that begins in 9m (30 ft.) of water and drops to 4,000m (13,120 ft.), sometimes straight down. See "Hitting the Beach on St. Croix," above, for information on good snorkeling beaches. The **St. Croix Water Sports Center** (see "Windsurfing," below) rents snorkeling equipment for $20 per day if your hotel doesn't supply it.

Buck Island ★★ is a major scuba-diving site, with a visibility of some 30m (98 ft.). It also has an underwater snorkeling trail. All the outfitters offer scuba and snorkeling tours to Buck Island. See the section "Buck Island," below.

Other favorite dive sites include the historic **Salt River Canyon** (northwest of Christiansted at Salt River Bay), which is for advanced divers. Submerged canyon walls are covered with purple tube sponges, deep-water gorgonians, and black coral saplings. You'll see schools of yellowtail snapper, turtles, and spotted eagle rays. We also like the gorgeous coral gardens of **Scotch Banks** (north of Christiansted), and **Eagle Ray** (also north of Christiansted), the latter so named because of the rays that cruise along the wall there. **Cane Bay ★★** is known for its coral canyons.

Davis Bay is the site of the 3,600m-deep (11,808-ft.) Puerto Rico Trench. **Northstar Reef,** at the east end of Davis Bay, is a spectacular wall dive, recommended for intermediate or experienced divers only. The wall here is covered with stunning brain corals and staghorn thickets. At some 15m (49 ft.) down, a sandy shelf leads to a cave where giant green moray eels hang out.

At **Butler Bay,** to the north of the pier on the west shore, three ships were wrecked: the *Suffolk Maid,* the *Northwind,* and the *Rosaomaira,* the last sitting in 30m (98 ft.) of water. These wrecks form the major part of an artificial reef system that also contains abandoned trucks and cars. This site is recommended for intermediate or experienced divers.

The St. Croix Heritage Trail

A trail that leads into the past, **St. Croix Heritage Trail** (✆ **340/772-0598**), launched at the millennium, helps visitors relive the Danish colonial history of the island. All you need are a brochure and map, available at the **tourist office** at 53A Company St. in Christiansted (✆ **340/773-0495**). This 116-km (72-mile) itinerary consists mainly of existing roadways and includes a combination of asphalt-covered roads suitable for driving, and narrow woodland trails which must be navigated on foot. The brochure will identify everything you're seeing. Many aficionados opt to drive along the route whenever practical, descending onto the footpaths wherever indicated, then returning to their cars for the continuation of the tour. En route, you'll be exposed to one of the Caribbean's densest concentrations of historical and cultural sites.

The route connects the two major towns of Christiansted and Frederiksted, going past the sites of former sugar plantations. It traverses the entire 45km (28-mile) length of St. Croix, passing cattle farms, suburban communities, even industrial complexes and resorts. It's not all manicured and pretty, but much is scenic and worth the drive. Allow at least a day for this trail, with stops along the way.

Nearly everyone gets out of the car at **Point Udall,** the easternmost point under the U.S. flag in the Caribbean. You'll pass an eclectic mix of churches and even a prison.

The highlight of the trail is the **Estate Mount Washington Plantation** (p. 765), a strikingly well-preserved sugar plantation. Another highlight is **Estate Whim Plantation** (p. 765), one of the best of the restored great houses, with a museum and gift shop. Another stop is along **Salt River Bay,** which cuts into the northern shoreline. This is the site of Columbus's landfall in 1493.

Of course, you'll want to stop and get to know the locals. We recommend a refreshment break at **Smithens Market.** Off Queen Mary Highway, vendors here offer freshly squeezed sugar-cane juice and sell locally grown fruits and homemade chutneys.

Anchor Dive, Salt River National Park (✆ **800/523-3483** in the U.S., or 340/778-1522; www.anchordivestcroix.com), is located within the most popular dive destination in St. Croix. It operates two boats. The staff offers complete instruction, from resort courses through full certification, as well as night dives. A resort course is $90, with a two-tank dive going for $90. Dive packages begin at $250 for six dives.

Another recommended outfitter is the **Cane Bay Dive Shop** (✆ **340/773-9913**).

TENNIS Some authorities rate the tennis at **The Buccaneer** ★★, G allows Bay (✆ **340/773-3036**), as the best in the Caribbean. This resort offers a choice of eight courts, two lit for night play, all open to the public. Nonguests pay $8 daytime, $10 nighttime per person per hour; you must call to reserve a court at least a day in advance. A tennis pro is available for lessons, and there's also a pro shop.

WINDSURFING Head for the **St. Croix Water Sports Center** (✆ **800/942-6725** or 340/773-7060), on a small offshore island in Christiansted Harbor and part of the Hotel

 on the Cay. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Here you can rent snorkeling equipment for $20 per day and Yamahas that seat two for $70 per half-hour.

EXPLORING ST. CROIX

Taxi tours are the ideal way to explore the island. The cost is around $80 for 2 hours or $100 for 3 hours for up to 3 passengers. All prices should be negotiated in advance. For more information, call the **St. Croix Taxi Association** (✆ **340/778-1088;** www.stcroixtaxi.com).

Christiansted ★★

One of the most picturesque towns in the Caribbean, **Christiansted** is an old, handsomely restored (or, at least, in the process of being restored) Danish port. On the northeastern shore of the island, on a coral-bound bay the town is filled with Danish buildings erected by prosperous merchants in the booming 18th century. These red-roofed structures are often washed in pink, ocher, or yellow. Arcades over the sidewalks provide shade for shoppers. The whole area around the harborfront has been designated a historic site, including **Government House** (✆ **340/773-1404**), which is looked after by the U.S. National Park Service.

Fort Christiansvaern This fortress overlooking the harbor is the best-preserved colonial fortification in the Virgin Islands. It's maintained as a historic monument by the U.S. National Park Service. Its original four-pronged, star-shaped design was in accordance with the most advanced military planning of its era. The fort is now the site of a military museum, which has exhibits on local Danish military history on the island from the late 1800s to 1917.

On the waterfront. ✆ **340/773-1460.** Admission $3 (also includes admission to the Steeple Building). Mon–Fri 8am–4:45pm; Sat–Sun 9am–4:45pm.

Steeple Building This building's full name is the Church of Lord God of Sabaoth. It was built in 1753 as St. Croix's first Lutheran church, and it was deconsecrated in 1831; the building subsequently served as a bakery, a hospital, and a school. Today it houses exhibits relating to island history and culture.

On the waterfront off Hospital St. ✆ **340/773-1460.** Admission $3 (also includes admission to Fort Christiansvaern). Daily 8am–4:45pm.

Frederiksted ★

This former Danish settlement at the western end of the island, about 27km (17 miles) from Christiansted, is a sleepy port town that comes to life only when a cruise ship docks at its shoreline. Frederiksted was destroyed by a fire in 1879. Its citizens subsequently rebuilt it with wood frames and clapboards on top of the old Danish stone and yellow-brick foundations.

Most visitors begin their tour at russet-colored **Fort Frederik,** at the northern end of Frederiksted next to the cruise ship pier (✆ **340/772-2021**). This fort, completed in 1760, is said to have been the first to salute the flag of the new United States. When a U.S. brigantine anchored at port in Frederiksted hoisted a homemade Old Glory, the fort returned the salute with cannon fire, violating the rules of neutrality. It was also here on July 3, 1848, that Gov.–Gen. Peter von Scholten emancipated the slaves in the Danish West Indies in response to a slave uprising led by a young man named Moses "Buddhoe" Gottlieb. A bust of Buddhoe now stands here. The fort has been restored to its 1840 appearance and is today a national historic landmark. You can explore the courtyard and

stables. A **local history museum** has been installed in what was once the Garrison Room. Admission is $3 or free for children 15 and under. It's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 3:30pm.

The **Customs House,** just east of the fort, is an 18th-century building with a 19th-century two-story gallery. On the ground floor is the **visitor bureau** (✆ **340/772-0357**), where you can pick up a free map of the town.

Buck Island ★★★

The crystal-clear water and white-coral sand of **Buck Island,** a satellite of St. Croix, are legendary. Some call this island the single most important attraction of the Caribbean. Only .5km (1/4 mile) wide and 1.5km (1 mile) long, Buck Island lies 2.5km (1 1/2 miles) off the northeastern coast of St. Croix. A barrier reef here shelters many reef fish, including queen angelfish and smooth trunkfish. In years past, Morgan, Blackbeard, and Captain Kidd frequented the island.

Buck Island's greatest attraction is its **underwater snorkeling trails,** which ring part of the island and provide some of the most beautiful underwater views in the Caribbean. Plan on spending at least two-thirds of a day at this famous ecological site maintained by the U.S. National Park Service. There are also many **labyrinths and grottoes for scuba divers.** The sandy **beach** has picnic tables and barbecue pits, as well as restrooms and a small changing room.

You can follow **hiking trails** through the tropical vegetation that covers the island. Circumnavigating the island on foot takes about 2 hours. Buck Island's trails meander from several points along its coastline to its sunny summit, affording views over nearby St. Croix. ***A couple of warnings:*** Wear lots of sunscreen. Even more important, don't touch every plant you see. The island's western edge has groves of poisonous manchineel trees, whose leaves, bark, and fruit cause extreme irritation to human skin.

Small boats run between St. Croix and Buck Island. Nearly all charters provide snorkeling equipment and allow for 1 1/2 hours of snorkeling and swimming. **Caribbean Sea Adventures,** in the King Christian Hotel, 59 King's Wharf, Christiansted (✆ **340/773-2628**), conducts two different types of tours. The first option is a half-day tour aboard a glass-bottom boat departing from the King Christian Hotel, daily from 9:30am to 1pm and 1:30 to 5pm; it costs $40 per person. The second is a full-day tour, offered daily from 10:30am to 4pm on a 12m (40-ft.) trimaran for $60. Included in this excursion is a box lunch.

Captain Heinz (✆ **340/773-3161** or 340/773-4041) is an Austrian-born skipper with more than 25 years of sailing experience. His trimaran, *Teroro II,* leaves the Green Cay Marina "H" Dock at 9am and 2pm, never filled with more than 23 passengers. This snorkeling trip costs $60 for adults, $40 for children 11 and under. The captain is not only a skilled sailor, but also a considerate host. He will even take you around the outer reef, which the other guides do not, for an unforgettable underwater experience.

The "Rain Forest" ★

The island's western district contains a dense, 6-hectare (15-acre) forest, called the "Rain Forest" (though it's not a real one). The area is thick with mahogany trees, *kapok* (silk-cotton) trees, turpentine (red-birch) trees, *samaan* (rain) trees, and all kinds of ferns and vines. Sweet limes, mangoes, hog plums, and breadfruit trees, all of which have grown in the wild since the days of the plantations, are also interspersed among the larger trees. Crested hummingbirds, pearly eyed thrashers, green-throated caribs, yellow warblers,

and perky but drably camouflaged banana quits nest here. The 45m-high (148-ft.) Creque Dam is the major man-made sight in the area.

The "Rain Forest" is private property, but the owner lets visitors go inside to explore. To experience its charm, some people opt to drive along Route 76 (also known as Mahogany Rd.), stopping beside the footpaths that meander off on either side of the highway into dry riverbeds and glens. Stick to the most worn footpaths. You can also hike along some of the little-traveled four-wheel-drive roads in the area. Three of the best for hiking are the **Creque Dam Road** (routes 58/78), the **Scenic Road** (Rte. 78), and the **Western Scenic Road** (routes 63/78).

Our favorite trail in this area takes about 2½ hours one-way. From Frederiksted, drive north on Route 63 until you reach Creque Dam Road, where you turn right, park the car, and start walking. About .5km (1 mile) past the Creque Dam, you'll be deep within the forest's magnificent flora and fauna. Continue along the trail until you come to the Western Scenic Road. Eventually, you reach Mahogany Road (Rte. 76), near St. Croix Leap Project. Hikers rate this trail moderate in difficulty.

You could also begin near the junction of Creque Dam Road and Scenic Road. From here, your trek will cover a broad triangular swath, heading north and then west along Scenic Road. First, the road will rise, and then descend toward the coastal lighthouse of the island's extreme northwestern tip, **Hams Bluff.** Most trekkers decide to retrace their steps after about 45 minutes of northwesterly hiking. Real die-hards, however, will continue all the way to the coastline, then head south along the coastal road (Butler Bay Rd.), and finally head east along Creque Dam Road to their starting point at the junction of Creque Dam Road and Scenic Road. Embark on this longer expedition only if you're really prepared for a hike lasting about 5 hours.

Sandy Point Wildlife Refuge ★

St. Croix's rarely visited southwestern tip is composed of salt marshes, tidal pools, and low vegetation inhabited by birds, turtles, and other wildlife. More than 5km (3 miles) of ecologically protected coastline lie between Sandy Point (the island's westernmost tip) and the shallow waters of the Westend Saltpond. The area is home to colonies of green, leatherback, and hawksbill turtles. It's one of only two such places in U.S. waters. It's also home to thousands of birds, including herons, brown pelicans, Caribbean martins, black-necked stilts, and white-crowned pigeons. As for flora, Sandy Point gave its name to a rare form of orchids, a brown/purple variety.

This wildlife refuge is open only on Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. To get here, drive to the end of Route 66 (Melvin Evans Hwy.) and continue down a gravel road. For guided weekend visits, call ✆ **340/773-4554.**

Around the Island

North of Frederiksted, you can drop in at **Sprat Hall,** the island's oldest plantation, or continue along to the "Rain Forest" (see above). Most visitors come to the area to see the jagged estuary of the northern coastline's **Salt River.** The Salt River was where Columbus landed on November 14, 1493. Marking the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival, Congress created the 365-hectare (902-acre) **Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve.** The park contains the site of the original Carib village explored by Columbus and his men, including the only ceremonial ball court ever discovered in the Lesser Antilles. Also within the park is the largest mangrove forest in the Virgin Islands, sheltering many endangered animals and plants, plus an underwater canyon attracting divers from around the world.

Moments The Easternmost Point of the Caribbean

The rocky promontory of **Point Udall,** jutting into the Caribbean Sea, is the easternmost point under the U.S flag in the Caribbean. Die-hards go out to see the sunrise, but considering the climb is via a rutted dirt road, you may want to wait until there's more light before heading here. Once at the top, you'll be rewarded with one of the best views in the U.S. Virgin Islands. On the way to the lookout point, you'll see **"The Castle,"** a local architectural oddity, owned by the island's most prominent socialite, the Contessa Nadia Farbo Navarro. Point Udall is signposted along Route 82.

Estate Mount Washington Plantation is the island's best-preserved sugar plantation and a highlight along the St. Croix Heritage Trail. It flourished from 1780 to 1820, when St. Croix was the second-largest producer of sugar in the West Indies. The on-site private residence is closed to the public, but you can arrange to go on a self-guided tour of the 5 hectares (12 acres). There is no admission charge, although donations are appreciated. Know that this is one of St. Croix's more loosely organized cultural attractions, but if you phone in advance (✆ **340/772-1026**), someone might give you permission. The plantation site lies at the very southwestern tip of the island, off Route 63, 1.5km (1 mile) inland from the highway that runs along the Frederiksted coast.

Cruzan Rum Factory This factory distills the famous Virgin Islands rum, which some consider the finest in the world. Guided tours depart from the visitors' pavilion; call for reservations and information. There's also a gift shop.

Estate Diamond W. Airport Rd., Rte. 64, Frederiksted. ✆ **340/692-2280.** http://cruzanrum.com. Admission $4. Tours given Mon–Fri 9–11:30am and 1–4:15pm.

Estate Whim Plantation Museum This restored great house is unique among the many sugar plantations whose ruins dot the island. It's comprised of only three rooms. With 1m-thick (3¼-ft.) walls made of stone, coral, and molasses, the house resembles a luxurious European château. A division of Baker Furniture Company used the Whim Plantation's collection of models for one of its most successful reproductions, the "Whim Museum–West Indies Collection." Upscale reproductions of some of the furniture on display within the Whim Plantation, plus others from the Caribbean, are for sale on-site. Slightly different inventories are available from an associated store in downtown Christiansted: **St. Croix Landmarks Museum Store,** 6 Company St. (✆ **340/713-8102**). For more information, refer to "Shopping on St. Croix," below.

The ruins of the plantation's sugar-processing plant, complete with a restored windmill, also remain.

Centerline Rd. (3km/1¾ miles east of Frederiksted). ✆ **340/772-0598.** Admission $8 adults, $4 children. Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.

St. George Village Botanical Garden This is a 6.5-hectare (16-acre) Eden of tropical trees, shrubs, vines, and flowers. The garden is a feast for the eye and the camera, from the entrance drive bordered by royal palms and bougainvillea to the towering kapok and tamarind trees. It was built around the ruins of a 19th-century sugar-cane workers' village. Self-guided walking-tour maps are available at the entrance to the garden's great hall. Facilities include restrooms and a gift shop.

 127 Estate St., 1 St. George, Frederiksted (just north of Centerline Rd., 6km/3¾ miles east of Frederiksted). ✆ **340/692-2874.** www.sgvbg.org. Admission $8 adults, $1 children 12 and under; donations welcome. Daily 9am–5pm.

SHOPPING ON ST. CROIX ★★★

In **Christiansted,** the emphasis is on hole-in-the-wall boutiques selling one-of-a-kind merchandise. The selection of handmade items is especially strong. Knowing that it can't compete with the volume of Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas, Christiansted has forged its own identity as the chic spot for merchandise in the Caribbean. All its shops are within about a half-mile of each other. **King's Alley Complex** is a pink-sided compound filled with the densest concentration of shops on St. Croix.

Frederiksted has also become a popular shopping destination. Its urban mall appeals to cruise ship passengers arriving at Frederiksted Pier. The mall is on a 15m (49-ft.) strip of land between Strand and King streets, the town's bustling main thoroughfare.

Below are our favorite shops in Christiansted.

At the hip and eclectic **From the Gecko,** 1233 Queen Cross St. (✆ **340/778-9433**), you can find anything from hand-painted local cottons and silks to that old West Indian staple, batiks. We found the Indonesian collection here among the most imaginative in the U.S. Virgin Islands—everything from glass jewelry to hemp linens.

Many Hands, 102 Strand St. (✆ **340/773-1990**), sells locally made pottery, art, and handmade jewelry. The collection of local paintings is intriguing, as is the year-round "Christmas tree."

Purple Papaya, 39 Strand St., Pan Am Pavilion (✆ **340/713-9412**), is the best place to go for inexpensive island gifts. It has the biggest array of embroidered T-shirts and sweatshirts on island. Although you're in the Caribbean and not Hawaii, there is a large selection of Hawaiian shirts and dresses, along with beachwear for the whole family, plus island souvenirs.

Royal Poinciana, 1111 Strand St. (✆ **340/773-9892**), looks like an antique apothecary. You'll find hot sauces, seasoning blends for gumbos, island herbal teas, Antillean coffees, and a scented array of soaps, toiletries, lotions, and shampoos. There's also a selection of museum-reproduction greeting cards and calendars, plus educational but fun gifts for children.

About 60% of the merchandise at **Gone Tropical,** 5 Company St. (✆ **340/773-4696;** www.gonetropical.com), is made in Indonesia (usually Bali). Prices of new, semiantique, or antique sofas, beds, chests, tables, mirrors, and decorative carvings are the same as (and sometimes less than) those of new furniture in conventional stores. Gone Tropical also sells art objects, jewelry, batiks, candles, and baskets.

The small West Indian cottage of **Crucian Gold,** 59 Kings Wharf (✆ **877/773-5241;** www.cruciangold.com), holds the gold and silver creations of island-born Brian Bishop. His most popular item is the Crucian bracelet, which contains a "True Lovers' Knot" in its design. The shop also sells hand-tied knots (bound in gold wire), rings, pendants, and earrings.

Sonya Hough of **Sonya Ltd.,** 1 Company St. (✆ **877/766-9284** or 340/773-8924; www.sonyaltd.com), has a group of loyal local fans who wouldn't leave home without wearing one of her bracelets. She's most famous for the sterling silver and gold versions of her C-clasp bracelet. Locals say that if the cup of the "C" is turned toward your heart, you're taken; if the cup is turned outward, you're available. Prices range from $30 to $3,100.

Coconut Vine, Strand Street (✆ **340/773-1991**), is one of the most colorful and popular little boutiques on the island. Hand-painted batiks for both men and women are the specialty.

For a shopping adventure in Frederiksted, head for the **St. Croix Landmarks Museum Store** ★, 52 Estate Whim (✆ **340/772-0598;** www.stcroixlandmarks.com). The shop focuses on reproductions of some of the antiques on display at the Estate Whim Plantation (p. 765). Also available are framed engravings of the kind of botany you'd expect on St. Croix, paperweights, books, brass candlesticks, and gift items redolent with memories and references to the West Indies.

ST. CROIX AFTER DARK

St. Croix doesn't have the nightlife of St. Thomas. To find the action, you might have to consult the publication ***St. Croix This Week,*** which is distributed free to cruise ship and air passengers, and is also available at the tourist office.

Try, if it's taking place, to catch a performance of one of the **Quadrille Dances** ★★ performed by either of two independent, part-time dance troupes based on St. Croix. Hours, performance details, and organization of these dance groups vary widely from season to season, but the basic steps associated with *La Quadrille* have changed little since the plantation days. The women wear long dresses, white gloves, and turbans, while the men wear flamboyant shirts, sashes, and tight black trousers. At one of these performances, after you've learned the (relatively basic) steps, you might be invited to join the dancers on the floor. Ask at your hotel if and when one of these loosely organized dance troupes might be performing, if at all, during your visit.

If you enjoy gambling, visit the **Divi Carina Bay Casino,** 35 Estate Turner Hole (✆ **340/773-7529;** www.carinabay.com). Set on the grounds of the Divi Carina Bay Resort, with which its management is not associated, it's sheltered from the glaring Caribbean sunlight with a glistening white dome inspired by the architecture of the North African desert. Inside, within a decor inspired by the Moroccan casbah, you'll find the only casino in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with 3,000m (9,840 ft.) of gaming space, a cafe-style bistro and bar, at least 20 gaming tables, and 300 jangling slot machines. Entrance is free. It's open Monday to Thursday from noon to 4am, and, Friday to Sunday, 24 hours a day.

If you're looking to hear some live music, try **Blue Moon,** 7 Strand St. (✆ **340/772-2222;** www.bluemoonstcroix.com), a hip little dive and a good bistro. It's currently the hottest spot in Frederiksted on Fridays, when a five-piece ensemble entertains. On Sunday, a live jazz trio performs. There's no cover.

The **Terrace Lounge,** in the Buccaneer, Route 82, Estate Shoys (✆ **340/773-2100**), off the main dining room of one of St. Croix's most upscale hotels, welcomes some of the Caribbean's finest entertainers every night, often including a full band.

The regional sounds of the islands, not only calypso and reggae, but also salsa and soca (a hybrid of calypso and reggae), are featured nightly at **2 Plus 2 Disco,** at the La Grande Princess (✆ **340/773-3710**), a real Caribbean dance club. Usually there's a DJ, except on weekends when local bands are brought in. The place isn't fancy or large. Hours are Thursday and Sunday from 10pm to 1am and Friday and Saturday from 9pm to either 4 or 5am. The cover is $10 when there's a live band.

The Palms Restaurant, 4126 La Grande Princesse (✆ **340/718-8930**), is set in a resort about 5km (3 miles) northwest of Christiansted. You can sit at tables overlooking the ocean or around an open-centered mahogany bar, adjacent to a gazebo. Excellent tropical drinks are mixed here. It is open daily from 7pm until the last customer leaves.

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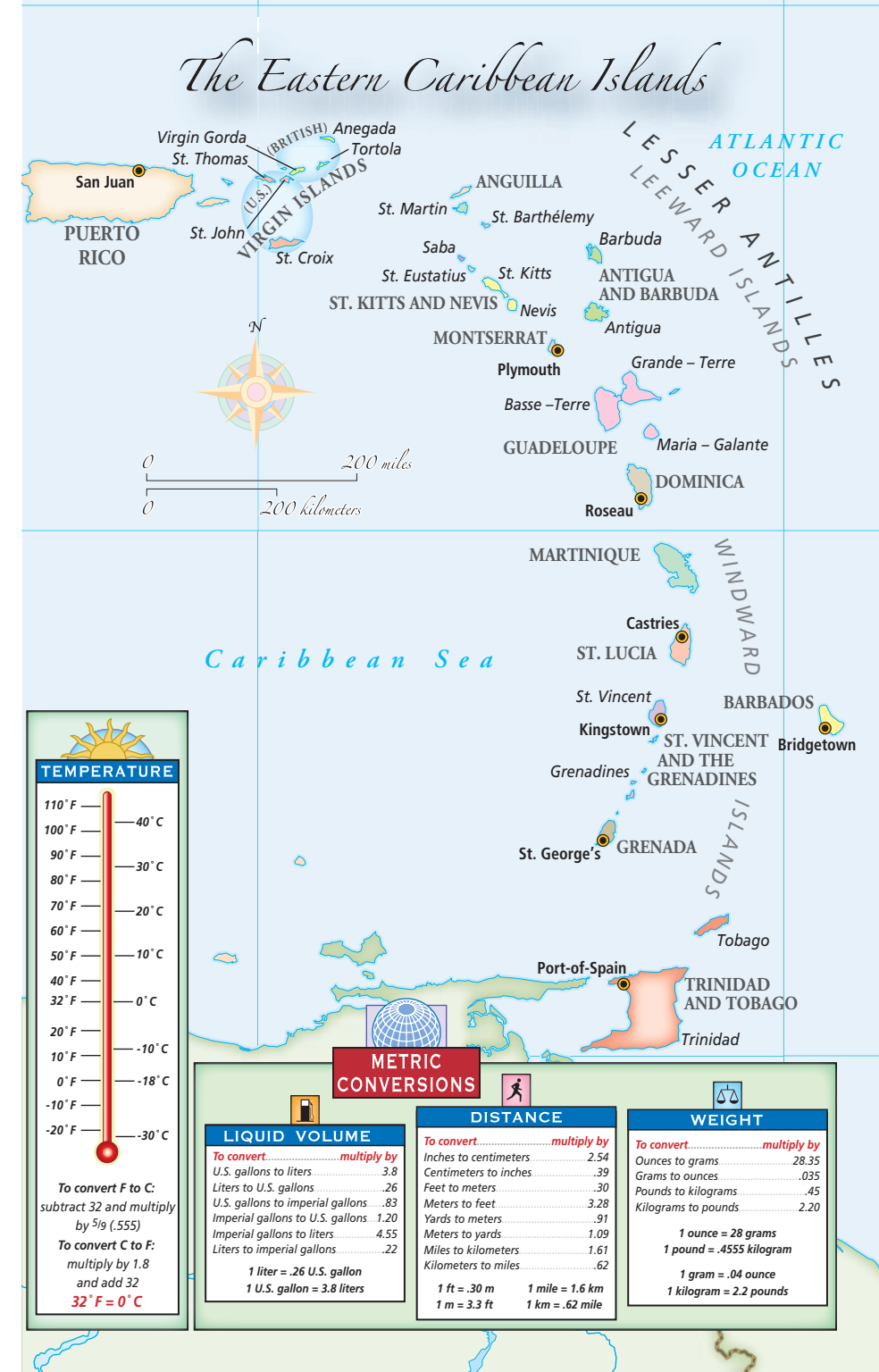
The Eastern Caribbean Islands
Virgin Gorda
(BRITISH)
Anegada
Tortola
St. Thomas
San Juan
(U.S.)
VIRGIN ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO
St. John
St. Croix
ATLANTIC OCEAN
LESSER ANTILLES
LEEWARD ISLANDS
ANGUILLA
St. Martin
St. Barthélemy
Barbuda
Saba
St. Eustatius
St. Kitts
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
Nevis
Antigua
MONTSERRAT
Plymouth
Grande – Terre
Basse –Terre
GUADELOUPE
Maria – Galante
DOMINICA
Roseau
N
0
200 miles
0
200 kilometers
MARTINIQUE
WINDWARD
Castries
ST. LUCIA
Caribbean Sea
St. Vincent
BARBADOS
Kingstown
Bridgetown
ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
Grenadines
ISLANDS
St. George's
GRENADA
Tobago
Port-of-Spain
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Trinidad
TEMPERATURE
110˚F
100˚F
90˚F
80˚F
70˚F
60˚F
50˚F
40˚F
32˚F
20˚F
10˚F
0˚F
-10˚F
-20˚F
40˚C
30˚C
20˚C
10˚C
0˚C
-10˚C
-18˚C
-30˚C
To convert F to C:
subtract 32 and multiply by 5/9 (.555)
To convert C to F:
multiply by 1.8
and add 32
32˚F = 0˚C
METRIC CONVERSIONS
LIQUID VOLUME
To convert ... multiply by
U.S. gallons to liters ... 3.8
Liters to U.S. gallons ... .26
U.S. gallons to imperial gallons ... .83
Imperial gallons to U.S. gallons ... 1.20
Imperial gallons to liters ... 4.55
Liters to imperial gallons ... .22
1 liter = .26 U.S. gallon
1 U.S. gallon = 3.8 liters
DISTANCE
To convert ... multiply by
Inches to centimeters ... 2.54
Centimeters to inches ... .39
Feet to meters ... .30
Meters to feet ... 3.28
Yards to meters ... .91
Meters to yards ... 1.09
Miles to kilometers ... 1.61
Kilometers to miles ... .62
1 ft = .30 m
1 m = 3.3 ft
1 mile = 1.6 km
1 km = .62 mile
WEIGHT
To convert ... multiply by
Ounces to grams ... 28.35
Grams to ounces ... .035
Pounds to kilograms ... .45
Kilograms to pounds ... 2.20
1 ounce = 28 grams
1 pound = .4555 kilogram
1 gram = .04 ounce
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds

Swim, snorkel, and explore the saltwater grottoes at the Baths on Virgin Gorda. See chapter 8.

Detailed maps throughout

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