



A Beginner's Guide to St. Barth's

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There's a reason why celebrities, models, socialites, and It girls (like [Bella Hadid](#), [Jessica Alba](#), and [Chrissy Teigen](#)) consistently retreat to the tropical paradise of St. Barth's. The island, an overseas collectivity of France, blends the sophistication of St.-Tropez with the laissez-faire Caribbean lifestyle—which means it's exclusive yet totally unpretentious. Walk into any beachfront restaurant, for instance, and you'll see well-dressed women with Birkins eating lunch beside sandy, barefoot beachgoers; walk into a club wearing jean cutoffs and no one will raise an eyebrow. It's a specific brand of laid-back luxury that breeds instant converts. Make one trip, and you'll find yourself immediately hooked.

Still, St. Barth's can be an intimidating place to navigate if you've never been. Even the island's name is cause for confusion—is it St. Bart? St. Barth? St. Barth's? (The answer: St. Barth's to locals; St. Bart's to English speakers.)

Here's everything a first-time visitor should know before planning a trip.



An airplane landing on St. Barth's very short airport runway

Photo: Alamy



Getting There

There are no direct flights to St. Barth's . . . unless you charter your own plane. If a PJ isn't a possibility, the next best option is flying to Princess Juliana International Airport on the Dutch side of St. Maarten, where, upon landing, you'll have to choose your own adventure for the final leg: a 15-minute plane ride or a roughly 45-minute ferry crossing. Flying will get you to paradise quickly, but the flight itself—a roughly dozen-seat puddle-jumper—is not for the faint of heart. (The runway in St. Barth's also happens to be one of the shortest in commercial aviation, which makes for a white-knuckled landing.) Book your flights in advance on either Winair or St Barth Commuter, the only commercial airlines that provide shuttle flights to and from the island. Or there's the ferry: an incredibly unglamorous but efficient option for nervous flyers. Buy your tickets in advance on

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Hotel Le Toiny

Photo: Courtesy of Hotel Le Toiny / @hotelletoinystbarth



Where to Stay

Cushy accommodations aren't hard to come by in St. Barth's. For complete seclusion, the freshly renovated Hotel Le Toiny St. Barth is a no-brainer. The hotel's neutral color palette and understated decor will make you feel like you're living in the pages of an interior design magazine. Le Toiny has just 14 individual

villas spread out over 42 acres—which means you may never see another guest the entire time you're there.

It's quite the opposite at Eden Rock St. Barth's, a splashy island mainstay where people go to see and be seen. The property even has a rock star-themed villa that's equipped with a professional recording studio (artists such as Kenny Chesney have been known to record tracks there), as well as a staff that prides itself on immaculate attention to detail.

The Christian Liaigre-designed Le Sereno is perfect for people who want something hip and trendy yet private at the same time. Couples often tend toward the elegantly romantic Cheval Blanc; adults traveling with children flock to the family-friendly Le Guanahani. Unlike many other properties, Hotel Christopher isn't on the beach, but its infinity pool—arguably the island's best—is so spectacular you won't even miss the sand.

If you like having the comforts of home while on holiday, rent a villa. The island is known for its selection of palatial pads, which range from one-bedroom guesthouses to eight-bedroom estates. Companies like St. Barth Properties will take care of all the arrangements—from airport transfers and dinner reservations to booking babysitters and organizing a masseuse.



Saline Beach in St. Barth's

Photo: Alamy



The Beaches

One thing St. Barth's regulars love about the island is the diversity of its beaches. There are 16 (!) of them in total, each with its own distinct personality. At Saline Beach you'll find topless women frolicking in the translucent azure water and stretches of soft, white sand that feels like powdered sugar between your toes. What you won't find: tiki-style tourist traps hawking sugary cocktails. Saline, like most other beaches on St. Barth's, is rather bare bones—no bars, no shops, no restaurants—so be sure to pack your own snacks and water.

Another local favorite is Colombier, an isolated haven accessible only by boat or a rugged, roughly 30-minute hike. Be warned: The downhill trail to get there is deceptively easy. The way back . . . not so much. (Try going in the early morning to avoid the afternoon heat.)

If you prefer a more vibrant scene, head to St. Jean, where hot spots like Eden Rock and Nikki Beach provide ample people-watching. During the day, you'll find the surfers at beaches like Toiny or Lorient and the snorkelers at Gouverneur or Petite Anse, but for sunset, everyone descends upon Shell Beach. It's covered in millions of thumbnail-size shells and home to the famed Do Brazil (more on that below).



Maya's To Go

Photo: Courtesy of Maya's To Go / @mayastogo



By Day

Contrary to its über-chic image, the island is surprisingly casual in the afternoon, so don't even think about breaking out your heels before dusk. Unless, of course,

you spend a Sunday carousing at Nikki Beach. Once a week, the posh beach club turns into a table-dancing day party complete with bottle service, model-esque waiters, and oversize sushi boats. (Everyone from Billy Joel to Beyoncé has participated in the mayhem.)

Looking for something low-key? Head to Do Brazil, a no-frills joint on Shell Beach where you can grab a table in the sand, order a mojito, and go for a swim while the bartender is muddling your mint. Everyone around you—even the fanciest jet-setters—will be sandy and shoeless.

And that's the case for most places on St. Barth's. Escape from the sun for a slice of pizza at The Hideaway, or head to one of the many burger joints—there's JoJo Burger, Burger Palace, and the dive-y yet delicious Le Select, which is said to have inspired Jimmy Buffett's "Cheeseburger in Paradise."

There are plenty of bikini-friendly spots, too: Maya's To Go and Kiki-é Mo have fresh salads and sandwiches; Tom's Juice Bar in Gustavia (the island's capital and main town) is known for tangy house-made juices, acai bowls, and smoothies. If you're renting a villa and prefer to cook for yourself, the markets—like Marché U, just across from the airport—are flush with amazing (albeit pricey) produce.



Bonito Restaurant Saint Barth

Photo: Courtesy of Bonito Saint Barth / @bonitostbarth



By Night

When the sun goes down, the island starts living up to its glamorous reputation. The swankiest spot for dinner is almost always Bonito Saint Barth, a Latin-French restaurant that has a South Beach-meets-St. Barth's vibe and no shortage of beautiful patrons. (Order the salmon tiradito and you'll dream about it long after you've left.)

Traveling as a couple? Go to Jean-Georges's romantic On the Rocks at Eden Rock and prepare to fall in love all over again. The restaurant is perched high above St.

Jean Bay with views to die for. Request a table by the ledge. While seafood tends to dominate in the area—and rightfully so—you can also get incredible Thai food (Black Ginger) and Southern Italian fare (L’Isola). French-Japanese fusion eatery Orega, located in the heart of Gustavia, is unanimously considered one of the best new additions to the local dining scene. The restaurant’s owner, Greg, will often serve guests himself (dishes like spiny lobster ravioli and wagyu beef gyoza) and warmly offers patrons a double-cheek kiss as they exit.



Le Ti St-Barth

Photo: Courtesy of Daniel Luxe / @daniel_luxevipstbarth



After-Hours

If you go to St. Barth’s and don’t experience Le Ti St-Barth, you’re doing it wrong. The raucous, kitschy nightclub is a rite of passage for first-timers. Waiters whisk

you into a secret back room, dress you up like you're going to Burning Man, and send you off onto the strobe light-soaked dance floor. (Hot pink mullets, matador capes, and feather boas are standard attire.)

Bagatelle, an offshoot of the original in New York, gets similarly rowdy, minus the costumes. Another New York transplant, 1 Oak, opened its first St. Barth's outpost over Christmas and quickly became the celeb-studded club of the season.

Should you be in the mood for a late-night bender, look no further than Modjo St Barts. The lounge-club hybrid usually doesn't get going until after 1:00 a.m. When you wake up the next morning, head immediately to Saline for a swim—the salty seawater is a secret hangover remedy locals swear by.

