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## Summer in the Caribbean

By MICHELLE HIGGINS

[HOUSTON](#) in summer can be a miserable place.

“It’s 100 degrees and 100 percent humidity — in the shade,” said Crystal Hadnott, a career counselor for a scholarship fund. That’s why many Houstonians often head to the [beaches](#) of [Galveston](#), about an hour’s drive away, in search of a temporary respite from the city heat.

But last [Memorial Day](#) weekend, Ms. Hadnott and a few of her friends skipped the traffic jams and got on a plane instead — and soon found themselves at a hotel on the Caribbean island of [St. Thomas](#), enjoying the sparkling turquoise waters, the nearly empty beaches and, most important, the cooling ocean breezes that kept daytime temperatures in the high 70s and low 80s. “It was beautiful,” Ms. Hadnott said. And not expensive: the entire cost, including airfare, hotel, airport transfers, all meals and drinks, was roughly \$1,100 a person.

The experience was so great that this year, she and several of her friends went south again for Memorial Day, this time to [Aruba](#).

The [Caribbean](#) in summer? It’s a more appealing option than you might think, especially if you’re looking for a bargain vacation this year. Here are a few reasons:

1. Prices are lower, with some hotels and resorts cutting as much as 60 percent off their winter rates.
2. Temperatures are typically only a few degrees higher than they are in the peak travel months of January through March. And they can be even lower than you’ll find at popular beach spots back in the [United States](#). (For example, last Sunday, the temperature hit 93 in New York; it was 88 in Montego Bay, [Jamaica](#) and 88 on [St. Lucia](#).)
3. The threat of [hurricanes](#) is certainly real, but perhaps not as great as you might imagine. Only one has hit the Caribbean before July 8 in the last decade — Hurricane Dennis, a Category 3 storm, which passed just east and north of Jamaica on July 7, 2005, producing hurricane conditions on the island. (This year the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration projects a “near normal or above normal” hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to Nov. 30 with the peak typically occurring from mid-August to mid-October.)
4. Did we mention that prices are lower?

This summer, rooms at Ritz-Carlton Golf and Spa Resort, Rose Hall, in Jamaica can be had for as little as \$199 a night compared with \$509 in mid-March. Starting rates at the Four Seasons Resort in [Nevis](#) drop to

\$335 a night from \$490, and families traveling with children 18 or under can get a second room for half the cost or as low as \$167.50 a night.

Despite the overall trend in rising airfares, prices of Caribbean packages, including airline tickets, are down 16 percent compared with peak travel, according to [CheapTickets.com](http://CheapTickets.com). That travel Web site is offering five-night getaways from [Chicago](#) starting at \$769 a person to the Gran Meliã [Puerto Rico](#) in [San Juan](#) in June, and \$1,345 a person at Aruba's Hyatt Regency hotel in July from New York. FunJet Vacations has been offering three-night trips including airfare for as low as \$650 a person from New York to Aruba or \$765 a person to [Barbados](#).

In some cases, practically entire islands are on sale. St. Maarten, the United States Virgin Islands and the [Cayman Islands](#) are all offering island-wide summer promotions including a night free at a bevy of resorts and discounts for tourist activities. (Information at [www.vacationstmaarten.com](http://www.vacationstmaarten.com), [www.usvitourism.vi](http://www.usvitourism.vi), and [www.caymanislands.ky](http://www.caymanislands.ky).)

The islands themselves are getting a lot more aggressive about trying to lure visitors over the slower summer months with festivals that show off what the island has to offer in the way of food, history, culture or [music](#). Each summer, for example, Barbados celebrates Crop Over ([www.barbados.org/cropover.htm](http://www.barbados.org/cropover.htm)), a festival that can be traced back to the late 1780s, as a way to mark the end of the sugar-cane cutting season. Today, it's a tourist draw involving calypso competitions and parades. Last year, [Bonaire](#) created the water-oriented Dive into Summer event ([www.bonairediveintosummer.com](http://www.bonairediveintosummer.com)), which it plans to repeat this year. [Grenada's](#) Carnival, one of the island's biggest festivals, begins in July and gains momentum leading up to Carnival Sunday, usually in the second week of August.

Other islands try to draw visitors with big-name stars. In July Jamaica hosts the Reggae Sumfest, which has featured such popular performers as [Mary J. Blige](#), 50 Cent and Missy Elliott. And for the first time this year, the Cayman Islands will host a championship-boxing event — Cayman Knockout, to be held on Friday, June 20. In a super middleweight bout, the Olympic Gold medalist Andre Ward will fight the former Olympian Jerson Ravelo, and in a heavyweight match, Eddie Chambers will take on Raphael Butler. "We want tourism to the Caribbean to be a year-round exciting experience for travelers," said Hugh Riley, a chief operating officer for the Caribbean Tourism Development Company.

Of course, there can be drawbacks to summering in the Caribbean. Some nonstop flights that run all winter long go on hiatus, requiring travelers who want to fly from [Philadelphia](#) to St. Lucia, for example, to make an extra stop or two. Once on the island, travelers may find that a number of restaurants or shops are closed for the season, resorts are undergoing construction, and staffing may not be quite as robust as it is during the winter.

That said, summertime brings some tourist opportunities that are simply nonexistent any other time of year. From March to August, visitors to St. Lucia can take a Turtle Watch tour run by Heritage Tours ([www.heritagetourstlucia.org](http://www.heritagetourstlucia.org)), where guests camp overnight on the beach and help measure the leatherback turtles and count the number of eggs they lay. Rain showers bring cool respites and lushness to the islands not usually found during the winter. And all deals aside, the dip in tourists during the summer allows for a sense of solitude that has become increasingly rare in the islands.

## Anguilla

Looking for a beach? Anguilla, a small, low-lying Leeward Island, has 33 of them, all of which — including the well-manicured sands in front of the fanciest resorts — are open to the public. The increasingly upscale island also has a strong culinary scene, with an impressive array of restaurants (as many as 100) for an island just 16 miles long and no more than 3 miles across at its widest point.

**Where to Stay** The sumptuous Malliouhana Hotel and Spa (800-835-0796; [www.malliouhana.com](http://www.malliouhana.com)) charges \$455 a night for a beachfront room. That's more than half off what visitors would pay for the same room (\$1,005) during the peak winter season. Cap Juluca (888-858-5822; [www.capjuluca.com](http://www.capjuluca.com)), another high-end Anguilla resort, is offering seven nights for the price of six for stays through August with rates beginning at \$495 a night compared with \$825 in the winter. At the opposite end of the price spectrum, the Arawak Beach Inn (877-427-2925; [www.arawakbeach.com](http://www.arawakbeach.com)) is offering rooms from \$125 a night through October.

**WHAT TO DO** From July 31 to Aug. 10, Anguilla will celebrate its annual Summer Festival, ([www.axasummerfestival.com](http://www.axasummerfestival.com)) with 11 days of carnival and boat racing festivities. Or explore the island by horseback. Seaside Stables (264-235-3667; [www.seaside-stables.com](http://www.seaside-stables.com)) offers group rides for \$60 a person.

**HOW TO GET THERE** From New York, take one of the many flights into St. Martin and catch a ferry. They run about every half hour between 7:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. between Marigot Bay, St. Martin and Blowing Point, Anguilla. Another option: fly nonstop to San Juan and hop a connecting flight into Anguilla on American Eagle.

- [Related Article: Affordable Anguilla](#)

## Aruba

Located 15 miles off the coast of [Venezuela](#), Aruba shares the distinction with [Trinidad and Tobago](#), [Bonaire](#) and Curaçao of being below the hurricane belt, making it less prone to major storms. Its long white-sand [beaches](#), [Las Vegas](#)-style casinos and array of water sports make for an ideal vacation spot for travelers with diverse interests. The island's many all-inclusive resorts make it easy for budget-conscious travelers to know exactly what their vacation will cost. And strong ocean breezes keep windsurfers aloft and vacationers cool all summer long.

**WHERE TO STAY** Kids stay and eat free, and parents can play [golf](#) for free after 3 p.m. at the Divi Village Golf and Beach Resort (800-367-3484; [www.diviaruba.com](http://www.diviaruba.com)) with a three-night minimum all-inclusive stay booked by June 30. Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino and Spa (800-333-3333; [www.radisson.com/aruba](http://www.radisson.com/aruba)) is running a Summer Fun Sale, with rates that start at \$275 a night and packages that include a fourth night free, 15 percent off spa treatments and a \$100 spa or restaurant credit. Reservations must be made by June 30. Ask for the Sand Dollars package (promotion code: S29) at the Aruba Marriott Resort and Stellaris Casino (800-223-6388; [www.arubamarriott.com](http://www.arubamarriott.com)) for a fifth night free and \$100 restaurant credit. Rates are from \$269 a night.

**WHAT TO DO** Watch windsurfers and kiteboarders freestyle at the Aruba Hi-Winds Competition ([www.aruba-hiwinds.org](http://www.aruba-hiwinds.org)) July 2 to July 7. Or try it yourself. Aruba Boardsailing Productions (297-586-0989;

[www.arubawindsurfing.com](http://www.arubawindsurfing.com)) runs windsurfing classes (\$50 for two hours) and kitesurfing lessons (\$100 for two hours). Beyond the beach the island has dozens of quirky attractions from an ostrich farm (297-585-9630; [www.arubaostrichfarm.com](http://www.arubaostrichfarm.com)) to a donkey sanctuary (011-297-584-1063; [www.arubandonkey.org](http://www.arubandonkey.org)).

**HOW TO GET THERE** It takes less than five hours to fly to Aruba nonstop from New York. Many airlines fly there each week, including JetBlue and American, which offer nonstop flights to the island from New York.

- [Related Article: Affordable Aruba](#)

## [Dominican Republic](#)

This country, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, has seen a surge in luxury developments in the last few years, with hotels offering \$600-a-night rooms to go with their championship [golf](#) courses. But a wide range of all-inclusive resorts, affordable beachfront cabanas and relatively low-cost flights continue to keep the D.R.'s reputation as a bargain-hunter's paradise intact.

**WHERE TO STAY** In [Cabarete](#), near Puerto Plata in the north, Natura Cabanas Hotel (809-571-1507; [www.naturacabana.com](http://www.naturacabana.com)) offers 11 un-air-conditioned thatched-roof bungalows with rates starting at \$120 a night. For even more savings, head inland: the Hilton [Santo Domingo](#) (877-464-4586; [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)) is offering summer weekend rates as low as \$110 a night. Hotel Palacio (809-682-4730; [www.hotel-palacio.com](http://www.hotel-palacio.com)), a former presidential palace in Santo Domingo's colonial zone, offers rooms as low as \$95 for two people sharing. Looking for luxury for less? Sivory [Punta Cana](#) (809-333-0500; [www.sivorypuntacana.com](http://www.sivorypuntacana.com)) is among several luxury resorts in Punta Cana on the island's easternmost tip that drop rates for the summer. Prices start at \$290 a night versus \$490 in peak season.

**WHAT TO DO** For a pure beach vacation, Punta Cana's powder-fine sands are some of the most popular, with tall, swaying palms and a wide range of resorts. Outdoor adventurers tend to favor the north coast, which features jungle forests, rolling mountain ranges, blue waters and golden [beaches](#). Using the towns of Puerto Plata, Cabarete and Sosua as a base, travelers can go mountain [biking](#), rock climbing or kiteboarding or just enjoy the sun. And culture-seekers can head for the capital, Santo Domingo, for a vibrant mix of night life, modern boutiques and Old World charm.

**HOW TO GET THERE** The Dominican Republic has seven international airports throughout the country, and there are many nonstop flights from the East Coast. For example, JetBlue has daily nonstop flights from Kennedy Airport to Santiago, Puerto Plata and Santo Domingo. Continental flies to Puerto Plata, Punta Cana and Santo Domingo nonstop from Newark. And American flies nonstop to Santo Domingo, Santiago and Punta Cana from Kennedy.

- [Related Article: Affordable Dominican Republic](#)

## [Jamaica](#)

Among the largest islands in the [Caribbean](#), Jamaica, with its beautiful [beaches](#), lush mountains, secluded waterfalls, clear waters, plentiful [snorkeling](#) spots and melodic grooves, offers something alluring for pretty much any traveler. There are a dozen [golf](#) courses, raucous nightclubs, quiet beaches and a wide range of

resorts from adults-only playgrounds to all-inclusive havens to quiet boutique hotels perched on cliffs.

**WHERE TO STAY** Pay for four nights, stay for five at three of Island Outpost's properties in Jamaica (800-688-7678; [www.islandoutpost.com](http://www.islandoutpost.com)) with rates starting at \$95 a night at Jake's Treasure Beach. In Negril, the Rockhouse Hotel (876-957-4373; [www.rockhousehotel.com](http://www.rockhousehotel.com)) — perched atop a rocky outcropping, with ladders and stairs carved into the rock that lead down to the water — has standard rooms for \$125 a night. The Ritz-Carlton Golf and Spa Resort, Rose Hall (876-953-2800; [www.ritz-carlton.com](http://www.ritz-carlton.com)) can be visited for as little as \$199 a night compared with \$509 in mid-March. Nearby, the Half Moon Resort (866-648-6951; [www.halfmoon.com](http://www.halfmoon.com)) is offering a five-night Summer Break package with rates from \$250 a night that includes a \$150 resort credit, daily breakfast and half-off meal plans for children under 12.

**WHAT TO DO** Music lovers can check out Reggae Sumfest (876-953-8360; [www.reggaesumfest.com](http://www.reggaesumfest.com)) at Catherine Hall in Montego Bay from July 13 to 19. Explore the Green Grotto Caves (876-973-3217; [www.greengrottocavesja.com](http://www.greengrottocavesja.com)), said to have been a haven for runaway slaves in the 18th century and featuring large rock formations, stalagmites and stalactites. A 45-minute guided tour costs \$20 or \$10 for kids 4 to 12. Go horseback riding, mountain [biking](#), river tubing or even dog-sledding on wheels. Chukka Caribbean Adventures offers these and other tours (876-979-6599; [www.chukkacaribbean.com](http://www.chukkacaribbean.com)).

**HOW TO GET THERE** A wide range of flight options helps keep airfares to this island lower on average than to some of its smaller Caribbean counterparts. Air Jamaica has the most nonstops from the [United States](#) to Jamaica, including daily service to Montego Bay from [Atlanta](#), [Baltimore](#), [Fort Lauderdale](#), New York, [Orlando](#) and [Los Angeles](#). In addition, there is daily service to Kingston from both New York and [Miami](#).

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### [St. Kitts & Nevis](#)

This twin-island federation, located in the northern Leeward Islands of the eastern [Caribbean](#), was made more accessible from New York last year when [American Airlines](#) began flying nonstop to St. Kitts in November. Now, travelers can leave New York in the morning and be on the beach, daiquiri in hand, by dinner time. Any one of four ferry services can take you to Nevis in about 45 minutes from \$4 one way.

**WHERE TO STAY** The all-inclusive seven-day, six-night Adventure Vacation package at the Royal St. Kitts Hotel and Casino (866-607-6242; [www.royalst Kittshotel.com](http://www.royalst Kittshotel.com)) includes scuba [diving](#) on Day One, a volcano and rainforest tour on Day Four and sport [fishing](#) on Day Five. Cost: \$1,380 a person.

On Nevis, rates at the Four Seasons (869-469-1111; [www.fourseasons.com/nevis](http://www.fourseasons.com/nevis)) begin at \$335 a night. Through Aug. 10, Nisbet Plantation Beach Club (800-742-6008; [www.nisbetplantation.com](http://www.nisbetplantation.com)) is offering savings up to 20 percent off regular rates, starting at \$550 a night, depending on the length of stay.

**WHAT TO DO** [Hike](#) Mount Liamuiga, St. Kitts's dormant volcano. Cost is \$65 for five-hour trip with the Tour Store. Take a three-hour railway tour (\$90 a person) around the island by narrow-gauge railroad, built a century ago to haul sugar cane from the island's plantations to the sugar mills (869-466-0413; [www.stkittstourstore.com](http://www.stkittstourstore.com)). Or just wander around the historic capital of Basseterre and take in the Creole and West Indian architecture. On Nevis, take a two-hour hike into the rain forest in search of vervet

monkeys, also called green monkeys by the locals. (869-469-2758; [www.nevisnaturetours.com](http://www.nevisnaturetours.com))

HOW TO GET THERE American flies to St. Kitts from Kennedy Airport in New York twice a week, on Wednesdays and Sundays, and five times a week from [Miami](#). In February, Delta added a Saturday flight from its hub in [Atlanta](#).

- [Related Article: Affordable St. Kitts & Nevis](#)

### [St. Lucia](#)

Nestled halfway down the eastern [Caribbean](#) archipelago, this Windward Island, marked by the twin peaks of its dramatic Piton Mountains, has been gaining ground as a luxury destination with several high-end resorts to choose from in just the last few years. During the summer, however, even the Star, Moon and Sun suites at Jade Mountain ([www.jademountainstlucia.com](http://www.jademountainstlucia.com)), which have private infinity pools and a fourth wall missing for maximum views of the mountains and sea, come down by \$300 from peak season to \$1,150, \$1,300 or \$1,600 a night.

WHERE TO STAY Discovery at Marigot Bay (758-458-5300; [www.discoverystlucia.com](http://www.discoverystlucia.com)) has 57 suites, — half of which have outdoor hot tubs — and 35 rooms starting at \$330 including tax and breakfast. Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort (800-345-0356; [www.windjammer-landing.com](http://www.windjammer-landing.com)) is offering 30 percent in Sun Dollars resort credits to guests who stay a minimum of five nights. Rates start at \$310 a night for one-bedroom villas. Rooms at the all-inclusive Coconut Bay Beach Resort and [Spa](#) (866-978-6226; [www.cbayresort.com](http://www.cbayresort.com)) begin at \$99 a person a night Aug. 16 to Sept. 30 — a 50 percent discount off regular rates.

WHAT TO DO During the summer, the island's lush rain forest and secluded waterfalls are in full effect. Nature hikes (\$10) and [bird](#) watching tours (\$30) can be arranged with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (758-468-5645; [www.slumaffe.org](http://www.slumaffe.org)). From March to August, night tours are organized by the Heritage Tours (758-458-1454; [www.heritagetourstlucia.org](http://www.heritagetourstlucia.org)) to witness the arrival of leatherback turtles as they come ashore to lay eggs on Grand Anse Beach. Cost: \$90 a person, tents and including transfers to and from hotel.

HOW TO GET THERE [American Airlines](#) flies to St. Lucia nonstop daily from [Miami](#) and three times a week on Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays from Kennedy Airport (except during September and October). Delta flies to the island from [Atlanta](#) as does US Airways from [Charlotte](#), N.C.

- [Related Article: Affordable St. Lucia](#)

### [Turks and Caicos](#)

Though technically in the Atlantic Ocean, not the Caribbean Sea, the Turks and Caicos has pretty much everything you could want in a [Caribbean](#) vacation. Made up of some 40 islands and cays, of which only eight are inhabited, the archipelago has an extensive national parks system with 33 protected areas, excellent sailing and exceptional [diving](#), especially along the Wall — the face of a 7,000-foot trench separating Grand Turk and Salt Cay from East Caicos and South Caicos.

Providenciales, or Provo as it's often called, is the most developed of the islands, with a growing list of restaurants, resorts and [spas](#) — most of which are on the north shore, along the 12-mile stretch of Grace Bay Beach. The Turks and Caicos [Music and Cultural Festival](#) ([www.musicfestival.tc](http://www.musicfestival.tc)) takes place on the island July 28 to Aug. 4 with performances by Lionel Richie and Anita Baker among others.

**WHERE TO STAY** New this summer is the trendy Nikki Beach Resort (649-941-3747; [www.nikkibeachhotels.com](http://www.nikkibeachhotels.com)), a \$100 million property that opened in April on Provo's northeast tip with 48 ocean-view suites, a beachfront area with infinity pool, swim-up bar and beds for lounging, and a mega-yacht marina it is billing as ecologically friendly. Rooms start at \$750 a night, but can be had this summer for 30 percent off if booked by June 30 with promotions code Gospec. The new 115-room Seven Stars Resort (866-570-7777; [www.sevenstarsresort.com](http://www.sevenstarsresort.com)) on Grace Bay Beach has two restaurants, a swimming pool, tennis courts and a spa. Summer rates start at \$274 a night, a saving of more than 25 percent. Guests at the Sands at Grace Bay (877-777-2637; [www.thesandsresort.com](http://www.thesandsresort.com)), which underwent a \$6 million renovation in December, get a sixth night free when booking five nights this summer. Rates start at \$185 a night.

**WHAT TO DO** Provo's calm, reef-protected waters and constant easterly trade winds make for good sailing, windsurfing or kitesurfing. Abuv-It-All, also known as Windsurfing Provo (649-241-1687; [www.windsurfingprovo.tc](http://www.windsurfingprovo.tc)) offers beginners' windsurfing lessons starting at \$90 a person. Visit the Caicos Conch Farm (649-946-5643; [www.caicosconchfarm.com](http://www.caicosconchfarm.com)) to see how conch are raised. Conch is a specialty on the island, served at fine-dining restaurants and casual establishments like Da Conch Shack on Blue Hills beach (649-946-8877; [www.conchshack.tc](http://www.conchshack.tc)). In search of solitude? Check out the extremely calm waters of Sapodilla Bay on the island's southern tip.

**HOW TO GET THERE** American flies nonstop to Providenciales from New York and three times a day from [Miami](#). There are also nonstop flights from [Atlanta](#) on Delta.

- [Related Article: Affordable Turks and Caicos](#)

*MICHELLE HIGGINS writes the Practical Traveler column for the Travel section.*

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