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ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

The beach is just the beginning...



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: THE LEEWARD ISLANDS TWINS THAT ARE MAKING HEADLINES

BY MERYL D. PEARLSTEIN

ARE YOU DREAMING OF A CARIBBEAN HOLIDAY? THE TWIN ISLANDS OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA MAY NOT BE THE FIRST TWO THAT COME TO MIND, BUT THEY SHOULD BE! CHARMING, FRIENDLY AND FILLED WITH SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BEACHES ANYWHERE, THIS DOUBLE-ISLAND INVITES YOU TO A WORLD BLESSED WITH BEAUTIFUL WEATHER, BUT NOT OVERRUN WITH TOURISTS. IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA WERE NAMED "THE CARIBBEAN'S MOST ROMANTIC DESTINATION" THIS YEAR IN THE WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS.

Antigua and Barbuda are islands on the move! The islands have the newest and most modern airport in the region, with plenty of duty-free shops to spoil you before and after your visit. An upgraded "marquee" cruise port is in the near future, and that means a nice infusion of cash to the islands. So you'll be sure to find some pretty wonderful restaurants, world-class casinos and designer shops. There are

also some significant infrastructure renovations happening to bring the islands up to the high standards of today's travelers, plus quite a lot of new accommodations on the horizon, so you can pamper yourself and relax, all in a dreamy setting.

Fun in the Sun

Let's get back to the basics of these two islands: the beaches! Antigua and Barbuda have a total of 365 beaches. You could

stay a year and visit a different one each day, with some beaches reachable only by boat or ferry. You can be as private or as social as you'd like as you set your blanket on the powder white sands of Antigua or the pink shell beaches of Barbuda. Snorkel the islands' beautiful undersea world or stay on top of the warm waters by chartering a catamaran or fishing boat. Sailors have long been hip to the attractions of these islands. Both Antigua Sailing Week and the fourth largest sail-

ing regatta in the world happen each year in late April and early May. <http://www.sailingweek.com/v4/>

Upscaling for the Future

According to Prime Minister, the Honorable Gaston Browne, in a presentation given at Le Bernardin restaurant in New York City, Antigua and Barbuda are poised to take their place among the go-tos in the Caribbean, as they are well governed and flush with international investment pledges and big name proponents like Robert DeNiro. Prime Minister Browne also noted that, because the islands are among the wealthiest on a per capita basis in the region, with the second fastest growing economy in the Americas, they are safe, beautiful and well-maintained. DeNiro, along with a host of international hoteliers, are currently rebuilding what was Princess Diana's favorite resort on Barbuda (there's a beach named for her there) and adding many more hotel rooms in Antigua for discerning travelers. In a short while, accommodations that had been relatively modest, will be enhanced by a top-notch range of luxury resorts (some all-inclusive), villas, boutique hotels, cottages and eco-resorts. Current favorites like The Inn at English Harbour, Hermitage Bay, Jumby Bay and Curtain Bluff will be spruced up as well, as Antigua solidifies its appeal among the sun worshipping and yachting set.

Plans for the islands include a solid network of roads to bring visitors by the increasingly green islands, made even lush by an active reforestation program that affirms the islands' commitment to fighting climate change. Sustainability and use of natural energy sources are paramount and can be seen even in the use of solar panels at the airport. Because of the lovely setting, you may see some film trucks as well. A partnership between the government and a newly created production company, Golden Island Filmworks, allows investors to become citizens on the islands. The first two films planned are the Bob Marley biopic, *Rebels* and an espionage thriller based on secret agent and master detective of fiction fame, Nick Carter.

Hot Time, Summer in the Islands

If you wanted to plan your trip around some of the islands' distinctive events, summertime is the most delightful time. There's The Mango Festival in July, where you can gorge yourself silly on everything mango. Or, if music and pageantry are more your thing, Carnival will be celebrating its 60th anniversary from July 22-August 2, 2016, and you can expect quite a party. Don't miss J'ouvert (or Juvé), the day when all of the islands' brass and steel bands hit the streets along with revelers in body paint and costumes. www.antiguacarnival.com.

If You Go

New this fall, JetBlue offers a direct flight from the US to Antigua's V.C. Bird International Airport from JFK, as well as codeshare connections through San Juan. Other flights are on American Airlines from JFK, Charlotte and Miami; on Delta from Atlanta; and on United Airlines from Newark. The upgraded and fully air-conditioned airport offers free WiFi, is completely accessible, guarantees lightning-quick customs and baggage claim, and provides quiet respite for you and your pets in VIP and Executive lounges.

Antigua and Barbuda are the largest of the Leeward Islands. In addition to their beau-

tiful beaches and yachting locations, you can delve into the history of the islands at Nelson's Dockyard in English Harbour to visit the remnants of a Georgian fort commissioned by the British in 1755. Also at Betty's Hope where restored mills from the 1674 sugar plantation are open to visitors. Photographers will love Devil's Bridge, a natural limestone arch created by waves smashing against the eastern tip of Antigua. The Frigate Bird Sanctuary in Barbuda is a paradise for bird watchers. Land sports aren't forgotten either: the islands' British heritage is manifest in both golf courses and cricket matches, open to the public. www.visitantiguabarbuda.com



FEEL THE WIND



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BEACHES



EXOTIC
CUISINE



SAIL
AWAY

With 365 beaches, yachting adventures, and exclusive accommodations, the islands of Antigua and Barbuda offer something for everyone.

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