



BARBADOS

Where Caribbean Flavors and British Traditions Meet
By Leah Furman



he scent of cocoa butter and tropical flora hangs heavy in the evening air. The rhythmic sound of crickets and whistling frogs sets the tempo for an after-hours adventure. Elegant resort attire—the local fashion whether you're headed to an outdoor fish fry or a cliffside five-star restaurant—completes the picture. You're now ready to roll Bajan style.

Barbados is an island nation that specializes in the unexpected. While visitors may arrive thinking only of their pristine accommodations and the endless procession of sun-filled afternoons that are sure to follow, they leave with memories of rum-fueled nights, a thriving and varied local culture and some of the Caribbean's finest and most diverse cuisine.

Those seeking the quintessential example of Barbados luxury need only remember two words: Sandy Lane. The stateliest and most opulent property on the island, the sprawling Sandy Lane Hotel is renowned for its gracious British Colonial design, its 42,000-square-foot spa and its 45-holes of championship golf—no wonder Tiger Woods rented out the entire property for his wedding. The international jet set is also enamored of Lone Star, a boutique hotel with a trendy, distinctly Bohemian edge. Considered the address for those in the know, the low-profile 4-room Lone Star is only too happy to shine its light on those seeking the tasteful, relaxed atmosphere that is so emblematic of the island.

No matter where you decide to stay, however, Barbados is best experienced in the open, far beyond the confines of one's hotel room. For a sample of authentic island flavor, start at Bridgetown, Barbados' capital. Here you'll find Broad Street with its duty-free shopping and prime examples of British Empire architecture, such as the coral limestone parliament buildings and the ornate awnings that cast shade upon nearly every inch of sidewalk. Arrive late enough and you'll also notice the throbbing bass emanating from the city's leading dance club, Harbour Lights.

Bridgetown is the most well-known town in Barbados, but as insiders will tell you, it's about as representative of the rest of the island as Times Square is of Manhattan. Which is to say, there's a whole lot more to the Bajan lifestyle. Holetown is a case in point. For many, this is the first and last name in the island's best shopping, dining and nightlife. Here is where you'll discover picturesque side streets that teem with quaint artisan shops,







charming restaurants that feature world-class menus and a bustling nightlife scene that attracts both local and visiting sophisticates.

While you're in the neighborhood, make sure to stop by The Mews restaurant. Not only will you be privy to a cosmopolitan bar scene, but you can dine on the best shrimp you've ever tasted in the restaurant's beautiful garden. On Fridays, The Mews also throws an after-hours party, with the kind of live music, dancing and celebrating that make Barbados one of the Caribbean's most festive islands. Afterwards, you can walk over to Lexy Piano Bar where the locals congregate to listen to an ever-changing roster of performers.

Another picture perfect night can be had at Barbados's most famous restaurant, The Cliff. Those of you planning on visiting during high season would do well to reserve weeks in advance. You'll realize why the place is so popular the moment you walk through its doors and feast your eyes on the sumptuous old-boys-club meets Out-of-Africa decor and the jaw-dropping, torch-lit view. The cuisine more than holds its own with selections such as Sautéed Scallops on Truffle Mash with Creamed Leeks and Cajun Tuna on Garlic Mash with Virgin Olive Oil. For after dinner drinks, repair to the nearby Scarlet, a local favorite recently opened by a couple of British expats with style and vision to spare. The red walls lined with Warhol prints and international staff of this restaurant/cocktail lounge will have you wondering if you took a wrong turn and wound up in London.

Of course, Barbados isn't just about sleek décor, fancy drinks and culinary masterpieces. To truly experience the island's unique national character, one has to embrace the rustic. And there's no better place to start than at Oistins Fish Market. Come Friday night, the market reverberates with the sound of live music and a crowd of spectators who show up to eat, drink, dance and make merry. Local vendors set up stalls that serve up rum punch the likes of which you just can't get outside the Caribbean as well as a wide selection of fresh fish and beer. With rows upon rows of jewelry and arts and crafts vendors, Oistins is also the place for souvenir shopping—both for yourself and your less fortunate family and friends back home.

Once you've been initiated into island life, go a step further by taking an afternoon or two to visit a few of the island's 1600 rum shops, such as the famed John Moore Bar. But be prepared, you won't find any Mojitos or Cosmos at these traditional Bajan bastions of liquor and communal life. Always unaffected and often verging on the rickety, rum shops only serve rum and beer by the bottle (but plastic cups are made available for those with daintier sensibilities). Many will argue that the fried fish, chicken and "cutter" sandwiches offered at these establishments account for some of the island's best cuisine.

On those days when you want to lunch with flatware, you can find no better spot than Champers, voted by Zagat surveyors as Barbados' most popular culinary experience due both to the quality of its dishes and the loveliness of its oceanfront setting and accompanying view. For a different yet no less spectacular visual experience, take a ride to St. Nichols Abbey, a traditional Barbados plantation house turned museum. One glance at the enchanted forest view and you, like so many others, may just find yourself thinking, Hmmm, I wonder if they do weddings.

As you wait for your lunch to arrive on the terrace, try to tear yourself away from the view long enough to take a tour of the house which dates back to 1650 and is one of only three such examples of Jacobean architecture that still exist in the Western Hemisphere. While you're browsing, consider buying one of the Abbey's beautifully-packaged bottles of rum to take home as a gift—you'll need to hand out plenty of souvenirs if you expect your friends to listen to all the stories you picked up on holiday. 🍹



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