





Travel – take off to the Caribbean

Scotland's first direct flight to the Caribbean takes off on 5 December 2021, when Virgin Atlantic starts flying from Edinburgh to Barbados.

Here's our guide to a Caribbean isle that packs a lot into a small package:

Just over 20 miles from north to south and 14 miles across at its widest – roughly the size of Arran – and poised between two seas, Barbados offers white sandy beaches on its sheltered Caribbean shore, while half an hour's drive away Atlantic rollers crash against the rugged east coast, creating fabulous conditions for surfers.

The island's poshest and most eye-wateringly expensive hotels and villas are dotted along the 'Platinum Coast' – north of Bridgetown, the island capital – but even here (to the annoyance, one suspects, of their big-spending, privacy-loving clients), the beaches are open to all.

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Closer to Bridgetown, there's a bigger choice of more affordable accommodation, with family-friendly (and sometimes

crowded) beaches like Carlisle Bay, Alleyne's Bay and Accra Beach (also known as Rockley), with beach shacks renting sun loungers and selling cold beers and soft drinks, and Bajan snacks like the island's signature flying fish sandwich.

Surfers and windsurfers should head to Silver Sands or Brandons, on the southern coast, or go east to Bathsheba, where Atlantic rollers offer outstanding waves and renowned breaks like the Soup Bowl.

Away from the beach, palms and tree-ferns shade water lily ponds at Andromeda Botanic Gardens, and at Harrison's Cave, beneath the thickly wooded hills in the centre of the island, you can plunge into a Tolkienesque underworld of strange rock formations and limestone caverns leading to the Great Hall, and echoing, 50-foot-high grotto.

You can't visit Barbados without sampling its most famous product (apart from Rihanna). If you're used to the rough stuff that goes into many rum-based cocktails, a tasting tour of the Mount Gay distillery <https://www.mountgayrum.com/> will come as a welcome surprise. One of the world's oldest rum makers (founded in 1703), Mount Gay has branched out to create innovative rums like X0 Peat Smoke Expression, a limited edition drop aged in Islay malt whisky casks.

Pretty Bridgetown is a popular cruise ship port, so its streets are full of stores aimed at US visitors in search of duty-free jewellery, designer watches and Cuban cigars. For something more authentically Barbadian, head to the Make for the Pelican Craft Centre <https://www.bidc.org/pelican-craft-centre> to find almost 40 shops and craft studios and an art gallery showcasing work by local talents. If you feel like plumbing ocean depths without getting wet, you can board a small submarine that dives to 100 feet below the surface to visit shipwrecks and coral reefs. <https://atlantissubmarines.com/>

Friday night is Fish Fry night at Oistins on the south coast. It's a regular fixture for locals as well as visitors, with street restaurants serve fried fish, shrimp, lobster and chicken with traditional side orders like grilled plantain, breadfruit and rice and peas to a throbbing soundtrack of soca, calypso and reggae. The music goes on until well after midnight.

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Getting around

Sadly, the classic Mini-Mokes that were the most popular rental vehicle on the island are long gone, but several car rental companies including Rhino Car Hire <https://www.rhinocarhire.com/Barbados/Mini-Moke-Hire-Barbados.aspx> offer more modern Japanese-built copies of the original.

Barbados Bike Tours <https://www.barbadosebiketours.com/> rents e-bikes so you can explore on two wheels without breaking much of a sweat.

More information: Visit Barbados www.visitbarbados.org.

Virgin Atlantic www.virginatlantic.com will fly twice weekly, with fares starting at £419. Flying time is around 12 hours.

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