

# CARIBBEAN



WHETHER YOU WANT TO RELAX IN THE SUN OR ENJOY A NEW EXPERIENCE, YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED.



## ARUBA

[WWW.ARUBA.COM](http://WWW.ARUBA.COM)

Balmy temperatures. Miles of sparkling beaches, lapped by turquoise waters. Water sports and deep-sea fishing.

Superb snorkeling and diving in an ocean teeming with life – including the rare green moray - and waters so clear you can often see over 330 feet (100 meters).

Sound familiar? It should ... because like many other Caribbean islands, Aruba is the perfect place to go to for an idyllic island vacation.

But Aruba also offers something else that not many others do. Weather that's good all year round.

Positioned as it is out of the hurricane belt, there's no 'bad time' to visit. And the combination of a low annual rainfall and the trade winds has sculpted an interior studded with cacti, stunning rock formations and the unearthly Divi-divi trees.

The relentless waves and wind on the eastern shore have also created some truly spectacular scenery. Limestone rock arches that soar across the sea. And a tranquil pool within volcanic rock, the locals call 'Cura di Tortuga'.



Arawak petroglyphs in the Fontein cave of Arikok National Park conjure up visions of the ancient past. The Church of Santa Anna, with its famous 120 year old oak altar, evokes images that are more recent. While 19th century windmills remind you of the island's Dutch heritage.

The islanders know how to party and are always ready to smile. Their music makes you want to swing your hips. And there are many great places to eat (including inside a delightful old windmill).

Downtown Oranjestad and Seaport Village are the best places to shop. If you tire of curios and island crafts, the seafood fresh off the boats at Oranjestad's wharves has delighted many a visitor.

Whether you come for the quintessential island vacation or to experience something different, you won't be disappointed. After all, they say it's the place where happiness lives all year round!

## BARBADOS

[WWW.VISITBARBADOS.ORG](http://WWW.VISITBARBADOS.ORG)

When you want a break from lazing on sparkling white beaches, basking in azure seas, sipping exotic cocktails under a palm tree or tapping your feet to the rhythm of a calypso band ... you can always go shopping! Because Barbados is the place for tax-free bargains in the Eastern Caribbean.

You have the choice of Bridgetown and St Lawrence Gap on the south coast, or Holetown on the west coast. The former is filled with a wide choice of national and international stores. The latter is home to a collection of craft stores, gift shops and quaint boutiques. Passport and return ticket in hand, you'll get great duty-free prices.

For those who like to explore, hire a car and take a drive around this delightful island. Pause at Gun Hill Signal Station for panoramic views of the spectacular land and seascapes. Linger at Ocean Park, the award-winning aquarium that offers a safe way for kids to experience



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the delights of underwater tropical wonderlands. Stop to enjoy Crane Beach, rated 'one of the ten best beaches in the world' by Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.

Colorful Speightstown, which began life as Barbados' first port, showcases historic architecture. Welchman Hall Gully and Harrison's Cave give you an insight into the unique way Barbados was formed - the island is actually two landmasses fused together. You can even take a day trip to Dominica, where much of 'Pirates of the Caribbean' was filmed.

And when the sun goes down, there are no shortages of places to party. Whether your idea of a good time is fine dining at a 200 year old mahogany table at the historic Sunbury Plantation House; a sunset cruise with tropical cocktail in hand; a dinner show highlighting the island's culture; or an outrageous beach party ... you'll find all that and more.

But then, as a beautiful tropical island, Barbados is best known for its vacations spent doing nothing much more than simply having a wonderful time.

## BELIZE

[WWW.TRAVELBELIZE.ORG](http://WWW.TRAVELBELIZE.ORG)

Although Belize's official language is listed as English, it's unique enough to be another language. In fact, it even has a different name: Creole.

This eclectic language is just the beginning of the delights Belize has to offer. Of course, you'll be able to enjoy the typical delights of a marvellous tropical vacation – never-ending beaches, warm cerulean seas, and spectacular palm-fringed sunsets. But it's best known as a bird watcher's dream and an underwater delight.

Not only does it possess the second longest barrier reef in the world, it also has three major offshore atolls. Ambergris Caye, the largest island off Belize, is only half a mile from the reef and is the spot most choose to stay.

It's the perfect stepping off point to experience the teeming life of the Hol Chan Marine Reserve; the giant groupers, barracuda and nurse sharks of 'the cut'; the Sand Bar, with its sting rays and nurse sharks; and the Blue Hole on Lighthouse Reef, that plunges hundreds of feet to the floor of the ocean. ►

Lighthouse Reef is also a protected bird and wildlife sanctuary. Ambergris Caye, being largely undeveloped, is a haven for bird and wildlife too. And you'll find over 400 of the nation's 540 colorful bird species in Orange Walk District.

Another major attraction in Belize is the Maya temples and palaces. There are a number in northern Belize and one on the southern tip of Ambergris Caye.

For those of you who delight in collecting souvenirs, you'll find authentic woodcarvings, hand-woven baskets, original hand-painted t-shirts, unusual pottery and handmade coral and silver jewelry.

One more thing ... before you go, make sure you dine on lobster, conch or the national dish of spicy stewed chicken, rice and beans cooked in coconut juice. And wash your choice down with the local Belikan beer. That done, you'll have experienced another wonderful aspect of Belizean life.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

[WWW.GODOIMINICANREPUBLIC.COM](http://WWW.GODOIMINICANREPUBLIC.COM)

So popular is this tropical paradise, it boasts seven international airports. But, no matter how many vacationers there are, the 870 mile coastline means there are enough 'white sugar' beaches for everyone to feel as though they have their own piece of heaven. No wonder the Dominican Republic is a favorite with celebrities.

Punta Cana beach is sometimes called the Coconut Coast thanks to hundreds of statuesque palms. Romantic Isla Soana was recently named as one of the Caribbean's Eight Dream Beaches. And Playa Dominicus was the first beach in the Caribbean to achieve Blue Flag status, a prized eco-label.



But it's not all pearlescent sand, azure waters and swaying palms in the Dominican. Santa Dominga, the southern capital, is a place of firsts for the Americas ... the first cathedral; first monastery; first 'fort' ... the list goes on. Numbering the Alcázar de Colon, the 22 room palace of Don Diego Columbus, amongst its notable buildings, history buffs will be able to entertain themselves for days.

Those who prefer nature will be captivated by the diverse charm of the national parks in the interior. Three mountain ranges high enough to have snow-covered peaks in winter separate arid semi-desert plains from verdant valleys filled with tropical rainforest. There's even an inland saltwater lake 88 feet (27 metres) below sea level!



LIKE ALL TROPICAL ISLANDS, THE NIGHTS HOLD AN EXCITEMENT ALL OF THEIR OWN AND YOU'RE SURE TO GO HOME WITH MANY UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES.





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Great things to bring home include amber, especially the rare smoky green and blue, and larimar, the unique opaque blue semi-precious gem only found here.

Cigars are a firm favorite, either for you or as a gift. Mamajuana, a liquid cure-all and supposed aphrodisiac, is a popular talking point. And what Caribbean vacation would be complete without at least one bottle of the sweetly potent Dominican rum.

That, and the local Presidente beer, has fuelled many a fantastic night, dining and partying at one of the many Dominican nightspots. And don't worry if you have two left feet when dancing. One of the locals will be only too happy to show you how to do it.

Relaxed, balmy and very, very friendly, you'll leave the Dominican Republic feeling recharged and ready to take on the world.

## PUERTO RICO

[WWW.GOTOPUERTORICO.COM](http://WWW.GOTOPUERTORICO.COM)

Living on one of the most densely populated islands in the world, the Puerto Ricans have all the warmth and charm of the sunshine that constantly surrounds them. This is a place where diverse worlds and cultures have fused to create a place of sharp contrasts.

The architecture, which mixes Spanish colonial with ultra-modern, is a clear indication of this. Another is the cuisine, where the flavors and ingredients passed down through the generations have blended into a distinctly exotic mix.

Although tiny, Puerto Rico has miles of palm-lined beaches on four coastlines. Even better, the climate is a balmy average of 80°F (26°C) all year round, making for perfect beach weather. However, if you plan to visit the mountainous interior, known for its spectacular waterfalls and deep wilderness, make sure you bring something warmer for the evenings. It's cool all year round.

The San Juan/Carolina area is the commercial hub and the place to find the major shopping areas and many excellent restaurants. Its beautiful beaches have also attracted many first-class resorts.

The heavily forested El Yunque and Mosquito Bay, renowned for its phosphorescence are popular attractions. As are Vieques and Culebra, offshore islands with panoramic views, secluded beaches and excellent snorkeling.

Although hot and humid, the south is extremely dry and rich in architectural heritage. The west, on the other hand, is renowned for its diving and surfing. Not surprisingly, some of the islands best beaches are found here.

Like all tropical islands, the nights hold an excitement all of their own and you're sure to go home with many unforgettable memories. ■