



Bask in the Bounty of Sandals Barbados

By Lavanya Sunkara

When the taxi pulled into the breezy driveway of Sandals Barbados, I realized I was in for a treat — and I don't just mean the tasty rum drink I was handed immediately upon arrival. With innovative swim-up rooms, beachfront suites serviced by butlers, soaking tubs on balconies, gourmet international cuisine, and a full service spa, this adults-only resort located on stunning Dover Beach in St. Lawrence Gap has reimagined an upscale oasis of pleasure and serenity.

Whether you seek a romantic getaway or a beach wedding, a direct JetBlue flight from JFK Airport will deliver you to a paradise where you can sink your toes in the sugary soft sand, sipping a refreshing rum punch steps from your suite. With its all-inclusive lifestyle, I never had to bring my wallet. I spent four amazing days sunbathing, drinking unlimited premium

cocktails, learning to surf, and discovering the island's natural wonders and nightlife. Whenever I needed to cool off in the clear turquoise waters, I could rent a boogie or paddle board or glide away on a sailboat or kayak. Diving is complimentary for PADI certified and novice guests to explore the spectacular reefs and shipwrecks at the bottom of the Caribbean.

The hardest choice each day was where to eat. Sandals Barbados hosts 11 restaurants ranging from Japanese to Indian (the first from Sandals), which can customize dishes to your spice level. When I craved sweets, I indulged in delicious crepes and locally handcrafted rum raisin ice cream at Café de Paris. On my first night, I meandered into a courtyard serving a chocolate buffet, complete with a fondue fountain, martinis, truffles, and a bevy of mouthwatering desserts under the stars as a live band serenaded guests with enchanting tunes.



Every room is ultra-modern, featuring electronic Do Not Disturb signs and central air conditioning that senses when you're in the room. Even better, the room comes equipped with a bar that's far from mini, brimming with full bottles of top shelf rum, scotch, vodka, gin, and wine replenished as often as needed. With spacious accommodations, sprawling four-poster beds, and gorgeous views of the garden, Crystal Lagoon pool, or the beach, you'll remain extremely comfortable throughout your stay. Waking up to the sound of waves lapping ashore and walking barefoot on an empty beach, listening to the gentle rustling of the swaying palms early mornings is a memory I will always cherish.

While it may be tough to leave the relaxing resort, a trip to Barbados isn't complete without experiencing its exotic marine life. Onboard a sailboat with Tiami Catamaran Cruises, I was whisked along the coast for an enchanting afternoon swimming with sea turtles and snorkeling on a coral reef teeming with colorful tropical fish. With the golden sun illuminating the subaqueous world, the transparent waters showcased the bounty of life underneath. Back on deck, the tropical drinks flowed as calypso music underscored a vista of deep blue and emerald Caribbean waters and white sandy beaches hugging the coast.

The next day, a 4x4 jeep from Island Safari picked me up for an on-and-off-roading adventure to Barbados' most iconic locations. The soft coral limestone of the Caribbean's easternmost island defines a rolling landscape that ranges from a rugged coastline of the east to hilly central highlands to the pristine beaches on the west. Atop Cherry Tree Hill, approximately 850 feet above sea level, I was enthralled by the sweeping panorama of the Scotland District. The striking rock formations jutting from the water in Bathsheba provided a striking backdrop from which I couldn't remove my gaze. This village is home to a small fishing community and surfers who travel from around the world to ride the famed Atlantic waves.

The popular subterranean destination of Harrison's Cave in St. Thomas Parish in the middle of the island offers a natural thrill ride on a tram past clear streams, towering stalactites and stalagmites, and deep emerald pools sculpted by waterfalls. If exploring caves isn't your thing, there are plenty of escapades from zip-lining through the jungle to hiking in the woodlands and spotting green monkeys in St. John, St. Joseph, St. Andrew and St. Thomas.



Following an exhilarating island tour, I headed to the famous Oistins Fish Fry in Bay Gardens for a true taste of Barbados culture. This is the place to be on a Friday night. Stretching for over a mile, locals and tourists flock to this outdoor seaside street fair for island crafts and delectable, homemade fried or grilled flying fish, red snapper, mahi-mahi or kingfish. The buttery macaroni pie provides an ideal side dish. Food is wrapped in aluminum foil and served in Styrofoam containers. The plastic forks are flimsy, but the fish is so flaky you won't even notice. Beer and rum are aplenty as a lively soundtrack of Bob Marley, The Platters, Jimmy Cliff, current popular artists, and the cheers of fellow partiers permeates the night sky. I heard the celebration rages on until 6 in the morning, but after a long day of activities, I needed to get back to the resort.

I felt at home at Sandals Barbados, where the cheerful wait staff greeted me with smiles and drinks. Slipping into the soaking tub on my balcony under the moonlight, I couldn't help but wonder how soon I could return to this glorious getaway.

Rooms start from \$370 per person. Visit www.sandals.com for special discounts.

