

ENSEMBLE

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Inspiring your passion for travel

FALL 2010

## CAPTIVATING COLOMBIA

The next hot spot

## THE BEST RESTAURANTS AT SEA

And the celebrity chefs  
at the helm

## EVOLUTION OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE

Packaged holidays 2.0

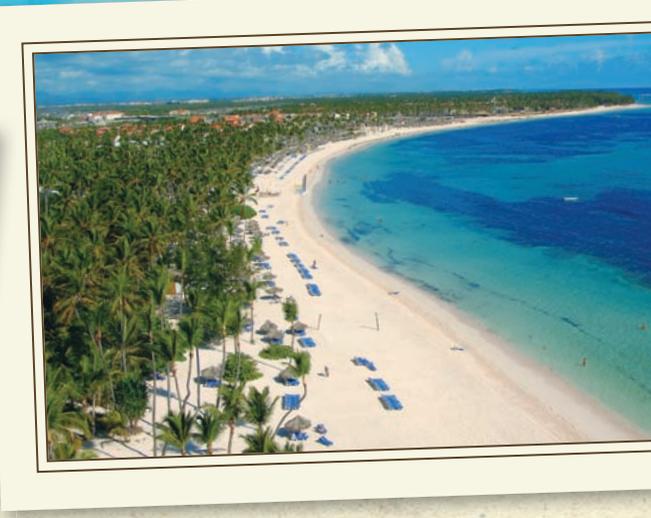
# 22

## BEACHES WE LOVE

# THE SUN ISSUE

**Heaven at Half Moon**  
Refine your relaxation at  
Jamaica's Fern Tree Spa

**Oceania's Newest  
Cruise Ship**  
Why you'll want to sail *Marina*





 **transat**  
HOLIDAYS

*It's a beautiful world*

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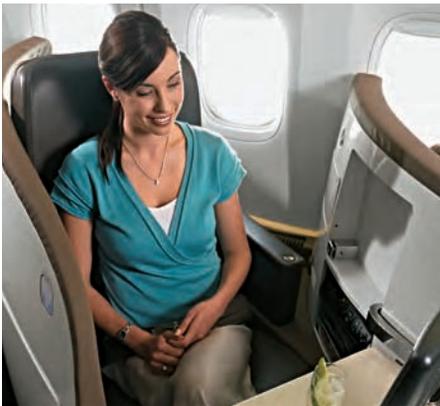


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Our agency belongs to an international network of over 1,000 professional travel agencies. Our combined buying power and expertise enable us to take you places that will inspire your passion for travel, in a style that exceeds your expectations. Our range of exclusive programs allows us to offer you additional amenities and services that are available only through Ensemble Travel® Group.

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Blissful



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We invite you to indulge. To stand at the rail in quiet awe of calving glaciers and blazing sunsets. To savor the simplicities of fruit and the complexities of wine; to breathe the sweet air of midnight at the equator; to surrender to an afternoon's spa. We invite you to make all five senses thankful at once. We invite you, and we are at your service. For more information, contact your Ensemble Travel® Group agency.



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THE CARIBBEAN, MEXICAN RIVIERA AND SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

# Cruising

The Caribbean, Mexican Riviera and South & Central America

**EXCLUSIVE  
OFFERS on  
2010/2011  
departures**

How to choose  
the cruise that's  
right for you

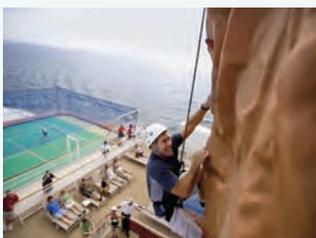
Family Cruising

{ CARIBBEAN DRIVE-THRU }  
- ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA -



**ENSEMBLE**  
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*Experiences that take you places*

*Justa*  
Beauty  
&  
Nail Salon





# Passion

AN AFFORDABLE LUXURY



True passion is born when a team is devoted to perfection. Oceania Cruises' chefs present the finest culinary experience at sea as inspired by Master Chef Jacques Pépin. Dine whenever you wish and with whomever you choose in our complimentary gourmet restaurants. Immerse yourself in the cuisine and culture of more than 300 global destinations.

Or simply relax with a massage in our Canyon Ranch SpaClub®.

Our passion is *Value* without compromise.

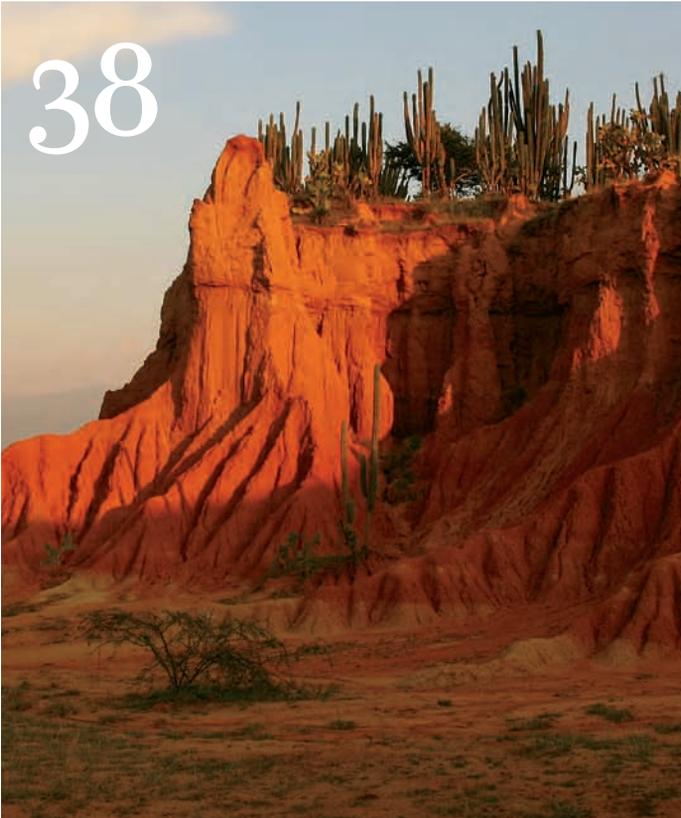
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BONUS \$100 SHIPBOARD CREDIT  
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Offer expires October 31, 2011. \$100 shipboard credit is per stateroom based on double occupancy. Free Airfare promotion applies to economy, round-trip flights only from Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, ATL, BOS, ORD, DFW, DEN, IAH, LAX, MIA, JFK, EWR, MCO, PHL, PHX, SAN, SFO, SEA, TPA, IAD. Special Offer Fares include all surcharges, airline fees and government taxes. Airline imposed baggage charges may apply. Airfare is available from all other U.S. & Canadian gateways at an additional charge. Ships' Registry: Marshall Islands. AUG1015

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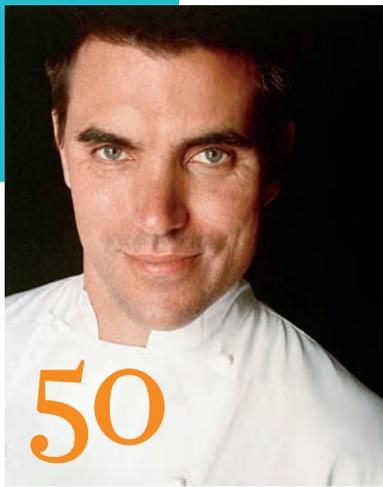
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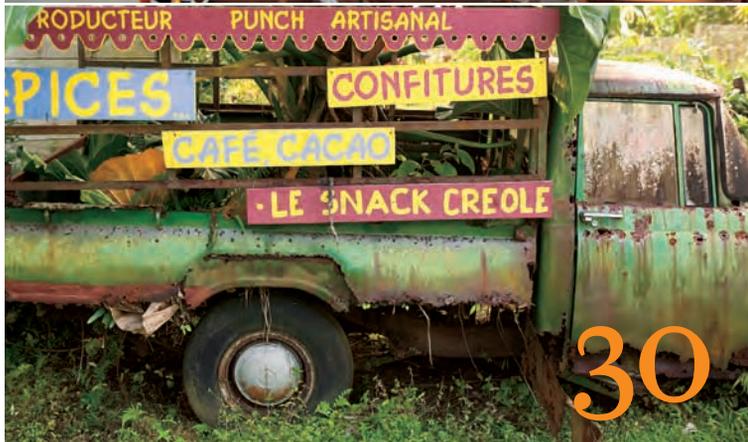
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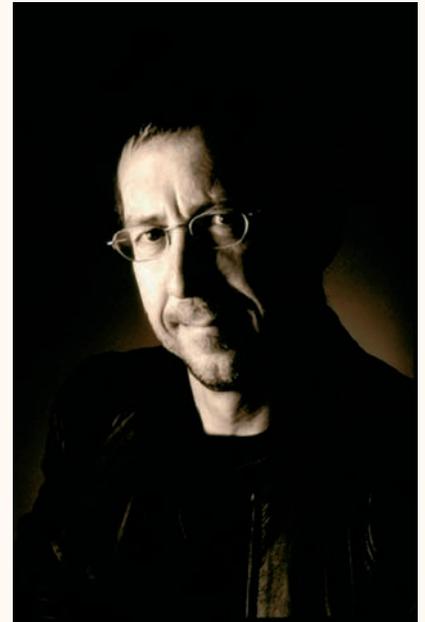
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Immersing herself in other cultures is the passion which led food journalist/researcher, Gemini-nominated TV producer and food communications professional **Mary Luz Mejia** to travel to 25 countries. She's taken cooking classes along the way in such far-flung kitchens as Madrid and Cusco, Peru – all the while soaking up the lore behind the food, getting to know the people who prepare it and why. A cookbook 'nerd', Mary Luz relaxes by cooking for her well-fed husband in their Toronto home. For this issue, she travelled to Mexico's Oaxaca region on a very authentic culinary journey, and whets our appetites along the way.

**Christopher P. Baker**, the 2008 Lowell Thomas 'Travel Journalist of the Year', is a freelance travel writer and photographer specializing in the Caribbean and Latin America. His many books include travel guides for *Fodor's*, *Lonely Planet*, *Moon* and *National Geographic*. One of his favourite destinations is Cuba, which he wrote about in *Mi Moto Fidel: Motorcycling Through Castro's Cuba*, a two-time national book award winner. He enlightens us on the rebirth of Colombia, where a crackdown on crime has increased safety and brought the return of tourism. In fact, he's going back again later this month.



A native of Montreal, **Nancy Wigston** has lived in Toronto, Cambridge, England and Penang, Malaysia. She has taught English literature, creative writing and literary travel writing. In 2006, Nancy read the works of nearly 50 first-time authors and selected both the long and short list for the Amazon.ca/Books in Canada First Novel Award. She travels widely in Asia, the U.K., Europe, Canada, Mexico and South America, and recently made an impromptu visit to Uruguay, where she discovered the charms of Colonia del Sacramento. Her favourite country? Always the last one she visited.

# Fun in the sun

It's the tail end of summer, and sooner than you think, long sunny days, patio cocktail hour(s) and backyard BBQs will be replaced by less enchanting events like putting away camping gear, closing the cottage and thinking about switching over to your winter wardrobe. As for me, I still feel a mild anxiety in the month of September, however irrational, when 'back to school' is a reminder of that *other* new year and a psychological signal to get back to work (not that we ever stop).

But why should the fun be over? The beauty of travel is that we can chase the good weather all year round; just hop on a plane and head south for a warmer climate and to top up your vitamin D. If, like me, you can't get enough of the sun, then you will be excited to read this issue - it's jam-packed with inspiring articles. We've put together a list of the top beaches in the Caribbean and South America, from the most romantic to the best for people-watching (page 46), and give you our picks of the choicest hotels in the Caribbean (page 66). We'll take you to a luxurious retreat in Jamaica (page 25),



explain how the all-inclusive vacation evolved and how it's changing (page 28) and look beyond Colombia's old reputation to discover the captivating tourist hot spot it has become (page 38).

Avid cruisers will enjoy a sneak preview of Oceania's newest ship, *Marina*, which will make its maiden voyage in January 2011 (page 42), as well as our list of the best restaurants at sea (page 50). Foodies also have much to sink their teeth into: mouth-watering articles and recipes from Montevideo and Oaxaca, plus I'll tell you about my epicurean experience on Grand Cayman, where I ate and drank my way through the four-day Cayman Cookout event (page 62).

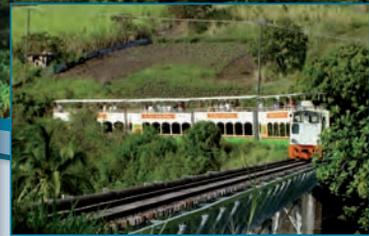
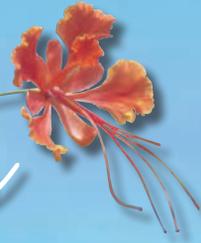
And that's not all. We cover other destinations, including Guadeloupe, Uruguay, Buenos Aires, Anguilla and the Grenadines, recommend which books to read and what to put on your packing list.

Fun times, eh? ▣

FEDERICA MARABOLI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
editor@ensembletravel.ca

# St. Kitts

EXPLORE › FEEL › LOVE › REMEMBER



Blessed by nature and rich in history, this lush tropical island invites you to experience a Caribbean destination like no other. From the golden sand beaches and cloud-fringed hillsides to the rich cultural heritage and warm, welcoming hospitality, St. Kitts invites you to share our unique island experience.

Visitors from Canada can connect year-round over the US gateways of **Atlanta**, **Charlotte** and **Miami**.  
Air Canada offers non-stop service to **Antigua** and seasonal non-stop service to **St. Maarten**,  
from which regional carrier Liat offers daily service to St. Kitts.

**Contact your Ensemble Travel® Group Agency  
for more information on St. Kitts.**



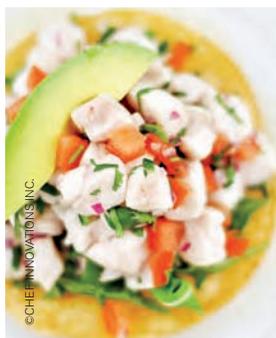
**CARIBBEAN**

[www.stkittstourism.kn](http://www.stkittstourism.kn)

## Diversions

Innovations and celebrations

### Let's dish: Must-try island food specialties



When it comes to food, leave the burgers and fries behind and take a bite of a destination's culture through its local cuisine. Before you order, check out our picks of delicious dishes to savour:

**Bahamas** From the sea, **conch** is a local favourite. Try it prepared as fritters or in chowder, or raw, ceviche-style, marinated in lime juice.

**Jamaica** Not surprisingly, fish is front and centre in Jamaican cooking. The national dish is **saltfish and akee** (a fruit native to Africa). It's not spicy, but flavourful. Grilled meat with jerk seasoning is also a perennial favourite.

**Curaçao and St. Maarten** Dutch colonies have had a long association with **Indonesia**. While you'll find yummy Dutch treats in bakeries, it's the Indonesian food you'll crave: mildly spiced and heavy on the noodles and rice. **Java honden portie**, a combination of fried eggs, rice, steak and vegetables, is so worth the calories – at least once.

**Dominican Republic** The national dish here is **sancocho**. It's a hearty, filling stew with Spanish roots, chock full of seven different types of meat blended with spices, served on rice with a side of chunks of cooked pumpkin.

**Grenada** Once you get over the odd name, eat like a local and try a dish called **oil down**. This stew-like meal is a filling mix of salted meat, chicken, dumplings, breadfruit (tastes like potato, but better), vegetables and coconut milk. Take home fresh spices and a bottle of delicious local **nutmeg liqueur**.

### Life's a beach: Sandy events around the world

**World Championship of Sand Sculpting, September 8 to October 3, 2010, Federal Way, Washington.** This competition moves south of the border for the first time after being held at British Columbia's Harrison Hot Springs. No ho-hum sand castles here. Teams from around the globe unleash their artistry with lavish creations.

**Full Moon Party, Koh Phangan Beach, Thailand.**

These monthly parties are notorious for their full-tilt merriment. Tourists worldwide flock to the sand to celebrate life by dancing in the water and sipping cocktails into the wee hours of the morning.

**Hot Rods at the Beach, October 9–10, Santa Cruz, California.** Car nuts will love this ocean-side event. Hot wheels of every description are on display, from cool 1940s roadsters to 1970s muscle cars.



### Trend watch: Booze news

**Tea-based cocktails** Tea is shedding its tame image by popping up on cocktail menus. L.A.'s trendy **Las Palmas** hotel is serving the **Earl**, a blend of lavender Earl Grey tea, elderflower liqueur and vodka. Meanwhile, the **Four Seasons Hong Kong** has added tea to martini concoctions like the **Nobo Berrytini**, with lemon vodka, Chambord, muddled berries and grapefruit juice.

**Designer ice** With mixology replacing bartending, the quest to make the perfect cocktail has turned its attention to ice. Size and shape matter, according to drink purists. Mixologists hand-cut a single chunk of ice to add to cocktails so melting becomes a slow process, key to preventing drinks from becoming watered down. Japanese bartenders shave blocks of ice into perfect spheres for their drinks. Adding a touch of lemon or lime is also elevating ice to a whole new level of cool.



**Whiskey and food pairings**

Whiskey comes in as many variations as wine. Some are smokey, others more peaty in flavour. To enhance the appreciation of the beverage, places like **The Scotch Malt Whisky Society** in **Edinburgh, Scotland** are offering whiskey-pairing dinners. No longer relegated to pre- and post-dining, whiskey has finally taken its rightful place at the table.

# Packing List

New and notable



### Double duty

Long-haul flights, late nights and sometimes too much fun can make your eyes look less than bright. **The Socializer™**, **Elizabeth Grant Skin Care's** latest product, has been declared "Canada's secret weapon for de-puffing tired eyes" by a well-regarded New York beauty editor. **Bright Lights**, the morning treatment, uses the light-diffusing power of mica to instantly brighten, while **Late Nights** blends peptides and Ulva lactuca to repair, awaken, de-puff and rejuvenate overnight. The lightweight eye product is dispensed in two click pens packed in a shiny, reuseable tube that's small enough to fit in your purse. Oh, men can use it too... we won't tell. \$40 (2 x 2g) ([www.elizabethgrant.com](http://www.elizabethgrant.com)), **The Red Carpet Room**, Toronto; **Hammam Spa**, Toronto ([www.hammamspa.ca](http://www.hammamspa.ca))

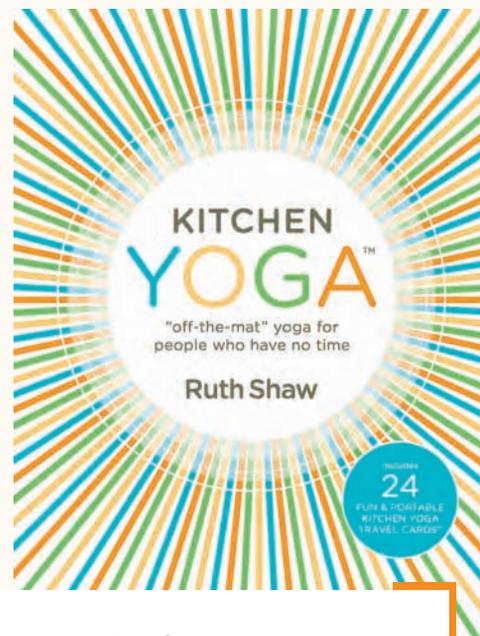


### Wine to go

Whether tucked in your luggage to protect your duty-free purchases or accompanying you on a picnic, the **Envoy** travels tough and light: the insulated aluminum looks like a spy kit but it's a two-bottle wine cooler case, complete with corkscrew. \$79.95 at **The Wine Establishment** (416-861-1331, [www.thewineestablishment.com](http://www.thewineestablishment.com))

### Curl 911

Anyone with curls remembers the episode of *Friends* where Monica goes on holiday and suffers from massive frizzy hair due to the humidity. Whether you're headed to the beach or the high seas, don't forget to pack **Frizzoff Curl Keeper™**. Developed by curl expert **Jonathan Torch**, of **Curly Hair Solutions™**, Curl Keeper™ controls frizz even in extreme humidity and moist air. Made from natural, biodegradable ingredients, the exclusive line is perfectly pH balanced – the key to fighting frizz – and is silicone-free. This handy three-pack comes with **Tweek™**, which adds volume and lift to limp locks, as well as **Slip™** detangler for easy detangling and protection from the harsh sun. \$15.50 for Curl Keeper™; \$15.50 for Slip™ detangler, \$33 for Tweek™ ([www.frizzoff.com](http://www.frizzoff.com)).



### It's in the bag

Traveller, yoga teacher and author **Ruth Shaw** has created a solution to the universal fitness challenge – the time crunch – with **Kitchen Yoga**. Learn how to benefit from a yoga pose through concise language and beautiful photographs in the five minutes it takes to brew coffee. "If you do this every day for a week," she enthuses, "that's 35 extra minutes of yoga." The best news is the book contains perforated cards you can take with you on your travels. Most poses can be performed in a hotel room or an airplane galley; shoulder raises can be executed in an economy seat. Colour-coded into four series – Back, Balancing, Hip and Shoulder – each card includes four clearly articulated steps with specific alignment and breathing instructions. \$29.95 ([www.ruthshawyoga.com](http://www.ruthshawyoga.com))

## Trends: Style Notes

### Poster Boy

Leave it to **Marc Jacobs** to not only get pals like Victoria Beckham and Kim Gordon to pose in his ad campaigns – Jacobs has a new men's cologne out called **Bang** – and now that he's buff, tanned and happy, he's mugging for the cameras himself, wearing the bottle, some foil and little else (\$69 for 50 ml, launching at [Holt Renfrew](#) in September, then in October at [Murale](#), [The Bay](#), [Shoppers Drug Mart](#), [London Drugs](#), [Sephora](#) and [Jean Coutu](#)).



### Walk a Mile in These Shoes

In just four years since founder **Blake Mycoskie** started his footwear company, **TOMS Shoes** has become the purveyor of cult favourite linen and canvas espadrilles. The inexpensive, bestselling basic comes in stylish, ever-changing bright patterns or simple solids (or metallic glitter, but don't worry, there are plain men's versions, too). The slip-ons go from day excursion to cruise deck to beach, are lightweight so they pack like a dream and benefit a good cause: for every pair purchased, TOMS donates a pair of the shoes to a child in a developing nation (\$45–\$55 at [Get Outside](#), [Little Burgundy](#), [Aritzia](#) and many other retailers across Canada, [tomsshoes.com](#)).

### Gone Fishing

Need more than nail clippers? There are dozens of other task-specific **Swiss Army knives** from **Victorinox**. Like the Angler version, a classic with all the usual bells and whistles (corkscrew, tweezers, can opener, screwdriver, etc.) but for the fishing devotee, it also features a fish scaler with ruler and hook disgorger. \$60 at [Modern Luggage](#), [Trinity Jewelers](#) and other retailers ([victorinox.com](#)).



## Trends: Style Notes



### Safer Sun

There's a new superhero under the sun. **Super Fluid UV Defense SPF 50+** is the latest addition to **Kiehl's Dermatologist Solutions** range (\$36 at [Kiehl's stores](#)) and offers the highest protection level of sunscreen in Kiehl's portfolio, but in a translucent, oil-free formula that is long-lasting and leaves no visible residue on skin. Stabilized Parsol 1789 and oxybenzone protect against UVA, while homosalate, octocrylene and octisalate tackle the UVBs.



### Instant Gratification

A group of former **Polaroid** employees released the first next-generation Polaroid integrated instant film camera this spring. Good for them, but not for us, since the limited edition sold out immediately at the company's New York and Vienna stores. But there's another analog option: Fuji's regular instant film camera, the **Instax 210** (\$99, currently available at [Black's](#), [London Drugs](#) and [Henry's](#), [fujifilmstore.ca](#)) has a sibling that's more compact and, if possible, even cuter. And it's finally available in Canada! The **Instax Mini 7S** offers four shooting modes and delivers full-colour, credit card-size instant prints in minutes. It's available at the same retailers and online (\$89.99, [fujifilmstore.ca](#)).

Want the best of both the analog and digital worlds? **Olympus** now offers ultra-compact, unbelievably lightweight **M.Zuiko extra-low dispersion lenses** for its spiffy new **Pen E-PL1 DSLR** camera (\$649.99, [getolympus.ca](#)). The camera is a 14-megapixel model and includes art filters and digital HD filming, but with the addition of lens options to take on vacation, shutterbugs can also pack a high-power wide angle or the super wide-angle (14 mm–150 mm \$649.99, 9 mm–18 mm \$749.99), or both.

### Vacation-proof nails

Before stepping on that plane, hit the salon and get Shellac'd. The **hybrid UV nail gel polish** from **CND** is the latest advancement in manicures and pedicures and took the company five years to develop. A polish job that is guaranteed to last 14 days with no chipping or smudging. Ideal for beach-proof pedicures, destination weddings and honeymoons – or just pure convenience. The painting process includes base, colour and top coats, cured under UV light with zero drying time and high-gloss shine (there's no formaldehyde, toluene or DBP, either). Shellac is available by professional application only and the process takes just under an hour (remember, no drying time – and later, removal takes about 15 minutes). Shades range from sheer pinks and French manicures through dusty rose, tangerine, cherry and deep plum. \$45 at [Ritual Salon & Spa](#) in Toronto and other salons across Canada (see [cnd.com](#) for a complete listing).



### Hot Shave

**Cromwell & Cruthers shaving oil** works for both a clean shave and detailing facial hair, and with both electric and blade razors. You need just four to five drops, so the teensy bottle is a compact luggage and carry-on traveller's perfect companion. A bottle lasts 100 shaves and prevents dry skin and razor burn with 100% natural essential oils. Best of all, it's made in Canada. \$5.99 for 15 ml at [Shoppers Drug Mart](#), [London Drugs](#), [Pharma Plus](#), [Rexall](#) and [IDA](#) ([cromwell-cruthers.com](#)).

# Travel File

## Ensemble® Hotel and Resort Collection



### PRETTIEST PATIO IN CHICAGO...

We Canadians love our patios, and any place that offers a welcoming outdoor space gets our attention. At the recently opened **St. Regis San Francisco** luxury hotel, you can enjoy al fresco dining while taking in spectacular views of the city skyline on the huge (600-person capacity) **Yerba Buena Terrace**. It's not the Raymond Saunders etched-glass mural installed on the terrace or that it shares space with the **Vitrine Restaurant** (renowned for its brunch menu) that makes it extra-special, but that it has a small garden – no bigger than 20 square feet – with hints of sage and lavender that waft through the air and which produces an array of fresh herbs, vegetables and flowers for use right in the hotel's restaurants and spa.

In and around the St. Regis San Francisco, which is located in the culturally vibrant **SoMa** district, you'll find a wealth of galleries and museums, including the **Museum of the African Diaspora** and the **San Francisco MOMA**, as well as urban green spaces, cutting-edge retail and fine dining. But we bet you'll want to spend plenty of time inside the hotel, which features the award-winning **Ame restaurant**, the 9,000-square-foot **Remède spa**, a fitness centre and indoor infinity lap pool. And, in the spirit of true luxury, the St. Regis San Francisco offers the services of the signature **St. Regis Butlers**, who are ready to provide their flawless, personalized attention 24/7.

### ...AND NEW YORK

Location? *Check.* Elegance? *Check.* Rooftop terrace? *Triple check!* The **Kimberly Hotel New York** recently opened its highly anticipated one-of-a-kind rooftop lounge, **Upstairs**. The latest go-to spot in the city, Upstairs features 4,000 square feet of space with a spectacular 360 degree view of midtown **Manhattan** and is the only New York City rooftop lounge with retractable glass ceilings and walls, ambient heated floors and a main room that promises to be as cozy and elegant during the winter months as it is sunny and sophisticated in the summer. The vibe is retro Hollywood glam: dark leather armchairs and carefully selected furniture from the likes of B&B Italia, Knoll and Moooi, bronze walls punctuated by living greenery and strings of incandescent lights floating overhead. A great 'small plates' menu and stunning cocktail list (try the Pomme d'Or, a delicious concoction made with Hennessy VSOP, Poire Williams and organic apple cider with lemon and clove) complete this unique urban oasis.

Nestled on midtown Manhattan's fashionable **East Side**, the Kimberly Hotel is conveniently located close to **Grand Central Station, Rockefeller Center, Radio City Music Hall, Times Square** and the **Theater District**, and within walking distance of cutting-edge boutiques, charming European-style cafés, museums and historical sites in the area. Well known for its spacious accommodations, the hotel has recently undergone a renovation and reconfiguration of its suites, which feature fine antique-inspired furniture, Frette linens, 42-inch plasma TVs, DVD players, iPod docking stations, balconies, upgraded personal amenities and enlarged marble-tiled bathrooms, some with jetted tubs and separate showers.



# Cruise News

## What's new on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*



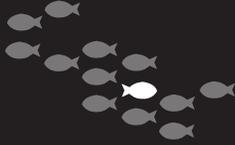
Decor – and the works of Dutch Old Masters and contemporary artists – distinguish MS *Nieuw Amsterdam*, the latest addition to Holland America's fleet. Following tradition with its recent christening by Princess Máxima of the Netherlands in Venice, Italy, the ship pays homage to the rich heritage of the Dutch immigrants in New York – or New Amsterdam, as it was then – through a selection of arts and antiques. The centrepiece, a huge mural of the Manhattan skyline by Dutch artist **Harald Vlugt**, adorns the wall opposite the Explorer's Lounge, but it's only one of many fascinating works onboard.

If you're interested in viewing the entire collection, a complimentary self-guided iPod tour is available.

Also new on this elegant vessel is the **Master Chef's Table**, featuring an intimate dinner for 18 guests at the **Pinnacle Grill**, which includes an exclusive dinner menu. Each meal is enhanced with specially selected wine pairings by the ship's sommelier. For \$89 per person, the evening includes seven courses served on signature Versace china, each personally delivered by a special culinary expert who will be the evening's host.



# NORWEGIAN EPIC



Prepare to Embark on the Remarkable.

Welcome to Norwegian Cruise Line's stunning new ship – Norwegian Epic. From her innovative design and world-class restaurants to her New Wave accommodations and the most happening and sophisticated nightlife at sea, everything about this ship is done on a grand scale.

Here are just a few of her highlights:

- Blue Man Group is performing at sea for the first time ever
- The liveliest nightlife at sea rivaling the experiences of Las Vegas, Ibiza, the Riviera and South Beach
- International dining options, incredible pools, exciting casino, lively bars and lounges, and a first-class spa
- The Studios, designed and priced for the solo traveler, offer private access to the Studio Lounge where you can relax, read a book or have a drink before dinner
  - The Villas upscale experience includes a private restaurant, concierge services, access to exclusive courtyard area with pool, hot tub and sundeck and every pampering amenity imaginable
  - Nickelodeon™ at Sea teams up exclusively with Norwegian Cruise Line to present SlimeTime LIVE!, SpongeBob SquarePants, Dora the Explorer and more



Ice Bar



Aqua Park

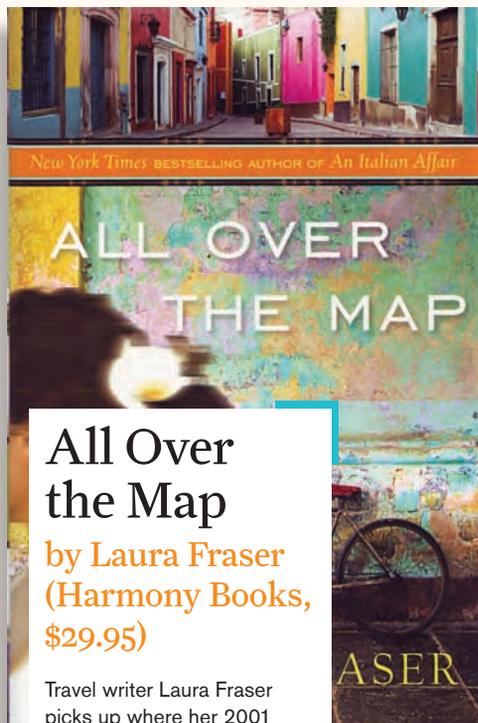


Blue Man Group



# Required Reading

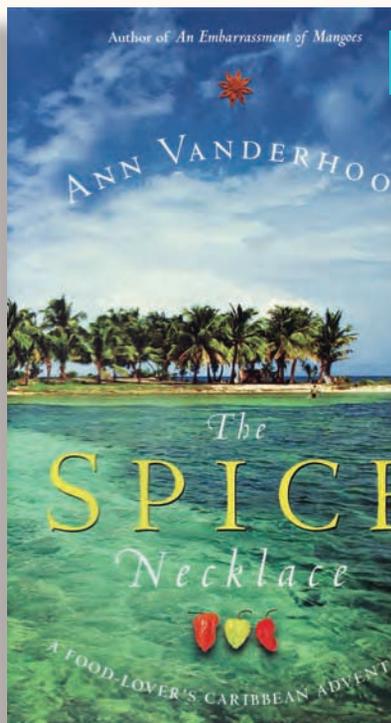
## Enchanting escapes



### All Over the Map

by Laura Fraser  
(Harmony Books, \$29.95)

Travel writer Laura Fraser picks up where her 2001 *New York Times* bestselling book, *An Italian Affair*, left off. The sequel begins with the end of her relationship with a sophisticated French professor and chronicles her struggle to reconcile her desire for adventure and passion with finding a committed, long-term romance. We follow her on jaunts to Italy, France, Argentina, Samoa, Rwanda and Mexico, and along the way are a silent witness to her internal journey of self-discovery as Fraser confronts herself and her mid-life fears of not finding a husband, a family and a safe, settled life.



### The Spice Necklace: A Food-Lover's Caribbean Adventure

by Ann Vanderhoof  
(Random House, \$32.95)

Reading more like a journal with its mix of storytelling, interesting characters, recipes, facts and random entries, *The Spice Necklace* is Ann Vanderhoof's follow-up to her national bestseller *An Embarrassment of Mangoes*. In her latest book Vanderhoof and her husband, both natives of Toronto, return to navigate the Caribbean by sailboat and she describes their culinary experiences along the way: from visiting tiny kitchens and family cook-ups to stops at fragrant markets where she discovers new spices and herbs, Vanderhoof links each food she encounters to its traditions, folklore and history.

### Book Lust to Go

by Nancy Pearl  
(Sasquatch Books, \$20.50)

Nancy Pearl's highly anticipated new work in the **Book Lust** series is recommended for any type of traveller – from armchair to jet-setter. In this next instalment of remarkable stories, Pearl guides us through Korea, Sweden, Afghanistan, Albania, Parma, Texas and Timbuktu, adding an interesting twist to fact and fiction in more than 120 destinations – both worldly and imagined. Whether it be fiction or non-fiction, a memoir, poetry or a touch of history, Pearl takes us on amazing literary globetrotting adventures – with no passport required!



## City Snap Guide: Buenos Aires

Imagine the neo-classical architecture and grand boulevards of Paris, the buzz of New York and the gusto of Rome. Add a sultry tango rhythm, a vibrant cosmopolitan vibe and the world's best beef. Welcome to Buenos Aires (BA), dubbed the Paris of South America.



Tango in the streets of Buenos Aires

Anita Draycott succumbs to the seductive charms of Argentina's capital

### The Evita trail

No visit to BA would be complete without an Evita pilgrimage. In real life Eva Duarte Perón was an actress from the provinces who came to BA and married General Juan Perón, who became president of Argentina. The **Evita Museum** in the trendy Palermo district portrays the country's 'femme fatale' as a humble, humanitarian heroine. Propaganda or not, it's worth a visit for the history lesson alone – and a glimpse of her glamorous wardrobe.

The Evita trail will also lead you to Recoleta, BA's poshest neighbourhood, where the remains of the former first lady lie in the **Familia Duarte mausoleum**. Strolling Recoleta's shady boulevards, lined with belle époque buildings, is reminiscent of a wander down Paris' Champs-Élysées, complete with well-coiffed *grandes dames* walking their equally well-groomed poodles.

### It takes two

If you wander around BA long enough you'll likely be smitten by all things tango. The dance was reputedly born at the turn of the 20th century in the Boca harbour district, where homesick dockworkers frequented the district's brothels. It wasn't until this rather lewd dance was taken to Paris in the early 1920s that it broke the social barriers and became "le craze."

If you're ready to strut your stuff, head to one of BA's many *milongas*. These tango halls often start with a lesson; then it's your chance to dip and dive with the local citizens (*porteños*).

If you'd rather sit back with a glass of champagne, feast on gourmet cuisine and take in one of the best choreographed shows in town, book a table at the intimate **El Cabaret** at Faena Hotel + Universe. Prepare to be mesmerized. In many ways the tango embodies the spirit of BA – the melancholy, the passion, the swagger and the seduction.

### Shop and sip

The San Telmo district, chockablock with cobblestone streets and colonial mansions, is a bohemian magnet for artists and designers – BA's version of New York's Greenwich Village. Try to visit on a Sunday when the central **Plaza Dorrego** turns into a flea market. The surrounding streets are brimming with antique shops and designer boutiques. No doubt you'll spot some *porteños* on the streets sipping something through a silver straw. This is *mate*, a strong tea made from dried leaves called yerba. Both the brew and the cup, usually made from a gourd embellished with silver, make unique souvenirs.

### Where's the beef?

Argentina arguably boasts the world's best beef. Whereas most North American cattle are pumped with hormones and bred to be marbled with fat, Argentina's cows are leaner, sweeter and chewier because they range freely on the vast pampas. The aroma of meat sizzling on an *asador* (wood fire) in the window lures carnivores into **Las Nazarenas**, where friendly staff will guide you through the various cuts of beef. The complimentary glass of *lequi* herbal liqueur is an effective digestif after your *Flintstones*-sized steak.

### GET AWAY

From BA it's less than a two-hour flight to Mendoza, one of the great wine capitals of the world in the Cuyo region of Argentina – a land blessed with 300 days of sun per year and some of the planet's most voluptuous and illustrious grapes. Have your hotel arrange for a car and driver (called a *remise*) for a tour of the nearby wineries along **Los Caminos del Viño** (wine roads). Most have dining rooms with commanding views of the spectacular snow-capped Andean peaks. **Bodega Ruca Malen** serves a fantastic five-course lunch with wine pairings.

# Egypt

Tarek Mousa takes us to the land of pharaohs and majestic pyramids, where ancient and modern civilizations meet



Egypt, home of the **Valley of the Kings** and the **Great Sphinx**, is also recognized as one of the cultural trendsetters of the Arabic-speaking world. Whether visiting this mystical land for the first time or returning to rediscover its vast beauty, there is much to see and do. The best way to ensure that your visit to Egypt is unforgettable is to work with agents who know the destination inside and out. With that directive in mind, we consulted **Tarek Mousa**, our On Location rep in **Cairo**, to ask him to share a little love about his homeland.

### *What is the best way to plan a vacation to Egypt?*

Egypt is a land of many different cultures and traditions, and can be a very challenging destination to visit. It's best to know who you are dealing with, so I would suggest that you book only through a trusted source. There are many phenomenal sights and experiences that await in Egypt, and in order to

get the best advice and end up with an experience of a lifetime, I recommend booking with a travel specialist who really knows the country.

One of the best ways to discover the wonders of **Upper Egypt** is to take a cruise down the **Nile**, tracing Egypt's history by following the course of the river. Let our team of guides take you on a fascinating journey through history, unveiling a new chapter with each tomb painting or ancient wall relief.

Cairo, our capital city, is a destination unto itself: A teeming metropolis full of intriguing contrasts – old and new; Western and Eastern; modern hotels next to traditional bazaars and coffee shops; 4,000-year-old pyramids and 19th-century palaces. The **Egyptian Museum of Antiquities** houses the world's greatest collection of Pharaonic treasures, including 12 rooms filled with the golden treasures of the boy king Tutankhamen. A tour of the **Citadel**, the massive stone fortress built in the

12th century, is a must, as well as a visit to the **Mosque of Sayyidna al-Hussein**, considered one of the most sacred Islamic sites in all of Egypt.

### *What are the trends and new things to experience in Egypt?*

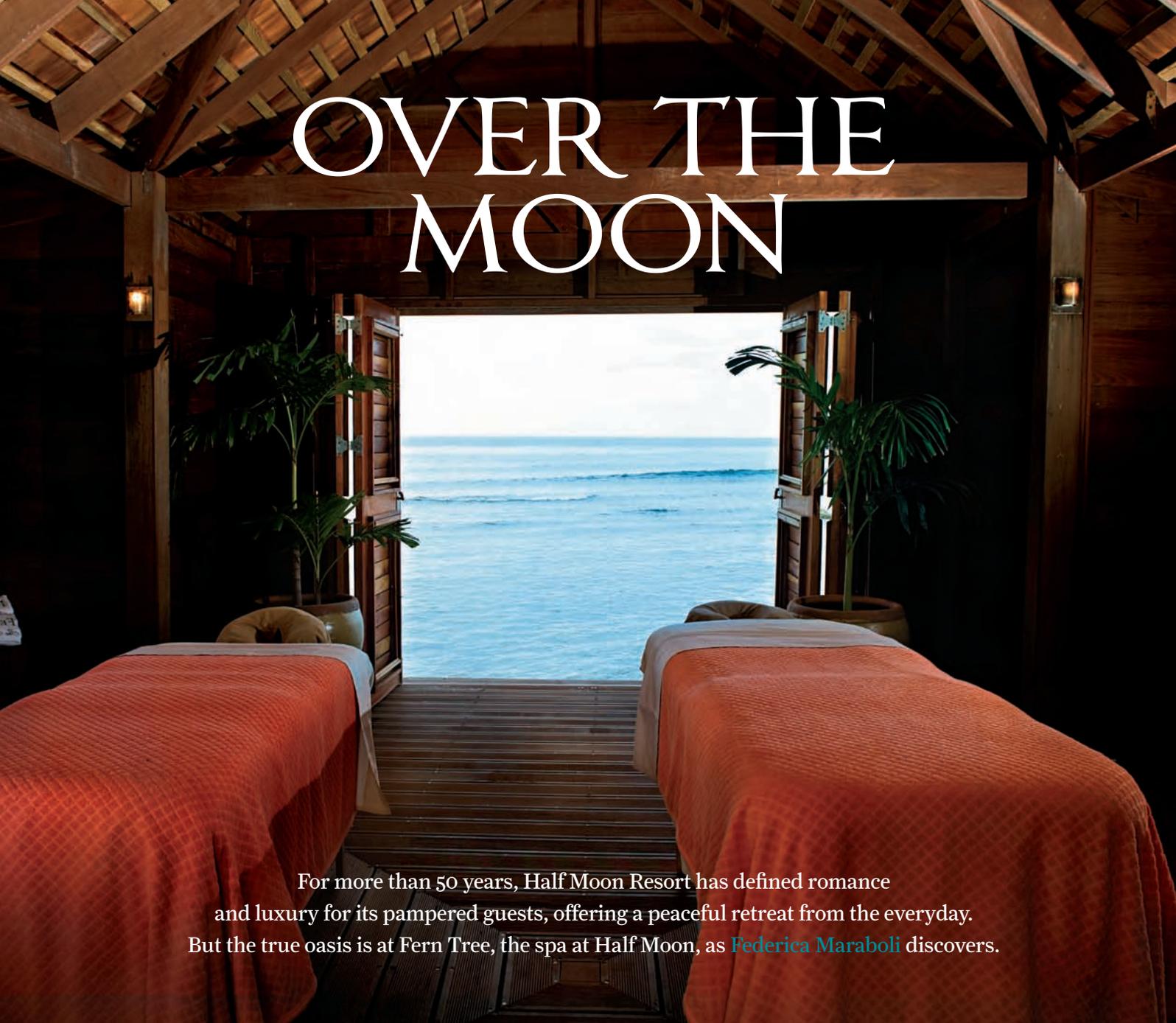
Anyone returning to Egypt will likely want to explore such new areas as the **Western Desert** – in particular the **Siwa Oasis**. Considered at one time to be one of the most inaccessible oases in all of Egypt, Siwa is a beautiful desert paradise, ideal for visitors who are looking for a little adventure but still want to enjoy being pampered. The area offers two saltwater lakes and soothing mineral springs. And those looking for a little history and archaeology will enjoy the **Temple of Amun**, where they can walk in the footsteps of Alexander the Great and visit the spot where he consulted the famous Oracle of Amun. Some archaeologists believe Alexander was buried here, though this theory remains a hotly contested issue.

The **Red Sea Coast** is one of the fastest developing areas for travellers to Egypt, offering fabulous opportunities for a more active holiday that includes diving and snorkelling in warm coral-filled waters, and spectacular desert safaris by Jeep or camel. Also popular are the spas along the **Red Sea** that offer world-class services and unique treatments.

### *What is the most exciting vacation package you have put together?*

Last year I had the pleasure of organizing an unforgettable event for 100 guests who wanted to have a private dinner in a tent at the **Great Pyramid of Giza**. We arrived after dark to a dimly lit tent; only after everyone was seated were the pyramids bathed in light. It was spectacular to be able to dine next to one of the **Seven Wonders of the Ancient World** (and, by the way, the only one that remains largely intact)... it was a truly awe-inspiring experience and available only in Egypt! ▣

# OVER THE MOON



For more than 50 years, Half Moon Resort has defined romance and luxury for its pampered guests, offering a peaceful retreat from the everyday. But the true oasis is at Fern Tree, the spa at Half Moon, as [Federica Maraboli](#) discovers.

**TIME SHIFTS GEARS** and slows down as soon as our car turns into the long driveway that leads to **Half Moon Resort**. As the road retreats behind us I am immediately transported into another world: a rarified atmosphere where majestic palm trees and lush tropical foliage form a cool canopy from the late afternoon sun. Twin white-washed gazebos flank wrought-iron gates that glide open while the attendant waves us through with a genteel nod of the head and a warm Jamaican smile. I gaze at thick vines hanging from the trees, an array of beautiful flowers and meticulously manicured gardens as our driver pulls around the circular drive to the main building, a stately mix of colonial and

plantation-style architecture. We are welcomed warmly; glasses of chilled punch are graciously proffered, and only then do I become aware of the quietness of this place – just the sounds of a gently trickling fountain, the low murmur of voices and the outdoor wildlife that announces itself as the sun begins to set. “This is lovely,” I say to our bellman as he leads us to our suite. He responds demurely, yet with an air of certainty: “A lovely evening for a lovely lady.” My first impression augurs well, indeed.

Leaving behind a hectic, non-stop work schedule, the plan for the next few days is to focus on my well-being: relaxing and rejuvenating mind, body and soul. The sprawling property – it covers

400 acres – offers plenty of opportunity to do just that: you can play golf or tennis, swim with dolphins, ride horses at the equestrian centre or, if you feel comfortable with British rules of the road, borrow a bike and ride the paths to see the original cottages and the newer villas, including the ones where Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles stayed.

But the jewel at Half Moon is its spa, the **Fern Tree**, where my partner and I will spend several hours and are about to enjoy our first couples massage. Covering 68,000 square feet, the spa’s expanse is well hidden by the surrounding vegetation and the only part visible from the road is the double-door entrance. Every detail of Fern Tree has been carefully considered,



from its relationship to the land and the organic design, to the selection of building materials and furniture used throughout. The transition from indoor to outdoor space is seamless, each sharing natural elements of water, stone, hardwoods and tropical flora. In keeping with its philosophy, the spa reflects respect for the earth and history, and the knowledge that has been handed down through generations. As an example, this morning I notice signs written in an unfamiliar language that mark each treatment room; I'm told they are phrases in **Taino**, a nod to the island's original inhabitants who pre-date Columbus' discovery of **Jamaica**. What's more noticeable is the pervading sense of calm that hasn't left me since the moment I arrived at the resort.

Robes donned, we are led outside, past the spa suites and down a dock that branches out toward two private cabanas at either end, perched over the **Caribbean**. Louvered wooden double doors line three sides, though for our privacy only the ones that overlook the azure sea are left open, letting in a gentle breeze as the water laps against the shore beneath us. My masseuse, Anne, offers a choice of scented oils and then quietly begins to knead the stress from my muscles. I focus on my breathing, trying to release all thoughts until my mind begins to quiet, as I do when meditating. This is my time... I can think later but this hour is a gift to myself. Between Anne's healing touch and the lull of the waves I nearly fall asleep and, before I know it, she is whispering that our time is up.

The next day I return to the spa to meet Stella Gray, the Fern Tree's 'spa elder'. The concept of the spa elder is unique to Jamaica and her role is part healer, part herbalist and guide. Drawing on her years of cultivated wisdom and experience, Stella creates custom programs, based on consultations with guests, that incorporate the old and new: everything from traditional Jamaican remedies to massage and energy work. A native of the island, Stella speaks patois, which wouldn't seem odd if she weren't of English and Scottish descent. She certainly has cred; her father's family has lived on the island since 1681, she grew up among horticulturalists and has been with Half Moon for 40 years, and she was the creator of the original spa. She also embodies the spirit of Fern Tree: calm, warm, caring. Following our meeting I indulge in a traditional Jamaican bush bath, which promises to "aid in cleansing and revitalization while relaxing the mind and spirit." Sounds perfect. Freshly picked herbs from the spa garden and roots, leaves and fruit from the surrounding trees and plants are wrapped in a calico pouch and steeped in hot water as a tea, and then the whole concoction is added to the bath water. I could get used to this. Best part is, they include a gift of local herbs and tell you how to recreate the experience at home. "My personal goal is for guests to be able to relive their experience here and maintain good health after they've left," says Stella. "I don't want people to feel good only while they are here; I want them to focus on things they can do at home to carry on the process of nurturing themselves and their well-being."

The spa menu is extensive, with some treatments created or conducted by Stella using indigenous ingredients and botanicals. Each therapy begins and ends with a 'spa welcome and departure ritual' and all signature treatments include a luxurious footbath of Jamaican cerasee to symbolically end the day and remove stress. Be warned: it will be difficult to choose from the inspired therapies on offer; names like 'Jamaican Allspice Sugar Scrub', 'Caribbean Sea Cocoon' or 'Ocean Waves Reiki' sound only half as good as their application.

After my bath, I follow the long wooden path out to the garden and find my way to the **Labyrinth**, a meditation maze tucked away in a private corner, to "centre the mind." A small stone at the entrance carries instructions on letting go of stress and negative emotions, something I could definitely use! Taking a deep breath,

I follow the short maze and concentrate on the ritual. While it wasn't overly cathartic, I was beginning to feel a deeper sense of calm – and even hope – simply from being more present in the moment. All this time to relax and focus on the positive, rather than being stuck in the erratic cycle of everyday life, was starting to pay off.

There was one more thing I had on my to-do list: yoga. In the early morning the day before my departure, I met Gabby, the resident yoga instructor, for a guided session. The yoga pavilion on the spa grounds was undergoing renovations so our small group made its way to the same cabana where I enjoyed my outdoor massage just days before. Once again, the doors looking out on the sea were left open and throughout our downward dogs and sun salutations we watched a lone seagull fish for its breakfast. Maybe it was the culmination of several days of restorative calm, maybe it was something in the yoga poses or maybe it was Gabby's prayer from the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad** at the end of our class, but something inside me was released. As I stepped out into the morning sun I saw my partner waiting for me at the end of the dock. It was nice that he had come to get me, and such a small gesture filled me with happiness. Taking my hand in his, he asked me how it went. I choked up and through my tears all I could muster in response was, "really good." It was enough. He understood. ▣

## GETTING THERE

WestJet flies direct to Montego Bay from Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary and Vancouver. [www.westjet.com](http://www.westjet.com)

## PRAYER FROM THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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May peace be unto all  
May fullness be unto all  
May prosperity be unto all

May all be happy  
May all be free from disabilities  
May all look to the good of others  
May none suffer from sorrow

Lead me from the unreal to the real  
From the darkness to the light  
From mortality to immortality

Peace, Peace, Peace.



# The evolution of the all-inclusive resort

*From humble beginnings, the all-inclusive concept has evolved into one of the most popular vacation options today. Now it's ready for the next stage of evolution.*

LIZ SCULL

Who invented the all-inclusive resort vacation? When did it all begin? There are many theories about who actually came up with the concept of the all-inclusive vacation. The original idea can be traced back to the 19th century, when the innovation of the 'American Plan' was developed, which included three meals per day. Some say the modern all-inclusive came about during the early 20th century, when hotel owners in popular U.S. resort areas, such as the Catskills in New York State, charged a rate that included accommodation, all meals, entertainment and activities.

Others claim the concept was pioneered by Jamaican resort chains back in the 1970s when there was much unrest on the island. It was a way to increase the number of tourists to Jamaica, since they provided one of the country's major sources of income. The all-inclusive created a safe haven where guests could experience a hassle-free vacation without ever having to leave the resort.

Still others say that Club Med was the first to introduce the all-inclusive concept in 1950, when Belgian former water polo champion Gérard Blitz opened the original Club Med resort on the Spanish island of Mallorca. Guests were housed in unlit straw huts on the beach and shared communal washing facilities. Regardless of who came up with the concept, the all-inclusive industry is hugely successful today.

Over the years many resorts and hotel chains have climbed aboard the all-inclusive bandwagon to satisfy the budget-minded



traveller's need for affordable vacations. Soon, all-inclusive packages were considered mainstream, and today they include accommodation, all meals, all alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, selected sports like tennis, sailing and windsurfing, nightly entertainment, plus tips and taxes, all for one fixed price. Tailored programs are also popular, catering to specific vacation interests like 'adults only' or for sports enthusiasts. Others are geared to families, specifically designed with the enjoyment of both parents and children in mind. Some feature a 'Kids Stay, Play & Eat Free' program that offers supervised children's clubs with activities, while parents can relax on the beach or by the pool knowing their kids are safe and well looked after. There are 'golf included' vacations where you can be out on the green teeing off every day of your holiday, or if you are into scuba diving, there are resorts that include that activity, as well.

Now, the next evolution of the all-inclusive resort is on the horizon: today's traveller is looking for a more luxurious property with superior amenities. Tastes and expectations are now elevated as guests move away from low-cost vacations toward more upscale experiences that still offer the all-inclusive concept. Hoteliers are successfully upgrading their properties and image to equate all-inclusive with luxury, having placed themselves in head-to-head competition with the most luxurious of resorts. Changes include a greater focus on the quality of cuisine, with

increased à la carte dining options, and some properties are even bringing in well-known celebrity chefs like **Sergei Arola** at the **Royal Hideaway Playacar**. You'll find a number of bars that open early and stay open late, with some now offering such premium brands as Grey Goose vodka or – as at the **Agavero Tequila Lounge** at **Karisma Azul Beach Hotel** in **Mexico** – more than 30 specialty tequilas. Of course, activities remain an important part of any holiday and today there is an almost unlimited number of options to choose from geared to all ages. Additionally, the majority of all-inclusive resorts now have luxurious spas on the premises, though treatments are usually at an additional cost.

If you think that all-inclusive resorts are all the same – large and sprawling properties with high occupancies – you may be surprised to find a range of styles from charming boutique hideaways right up to large prestigious resorts. In fact, seven of the top 25 Caribbean resorts in *Conde Nast's* Reader's Choice Awards for 2010 are all-inclusive properties. Even traditional luxury resorts are catching on and now offer all-inclusive package options.

All this change has merely added more choice to the world of all-inclusives. In today's market, there is an all-inclusive vacation that is sure to meet every budget, style and need. ▣

## TOP 10 LUXURY ALL- INCLUSIVE RESORTS

- 1 **Riviera Maya** El Dorado Royale, a Spa Resort by Karisma
- 2 **Punta Cana** Majestic Elegance Punta Cana
- 3 **Holguin** Paradisus Rio de Oro
- 4 **Barbados** Almond Beach Village
- 5 **Turks & Caicos** Beaches Turks & Caicos
- 6 **Jamaica** Half Moon Resort
- 7 **Nassau** Sandals Royal Bahamian
- 8 **Costa Rica** Paradisus Playa Conchal
- 9 **St. Kitts** St. Kitts Marriott Resort
- 10 **Mexico** Club Med Ixtapa Pacific

**THE SERENE LANDMASSES** of Guadeloupe form what is known as a geological basin, creating some of the world's best diving conditions. Virtually all species of coral fish can be seen within this healthy marine landscape. Every form of diving is carried out here and all levels of ability encouraged, from novice to veteran. The sheer number of marine outfitters specializing in the diving experience is testament to the popularity of the sport throughout Guadeloupe.

Atlantic trade winds blowing off the African continent once brought the majority of European explorers directly into a Caribbean passage between the islands of **Dominica** and Guadeloupe. Columbus named these outcroppings after the Virgin Mary to whom he had prayed during his 1493 voyage and a Spanish monastery (Santa Maria de Guadalupe). Today, Guadeloupe presents a unique combination to visitors – an amazing display of flora and fauna without the violence, crime and cruise ship crowds some Caribbean islands suffer from.

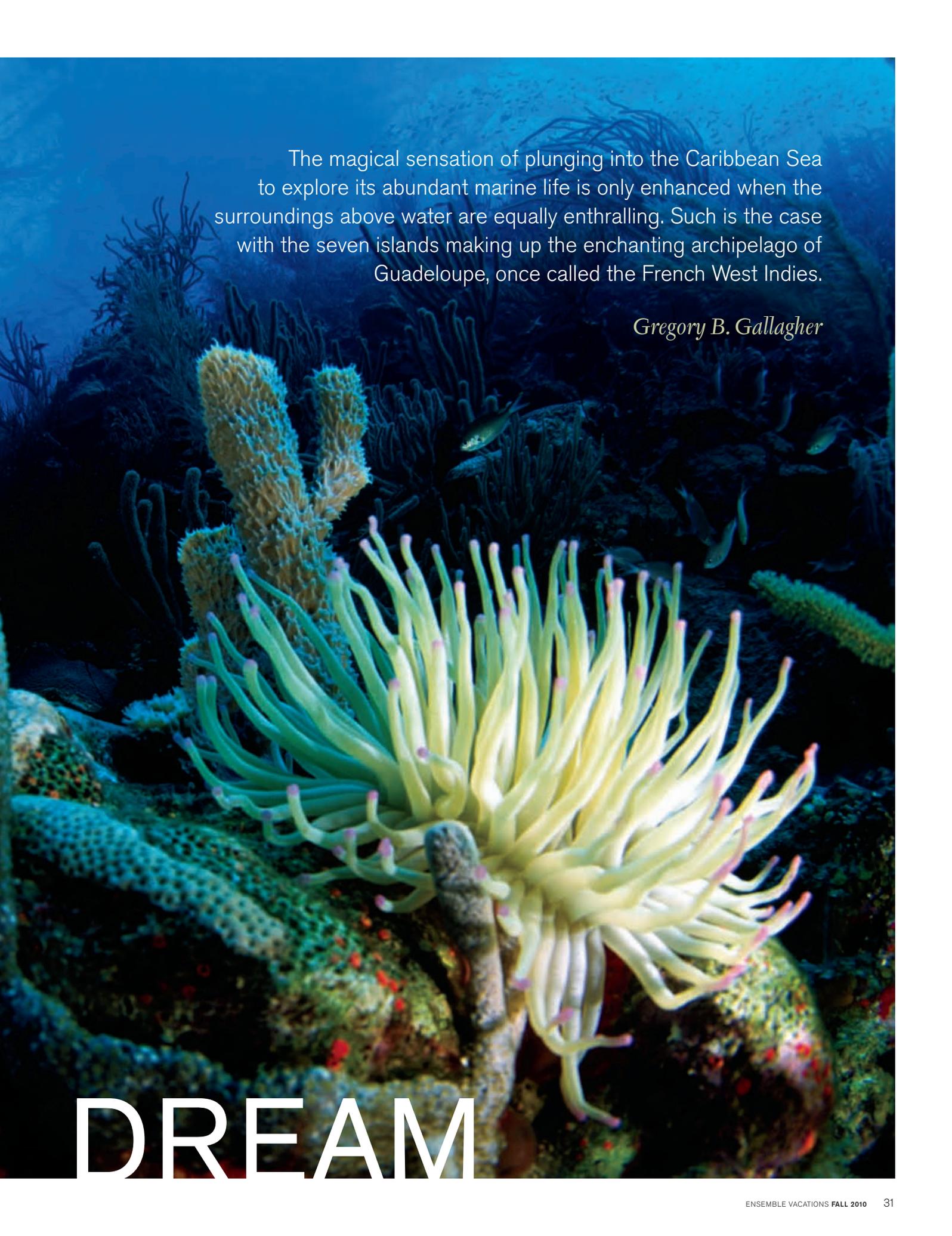
This friendly French-speaking territory consists of the large twin islands of **Basse-Terre** and **Grande-Terre**, shaped like the wings of a butterfly, and five 'dependent islands' which include **Marie-Galante**, **Les Saintes**, **La Désirade**, **St. Barthélemy** and the northern three-fifths of **Saint Martin**.

English and Creole are widely spoken here, and for those wishing to practise their French, this is one of the friendliest locales on the planet to experiment. The fun begins when you utter a simple "bonjour." The locals are quick to laugh, and before long visitors are able to obtain information, arrange services and forge easy friendships.

All international flights land on the island of Grande-Terre, the flatter and drier of the two main islands. After disembarking a flight at **Pôles Caraïbes Airport**, visitors experience a cultural baptism beginning with the lively singsong Creole patois spoken by locals and continuing with a tapestry of influences including African *gwo ka* street drummers, hip New York-style nightclubs in towns like **Le Gosier** and **Sainte-Anne** and European standards at resorts like **Club Med** or **Des Hôtels et des Îles**.



# A DIVER'S

An underwater photograph of a vibrant coral reef. In the foreground, a large, pale yellow sea anemone with numerous long, thin tentacles is the central focus. The background is filled with various types of coral, including branching and columnar varieties, and several small fish swimming in the blue water.

The magical sensation of plunging into the Caribbean Sea to explore its abundant marine life is only enhanced when the surroundings above water are equally enthralling. Such is the case with the seven islands making up the enchanting archipelago of Guadeloupe, once called the French West Indies.

*Gregory B. Gallagher*

DREAM

## GRANDE-TERRE

If diving is your passion, go no farther than the northern tip of Grande-Terre, where you will find like-minded devotees. **Anse-Bertrand** is the beach community where many scuba enthusiasts gather, with dive schools and convivial accommodations offered at reasonable rates throughout the year. **Eden Plongée** ([www.edenplongee.fr](http://www.edenplongee.fr)) has been providing a wide array of services to divers and their families for many years, and is recommended by the **Guadeloupe National Park**. A little farther up the coast are the dramatic 200-foot cliffs of **Pointe de la Grande Vigie**, from which you can see the nearby islands of **La Désirade** and **Montserrat**.

To prepare to explore this large island, book accommodations at **La Toubana Hotel and Spa** in **Sainte-Anne**. A hillside perch with its own beach, it is perfectly located with a panoramic view of the sea and 32 comfortable bungalows, plus a homestyle restaurant that allows for that deep level of Caribbean relaxation to take over one's body, mind and spirit.

## BASSE-TERRE

Basse-Terre Island meanwhile, where the sleeping volcano **Soufrière** stands silently over **Pigeon Island**, is what legendary marine explorer Jacques Cousteau called "the most pristine underwater environment on the planet." As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of this underwater explorer's birth ([www.oceaninspiration.net](http://www.oceaninspiration.net)), it is worth noting he placed Guadeloupe among the world's top 10 diving destinations.

The western coast, known as **Côte-sous-le-vent**, is home to hidden marine treasures covering more than 30 continuous miles of coral environment, featuring a score of sunken warships and their resident marine life. The **Jacques Cousteau Marine Reserve**, which is a protected non-fishing zone and part of the Guadeloupe National Park, includes the tiny Pigeon Islets and the waters off **Malendure Beach**, where hot springs create a consistently warm (26°–28° C throughout the year) underwater feast for marine life and a magnet for snorkellers, scuba divers and even non-divers touring in glass-bottom boats.

The centre of activities is the **Centre international de plongée** ([www.cip-guadeloupe.com](http://www.cip-guadeloupe.com)) in the town of **Bouillante**, which offers equipment rentals, tours, night dives and even a school with PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) International certification. If you continue up the west coast, the quaint seaside villages of **Pointe-Noire**, **Deshaises** and **Sainte-Rose** will ensure you return a second time to Guadeloupe. This entire coast is a diver's dream, but also a well-kept secret for those seeking an exotic retreat; for accompanying family members who are not divers, the country offers a full menu of other activities and sights.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP  
Îles des Saintes;  
Carbet Falls;  
four-eye butterflyfish;  
old truck in Basse-Terre.



## DIVING ALTERNATIVES

Hiking, walking, or camping near the Soufrière volcano is arguably the most popular activity after diving. The road to the volcano begins north of **Saint-Claude**, accessed from the capital city of Basse-Terre along the southern coast road. The **Carbet River** begins atop the volcano, and along its descent produces **Carbet Falls**, truly one of Guadeloupe's gems. Remaining the same since Christopher Columbus revelled at its sight, these stunning falls are not to be missed.

The pathway network for hikers, hugging the highest areas of Guadeloupe's 'second island', and is nothing short of a marvel. You can go for a few hours or as long as seven days of overnight camping and hiking, with rustic cabins dotted along the way for travellers' use and areas to pitch a tent.

**La Grivelière** ([www.vertevallee-guadeloupe.com](http://www.vertevallee-guadeloupe.com)) is an ecological attraction worth the effort to explore. A heritage coffee plantation and processing plant located inside the Guadeloupe National Park rainforest in **La Vallée de la Grande Rivière**, this spectacular rainforest facility demonstrates how to mix agrotourism, ecotourism and entrepreneurship into a successful tourist attraction. The onsite restaurant makes visitors feel immediately at home, with a full menu of fresh local cuisine and unique artisan goodies (don't miss the coffee digestif).

## MARIE-GALANTE

A tantalizing mélange of European gastronomy mixes effectively with garden produce, Creole classics and a steady flow of fresh seafood to provide visitors with more than a few excellent culinary reasons to travel to Guadeloupe. After all, no matter what travellers do during their stay, at a certain point we all agree on one very important item: food. So, whether for divers actively pursuing underwater explorations or family members discovering the many attractions to be found on shore, the cuisine of this place matters.

**Marie-Galante Island** is a prime example. A 45-minute ferry ride from the main city of **Pointe-à-Pitre** delivers visitors to an easier, slower-paced community. After disembarking, check in with Madame Pierre Marie Joseph at **Chez JoJo's** restaurant. The décor is basic, but the Creole plate is memorable and inexpensive. Located on **Perle à Deshaies Beach** in the main town of Grand-Bourg, locals and visitors alike savour classic fresh seafood literally minutes after being harvested. Wash down the food with the local Ti'Punch and ask about diving with David at **Ti'Bulles** ([www.tibulles-plongee.com](http://www.tibulles-plongee.com)).

## LAST DIVE OF THE DAY

Whether you're a novice snorkeller, a veteran scuba diver or a landlubber, these islands of Guadeloupe are a dream vacation destination. Packaged with a boisterous mix of *gwo ka* music, *biguine* dance styles and other colourful Creole traditions, these captivating islands provide an opportunity for all tastes, budgets and philosophies to enjoy this stunning Caribbean location. So, dive in and enjoy what the locals call **Karukera**: Isle of Beautiful Waters. ▣

# MAPA DE LA COLONIA

del  
SACRAMENTO  
1762.



- |                                |                                 |                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Puerto del Puente Levantado | K. BARRIO DE LA RITA            | V. GUARDIA PEREGRINA  |
| B. BALUARTE DE LA BANDERA      | L. Colegio de San Francisco     | X. MAESTRANZAS        |
| C. Salida en caso de Sitio     | M. Capilla de San Antonio       | Y. HOSPITAL           |
| D. Baluarte de San Juan        | N. Capilla de San Pedro         | Z. BARRIO DE LA VANA  |
| E. Salidas y Sitios            | O. RETAZO ABTIENGA              | a. ALM. de GUERRA     |
| F. Baluarte del CARMEN         | P. SALIDA de Comunicacion       | e. ALM. de VORN SUB   |
| G. SALIDA de Sitios            | Q. BAL. S <sup>ta</sup> MIGUELS | i. Capilla de la RITA |
| H. PUERTA EMBARCO              | R. Cuartiles de la VANA         | o. Colegio Jesuitico  |
| I. BALUARTE TABOR              | S. IGLESIA DE SAN JUAN          | u. Cap. de la CONCIER |
| J. CASAS de los Señores        | T. CASA del GOB.                | y. Pta. de ARMAS      |





# A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

*From bustling Buenos Aires, Uruguay's Colonia del Sacramento is just a quick boat ride across the Rio de la Plata, but the town proves to be everything her neighbouring sister is not: pristine, charming and seductively languorous.*

NANCY WIGSTON

"You're going to Uruguay?!" The excitement sang in my daughter's e-mail. My spontaneous decision to travel from Buenos Aires to the exotic-sounding small country sandwiched between Argentina and Brazil had caught her by surprise. Frankly, I am just as surprised. Uruguay? It had never entered my mind.

But that was before I met an exuberant Uruguayan-Canadian, my seatmate on the Air Canada flight from Toronto to Buenos Aires. As we chatted about our travels, family and children, we found we shared much in common, so when she urged me to visit her new beach house – it was nearly finished – I accepted at once. After all, I might never be here again.

Wrong. I liked Uruguay so much I went twice, spending one day in town and one day at the beach. Uruguay is just an hour from Buenos Aires, via a very fast boat called a **Buquebus** (there are regular ferries, too). Day-trippers fall in love with the 1680 colonial Portuguese town of **Colonia del Sacramento**, a preserved historical gem and UNESCO World Heritage Site. It shares with Argentina a freshwater sea – actually a river – the **Rio de la Plata**.

Both **Colonia** and **BA** (their respective nicknames) are alluring winter destinations for us northerners. These below-the-equator charmers have radically different personalities: one laidback and serene, the other, caffeinated and sexy – as close and yet as different as any two sisters.

My friend's contractor was, naturally, delayed – this is a truth universally acknowledged – so the beach house wasn't quite ready. My first visit to Uruguay, then, was spent in seductive Colonia. I wandered cobblestone streets with enchanting names like **'The Street of Sighs'**. Parked here and there were 1940s- or '50s-era vehicles known locally as *cachillas*. People used to scour the Uruguayan countryside for these pristine old cars and trucks; today, many have become permanent homes for flower displays or advertisements for cafés and restaurants.

We enter the old town by passing over the **1745 drawbridge**, designed to protect the walled town. Seems a drawbridge was once something of a necessity, according to the smiling Spanish-speaking folks at the **Info Turismo** near the **City Gate**. Armed with handfuls of colourful leaflets, I soon learn that things were not always as peaceful here as on this sunny afternoon. Not only do Uruguay and Argentina share the Rio de la Plata, they also share a long and turbulent history. Pretty Colonia del Sacramento was founded as a fortified base from which to hustle contraband through the warren-like isles of the Rio de la Plata, a practice that ignited more than a century of battles, as Portugal and Spain vied over what the tourist brochures call,





in a nicely mythological touch, “the apple of discord.”

Colonia’s zigzagging streets open, puzzle-like, onto small plazas, lined with buildings that date as far back as Portuguese times. “Decompress,” they seem to say. “Relax.” Fountains of purple and pink bougainvillea pour over stone cottages; gracious old restaurants celebrate the three-hour lunch. I fall into conversation with a group of American opera lovers in town for the day. We adjourn to a restaurant where the service is attentive and the mood languid, as dish after glorious dish (local greens, mussels, lamb) appears in a room romantic with greenery. French doors open onto a courtyard. As a favour to one of the women, I volunteer to mail a postcard (from Uruguay!) to her granddaughter; this involves first changing money and then finding the post office. By the time I return almost an hour later, the sweets are only just beginning to arrive.

Open-air cafés attract both tourists and locals, while artisans’ shops sell designer woollens that make wonderful souvenirs. In the **Plaza Mayor**, there is the **Portuguese Museum**. The **Spanish Museum** is located somewhat farther from the town centre, perhaps in a diplomatic gesture. The Street of Sighs runs down to the water, its central gutter and cobblestone paving evidence that it was built by the Portuguese. Among other oddities, the town boasts a bullfighting ring – last used in 1912 – as well as South America’s only jai alai court.

The 1994 film *I Don’t Want to Talk About It*, was shot on location here: the ‘fable’ as director Maria Luisa Bemberg called it, starred actor Marcello Mastroianni as an aging roué in love with a young dwarf. It’s easy to imagine the handsome Italian wandering about Colonia in his white linen suit, slightly mad, wholly charming.

Colonia sometimes feels like an open-air museum, with its charms preserved in time. After the Spanish established the trading hub of **Montevideo** in 1726, farther up the coast, Colonia settled into a new role: the town that time forgot. Today, says Buenos Aires tour operator Salito Gutt, “Colonia is a small, relaxed town where people leave their cars and the doors to their houses unlocked. For those of us who live in a crazy city like Buenos Aires, these things are amazing.”

Despite such compliments, a sibling-like rivalry persists between the town and city. “They hate us because we have better beaches,” my Uruguayan pal informs me. When I repeat this to

a *porteño* (Buenos Aires native), he laughs. “It’s true!”

Argentineans have long treated Uruguay as a holiday playground when times are good. The upscale beach resort, **Punta del Este**, is almost exclusively the product of wealthy, yacht-owning Argentineans’ cravings for a sun and sand getaway, although the European jet-set has recently discovered its charms.

Like much of South America, Uruguay was a 19th-century haven for a hodge-podge of European immigrants: English, Swiss and Basque, among others. Hence place names like **Nueva Helvecia** (New Switzerland) and the murals in the small city of **Rosario** that illustrate Basque glories of yesteryear.

Older cultures also endure, if only symbolically. Indigenous peoples are celebrated in figures like the Indian medicine man who appears at carnival time; Africans in the wide variety of Afro-Uruguayan drums. Colonia, with a population of about 21,000, boasts seven museums, one of which is devoted entirely to the art of tiles.

When spring (late November temperatures in BA rocket to uncomfortable highs, I flee the big city again and hop on a Buquebus to Uruguay for the second time. By now, the beach house is ready! My friend picks me up at the dock and after a quick steak lunch at her cousin’s restaurant on Colonia’s main street, we head for the water.

Driving anywhere in South America is a heart-in-your-mouth adventure and Uruguay, despite its flat roads, is no exception. It’s also an excellent way to see the pampas, where enterprising Uruguayans are opening new ranch-themed B&Bs.

At last, there it is: a small beach house near the resort of **Colonia Suiza Britopolis**, where all is green and bucolic. Slowing down for a cow crossing sign, we see a cow duly crossing, right on cue, leaving the rest of her herd grazing by the roadside. We are now in the heart of the **King’s Acres**, an area named for vanished times when the monarch’s horses roamed here.

Tripping down to the water through a heavenly-smelling eucalyptus forest, we come to a vast, empty beach, white sand everywhere you look. As we spread out our picnic of specialties that reflect the country’s multicultural heritage – wine (Portugal, Spain), marmalade (England) and fabulous cheeses (Switzerland) – we are content. The river is cool, shallow and refreshing beyond description. If only the boat back to Buenos Aires weren’t departing, we could remain here forever. ▣



*With its dangerous reputation a thing of the past, this South American giant is just awakening to its tourism potential and, as Christopher P. Baker discovers, there's truth in the country's travel motto:*

“Come to Colombia.  
The only risk is  
wanting to stay.”



# CAPTIVATING COLOMBIA

**WHEN I SAW THE INVITATION**, I did a double-take. Wasn't Colombia supposed to be one of the world's most dangerous places? Yet the Colombian Tourism Board was inviting me down for 10 days with a promise that kidnappings and guerrilla conflict are yesterday's news.

My research seemed to back it up. Most of the country is now safe thanks to a brass-knuckle crackdown initiated a decade ago. Word is getting out. Tourism is booming. The cruise ships have returned to swashbuckling **Cartagena**. And budget airlines JetBlue and Spirit recently expanded their service, adding to dozens of direct flights by major airlines from U.S. and Canadian gateways.

So, with some lingering doubts and trepidation, I flew down to Bogotá and... bingo! *I fell in love and wanted to stay.*

Geographically stunning, ecologically astounding and culturally vibrant sum it up. A cornucopia of natural wonders side by side with sleepy colonial villages and vibrant cosmopolitan cities, **Colombia** – a country the size of California and Texas combined – is a South American giant just awakening to its vast potential. To see it in barely more than a week, I decided to divide my time between **Bogotá**, **San Agustín** and **Cartagena**.

From above, the salient physical feature was of towering mountains. Below, snow-capped Andean peaks were beaded with lakes sparkling like Colombian emeralds. In the distance, the **Amazon** jungle unfurled beyond the horizon in an endless carpet of velvety green. Then, our plane touched down and with swift efficiency I found myself caught up in the modern

maelstrom of Bogotá, Colombia's cosmopolitan capital.

Thank goodness I'd packed some warm clothing. Sure, I was in the tropics. But Bogotá basks in a deliciously temperate climate at an elevation of almost 8,700 feet.

Founded in 1538, the city became one of the main centres of Spanish colonial power. The timeworn **La Candelaria** district, still the seat of political power, proved chock-full of historic buildings, quaint plazas and eclectic museums. The old quarter's lingering dignity is enhanced by an earthy bohemian quality that I savoured while sipping hot chocolate and *aguardiente* (a popular anise-flavoured liquor) at sidewalk cafés.

Although Christopher Columbus never set eyes on the land that today bears his name, his arrival in the Americas in 1492



unleashed an army of conquistadores on a quest for a fabled city of gold. Colombia's Quimbaya people perfected goldsmithing to a degree that not even Peru's Incas could match. The proof is buried in the vaults of Bogotá's world-class **Museo del Oro**. The world's largest gold museum held me spellbound with its jaw-dropping pre-Columbian relics. Worth the price of admission alone, the *balsa muisca* (Muisca raft) gave evidence that El Dorado (the golden one) was real: the 10-inch-long raft of filigreed gold shows a *cacique* (chieftain) and 12 attendants performing an initiation ceremony that eventually gave rise to the legend.

My accommodation in Bogotá – the elegant old-world **Hotel Casa Dann Carlton** – gave a foretaste of another aspect I hadn't expected: Colombia has first-rate hotels and an exciting restaurant scene. I'd anticipated trendy nightclubs and midnight-to-dawn marathons of sizzling salsa. I didn't think, though, that my revels would take place aboard a *chiva rumbera* – a dolled-up old bus turned party-on-wheels. It was great fun and wholly Colombian, with free-flowing rum and live onboard music to which to dance infectious *champeta* and *vallenato*.

On day three I flew south to **Neiva** and headed for the **Tatacoa desert**. Go figure! Just five degrees north of the equator, I was staring up at 20-foot-tall cacti probing the sky. The eerie landscape was made more surreal by the proximity of the **Nevado de Huila volcano**, its peak glistening with snow, as a backdrop. Colombia's landscapes are kaleidoscopic. Soon I was clawing up into the **Andean foothills**. Armed soldiers were

posted along the highway every few miles. At first I found it unsettling but then realized such policing is what permits you to drive the length and breadth of this stunningly beautiful country while singing along to Shakira.

Come dusk I arrived in San Agustín, one of a thousand time-warp villages that dot Colombia's highways. Women sewing lacy *polleras* (skirts) and men wearing *sombreros vueltiaos* (straw hats) made the living past almost cinematic. Reason enough to visit. But I was here to view something altogether more ancient. After chilling out the previous night at a simple hacienda, I mounted a horse and set out with local guide Davido Pérez to visit ancient tombs guarded by sculptured stone statues: massive, solemn, big-eyed, with large scowling mouths. About



500 monolithic statues and tombs have been discovered. Most are enshrined within the Parque Arqueológico de San Agustín, a UNESCO World Heritage Site covering 250 square miles. Amazingly, archaeologists know nothing about the culture that made them.

When it comes to mystery, sunwashed Cartagena – my final stop – supplies it in spades. Memories came streaming back from history books as I strolled the narrow streets once roamed by conquistadores. Enclosed within thick fortress walls, Colombia’s centuries-old Caribbean crown jewel is a patchwork quilt of cobbled plazas lined with cathedrals and convents. Bougainvillea spills over ancient mansions painted in guava, papaya, tangerine and other soft tropical colours.

Steeped in sentimental, sultry allure, Cartagena seemed like something out of a fairy tale. Except it was so tangibly real, teeming with endearing characters, not the least of whom were the stately *palenqueras* – Afro-Caribbean women clad in traditional garb in Crayola colours. Balancing fruit baskets atop their heads, they were happy (for a fee) to ham it up for my camera.

Emerging onto **Plaza Santo Domingo**, I smiled at a voluptuous nude reclining in front of an imposing colonial church by celebrated Colombian artist Fernando Botero. The cheeky statue seemed to scream “Don’t touch me there!” So I did. As do thousands of Colombians daily. They believe that Botero’s sculptures bring good fortune. Thus, they’ve fondled her bronze breasts for good luck, love and sex so much that now her nipples shine. Alas, to no avail. I slept alone.

Zen-inspired urban minimalism sums up Cartagena’s exciting, newly evolved hotel scene. A dozen or more stylishly sophisticated boutique hotels, such as the **Hotel LM** and the **Hotel Sofitel Santa Clara**, deliver divinely contemporary comfort behind antique façades. And the über-chic dining scene left me slack-jawed. Together, the trendy hotels and restaurants reflect Colombia’s bright future while showcasing the best of its picturesque past. So believe me when I say that I really didn’t want to leave. And should you go, neither will you. ▣

## JANA JONES

THE ANTICIPATION WAS PALPABLE in Genoa, Italy as the bus full of cruise line executives, media and VIPs pulled up at the Fincantieri Sestri Ponente shipyard last February. You could literally feel the excitement mount, and then... there she was, the star attraction, the reason for all the hoopla. Oceania Cruises' new, highly anticipated 1,258 passenger cruise ship, MV *Marina*, was being unveiled on this day in a ceremony called a 'float out', in which a ship under construction is finally lowered into the water.

The glistening white hull, which elicited gasps and applause as it came into view, was the only portion of the ship that was finished. The inside of the ship, for which guests were required to don hard hats in order to enter, was a cavernous jumble of steel and cables. It took imagination to picture the interior spaces as they would look when finally finished in January 2011.

Well, mostly. Off to the side was a building in which full-sized mock-ups of two stateroom categories were available to view; this was a preview of what the space, design and materials would look like in the final product.

*Marina*, the first ship custom-built for eight-year-old Oceania Cruises, is a study in genteel elegance. Unlike most of the city-sized ships being introduced today, this one is perfectly mid-sized, and – while there are some truly innovative elements – makes no attempt to 'wow' with rock-climbing walls, surf parks, bowling alleys and the like. No, the innovations on *Marina* are much more subtle, much more refined.

Because *Marina* was designed from the 'ground' up, Oceania's management team was able to pick and choose what was important – specifically, what previous guests had told them was important. The first element was space... space in the lounges, space in the restaurants, space on deck, and most particularly space in the staterooms and suites. *Marina's* standard oceanview, verandah and concierge-level staterooms deliver, at 242 square feet, the largest of any standard staterooms at sea (standard verandah and concierge staterooms have 40-square-foot balconies).

The bathrooms, though, are what people are talking about. Even in the standard rooms, baths are fitted with marble floors, granite vanities, a full-size tub and separate shower.





OCEANIA'S  
*Marina*

Suites are positively palatial, ranging in size from 420 to more than 2,000 square feet, but size alone isn't what makes the accommodations so inviting. It's the quality of the furnishings, the warm colours used in the rooms, furnished teak verandahs and the custom-created **Prestige Tranquility Bed**, an oasis with a chamomile-infused layer of gel in the mattress. Add some down pillows, a down comforter and 1,000-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets and you have a little bit of heaven.

Fine cuisine has always been a hallmark of the Oceania brand. On *Marina*, there will be two new restaurants joining the other well-established no-surcharge venues (**The Grand Dining Room, Toscana, Polo Grill and Tapas on the Terrace**). **Red Ginger**, an Asian fusion restaurant, will serve fare from Thailand, Japan and Vietnam, while for the first time on land or sea Oceania's Executive Culinary Director, author and **Master Chef Jacques Pépin**, is putting his name on a French-inspired bistro called **Jacques**. M. Pépin, who loves food, is a stickler for quality ingredients and a joyful ambiance.

"The standard for fine cuisine is that the dish be fresh, simple, and beautifully presented, in an atmosphere of warmth and camaraderie," he says. "That's what we will provide our guests aboard *Marina*."

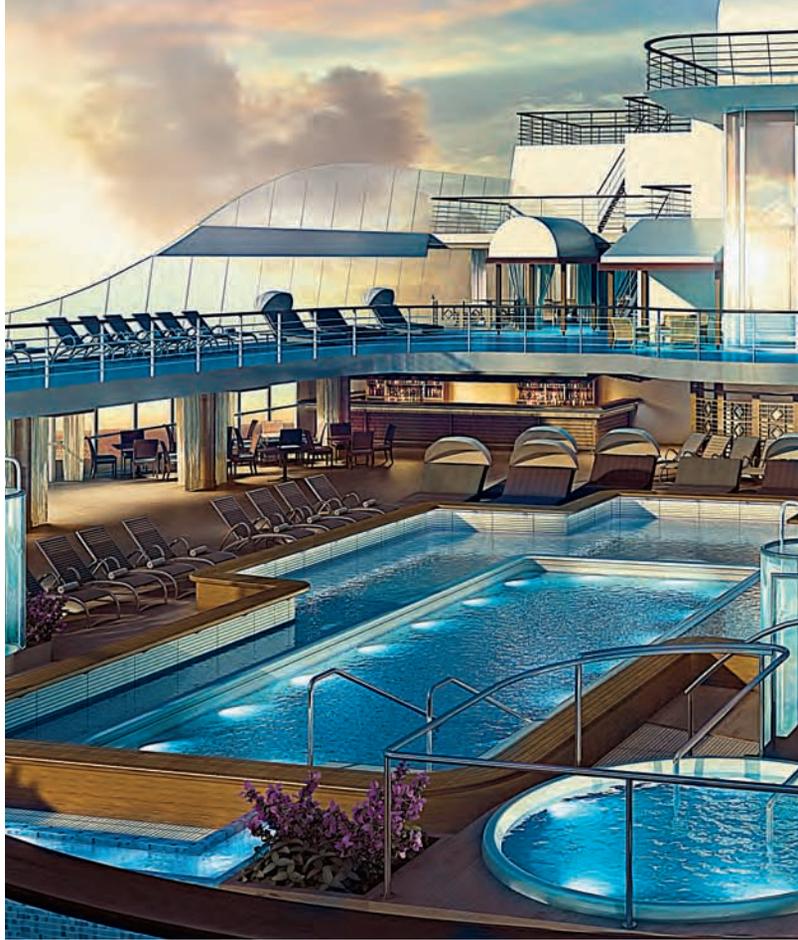
One of the most exciting revelations about *Marina* is the introduction of the first-ever fully equipped, 24-station cooking studio at sea. While other ships might have culinary demonstrations, *Marina*, in partnership with *Bon Appétit*, will conduct hands-on workshops with master chefs from around the world. Because they will be using fresh ingredients purchased en route, the curriculum will be itinerary-based, and might include shopping forays with the chef and special excursions to vineyards in the region.

Speaking of vineyards, *Marina* will also be introducing **La Reserve**, an alfresco venue for wine lovers. The ship's Master Sommelier will be making selections and recommendations; special wine pairing dinners will be available by reservation in the intimate 24-seat space.

Artists and craftspeople will have a dedicated space of their own in **The Artist's Loft**, another innovation on the ship. Artists-in-residence will be on board conducting classes in their areas of expertise. It might be watercolour painting, or charcoal drawing, but materials will be available for several activities during the course of a cruise.

When assessing the desires of its guests, Oceania management found that they love **The Library**. On *Marina*, it is an expansive, clubby, quiet spot with hundreds of books flanked by a new coffee bar, Baristas, and the Internet centre, **Oceania@Sea**. Guests also wanted a big, well-equipped fitness centre. On this, too, the ship delivers: located adjacent to the **Canyon Ranch SpaClub**, Oceania's choice for guest pampering, is a large, fully equipped workout room with state-of-the-art cardio and weight machines, all with a sweeping view of the sea.

Of course, a tour of an unfinished ship, glorious though she might be, didn't touch on Oceania Cruises' biggest asset, its onboard personnel. As a repeat guest, I can attest to the fact that when the ship's interiors are done, all dressed up in flowing fabrics complete with a special Lalique grand staircase, it will still be the warm and welcoming staff and crew who will make *Marina* special. ▣





# OCEANIA MARINA FACT SHEET

.....

## **BUILT**

2010, Fincantieri S.p.A., Sestri Ponente, Italy

## **TONNAGE**

65,000 gross tons

## **LENGTH**

774 feet

## **WIDTH**

105 feet

## **DECKS**

15

## **MAXIMUM DRAFT**

24 feet

## **CRUISING SPEED**

20 knots

## **NUMBER OF PASSENGERS**

1,258 (double occupancy)

## **STATEROOMS**

**Owner's Suites** 3

**Vista Suites** 8

**Oceania Suites** 12

**Penthouse Suites** 124

**Concierge Staterooms** 200

**Verandah Staterooms** 244

**Oceanview Staterooms** 20

**Inside Staterooms** 18

## **DINING VENUES**

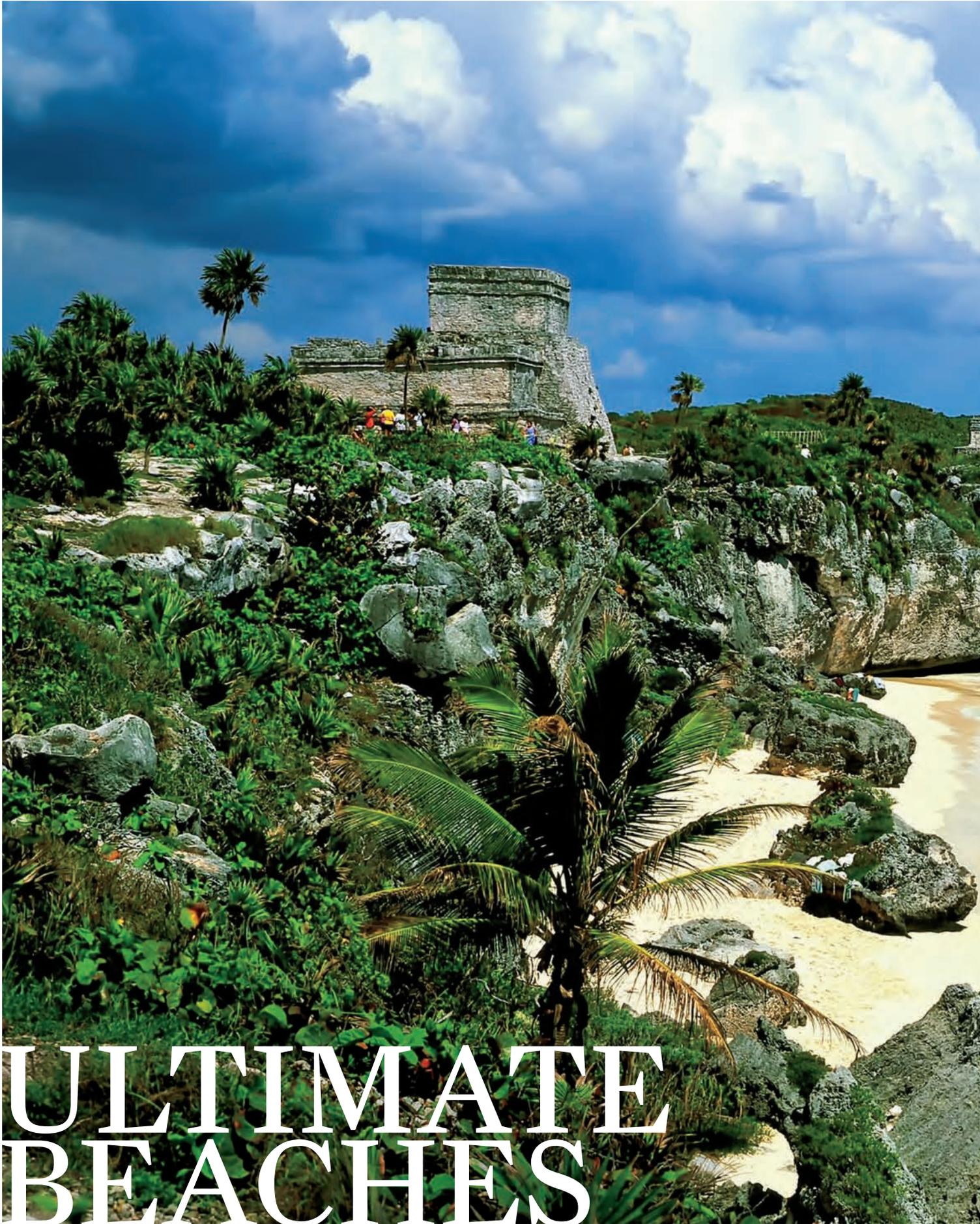
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## **LOUNGES AND PUBLIC ROOMS**

10

## **ITINERARIES**

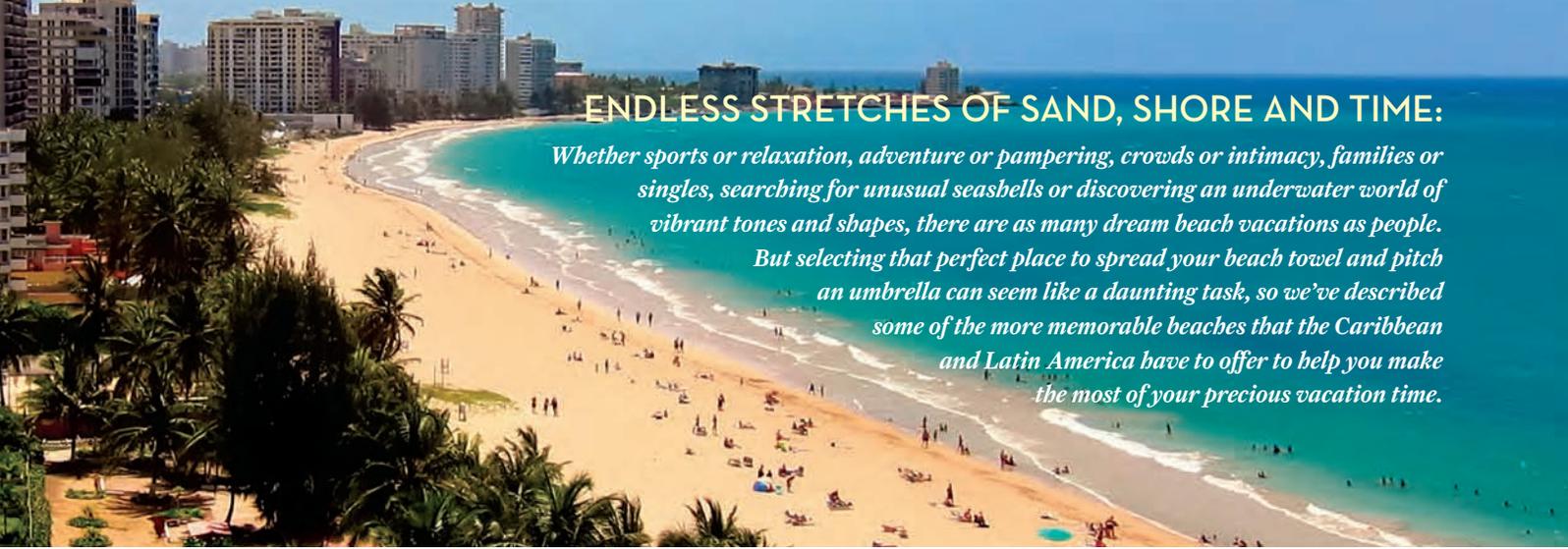
Transatlantic from Barcelona to Miami in January 2011. Panama Canal, the Caribbean and Bermuda for the winter, back to Europe in late March, then Mediterranean, Baltic and Western Europe cruises throughout the summer months.



# ULTIMATE BEACHES

The Caribbean and Latin America offer some of the most spectacular beaches in the world. But which one to choose for your next vacation? Here's our guide to 22 of the best beaches around.

MICHAEL DEFREITAS



## ENDLESS STRETCHES OF SAND, SHORE AND TIME:

*Whether sports or relaxation, adventure or pampering, crowds or intimacy, families or singles, searching for unusual seashells or discovering an underwater world of vibrant tones and shapes, there are as many dream beach vacations as people.*

*But selecting that perfect place to spread your beach towel and pitch an umbrella can seem like a daunting task, so we've described some of the more memorable beaches that the Caribbean and Latin America have to offer to help you make the most of your precious vacation time.*

### Intimate Strands

Most of the beaches in this region are magnets for sunbathers and water sport enthusiasts, and some of them do get crowded. However, if you're looking for a secluded spot, where the only sound you're likely to hear is the soft rustle of the breeze through the palm trees, and your only company is a few gulls, then perhaps one of these intimate strands may be just what you're looking for.

**Princess Margaret Beach**, a ribbon of soft white sand and calm warm water on the north coast of the tiny, quiet Caribbean island of **Bequia** (part of **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**) is a peaceful oasis for couples who want to chill out and be alone.

Speaking of princesses, we cannot forget **Barbuda's** truly intimate **Coco Point Beach**, where Princess Di and Charles spent their honeymoon. Di loved the isolated spot so much she returned to it after their breakup.

A few thatched-roof beach umbrellas and powdery white sand is all you'll find on **Aruba's Malmok Beach**. Situated on the island's west coast, a short drive north of the crowded resort beaches, Malmok is popular with snorkellers and those wishing to avoid tan lines, if you know what I mean.

But the islands do not have the monopoly on intimate strands. A few kilometres south of **Cancun's** bustling beaches is tiny **Tulum Beach**. Nestled between tall limestone cliffs and the emerald Caribbean, this 100-metre-long strand offers seclusion and ancient Mayan ruins.

### Long Stretches

For restless types who can't sit still longer than it takes to sip a piña colada, the region boasts a number of beaches that rank among the world's longest.

These include **Mexico's** 22-kilometre-long **Cancun Beach**, **Puerto Rico's** 16-kilometre-long **Isla Verde Beach**, **Grand Cayman's** aptly named **Seven Mile Beach**, the nine powdery white kilometres of **Aruba's Palm Beach** and the nine kilometres of **Costa do Sauipe** along **Brazil's Bahia** coast. From posh resorts to water sports and funky beach bars, these stunning playas offer tons of things to see and do.

### Classic Curves

It's hard to top the visual impact of one of those classic, sensuous arcs of sand that grace many a postcard or glossy brochure. And few places offer more classical curves than the **Caribbean's Leeward Islands**; tiny island paradises that boast some of the world's best beaches for families, couples or singles.

One of the region's most famous curves is the sweeping two-kilometre arc of **Magens Bay Beach** on **St. Thomas**, in the **U.S. Virgin Islands**. *National Geographic Traveler* magazine ranked it as one of the world's 10 best beaches.

Not far away, on the neighbouring island of **Saint Martin**, is **Baie Longue Beach**. This striking, intimate crescent-shaped strand is a favourite R&R spot for big-name celebrities.

Another popular celeb destination is tiny laidback **Anguilla**, only a 30-minute ferry ride from Saint Martin. The island's signature **Meads Bay Beach** is a favourite hangout of Robert De Niro. Of course, it helps to have the five-star **Malliouhana Hotel and Spa** overlooking the beach.

A bit farther south is **St. Kitts** with its wonderful **North Frigate Bay Beach**. Soft white sand stretches for three kilometres in a perfect arc along the island's eastern coast and smack dab in the middle is the fabulous **Marriott Resort Casino and Spa**.

### Best People Watching

While many people go to the beach to enjoy the sun, sand and surf, others go for the people. And few places in the world offer better people-watching beaches than **Latin America** and the Caribbean. Of course it goes without saying that these beaches can get crowded. But don't worry. When you get tired of looking, you can always rest your eyes at one of the many top resorts, or enjoy the restaurants or water sport outfitters that line these beaches.

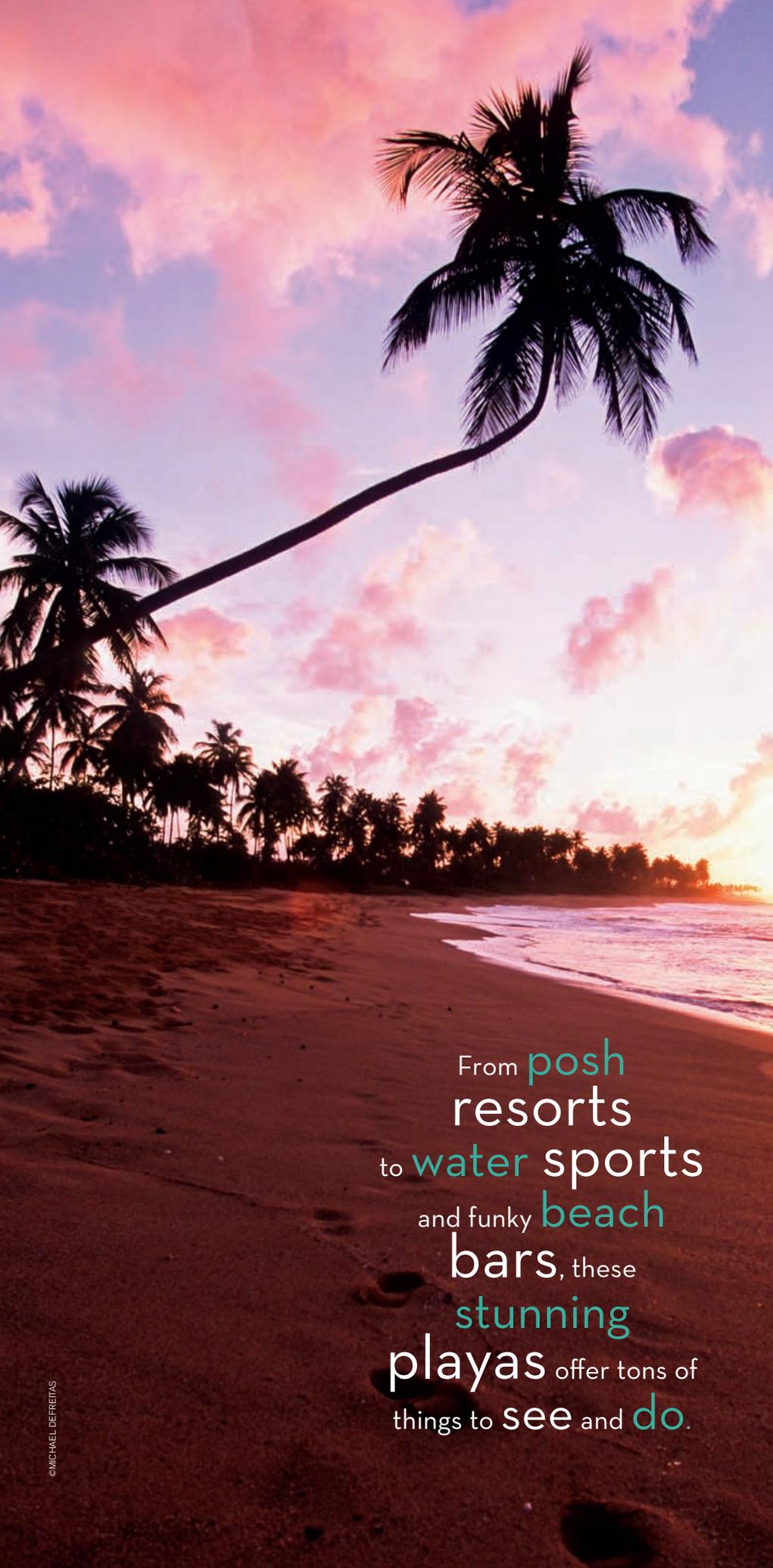
By far the world's top seaside venue for people gazing is **Rio de Janeiro's** famous **Copacabana Beach**. On weekdays, upward of 200,000 people pack the sand; on weekends, that number can swell to 400,000. Given all those beautiful Copa bods, it's no wonder the locals consider people watching an extreme sport. Just as exciting is nearby **Ipanema Beach**, long revered in song for the elegant beauties who parade its shores.

Other great people-watching beaches include **Aruba's Eagle Beach** and **Trinidad's** popular local weekend hangout, **Maracas Bay Beach**.

### Romantic Sunsets

No discussion of sandy beaches would be complete without including those where romantic sunsets seem to last forever. And there is no better place for couples to take that quiet sunset stroll than **Tres Palmitas Beach** on **Puerto Rico's** north-east coast. The name comes from a group of three oddly shaped palm trees midway along the beach.

Other memorable romantic sandy spots include **Playa Herradura** on **Costa Rica's** Pacific coast, **Playa Bayahibe** on the **Dominican Republic's** southeast coast, the long stretch of sand lining **Chile's Viña del Mar** coast and the palm-fringed strand of **Playa Medina** along **Venezuela's Paria Peninsula**.



From **posh**  
resorts  
to **water sports**  
and funky **beach**  
**bars**, these  
**stunning**  
**playas** offer tons of  
things to **see** and **do**.

## Dive Bars

Dazzling coral reefs, most of which are only a few fin kicks from shore, fringe many Caribbean and Latin American beaches.

**Bonaire's** accessible coral gardens have earned it the title of '**Shore Diving Capital**' of the Caribbean. Three of the more popular dive and snorkelling sites include the town pier off **Town Beach**, the **Harbour Beach** reef and the shallow reefs off **Pink Beach**.

Other superb snorkelling and diving spots include the reefs off **Indian Bay Beach** on **Saint Vincent**, **Sapphire** and **Banana Beaches** on **Ambergris Caye**, **Belize**, **West Bay** and **Half Moon Bay Beaches** on **Roatan** in the **Bay Islands** of **Honduras**, and **Cozumel's San Francisco** and **Nachi Cocom Beaches**. Shipwreck divers from expert to novice can look forward to the sinking of the *USS Kittiwake* at the north end of **Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach**, currently set to happen at the end of the year. It will be sunk in only 65 feet of water, with the top of the bridge and smokestack a mere 20 feet from the surface, making it perfect for snorkellers, too.

## Seaside Pampering

Whether in a private beach cabana or a beach chair, few activities elicit more oohs and aahs after a day of water sports than a relaxing beach massage. You'll find beach spas and massage therapists on many of the region's more popular beaches.

Jackie Lewis at **Jackie's on the Reef** will pamper you with her deep tissue and hot stone treatments at the west end of **Jamaica's famous Negril Beach**, while **Kenville Richardson** (known locally as **Mr. Magic Hands**) delivers unforgettable aloe vera massages and reflexology treatments on **St. Kitts' South Frigate Bay Beach**.

Other popular pampering spots include **Boca Chica Beach** in the **Dominican Republic**, **North Beach** on **Mexico's Isla Mujeres** and **Club Orient** on **Saint Martin's Orient Beach**. ▣

TRES PALMITAS BEACH  
PUERTO RICO



# BEST RESTAURANTS

*Gone are the days of boring buffets and mediocre meals. Today, cruise lines are competing by enticing celebrity chefs to helm their kitchens, offering cuisine that rivals that of any restaurant on land. Here's our shortlist of the best places to savour the flavours at sea.*

*Mary Luz Mejia*



# AT SEA

**YOU WALK INTO AN ELEGANT DINING ROOM** that exudes Zen tranquility. The intoxicating aromas of modern Japanese fusion cuisine tempt the senses. You take a seat on a sumptuous banquet and admire the shimmering red on walls adorned with Japanese calligraphy. The question is, do you order celebrity chef **Nobu Matsuhisa's** famous black cod with miso, a masterful tray of sashimi or the much-lauded grilled Wagyu rib eye? And the most intriguing part of this experience so far is that you're not in Tokyo or Los Angeles, but out at sea in Nobu's **Silk Road** restaurant on the **Crystal Cruise Line!**

Over the past few years, culinary tourism has become increasingly popular and the trend has extended to seafaring travellers who want their cruise with a side of haute cuisine. Cruise lines have responded to the call for better, brighter and bolder culinary experiences by tapping celebrity chefs to helm restaurants that bear their names, signature dishes and aesthetic. And while the celeb chefs may not be lovingly ladling your hollandaise at sea,

you can rest assured that they developed all the recipes, trained the staff and created the menus with discerning attention to detail.

In a recent interview with *Ensemble Vacations*, famed French chef **Jacques Pépin** spoke about his first-ever, eponymous restaurant on *Oceania's Marina*, saying, "Jacques is a very personal experience, both in my expression of the cuisine that is served and the actual experience the guest has. I want guests dining there to feel as though they have just arrived at their favourite neighbourhood brasserie," adding, "our ships are great hotels that happen to travel to the greatest cities in the world, so it is only fitting they have the best restaurants."

With that in mind, here's our list of the best restaurants at sea for those with a yen for culinary nirvana while on vacation.

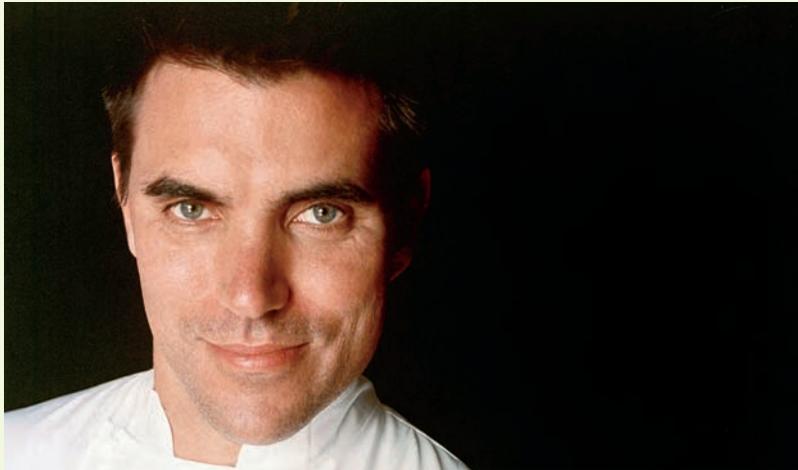
\*NB: some restaurants impose a cover charge, others do not; but one thing is certain: to get the hot-ticket, dining room seating, it's always wise to reserve ahead.

# SEA TO LAND CULINARY HIGHLIGHTS

Landlubbers have a reason to celebrate too, thanks to the new culinary adventures Silversea Cruise Ships are offering travellers. From learning to make tapas in Barcelona, to turning your hand at French pastries in Cannes, the world is literally your oyster.

## Must-savour adventures include:

- Cook alongside true-blue nobility, with the **Countess Lelia Passi**, at the **Palazzo Tiepolo** to master Venetian delicacies.
- Learn to make quintessential Portuguese dishes with **chef Miguel Gonçaves** of the beautiful **Albatroz Palace**, with a stunning sea vista in Cascais. Use local produce to create five intoxicating dishes paired with a glass of Portuguese wine.
- Visit food journalist **Eleonora Consoli** at her 18th-century home where you'll learn the nuances of Sicilian cooking using produce from her own garden.
- Forage for truffles, pick fresh figs and ripe olives in Croatia's Istria region with the **Stefanic family**, tour their vineyard and farm and sit down to enjoy a specially created lunch with the day's harvest.



CHEF	CLAIM TO FAME	ACCOLADES	CRUISE SHIP RESTAURANT/ CRUISE LINE	CUISINE TYPE/ DISHES	COVER CHARGE
<b>Charlie Palmer</b>	New York's <b>Aureole</b> , California's <b>Dry Creek Kitchen</b> and <b>Charlie Palmer Steak</b> (numerous locales from Las Vegas to Washington, D.C.).	Palmer's Aureole in Las Vegas and New York City are featured in the <i>Michelin Guide</i> and in 2008 both were given a prestigious <b>one star</b> .	<b>Tastings@2</b> on the <i>Seabourn Legend</i> , <i>Pride</i> and <i>Spirit</i> .	Progressive American cuisine with an upscale twist that may include foie gras or fresh seafood prepared à la minute. You might start with the Chef's Cocktail, a seared tuna mojito with shaved watermelon and topped with minted lime popcorn and proceed to a butter-braised lobster and sweet pea leaf ravioli. End with artfully presented dessert, like a white chocolate mascarpone cheesecake with the house-made raspberry gelato.	Not applicable.
<b>Nobu Matsuhisa</b>	Matsuhisa has 25 restaurants in 21 cities around the world. These include the Matsuhisa family-owned restaurants in Beverly Hills, Aspen and Athens, as well as <b>Nobu Restaurants</b> (co-owned with actor Robert De Niro and Meir Teper) in Miami Beach, Los Angeles, New York City and Tokyo to name a few locales.	Matsuhisa was chosen as one of the <b>Top Ten Restaurant Destinations</b> in the world by <i>The New York Times</i> and his Nobu Las Vegas, Nobu London and Nobu Berkeley Street London were each awarded <b>one Michelin star</b> .	<b>Silk Road</b> and the <b>Sushi Bar</b> , <i>Crystal Cruise Line</i> on the ships <i>Symphony</i> and <i>Serenity</i> .	Chef Nobu is known for infusing Japanese cuisine with South American flair, a reflection of the time he spent cooking in Argentina and Peru. He's known for his impeccably fresh seafood ceviche (citrus-cured, cold seafood appetizers) and masterful sushi and sashimi presentations. The dish that perhaps made him most famous, however, is the grilled black cod prepared in sake, mirin and miso – a must-try.	Not applicable. If you don't have reservations, you might be able to perch yourself at the Sushi Bar until a seat becomes available, likely after 9 pm.
<b>Todd English</b>	Best known for his restaurant <b>Olives</b> , located in both Boston and Las Vegas, English also helms the restaurants <b>Figs</b> , <b>Bonfire</b> , <b>Beso</b> (co-owned with actress Eva Longoria-Parker) in Las Vegas and <b>Tuscany Restaurant</b> in Connecticut to name a few. Fans may also know the dapper chef from watching his TV series <i>Food Trip with Todd English</i> , on PBS.	English has been recognized as one of <i>People</i> magazine's ' <b>50 Most Beautiful People</b> ' and his restaurants have been lauded by <i>Travel &amp; Leisure</i> , <i>Gourmet</i> , <i>Zagat</i> and <i>Nation's Restaurant News</i> as some of the best in their respective cities. He's recently been inducted into the James Beard Foundation's 'Who's Who in Food and Beverage in America' and won a <b>James Beard Award</b> for his PBS culinary travel series.	<b>Todd English</b> on Cunard's <i>Queen Mary 2</i> and <i>Queen Victoria</i> .	The chef's Italian roots are clearly discernable in the modern Mediterranean fare at both Todd English restaurants. You may find an oven-fried asparagus and morel tart topped with caramelized onions, double-smoked bacon and creamy Fontina cheese on the menu. Lamb lovers will revel in his lamb porterhouse and if there's room, end with chocolate fallen cake – made famous at his Olives restaurants.	Lunch is \$20 and dinner is \$30 per person.
<b>Jacques Pépin</b>	Few names in the culinary world exemplify 'French gastronomy' quite like Jacques Pépin. He has been chef to three French heads of state, including Charles de Gaulle, published close to 20 award-winning cookbooks and created numerous highly lauded cooking shows. He's also the Dean of Special Programs at the <b>French Culinary Institute</b> in New York City.	Pépin has received three of the French government's highest honours, including the prestigious ultimate civilian recognition, the <b>Légion d'honneur</b> . He's also in the James Beard Foundation's <b>Cookbook Hall of Fame</b> for his contributions to food literature.	<b>Jacques</b> on Oceania's <i>Marina</i> ship. Oceania is the only cruise line inducted into the <b>Maitres Cuisinier de France</b> , thanks in large part to the menus crafted by Pépin himself.	Classic French brasserie fare from Pépin's hometown of Lyon is served with attention to every detail. Dishes include a New York strip steak frites with hand-cut frites and a garlic butter rosette, striped bass filet with vegetable-stuffed calamari or veal medallions Oscar with asparagus spears, a snow crab claw and hollandaise sauce.	Not applicable.

## Worldly Delights: Montevideo

On and off the grill; in and out of town  
Stephanie Ortenzi



Gabriel Coquel

**Gabriel Coquel** is Montevideo's anti-*parrillero*, the opposite of the cook who grills meat on a *parrillada*, the renowned South American barbecue. All over town, hot grills of iron sizzle with all manner of meat. In **Uruguay**, 80 per cent of the land is specifically designated for animal grazing. The country's grass-fed beef is hormone-free by law. But growing up here, Coquel could see beyond the pasture, the cattle and the fire. He went to Paris to train at Cordon Bleu and returned with a global repertoire. He now owns **Tandory**, the restaurant considered to have raised the bar for cuisine in Montevideo.

Appetizers include spring rolls, sushi, samosas, dim sum and a native country soup. For mains, you'll find duck confit, Moroccan tagine and Vietnamese noodles with peanut sauce. But it's really his harmonies – like a Thai-curry risotto, or Spanish-style rabbit and ossobucco with *salmorejo* sauce – that established his reputation.

Not unlike Coquel, Montevideo is a kind of anti-Buenos Aires; one-tenth the size, a fraction of the hustle and bustle but equally rich culturally. International ballet and classical music are hosted at the 1,250-seat **Teatro Solero**, which is also the site of evening tango classes. Buenos Aires may be considered the epicentre of tango, but the soul of this dance belongs to Montevideo. Here, tango is danced quietly, devoutly and without a hint of



Interior, Tandory restaurant

commercialism. Local *tangueros* have been known to say, "In Montevideo, tango is not for sale."

Eating is serious business too, as the two most important meals – lunch and dinner – prove. Lunch doesn't get going until 1:30 pm. City-centre business lunches might arrive at the office wrapped in white linen, on a tray carried overhead by a deft waiter. After lunch, shutters are drawn for a few hours, as if to rest for dinner, which isn't a consideration until 9:00 at night.

Everyday food is clearly Italianate. This is a country that celebrates gnocchi on the 29th of every month. The *milanesa* is a breaded steak. *Muzzarellas* are pizza slices named for their generous topping. But the *chivito* is something else. This distinctly Montevidean steak sandwich – with cheese, sweet peppers, olives, eggs, pickles, lettuce, tomato and mayo – seems to have been designed for the appetite of a 17-year-old boy, which, it must be said, we've all experienced from time to time.

Still, Montevideo is a port city, where two rivers meet to form an estuary. Fish and seafood are abundant, but always play second fiddle on the grill. At the family dinner table, you'll find Mediterranean tastes represented by roast suckling pig, stuffed rabbit and grilled baby squid in garlic and olive oil. Dessert, as everywhere in South America, is all about *dulce de leche*, a caramel filling, sauce and spread made from slow-cooking sweetened evaporated milk.

Not far from the city limits, wine country has vines that have been cultivated for more than 250 years. *Tannat* is the local indigenous varietal, often blended, since it packs a tannic wallop. *Uvita* is a Montevidean quaff along the lines of sangria. *Mate* is what you drink when you want to blend in, an herbal tea sometimes served in a communal vessel, sipped through a metal straw with a perforated tip to strain the leaves.

Montevideo is also a point of departure for culinary pilgrims with luxurious tastes. **First stop: Punta del Este**, an hour east along the coast, popular with surfers, jetsetters and the continent's vacationing elite. Retail therapy is available via Louis Vuitton and Valentino. Dinner might be at the hand of **Jean-Paul Bondoux**, chef-owner of the Relais & Châteaux **La Bourgogne**. Bondoux is from Burgundy. His unwavering focus is on impeccable modern French fare. Think pan-seared stingray in saffron sauce.

**Second stop:** the rustic yet über-exclusive **Garzón**, named for its location in a drowsy hamlet (population 200) an hour's drive from Punta del Este. Garzón is recognized as among the top culinary destinations in the world, thanks to the work of its Argentine chef-owner **Francis Mallmann**, whose mother is half-Uruguayan. Mallmann's cuisine tends toward Provence. To wit: braised lamb with arugula, almonds and lemon confit, or ravioli stuffed with pumpkin and rabbit braised in wine.

There's good cause to consider Mallmann a *parrillero*. He cooks on a grill of his own design. He calls it *el infiernillo* (little hell), essentially an Incan-inspired wood barbecue that he feeds with local dried wood and eucalyptus. Mallmann is also an imaginative culinary purist. He does an unforgettable dessert: a single orange, roasted until crisp and perfumed with fresh rosemary.

**Final stop:** back to Montevideo for some anti-French fare. Back to a seat in front of an open-air *parrillada*, for meat so outstanding it's grilled without being marinated, and the reason why meat reigns supreme in this part of the world. Here, hot coals trump haute cuisine any day. ▣

## Worldly Delights: Recipe

### Curried Flank Steak

Serves 4

**Ingredients:**

2½ lb cleaned\* flank steak  
1 litre milk  
1 clove garlic  
4 tbsp curry  
1 tbsp crushed chiles  
¼ cup demiglace†  
½ cup coconut milk  
salt and pepper to taste

**Directions:**

Season the steak with salt and pepper. Create a marinade by combining the milk with garlic, curry and chiles. Marinate the meat overnight in the refrigerator. Place the steak and its marinade in a baking dish and cover. Braise in a preheated 300° F oven for four hours or until very tender. Remove the meat from the braising liquid and keep warm. Strain the marinade into a pot. Add demiglace and coconut milk, and reduce to the consistency of a sauce. Check the seasoning and adjust as needed. Add the meat back to the sauce, where it can be held until ready to serve.

*Adapted from a recipe by Gabriel Coquel of Tandory Restaurant, where he plates this dish by placing the meat on a base of mashed potatoes to capture as much of the curry sauce as possible. He garnishes this dish with crispy fried leeks, chives and crushed chiles.*

\* Ask the butcher to remove all fat and connective tissue from the meat

† A reduction of wine, shallots and beef stock

## Worldly Delights: Oaxaca

Mary Luz Mejia discovers a more authentic ‘other’ Mexico in the cuisine and culture of Oaxaca

Joyous music fills the *zócalo*, or town square, thanks to the musicians playing in the gazebo nearby. I'm sipping a picture-perfect margarita made with the sun-kissed juice of Mexican *limónes* and artisanally produced tequila, while palms sway overhead. Bougainvillea overflows balconies in a riot of colour as vendors sell their handcrafted treasures in its shade. While this may conjure up images of a beautiful Mexican seaside resort, I'm actually referring to inland **Oaxaca**, one of the country's culinary and artistic gems.

I fell in love with Oaxaca years ago when I filmed an episode there of a culinary documentary series for the Food Network Canada. I had a vague idea of what awaited me in this city, nestled in a valley among mountains in the country's far south. I knew Oaxaca was renowned for its culinary and cultural traditions that weave proud pre-Hispanic roots with a Spanish colonial legacy. What I didn't expect was the city's dramatic beauty, the lilt of ancient Mixtec and Zapotec languages spoken in the streets, and the sheer abundance of the fresh produce available year round. I also never expected to experience so much heart and soul in a place where

the people are as generous as the fertile valleys surrounding the state of Oaxaca's capital city.

This is the Oaxaca I've come to respect and admire more with each visit. But it wasn't enough for me to enjoy a vacation there, take photos and share them with friends and family. No, I wanted other like-minded travellers to revel in a well-made *mole* (complex sauce) and to get our hands 'in the *masa*' (dough), making tamales or Oaxacan chocolate. And I wanted to stray off the beaten path with a special group of people who would have a great appreciation for a lunch made by three generations of Zapotec women, who also happen to be the best textile weavers in the state. With the help of our Oaxacan connection **Alvin Starkman** (a former Toronto litigator), internationally renowned chef **Pilar Cabrera Arroyo of La Olla** restaurant and **La Casa de los Sabores** cooking school, as well as my husband Mario, our collective wish came true.

Among the first travellers to sign up were two of Canada's leading culinary icons, **Elizabeth Baird** (former food editor of *Canadian Living* and still a prolific food writer) and award-winning cookbook author **Rose Murray**. Toronto chef **Vanessa Yeung** joined in as well, and soon we had our group of adventurous gourmands. We swapped all-inclusives for a beautiful B&B in the centre of town, substituted liquor-fuelled days for artisanal mezcal tastings in nearby pueblos and all-you-can-eat buffets for Oaxacan cuisine at some of the city's finest rooftop terraces. Flocks of tourists swarming for super-sized margaritas at chain restaurants? Not a chance! This is another Mexico, one that Baird describes as ideal for those "wanting to discover a vibrant, different culture."

In Oaxaca, there's no better place to start than with a walking tour of the historic city centre, which includes the jewel in the city's crown – the **Santo Domingo Church**. A beautiful church that began to take shape in 1572 thanks to Spanish Franciscan friars, the structure is a study of shape and light. The beige stone façade is considered 'simple' by Mexican decorative standards – but it's impressive to our eyes. We step inside at dusk as the sun filters through the stunning stained glass windows, and we're mesmerized by what





©MARY LUZ MEJIA

some describe as a “golden vision of a Baroque heaven.”

Later that evening, chef Pilar hosts dinner at La Olla’s rooftop patio. A dark blue velvet sky and a magnificently set table await us, along with our chef’s take on Oaxacan cuisine. Her *pescadillas*, or minced red snapper, caper and onion turnovers are sublime, matched only by the *tamalitos de mole amarillo*, mini cornmeal tamales stuffed with chicken in a yellow *mole* sauce, steamed in banana leaves. I see our culinary friends’ eyes light up when they bite into the rehydrated dried *chile pasilla Oaxaqueño* stuffed with mashed black beans and topped with fresh cheese. Balanced, mildly spicy and unique in its combination – we are all smitten. We cap these and other unique dishes off with a cup of *café de Olla* (cinnamon-infused, sweetened coffee) and Pilar’s *pan de quesón* (cheesecake) with pineapple and prickly pear compote.

A post-dinner stroll through the colonial downtown city streets is in order after this feast. Everywhere we turn, we’re greeted by scarlet red, indigo blue and burnt orange textiles. Indigenous women with neatly braided hair tell us they learned to make everything from rugs to shirts from their foremothers; traditions that are still very much alive in Oaxaca and its surrounding pueblos.

On a warm afternoon, we drive 45 minutes to **Santo Tomás Jalieza**, where the Navarro family greets us at their home. Chef Pilar and Alvin are good friends with the mother, her son and two daughters – all of whom are known for their beautiful backstrap loom work, save for Gerrardo, who is the family painter. The group was treated to a special lunch including fresh-off-the-*comal* (flat terracotta griddle) tortillas and grilled *tasaño* (or thin beef steaks), and a demonstration of how to make *sopa de guías*. This vegetarian

soup is typical of the area and is made with zucchini, its blossoms and vine as well as corn to thicken the broth. Since tourists would never have access to the Navarro’s family home – with its impeccable dirt courtyard where the weaving takes place – or their outdoor kitchen, the group was transfixed. Rose Murray said it best: “To see artisans like this working in their own homes and then to have lunch made by them, this is a rare treat.”

Mexican food is the original **Slow Food**. You can’t rush the making of tamales or a *mole* sauce any more than you can a well-smoked barbecue. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the valley’s markets. The Sunday-only **Tlacolula town market** is where you go to smell roasting chiles, sip the ‘drink of the gods’ (*tejate*), a cool cacao and corn drink, eat cinnamon tortillas and find artisanal kitchen gadgets.

We follow this with cooking classes led by internationally renowned chef **Susaro Trilling** at her picturesque **Seasons of My Heart Cooking School** and chef Pilar at La Casa de los Sabores. Two types of *mole* (*chichilo* and *negro*) are made, devoured and admired for their complexity. Along the way, we meet other travellers, all seeking something more from Mexico. Elizabeth Baird decides that it’s the ability to “buy bread at the bakery, have tacos with the locals and shop in their markets that makes you feel like a visitor rather than a tourist” in Oaxaca.

I could go on about the knife-maker, who uses 12th-century Spanish techniques to produce timeless knives, or the coal-seared meat tacos we savoured at the best street-side stand downtown, but that would be unfair. The only way to really experience the vibrancy, colour and pageantry of Oaxaca is to go there yourself. And when you sit down for a margarita in the *zócalo* and hear marimba music floating through the flower-perfumed air, have another for me! ▣

## Worldly Delights: Recipe

### *Crema de Chile Poblano* *Roasted Chile Poblano Bisque*

I had this soup for the first time at a very fancy wedding in San Felipe del Agua, the ritziest section of Oaxaca. The soup was delicious – creamy but not picante at all. One day I started craving *chiles poblanos*, and we made the soup for a cooking class. We had just been to the Etna market, where I had bought some *requesón* (farmer's cheese), so we put it in the soup to thicken it, adding another dimension. The corn tortilla topping contributes a flavour contrast with the *poblano*. If the soup is too picante, you can double the amount of cheese.

#### Serves 6

#### Ingredients:

7 *chiles poblanos*  
1 tbsp butter  
2 medium white onions, thickly sliced  
½ head of garlic, cloves separated  
salt and black pepper to taste  
3 sprigs fresh *epazote*\* or 1½ teaspoons dried (optional)  
1 quart chicken stock  
1½ cups milk  
2 ounces *requesón* (about ⅓ cup), ricotta or farmer's cheese (with salt)

#### To serve:

3 teaspoons Mexican fresh *crema*, heavy cream or *crème fraîche*  
4 corn tortillas, 8 inches in diameter, cut into thin strips and fried or toasted

#### Directions:

In a 10-inch *comal*, griddle, cast-iron frying pan or over an open flame, roast the chiles until they blister, turning to roast all sides. Place in a bowl and top with another bowl, inverted, and set aside for 15 minutes to sweat. Peel and remove stems and seeds. Cut the clean flesh into strips; these are called *rajas*.

In a heavy 4-quart stockpot, melt the butter over medium heat and sauté the onions until transparent. Add the garlic and continue to cook about five minutes longer, but do not brown it. Add the chile strips and continue to cook about 20 minutes longer, stirring. Add the salt and pepper and *epazote* to the mixture, then follow with the chicken stock. Simmer 15 minutes longer, covered, over low heat.

Purée the chile mixture in a blender until smooth. Return the purée to the pot and add the milk. Heat through. Remove ½ cup of the purée and blend with the *requesón* in a mixing bowl until smooth. Return mixture to the soup and heat through. Adjust salt to taste.

#### To serve:

Place the *crema* in a mixing bowl and beat it with a whisk until smooth. Thin with a little milk if necessary to make a thin stream. Pour the *crema* into a small plastic bag or squirt bottle. Place a ladle of soup in the bowl. Squirt about ½ teaspoon of *crema* onto each serving in a free-form fashion. Add a handful of tortilla strips on top in a vertical fashion or serve tostadas on the side.

**Tip:** Sometimes, I sauté corn kernels in the chile mixture and purée it all to make a corn and *poblano* bisque or I sauté the kernels on the side and add them to the puréed bisque.

Excerpted from *Seasons of My Heart, A Culinary Journey Through Oaxaca, Mexico* by Susan Trilling.

\* *Epazote* is also known as wormseed or Mexican tea; it can be found in Hispanic grocery stores.



# INTRODUCING Sunquest Elite



Great Vacations Start Here



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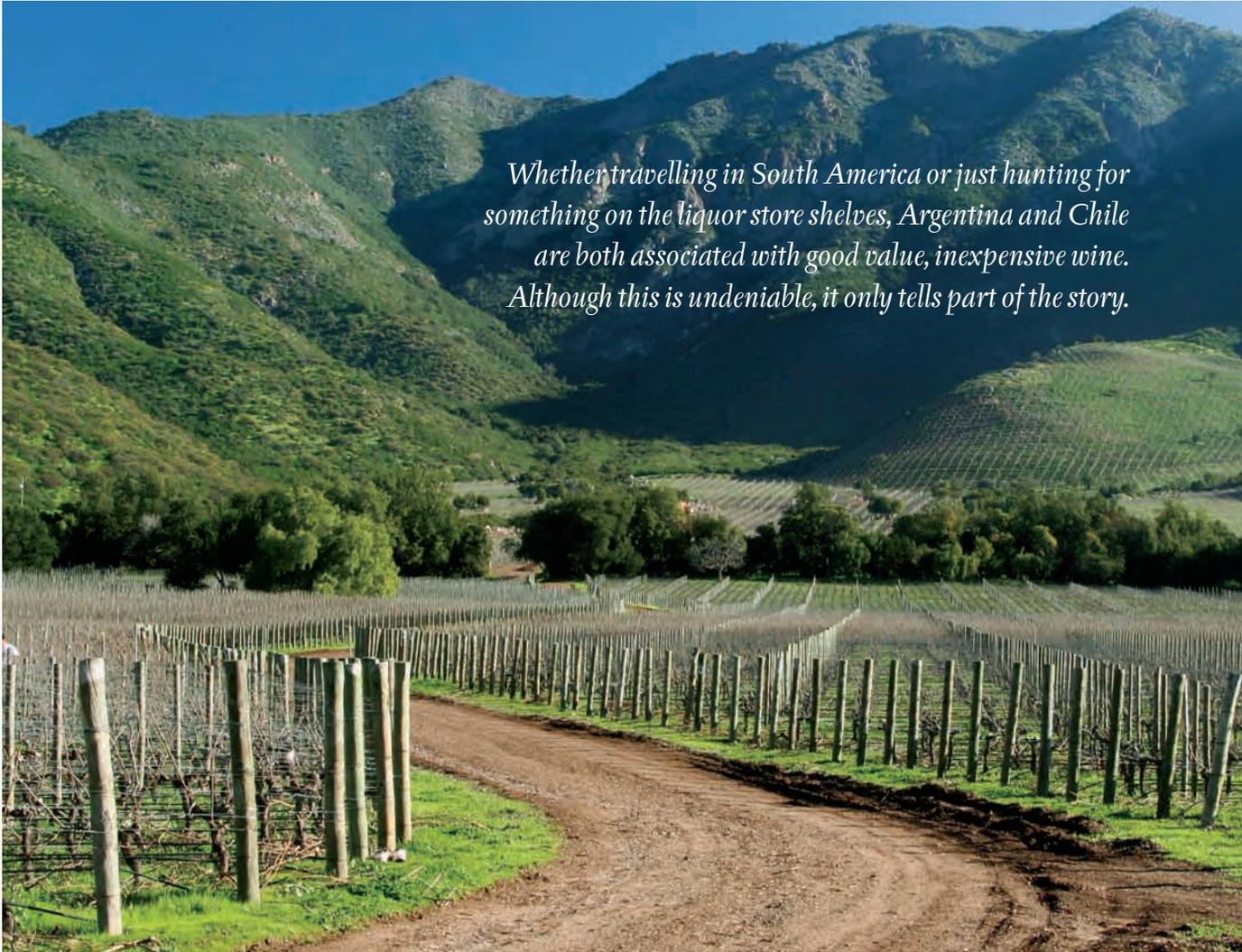
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## Worldly Delights: Wines

Nick Keukenmeester uncorks several South American surprises



*Whether travelling in South America or just hunting for something on the liquor store shelves, Argentina and Chile are both associated with good value, inexpensive wine. Although this is undeniable, it only tells part of the story.*

Like Australia before it, **Chile** is now trying to shift the emphasis of conversation to its top-end and iconic wines. But, is there much to talk about? The Europeans seem to think so. Some of the great Bordeaux estates including **Lafite**, **Cheval Blanc** and **Mouton Rothschild** have estates in Chile where they are trying to make world-conquering wines. Even **Grand Marnier** has entered the game with its **Casa Lapostolle** estate making **Clos Apalta** (about \$100 at the SAQ in Quebec).

Like buried treasure, the roots of Chilean quality grapes are in the soil... pardon the

pun. The variety of soil types is immense and, as a result, so are the styles of quality wines made there.

In 1995 **Robert Mondavi** and **Eduardo Chadwick** got together to try to make Chile's best wine. They called it **Seña**, which roughly translates to personal signature. They spent four years in the search for ideal terroir. To express this terroir they used only biodynamic methods (cycles of the moon, all organic, that sort of thing). **Seña** is a blend of **Cabernet Sauvignon**, **Merlot**, **Petit Verdot**, **Carmenère** (a traditional but now

defunct Bordeaux grape seen only in Chile) and **Cabernet Franc**.

When Robert Mondavi died, Chadwick took complete control and is now making the finest wines of his career. Chadwick also happens to make one of the most expensive wines Chile produces (it's about \$80 per bottle in Ontario). This is a far cry from an \$8 Cabernet.

In January 2004, a famous blind tasting took place with top-end wines from around the world. Now simply referred to as the '**Berlin Tasting**', it included such luminaries as **Château Lafite**, **Château Margaux**,



**Château Latour, Tignanello and Sassicaia.** It was conducted by **Steven Spurrier**, the man behind the 'Judgment of Paris', where California shocked the wine world. They made the movie *Bottle Shock* about it.

Anyway, the Berlin Tasting included some of Europe's most esteemed wine journalists, writers and buyers. **Viñedo Chadwick 2000** (another top Chilean wine made by Eduardo) and **Seña 2001** were placed first and second, respectively. I love those David and Goliath stories.

If you don't have time to tour the estates from **Maipo to Maule**, make your way to

the **Ritz-Carlton in Santiago** to visit **Wine 365**. There you will find 365 wines from all over Chile. Santiago is not crowded with wine bars, but most restaurants become unofficial wine bars after dinner finishes around 11 pm (they keep Spanish hours).

#### SO WHAT ABOUT ARGENTINA?

People are often surprised to learn that **Argentina** produces more than twice the amount of wine as Chile. Our view of the two main exporting countries is a little skewed. This is because Chile makes about 580 million litres of wine each year and exports about 90% of it. By comparison, Argentina makes more than double this but most of it is guzzled locally, and only 280 million litres makes it to the outside world.

Now credited with putting Argentina on the wine map, **Nicolas Catena**, owner of **Bodega Catena Zapata** – one of the largest wineries in **Mendoza** – is the fourth generation of his family to devote his life to wine. He has been instrumental in the search for better clones of **Malbec** and a more pure expression of their high altitude terroir. *Decanter*, the most influential British magazine on wine, made Catena their Man of the Year in 2009. That may not be as impressive as *People's Sexiest Man Alive*, but it still opens doors. The LCBO carries a selection of Catena wines, including **Catena Zapata Argentino Malbec 2006** (\$89.00, Vintages) while Catena Zapata's **Nicolas Catena** sells for approximately \$110 per bottle in B.C.

Another winery of note is **Finca Decero**, which means 'from scratch' in Spanish. They make single-vineyard wines in Mendoza, showing a complete dedication to the expression of terroir. That must mean that they think there is something worth expressing! In the cellar they receive consultation from the famous Californian winemaker, **Paul Hobbs**.



**Finca Decero 2006 Amano Remolinos Vineyard**

is a blend of Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, and the *Wine Advocate* (Robert Parker's wine bible for collectors) gave it 94 points out of 100. Decero's Amano is approximately \$70 in Ontario.

So don't be fooled by the plethora of cheap and cheerful wines on the shelves at your local liquor store. South America offers a wealth of quality and sophistication that await the curious wine lover. ▣



# Worldly Delights: Cayman Cookout

Federica Maraboli feasts on the culinary treasures of Grand Cayman



Muddling drinks at the Ritz's poolside mixology lounge

Nestled like diamonds in the turquoise Caribbean Sea, less than 500 miles south of Miami, are the well known – if somewhat secretive – **Cayman Islands**. With their reputation as a major offshore finance centre, the Cayman Islands also have other benefits, perhaps the best of which is the culinary expertise that **Grand Cayman** offers its visitors, celebrated during the annual **Cayman Cookout festival**.

Now in its third year, this four-day food extravaganza is hosted by the **Ritz-Carlton** and resident celebrity chef **Eric Ripert**, whose restaurant **Blue** is the region's finest and only AAA Five Diamond award-winner (many may recognize Ripert from **Le Bernardin** – one of only five restaurants in New York to be awarded three Michelin stars – where he is the co-owner and chef). Each year, Ripert invites some of his personal friends – a select roster of world-famous chefs, sommeliers and culinary professionals, including chef and raconteur **Anthony Bourdain** of **No Reservations**; **Food & Wine's Gail Simmons**; chef **David Chang** of **Momofuku** and sommelier/author **Anthony Giglio**,

to name a few, to entertain, demonstrate, cook for and schmooze with the local and visiting gastronomes. Earlier this year, I was one of those lucky attendees to experience this epicurean bacchanal firsthand.

'Barefoot elegance' is definitely the vibe in Grand Cayman; at the Friday evening opening event, shoes and sandals were left at the Ritz-Carlton's 'shoe concierge' (nobody needs to worry about their Choo's taking a walk without them) as the guests stepped onto **Seven Mile Beach**. Stations were set up with local chefs who served exquisitely fresh conch and grilled lobster (yes, I had seconds), lamb and certified Angus beef – not to mention a selection of desserts that made the word 'decadent' seem downright prudish. All this was accompanied by a variety of spirits including champagne, wine, beer and of course, Tortuga rum. But this night was merely an *amuse-bouche* of things to come. Like trying to choose from a menu loaded with tempting selections, deciding which events to attend over the next few days proved challenging.



Guests enjoy the cultural showcase



Friday morning, after a de rigueur walk on the beach gazing at the impossibly blue water, I started with a cooking demonstration by chef **Grant Achatz**, the American wunderkind known for his molecular gastronomy skills, who shot to culinary fame before the age of 30. His Chicago restaurant **Alinea** has won numerous awards, including 'Best Restaurant in America' – twice – from *Gourmet* and the AAA Five Diamond award. Apart from his aromatic lobster and pineapple dish made with dry ice, what impressed – and touched – me most was his personal story. Achatz was diagnosed with stage four cancer of the tongue in 2007, losing his sense of taste due to radiation therapy. That he adapted and still creates delectable dishes is testament to his innate passion and skill.

Next up was a cooking demonstration by Eric Ripert, who prepared a sumptuous curried red snapper right on the beach and easily charmed the crowd with his culinary savoir faire and French accent. Sunset rum tasting on a pirate ship and five-course dinner at the Brasserie rounded out the day, which included a delicious pumpkin ravioli with almond butter sauce by chef Cindy Hutson, and a perfectly grilled sirloin with caramelized onions and local greens by Michael Schwarz, owner and executive chef of **Michael's Genuine Food & Drink** in Miami (and now **Camana Bay**).

Day two was a whirlwind of tasting and touring. A morning catamaran trip to **Stingray City** with Eric Ripert provided

an opportunity to play with stingrays in their natural habitat before Ripert prepared tuna tartare with wasabi right on the boat. Lunch was at the luxurious **Caribbean Club's Luca** restaurant: a five-course meal hosted by renowned wine expert, journalist and author Anthony Giglio, who tutored the wine pairings and entertained with funny anecdotes from his Italian childhood.

January is officially the Caymans' culinary month and the pinnacle event, coinciding with the Cookout, is **Taste of Cayman, Food and Wine Festival** at Camana Bay. Camana Bay is a stunning mixed-use development based on New Urbanist principles, where people can live, work and play, and its **Town Centre** is a lively pedestrian hub of shopping, food and entertainment. Reminiscent of Europe, its high-end retail, entertainment facilities and chic 'street-side' restaurant patios and lounges attract all ages. Various wine, beer and spirits booths were set up among the food tastings for up to 60 of the top restaurants, as well as a VIP courtyard lounge sponsored by Veuve Clicquot. The mouthwatering scent of freshly grilled meats and fish wafted through the air and although dinner would soon be served at the **Bourdain Beach BBQ** at **Calico Jacks**, I couldn't help but sample the grilled beef on roasted shallot whipped potatoes served at **Abacus**, a trendy restaurant and bar/lounge. Don't miss this

spot for dinner – and later claim one of its comfortable sofas on the patio to enjoy a cocktail and the sophisticated local scene.

The Cookout wrapped up on Sunday, first with a lavish brunch held at the Ritz, a veritable feast including local fish, sushi and caviar. Two local chefs competed in a cook-off with a mystery basket of ingredients, judged by six star chefs including Ripert, Bourdain and David Chang, for an all-expenses paid trip to New York City and *Food & Wine's* **Best New Chef** event. A poolside 'mixology lounge' in the afternoon was followed by a nine-course gala dinner at Blue, where each of the celeb chefs prepared a main dish.

The next Cayman Cookout is scheduled for January 13–16, 2011 and Canadian restaurant star **Susur Lee** is one of the chefs confirmed on the roster. Ticket prices for events range from \$75 to \$600 and packages will also be available – visit [www.caymanislands.ky/cookout](http://www.caymanislands.ky/cookout). ▣

### Getting there

*West Jet will offer direct flights to Grand Cayman from Toronto Pearson in November; three times weekly. Air Canada offers direct and connecting flights to Grand Cayman throughout the year.*



Abacus, Camana Bay Town Centre

# St. Kitts



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## A Signature Blend of Natural, Cultural and Recreational Experiences Awaits

Imagine yourself surrounded by centuries-old sugar plantations, grand stone churches, volcanic mountain peaks, a flourishing rainforest and vast stretches of sandy beaches, all part of an island bordered by the clear waters of the **Caribbean Sea** on one side and **Atlantic Ocean** on the other. With its rich history, scenic natural beauty, vibrant island culture, genuinely welcoming people and innumerable things to see and do, **St. Kitts** provides an ideal setting for a distinctive and inspired escape.

Located approximately midway along the chain of islands that makes up the **Eastern Caribbean**, St. Kitts is an emerging destination which has long been a favourite secret of discerning travellers. Ideal for

an enriching vacation, you'll immediately experience a sense of warmth and connection with the land from its sleepy country villages to the animated streets of historic **Basseterre**.

St. Kitts' pristine landscape makes exploring the island an unforgettable experience, providing a striking backdrop for a variety of activities. Many visitors enjoy walking or biking along one of many lush, verdant rainforest trails while others prefer more challenging hikes in the central mountain chain. Watersports enthusiasts will love to sail, windsurf or fish on the island's Atlantic side or perhaps snorkel, swim or scuba dive on the calmer Caribbean side, where

an underwater world of ancient shipwrecks, colourful coral and marine life beckons. Play a round of golf on an oceanfront fairway with picturesque greens, then sit back to admire the sunset from a rocking chair on the porch of one of several charming plantation inns or indulge in a relaxing spa treatment. There are also numerous places to shop and dine, or the island's two exclusive casinos are great places to try your hand with Lady Luck. Whether you leave your footprints on a secluded beach, sway to the breeze in a hammock under the stars, or even take a day trip to **Nevis** via catamaran or ferry, you'll have the opportunity to create many pleasant memories during your time on St. Kitts.

66 Explore...  
Feel... Love...  
and Remember  
the island of St. Kitts...  
99



©LUDIAN NEHEVA/ISTOCKPHOTO

Revitalizing excursions in nature, a rich colonial history dating back hundreds of years and a wealth of cultural activities all lie in store, simply awaiting your visit. Many attractions offer a glimpse into the island's past, such as a ride aboard the 'Sugar Train', the Caribbean's only scenic railway, for a unique overview of the island. You can also watch genuine batik fabric as it is being created by hand in accordance with the old traditions at the exquisite **Caribelle Batik** factory; reach out and touch an ancient Carib Indian petroglyph rock carving; stroll through the manicured gardens of **Romney Manor** and rest under the sprawling branches of a 300-year-old Saman tree; or see a rainbow over the ocean's spray at the volcanically-carved formations at **Black Rocks**. Enjoy the incredible panoramic view as you look out over the cannons to the sea from the top of the magnificent Brimstone Hill Fortress (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) or stroll through the lively streets of Basseterre to browse the souvenirs and handmade crafts amid the capital city's boutiques and gift shops.

If you visit during the holiday season, the island's **National Carnival** is a jubilant, engaging experience for residents and visitors alike. It's easy to become joyously swept up in celebrations throughout the island, ornate and colourful costumes, parades, music competitions, folkloric plays and a variety of performances, food and activities. Or, if you're a music lover, you won't want to miss the annual **St. Kitts Music Festival** that takes place each June, featuring a mix of local and international artists performing various styles of music over the course of three nights in a lively and fun block-party atmosphere.



Most importantly, you can interact with the Kittitian people and connect with their spirit to truly become immersed in this unique destination. Go 'liming' with them at a local beach bar or ask about cricket to spark a lively conversation and learn about the sport. The people of St. Kitts & Nevis always extend a heartfelt invitation to the shores of their twin-island nation and look forward to making you feel at home. Think of it as an opportunity to become a participant, not a spectator, and revel in the island's gentle embrace. Explore... Feel... Love... and Remember the island of St. Kitts, then revel in the notion that you belong here... because you do.



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# TREASURES OF THE CARIBBEAN

*A canopy bed sits as the centerpiece of a luxurious room across from which sheer white curtains billow in the fresh ocean breeze. Beyond, a large balcony offers a perfect view of the beach. On the coffee table sit a chilled bottle of champagne and fresh strawberries. This is your home for the next seven days. Sounds like a dream? This is but one description of the many luxurious Caribbean properties we have selected from the Ensemble® Hotel and Resort Collection - some of the best in the world - for you to explore.*



COURTESY OF ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB

## ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB

### Paradise Island, The Bahamas

The islands of the Bahamas were the real home of the pirates of the Caribbean, but the real treasure is the islands themselves. On a pristine stretch of beach on Paradise Island, Swedish industrialist Axel Wenner-Gren built a magnificent Versailles-inspired estate. It took him more than 20 years to complete his dream home and after several owners over the past century, Wenner-Gren's former estate has been transformed into a magnificent hotel. The architecture suggests a colonial plantation, with large verandahs and sweeping views of the beach. Guests are housed in two distinct wings, **Hartford** and **Crescent**, featuring spacious balconies and patios with a garden or ocean view. But what makes this resort unique are the personal butlers who elevate hospitality to an art form, ready to provide impeccable, unobtrusive service and attention to detail 24 hours a day. You'll find platters of fresh fruit in your room replenished daily, strawberries and champagne in the afternoon, maid service twice daily and a nightly turndown service. Dining is another important feature of the **One&Only**: world-renowned chef **Jean-Georges Vongerichten** offers a tantalizing menu, served al fresco at the Courtyard Terrace restaurant overlooking the ocean.

## THE CRANE RESORT & RESIDENCES

### St. Philip, Barbados

Perched on a hill overlooking the Atlantic, **The Crane Resort** is the grand lady of the Caribbean and the first resort to be built on the island. The mansion, known as

**Marine Villa**, was a well-known meeting place for plantation owners and merchants who came to take advantage of both the climate and the restorative benefits of sea water. Sea bathing was slowly becoming an acceptable practice for women, and in 1769 the first discreet bathing site was constructed at the resort: a stairway leading from the beach up to the main house was built into the cliff and still stands as a proud reminder of the history of this magnificent resort.

In 1887, Donald Simpson bought Marine Villa and transformed it into a hotel that quickly gained a reputation as a hideaway for celebrities and the wealthy. The resort is still owned by the Simpson family and was developed throughout the 20th century into the luxurious property it is today, with elegantly appointed suites, many of which offer panoramic ocean views and private plunge pools. Located on **Crane Beach**, the property was voted by *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* as one of the 10 best



COURTESY OF THE CRANE RESORT & RESIDENCES

beaches in the world. The original hotel rooms retain their historic colonial charm; many still feature original coral walls as well as authentic antique furnishings and elegant four-poster beds, though modern amenities have been added to ensure each stay is unforgettable.

## THE INN AT ENGLISH HARBOUR

### St. John's, Antigua

The British navy knew it had reached paradise when it landed in **English Harbour** on Antigua in the 18th century. The stunning and sheltered beach was transformed into a naval base, which served as headquarters of the Caribbean fleet. Two fortresses were built on the hilltops of **St. John's Harbour** and they both still stand, overlooking the ocean. Nearby is **Shirley Heights**, where visitors can explore the remnants of ruined forts, gun batteries and cemeteries. **The Inn at English Harbour**, which reflects an era of bygone elegance, is an intimate boutique resort consisting of 28 luxurious guest



COURTESY OF THE INN AT ENGLISH HARBOUR

rooms, featuring marble and mahogany floors, large canopy beds, spacious modern bathrooms, and verandahs and balconies from which to enjoy the idyllic scenery.

In true English tradition, afternoon tea is served at the **Terrace** restaurant. Surrounded by palm trees and cooled by fresh ocean breezes, the Terrace is the perfect spot to relax and enjoy expertly prepared dishes.

## MARIGOT BAY HOTEL

### St. Lucia

The picture-perfect island of **St. Lucia** is what most travellers imagine the Caribbean to be like: lush tropical hills, white sandy beaches dotting the coastline and high mountains that form a stunning backdrop. **Marigot Bay**, selected as the location for the 1967 movie *Dr. Dolittle*, is a little slice of paradise. **Marigot Bay Hotel**, built against the hillside above the bay, is a favourite getaway for the well-heeled traveller. Author James Michener described this hotel as the most beautiful in the Caribbean. A true five-star boutique hotel, Marigot Bay blends luxury, privacy and style to provide a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Make sure you try the **Lapli Spa** - Creole for 'rain' and 'blessings'. The treatments at the spa incorporate such local produce as bananas, which are said to help in firming, tightening and smoothing the skin, papaya to exfoliate, mangoes to rejuvenate and cocoa to heal and hydrate. The Spa's **Zen garden** offers a serene setting in which to relax and renew the senses. ▣



COURTESY OF MARIGOT BAY HOTEL

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# Spotlight: Anguilla

Federica Maraboli

The tiny island of **Anguilla** (rhymes with vanilla) is only 26 kilometres long by five kilometres wide and it takes a mere 40 minutes to drive from one end to the other. It helps when there are only four stop signs. This is one of the few islands left in the Caribbean that hasn't yet been spoiled by throngs of tourists and blatant consumerism; development has only begun over the past 20 years. Anguilla is still an idyllic and authentically friendly island, and what you'll find is a serene, romantic and sophisticated place; the kind where you can opt for down-home experiences at simple B&Bs or indulge in luxurious villas that cater to your every whim.



## Good

### LLOYD'S BED AND BREAKFAST

Sister and brother Maris and David have continued their parents' legacy at **Lloyd's**, a charming and friendly B&B. The original B&B on the island, Lloyd's has a reputation for home-style comforts and a welcoming vibe. With its architecture still intact, Lloyd's reveals an authentic slice of Anguillian life and history in each uniquely decorated room; visiting dignitaries and VIPs stayed here in the early days. Guests come from all over the world, many of them returning time and again. Rooms include air-conditioning, TVs and ensuite bathrooms, and family-style dining makes getting to know people easy.



## Better

### MALLIOUHANA

With its intoxicating view over **Meads Bay**, the atmosphere at the **Malliouhana** is so relaxing it will induce a sleepy, Zen-like state within 10 minutes of arrival. Sun-dappled trees, chirping birds and an assortment of waterfalls and fountains add to the elegant plantation architecture. The resort is family friendly but also caters to couples; kids are whisked away to their own pool area on the property so as not to disturb the adults. Attentive service, extensive facilities, award-winning chefs and a renowned beach make the Malliouhana a perennial favourite.



## Best

### CAP JULUCA

Dramatic Moorish architecture, lush landscaping, all ocean-front views and a recent \$20 million renovation combine to create a first-rate resort on Anguilla. Nestled in the crescent-shaped **Maundays Bay**, **Cap Juluca** is the kind of exclusive and private place that offers celebrities a secluded hideaway and couples a romantic wedding or honeymoon paradise. The resort has a four-to-one staff-to-guest ratio, with villas providing 24-hour butler service. You'll find award-winning dining, top-notch sports and fitness facilities, a golf course and 179 acres to explore. **Warning:** you may not want to leave.



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# Cultural Close-up: Canouan Island

Gregory B. Gallagher



COURTESY OF CANOUAN RESORT

Since appearing as the backdrop for the 2009 *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue cover, **Canouan Island** in **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** has attracted a lot of attention. Once virtually unknown to most vacationers, except a few 'in the know' luxury aficionados, this tiny outpost (only 1,600 acres) in the southern Caribbean offers a level of idyllic rejuvenation difficult to find anywhere else.

While comprising only a few square miles of hilly turf and sandy bays (3½ miles by 1½ miles), partly surrounded by exquisite coral, the island is perfect for snorkeling and scuba diving. It's also a perfect place to launch a boat and explore nearby islands, with **The Moorings'** Caribbean hub offering leasing, moorage, maintenance and day tours ([www.moorings.com](http://www.moorings.com)).

## OUT WITH THE OLD...

Canouan's history is a veritable saga of legend: changing from the hands of pirates to the British, then the French and subsequently to native ownership, and back to the Brits. In 1990 all that changed. Conditions on this island were closer to those of the Middle Ages than the 20th century when Swiss-Italian banker Antonio Saladino visited and decided to develop the island as a resort. What he built in the ensuing years is a legacy for this community.

## ...AND IN WITH THE NEW

Today, international hospitality service levels are high, and partnerships have been forged with global brands like Donald Trump, American Airlines, Moorings and Amrita Spa to create a unique set of offerings for travellers seeking distinctive luxury in an original setting.

## FESTIVAL FEVER

If swimming, golfing, diving, spa treatments, gambling and fine dining aren't enough, you can also visit the nearby islands. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines hosts the **Blues and Rhythm Festival** each year. Beginning in late January and continuing for several weeks, it's the only blues festival in the Caribbean, and was originally held on **Mustique**. Events now unfold on **Bequia** and Saint Vincent as well, with rumours that Canouan is next. The **Nine Mornings Festival** is a distinct Vincentian celebration associated with Christmas revelry. For nine consecutive mornings leading up to December 25, Vincentians rise in the wee hours to begin festivities, among them sea baths, local dances or 'fetes', bicycle riding and music in the streets. In rural areas, the final morning ends with a steel band 'jump-up'. **Vincy Mas**, another name for Saint Vincent's **Carnival**, is one of the most colourful festivals around, lasting

from May through July and culminating in **J'ouvert** and **Mardi Gras**. Nearby **Barbados** also offers horse races, polo games and sailboat competitions, among other diversions.

## CULINARY CRED

Despite its petite size, Canouan offers wonderful dining possibilities, beginning with the spectacular buffet breakfast at **Jambu's**. The afternoon cocktail tradition at **Bellini's** courtyard often leads to a full dining experience of Italian specialties. The Caribbean's most interesting *enoteca* (wine house) features more than 3,500 bottles from some 350 labels. Formal dining at **La Varenne** is located high atop **Mount Royal**, where **Frédéric Boulay**, Quebec City's Chef of the Year in 2006, creates culinary magic and brings an enviable service record from stints in Monaco, Luxembourg and Australia. **Godhal's Beach Bar and Grill** serves the waterfront, and its Friday live-music BBQ buffet is legendary.

## R&R

Canouan Island has three major accommodations, led by the five-star ultra luxurious **Canouan Resort** (formerly Raffles) covering 200 acres on Carenage Bay ([www.canouan.com](http://www.canouan.com)), which includes the Trump International Golf Club, Trump Club Privée Casino and Canouan Resort Spa. On the opposite side of the island near the village of Charlestown, the **Tamarin Beach Hotel and Yacht Club** offers 40 upscale Brazilian walnut-panelled hideaway units beside the **Moorings Yacht Centre**. The **Tamarin** serves the yachting community generously, with cuisine and beverages at the Palapas and Pirate Cove restaurants. Tours of nearby Tobago Cay, Palm and Union islands are available, and the Sea Grape provides delightful seaside massages to soothe body and soul ([www.tamarinbeachhotel.com](http://www.tamarinbeachhotel.com)). For the ultimate in luxury, the **Grenadines Estate Villas** beckon with four- and five-bedroom villas complete with their own pool, maid and the full-service amenities of the resort. ▣

## GRAVITAS QUOTIENT

**Bonnie Brooks** is President and CEO of the Bay, and has spent more than 25 years building prestige retail formats around the world, including for Holt Renfrew, Harvey Nichols and leading designer brand stores in Asia, where she lived for 11 years. In Canada, Ms. Brooks is best known for her executive roles at Holt Renfrew, and she also served as Editor-in-Chief of *Flare*, Canada's most popular fashion and lifestyle magazine. Her distinctive voice can be heard in radio commercials for the Bay, and also here, in her answers to our Gravitas questions.

### *What is the best way out of a funk?*

Stargazing to *Corcovado* by Stan Getz and João Gilberto; dreaming to Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 6*; dancing to Bob Marley's *One Love* or moving to *I Gotta Feeling* by the Black Eyed Peas.

### *What questions are best left unanswered?*

Those related to past loves, posed by current loves.

### *Why are some people so restless to seek extraordinary experiences?*

They are probably suffering from adrenaline addiction, or an insatiable curiosity. Or perhaps they might just be overly competitive!

### *What are the disadvantages of a bugely creative personality?*

None that I can think of. I love a creative mind – and a dreamer – even if they can't make ends meet or don't see the need to do so!

### *If you wanted to disappear, where would you go?*

There are a lot of places that come to mind: my closet, my head, my cottage. But probably the most exotic and meditative would be the terraced rice fields in the deepest interior of Bali... Having lived in Asia for 11 years, I know of a few great spots to slip away to easily.

### *What magic elixir would you like to create?*

One that enhances our ability to be kind to others and increases our tolerance of what we don't understand.

### *How can you tell if someone is lying?*

I think I'm pretty terrible at that. I don't understand why people think that lying is going to go unnoticed over time. I also think too many people may have misunderstood Eckhart Tolle's concept of 'living in the now'.

### *What is the best thing you've ever found in a shoebox?*

Old photos. But you didn't ask about the worst thing I've found in a shoebox: unworn, forgotten and out-of-date shoes!

### *How do you know you have been on an exotic journey?*

If I need another suitcase, just to get home, and if my Visa has been refused.

### *What makes your heart stand still?*

A big spider. My dog with his ball in his mouth luring me to throw it yet one more time! The view of the Canadian Rockies at sunrise from Cathay Flight 826. ▣

## GRAVITAS THE GAME

Invented by Canadian **Alan Gratias** after hosting a particularly interesting dinner party, Gravitas is a game of discovery – of who we are and how we live. There are no dice or cards, just questions with no right or wrong answers. Although the game calls for reflection, you can make it as lighthearted as you wish. The player with the highest Gravitas Quotient (GQ) wins! Why not test your own GQ? Find out more about the game at [www.gravitasthegame.com](http://www.gravitasthegame.com).



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