Barbados

**Why Go?**

Barbados is ringed by azure water and white-sand visions that fuel the fantasies of those stuck in chilly winter climes. No matter your budget or style, you’ll find a place to stay, especially on the popular south and west coasts. Elsewhere, however, is where you’ll find what makes the island special. Barbados has lush scenery among rolling hills dotted with fascinating survivors of the colonial past. Vast plantation homes show the wealth of European settlers, while several botanical gardens exploit the beauty possible from the perfect growing conditions.

The wild Atlantic-battered east coast is a legend with surfers; those looking for action will also find windsurfing, hiking, diving and more. Away from the glitz, it’s still a civilized place (with a 98% literacy rate) of classic calypso rhythms, an island-time vibe and world-famous rums.

**When to Go**

The climate in Barbados tends to be nice year-round: in January, the average daily high temperature is 28°C (83°F), while the low average is 21°C (70°F). In July, the average daily high is 30°C (86°F), while the average low is 23°C (74°F). April averages only seven days of rain, while July is the wettest month, with some 18 days of rain. The tourist high season runs from mid-December through mid-April. June through October is the hurricane season – although many years see none.
GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

Short of sailing your own boat – or hitching a ride – the only way to and from Barbados is by air. Every so often there is talk of a ferry service to neighboring islands like St Lucia or St Vincent but it never materializes. Air links are comprehensive and frequent.

FOUR DAYS
Depending on your budget, stay on the mid-priced south coast or the fancier west coast, go diving or snorkeling (maybe surfing in the south) and spend an afternoon wandering the island’s heart: Bridgetown.

ONE WEEK
As above, but spend a couple of days exploring the interior and the east coast. Or stay in the wet and wild east and make trips west. Or try it all and split your time between the south or west and east. This will give you time away from crowds plus time partying with crowds.

TWO WEEKS
The same as for one week but with more time to utterly chill out. Get lost! Head into the hills of central Barbados and take roads at random. It’s green, beautiful and full of sights and surprises. Plus you’re on an island, so you can’t get lost for long.

Essential Food & Drink

» Flying fish Served fried in delicious sandwiches all over the country. It’s a mild white fish that is great sautéed or deep-fried.

» Conkies A mixture of cornmeal, coconut, pumpkin, sweet potato, raisins and spices, steamed in a plantain leaf.

» Fish cakes There are myriad Bajan recipes, made from salt cod and deep-fried.

» Cou-cou A creamy cornmeal and okra mash.

» Cutters Meat or fish sandwiches in a salt-bread roll.

» Jug-jug A mixture of cornmeal, green peas and salted meat.

» Roti A curry filling rolled inside flat bread.

» Bananas Local varieties are green even when ripe (look for them in markets).

» Barbadian rum Considered some of the finest in the Caribbean, with Mount Gay being the best-known label.

» Banks The island’s crisp lager is refreshing after a day in the hot sun.

AT A GLANCE

» Currency Barbadian dollar (B$)

» Language English

» Money ATMs all over; some dispense Barbadian and US dollars

» Visas Not required for citizens of the US, Canada and most European and Commonwealth countries

Fast Facts

» Area 432 sq km

» Population 286,000

» Capital Bridgetown

» Telephone country code +1

» Telephone area code 246

» Emergency Fire 311, police 211, ambulance 511

Set Your Budget

» Budget hotel room B$100

» Two-course evening meal B$30

» Beer B$5

» Flying-fish sandwich B$10

» Bus B$1.50

Resources

» Barbados Tourism Authority (www.visitbarbados.org)

» Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (www.bhta.org)

» Barbados National Trust (http://trust.funbarbados.com)

» National News (www.nationnews.com)
Unwind on the blissful beaches fringing the island, such as the perfectly white Accra Beach (p204) in Hastings

Revel in one of the Caribbean’s great parties, the weekly Oistins Fish Fry (p209)

Join the raucous crowds at a cricket match (p218)

Stroll through the beautiful Bajan past in the old port town of Speightstown (p212)

Enjoy the lush beauty of the island’s rich floral wonders, such as Welchman Hall Gully (p214)

Sample Barbados’ most popular meal, a flying-fish dish at a cafe in Bridgetown (p200)

Experience the beautiful present and ugly past at grand plantation homes such as St Nicholas Abbey (p213)
BRIDGETOWN

POP 101,000

Barbados’ bustling capital, Bridgetown, is also the island’s only city and is situated on its only natural harbor, attractive Carlisle Bay. Wandering around its many sights and old colonial buildings can easily occupy a day. Head along the side streets of the main drags to discover residential neighborhoods scattered with rum shops and chattel houses.

Many visitors enjoy taking a rest from sightseeing at one of the cafes or snack stands along the south banks of the Constitution River. There is good shopping, especially along Broad St and on pedestrian-only Swan St, which buzzes with the rhythms of local culture. Bay St, south of the center, has a nice beach and several bars, and further on are some important sights. The entire area is in St Michael Parish.

Sights & Activities

All of the following sites can be reached on foot.

St Michael’s Cathedral

The island’s Anglican cathedral was originally completed in 1665 to accommodate 3000 worshippers, but came tumbling down in a hurricane a century later. The scaled-down but still substantial structure (it’s also a hurricane shelter) that stands today dates from 1789 and seats 1600. At the time of construction it was said to have the widest arched ceiling of its type in the world. Among the island notables tightly packed into the rather shambolic adjacent churchyard are Sir Grantley Adams (Barbados’ first premier and the head of the West Indies Federation from 1958 to 1962) and his son Tom (prime minister of Barbados from 1976 to 1985).

National Heroes Square

The triangular square (formerly known as Trafalgar Sq) marks the bustling center of the city. The square once celebrated Battle of Trafalgar hero Lord Horatio Nelson (whose statue still stands on the west side of the square), but was eventually changed to honor 10 Bajan heroes – from cricket greats to slave leaders.

Parliament Buildings

On the north side of National Heroes Sq are two stone-block, neo-Gothic-style buildings constructed in 1871. The west-side building with the clock tower contains public offices; the building on the east side houses the Senate and House of Assembly and is adorned with stained-glass windows depicting British monarchs. Parliament meets most Tuesdays and you can line up for a free spot in the gallery, but be sure to dress accordingly: long pants and skirts plus proper shoes.

At the museum (admission $5; ✂️9am-4pm Mon, Wed-Sat) learn about the island’s proud democratic heritage (it regularly finishes in surveys of the top tier of countries with the least corruption, ahead of the UK and US); museum entry includes a tour of the parliament buildings.

Barbados Synagogue

(BSynagogue Lane; ✂️9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Built in 1833, this small synagogue between James St and Magazine Lane, near National Heroes Sq, was abandoned in 1929 and beautifully restored in 1986. The island’s first synagogue was built on this site in the 1600s, when Barbados had a Jewish population of more than 800. Over the following years the population dwindled, owing to emigration and Christian conversion, leaving only one person by 1929. In 1931 the Jewish population of Barbados rebounded when a large group arrived after fleeing discrimination in Poland. In decline again, the community now numbers about 90.

Nidhe Israel Museum

(Housed in a restored 1750 Jewish community center, this museum documents the fascinating story of the Barbados Jewish community. It’s massively built from cut coral blocks that glow in the sun and is near the synagogue.

Carlisle Wharf

(Hincks St) A small commercial building has benches on the waterside which overlook the harbor; interesting plaques chart the local maritime heritage.

Sleeping

Few visitors stay in Bridgetown and there are few accommodations available. Aquatic Gap, just south of town, is the first spot with any hotels to speak of; however, it is recommended that you head the few minutes further to Hastings, Rockley, Worthing, St Lawrence Gap or beyond for a more relaxed beach atmosphere.
**Eating**

*Mustor's Restaurant*  
CARIBBEAN $  
(McGregor St; lunch from B$14; lunch Mon-Sat) Climb the stairs past the small snack bar and bar to a large, plain dining room. Choose from staples such as beef and pork stew, flying fish and chicken in various forms. Then select the sides – we love the macaroni pie (like mac ’n’ cheese but better) and the split peas and rice. If you’re lucky you’ll snag one of three balcony tables where you can gaze down on passers-by not enjoying what you’re enjoying.

*Lobster Alive*  
SEAFOOD $$$  
(435-0305; www.lobsteralive.net; Bay St; meals from B$40; lunch & dinner) The name is only true until you order. Lobster bisque and grilled lobster are just some of the choices on the crustacean-heavy menu at this ramshackle joint on the beach. A huge tank holds hundreds of the namesake critters at any given time – all flown in, one-way, from the Grenadines. Smooth jazz (Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday nights) is also a trademark.

*Balcony Restaurant*  
CARIBBEAN $  
(Broad St; lunch from B$12; lunch Mon-Sat) The in-house restaurant at the landmark Cave Shepherd Department Store has a small daily buffet of island favorites like curries and salads. Ask a local where they go for lunch, and they’ll point here. The fresh juices are excellent.

*Waterfront Cafe*  
CAFE $$  
(Careenage; meals from B$25; lunch & dinner) Always packed, especially the breezy tables on the river. Lunches include a fine version of a flying-fish sandwich; dinners are more elaborate and have Mediterranean color and flair. There’s live music ranging from steel pan to jazz.

*Cheapside Market*  
MARKET $  
(Cheapside; 7am-3pm Mon-Sat) Even if you’re not intending to buy, this is a fascinating place to browse local produce in a grand old market hall recently restored by the thoughtful Chinese government. It has some nice snack stands on the 2nd floor. The best times to visit are Friday and Saturday mornings. Southwest across Princess Alice Hwy, the open-air public market has all things briny fresh from the boats.

*Paris Bakery*  
BAKERY $  
(Cheapside; snacks from B$3; breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) Enjoy take-out banana bread, coconut bread and other treats at this delectable little bakery.
Parliament Market
(Palmetto St; meals from B$10; lunch Mon-Sat)
A series of small wooden huts behind the Parliament buildings has both produce and lunch items. Some of the region’s finest chicken soup comes from a green hut without a sign but with a pile of sugar beets out front.

Fairchild St Market
(Fairchild St; 7am-3pm Mon-Sat) Have a meal or a cheery drink with amiable and voluble locals; has snack stands, cafes and rum shops in a long row along the river. The markets are usually open 7am to late afternoon Monday to Saturday.

Palmetto Market
(Swan St; 7am-3pm Mon-Sat) At the east end. A good place for fresh produce and snacks.

Drinking
Bridgetown’s many rum shops are patronized by local regulars, though visitors are not unwelcome. Along Baxters Rd, just north of the center, you’ll find a concentration of these bars, where alcohol flows and fish is fried up until late at night. Although women will not be turned away, be warned that rum shops are a macho haunt.

Boatyard
(Bay St; 11am-2am) An over-amped beach bar that pushes the sex-on-the-beach angle hard, the Boatyard gets visitors by the busload who come for the daytime drinking contests and beach activities. By day there’s a cover charge to use the many beach facilities. Late night it’s a club with DJs and live music (cover varies). There’s free transportation to and from the cruise dock or it’s a 30-minute walk through the heart of town.

Smith Corner Pub
(Bay St; 5pm-late) For an accessible rum-shop-style experience check out this old place, which is one of several on the stretch. Note how old cannons are now used as posts.

Shopping
Broad St in the center is the place for shops great and small.
Pelican Craft Village  
(CRAFTS) This ever-evolving complex of galleries and workshops, between downtown and the cruise-ship terminal, features the works of many local artists. The Barbados Arts Council (www.barbadosartsCouncil.com) has a shop here with the works of more than 100 of its members usually on show.

Cave Shepherd  
(DEPARTMENT STORE) The island's grand old department store has well-priced rum and a quality souvenir section. There's camera supplies and a decent book department, with a wide selection of Caribbean and international literature plus the UK's Sunday Times. The Balcony Restaurant is a local lunch fave.

Cloister Bookstore  
(BOOKSTORE) Carries local and international literature and bestsellers.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS  
Connect (Shop 9, 27 Broad St; per 10min B$3; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-4pm Sat) Upstairs in the Galleria Mall behind Nelson’s Arms (enter from Lancaster Lane). Laptop connections and cheap calls.

LIBRARIES  
National Library (Coleridge St; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) To check out books here you’ll pay a refundable deposit of B$20. The deposit is valid also at Holetown, Speightstown and Oistins branches.

MEDICAL SERVICES  
Collins Pharmacy (28 Broad St) Prescriptions, sundries, shoe and watch repair. Fun to browse even if you’re ailment-free.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital  
(MONEY) Major banks for currency exchange line Broad St.

POST  
Post office (Cheapside; 7:30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

TOURIST INFORMATION  
Barbados Tourism Authority (427-2623; www.barbados.org; Harbour Rd; 8:15am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Answers questions, offers brochures; a branch office at the cruise-ship terminal opens when ships are in port.

Getting There & Away

Bus stations are scattered through town.

Fairchild St Bus Terminal  
(Bridge St) North of Fairchild St; public buses going south and east.

Minibus Terminal  
(Princess Alice Hwy) At the west end; minibuses going north. Adjoins Princess Alice Terminal.

Princess Alice Terminal  
(Princess Alice Hwy) At the west end; public buses going north.

River Bus Terminal  
(Nursery Rd) Minibuses along central and eastern routes.

Route Taxi Terminal  
(Nursery Rd) Along the river; minibuses along the tourist-heavy southern coast.

Getting Around

Bridgetown is easily covered on foot, although taxis can be flagged on the street if necessary, or hailed from the waiting area. The set taxi fare from one end of town to the other is B$6.

Around Bridgetown

The following sights are within 5km of Bridgetown’s center.

Sights

Barbados Museum  
(MUSEUM) (Garrison; adult/child B$15/7.50; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) This excellent museum is housed in an early-19th-century military prison. It has engaging displays on all aspects of the island’s history, beginning with its early indigenous residents. The most extensive collections cover the colonial era, with exhibits on slavery, emancipation, military history and plantation-house furniture, all accompanied by insightful narratives.

George Washington House  
(MUSEUM) (Bush Hill, Garrison; adult/child B$20/5; 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Just west of the Barbados Museum, they can truly claim that the great
man slept here. After decades of research and debate, it was finally shown that this 18th-century estate had been the home of the future US president and his brother Lawrence during their fateful stay in 1751. The beautifully restored home shows what it must have looked like during their stay. A large museum brings 1750s Barbados to life. Lush gardens include a herb patch and cafe.

Garrison Savannah Area

About 2km south of central Bridgetown, spreading inland from the south side of Carlisle Bay, was the home base of the British Windward and Leeward Islands Command in the 1800s. A focal point is the oval-shaped Savannah, which was once parade grounds and is now used for cricket games, jogging and Saturday horse races. Standing along the west side of the Savannah are some of the Garrison’s more ornate colonial buildings, where you’ll find the world’s largest collection of 17th-century iron cannons.

Pebbles Beach

A fine beach close to downtown Bridgetown (a 10-minute walk) that makes a good break before and after lunch and shopping. Lots of parking and shade trees plus shacks selling drinks.

Tours

Rum has long been a critical part of local life and you can make it part of your life as well at two facilities run by famous local distilleries.

Malibu Beach Club & Visitor Centre

Coconut-flavored Malibu is more of an export to Americans barely old enough to drink than a Bajan drink, but the company has a popular tour at the beachfront distillery. Spend time in a beach chair after the tour and samples. It’s about 3km north of the center; call to arrange transportation.

Mount Gay Rum Visitors Centre

The aged rums here are some of Barbados’ best. The visitors centre is about a kilometer north of Bridgetown Harbour. Other tour options include transportation and cocktails, from B$70.

Sleeping & Eating

Island Inn Hotel

This 24-room all-inclusive hotel is partially built in a restored 1804 garrison building that was originally a military rum store. It is near the beach off Bay St and close to town. It was given a complete renovation in 2009 and has muted island-chic motifs.

Brown Sugar

The much-loved Brown Sugar, next to the Island Inn Hotel at Aquatic Gap, is a lush paradise inside and out. The excellent West Indian buffet is popular; dinner is off a menu that includes shrimp Creole, lobster, flying fish and much more. The Bajan bread pudding is a rummy delight. Book for dinner.

Entertainment

Cricket matches are played throughout the year at the Kensington Oval in Garrison near Bridgetown, which was the site of the final in the 2007 World Cup. The Barbados Cricket Association (www.bcacricket.org) is the source of all things cricket.

Horse races are held at the Garrison Savannah on Saturday afternoons throughout the year, except April and September. Barbados Turf Club (www.barbadosturfclub.com) offers seats in the grandstand starting at B$20, but for no charge you can also watch the races from benches under the trees around the outside of the track – you can also place a bet at booths on the south or west side.

GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

In 1751, at age 19 – some 38 years before he would become the first US president – George Washington visited Barbados as a companion to his half-brother Lawrence, who suffered from tuberculosis. It was hoped that the tropical climate would prove therapeutic.

The two rented a house in the Garrison area south of Bridgetown and stayed on the island for six weeks. The restored George Washington House (see p202) gives a fascinating glimpse of the trip and the time. As it was, Lawrence never recovered and died the next year.
SOUTH COAST

The south coast is the island's tourism epicenter, with most of the budget-to-midrange accommodations along its fine white-sand beaches. This virtually uninterrupted stretch of development runs from the outskirts of Bridgetown all the way to the airport.

Hastings, Rockley and Worthing are part of one long commercial strip. St Lawrence Gap and Dover Beach is a surprisingly appealing area off the main road. East of Oistins, development begins to thin. Starting with Silver Sands the coast is fairly sedate (except for the surf and wind). All are linked by the main road along the coast, which, while designated Hwy 7, is never called that. The entire area is in Christ Church Parish.

Frequent minibuses from the Route Taxi Terminal in Bridgetown run along Main Rd (Hwy 7) on the southern coast and link all the south-coast villages. Private taxis are relatively easy to find in the main tourist areas.

Hastings & Rockley

POP 24,000

Just a 15-minute bus ride from Bridgetown are the first major tourist areas of Hastings and Rockley. They are home to a lot of aging budget and midrange hotels plus some attractive, popular beaches. Commercialism rules, and the streetscape is a Babel of signs. About halfway between Bridgetown and Rockley is Hastings Rock, a nice spot to enjoy views of the ocean. On weekends, community groups set up flea markets and hold activities around the gazebo in the small park above the water.

Beaches

Accra Beach

The largest beach in the area, it is a picture-perfect crescent of sand that you’ll want to immediately photograph and post on Facebook to irritate those left at home. Backed by shade trees, there's surf to make things interesting but nothing too dramatic. Parking is copious, as are nearby cafes and snack shops. A new boardwalk allows you to walk west for more than 3km to Hastings.

Rockley Beach

The center of activity here, this roadside white-sand public beach has shade trees, snack kiosks and clothing vendors.

Sleeping

Coconut Court Beach Resort

HOTEL $$
(2427-1655; www.coconut-court.com; Main Rd, Hastings; r US$150-250; 2) Coconut Court is a five-story beachfront 112-room hotel filled with package tourists – it’s good for families. In the right light, the institutional green paint can take on a turquoise hue from the azure waters right out front. Rooms have balconies or terraces plus kitchen facilities.

Tree Haven Beach Apartments

APARTMENTS $$
(2435-6673; kentolaya@caribsurf.com; Main Rd, Rockley; apt from US$90; 2) This affordable, laid-back option has three OK units just across the road from the beach and right near Bubba’s bar. This is one of the cheapest options here; try for the 2nd-floor unit.

Eating & Drinking

Just Grillin’

CARIBBEAN $
(Quayside Centre, Hwy 7, Rockley; meals from B$16; 11:30am-10pm) A welcome dash of style to the strip, this barbecue does exactly what the name implies. Grilled jerk chicken, burgers, fish and more. Except for the salad and rice (!), the sides are all grilled as well; the veggies will woo any carnivore.

Champers

SEAFOOD $$$
(2435-6644; Rockley; mains B$50-80; lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This longtime favorite has a dreamy location off the main road right on the water overlooking Accra Beach. There’s barely an obstruction between you and the view. Elegant meals are served on cream-colored tablecloths and include the usual range of grilled seafood plus fresh pasta. Brits will understand the name means ‘Champagne’ – drink some at the lower-level lounge.

Mojo

BAR, GRILL $$
(Hwy 7, Rockley; meals from B$20; 11am-late) A big old house by the side of the road, Mojo has a wide open-air veranda plus all sorts of nooks inside for nuzzling your companion or listening to the excellent music. Monday is open-mike night and some of the island’s best acoustic players drop by. Food ranges from burgers to bar snacks.

Information

There are plenty of shops, banks and ATMs along the main road, Hwy 7.
Worthing

POP 8500

Worthing is between the popular tourist areas of Hastings and Rockley and St Lawrence Gap. It's a good base if you're on a tight budget but still want to be near all the action. It has relatively inexpensive places at which to eat and a handful of lower-priced guesthouses that are either on the beach or a short walk away. The walk at night on the narrow, busy road to nearby St Lawrence Gap can be perilous.

Sights & Activities

Sandy Beach

A nice strip of white powder without a clever name that’s well off the main road down some tiny lanes. It’s a nice little scene with some sand-floor bars such as the Carib Beach Bar. Several budget guesthouses are stashed away on the small nearby streets. Parking is elusive at best.

Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary

(1435-9727; www.graemehall.com; Main Rd; 8am-5pm) Just east of Worthing, this preserve protects the last major mangroves on the island, but, at the time of our visit, the foundation that runs it had closed the grounds to protest decisions allowing development that may threaten the site. Meanwhile, the lush gardens spread over 14 hectares, boardwalks, trails and displays remain perfectly groomed for reopening. You can get a glimpse of the beauty from the outdoor tables at the excellent cafe. Check for sporadic opening days.

Sleeping

Coral Mist Beach Hotel

(1435-7712; www.coralmistbarbados.com; Hwy 7, Worthing; US$125-250; ) This small and traditional beachfront hotel wins plaudits for its exceptionally warm and gracious staff. All rooms have kitchen facilities and most are either studios or one-bedrooms; some have no internet access. All have balconies and views of the blinding-white beach. There’s plenty nearby in walking distance.

Maraval Guesthouse & Apartments

(1435-7437; www.maravalbarbados.com; 3rd Ave; r from US$40, apt US$60-130) On a tiny lane near

Information

Big B Supermarket (Hwy 7, Worthing; 8am-6:30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-7:30pm Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) Literally offers one-stop shopping. It has a deli, bank, ATM, pharmacy and a decent bookstore. It’s just north of the main road at the central intersection.

Eating

Worthing has some good inexpensive dining choices and a few garish midrange themed restaurants. For a nice dinner you are better off heading down the road to St Lawrence Gap.

Carib Beach Bar & Restaurant

(2nd Ave; meals B$20-40; 11am-midnight) This open-air eatery right on Sandy Beach is the hub of local holiday life. Seafood and burgers are the main items on the menu, enjoy ‘em at picnic tables on the sand while you watch waves break on the reef offshore and hear the soft rustle of palm trees overhead. The bar boogies long after the kitchen closes.

Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary Cafe

Until the nature preserve itself reopens, you can still get a view of the mangroves from the picnic tables here on a little knoll. But the food and fine coffees alone are reason enough to stop. Excellent sandwiches and baked goods are served all day.
St Lawrence Gap & Dover Beach

POP 26,000

The town of St Lawrence is almost lost along the busy main road. Instead the real action lies along a mile-long road that runs close to the beach. Lined with hotels, bars, restaurants and shops, this street is actually more pleasurable than it sounds. It’s not commercialized to the point of being gross and it’s mostly free of traffic, allowing nighttime strolling. However, some huge new projects being built may give the Gap more of a Miami Beach vibe.

The west end is known as St Lawrence Gap; the east end carries the Dover Beach moniker.

Dover Beach itself has a nice, broad ribbon of white sand that attracts swimmers, bodysurfers and windsurfers. Breakwaters maintain a good strip of sand right in the center of the main strip. Catch the sunset and enjoy a drink from the many little stands back from the beach. It’s a mellow and friendly scene.

Sleeping

Accommodation options in the Gap span the gamut from backpacker-oriented hostels to flash resorts. Most fall into the middle: smaller hotels on or near the water that have a mellow, pretense-free charm. Some have been enjoyed by the same regular guests each year for decades, all gracefully aging together.

BOAT TRIPS

Day cruises are a popular way to explore the island from a pirate’s vantage point. Many of the larger boats are floating parties, while the smaller operations tend to be more tranquil. For those who want the scuba experience without getting wet, there are submarine cruises. Boats take passengers from across the island; ask about transportation options when you book.

**Atlantis** (*436-8929; www.atlantisadventures.com; adult/child US$104/52*) With siblings in most of the Caribbean’s major destinations, the Atlantis is a 28-seat submarine lined with portholes. Departs from Bridgetown and tours the coral reef off the island’s west coast.

**El Tigre** (*417-7245; www.eltigrecruises.com; cruises adult/child from US$70/35*) Offers a three-hour cruise with snorkeling plus lunch voyages and more from B$120.

**Tall Ships Cruises** (*430-0900; www.tallshipscruises.com; cruises adult/child from US$60/45*) A range of cruises aboard vessels that include the Harbour Master, a four-deck vessel with a waterslide attached. Options include turtle-viewing and pirate-themed party cruises. Aaaaarrrr!
to a family of monkeys) at the east end of the strip, it has four large rooms that share a kitchen, TV lounge and covered patio. Two rooms share a bathroom, one has air-con.

**Rio Guest House**  
HOSTEL $  
(2428-1546; www.rioguesthouse.hostel.com; St Lawrence Gap; r US$40-65;  ) This backpacker special has nine unpretentious fan-cooled rooms. Singles share a bathroom and some rooms have optional air-con and kitchens. It’s in a tranquil location, off the main drag but about one minute from the beach and nightlife.

**Eating & Drinking**

One of the pleasures of the Gap is wandering the street at night comparing the many restaurants. Your hunger will be spurred on by the many street vendors who set up at night selling juicy burgers, grilled chicken and the ubiquitous macaroni pie. Bars range from humble to vaguely swank. Blues and show tunes at many of them keep the chatter mellow until past midnight.

**Sweet Potatoes**  
CARIBBEAN $$  
(2420-7668; St Lawrence Gap;  noon-10pm) A long terrace lit by tiny lights looks out over the water and sunset at this fabulous place for Bajan treats. Sure you can get a variety of fresh seafood, burgers and the like but, really now, eat local! Bol jol is a terrific starter that you spread on bread; it’s made with marinated local codfish. Try one of the flying-fish dishes and be sure to get it with cou-cou, a form of polenta made with okra. Ask about the cooking classes.

**Pisces**  
SEAFOOD $$  
(2435-6564; St Lawrence Gap; mains B$55-75;  dinner)  This ever-popular large restaurant stretches right along the waterfront; waves lap against the foundations below. The view at sunset followed by the twinkling lights of the coast and fishing boats is captivating. Little candles illuminate fine seafood dishes (as you’d expect from the name). The wine list favors the US, France and Australia. It’s always busy – come at 9pm for a relaxing time after the rush.

**David’s Place**  
CARIBBEAN $$  
(2435-9755; St Lawrence Gap; mains B$60-95;  dinner Tue-Sun) One of the most romantic choices in the Gap. You first encounter a proper bar as you enter; further in the lights dim and you’re at tables overlooking the bay, which laps gently below. Waiters glide about with seafood and steak dishes that feature accents of Creole and curry. It’s all very genteel and there is a dress code.

**Scotty’s**  
CONVENIENCE STORE $  
(Dover Beach; meals from B$10; 7am-9pm)  It looks like another convenience store but this one comes with a hot buffet. Enjoy trad fare like curries and stews at tables outside. Scotty’s shines, however, when cricket is on the tube: TVs outside attract a jovial mob who serve themselves beer from the coolers and cheer on the Bajan players.

**Entertainment**

Several popular venues in the Gap jam with live bands and DJs. Most have a cover charge, sometimes up to B$30 and sometimes partially redeemable for drinks. Several of the bars have live music one or more nights. Strolling the Gap, especially near the public access point for Dover Beach, you’ll find many simple joints along the road where you can enjoy low-key drinks all night.

**Reggae Lounge**  
LIVE MUSIC  
(2435-6462; St Lawrence Gap; cover varies; 9pm-late) The Reggae Lounge not only plays classic reggae, but dancehall, hip-hop and more. Although the cover charge can hit B$30, everything’s gonna be all right, especially on Mondays, when the cover includes unlimited drinks.

**Oistins**  
POP 17,000  
This decidedly local yet modern town a few miles east of St Lawrence is best known as the center of the island’s fishing industry. Oistins’ heart is the large, bustling seaside fish market, which on Friday and Saturday hosts the island’s best party.

**Beaches**

**Miami Beach**  
SECLUDED BEACH  
A somewhat hidden gem that is the antithesis of its American namesake. Small, shady and intimate, it is well removed from the often frenetic south-coast pace. It gets crowded on weekends but is wide open during the week. Look for Mr Delicious, a vendor selling rum punch and fab fish cutters (sandwiches). Take the small road heading towards South Point Lighthouse from Oistins, then curl back west to the beach.
Enterprise Beach
Immediately east of the fish market, this long and shady public beach has full facilities, lively surf, shady trees and a good vibe from a mix of locals and tourists.

Sleeping & Eating
Some of the stalls at the fish-fry complex stay open during the week for lunch and dinner. The bars never close, and get a general mix of fishing types, locals and visitors.

Little Arches Hotel
BOUTIQUE HOTEL $$$
(342-4689; www.littlearches.com; Miami Beach; r US$220-500; $88) Possibly the best boutique hotel on the south coast. Once a Mediterranean-style mansion, the hotel now has 10 rooms in a variety of shapes and sizes, some with private whirlpool baths. Privacy is at a maximum and there are lots of artful touches throughout. The decor combines bright Caribbean colors with restrained luxury such as deeply comfortable wicker chairs. It’s on the quiet Miami Beach access road.

Lexie’s
BAR
(Fish Market, Oistins Beach; 24hr) With ballroom dancing on a literally hot open-air dance floor, this combo of beach and fishing bar stands out from its nearby contemporaries.

Silver Sands
POP 12,000
At the southernmost tip of the island, between Oistins and the airport, is the breezy Silver Sands area, which includes Inch Marlow. Although you should avoid some characterless large resorts, there are good small choices popular with kitesurfers and windsurfers. In January and February, accommodations fill up when everything literally blows in the right direction.

Activities
Surfing, whether by board, kite or sail, is the huge draw here.

Surfing
Barbados has good windsurfing and kitesurfing, with the best winds from December to June. Silver Sands, at the southern tip of the island, has excellent conditions for advanced boarders, while Maxwell, just to the west, is better for intermediates.

Silver Sands

TOP CHOICE deAction Beach Shop
WINDSURFING
(342-2027; www.briantalma.com; Silver Sands) Run by board-legend Brian Talma, this shop is set on one of the hemisphere’s premier spots for windsurfing and kitesurfing. Complete gear rentals average US$80 per day; lessons begin at US$60 per hour. Watch huge kites twirl about the sky while riders hop the waves below with a cold Banks at the cafe.

Zed’s Surfing Adventures
SURFING
(342-3610; www.barbadossurfholidays.com; Surfer’s Point) Runs beginners’ surf classes (US$80), rents boards (US$25 per day, US$40 for a stand-up paddleboard) and offers surf tours around the island. It’s affiliated with Surfer’s Point Guest House.

Horseback Riding
Wilcox Riding Stables
(342-3610; rides from US$60) These stables near the airport offer one-hour rides. The trails are in Long Beach on the southeast coast, and prices include hotel pickup.

Golf
The well-heeled of Barbados support several golf courses. The oldest public course is the Barbados Golf Club (342-8463; www.barbadosgolfclub.com; Durants), where green fees begin at US$120; top-end hotels often offer discounts to guests. It was redesigned in 2000 by Ron Kirby and is 6km long.

Sleeping
In addition to the following listings, there are a number of private places in the Silver Sands area that can be rented by the week. Many windsurfers stay a night or two in a hotel and then, through word of mouth, find a shared house or apartment nearby (simple doubles for US$40 a night can be found in season – ask at the activity shops). The appeal of Surfer’s Point at the east end speaks for itself.

TOP CHOICE Surfer’s Point Guest House
GUESTHOUSE $$
(342-7873; www.barbadossurfholidays.com; Surfer’s Point; apt US$80-250; $88) The HQ of Zed’s Surfing Adventures is on a little point amid a very good break. The seven units here come in various sizes; some have balconies with views, all have kitchens and wi-fi. There’s a small protected pool out front for kids.
With soca, reggae, pop and country music, vendors selling barbecued fish and plenty of rum drinking, the legendary **Oistins Fish Fry** (food 6-10:30pm) is the weekly social event on the island. It’s roughly 60% locals, 40% tourists and there’s a joyous electricity in the air on Friday night, which is just a tad more fun than the fish fry’s other night, Saturday. It’s held in a complex of low-rise modern buildings right on the sand next to the fish market.

Here are some tips to have a great time:

- **Standard menu** Most of the stalls serve the same menu: grilled fish and shellfish, pork chops, ribs and chicken. Sides include macaroni pie, chips, plaintains, grilled breadfruit, garlic bread and more. Unless you specify, you’ll get a bit of each side with your main. It costs about B$35 per person.

- **Standards vary** Just because there’s more than 30 vendors serving the same menu doesn’t mean all are created equal. Where one will have some fish slowly drying out on an electric frying pan, another (like hugely popular **Pat’s Place**) will have a line of 100 people waiting to order and vast flaming grills.

- **It’s chaotic but orderly** Order at the vendor’s window. Despite the lines and ruckus, you almost always end up with the correct plate. And despite the crowds, space at a picnic table always seems to open up when you need it.

- **Park early** Roads to Oistins get jammed on Friday night; when you get sort of close, park. You’ll walk past hundreds of cars trying to get 200m closer.

- **Party!** Buy a cheap and icy bottle of Banks (B$3) and wander the scene, enjoying the live music, ignoring the karaoke, possibly nabbing a snog in a shadowy corner of the beach and generally hooting it up. Some of the open-air bars among the stalls never close.

**Oistins Fish Fry**

- **Peach and Quiet Hotel**
  - **Hotel $**
  - **(428-5682; www.peachandquiet.com; Inch Marlow; r from US$120; 🌼)**
  - Like mushrooms after the rain, organic shapes abound here. The 22 airy rooms come with sea-view patios set around a secluded pool. There’s an ocean-side bar and a restaurant. The owners ban children, lead walks across the island that are booked years in advance and are generally as idiosyncratic as this charming inn.

- **Ocean Spray Beach Apartments**
  - **Apartments $$**
  - **(428-5426; www.oceansprayapartments.com; Inch Marlow; r US$85-150; 🌼)**
  - Salt spray from the pounding surf mists the air at this attractive and modern 25-unit apartment complex. Balconies on rooms with views offer a captivating spectacle of the famous local surf. Relax with a cranberry juice and vodka.

**SOUTHEAST COAST**

St Philip, the diamond-shaped parish east of the airport, is sparsely populated, with a scattering of small villages. Along the coast are a couple of resort hotels and fine beaches.

Some minibuses continue into the southeast after heading east from Oistins.

**Crane Beach**

Crane Beach, situated 7km northeast of the airport, is a hidden beach cove backed by cliffs and fronted by aqua-blue waters. It is generally regarded as one of the best beaches on the island.

An adventurous trail over rocks along the water accesses the beach from the end of a small road about 700m east of the Crane Beach Hotel. Parking is competitive but the sands are simply wonderful. Bring a picnic and make a day of it.

To really blaze a trail, follow the road east another 500m and you’ll come to a cow pasture where a path leads down to a long, lovely and very much less-crowded strip of sand.

**Crane Beach Hotel**

- **Resort $$$**
  - **(423-6220; www.thecrane.com; r from US$210; 🌼)**
  - Dating to 1887, the roots of this gracious resort can still be found in the
lovely restaurants that overlook the beach and ocean (L’Azure, for example, has upscale Caribbean fare, with lunch and dinner from US$30; book in advance). Much of the complex is quite modern, with hundreds of condos and lavish resort facilities. If you like the kind of place that has an entire shop devoted to items bearing its logo, you’ll love this sprawling, swank Shangri-la.

**WEST COAST**

Barbados’ west coast has lovely tranquil beaches that are largely hidden by the majority of the island’s luxury hotels and walled estates. Known to some as the Platinum Coast, it gets this moniker either from the color of the sand or the color of the credit cards.

In colonial times, the area was a popular holiday retreat for the upper crust of British society. These days, the villas that haven’t been converted to resorts are owned by the wealthy and famous. That’s on the water side of course. On the other side of Hwy 1 are modest huts and simple vacation retreats. Although the beaches are all public, the near constant development means that you only get a few coastal glimpses.

Hwy 1, the narrow, busy and at times perilous two-laner that runs north from Bridgetown to Speightstown, has a mad mix of roaring buses and the occasional Rolls Royce. It is bordered much of the way by a mix of tourist facilities and residential areas. If you don’t have your own wheels, minibuses and public buses run frequently.

**Paynes Bay**

Fringed by a fine stretch of white sand, gently curving Paynes Bay in St James is endlessly popular and is the west coast’s most popular spot for swimming and snorkeling (you will almost certainly see sea turtles). Beach access walkways are clearly marked by roadside signs.

The main public beach site at the southern end of the bay has chair rental, picnic tables, restrooms, laid-back bars and a Friday-night fish fry. Parking can be a hassle; take a bus.

**Sleeping**

- **Tamarind Cove Hotel**

(☎432-1332; www.tamarindcovehotel.com; Paynes Bay; r from US$350; 💻) Right on the beach at Paynes Bay, everything is discreet about this understated luxury resort, which has a hacienda motif. The 110 units are decked out in a restful palette of beachy pastels. All have balconies or patios and views of either one of the three pools or the ocean. The lushly landscaped grounds boast many fountains.

- **Angler Apartments**

(☎432-0817; www.anglerapartments.com; Clarke’s Rd 1, Derricks; r US$80-140; 🚪) An unpretentious place with 13 older, basic apartments. Studios in an adjacent old plantation house are similar but smaller. There’s a little patio bar. It’s at the south end of Paynes Bay, off a road east of the main road.

**Holetown**

POP 32,000

The first English settlers to Barbados landed at Holetown in 1627. An obelisk monument along the main road in the town center commemorates the event – although the date on the monument, which reads ‘July 1605,’ is clearly on island time.

Long a bastion of understated luxury, Holetown now boasts a flashy, upscale mall, Limegrove. Still, the cute little nightlife area squeezed into a wedge between the main road and the beach retains its charm.

**Sights & Activities**

- **Barbados Marine Reserve**

(Folkstone Beach; museum adult/child B$1.50/0.50; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri) At the north end of Holetown, the marine reserve’s visitor centre (admission B$5; ☎9:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) includes a small museum with displays on the reserve, which extends for a few miles north and south. You can rent snorkeling gear (from B$20) and there are lockers. From here you can walk along the water to Holetown.

- **Hightide Watersports**

(☎432-0931; www.divehightide.com; Coral Reef Club) One of the better dive shops on the west coast.

**Sleeping**

The Holetown area can be a black hole for those on a budget, although you can find little apartments on the east side of Hwy 1. Many of the island’s poshest resorts, such as the Fairmont Glitter Bay (the former home of the Cunard family), occupy vast swaths of beach while charging the moon.
**DIVING & SNORKELING IN BARBADOS**

The west coast of Barbados has reef dives with soft corals, gorgonians and colorful sponges. There are also about a dozen shipwrecks. The largest and most popular, the 111m freighter Stavronikita, sits upright off the central west coast in 42m of water, with the rigging reaching to within 6m of the surface. In Bridgetown’s Carlisle Bay, the coral-encrusted tug Berwyn lies in only 7m of water and makes for good snorkeling as well as diving.

Not surprisingly, good dive shops are as common as flying fish along the west coast. Locations include Holetown, Mt Standfast and Speightstown.

One-tank dives with gear average B$120. For beginners, most dive companies offer a brief resort course and a shallow dive for B$120 to B$160. Rates often include free transportation from your hotel.

Snorkeling sets can be rented for about B$20 per day at west-coast beaches and dive shops. Snorkeling tours are common; many dive shops offer good ones. The Barbados Marine Reserve (p210) has good snorkeling and you can rent gear there.

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**TOP CHOICE**

**Coral Reef Club**

**RESORT $**

(3422-2372; www.coralreefbarbados.com; Holetown; r US$420-900; ★★★) This family-owned 88-unit luxury hotel has 12 acres of gorgeous landscaped grounds surrounding an elegant gingerbread fantasy of a main building. Unlike some other top-end places around Holetown, this place oozes with character. You may actually find yourself needing to be convinced to leave the grounds.

**Discovery Bay**

**RESORT $**

(3432-1301; www.rexresorts.com; Holetown; r US$150-300; ★@★) On the north side of Holetown, if this resort could speak, it would have a middle-class English accent from Kent. This older property has a faded charm that wears like a beloved old cardigan. The grassy grounds back up a tiny sandy cove. Rooms are pretty basic but those with large terraces overlooking the gardens are the best pick. Skip all-inclusive options for the bounty of Holetown.

**Eating & Drinking**

Holetown’s best attribute is its little enclave of bars and restaurants. Mostly off noxious Hwy 1, it mixes the grand with the pedestrian. At a couple of mellow rum shops, swells in pink shirts and loafers mix with locals.

**Beach House**

**CONTINENTAL $$$$**

(3432-1163; www.thebeachhousebarbados.com; lunch/dinner from B$30/100; ★@★) Anchored by a vast terrace right on the water, the Beach House fulfills all your holiday dining fantasies. The drinks and wine list is encyclopedic. The menu segues from comfy lunch food (burgers, salads) to set menus of steaks and seafood at night.

**Ragamuffins**

**CARIBBEAN $$**

(1st St; mains from B$50; ★@★) Ragamuffins is in a 60-year-old chattel house painted a stylish olive and turquoise. Dishes are all Caribbean with some added attitude: the blackened fish with aioli is pure joy. On Sunday there’s a drag show.

**Information**

Holetown is the center for all services north of Bridgetown. Besides banks, ATMs and gourmet markets, a branch of Cave Shepherd (8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) has sundries and a good book department.

**Mt Standfast**

Popular with hawksbill turtles that feed on sea grasses just off its shore and with the snorkelers that come to watch, Mt Standfast also has a good beach. Most snorkeling tours make a stop here for turtle feeding; without a tour, you can rent snorkeling gear at the beach and get advice for freelance turtle viewing. **Dive Barbados** (3422-3133; www.divebarbados.net) is a well-known local dive shop.

**Weston**

This is the west coast in a nutshell: a fish market and fruit stand on the waterfront with a couple of church steeples as a backdrop. The nearby rum shop, **John Moore Bar**, offers a heady mix of genial local characters and their newfound visitor friends.
Mullins Beach
A popular and family-friendly beach along Hwy 1 between Holetown and Speightstown, the one off note at Mullins is the poor parking. But the waters are usually calm and good for swimming and snorkeling. Drinks from the boisterous cafe are delivered to your beach chair.

Escape it all just south at uncommercialized Gibbes Beach.

Speightstown
POP 46,000
Easily the most evocative small town on Barbados, Speightstown combines old colonial charms with a vibe that has more rough edges than the endlessly upscale precincts to the south. The town is a good place for a wander. Since the main road was moved east, traffic is modest, so take time to look up at the battered old wooden facades, many with overhanging galleries.

During the sugarcane boom, Speightstown was a thriving port and the main shipping line ran directly from here to Bristol, England.

Sights & Activities
A radiant vision in white stucco, Arlington House (Queen St; adult/child B$25/12.50; 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) is an 18th-century colonial house that now houses an engaging museum run by the National Trust. It covers the colonial period locally with exhibits over three floors.

A good local dive shop is Reefers & Wreckers (242-5450; www.scubadiving.bb).

WORTH A TRIP
ARCHERS BAY
Fierce waves pummel stone cliffs, eroding them into giant mushroom-shaped oddities at Archers Bay, a desolate and ruggedly gorgeous bit of the north coast. To get there, follow the signs off Hwys 1B and 1C to Grape Hall, then keep driving north 500m and follow the ‘Public Beach Access’ sign that directs you down a short dirt road and a grassy parking area near the cliff. The views are stunning; a short but steep trail leads down to a tiny pocket beach. Swimming is unsafe.

Sleeping
Speightstown has a number of modest holiday apartments along its historic main drag, which is bookended by tiny, cute beaches. Check with the Fisherman's Pub for leads.

Sunset Sands Apartments APARTMENTS $$ (2438-1096; www.sunsetsands.com; Sand St; apt from US$120; *) Just north of the town center across from the small beach, the Sunset Sands has four attractive units in a building with solid colonial charm. The upstairs apartments have stunning ocean views and there’s a secluded garden.

Eating & Drinking
Fisherman’s Pub CARIBBEAN $ (2422-2703; Queen St; meals from B$10; 11am-late Mon-Sat, 6pm-late Sun) Worth the trip, this waterfront cafe is a local institution that serves up fish from the boats floating off the side deck. Like a seal with a new ball, it’s always lively and unpredictable. On Wednesdays, there is steel-pan music and a buffet. As the evening wears on, the scene gets more Bajan. Line up for the ever-changing and excellent fare; try the national dish of cou-cou and flying fish here. Or if you’re lucky it will have some of the super Creole banana and fish.

Cassareep Cafe CAFE $$ (coffees B$5, meals from B$40; 8am-4pm Mon-Sat, 6:30-10:30pm Wed-Sat; *) A real find tucked down an alley in the heart of town, this joyous little cafe serves coffees, snacks and drinks at tables on a tiny beach out back. For dinner it offers Asian-accented fare.

Mango’s by the Sea SEAFOOD $$$ (Queen St; mains B$50-90; dinner Sun-Fri) Overlooking the water, the interior here mixes elegant (white tablecloths, candles, local art) with the casual (thatched decor). Dinners comprise the usual shellfish and steaks with nightly specials. The herb-and-garlic shrimp are an explosion of local flavors. Look for a mango-colored wooden building tucked down a little alley.

Heywoods Beach
The best strand on the west coast for day-trippers from elsewhere on the island, Heywoods Beach offers good parking, a location well off Hwy 1, and lots of powdery, uncrowded sand (especially on weekdays).
It’s about 500m north of the road into Speightstown from the north.

**Shermans**

Just past the road that turns inland to St Lucy, Shermans is a narrow enclave of fine holiday homes and lovely local places; they seem to be competing to grow the most flowers. The narrow road runs through the tiny fishing village of Fustic, which has a couple of good rum shops.

The boutique hotel **Little Good Harbour** (☎439-3000; www.littlegoodharbourbarbados.com; Shermans; villas from US$300; ⭕️) has 21 one- to three-bedroom villas in a little compound near the water. The decor combines wicker with linens in units that open completely to the outside and flowering trees. The **Fish Pot Restaurant** (mains B$30-70; ☎️8am-2pm & dinner) is renowned for its views and seafood.

**CENTRAL BARBADOS**

Several important roads cross the rolling hills of the island’s interior. There’s a wealth of historical and natural sights here and you can spend days winding around small roads far from the hustle and crowds of the west and south coasts. What follows are three main routes that take in major attractions and which can be combined in various ways to produce some delightful circle tours of Barbados.

Having your own transportation will give you total freedom on the routes listed here, but you can also cover most of them by public bus, as the main roads all have service. There will be some walking to access sites off the main road. One real hike, but a beautiful 6.5km one, is necessary to access the St Nicholas Abbey and Cherry Tree Hill off Hwy 2.

**Speightstown to Bathsheba**

The road going into the hills east of Speightstown steadily climbs through historic sugarcane fields. The ruins of mills dot the landscape. Including the jaunt to St Nicholas Abbey, this route covers about 26km.

Eventually after about six miles you’ll come to a fork in the road – if you continue on Hwy 2 to the east, you’ll encounter **Farley Hill National Park** (☎422-3555; Hwy 2; per car B$3.50; ☎️8:30am-3:30pm), which has 7 hectares of lovely gardens surrounding the ruins of an old estate. Bajans love this park for its views to the Atlantic, and picnic here in droves on Sundays.

**Barbados Wildlife Reserve** (adult/child under 12yr B$24/12; ☎️10am-4pm) is a walk-through zoo opposite Farley Hill, with short paths that meander through a mahogany forest. The main attraction here is a colony of green monkeys. From September to January, the monkeys go marauding across the countryside in search of food and monkey business. If they’re out when you’re there, you’ll get a ticket so you can come back again. Note that if the monkeys seem on good behavior, it’s because the reserve is run by the Barbados Primate Research Centre, whose activities are just what the name implies.

Just above the reserve, it is a five-minute hike to the 19th-century **Grenade Hall Signal Station**, which has been restored. It was used by British troops for communications using flags and semaphores and was part of the chain that included one at Gun Hill (p214).

Back at the fork in the road, if you turn to the left (north) you are on one of the best little scenic drives on Barbados, with a narrow road winding under a cathedral of huge mahogany trees arching overhead to **St Nicholas Abbey** (www.stnicholasabbey.com; adult/child B$35/20; ☎️10am-3:30pm Sun-Fri), a Jacobean-style mansion that is one of the oldest plantation houses in the Caribbean and a must-see stop on any island itinerary. Owner and local architect Larry Warren has undertaken a massive improvement program. The grounds are now simply gorgeous, with guinea fowl wandering among the flowers. The interior re-creates the mansion’s 17th-century look, right down to the furniture. An old steam engine has been restored and the plantation is again bottling its own rum and molasses; you can taste some and enjoy a snack at the serene cafe. Be sure to read the lurid history of the plantation’s founders: murder, intrigue, sex!

About 700m southeast of the abbey, the road passes **Cherry Tree Hill**, which has grand views right across the Atlantic coast. From here the road heads downhill through fields of sugarcane that seem to envelop the car.

On the right you’ll see the remains of the **Morgan Lewis Sugar Mill**, 2km southeast of Cherry Tree Hill, which claims to be the
largest sugar windmill (barely) surviving in the Caribbean.

The road continues on a sinuous path downhill until it rejoins Hwy 2. Heading toward the coast, you pass through the little town of Belleplaine, where you veer east to the road to Bathsheba. Running along the rugged coast through low sand dunes, this is one of the great ocean roads. Look for Barclays Park (8am-5pm), which has picnic tables under the trees, tidy bathrooms and constantly roiling waves pounding the seemingly endless beach. Many who try to swim here wash ashore in South Africa.

The coast road continues another 5km south to Bathsheba.

**Bridgetown to Belleplaine**

This route takes you past sites that show the beauty of the myriad plants that thrive on Barbados. It also goes near Harrison’s Cave, a subterranean attraction that has been closed while new whiz-bang gewgaws are added. The road, Hwy 2, runs for about 16km to Belleplaine.

**Tyrol Cot Heritage Village** (Codrington Hill; adult/child B$12/6; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a somewhat contrived 1920s Bajan village centered on the former home of Sir Grantley Adams, first premier of Barbados. The site, on Hwy 2 just north of Bridgetown, is complete with chattel houses where artists work on their crafts.

About 8km northeast of the Everton Weeks Roundabout on the bypass, look for a road crossing Hwy 2. About 400m west, Welchman Hall Gully (Hwy 2, Welchman Hall; adult/child B$24/12; 9am-4pm) is a thickly wooded ravine with a walking track that leads you through nearly 200 species of plant, including spices like nutmeg. Such gullies were too difficult for growing crops and as a result preserve some of the tropical forests that once covered the island. Look for bearded fig trees, which gave their old Portuguese name Los Barbados (the bearded ones) to the island.

Worth a detour, Flower Forest of Barbados (433-8152; Hwy 2; adult/child B$20/10; 8am-4pm) is another worthy natural sight. The 20-hectare botanic garden is on the site of a former sugar estate which has many stately mature citrus and breadfruit trees. Paths meander among examples of almost every plant growing on the island. It is reached by taking an access road some 700m off a meandering road that links Hwys 2 and 3A. Look for signs.

Hwy 2 curves down through more sugar-cane before reaching Belleplaine. Here you have a decision: turn west for the beauty of St Nicholas Abbey (p213) or turn east for the wild beauty of the Atlantic coast.

**Bridgetown to Bathsheba**

Hwy 3 is a lovely road that goes up and over the middle of Barbados, on a 16km route that links the west and east coasts. Along the way there are some historic sights and some bucolic scenery.

Driving Hwy 3, 3km east of the Clyde Wolcott Roundabout on the bypass, look for signs for Gun Hill (429-1358; Fusilier Rd; adult/child B$10/5; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) on a small road turning south. There’s a couple of twists and turns as you travel 1.5km to this 1818 hilltop signal tower with its impressive views of the surrounding valleys and the southwest coast. The island was once connected by six such signal towers that used flags and lanterns to relay messages. The official function of the towers was to keep watch for approaching enemy ships, but they also signaled colonial authorities in the event of a slave revolt. There is a cute cafe here.

About 8km after the Gun Hill turn on Hwy 3, you’ll see squat little St Joseph’s...
BRIGHTON FARMERS MARKET

Early on Saturdays, foodies, chefs, artisans and more converge on the Brighton Farmers Market (7am-10am Sat) in the heart of the fertile St George Valley on Hwy 4B. It’s a festival of the finest produce, prepared foods and crafts. Grab a cup of coffee, enjoy some local gab and see what treasures you root out.

This entire farm-filled region is good for wandering by car any day of the week. For instance, Hwy 3B runs northeast of Gun Hill through gorgeous valleys and plains. It’s worthwhile to literally lose yourself here amid the pretty farms punctuated with the odd colonial-era building. Turn north on any of the many small roads any time you want to rejoin Hwy 3.

Church on the left. Turn on the road that goes south to the right and after only 250m you’ll see the unrestored 1819 Cotton Tower, another of the signal towers. From here it is a short drive downhill on Hwy 3 to Bathsheba.

EASTERN BARBADOS

The wild Atlantic waters of the east coast are far removed from the rest of the island. The population is small, the coast craggy and the waves incessant. It’s a place of beautiful windblown vistas and is becoming internationally famous for surfing. For sights along the coast road north of Bathsheba, see p 214.

Bathsheba

POP 5,300

Bathsheba is the main destination on the east coast, although there’s no real ‘there’ here as things are scattered along about 1.5km of sandy, wave-tossed shore and in the hills immediately behind. This is prime surfing country. It’s also good for long beach walks as you contemplate feeling you’ve reached the end of the world. It’s an idyllic image of sand, sea and palm trees.

At night, it’s very quiet here. For excitement there are the lyrical croaks of whistling frogs and the flash of fireflies.

Sights & Activities

Andromeda Botanic Gardens GARDEN

(3433-9261; http://andromeda.cavehill.uwi.edu; Hwy 3; adult/child B$25/12.50; 9am-5pm, last admission 4:30pm) At the top of the southern entrance to Bathsheba, the splendid Andromeda Botanic Gardens cover 2.5 hectares and have a wide collection of introduced tropical plants, including orchids, ferns, water lilies, bougainvillea, cacti and palms. Self-guided walks of various lengths enjoy the floral beauty and splendid views.

TOP Choice Soup Bowl SURF BREAK

The world-famous reef break known as the Soup Bowl is right off the beach in northern Bathsheba. It is one of the best waves in the Caribbean islands. Don’t underestimate the break just because the region is not known for powerful surf – Soup Bowl gets big. Moreover, the reef is shallow and covered in parts by spiny sea urchins. This is not a spot for beginners.

It’s a strong right-handed break which has three takeoff points that can be surfed point to point if you are fast and can read the wave. Overall, the best months are August to March. For good surfers, it’s September to November during hurricane season and the start of cold fronts. Famed surfer Kelly Slater calls it a 9+ on a scale of one to 10. For beginners March to May is best.

Bathsheba Beach BEACH

If you’re not an expert swimmer, this is not really the place to go into the water; rather, enjoy the wave-tossed scenery on long beach walks. Bifurcated by huge rocks, much of the modest action is at the south end, where reefs afford enough protection for very limited swimming. Note the iconic Mushroom Rock, one of several rocks carved into shapes that will cause mycologists to swoon.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is limited in Bathsheba and that’s good. Who wants crowds?

TOP Choice Sea-U! Guest House BOUTIQUE HOTEL $$

(3433-9450; www.seaubarbados.com; Tent Bay, Bathsheba; r US$110-200; †) The pick of Bathsheba lodging, the Sea-U has a mannered main house with an addictive porch
looking out to sea from the hillside location. Cottages and a restaurant pavilion round out the verdant site. The nine units have kitchen facilities, and a non clichéd island motif. There’s no TV, kids under eight or smoking. Dinner is served daily. Has good green cred.

Atlantis Hotel

HOTEL $$$
(\(\#\) 433-9445; www.atlantisbarbados.com; Tent Bay, Bathsheba; r from US$255;  \(\#\#\#\) ) One cove south of Bathsheba, Atlantis was the original hotel in the area. Now lavishly renovated, it has 10 units in a solid old wooden building facing the sea. The views are sweeping and you have a choice of one-bedroom suites in the original building or apartments in a new wing by the small pool. The restaurant is good through the day, although on some days it gets busy with tour groups.

Roundhouse Restaurant

CARIBBEAN $$
(\(\#\) 433-9678; meals from B$40;  \(\#\#\) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular touristy restaurant has customers throughout the day who sit around, sip cocktails and savor the views south over Soup Bowl. You can enjoy banana bread with your breakfast, sandwiches and salads at lunch, and specials such as breadfruit soup at dinner.

Bathsheba Railway Bar

CARIBBEAN $
(meals from B$10;  \(\#\) 9am-6pm) Near the sand, this elevated hut serves classic local lunch fare plus burgers and various fruit juices.

Sea Side Bar

CARIBBEAN $
(meals from B$10;  \(\#\) 11am-late) More bar than cafe (although local stews and the like are served on the deck at lunch), this joint hums with energy through the day as locals and surfers do their best to out-shout each other.

Getting There & Away

A taxi can be negotiated for about B$70 from Bridgetown or the south coast, or catch one of the regular buses from Bridgetown that travel Hwys 2 and 3. The trip takes about 45 minutes.

Bathsheba South to Christ Church Parish

Few people take the time to follow the coast south of Bathsheba. They should. Look for signs on the road, which stays well up the hillside, for Martin’s Bay, a little notch in the coast that features a sliver of a beach and a sweet little rum shop. Like elsewhere, this isn’t swimming country, but the ceaseless surf is captivating.

After about two more miles look for another steep road, this one leading down to gorgeous Bath Beach. It’s about 1.5km and has a long beach of golden sand. Unlike other parts of this coast, a reef makes swimming possible. Oodles of picnic tables are empty on weekdays, but are crowded with laughing families on weekends.

The road continues south before turning inland through cane fields. Look for an iconic Anglican pile of rocks, St Philip Church. Here you turn south, following signs to Sunbury Plantation House (\(\#\) 423-6270; www.barbadosgreathouse.com; tours adult/child B$20/10;  \(\#\) 9am-4:30pm). Built in the mid-17th century, it was painstakingly restored after a fire in 1995. The house has 60cm-thick walls made from local coral blocks and ballast stones, the latter coming from the ships.

SURFING BARBADOS

Barbados has gained international fame for its east-coast breaks. Ground Zero is the Soup Bowl (p215), off Bathsheba, and another spot called Duppies, up the coast. South Point, Silver Sands and Rockley Beach on the south coast are sometimes good, as is Brandon’s, which is next to the Hilton Hotel at Needham’s Point. There are some 30 other named breaks.

There are local guys renting out boards on the beach at most of the popular surf spots. Prices are negotiable depending on the quality of the board, but even the nicest board should never be over B$15 to B$20 per hour. Also nice are the locals, who are generally welcoming to outsiders.

There are two good surf schools of note: Zed’s Surfing Adventures (p208), based at Silver Sands; and Surf Barbados (\(\#\) 256-3906; www.surf-barbados.com), which transports clients to various spots depending on conditions. Surf Barbados’ beginners class costs US$75 for two hours; it also rents boards and arranges custom trips for advanced surfers.
that set sail from England to pick up Bajan sugar. The interior retains its plantation-era ambience and is furnished with antiques. The grounds serve as mere backdrops to the busloads of tourists who come for the lunch buffets (B$50).

Continuing south from the plantation house, you reach the busy village of Six Cross Roads, where your route options live up to the promise of the name. You can head southeast to Crane Beach, southwest to Oistins or west to Bridgetown.

UNDERSTAND BARBADOS

History
The original inhabitants of Barbados were Arawaks, who were driven off the island around AD 1200 by Caribs from South America. The Caribs, in turn, abandoned (or fled) Barbados close to the arrival of the first Europeans. The Portuguese visited the island in 1536, but Barbados was uninhabited by the time Captain John Powell claimed it for England in 1625. Two years later, a group of settlers established the island’s first European settlement, Jamestown, in present-day Holetown. Within a few years, the colonists had cleared much of the forest, planting tobacco and cotton fields. In the 1640s they switched to sugarcane. The new sugar plantations were labor-intensive, and the landowners began to import large numbers of African slaves. These large sugar plantations – some of the first in the Caribbean – proved immensely profitable, and gave rise to a wealthy colonial class. A visit to a plantation estate, like the one at St Nicholas Abbey, will give some idea of the money involved.

Sugar Boom
The sugar industry boomed during the next century, and continued to prosper after the abolition of slavery in 1834. As the planters owned all of the best land, there was little choice for the freed slaves other than to stay on at the cane fields for a pittance.

Social tensions flared during the 1930s, and Barbados’ black majority gradually gained more access to the political process. The economy was diversified through the international tourism boom and gave more islanders the opportunity for economic success and self-determination. England granted Barbados internal self-government in 1961 and it became an independent nation on November 30, 1966, with Errol Barrow as its first prime minister. While not flawless, Barbados has remained a stable democracy.

Owen Arthur and the Barbados Labour Party were in power from 1993 to 2008. In a campaign that saw ‘change’ as the popular theme, David Thompson and the left-leaning Democratic Labour Party won the election. But in late 2010 he died suddenly, which was a traumatic event for a nation used to political stability. He was succeeded by Deputy Prime Minister Freundel Stewart. A general election must be held by January 2013.

Unlike other Caribbean islands, Barbados maintains its sugar industry, although the majority of the economy is now based on tourism and offshore banking. Condos are being built as fast as the concrete dries.

Culture
Bajan culture displays some trappings of English life: cricket, polo and horse racing are popular pastimes, business is performed in a highly organized fashion, gardens are lovingly tended, older women often wear prim little hats and special events are carried out with a great deal of pomp and ceremony.

However, on closer examination, Barbados is very deeply rooted in Afro-Caribbean tradition. Family life, art, food, music, architecture, religion and dress have more in common with the nearby Windward Islands than with London. The African and East Indian influences are especially apparent in the spicy cuisine, rhythmic music and pulsating festivals.

Like other Caribbean cultures, Bajans are relatively conservative and the men are macho, but the ongoing bond with a cosmopolitan center like London has made Barbados slightly more socially progressive than its neighbors.

Bajan youth are fully within the media orbit of North America. The NBA and New York hip-hop fashion are as popular in Bridgetown as in Brooklyn.

Another similarity to the US is the suburban sprawl around Bridgetown. Traffic is often a problem and you can join the masses at a growing number of air-conditioned malls.
Sports

The national sport, if not national obsession, is cricket. Per capita, Bajans boast more world-class cricket players than any other nation. One of the world’s top all-rounders, Bajan native Sir Garfield Sobers, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II during her 1975 visit to Barbados, while another cricket hero, Sir Frank Worrell, appears on the face of the B$5 bill.

In Barbados you can catch an international test match, a heated local First Division match or even just a friendly game on the beach or grassy field. Thousands of Bajans and other West Indians pour into the world-class matches at Kensington Oval, in Garrison near Bridgetown, which was the site of the final in the 2007 World Cup. For information, schedules and tickets, contact the Barbados Cricket Association (2436-1397; www.bcacricket.org).

Horse races and polo (see www.barbadospoloclub.com) are at their peak during the tourist season.

Music

Bajan contributions to West Indian music are renowned in the region, having produced such greats as the calypso artist the Mighty Gabby, whose songs on cultural identity and political protest speak for emerging black pride throughout the Caribbean. These days, Bajan music leans toward the faster beats of soca (an energetic offspring of calypso), rapso (a fusion of soca and hip-hop) and dancehall (a contemporary offshoot of reggae with faster, digital beats and an MC). Hugely popular Bajan soca artist Rupee brings the sound of the island to audiences worldwide.

The hugely popular singer Rihanna has achieved worldwide fame while being idolized at home. Her reggae-style rap has won many Grammy awards, including Best Rap Song and Best Dance Recording.

Landscape & Wildlife

Barbados lies 160km east of the Windward Islands. It is somewhat pear-shaped, measuring 34km from north to south and 22km at its widest. The island is composed largely of coral accumulations built on sedimentary rocks. Water permeates the soft coral cap, creating underground streams, springs and limestone caverns.

Most of the island’s terrain is relatively flat, rising to low, gentle hills in the interior. However, the northeastern part of the island, known as the Scotland District, rises to a relatively lofty 340m at Barbados’ highest point, Mt Hillaby. The west coast has white-sand beaches and calm turquoise waters, while the east side of the island has turbulent Atlantic waters and a coastline punctuated with cliffs. Coral reefs surround most of the island and contribute to the fine white sands on the western and southern beaches.

Two good places to enjoy the island’s lush natural beauty are Andromeda Botanic Gardens, in a gorgeous setting above Bathsheba with a huge range of beautifully displayed local flora; and Welchman Hall Gully, off the main road from Bridgetown to Belleplaine, which has examples of the island’s ancient forests.

Wildlife

The majority of Barbados’ indigenous wildlife was overwhelmed by agriculture and competition with introduced species. Found only on Barbados is the harmless and elusive grass snake. The island also shelters a species of small, nonpoisonous, blind snake;
plus whistling frogs, lizards, red-footed tortoises and eight species of bat.

Hawksbill turtles regularly come ashore to lay their eggs, as does the occasional leatherback turtle. As elsewhere, the turtles face numerous threats from pollution and human interference. The Barbados Sea Turtle Project (www.barbadosseaturtles.org) is working to restore habitat and populations.

Most if not all mammals found in the wild on Barbados have been introduced. They include wild green monkeys, mongooses, European hares, mice and rats.

More than 180 species of bird have been sighted on Barbados. Most of them are migrating shorebirds and waders that breed in North America and stop over in Barbados en route to winter feeding grounds in South America.

Environmental Issues
The forests that once covered Barbados were long ago felled by the British planters. One of the knock-on effects is that the country now has a problem with soil erosion. This loose dirt, along with pollution from ships and illegally dumped solid wastes, threatens to contaminate the aquifers that supply the island's drinking water.

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Directory A–Z

Accommodations
You can find some place to stay at every price point on Barbados, although there are quite a few more places at the top end than at the budget end.

The west coast, or tellingly the ‘Platinum Coast,’ is home to most of the posh resorts and boutique hotels plus rental apartments and a smattering of more affordable places. The south coast aims for the masses and there are many places to stay, ranging from simple guesthouses to beachfront hotels. Your money will go further in the south; the west is where you go if money is no concern. Throughout the rest of the island you’ll find a number of interesting places, including cool and funky places in and around Bathsheba.

In high season (December to April), expect to spend at least US$150 per night for a nice midrange double on, or more likely near, a beach. But shop around online as there are deals to be had.

The Barbados Tourism Authority (www.visitbarbados.org) maintains a list of families who rent out bedrooms in their homes, from about US$30 per person per night. The staff at its booth (8am-10pm or until the last flight arrives) in the airport can help you book a room. Camping is generally not allowed.

Most hotels add a 7.5% government tax plus a 10% service charge, and many have a minimum stay in high season. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, rates decline by as much as 40% outside of high season.

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Business Hours
The following are standard business hours across the island. Exceptions are noted in specific listings. Some bars stay open 24 hours. Note that much is closed on Sunday.

**Banks** 9am-3pm Mon-Fri

**Restaurants** noon-10pm

**Shops** 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat (in tourist areas to 8pm Mon-Sat)

PRACTICALITIES

- **Electricity** 110V, 50Hz; US-style two-pin plugs are used; you may find some UK-style sockets as well.
- **Newspapers & Magazines** Barbados has two daily newspapers, the Barbados Advocate and the Daily Nation (the latter has a delightful column by Harry Russell, who calls himself ‘The Wild Coot’). Some UK papers are sold in touristy areas for those who need a dose of Middle England.
- **Radio & TV** The government-owned TV station CBC broadcasts on Channel 8. Local radio is on FM 92.9 and 98.1 or AM 790 and 900; there’s soca music on FM 95.3; gospel on FM 102.1 and the BBC on FM 92.1.
- **Weights & Measures** Barbados uses the metric system; however, many islanders still give directions in feet and miles and sell produce by the pound.
Children
Barbados is generally a family-friendly destination. A number of resorts have organized children's activities or in-house daycare/babysitting.

Most beaches are safe for children to play on and many of the south- and west-coast beaches are calm enough for younger swimmers. The east-coast surf is too powerful for novice swimmers of any age.

Older kids enjoy surfing lessons.

Dangers & Annoyances
Crime, including assaults on tourists, is not unknown on Barbados. Most crimes, however, are simple tourist scams – normal precautions should suffice.

Beware of pickpockets in Bridgetown – keep your valuables secure around the bustling center on Swan and Broad Sts. There are some slick hustlers who hang out at the entrance to St Lawrence Gap and also around south-coast nightlife venues. Steer clear unless you want to invest in someone’s habit.

Sidewalks are narrow or nonexistent and roads are curvy, so use caution even while walking along quiet streets.

Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish are occasionally encountered in Bajan waters (although they are large, slow and usually easy to spot), and poisonous manchineel trees grow along some beaches.

Truth be told, the greatest risk is a bad sunburn.

Embassies & Consulates
Canada (2429-3780; www.canadainternational.gc.ca; Bishop’s Court Hill, St Michael)
UK (2430-7800; www.ukinbarbados.fco.gov.uk; Lower Collymore Rock, St Michael)
USA (2227-4000; http://barbados.usembassy.gov; Wildey Business Park, Wildey, St Michael)

Festivals & Events
Barbados has visitor-friendly events through the year. The island’s compact size means you can enjoy them no matter where you’re staying. One worth a trip is the Crop-Over Festival (www.barbadoscropoverfestival.com). The island’s top event, this festival originated in colonial times as a celebration to mark the end of the sugarcane harvest. Festivities stretch over a three-week period beginning in mid-July with spirited calypso competitions, fairs, and other activities. The festival culminates with a Carnival-like costume parade and fireworks on Kadooment Day, a national holiday, in August. Thousands cavort, dance and strut their stuff in a madcap procession where the air pulses with music and is alive with wafting feathers.

Other large festivals:
Jazz Festival (www.barbadosjazzfestival.com) In January. Celebrates Bajans’ historic love of jazz; took a hiatus in 2011 but there is great hope it will resume.
Holetown Festival (www.holetownfestivalbarbados.com) This festival celebrates February 17, 1627 – the arrival of the first English settlers on Barbados. Holetown’s week-long festivities include street fairs, a music festival at the historic parish church and a road race.
Oistins Fish Festival Commemorates the signing of the Charter of Barbados and celebrates the skills of local fishermen. It’s a seaside festivity with events focusing on boat races, fish-filleting competitions, local foods, crafts and dancing. Held over the Easter weekend.
National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (www.ncf.bb) Held in November. Features talent contests in dance, drama, singing and the like. Performances by the finalists are held on Independence Day (November 30).

Food
The following price categories for the cost of a main course are used in Eating listings in this chapter.

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Gay & Lesbian Travelers
Barbados is a conservative and religious place that is generally opposed to homosexuality. That said, there are a few openly homosexual Bajan couples (although they still tend to be discreet) and even the rare transvestite.

Homosexual visitors to Barbados will need to be judicious outside of international resorts and especially in smaller, more traditional towns.

Health
There are excellent medical facilities in Barbados. For minor illnesses, nearly all hotels will have a doctor on call or will be able to
help you find assistance. Be sure to have travel insurance that covers medical care.

The country’s main hospital is in Bridgetown (p202).

Tap water is safe to drink.

Internet Access

There are a few internet places in Bridgetown and most of the tourist centers. Wi-fi is common at hotels and many have a computer that guests can use. Public hot spots usually come with a fee.

Money

You’ll certainly want some Barbadian dollars on hand, but larger payments can be made in US dollars, frequently with a major credit card. Hotels and guesthouses quote rates in US dollars (as do many dive shops and some restaurants), although you can use either US or Bajan currency to settle the account.

The common street exchange rate is B$2 to US$1 for traveler’s checks or cash, although true rates can fluctuate a couple of cents either way.

A tip of 10% to 15% is the norm in restaurants (often added to the bill); 10% in hotels (usually added to the bill). A 10% tip is the norm in taxis.

Public Holidays

In addition to those observed throughout the region (p872), Barbados has the following public holidays:

Errol Barrow Day January 21
Heroes’ Day April 28
Labour Day May 1
Emancipation Day August 1
Kadooment Day First Monday in August
UN Day First Monday in October
Independence Day November 30

Telephone

Barbados’ country code is 246; the area code is 246. To call any other country with a country code of 246 (most of North America and the Caribbean), just dial 246 and the 10-digit number. For other countries, dial the international access code 011 + country code + number.

GSM cell phones are compatible with local SIM cards. There is also 3G service. The main operators are Digicel (www.digicelbarbados.com) and Lime (www.time4lime.com/bb).

Tourist Information

The free annual, Ins & Outs of Barbados (www.insandoutsofbarbados.com), is encyclopedic, filled with watch ads and so large that your holiday will be over if you drop it on your toe.

Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (www.bhta.org; 4th Ave, Belleville, St Michael; ☑8am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Barbados Tourism Authority (www.visitbarbados.org) Bridgetown (Harbour Rd; ☑8:15am-4:30pm Mon-Fri); Grantley Adams International Airport (☑8am-10pm or until the last flight arrives); Cruise-ship terminal (☑when ships are in port)

Getting There & Away

Entering Barbados

Nearly all visitors will enter the country through Grantley Adams International Airport or Bridgetown’s cruise-ship terminal. All foreigners entering Barbados should be in possession of a valid passport and a return or onward ticket. And although it’s not often enforced, officers may ask for proof that you have a ticket back to your country of origin or residence. So if you are island hopping, show that you intend to eventually return home and if you live outside the country of your passport, have your residency permit.

Cruise-ship passengers who stay less than 24 hours are not required to carry a valid passport.

Air

Grantley Adams International Airport (www.gaiainc.bb) is on the island’s southeast corner, about 16km from Bridgetown. It is the largest airport in the Eastern Caribbean and the major point of entry for the region.

Barbados is served by major airlines flying from North America, including Air Canada, American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, US Airways and WestJet. British Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly from London.

Airlines connecting Barbados with the region:

LIAT (www.liat.com) The main locally based carrier, known for changing flight schedules at the last moment. Flights to Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent, Tobago and Trinidad.

Caribbean Airlines (www.caribbean-airlines.com) Flights to Antigua, Sint Maarten and
Trinidad. Has announced plans to challenge LIAT on regional routes.

Sea
CRUISE SHIP
About 450,000 cruise-ship passengers arrive in Barbados each year as part of Eastern Caribbean itineraries. Ships dock at Bridgetown Harbour, about 1km west of the city center.

Ships dock in the port, which has the usual duty-free shops and a branch office of the Barbados Tourism Authority (when ships are in port). The center of Bridgetown is about 1km away.

YACHT
Because of Barbados’ easterly position and challenging sailing conditions, it is well off the main track for most sailors.

Getting Around
To/From the Airport
If you’re traveling light, it’s possible to walk out of the airport to the road and wait for a passing bus (B$1.50). Look for buses marked ‘Sam Lord’s Castle’ (or just ‘Castle’) if you’re going east, ‘Bridgetown’ if you’re going to the south coast. For the west coast, occasional buses run to Speightstown, bypassing the capital; alternatively, take a bus to Bridgetown, where you’ll have to change to the west-coast terminal. Make sure the bus driver knows your destination.

Taxis are plentiful. Some ‘official’ prices (subject to negotiation) from the airport to the island’s main destinations:

- Bathsheba: B$73
- Bridgetown Harbour: B$46
- Holetown: B$58
- Prospect: B$53
- Speightstown: B$73

Many hotels offer pickup services for only somewhat more.

Bicycle
Barbados offers good riding for the adventurous. It’s hilly but roads are not usually steep (excepting parts of the east). However most roads are quite narrow, so traffic is a constant bother in the west and south.

Most shops require a credit card or B$100 deposit for rentals. Your hotel can hook you up with a rental; there are also usually bikes available at the cruise-ship port.

Bus
It’s possible to get to virtually any place on the island by public bus. There are three kinds of bus:

- Government-operated public buses
  Large and blue with a yellow stripe.
- Privately operated minibuses
  Intermediate-sized buses painted yellow with a blue stripe.
- Route taxis
  Individually owned minivans that have ‘ZR’ on their license plates and are painted white.

All types of bus charge the same fare: B$1.50 to any place on the island. You should have exact change when you board the government bus, but minibuses and route taxis will make change.

Most buses transit through Bridgetown, although a few north–south buses bypass the city. Buses to the southeast part of the island generally transit through Oistins.

Bus stops around the island are marked with red-and-white signs printed with the direction in which the bus is heading (‘To City’ or ‘Out of City’). Buses usually have their destinations posted on or above the front windshield.

Buses along the main routes, such as Bridgetown to Oistins or Speightstown, are frequent, running from 6am to around midnight. You can get complete schedule information on any route from the Transport Board (243-6820; www.transportboard.com).

Car & Motorcycle
DRIVER’S LICENSE
Visitors must obtain a temporary driver’s license from their car-rental agency (B$10); you’ll need to show a valid driver’s license from your home country.

RENTAL
Barbados doesn’t have any car-rental agents affiliated with major international rental chains. There are, instead, scores of independent car-rental companies, some so small that they are based out of private homes.

Despite the number of companies, prices don’t seem to vary much. The going rate for a small car is about B$150 a day including unlimited mileage and insurance.
Previously it was common for companies to rent out strange, small convertible cars called ‘mokes’ (they look like the odd car in *Fantasy Island*), which don’t have doors. These are an acquired taste and small economy cars are more common now. Rental cars are marked with an ‘H’ on the license plate.

While most car-rental companies don’t have booths at the airport, most will deliver your car there or to your hotel. Note that among the small agencies, some aren’t especially professional and complaints are common.

Some of the larger, more established companies:

**Courtesy Rent-A-Car** (☏431-4160; www.courtesyrentacar.com)

**Stoutes Car Rental** (☏416-4456; www.stoutescar.com)

**Top Class Car Rentals** (☏228-7368; www.topclassrentals.com)

**ROAD CONDITIONS**

Highways are not very well marked, although landmarks are clearly labeled, as are some roundabouts (traffic circles) and major intersections. The most consistent highway markings are often the low yellow cement posts at the side of the road; they show the highway number and below that the number of kilometers from Bridgetown.

All primary and main secondary roads are paved, although some are a bit narrow. There are plenty of gas stations around the island except on the east coast. Some stations in the Bridgetown area are open 24 hours.

Expect rush-hour traffic on the roads around booming Bridgetown.

**ROAD RULES**

In Barbados, you drive on the left. At intersections and narrow passages, drivers may flash their lights to indicate that you should proceed.

**Taxi**

Taxis have a ‘Z’ on the license plate and usually a ‘taxi’ sign on the roof. They’re easy to find and often wait at the side of the road in popular tourist areas.

Although fares are fixed by the government, taxis are not metered and you will have to haggle for a fair price. The rate per kilometer is about B$2 and the flat hourly rate B$50. ‘Official’ fares from Bridgetown include: Bathsheba (B$58), Oistins (B$31) and Speightstown (B$46).

**Tours**

Most tour companies offer a variety of half- and full-day options that either provide an overview with stops at key sights or emphasize special interests such as nature and gardens. There is a huge range of choices, as you’ll see from the brochure racks. Most, however, follow very set routes and you may well feel part of a herd. The various 4WD options are for those with Hummer envy.

One delightful option is run by the **Barbados Transport Board** (☏436-6820; www.transportboard.com; adult/child B$20/12; tours 2-7pm Sun). These engaging tours of the island are popular with locals and the itinerary varies each week. Buses depart from Independence Sq, Bridgetown.

The going rate for custom tours by taxi drivers is B$50 an hour, but you can usually negotiate with individual drivers to work out your own deal. Hotels usually have drivers they work with.

See p206 for information on boat trips.