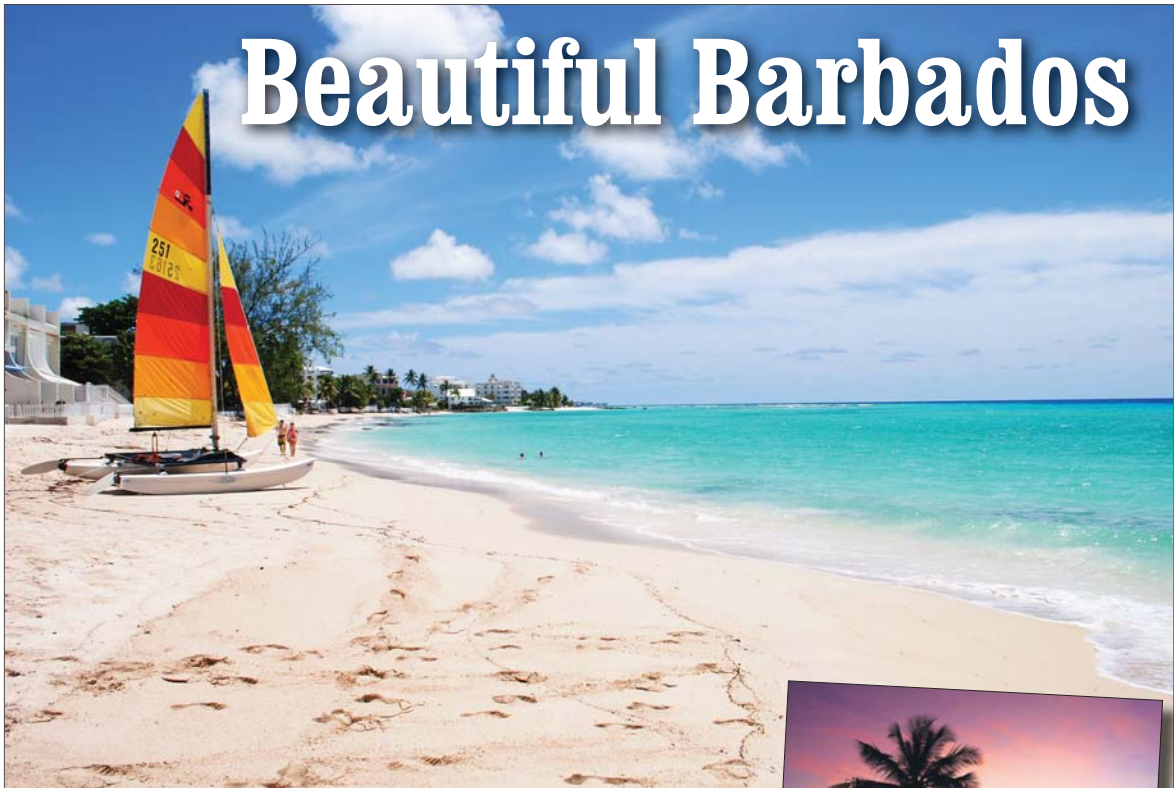


Beautiful Barbados



BARBADOS is a trio of islands in all but topography.

The west, nicknamed the Platinum Coast, is the side for exclusive hotels patronised by a demographic spectrum from soap and soccer stars to toffs with titles.

The south is less glam but much more affordable and better for both watersports and nightlife. The east coast is wild and untamed, great for looking at but the sea is too rough for all but surfers. Being rather pear shaped, there is no north coast as such.

Beaches

The west is for waters as calm as a swimming pool, with areas buoyed off from hazardous jet skis, and beaches of soft golden sand – although disappointingly rather narrow. Paynes and Mullins are two of the best. In the south the beaches are broader, the sands whiter and squeaky soft but the downside is a stiff breeze which can make the sea more frisky (great for windsurfers, not so good for toddlers).

Eating Out

Foodies, as long as their wallets match their

appetites, will be very happy here. Among the best restaurants are the Lone Star (246 419 0599; thelonestar.com), former garage now beachfront pinnacle of cool; Daphne's (246 432 2731; daphnesbarbados.com), the trendy Bajan sister of the one in Chelsea serving contemporary Italian on the beach; and the uber fashionable Cliff (246 432 1922; thecliffbarbados.com) with an unbeatably romantic waterside setting, complete with floodlit ocean and flaming torches. If you're visiting the capital Bridgetown, plan on a Bajan lunch at the Waterfront Cafe (246 427 0093; waterfrontcafe.com.bb)

Drinks & Nights Out

The south coast's St Lawrence Gap is the prime decibel hub. Check out one of the newest bars, Sugar Ultra Lounge (246 420 7662; barbadospulse.com) featuring top DJs. On Friday evenings head for the Oistins Fish fry, a thumping, rum and beer fuelled street party. The island's one room rum shacks are also great for local colour; check out Nigel Benn Auntie Bar, owned by the aunt of the British middleweight boxer (in the parish of St Andrew).

Activities

Sporties will find four golf courses, three belonging to Sandy Lane, the other being the Royal Westmoreland (246 419 7244; royalwestmoreland.com). Other activities include wreck diving with Barbados Blue (246 434 5764; divebarbadosblue.com); a sunset catamaran cruise with 'Cool Runnings' (246 436 0911; coolrunningsbarbados.com) and zip wiring (246 433 8966; aerialtrek.com).

The cultural highpoint of

the calendar, the Glydebourne in the sun, takes place in spring in the gardens of Holders House featuring leading names in opera, theatre and music. Tickets: 246 432 6385; theseason@holders.net.

Out & About

Some say the reason Columbus never came to Barbados was because he never even saw it on the horizon. The contoured exception is Scotland, a district of hills in the north of the

island broken up by botanically rich cleavages in the limestone capping. See it on a big day out – the island is roughly the size of the Isle of Wight.

There are also a few grand houses open to the public, including St Nicholas Abbey

(246 422 5357; stnicholasabbey.com), built to British plans right down to fireplaces and chimneys (the last thing you'd ever need in Barbados) and Fisherpond which does a memorable Sunday brunch (book on 246 433 1754).

