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St. Barts Travel: 7 Things Not To Miss When Visiting the Island

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Travel

It's easy to feel skeptical about this star-studded Caribbean getaway; until you find yourself being pummelled back into shape at a spa overhanging the cerulean waters, strolling the island's untouched beaches or snoozing to the sound of the ocean's swell by an infinity edge pool, that is. And you reluctantly realize that, you too, have fallen head over heels for the paradise island.

Now reopen following the coronavirus shutdown - just three years after the island was wiped out by Hurricane Irma - it's possible to visit once again. Follow our guide of seven highlights not to miss when visiting this far-flung corner dubbed "little France".



The turquoise waters of Gouverneur Beach in St. Barts. ST. BARTS TOURIST OFFICE

Surrounded by warm translucent waters and adorned with sloping hills draped in jungly vegetation, the tiny 10 square-mile St. Barts is a volcanic island of incredible natural beauty. Now a French overseas collectivity, it was first discovered and named in 1493 by Christopher Columbus after his brother Bartoloméo.

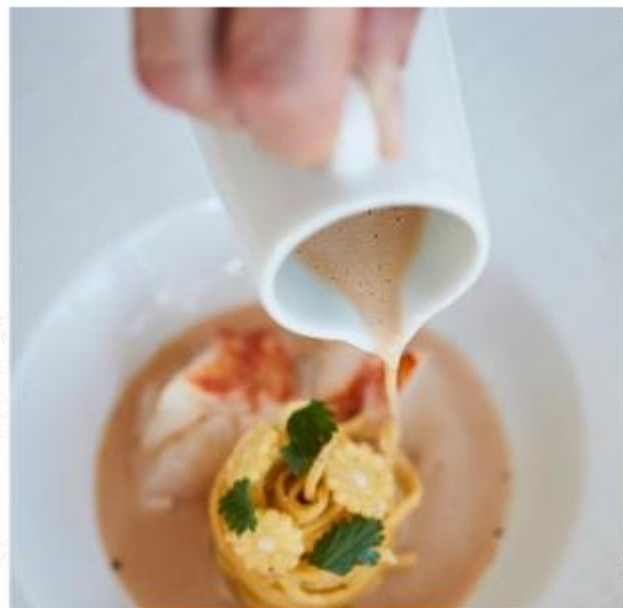
Geared toward a high-flying clientele of celebrities (Johnny Hallyday, France's answer to Elvis, is buried here for instance, and his grave has become a pilgrimage site for his many fans), billionaires come to lounge poolside at their private villas and show off their designer beachwear at the island's clutch of upscale hotels. Add the French gastronomical offerings to the mix, and you've got the whole picture.

1. The Event to Book: St. Barts Gourmet Festival

Celebrating a longstanding tradition of culinary excellence and the island's French ties, the [Gourmet Festival](#) tops St. Barts' social calendar. And the good news is that the seventh edition has just been announced.

The 2020 festival will take place November 11-15, it will be overseen by three-star chef Pierre Gagnaire and will feature chefs Dimitri Droisneau, Marcel Ravin, Jean-Rémi Caillon, Sébastien Vauxion, Cédric Grolet and Juan Arbelaez.

And as American and French visitors tend to flock to the island at this time just to get a taste for the Caribbean-meets-French experience, do book your table early.



The sixth edition of the St. Bart's Gourmet Festival welcomed a host of French chefs, including ... [+]

MICHAEL GRAMM

For the occasion, the organizers round up a handful of Michelin starred chefs from France and jet them off to the Caribbean island ("it's a hard gig," the chefs will tell you wryly), so they can cook alongside locally established chefs in their kitchens, and give regular guests a new spin on the St. Barts dining experience.

Last year's instalment included a star-studded cast: from patron of the festival Arnaud Faye (two stars at the bewitching [La Chèvre d'Or](#) in Eze in the South of France), to Eric Bouchenoire (two stars at [Atelier Joel Robuchon](#)), Taku Sekine (one star [Dersou](#) and [Cheval d'Or](#) both in Paris), Guillaume Goupil (one star at the top-end [Burgundy Hotel](#) in Paris), Stéphane Buron (two stars at the iconic Courchevel hotel [Chabichou](#)), Jean-Denis Rieubland (one star at the sumptuous [Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa](#) an hour outside Paris), Patric Vander (one star at [Les Fresques](#) at the [Hotel Royal Evian Resort](#)), and Philippe Jourdin (one star at [Le Faventia](#), [Terre Blanche Hotel](#) on the Côte d'Azur).

For one week, the chefs rustled up special dinner menus at local restaurants and hotels: [Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa](#), [Hotel Christopher](#), [Hotel Le Toiny](#), [Le Sereno](#), [Hotel Manapany](#), [Le Tamarin](#), [L'Esprit Jean Claude Dufour](#) and [Nikki Beach](#).

The highlights were plenty. But one chef's dinner that particularly stood out was Guillaume Goupil's Italian-infused French feast at Le Sereno Hotel. His simply grilled local lobster with fresh corn pasta and ginger stock will remain forever engraved in my memory. Tangy, fleshy, light and moreish, it was perfection.

2. The Eco-Hotel to Stay at: Manapany

Unless you've been sleeping under a rock for the last three years, you'll have read about the grand undertaking to rebuild the island following the widespread destruction of Hurricane Irma. Along with the reconstruction (coming in at no less than \$1.4 billion) the island's swanky hotels have reemerged looking slicker than ever. However, far from the kerfuffle of swanky cars disemboweling vacationers ready to bask in the sun in their designer clobber, is eco-hotel [Manapany](#). Run by hotel collection B Signature CEO Anne Jousse, its desert-island atmosphere is its main asset - and a unique one at that.

Tucked at one end of the island's wild Anse des Cayes beach, devoid of buildings, the setting is one of dreams. The hotel's two pools, both with ocean views, and the all-wooden circular restaurant that overhangs the water, are backed by beautiful hills of thick tangly nature that soar up to cobalt blue skies.

Forbes



The hotel bar looking out over the pool and ocean and the turquoise waters at the end of the beach ... [+]

MANAPANY HOTEL



An all-wooden villa at Manapany Hotel and the view from a villa of the hotel's preserved, wild bay. MANAPANY

HOTEL

Mealtimes here will have you stay for an hour - or two, or more - as you take in the changing colors of the skies above the inky horizon. And before you know it, your day chimes to a slower local pace of life made up of breakfast on the water, sunbathing to the sounds of the waves, and drinks on the castaway-style terrace of your room.

3. The Dreamiest Beach to Drive to: Plage du Gouverneur

Open to all and away from man-made constructions, the retina-pulling waters of this beach are lined by a ribbon of the finest of white sands that screams: “I’ve arrived in the Caribbean!”



The white sands and cerulean waters of Gouverneur Beach, St. Barts. ST. BARTS TOURIST OFFICE

Located on the south side of the island, the unspoiled stretch of beach is ideal for reconnecting with nature outside of a hotel setting and meeting locals who come here for some downtime and a swim in the cool salty waters. When the waters are calm, it’s also a great snorkeling hotspot. Other beaches to check out on the island include Saline, Shell Beach, and Colombier.

4. The Place to Go For Lobster: La Langouste

Something else that should be on your to-do list, is eat lobster, *bien sûr*. And lots of it. St. Barts doesn't have many local specialties culinary-wise, cherry-picking its produce in neighboring St. Martin and Guadeloupe islands - except for lobster. Have it in a sandwich, tossed in a salad, or, as it's served at La Langouste, mixed with fresh creamy tagliatelle.



Lobster is a St. Barts staple, and La Lagouste is the place to go to sample it. LA LANGOUSTE

Tucked away in the quieter north-western part of the island in the Bay of Angels, is an empty stretch of sand you get to have all to yourself. And it's here, at a low-key three-star hotel, that you'll find [La Langouste](#). Its laid-back no-frills vibe is a welcome breath of fresh air though, especially if all the glitz and glamour of the fat-cat hotels have left you wondering where the local life is at.

La Langouste also serves lip-smacking good creole dishes like curries with rice and spicy fritters, which are perfect for mixing up your culinary experience while on the island.

5. The Hotspot to Go Shopping: Gustavia Harbour

The main town and capital of the island, Gustavia is a picture-perfect port surrounded by green hills, red-roofed houses and a handful of restaurants along the water like [the Victoria](#). A smart colonial-style white clapboard set-up, it serves cocktails and stone-baked pizza but also large healthy salads and fresh-pressed fruit and vegetable juices. Looking out on the port and calm waters, from here, it's easy to imagine the island's early days.



Gustavia Harbour, St. Barts. ST. BARTS TOURIST OFFICE

After it was discovered by Christopher Columbus, the island became a French colony in the 1600s, before being handed over to the Swedes at the end of the 1700s for almost a century - in fact, Gustavia gets its name from the Swedish king of the time. A century later, the island returned to French rule until it became an autonomous territory in 2007 and left the EU in 2012.

As well as the island's main town, Gustavia is also its main shopping hub with plenty of French brands like Cartier and Hermès to keep the crowds busy. Get lost in the cobblestone streets garlanded with fairy lights that click on at nightfall as music drifts through the streets. Pick up silk sarongs from [Poupette](#), and pop into [Clic](#) to browse photography books by lesser-known designers. For something a little more cocktail-appropriate, St. Barts has its very own offshoot of Paris's [Montaigne Market](#). And for something a little more local, head to [Ligne St. Barth](#) beauty brand where products are made locally.

6. The Spa to Book: Hotel Christopher's Sisley Spa

The smart [Hotel Christopher](#), with a swanky infinity-edge pool, is where you'll want to lay sunbathing all day. But its discreet iconic French branded [Sisley spa](#) with killer ocean views is a must for some post-flight TLC.



The Sisley Spa at Hotel Christopher, which looks out onto the ocean. HOTEL CHRISTOPHER

Small and intimate, it's tucked away right at the very extremity of the hotel, along a stone path lined by villas on one side and the turquoise water on the other. Understated, the spa's seating area hangs over the water and looks out on one of the island's many curved bays.

There's no changing in a communal area here. Each guest is led to their private cabin with glass doors thrown open onto the water and an outdoor shower you'll never want to leave. Except the treatment is well worth going back inside for. Laying on the massage table, the sound of the waves just down below and the therapists' slow and steady expert movements will transport you somewhere close to nirvana.

7. The Place to Party: Nikki Beach

Regulars seem to all descend on the island to compare notes and suntans, catch up on gossip - and party. And one essential go-to for a champagne-fuelled brunch that, before you know it, turns into an everyone-on-tables daytime dance marathon, is [Nikki Beach](#).

Its gentle clubby vibe is what keeps people coming back, but also its setting. Laid out on a gleaming white open-plan wooden deck just steps from the lapping turquoise waters, it's the perfect spot for groups of friends and families to eat and drink with their toes in the sand. A must, no St. Barts experience is quite complete until you've danced the afternoon away here.



The smart set-up at Nikki Beach, right on the beach. NIKKI BEACH