



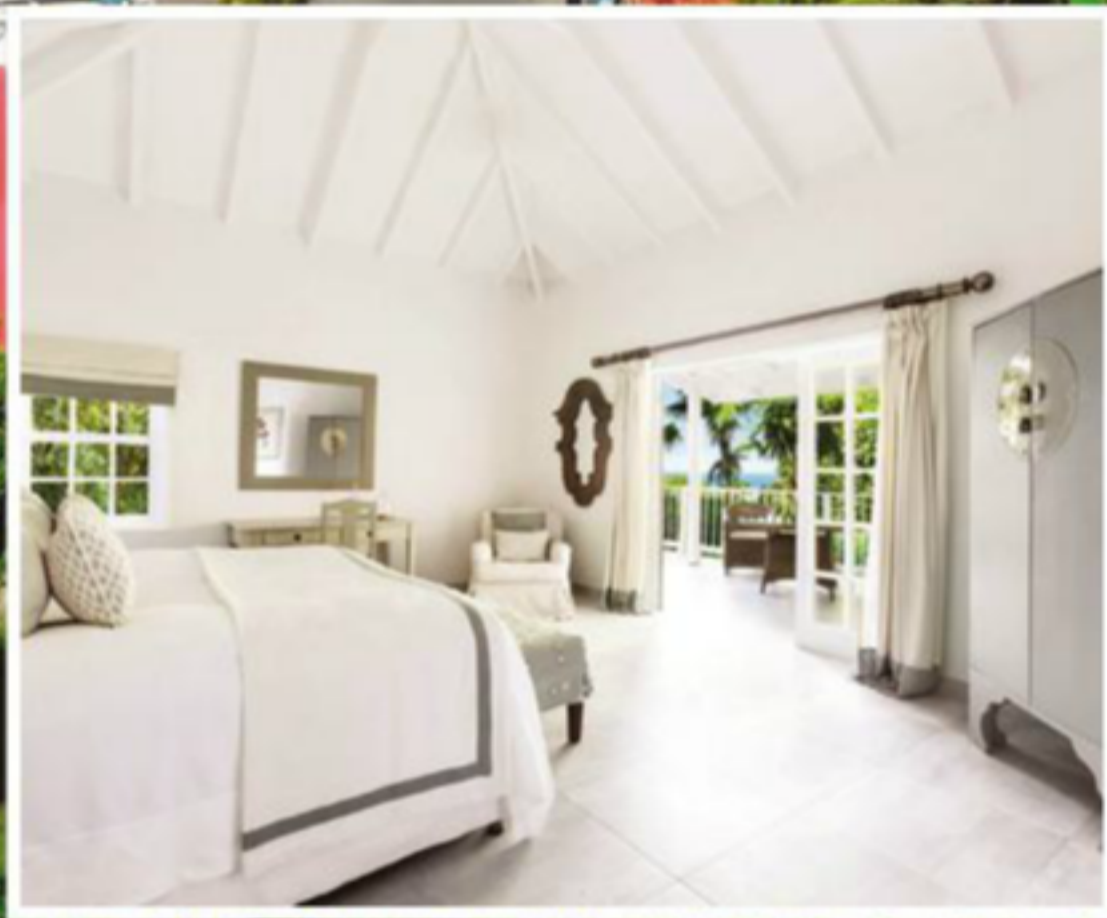
St. Barth's:

By Michele Peterson

PHOTOS

1. Gustavia Harbour
2. Children in the garden at Cheval Blanc Resort
3. Tropical Suite at Cheval Blanc

Beach butlers, Michelin-trained chefs, designer boutiques, haute resorts – all set amidst a constellation of the Caribbean's prettiest beaches. A family vacation on the posh island of Saint Barthélemy proves you don't have to sacrifice luxury for kid-friendly appeal.



Luxurious Family Travel with French Flair

I sip a perfectly chilled glass of French rosé, my toes tucked in sand as powdery as chiffon. At the next table, two boys equipped with surfboards from the kids club snack on *frites*. A willowy model struts past, pivots and strikes a pose, her fuchsia sheath a bright silhouette against the turquoise blue Caribbean. Glamorous beachside fashion shows and kids watersports may not be typical ingredients of a family vacation, but on chic Saint Barthélemy, French flair and family time go together as naturally as caviar and champagne.

A 10-minute flight from St. Maarten's modern new Princess Juliana International airport, Saint Barthélemy (usually abbreviated as St. Barth's or St. Bart's) serves as a high wattage playground to celebrities, A-Listers and billionaires. But this overseas collectivity of France is just

as welcoming to travellers vacationing *en famille*. The French ideal of *mixité* promotes diversity of age, gender and social classes, meaning there are no adult-only resorts.

A welcoming spirit is especially true at Cheval Blanc, the newest member of the LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) collection. Set on glitzy Les Flamands beach, the resort's soothing salmon pink and taupe decor is understated yet glamorous. No need to tote your own baby gear. Little ones are welcomed with beach strollers with parasols, mini-bathrobes with matching flip flops and baby cots decorated with seahorses and stars.

Cheval Blanc's *alchemists* create highly personalized experiences that go well beyond the usual kids club.



PHOTOS

1. Two-bedroom Garden Suite with private pool
3. Mermaid encounter, a tailor-made experience imagined by a team of *alchemists*



Their goal is to celebrate creativity. When I arrive, a young girl is painting a watercolour under the direction of Kate Kova, an artist recognized as Artist of Distinction by the Quebec government. Other enrichment activities include a mermaid encounter, an experience chosen by Kim and Kourtney Kardashian whose daughters swam with a “real” mermaid.

It's not all structured time. Kids can burn off energy while exploring lush tropical grounds offering unexpected glimpses of turtles, hummingbirds and iguanas. The surf-ready set can master gentle rolling waves with ease.

When it's time to retreat, don't worry about disturbing the neighbours if your kids play endless games of Marco Polo – your two-bedroom Tropical Garden Suite comes equipped with its own pool for the ultimate in privacy. If you're travelling with an entourage or just want to sprawl out, opt for a Flamands Villa; it comes equipped with a Majordome (concierge)

who can arrange an excursion to secluded Colombier Beach, score dinner reservations or stock your fridge with Brie (and baby's favourite juice).

For those who want to venture beyond the resort, diversions include zipping around the island in an open-air Mini Moke beach buggy. Launched in the 1960s, these British-built precursors to the Mini Cooper look like Tonka trucks but have become a cult ride due to their fun factor. Measuring just 21 square kilometres, St. Barth's is easy to explore offering hashtag-worthy lookouts along with a few hairpin turns. If your kids are feeling adventurous, hike to the lighthouse for breezy, spectacular views.

For lunch, be sure to stop at La Plage, a beachfront restaurant on Baie de St. Jean, where the water is so calm even the tiniest tot can paddle peacefully. This high-wattage beach is a fave among celebrities so don't be surprised if you see Jessica Alba or Beyoncé and Jay-Z enjoying paparazzi-free family time here. Come evening, La Plage buzzes with DJs, fire spinners and dance parties, but afternoons are low key, a time to slip off your sandals, indulge in some grilled lobster and relax.

With so much star power around, you'll want to look your beach best. St. Barth's is a duty free port so before the kids tucker out, head to Gustavia Harbour to browse the luxury boutiques within the Carré d'Or shopping enclave. You'll find designer brands such as Hermès as well as boho chic Vanita Rosa, a French collection popular with Kate Moss and Jane Fonda. For the younger set, Black Swan carries Pate de Sable, the playful kid's swimwear label founded in the French Riviera. Gustavia's pretty port is also the spot to gawk at the mega-yachts owned by billionaires such as Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich.

Still wondering if high-end St. Barth's is a slice of paradise for families? The answer is *mais oui!*