



Tourism and Barbados go together like rum and coke, flying fish and chips. Visitors come back time and again to tune in to the rhythm and lime with a Banks beer. You can pay thousands of dollars to be truly cosseted along with music moguls and supermodels, or you can cater for yourself and go shopping with Bajans. The west coast is the place to be seen, commonly referred to as the Platinum Coast. The south is for beach life, night life, fun and games, the package holiday end of the market with a cheerful, relaxed atmosphere and the best sand. The east is wild and untamed, a world apart, where the Atlantic crashes into cliffs, eroding the coastline and creating beaches of a rare beauty. Head to the hills inland to explore relics of colonial days such as plantation houses, signal towers, tropical gardens, museums and rum distilleries.

Of all the islands in the eastern Caribbean, Barbados is unique in that it remained British throughout its colonial history, without being passed from one European master to another. The island is divided into 11 parishes named after 10 saints, Christ Church being the 11th. Many parish churches are impressive buildings. Towns have the charming English seaside resort names of Hastings, Brighton or Dover and it was often referred to as Little England in the past, not always as a compliment. Since independence in 1966 the country has tried to shake off that white middle-class suburban image and has moved closer in cultural terms to North America while also pursuing its African roots. Drum music, banned by colonial masters to prevent the organization of slave rebellions, and 'tuk' bands are an essential part of carnival processions. Calypso, soca and pan music blast from vehicles, as well as being the centre piece of Crop Over, the boisterous festival celebrating the end of the sugar harvest. However, some habits die hard. You can still go to a polo match and be offered tea and cucumber sandwiches, or watch Sunday cricket on the village green. A Test Match at the Kensington Oval, though, is a sight to behold – an example of how an English sport has been turned into pure Afro-Caribbean pageantry.

Planning your trip


Best time to visit Barbados

Any time of year is holiday time in Barbados but some months are better than others, depending on what you want to do. The climate is tropical, but rarely excessively hot because of the trade winds. Temperatures vary between 21°C and 35°C, the coolest and driest time being December–May, and a wet and hotter season June–November. Rain is usually heavy when it comes but Barbados has rarely been hit by hurricanes. When Tropical Storm Lily struck in September 2002, around 150 houses were damaged, mostly in the Parish of St Philip, but there was no loss of life. Bajans said they hadn't seen anything like it since Hurricane Janet in 1955.

If you want to join in a carnival atmosphere then time your visit for **Crop Over** in July–August, but book flights, accommodation and car hire in plenty of time as everything is very busy. Bajans return home from all over the world for **Crop Over** and the partying goes on for five weeks. Other musical events worth aiming for are the **Jazz Festival** in January, **Holder's Season** in March and the **Celtic Festival** in May with lots of music, dance and sports. Cricket lovers should aim to take in a **Test Match** or the **BUSTA Cup** to see top international players at the Kensington Oval, but there are cricket festivals at other times of the year and of course matches every Sunday in villages around the island. Even if you know nothing about cricket a match at the Oval is worth seeing for the audience. The stands throb to the beat of drums and whistles, calypso and comedy. This is more than just the national sport, it's almost a religion.

Getting to Barbados

Air

Barbados' popularity as a tourist destination has resulted in good transport connections with many flights from Europe and North and South America. The **Grantley Adams International Airport**  www.gaia.bb, is 16 km from Bridgetown, near the resorts on the south coast and connected to the west coast beaches by the ABC Highway which bypasses the capital. Flights to Barbados are heavily booked at Christmas and for Crop Over (July–early August).

Flights from the UK The main scheduled carriers from the UK are **British Airways** and **Virgin Atlantic** from London Gatwick, while there are flights from several cities with **flythomascook** (via Antigua or St Lucia), **Monarch** and **Thomson Flights** and connections for scheduled flights with **Flybe**, **Caribbean Airlines** flies from Gatwick to Barbados via Trinidad.

Flights from the rest of Europe Condor flies from Frankfurt via Tobago but most flights from European cities connect through London with **British Airways**. Other connecting flights are available with **Air Canada** and **American Airlines** if you want to go via North America.

Flights from North America Air Canada, American Airlines, Delta, Jet Blue, US Airways, Canjet and West Jet as well as several charter services fly from cities across

Don't miss...

- 1 The Garrison, page 29.
- 2 Flower Forest, page 42.
- 3 St Nicholas Abbey, page 48.
- 4 Bathsheba, page 52.
- 5 Bottom Bay, page 57.
- 6 Oistins Friday Fish Fry, page 60.

Numbers relate to the map on page 4.

the USA and Canada. **Caribbean Airlines** has connecting flights from New York, Florida and Toronto via Jamaica and Trinidad.

Flights from Australia and New Zealand There are no direct flights and connections must be made through North America or London.

Flights from the Caribbean LIAT has lots of direct flights from Antigua, Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent, Grenada, Trinidad and Guyana, while at their Antigua hub they connect to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St Thomas, St Croix, Tortola, Anguilla, Sint Maarten, St Kitts, Nevis and Guadeloupe, and from Trinidad you can fly on to Curaçao. **Caribbean Airlines** connects Barbados to its hubs in Trinidad and in Jamaica, from where they connect to other islands: Sint Maarten, Antigua, St Lucia, Grenada, Tobago and Nassau, as well as to Guyana, Suriname and Caracas. Charter service is available with **Executive Air** to and from St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Grand Cayman and Cuba, as well as to Canada and Florida. They also operate an **Air Ambulance** service. Other airlines operating charter flights, day tours and air taxi services are **Trans Island Air**, **St Vincent and Grenadines Air** and **Mustique Airways**. GOL flies from Brazil with other South American connections.

Airport information The airport is modern and well equipped. There are two linked terminals, one for departures and one for arrivals. There is a helpful **Tourism Authority office**, **Barbados National Bank**, car hire agencies (**Courtesy Rent-A-Car**, **Drive-a-matic** and **Stoute's Car Rental**) in the public area to the left as you exit the arrivals terminal, and quite a wide range of shops including **Cave Sheperd**, an inbound duty-free shop (very useful, saves carrying heavy bottles on the plane).

Taxis stop just outside customs. Check the notice board on the left as you come out of arrivals, as it gives the official taxi fares. Alternatively see www.gaia.bb/content/taxi-rates-airport. Authorized taxis have a yellow sticker on the side, The taxi dispatcher will give you a trip form and advice on fares. Drivers may attempt to charge more if you haven't checked. There is a bus stop on the main road just across the car park, with buses running hourly along the south coast to Bridgetown, or (over the road) to the Crane. Across the car park there are two lively rum shops; the shop in the gas station is open when terminal shops are closed, selling food, papers, etc. Next to the departures terminal is a Concorde museum housing the ex-British Airways plane G-BOAE. Very few flights arrive late at night, but if you are delayed, there are hotels a short taxi ride from the airport, see Where to stay, page 64 (South Coast).

Sea

Cruise ships call at Bridgetown and some passengers choose to start or break their journey here, but otherwise there is no passenger shipping. The cruise ship terminal, just north of Bridgetown, has shops, restaurants, communications centre, tourist information, tour operators, taxis and a chattel house craft village.

Transport in Barbados

Road

The island is fairly small but it can take a surprisingly long time to travel as the rural roads are narrow and winding. Although the island is only 34 km long and 22 km wide, there are about 1475 km of paved roads and plenty of ways to get lost. The Adams Barrow Cummins highway runs from the airport to a point between Brighton and Prospect, north of Bridgetown. This road skirts the east edge of the capital, giving access by various roads into the city and to the west and east coasts. Its roundabouts are named after eminent Bajans, including Sir Garfield Sobers, Errol Barrow and Everton Weekes. North of Bridgetown, heading up the west coast, is Highway 1, giving access to all the beach hotels. Highway 2A runs parallel inland, going through the sugar cane fields and allowing rather speedier access to the north of the island. The highway and roads into Bridgetown get jammed morning and afternoon; the city centre is worst in the middle of the day. Minibuses and route taxis run around the capital, cheaply and efficiently, but are terribly slow in rush hour.

Bus

Buses are cheap, frequent and crowded. Flat fare of B\$2 per journey anywhere on the island, so if you change buses you pay again. The drivers do not have change on the public buses so exact fare is required and no foreign coins are accepted. If you are boarding at a terminal, however, you can get change from the cashier, open 0700-2200. Almost all the routes radiate in and out of Bridgetown, so cross-country journeys are time-consuming if you are staying outside the city centre. However, travelling by bus can be fun. There are some circuits which work quite well; for example: 1) any south coast bus to Oistins, then cross country College Savannah bus to the east coast, then direct bus back to Bridgetown; 2) any west coast bus to Speightstown, then bus back to Bathsheba on the east coast, then direct bus back to Bridgetown. Out of town bus stops are marked simply 'To City' or 'Out of City'. For the south coast ask for Silver Sands route.

Around Bridgetown, there are plenty of small yellow privately owned minibuses with B licence plates and route taxis with ZR licence plates; elsewhere, the big blue and yellow buses (exact fare required or tokens sold at the bus terminal) belong to the Transport Board, www.transportboard.com. Private buses tend to stick to urban areas while the public buses run half empty in rural areas and in the evening. There is a City Circle route, clockwise and anti-clockwise round the inner suburbs of Bridgetown which starts in Lower Green.

Terminals for the south: Fairchild Street for public buses, clean, modern; Probyn Street, or just across Constitution River from Fairchild Street for minibuses; further east by Constitution River for ZR vans. Terminals for the west: Lower Green for public buses; west of Post Office for minibuses; Princess Alice Highway for ZR vans, but from 1800-2400 all leave from Lower Green. During the rush hour, all these terminals are chaotic, particularly during school term. On most routes, the last bus leaves at, or soon after, midnight and the first bus leaves at 0500. There is also a terminal in Speightstown and a sub-terminal in Oistins.

There are two routes from the airport: Yorkshire buses go straight to Bridgetown, others go along the south coast past the hotels to Bridgetown. For a shopping trip into Bridgetown from the south or west coast hotels from Monday to Saturday, call the **Bridgetown Visitor Shuttle** ☎ *T431 2078, US\$3, 0830-1600*. It is of course cheaper to hop on a regular bus for B\$2.

The Transport Board also runs Sunday scenic bus tours starting at 1400 from Independence Square, B\$20 adults, B\$12 children. On the first Sunday of the month they go to Speightstown, Farley Hill, East Coast Road; on the second Sunday to Cherry Tree Hill, Little Bay, River Bay; on the third Sunday to Foul Bay, Three Houses Park, Bath; and on the fourth Sunday to Bathsheba, St. John's Church, King George V Park, Silver Sands. Tickets are available from the change booths at Fairchild Street or Princess Alice Terminals and the **Transport Board Headquarters** ☎ *T310 3568*.

Car

Drive on the left. Drivers need a US\$5 visitor's driving permit (Visitor Registration Certificate), valid for two months, even if you have an International Driving Licence. Car hire companies will usually sort it out for you. Drivers must be over 21 and under 80 and have held a licence for a minimum of two years. Car hire is efficient and generally reliable. Mini mokes, jeeps, vans and air conditioned cars are all available. A medium-sized car or a mini moke will cost on average US\$90-100 a day, US\$400 a week, but you can get cheaper deals with small companies. There are often discounts available (including free driver's permit) and tourist magazines frequently contain 10% discount vouchers. There are some 60 car rental companies on the island, of which only three have offices at the airport. Fuel prices rise in line with international prices. The speed limit is 80, 60, or 40 kph depending on the type of road. Tourist maps are notoriously short on detail as navigational tools. John Mann's BajanNav, <http://bajannav.com/>, has been recommended as an alternative to getting lost, either in the city or in the countryside and is highly accurate. Many rental companies offer gps systems as well as child booster seats for an extra fee. All charges for car hire, excess waiver and other extras are subject to VAT of 17.5%. Gasoline costs about US\$2.50 per litre.

Cycling

Bridgetown is not recommended for cyclists. The roads are dangerously busy, traffic moves quite fast round the one way system and the road surface is uneven and potholed. Out of town you should be careful on narrow, twisting roads, which also have potholes. There have been many accidents with bicycles and many people who rent bikes lose their deposit because of damage or theft, so it can work out expensive. Besides being dangerous and expensive it is also hot work. Take lots of water and sun screen.

Taxi

There are plenty of taxis at the airport, main hotels, and in Bridgetown. There are standard fares, displayed just outside 'arrivals' at the airport, and are also listed in the *Visitor* and the *Sunseeker*. From the airport to St Lawrence Gap is US\$15.50, to Bridgetown US\$23, to Hometown US\$29, to Speightstown US\$36.50. Taxi fares start from the basic tariff of US\$8 and if they have to wait for you there is a US\$7.50 charge per hour of waiting time. You may have to bargain hard for tours by taxi but always agree a fare in advance.

Walking

The sights of central Bridgetown can be toured on foot in a morning with no difficulty. The Tourism Authority does a useful free leaflet with map for a self-guided walking tour of Bridgetown. There is a good walking route along the old east coast railway track, from Bath to Bathsheba and on to Cattlewash. For organized hiking tours, see page 75.

Where to stay in Barbados

Tourism is the major industry on Barbados and there is a wide selection of hotels, guesthouses, apartments and villas, providing some 10,000 registered and unregistered guest rooms. Barbados is not for the impecunious, it is an upmarket destination. Visitors come here for a treat and expect – and receive – excellent service and value for money. Unusually for the Caribbean, most of the hotels are independently run. Generally, the top hotels in the super luxury category, costing well over US\$300 a night, are on the west coast. Places such as **Sandy Lane** are among the world's top resorts, where you can get every conceivable service and luxury. Small and chic hotels are also to be found here. Cheap and cheerful places can be found on the south coast, but many of these are concrete block, characterless hotels usually booked as package holidays. All-inclusives are to be avoided as the food quickly becomes boring and you will miss out on the fun of selecting from the huge choice of places to eat. The best 'getaways' are on the east coast at Bathsheba, where the landscape is rugged and breezy, air conditioning is rarely needed and the atmosphere is completely different. If you are a night owl, this is not the place for you as there is little entertainment and people tend to go to bed early, having had an active day.

Self-catering is popular on Barbados, partly because restaurants are not cheap, and if there is a group of you, you can find good value places to stay. Despite the reputation of the west coast as expensive – it is nicknamed the 'platinum coast' – you can find an apartment to rent for as little as US\$25 a night per person if you are not too demanding and don't mind walking a few minutes to the beach. Try **Owners Direct** www.ownersdirect.co.uk, for a wide range of properties to rent. To get a really Bajan feel, look out for renovated chattel houses for rent, these are popular and are charming places to stay for a couple or small group. A two-bedroomed chattel house rents for around US\$75-125 a night, depending on the season, length of stay and proximity to the sea. The décor may not have that 'interior designer' look, but will be of a good standard with all the amenities and equipment you need. Guesthouses are another budget option, some of which are like small hotels but others are more in the line of bed and breakfast in a family house. If meals are available, you can rely on being able to sample local ingredients and recipes. The Barbados Tourism Authority lists a range of hotels, guesthouses and apartments around the island. For small, low-priced hotels try www.intimatehotelsbarbados.com and www.shoestringbarbados.com.

Food and drink in Barbados

Just as Bajan culture is a blend of British and African traditions, so the cuisine of Barbados is a mix of British and West African tastes and ingredients, developed over the centuries with some other flavours brought to the pot by immigrants from other nations such as India. The need for carbohydrates to fuel slave labour and arduous work in the sugar cane fields has led to a diet based on starchy vegetables known as ground provisions, while difficulties in storing meat and fish in the tropical heat led to common use of salt meat

Price codes

Where to stay

\$\$\$\$ over US\$150

\$\$\$ US\$66-150

\$\$ US\$30-65

\$ under US\$30

Price of a double room in high season, including taxes.

Restaurants

\$\$\$ over US\$12

\$\$ US\$7-12

\$ US\$6 and under

Prices for a two-course meal for one person, excluding drinks or service charge.

and fish, pickles and other preserves. Sugar, the main crop of the island for generations, features heavily in both food and drink, reaching perfection in the production of rum.

Food

Fresh fish is excellent and sold at the markets in Oistins, Bridgetown and elsewhere in the late afternoon and evening, when the fishermen come in with their catch. It is a fascinating sight to watch the speed and skill with which women fillet flying fish and bag them up for sale. The main fish season is December-May, when there is less risk of stormy weather at sea. Flying fish are the national emblem and a speciality with two or three fillets to a plate, eaten with chips, breaded in a sandwich (flying fish cutter) or with an elegant sauce. Dolphin fish, also called Dorado or Mahi Mahi on restaurant menus, and kingfish are larger steak-fish. Snapper is excellent. Sea eggs are the roe of the white sea urchin, and are delicious but not often available as they are increasingly rare and in need of protection. There is also plenty of local crab, lobster, conch, octopus and shrimp/prawns.

Cou-cou is a filling starchy dish made from breadfruit or corn meal with okra, peppers and hot sauce. Jug-jug is a Christmas speciality made from guinea corn, pigeon peas and salt meat, supposedly descended from the haggis of the poor white Scottish settlers exiled to the island after the failed Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. Pudding and souse is a huge dish of pickled breadfruit, black pudding and pork. Conkie is a corn-based dish often referred to as stew dumpling, traditionally made and sold during November, originally to celebrate the failure of Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament and King James I, and later to celebrate Independence from British colonial rule. Conkie contains spices, sugar, pumpkin, corn meal, coconut and sometimes raisins or cherries, all wrapped and steamed in a banana leaf, served hot.

There is a riot of tropical fruit and vegetables: unusual and often unidentifiable objects as well as more familiar items found in supermarkets in Europe and North America but with ten times the flavour. The best bananas in the world are grown in the Caribbean on small farms using the minimum of chemicals, if not organic. They are cheap and incredibly sweet and unlike anything you can buy at home. Many of the wonderful tropical fruits you will come across in juices or in ice cream. Don't miss the rich flavours of the soursop, the guava or the sapodilla. Mangoes in season drip off the trees and those that don't end up on your breakfast plate can be found squashed in abundance all over the roads. Caribbean oranges are often green when ripe, as there is no cold season to bring out the orange colour, and are meant for juicing not peeling. Portugals are like tangerines and easy to peel. The grapefruit originated in Barbados in the 18th century, crossing a sweet orange and a bitter citrus called a shaddock, brought from Polynesia by Captain

Shaddock. Avocados are nearly always sold unripe, so wait several days before attempting to eat them. Avocado trees also provide a surplus of fruit and you will be doing everyone a favour if you eat as many as possible. Avocados have been around since the days of the Arawaks, who also cultivated cassava and cocoa, but many vegetables have their origins in the slave trade, brought over to provide a starchy diet for the slaves. The breadfruit, a common staple rich in carbohydrates and vitamins A, B and C, was brought from the South Seas in 1793 by Captain Bligh, perhaps more famous for the mutiny on the *Bounty*. It is eaten in a variety of ways in Barbados: with tomato and onion, a cucumber and lime souse, mashed like a potato or as wafer-thin crisps. It is one of the many forms of starch popular in local cooking, others include sweet potato, yam, eddo, green banana, plantain, bakes, cassava, rice, pasta and potato. Rice usually comes mixed with pigeon peas, black eye peas or split peas. Macaroni cheese is a popular accompaniment, referred to as 'pie'.

With sugar being grown on the island, Bajans have developed a sweet tooth. It is worth trying tamarind balls, guava cheese, chocolate fudge and peanut brittle, while for dessert, coconut bread, Bajan baked custard and lemon meringue pie are firm favourites.

Drink

There are hundreds of different rums in the Caribbean, each island producing the best, of course. Barbados is one of the main producers and you can find some excellent brands: Mount Gay, Cockspur, Malibu, Foursquare and St Nicholas Abbey. Generally the younger, light rums are used in cocktails and aged, dark rums are drunk on the rocks or treated as you might a single malt whisky. Barbados rum is probably the best in the English-speaking Caribbean, unless of course you come from Jamaica, or Guyana or ... It is worth paying a bit extra for a good brand such as VSOP or Old Gold, or for the slightly sweeter Sugar Cane Brandy, unless you are going to drink it with Coca Cola, in which case anything will do. A rum and cream liqueur, *Crisma*, is popular in cocktails or on the rocks. Mount Gay produce a vanilla and a mango flavoured rum. *Falernum* is sweet, sometimes slightly alcoholic, with a hint of vanilla and great in a rum cocktail instead of sugar syrup. *Corn and oil* is rum and falernum. *Mauby* is bitter, made from tree bark and non-alcoholic. It is watered down like a fruit squash and can be refreshing with lots of ice. *Sorrel* is a bright red Christmas drink made with hibiscus sepals and spices; it is very good with white rum. Banks beer has Bajan Light and other beers. Water is of excellent quality, it comes mostly from deep wells sunk into the coral limestone, but there is bottled water if you prefer.

Eating out

There are a number of excellent restaurants on Barbados, with several of gourmet standard. Some of these are in the luxury hotels such as **Sandy Lane**, but you don't have to go to a hotel for cordon bleu cuisine. Many of the chefs have been around a bit, working in high class kitchens in London or Paris before trying a spell in the Caribbean, bringing a variety of skills to the task of preparing tropical ingredients. Eating out is not cheap, and restaurants will charge around US\$12-40 for a main course, but standards are high and the settings often special; you may get an open air waterfront table or a garden terrace, maybe even a table on the beach. The majority of places to eat are clustered around Holetown on the west coast and St Lawrence Gap on the south coast, where there is a wide variety, allowing you to indulge in Italian, Mexican, Indian, French, Japanese or whatever takes your fancy. In Bridgetown there are several cheap, canteens for office workers where you can get a filling lunch for around US\$6, and around the island there are beach bars for lunch, but what is lacking are Bajan restaurants serving cheap, local food in the evenings. A few rum

Rum cocktails

There is nothing better at the end of a busy day than finding a spot overlooking the sea with a rum in your hand to watch the sunset and look out for the green flash. The theory is that the more rum you drink, the more likely you are to see this flash of green on the horizon as the sun goes down.

There are hundreds of different rums in the Caribbean, each island producing the best, of course. Barbados is one of the main producers and you can find some excellent brands. Generally, the younger, light rums are used in cocktails and aged, dark rums are drunk on the rocks or treated as you might a single malt whisky. Cocktails first became popular after the development of ice-making in the USA in 1870, but boomed in the 1920s partly because of prohibition in the USA and the influx of visitors to Cuba, the Bahamas and other islands, escaping stringent regulations. People have been drinking their rum in cola ever since the Americans brought bottled drinks in to Cuba during the war against Spain at the end of the 19th century, hence the name, **Cuba Libre**. You can in fact adapt any cocktail recipe to substitute other spirits and incorporate rum. It makes an excellent **Bloody Mary**, the spicier the better.

One of the nicest and most refreshing cocktails is a **Daiquiri**, invented in Santiago de Cuba in 1898 by an engineer in the Daiquiri mines. The natural version combines 1½ tablespoons of sugar, the juice of half a lime, some drops of

maraschino liqueur, 1½ oz light dry rum and a lot of shaved ice, all mixed in a blender and then served piled high in a wide, chilled champagne glass with a straw. You can also have fruit versions, with strawberry, banana, peach or pineapple, using fruit or fruit liqueur.

Everybody has heard of the old favourite, **Piña Colada**, which can be found on all the islands and is probably the most popular of the fruit-based cocktails, ideal by the side of the pool. Combine and blend coconut liqueur, pineapple juice, light dry rum and shaved ice, then serve with a straw in a glass, a pineapple or a coconut.

Many hotels offer you a welcome cocktail when you stagger out of the taxi, jet-lagged from your transatlantic flight. This is often an over-sweet, watered-down punch, with a poor quality rum and sickly fruit juice. You are more likely to find something palatable in the bar, but it always depends on which blend of juice the barman favours. The standard recipe for a **rum punch** is: 'one of sour, two of sweet, three of strong and four of weak'. If you measure that in fluid ounces, it comes out as 1 oz of lime juice, 2 oz of syrup (equal amounts of sugar and water, boiled for a few minutes), 3 oz of rum and 4 oz of water, fruit juices, ginger ale, or whatever takes your fancy. You could add ice and a dash of Angostura Bitters from Trinidad, use nutmeg syrup from Grenada or Falernum from Barbados instead of sugar syrup, and garnish it with a slice of lime. Delicious.

shops sell fried chicken and there are some fast food places, but nothing else at the budget end of the scale after dark. Oistins on a Friday night is a major event for both Bajans and tourists. Lots of small shops sell fish meals and other food, dub music one end and at the other a small club where they play oldies for ballroom dancing. It continues on Saturday and Sunday, though a bit quieter, and some food places also stay open through the week.