

Luscious St. Lucia

The Caribbean island du jour has plenty to keep adventurers occupied.

Alison Humes braves steep hills and a spewing volcano, finding a quiet escape

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Getting around St. Lucia's 238 square miles of peaks and valleys can be a challenge. Adventurous types should rent a car: There are hairpin turns galore with splendid distracting views. Otherwise, taxi vans are easy to come by, and many of the drivers are also helpful guides. Water taxis run up and down the west coast, and a number of hotels offer transportation from the airport via helicopter. Whichever you choose, this is not an island where you want to park yourself on the beach. **Gros Piton Tours**, in the village of Fond Gens Libre, offers a number of hikes and walks as well as a climb on Gros Piton (489-0136; hikes, \$25-\$30). In addition, check out master sculptor **Vincent Eudovic's** St. Lucian hardwood creations in his Castries studio (452-2747), Verena Lawaetz's exceptional jewelry made of locally collected seeds at **Balenbouche** (455-1244), and, if you've forgotten your beach cover-up, Joan Alexander's batik studio at Hummingbird Beach Resort in Soufrière (459-7232).

The area code for St. Lucia is 758. Prices quoted are for July 2008.

Lodging



The new **Jade Mountain** stands on a hillside above its sister resort, Anse Chastanet, just outside Soufrière. The shape of the hotel resembles a starship station, with individual pale stone walkways leading to 24 three-sided lofts. Each one has a private patio, an infinity pool, and views of the Pitons and the sea. On the roof, there's a quiet deck and an excellent restaurant. Try the giant prawns with watermelon, watercress, and apple chutney. If you are sensitive about insects or need to be electronically connected (there are no phones or TVs in the rooms), Jade Mountain is not for you (459-4000; doubles, \$1,150-\$1,600). Instead, stay at the fully wired **Landings**, on the north end of the island, just before Pigeon Point National Park. Although the property will be under construction until 2010, 62 one-, two-, and three-bedroom suites—each with a deck, a kitchen, and Internet access—are already operational. The open-air **Yacht Haven** restaurant, on the seaside under a tented pergola, is lovely (458-7300; doubles, \$318-\$495; entrées, \$15-\$30).

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Conveniently located midway up the island's west coast, **Discovery at Marigot Bay** is right on the snuggest harbor. Its high-ceilinged rooms have dark-wood fur-

nishings and thoughtful amenities such as sunblock and bug spray.

The on-site **Boudreau** serves grilled fish with a killer jasmine rice, and the beach is a two-minute ferry ride across Marigot Bay (458-5300; doubles, \$330-\$378; entrées, \$12-\$25). The less posh **Ti Kaye Village**, also mid-island, has comfortable cabins and a protected sandy beach (456-8101; doubles, \$195-\$350).

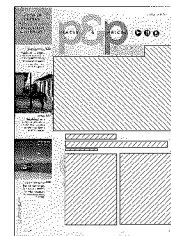
Another option is one of the atmospheric and unpretentious plantations. **Fond Doux**, a working cocoa farm, has a collection of charming cottages and a multi-tiered arrangement of pools. Order local fish with creole sauce and fresh salad in a traditional clay pot at the friendly outdoor restaurant (459-7545; doubles, \$130-\$300; lunch, \$10). A stay in one of **Balenbouche Estate's** four cottages is like a visit with a stylish, bohemian old friend (455-1244; doubles, \$80-\$140).

For a taste of town, the **Hummingbird Beach Resort**, at the edge of Soufrière, has simple clean rooms, a pool, and a lively bar and restaurant (459-7232; doubles, \$55-\$130; entrées, \$12-\$20). Up north, in Rodney Bay, sister properties **Coco Palm** and **Coco Kreole** are likewise affordable and efficient (456-2800; doubles, \$115-\$290).

Dining



The top restaurants are generally affiliated with hotels, such as those listed above. Other options include Pigeon Island's **Jambe de Bois** for homemade dishes served on a veranda overlooking the beach (450-8166; entrées, \$11-\$20). While driving up the west coast, stop for a piece of hot cassava bread at **Plas Kas-sav**, on the main highway in Anse La Verdure. It comes in 13 different



flavors (coconut, cherry, chocolate) with varying degrees of sweetness (459-4050; bread, \$2). **Spinners**, on Reduit Beach in Rodney Bay, makes a great piña colada and is a perfect place to watch the sunset (452-8491).

Reading



The Rough Guide (\$11), **Hunter Adventure Guide** (\$17), and **Insight Compact Guide** (\$9) all provide a decent overview of St. Lucia. For an explanation of the Brigands War and a guide to the range of historical sites, look

for a copy of **They Called Us Brigands**, by Robert J. Devaux (out of print). Henry H. Breen's **1844 St. Lucia: Historical, Statistical, Descriptive** details colonial history through emancipation (out of print; digitized on Google Books). For more contemporary history, Anderson Reynolds's **Struggle for Survival** covers the 19th and 20th centuries, including the collapse of sugar prices in the 1950s and banana prices in the 1990s, and the coming of tourism in the 1980s (Jako Books, \$22).



In the shade: Petit and Gros Pitons overlook calm Soufrière Beach.

