



Barbados: The Destination

Barbados... just the name conjures a feeling of longing to escape. Your fantasies fuelled by mental pictures of smooth, sugary-white sands, aquamarine waters, tropical foliage, mango-ripe sunsets, calypso rhythms and the perfect rum cocktail mixed by an ultra-laidback local. Barbados, where the sun shines all year – and when it rains, rainbows follow soon after – fulfills your expectations of a Caribbean idyll, delivering all this and more. So while Sandy Lane is a world unto itself, don't forget there is an island waiting to be discovered.

The most easterly of the West Indian island nations, Barbados is approximately 166 square miles of generally low lying and gently undulating terrain. Unlike many other Caribbean islands, Barbados has no volcanic peaks or lava-like landscapes. Instead, old sugar-cane estates dominate – with Palladian, Regency, and even Jacobean-era buildings – and gentle, bucolic pastures with panoramic glimpses of the ocean; though you will still find the odd tropical woodland and mangrove. Barbados is one of the most developed, ordered and literate nations in the region. Bonds with Britain are still strong; the island was British for over three centuries, and the Queen remains the head of state. Many visitors are taken aback by the British aspects of Barbados; some even see the island as expressing the British Empire in miniature: There is a dominant Anglican religious culture; a deep reverence for the game of cricket; and even a well developed polo season.

The island is compact enough to have a homey, discoverable feel – it takes only about 45 minutes to drive from one side to the other. The east coast is wild with windswept palms, deserted yellow sands, and a surfers' paradise, backed by wind-sculpted casuarinas trees and verdant hills – Bathsheba is its laidback "centre"; dotted with chattel guesthouses and the odd rum shop or café, it is wonderfully sleepy with little else going on except surfing the foamy breakers on the boulder-covered beach and watching out for green monkeys, fireflies and whistling frogs in the banana crops. Central Barbados has rolling limestone hills, botanic gardens, giant caves and lush scenery, with reminders of the colonial past in its plantation homes. The commercial south coast houses many midrange hotels – from Bridgetown to the airport its white-sand beaches are very developed. Don't neglect to discover Bridgetown, built on a natural harbour.



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You can lose a day here wandering among its duty-free shops, renovated chattels, colonial buildings, rum shops and harbourside cafes, or take a deep-sea fishing trip. In a diminutive but atmospheric west coast Speightstown and Holetown, you'll find the authentic atmosphere of 'local' Barbados and, in Holetown in particular, plenty of tasty Bajan cuisine.

Finally, the best beaches are on the west coast, with their protected, sparkling Caribbean waters, plum sunsets and discreet hotels. This is, of course where you'll find Sandy Lane – just forty minutes' drive from the International Airport. The half a million tourists who visit Barbados every year love the island for its beauty, its gentle nature, its laid back population and its diversity – one minute you'll be partaking in a cheap and cheerful Friday night fish fry; the next checking out homegrown couture in an exquisitely renovated chattel. The quality of Barbadian restaurants is unparalleled – how many other Caribbean islands have their own dedicated Zagat Guide? Here, you can eat anything from French and Italian to Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Polynesian – and of course, Bajan.