LITTLE BRITAIN

AFTERNOON TEAS, CRICKET AND LONDON RESTAURANT OUTPOSTS, BARBADOS FEELS LIKE A HOME FROM HOME – WITH ADDED GLAMOUR

WORDS DAWN ALFORD
Barbados is a blissful destination for Brits—a marvelous mix of the familiar and the exotic. Cricket greens and Anglican churches in every village but with a balmy climate to die for. Add white beaches with clear azure sea, plus rainbow-hued hummingbirds and green monkeys in your hotel garden, and you are in paradise.

I am lucky enough to have visited many times, but this trip was a family affair. The cliche about making memories springs to mind. There were too many happy experiences to list. We were lucky enough to stay in the Ixora, a handsome villa in the lush gardens of the Coral Reef Club. This otherworldly five-star resort has been run by the same family for more than half a century and really shows for the passion put into it. Set on the west coast in a prime location just 30 minutes from the airport, the resort owes its stellar reputation to Brits Cynthia and Budge O'Hara. They arrived in Barbados in the 1950s; Budge was to be manager of a fledgling hotel on 12 acres of beachfront property. The couple turned the scrub-like land into gorgeous gardens, and arranged fresh flowers in every room. Personal touches like this are one of the many reasons that the Coral Reef has a high rate of repeat business. Once you have sampled this paradise, nowhere else seems comparable.

The resort is now run by the O'hara's children and grandchildren, who insist on only the finest service. As we delightedly discovered, this is the jewel of the Caribbean crown. Our villa had a large lounge complete with cable television, leading to a spacious patio and separate kitchen. Tastefully decorated, the wooden balustrading, fretwork and shuttered windows are typically Caribbean. The master bedroom's huge air-conditioned marble bathroom, luxurious bed and soft furnishings were sumptuous. And a second patio for a little privacy was the icing on the cake. The other three bedrooms were on the other side of the villa and my daughters adored them. The large terrace, with comfy chaise longues, led out onto our own verdant private lawn and garden. The grounds are so spacious that we had the luxury of feeling we had them to ourselves. A nearby full-sized swimming pool was practically ours alone and we spent many happy hours splashing around. My youngest learned to swim independently in that nearby swimming pool and after completing a full width, celebrated with fresh fish and chips and a milkshake brought to her by the pool on a silver platter by one of the amazing team from room service. She declared it her "very best day ever" and it's a memory I know she will remember forever.

Barbados is fantastic for foodies and the Coral Reef's chefs are some of the best. The hotel has a superb restaurant with...
A favourite pastime is snorkelling and the seas off the Coral Reef Club are sublime. There were plenty of reefs in Barbados. You don’t need an aqualung to see the gorgeous marine life. Whether snorkelling or taking a glass-bottomed boat, head for Folkestone Marine Park and Carlisle Bay where there are coral heads, and wrecks which will fascinate any youngster.

Barbados stages dozens of great sporting events every year. From May to December you can see local cricket matches played on pitches around the island, but the major competitions like the Test Series happen early, from January to May.

Shopping, whether upscale boutiques or authentic Bajan stores, is pure pleasure and Bridgetown is the island’s retail therapy capital with Jacoetta’s Mall in the historic Colonnade building, and famous department store Cave Shepherd.

But one of the finest features of Barbados is its tradition of friendliness and courtesies. The Bajans are warm, sociable and dynamic people, always with a smile.

There is a heavenly scent on the island which you just don’t seem to get anywhere else. A sweet blend of fragrant Frangipani and Bougainvillea mixed with a salty sea tang. If you could recreate this in a spray, you’d make a fortune.

But since we cannot yet buy Barbados in a bottle, we’ll just have to keep taking those trips.

FACT FILE

For a small island, Barbados packs a powerful punch. Here are some fascinating facts about the Caribbean jewel:

Celebrities who love the island include pop star Rihanna, who was born there in 1988, and golf legend Tiger Woods, who married on the island. Simon Cowell visits every year, and Wayne Rooney has a fabulous £5 million villa there.

“Pride and industry” is the Barbadian national motto.

Holetown – originally known as St James Town – was named after King James I of England.

In Barbados it is considered good luck if a mongoose crosses your path.

Grapefruit is a hybrid fruit invented in Barbados.

Barbados has a literacy rate of 99.7%, ranking it third in the world.

The island’s oldest rum, Mount Gay, which dates back to 1703.

The island gets 3,000 hours of sunshine each year, with April the hottest month and January the coolest.