

ST. BARTS

The Lap of Luxury

PRIME TIME
 No place else glistens quite like St. Barts in high season.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, don't fix it. Unless, of course, it's on St. Barts, where upgrading from ultra to *ne plus ultra* is an annual tradition. Of course, the French island has been feeling the pinch from the weakened economy and a decline in American tourists, but recession-proof visitors overdosing on luxury would never know it. From new restaurants to five-star renovations, St. Barts is as glitzy and glamorous as ever.

INN STYLE St. Barts' mode is best expressed with an oxymoron: sumptuous

simplicity. Take **Le Sereno** hotel — its 37 renovated rooms along Grand Cul-de-Sac beach are a sophisticated pairing of white linen and russet wood. The hotel is also offering a trio of new four-bedroom villas for sale this winter, decorated by trendy French designer Christian Liaigre.

Hotel Le Toiny's new managers have spiffed up the secluded villa escape for the season, adding new beach access from its 15 redecorated cottages (which now have Wi-Fi, flat-screen TVs and Frette linens), a fitness center, spa and seaside → →



CHIC EATS Once a burger joint, the **SANTA FE** in Lurin has been reborn as a slice of the Southwest, cactuses and all. But its view from high in the hills above Gouverneur Beach is quintessentially Caribbean, and the menu — including wahoo with ginger and coriander, a tomato tart with pesto and mascarpone cheese — is pure St. Barts. Fish Market Wednesday at Le Toiny's esteemed eatery, **LE GAIAC** (left), is a rare bargain by local standards: \$67 for a three-course *prix-fixe* lunch or dinner. Select your main course by placing the shell from your table by the fish of your choice, displayed on a nearby table and cooked while you watch.

ST. BARTS THE AGENDA

STAY

Hotel Carl Gustaf

011-590-590-297-900
 hotelcarlgustaf.com
 From \$727 in low season
 (\$1,564 high)

Hotel Le Toiny

011-590-590-278-888
 letoiny.com
 From \$740 in low season
 (\$1,120 high)

Le Sereno

888-537-3736
 lesereno.com
 From \$655 in low season
 (\$929 high)

Villa Lodge 4 Epices

011-590-590-876-868
 villalodge4epices.com
 From \$481 in low season
 (\$825 high)

Villa Triagoz

011-33-607-115-419
 villa-triagoz.com
 From \$6,500 in low season
 (\$10,000 high)

EAT

Le Gaiac

011-590-590-278-888
 letoiny.com
Prix fixe lunch or dinner
 for \$67

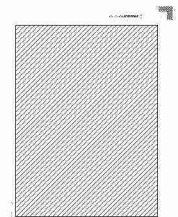
Santa Fe

011-590-590-276-104
 Entrées from \$24

DRINK

Yacht Club

011-590-590-276-891
 ksplaces.com/yacht.swf





ISLAND FLAVOR In the hills above Grand Cul-de-Sac sits **VILLA LODGE 4 EPICES**, part villa, part small-town bed-and-breakfast, and entirely unique. Its four whimsically decorated suites and a two-bedroom villa, each named for a different spice, feature tongue-in-cheek takes on baroque style and have an Alice-in-Wonderland feel, with brightly colored doors, plastic chandeliers, fluorescent green tapestries and baskets made from tires. Breakfast and a weekly tasting menu are served at a communal table overlooking the pool and the sea.

→ walking trail.

Villa Triagoz is a minimalist combination of metallic railings, white columns and wooden decks, nestled in the hills above sweeping Flamands Beach. The three-bedroom property has a plunge pool suspended precipitously over a lush hillside, offering breathtaking views of the ocean and neighboring Anguilla. Meanwhile, in Gustavia, the capital, the ever-elegant **Hotel Carl Gustaf** reopens with a newly designed restaurant, reception area and a four-bedroom Royale Suite.

NO RESERVATIONS Scoring a table at a fashionable St. Barts restaurant in high season can be like getting seats on the 50-yard line for the Super Bowl. Rise to the challenge with the help of **St. Barth Properties**, a concierge service that handles travel needs large and small, from dinner reservations to hotel and villa bookings. stbarth.com

RECESSION? WHAT RECESSION?

Two vodka tonics at chic Gustavia nightclub **The Yacht Club**: \$45.
 A generous serving of beluga at

Gustavia lounge **Caviar Island**: \$1,105.
 A one-week Christmastime stay at St. Barts' most opulent villa, the lavishly appointed, seven-bedroom **La Grand Maison des Etoiles**: \$281,671.
 Experiencing just how egregiously expensive St. Barts is: priceless.

ARTFUL ANTIDOTE On an island where "highbrow" is a strenuous understatement, **Zaza Noah's studio** at Anse des Cailles' Hotel Manapany is a refreshingly bohemian oasis where the dreadlocked artist with color-splattered hands uses acrylic house paint to create canvases bursting with life. Born to a French mother and a West African father, the 43-year-old free spirit honed her self-taught craft in locales that included France, Cameroon and the U.S., but St. Barts is her home and primary inspiration. Noah's international exhibition schedule is posted on her website (zazanoah.com), and she welcomes visitors to her studio. But the artist suggests an even simpler way of finding her work on island: "Just look for Zaza."

— Baz Dreisinger