



AllWays Traveller

Saint Lucia, the Caribbean

www.allwaystraveller.com

A Caribbean island of contrasting beauty

Saint Lucia is a British Commonwealth Caribbean island country off the coast of Central America.

It is located between the Caribbean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean and lies 21 miles south of Martinique and 90 miles northwest of Barbados

Saint Lucia forms part of the Windward Islands, so named because they were more windward to sailing ships arriving in the 'New World' (than the Leeward Islands).

This is a small volcanic island measuring 27 miles by 14 miles with a lush rain forest interior, much of which is protected as a national park.

During its history, Saint Lucia has relied on its abundance of fruit, coconuts and particularly bananas for economic stability.

Tourism is now vital to the Saint Lucian economy and its people are warm and welcoming to those who visit its shores to enjoy its tropical weather, natural beauty and many sandy beaches and resorts.

Ashley Gibbins

Managing editor
AllWays traveller

Jazz and carnival are annual highlights

Saint Lucia hosts a number of annual events with the Saint Lucia Jazz Festival in May and one of the best carnivals in the Caribbean taking over the island in July.



The warmest welcome awaits in Saint Lucia

by Ashley Gibbins



Everyone who has been to the Caribbean will a favourite island.

As a travel journalist, however, I have sense enough to sit squarely on the fence on that one.

But I will say this. There is no island here more attractive or welcoming than Saint Lucia.

And welcome is a word that constantly comes to mind when looking to explain the pleasure of a visit to the island.



Everybody – and indeed everything – on this small Caribbean island seems geared to making me feel welcome.

It started with the warm, beaming smile of welcome from our driver at the airport.

Then, some 90 minutes later, we were welcomed to our resort (Windjammer Landing) with handshakes and rum punch (the first of oh so many) at check-in.

This is so important when arriving long-haul, feeling a little frazzled and wanting to catch the last of the sun (and a second or third rum punch before sun down and an early night.

Once in our villa, I opened the French windows to take in the stunning ocean view and was greeted by a small bird who flew in as if, well, he owned the place.

Thanks to the wonder that is Wikipedia, I discovered it was a male lesser Antillean Bullfinch.

'Bully' and his chums were regular guests on our patio through the stay and, I must confess, to sneaking bread from the breakfast buffet to provide them with snacks.

They became friends, if not for life, for the next nine days.

Take in Castries, So and the St Lucian fishing villages



Most visitors initially opt for Saint Lucia for its sun, sea, sandy beaches, tropical landscape and fine resorts.

An equally rewarding experience, however, is to be had touring the capital city, the sea port town of Soufrière and the island's small fishing villages.

The real island character



This will reveal the true character of the island and its people.

Many of those living on Saint Lucia face a life of struggle that is a world apart from that enjoyed by those there on vacation.

Despite, the hardship, people are welcoming and a tourist dollar or two is always very much appreciated.

Everyone is genuinely friendly and helpful



And so the welcome continued.

From the many Saint Lucians we met, who appreciate what tourism can bring to the island and were genuinely friendly and helpful.

As everywhere there are those who want to sell tourists all manner of things. But on Saint Lucia there is not the aggression one finds in other places.

A smile and a firm no thank you suffices.

Needless to say, this being the Caribbean, the weather was glorious and there is even the ever present warm sea breeze which, in itself, is so very welcome.

Sipping that third rum punch on our first evening in St Lucia, I sang along to a Caribbean combo singing .. *leaving on a jet plane, don't know when I'll be back again, I hate to go.*

On my jet plane home after a really enjoyable stay on Saint Lucia, I also hated to go. But knew I would be back again.

What Saint Lucia offers



With these stacked in its favour, it's no wonder so many visits to Saint Lucia are by those returning for yet another stay here.

Saint Lucia offers visitors a veritable royal flush of incentives to visit the island.

The wonderful, year-round, Caribbean climate and pristine beaches, particularly on the Caribbean Sea side of the island.

Then there is a lush, tropical landscape, great food and the wonderful rum punches and a range of stunning resort hotels.

Trumping all these are the Saint Lucians themselves, a genuinely welcoming people (yes there's that word again), particularly in Castries, Soufrière and the small villages scattered across the island.

Try ziplining



Having enjoyed the thrill of ziplining once before in Florida I was really looking forward to 'riding the wires' in the lush rainforest of glorious Saint Lucia writes Ann Mealor.

I was not disappointed!

The *Treetop Adventure Park* is set in the heart of the tropical rainforest and you could not ask for a more beautiful location.

The journey there by minibus is via very steep and winding narrow roads, and although the views are breathtaking I was very conscious of the steep drop to one side!

Fortunately, the drivers are skilled and experienced, and take the hairpin bends and oncoming vehicles in their stride.

On arriving at the Adventure Park, guests are offered a welcome, complimentary drink and get kitted out with harness, safety helmet and robust, leather gloves.

Off into the forest

With the equipment on and safety checked, we headed off into the forest to the start of our 12 line adventure.

The weather was pleasantly warm and amazingly there were no mosquitoes about.

At the first line we were told how to sit in the harness, where to hold the wire and how to slow down if needed.

There is a trained guide at the start and finish of each zipline who clips and unclips you to the wire and gives you advice on how to stay straight and how fast to go to reach the other side.

A 'stormy' tour of Saint Lucia



Although the resorts can be all-enticing, it is important to spend as much time exploring the island. not to do so would be to miss so much.

When I asked about getting a guided tour of the island I was introduced to 'Stormy' Norman Mercier as 'one of the best there is'.



Stormy, aka 'Rambo' and 'First Blood' (it's a long story and I will leave him to tell you) has been running his guided tours for 25 years now.

As a result, he is a veritable mine of information.

The first thing he told us is that, when in a country that's not your own, no question is stupid.

As a journalist I base my approach on never being afraid to appear stupid when asking questions, so this fitted my needs perfectly.

Stormy's Saint Lucia Colonial Connection (historical) tours are particularly popular as are those focusing on the the island's connection with sugar, rum and birds.

Norman also arranges bird watching excursions and walking trails though the rain forest. We opted for the round island option, which gave a complete picture and understanding of the island.

Rodney Bay and Gros Islet

This first took in Rodney Bay and Gros Islet.



Rodney Bay and its marina combine to provide the islands designer shopping, dining and vibrant entertainment area. As such it is a magnet for tourists.

You must build up speed

If you don't build up enough speed, you won't reach the end and will have to pull yourself along- the crawl of shame!

Once I had the first wire under my belt, my nerves left me and I once again relished the experience!

Zooming through the trees

It was thrilling zooming high-up through the trees above the streams and ravines.

The longest and the best view

The last wire is Saint Lucia's longest (800 foot) and best in my view, providing me with a great adrenalin rush, as I roared along at a speed of up to 60miles per hour towards the end of my two hour adventure.

Before leaving the Treetop Canopy Adventure, I also had the pleasure of meeting a native of the rainforest close-up.

An unperturbed tarantula was carefully placed on my hand and kindly posed for a photo with me.

Trousers or long shorts and trainers or closed toe shoes must be worn

www.adventuretourstlucia.com/treetop-canopy

Take in Carnival



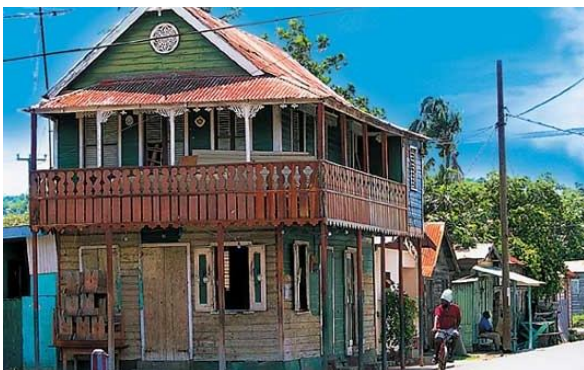
Carnival festivities take place throughout the island during July with competitions and performances by masquerade bands, calypso and soca singers and steel bands.

The highlight of the celebration takes place during the second week in July beginning on the weekend and ending on Tuesday (Monday and Tuesday are public holidays).

Competitions for beauty queens, soca and calypso monarch gets under way and bands compete for king and queen of the bands and the band of the year title.

www.luciancarnival.com

Far removed from the luxury resorts



Just down the road, in complete contrast and, for me more rewarding was Gros Islet.

This no frills fishing village, is one of a number scattered along the Saint Lucian coastline.

Life here is far removed from the luxury resorts that compete for coastal space and, as such, offer a reality check in understanding and appreciating the true character of the island and the challenges it still faces as a developing country.

One of the best times to visit Gros Islet is any Friday evening when its main street shuts to traffic for the fish festival of food, drink and live entertainment. Saint Lucians and visitors pack the area to party together.

Pigeon Island

Our Stormy tour of Saint Lucia also took us to Pigeon Island or Pigeon Point, since the excavated soil when building the marina was used to build the causeway that joins the island to the mainland.

We then headed into the mountainous, rain forest region to appreciate the true beauty of this lush region before making a stop at the Diamond Falls and Botanical Gardens.

Scenic overviews



And on route Stormy would stop at some stunning scenic overviews, buy the delicious casava bread and sweet sugar syrup from roadside sellers, enjoy a drink in one of the many roadside ramshackle 'rum shacks' and enjoy piping hot, freshly made bread from a village bakery.

These are the sort of things one might feel reluctant to do if not in the company of a trusted tour guide.

Stormy was that, and more and by the end of the tour a friend as well.

Stormy Norman is well known by the tours teams of island hotels and resorts.

Try taking the bus

For short trips around Saint Lucia, there is an efficient taxi (mini-bus) service, which can be booked from the hotels.

For the more adventurous, and far less expensive, is the public bus service. These are, again, mini-busses but with green number plates beginning with the letter 'M'.

There is no scheduled time table but, with so many of them, there is sure to be one along any minute.

They stop at all the bus shelters and, in between, to anyone raising even an eyebrow as a request sign. Each driver runs his own bus and will often decorate them and play Caribbean music for passengers.

They are generally honest with the fare but it is always best to agree this in advance. One final thing, Saint Lucians like their own space and will not appreciate tourists cramming themselves onto a bus.

Go horse riding

Galloping along a mile of firm sand on the edge of the surf in St Lucia is an unforgettable experience writes Ann Mealor



The horses are thin, some are too thin by UK standards and they are small, the largest being about 15.2hh . But the Creole horses, a mix of Arab and Quarter Horse, are fast, sure footed and strong.

They need to be as the paths leading to Casa Ban beach, on the Atlantic side of the island are rocky and steep, but our horses, Trad, Pretty Boy and Sponge Bob (ridden by our rasta guide, Bushman) knew their route and picked their way carefully along.

My horse, Pretty Boy, was happy to follow his chum Trad at a leisurely pace and snack occasionally on fern leaves or anything else green that took his fancy.

I didn't mind him having a munch as he certainly needed fattening up.

Marjories bar

On arriving at Casa Ban beach we found ourselves at Marjories bar, a small wooden shack on the sand where apparently Amy Winehouse spent much of her time happily hanging out with the locals during her stay on St Lucia.

After a quick drink, Bushman took the saddles off the horses and we headed bareback into the pleasantly warm Atlantic Ocean.

In the swim

The sea was almost deep enough for the horses to swim in, and I think, being the smallest, Sponge Bob's feet did come off the ground at one point.

The horses seemed happy enough with the whole deep water thing and it was relaxing and cooling riding with the sea lapping against their bellies.

A place to stay : Windjammer Landing



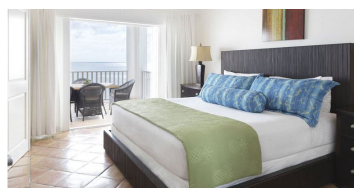
Windjammer Landing, which is located on the north shores of island at Labrelotte Bay, is laid out as a Mediterranean village terraced over 60 tropical hillside acres and is one of the premier resorts on Saint Lucia.



Windjammer Landing offers one, two, three and four bedroom luxury villas with patios overlooking the Caribbean Sea.

Guests at Windjammer Landing can opt for accommodation only or choose to go all-inclusive. And while all-inclusive, in some destinations, can mean basic all the way, at Windjammer Landing this is anything but the case.

The resort serves the finest cuisine in all of its restaurants, premium wines and spirits and top notch service throughout.



Each villa guest is also allocated one of Windjammer Landing's ambassadors whose role is to do as little or as much as needed to make the stay as enjoyable as possible.

The resort has four adult pools and two children's pools. There is also a full-service Serenity Spa with indoor and outdoor massage and beauty treatments areas.

Organised beach and aqua activities include pool volleyball, beach soccer, aquacise, hikes, mixology and dance aerobics. For the younger ones there are kids' and teens' clubs.

www.windjammer-landing.com

Back on Pretty Boy

Once back on board Pretty Boy, Bushman suggested we go for a canter along the mile long stretch of sand.

This was obviously something Pretty Boy enjoyed doing as he suddenly turned into a racehorse and shot off along the beach, overtaking our guide Bushman (in spite of his protests) and splattering him and Sponge Bob with wet sand in the process.

I hadn't expected the waif-like Pretty Boy to be so fast, sharp or to have so much energy, making the gallop along the edge of the shore exhilarating.

Arriving back at the stables, I offered our mounts some carrots I had bought for them as a treat, only to find they weren't keen on them at all and would have much preferred bananas! I won't make that slip-up again.

The two hour ride with The International Pony Club, based close to Castries, costs \$60 (approx £40) per person.

You need to take your camera, suntan lotion, towel and change for the drinks and souvenirs you can buy at Marjorie's Bar and for tipping your guide.

You also need to wear a bathing suit under long trousers and closed shoes.

The stables cater for all levels of rider from beginner through to advanced and you can choose to have a Western or English saddle. Hats are provided.

Most importantly, don't forget to take a couple of bananas to reward your horse! Bookings can be made direct or through your hotel.

Contact : ponyclub2010@live.com

Have a rum punch



It has to be either Chairman's Reserve (a cask-aged dark rum) or Crystal Lime (a clear rum infused with lime) the two premium brands.

Piton Lager beer is brewed and bottled on the island.

AllWays more on Saint Lucia

When to go

The high season (with premium hotel rates) runs from mid-December through mid-April - and during the island's international Jazz Festival in May and Carnival in July.

The dry season is from January to April with rainy season from May to August.

Saint Lucia lies within the hurricane belt although these are rare.

St. Lucia's temperature ranges from 65-85 degrees (Fahrenheit) between December and May and 75-95 degrees between June and November.

How to get there

By air

Hewanorra International Airport

International visitors will fly in and out of Hewanorra International Airport at Vieux Fort, which is located 40 miles south of Castries.

The smaller George F. L. Charles Airport on the outskirts of Castries serves the Caribbean islands.

Fares to Saint Lucia include an additional US\$35.00 Airport Development Charge.

And the time on arrival

Saint Lucia is four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

Where to stay

Windjammer Landing

www.windjammer-landing.com

Other resorts

www.stlucianow.com/resorts

The *INNtimate inn* collection

The *INNtimate inn* collection has a portfolio of beachfront lodges, smaller hotels, guest houses, vacation apartments and villas.

www.stlucianow.com/small-and-private

The Saint Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association

The Saint Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association (SLHTA) is the organisation representing the hospitality Industry, with most of the islands leading hotels as members.

www.slhta.org

How to get around

By taxi

Tourists tend to use the islands taxi service.

Taxis are available from the airport, taxi ranks in Castries and can be booked by all the major resorts. The fee will be agreed in advance and will be relatively high.

By public minibus

For the cost-conscious, and more adventurous traveller, the island has a fleet of independently run minibuses, which serves as the island's public transport.

These minibuses can be identified by the green number plates with the prefix 'M'.

By tour bus

Groups of visitors can also hire one of the tour guides for tours of the island and/or particular attractions.

The resort hotels will assist with booking.

By hire car

Saint Lucia drives on the left.

A number of the major car rental companies operate on the island. Visitors to Saint Lucia who do not possess an international driving permit must purchase a temporary permit in order to drive in Saint Lucia.

What to speak

Although English is the official language Saint Lucians will also speak Creole, which is a French dialect.

Creole is not just a patois or broken French, but a language in its own right.

Saint Lucians are proud of this language and use it for everyday conversation.

The island celebrates its Creole heritage and language, every October, during the Jounen Kwéyòl Festival.

What to spend

The currency of Saint Lucia is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$), which is linked to the US Dollar at an exchange rate of US\$1 to EC\$2.70.

US dollars are also widely accepted on the island with the major resorts also happy to exchange Pound Sterling and Euro's for EC\$'s.

... and tip

Tipping is not automatically added but is customary at about 10% to 12% of bills. Tips are generally accepted by bell hops in hotels, taxis and other persons providing service.

What to wear

As a tropical island make it cool, comfortable, casual clothing during the day – and night.

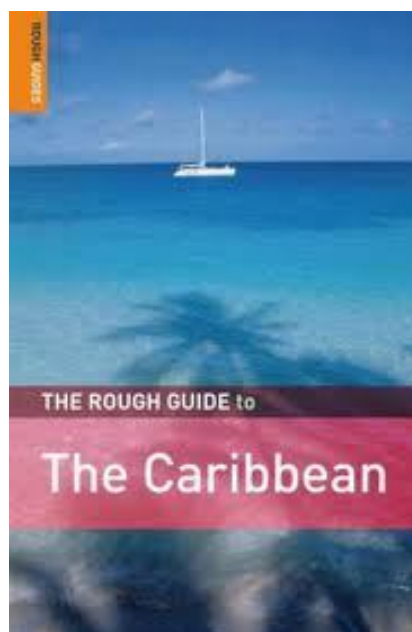
Jacket and tie is only rarely required although overly casual beachwear does not go down well off the beach.

More information



www.stlucianow.com

... a good guide book



There are a number of good guide books to Saint Lucia.

One of the best is the *Rough Guide to the Caribbean*, which provides an excellent overview of Saint Lucia and the other islands in the Caribbean.

The guide features detailed historical and practical information on the entire region, and also has a full-colour introduction and over 100 detailed maps covering over 50 islands!

There are hundreds of accommodation and restaurant reviews, as well as practical information for

www.roughguides.com

... taking photocopies of your passport

On tip for travellers anywhere is to take a couple of photocopies of your passports.

One copy can be carried around, while the original is in the hotel safe.

And the other copy can be stored in the luggage.

You are unlikely to lose your passport but, if you, do, the photocopy will get you home for more easily.

... using an airport lounge

We all know that our time at the airport is, by far, the worst thing about flying.



The time it takes to get through security, the panic at the thought of checking in late and then the wait in crowded departure areas.

To avoid the stress and pressure of flying, get to the airport early, check in and clear security in a leisurely fashion and head to one of the airport lounges to relax or work in style.



This costs a little more but, with all the lounges offer to make their guests comfortable, it is money well spent.

Passengers flying out of London Heathrow, Gatwick or Stansted should opt for the premium lounges operated by *No.1 Traveller*.

In addition to its premium lounges, No.1 Traveller offers chauffeur-driven airport transfers to provide a 'driveway to runway' service, as well as travel spas and bedrooms.

www.No1Traveller.com

.. the right footwear

Selecting multi-purpose footwear that suits the islands sandy beaches, tropical - often rugged – landscape and still looks cool around the resorts is important.

Teva Churn

I was invited to try the *Teva Churn* multi-sport shoe, which lightweight, comfortable and waterproof.



They are so comfortable that I fly in my *Churns*.

Great for the flight (and slipping off and on through security) and like a slipper onboard.

Teva's SS12 Water Range



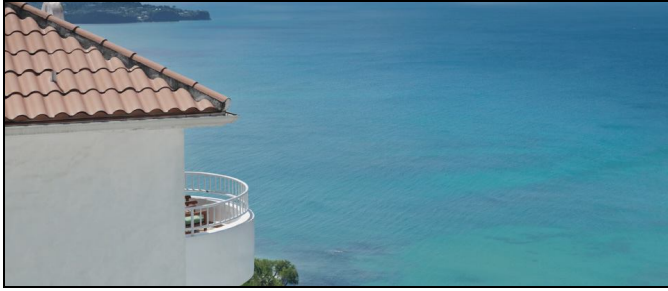
Teva's SS12 Water Range are great for wading in the Caribbean, or hiking through streams.

And, from a fashion perspective they make a real impact. So many Saint Lucian lads wanted to buy them from me.

The Teva brand was first devised on the Colorado River in 1984 when the difficulty experienced by a Grand Canyon river guide when negotiating watery terrain inspired him to create the first sports sandal.

www.teva.com

A snapshot of Saint Lucia



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance

Ashley and Ann



AllWays :

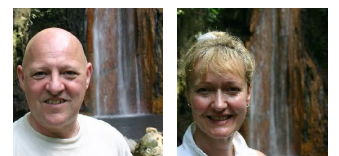
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AllWays traveller provides independent travellers with an equally independent view of the world from the travel journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.

The International Travel Writers Alliance

www.itwalliance.com

The International Travel Writers Alliance is the worlds largest association of professional travel journalists.



Ashley Gibbins is Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance and Managing Editor of AllWays traveller.

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