

DESTINATION

St. Barts Villa Vacations: Insider's Guide

PEG WALSH | FEBRUARY 27, 2015



Stunning poolside and ocean views. Photo courtesy St. Barth Properties.

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The insider advice on this page is from Wendy's Trusted Travel Expert for St. Barts Villa Vacations: Peg Walsh of St. Barth Properties




TRUSTED TRAVEL EXPERT

Peg Walsh

Peg Walsh, who founded St. Barth Properties in 1989, spends half the year (December through May) on St. Barts and the other half on Cape Cod and at her company's Boston-area office. Since St. Barth Properties represents villas on only this one small island, everyone on the team knows the island and inventory intimately. The company's portfolio includes nearly 200 properties that range from beachy-casual bungalows to chic hillside homes and *Architectural Digest*-worthy estates. Peg re-inspects them all regularly to ensure they meet her strict standards, so she has an encyclopedic knowledge of each house's features and amenities: which have heated pools, athlete-worthy gyms, the best wintertime sunset views. Every client also gets Peg's nine pages of Helpful Hints, advising on all aspects of a St. Barth vacation—from warning people about taking the ferry from Sint Maarten (rough seas) to

 Weekly rentals start at \$1,970. At most villas, if you don't need to use all the bedrooms the rate can be

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Wendy's Trusted Travel Experts

Wendy-Approved

I rigorously vet travel specialists to find the best people out there. Each Insider's Guide comes from one of my Trusted Travel Experts. Have you traveled with this one? If so, leave a review below.



Best Times to Go

High season runs from mid-December to mid-April—simply because that's when cold weather sends American travelers to the Caribbean. The rest of the year, prices are slashed by up to 40 percent, but the weather is much the same. And during this "value season," the island is quieter and less crowded. Shoppers come for the annual sales, which run from May into early June, when there are bargains galore at the island's boutiques. I also love November, when everything re-opens after hurricane season, so things are fresh and new.

Worst Times to Go

Over Christmas and New Year's, villas triple in price, and most properties require a two-week minimum stay. It is the see-and-be-seen season for celebrities and pop stars, and the harbor is filled with millionaires' yachts—but traffic, parking, and restaurant reservations are all difficult and can offset the glam factor. From early September to mid-October, the island goes on

lowered, but you'll still have exclusive use of the property.

CONTACT

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tipping guidelines—and outlining special perks at certain restaurants and on some excursions. When she's on St. Barts, Peg hosts a weekly cocktail party for clients at one of the island's hottest beachfront bistros. Peg was also included in Wendy's prestigious list of top villa specialists, which was published annually in *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine from 2006 to 2013.

WHY USE A TRUSTED TRAVEL EXPERT



St. Barts' bustling capital of Gustavia, and its Wall House Museum. Photo courtesy St. Barth Properties.

Where to Rent

Best location for a taste of village life

Gustavia is St. Barts' bustling little capital, with the island's trademark red roofs spilling down to the yacht-filled harbor; the town's high-end boutiques and sidewalk cafés (great for people-watching) make it feel like a slice of Europe in the middle of the Caribbean. The village of St. Jean is both sophisticated and charming, and a bit more hip; it's often compared to France's Côte d'Azur. Corossol is a traditional fishing village, where you can step back in time to see island life unspool as it has for generations; many women here sell baskets and hats woven from palm leaves at street-side stalls.

Best location for a big group

The Domaine du Levant is a gated community in Petit Cul de Sac where the villas sit close together; groups can rent several neighboring properties, and have use of the community's small beach and tennis courts. If you're planning a destination wedding, St. Barth Properties has designated staff who can help plan everything from a simple barefoot ceremony on the beach to an uber-glamorous affair. We handle all the details—the venue, catering, flowers, pre- and post-parties, accommodations for all the wedding guests—and walk you through the legalities and paperwork, due 30 days before the “I dos.”

Best location for home cooks

Villas throughout the island have large kitchens outfitted with high-end appliances and every culinary amenity. Many also have BBQ areas with wet bars and food prep areas. There are no farmers' markets per se on the island, but there's an early-morning fish market in Gustavia where local fisherman offer their wares, and authentic boulangeries for baguettes and French pastries (St. Barth is, after all, an overseas territory of France). Cheeses, specialty items, and wines are flown in from the mainland also.

hiatus, with many shops and restaurants closing.

Minimum Stays

Depending on availability, rentals may begin on any day of the week and you can rent for any length of time, but there is a seven-night minimum in high season.

Biggest Rookie Mistakes

Many first-time visitors think that they need to rent a villa on the beach. Actually, most of St. Barth's villas are located in its hills and leverage the views and trade winds—not to mention the greater privacy. Each beach has its own personality, so it's fun to visit several over the course of a trip—and some of the most beautiful ones are undeveloped, so you couldn't stay there anyway.

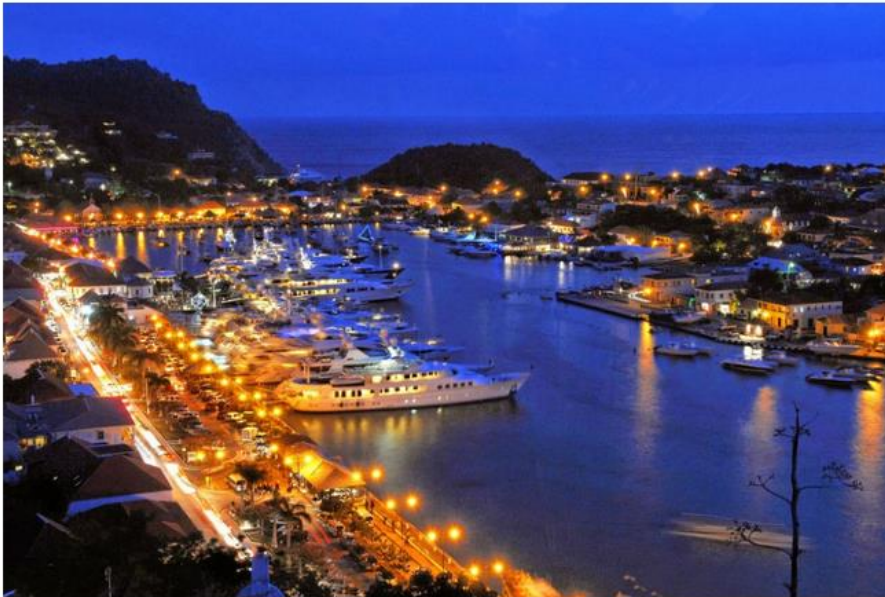
Not packing a bathing suit, cover-up, and change of clothes in your carry-on. If your luggage doesn't make it onto the [puddle-jumper](#) in time (there are flights to St. Barth from St. Maarten and San Juan), you'll still be ready for your first dip in the pool or ocean and dinner out that evening.

Crucial Questions to Ask Before Renting

Since the island is so small—just nine square miles—visitors should focus on the villa itself and its amenities, as opposed to a specific location. Air-conditioning is a major consideration—especially if you're prone to mosquito bites: All bedrooms have AC, but many of the living areas are open-air, which is fine when the trade winds are blowing. If you have small children, make sure the bedrooms are close together; in some villas, they are housed in separate pavilions.

What to Arrange in Advance

You'll need a rental car to explore the island and its beaches. If you opt for a Suzuki Jimney 4x4



St. Barts after sunset. Photo courtesy St. Barth Properties.

What to Know

Amenities usually included

Daily maid service is included, except on Sundays and island holidays. Linens, including beach towels, are always provided. Most villas also have Wi-Fi, but the connection can be iffy and cut out at any time. St. Barth Properties' office on the harbor in Gustavia has a strong signal, and our guests are welcome to stop in and check their email or print boarding passes.

Amenities not usually included

Many of the island's villas do not have U.S. satellite TV service.

Amenity worth splurging on

An in-villa massage. A number of villas have rooms or nooks designated specifically for spa treatments. In the late afternoon, getting a rubdown in a shady poolside cabana is the ultimate indulgence.

Amenity not worth splurging on

Hiring a private chef for your entire vacation. St. Barth has the best restaurants in the Caribbean. If you're on a romantic getaway or celebrating a milestone, consider booking a private chef to prepare just one in-villa dinner.

(the best choice for the island), we can usually get a seventh-day free discount, so weekly rentals come out to about 300 to 450 euros (though they are higher over the Christmas holidays). After a long day of travel, it's also nice to arrive at a villa with a fully stocked fridge (we send our guests a list of groceries to choose from). Have any other special requests? Birthday parties, in-villa massages, sunset cocktails with a mixologist, snorkeling trips, lunch and dinner reservations—just ask!

The Welcome

We meet each client at the airport, assist with luggage and rental car pick-up, then guide them to their villa and show them around the property. Our staff is on-call for emergencies 24/7, and the concierge is on duty during regular business hours.

Don't Forget to Pack

Adapters and converters for your electronic devices: St. Barts has 220 voltage, and the outlets only accept plugs with two round prongs.

The Inside Scoop

Unlike some other Caribbean islands, St. Barts is exceedingly welcoming to gay travelers. In fact, now that same-sex marriages are legal in France, the island is starting to become a popular wedding spot for gay couples.

