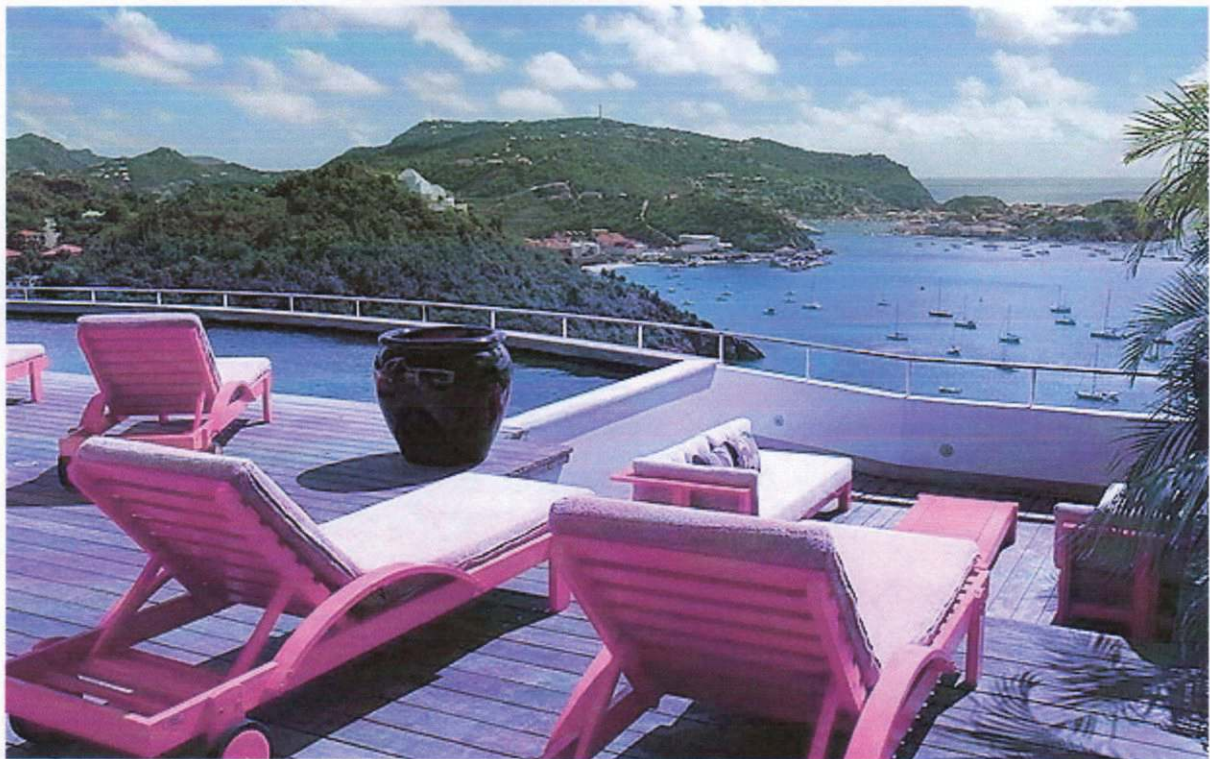


St Barts on a budget: flights, sights, hotels and restaurants

Essential information for visitors to St Barts, including the best hotels, restaurants and attractions.



One of the islands numerous holiday villas Photo: ALAMY
By Jane Anderson 3:22PM GMT 14 Feb 2011

Comment

Getting there

Air France (0871 663 3777; www.airfrance.co.uk) offers flights from Heathrow via Paris to St Maarten from £787. The cheapest way to get from St Maarten to St Barts is by ferry; a return trip

with **Great Bay Express** (00590 590 524506; www.sbhferry.com) from Bobby's Marina in Philipsburg (near the airport) to Gustavia costs €90/£75.50 and takes 45 minutes.

A return flight from St Maarten to St Barts with **Winair** (599 545 2568; www.fly-winair.com) costs from €160/£135.

Flights are often cheaper if bought as part of a package; unfortunately UK operators tend to feature only the top hotels. **Caribtours** (020 7751 0660; www.caribtours.co.uk), for example, offers seven nights' b & b at Eden Rock from £3,259 per person.

Getting around

Self-drive is the way to go as taxis are expensive. **Avis** (00590 590 277143; www.avis-stbarth.com) offers a Gem Electric for €210/£177 per week. Local companies such as Island Car Rental (277001) offer good deals, especially in the low season, with reductions of up to 30 per cent.

For an island tour, book **Claude Questel** (493454; claudio.taxi10@hotmail.fr); €100/£85 per hour for up to six people. Alternatively, visit the **St Barts Tourist Board** (Quai du Général de Gaulle, Gustavia; 278727; www.saintbarth-tourisme.com) for advice on what to see.

The inside track

For an insight into the island's past, the **Wall House Museum** (www.st-barths.com/museum) in Gustavia costs just €2 and displays handmade fishing nets, Breton costumes and Singer sewing machines.

Football fans should head to **Au Regal Snack Bar** (278 526), on the road into Corossol, which broadcasts all the the big international games at the weekend. Visiting footballers are often spotted here, too. Local meals cost less than €15/£13.

For self-catering and picnic supplies, **Marché U**, opposite the airport, sells good-quality French produce and there are usually promotions (I picked up a bag of 10 croissants for €1 on my visit).

Le Marché de L'Oasis in Lorient has the advantage of being open daily. Coffee lovers should try St-Barths Blend, freshly roasted at home by Laurent Moller.

What to take home

For best-value souvenirs shop at **Pati de St Barth** (1 rue de Mer, Gustavia; 278261; www.patidestbarth.com) for T-shirts, shorts, bags and caps with the island's logo. T-shirts from €32/£27. If you simply have to buy designer gear, come when the sales are on, usually May and October. Louis Vuitton, Ralph Lauren, Hermès and Longchamp are all in and around rue de la Republic in Gustavia; or pick up a fabulous island-style kaftan from **Poupette** (rue de la Republique, Gustavia; 275578; www.poupette-st-barth.com) or **Lolita Jaca** (Les Hauts du Carré, Gustavia; 275998; www.lolitajaca.com).

Visit the **Ligne St Barth** shop and factory in Lorient for local beauty products (278263; www.ligne-stbarth.com) from €15/£13.

The best budget hotels

Normandie Hotel ££

Built in the Seventies and lovingly restored by American couple, Wendy and Denis Carlton. Eleven rooms, all with air conditioning and free Wi-Fi. Rooms at the back are quieter and lighter. Rather stark bar but a much more welcoming decked pool area for breakfast and lounging (Route de Saline, Lorient; 276166; www.normandiehotelstbarts.com; double b & b from €130/£110 per night, including complimentary wine in the afternoon).

Tropical Hotel ££

Up a steep hill above Saint-Jean but just a stroll from the beach, this is a cosy island b & b with 20 air-conditioned rooms set around a lush garden, full of birdsong. Rooms are elegant and snug, with white draped beds. Pool, bar and boho chic lounge with free Wi-Fi (Baie de Saint-Jean; 276487; www.tropical-hotel.com; double b & b from €144/£122 per night including airport transfers).

Hôtel Le Village Saint Jean ££

On the hill above Saint-Jean; 28 rooms, one villa and a fabulous house with a private pool. If you're on a budget a standard room is the one to go for but if you can stretch a little, a cottage terrace room has a kitchenette and a sea-view terrace. The Terrazza Italian restaurant is lively with a great area for taking it easy (Baie de Saint-Jean; 276139; www.villagestjeanhotel.com; double b & b from €135/£114 per night).

Les Ilets de la Plage £££

Four white wood villas right on Saint-Jean Bay, seven more affordable villas tucked up the hill. All villas have spacious interiors with fully equipped kitchens, with a barbecue in the gardens for all to use (Plage de Saint-Jean; 278857; www.lesilets.com; one-bedroom garden villa from €200/£169 per night).

The best budget restaurants

The Hideaway £

Englishman and long-term St Barts resident Andy brings a touch of British humour to the island with his slogan, "Corked wine, warm beer, lousy food and a view of the car park". It's true there is a view of the car park but it's a very nice one and the pizzas are top notch. From €9.50/£8 (Saint-Jean; 276362; www.hideaway.tv).

L'Entre Deux £

This bohemian-style restaurant is tucked behind the Totem surf shop in Gustavia. It's a bit like eating in a hippy tree-house, with decking and palms, bright throws and cushions and Ganesh statues. From €4 for tapas and €15.50/£13 for fajitas (rue Samuel Fahlberg, Gustavia; 275088).