



10

REASONS
TO LOVE
ST BARTH

By Ellen Lampert-Gréaux

I NEVER REALLY *i n t e n d e d* TO LIVE IN THE CARIBBEAN. BUT MY STORY IS NOT UNUSUAL... A FIRST VISIT TO ST BARTH – MINE WAS IN 1989 – AND THE ISLAND ROPES YOU IN, WITH ITS CRAGGY VOLCANIC TERRAIN THAT SLOPES DOWN TO THE BLUEST WATER YOU HAVE EVER SEEN, AND ITS UNUSUAL MIX OF FRENCH AND CARIBBEAN CULTURE. HERE ARE A FEW OF THE REASONS IT GETS UNDER YOUR SKIN.

BE CAREFUL, THOUGH, ONCE ENSNARED YOU MIGHT, LIKE ME, END UP A LONG TERM RESIDENT.

1. Great Beaches

St Barth is really lucky to be encircled by soft white sand. But in addition to popular beaches like *Saline*, *Gouverneur*, and *St Jean*, it's worth the *détour* to some of the smaller ones like *La Petite Anse* and *Petit Cul de Sac*, where you frequently find yourself in total solitude even in high season. And while swimming is not recommended, the small beach below the *Toiny Hotel* is as wild as they get and a hot spot for surfers.

2. Shop Till You Drop

Some of the world's top luxury brands, from Hermès to Ralph Lauren, are within a few steps from the port of Gustavia, but I'd suggest wandering further into the charming little streets of the town to discover shops like *Les Artisans*, a treasure trove which doubles as an art gallery and jewellery store, or stop in at *Fabienne Miot's* shop and take a look at her custom pieces. Then head to St Jean where a collection of boutiques sparkle with baubles, bikinis and beads.

3. Dining in Saline

There are three good restaurants in a row along the edge of the salt pond that gives Saline its name. Definitely worth heading back there in the evening to try *Grain de Sel* with its traditional Creole cooking, *Meat & Potatoes* with tender cuts of beef as the centrepiece of the menu, and the real star of the dining show in Saline, Jean-Claude Dufour, who runs the kitchen at his own place, *Esprit*, where the sautéed foie gras is sublime.

4. Pamper Yourself

Many of the hotels now have spas, the perfect place to spend a few hours taking care of your body and soul. Among my favourites are *Isle de France*, *Guanahani*, and *Le Sereno*, where you can enjoy a massage that literally melts away stress. Stay for lunch, relax on the beach or by the pool, and make a day of it.

5. Off The Beaten Track

To really discover St Barth, you need to contact a local lady by the name of *Hélène Bernier*, environmental protector and the best hiking guide on the island. She will tailor an outing to your pace, timetable and ability, taking you places you had no idea even existed. Some of the landscapes and vistas are simply breathtaking, and you might run into some of the local fauna, from wild goats to prehistoric-looking iguanas.

www.stbartheasytime.com

6. Sunrise, Sunset

The days are short in St Barth all year, with usually no more than 12 hours of daylight, roughly 6am to 6pm, so watching the sunrise and sunset can be a daily ritual. Head over to the road from Grand Fond to Toiny before dawn and sit along the rocky shoreline to get an eyeful as the sun rises. Sunsets can be seen from the port, so look out for that famous green flash.

7. Music Festival

One of the highpoints on the cultural calendar is the St Barth Music Festival, celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2014 (4 – 27 January). I'm not sure how she does it year after year, but festival director Frances DeBroff pulls such top-notch musicians out of her hat that you can hardly believe your ears. Many of the concerts take place in the Anglican and Catholic churches in Gustavia, an easy stroll from the port.

8. Live Like A Rock Star

It goes without saying that St Barth has some of the most upscale lodgings in the world, but if you're going to extend your superyacht charter with time ashore, or hook up with shore based friends, do anything you can to check out *Rock Star Villa* at the *Eden Rock Hotel*. It not only has a recording studio in the basement and an incredible art collection, but it comes with its own butler who last I heard was a charming fellow from South Africa who makes life at this gilded lily even more delightful.

9. Corossol

Perhaps the most traditional village left on the island, Corossol has quaint houses and a nice little beach. Some of the older women still weave hats and baskets from dried palm fronds, one of the few actual native crafts in St Barth. Stop into the small shop to grab a bottle of rum punch made with local fruit, including the corossol (soursop) after which the place is named.

10. St Barth Bucket

For me, this is the high point of the sailing season in St Barth. Totally self-funded, this regatta (27– 30 March 2014) is open to sailing yachts over 30 metres in length and attracts some real beauties. Last year a mini-regatta for five J-Class yachts during the Bucket added to the eye-candy as the fleet sailed around the island. A great reason to stay on the island through late March!