



1 A BARBADOS CLASSIC £££

With staff willing to buff your sunglasses as you lie on the signature pink sun loungers, along with palatial, marbled, hi-tech bedrooms, an over-the-top Romanesque spa and golf carts equipped with GPS systems on its three courses, Sandy Lane (sandylane.com) pampers its guests at every turn. The atmosphere is less formal and more relaxed than at Barbados's other high-end hotels.

Booked through Elegant Resorts (01244 897516; elegantresorts.co.uk), from £4,650 including breakfast and US\$1,200 (£910) food and drink credit per couple.

2 STAY WITH THE LOCALS £

The cheapest holiday you can have in the Caribbean is a trip to Cuba staying in a spare room of a private home. Standards of so-called *casas particulares* vary enormously, but many are hugely atmospheric (you can end up living in a colonial mansion), and hosts can be wonderfully welcoming.

Airbnb (airbnb.co.uk) has hundreds of rentals across the island with positive reviews: a private room costs on average £27 a night, or £32 in Havana.

3 ST LUCIA CLIFFHANGER ££

On a remote cliff-top, adults-only Ti Kaye (tikaye.com) on St Lucia is an utterly romantic but relatively affordable hideaway. You stay in simply-decorated gingerbread cottages with open-air showers, and hammocks, rocking chairs and in some cases plunge pools from which to take in the mesmerising ocean views. There's a lovable little cliff-hanging spa, and 166 steps down from the hotel lies a pristine and often empty silver-sand beach (great offshore snorkelling).

Booked through Trailfinders (020 7368 1200; trailfinders.com), from £1,299 including breakfast.

4 GOOD VALUE ALL-INCLUSIVE £

Want to spend as little as possible on an undemanding beach- and pool-oriented holiday in the Caribbean with every facility on hand? Then book a package to a big all-inclusive hotel in

the Dominican Republic. Dreams Palm Beach Punta Cana (dreamsresorts.com), on a lovely palm-sprinkled section of white-sand beach at Punta Cana, is fairly high quality, with good dining options (and there is unlimited access to eight restaurants which is a bonus).

Booked through British Airways Holidays (0344 493 0120; ba.com), from £930 all inclusive.

5 ROOMS WITH A VIEW £££

Adults-only Jade Mountain (jademountain.com) is arguably the Caribbean's most unusually designed luxury hotel and certainly the most sumptuous and striking in St Lucia. Set on a forested hilltop, the concrete structures contain vast, butler-serviced suites (called sanctuaries) with jaw-dropping views – the fourth wall of each room is missing so you have uninterrupted views of the island's landmark Pitons. Most suites also have a private, iridescent-tiled infinity pool that merges seamlessly into the view. It's all romantic in the extreme.

Booked through the Inspiring Travel Company (01244 355527; inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk), with prices starting at £4,139 including breakfast.

6 LOCAL LIFE, GOLDEN SANDS ££

To partake in local life, head to friendly and unspoilt Bequia in St Vincent and the Grenadines. It has a quaint little capital (Port Elizabeth) overlooking a picturesque natural harbour (Admiralty Bay, a popular stopover with yachties), and a good smattering of laid-back bars and decent restaurants. Stay at colonial-chic Bequia Beach Hotel (bequia-beachhotel.com) on Friendship Bay, one of several golden-sand beaches.

Booked through Just Bequia (01373 814244; www.justbequia.co.uk), from £1,560 with breakfast.

7 EXCLUSIVE ESCAPISM £££

Very exclusive Jumby Bay on (oetkercollection.com) occupies a 300-acre private island, seven minutes' boat ride from Antigua's north coast. With just 40 elegant rooms and suites plus some very lavish (and rentable) homes, you'll always find privacy on the stunning white-sand beaches and it is the ideal destination for luxury escapism. The island is car-free: bikes are provided

for exploring. A wide range of watersports are covered in the all-inclusive rates.

Booked through Carrier (0161 492 1355; carrier.co.uk), from £7,045 all inclusive in a Beachside Suite; cheaper stays are often possible in Rondavel rooms.

8 EAT-WELL, SLEEP WELL £££

The Calabash (calabashhotel.com) on Grenada is an old-school Caribbean classic, meticulously run by the Garbutt family. Its restful bedrooms (all suites) look across lawned grounds to a peaceful, protected beach and yacht-speckled bay. The food ranks among the most memorable you'll eat anywhere in the Caribbean.

Booked through Virgin Holidays (0344 739 4986; virginholidays.co.uk), from £2,755 half board.

9 PLANTATION HOTELS, NEVIS ££

Sleepy little Nevis was once a major sugar cane producer, and you can stay in atmospheric and civilised plantation houses dating from colonial times. Nisbet Plantation Beach Club (nisbetplantation.com), once home to English naval hero Horatio Nelson's

wife, Fanny Nisbet, is on a good beach, while Montpelier Plantation (montpeliernevis.com), in a lush inland setting but with a beach club (free transport provided), is infused with aristocratic Caribbean charm.

Booked through Caribtours (020 7751 0660; caribtours.co.uk); four nights at Montpelier, three at Nisbet, from £1,885 including breakfast.

10 JAMAICAN FUNK £

Jamaica is a good bet for affordable, small-scale and funky places to stay and a prime example is Rockhouse in Negril. Set on low cliffs in the villagey West End area, the hotel has flights of steps and ladders into the sea, a highly-rated spa, excellent Jamaican food, and tasteful bedrooms – the cheapest conventional in style, pricier ones stone, wood and thatched cottages.

Book direct (001 876 618 1533; rockhouse.com), from £88 room only.

Unless otherwise stated, prices are per person for seven nights in early December (low season), based on two sharing the cheapest accommodation, and including economy flights and transfers.