FULL OF FLAVOUR

The Caribbean is definitely back in style, with a range of enviable new hotels and reopenings, exciting experiences to try and new flights to make getting there easier.

Plus: China, Turkey, Tel Aviv, London, Marrakech, Tuscany, on location with Full Circle Travel, the secret of The Pig's success, how to revamp your store and reviews from around the world.
Sand system

Just when you think the Caribbean is falling behind on the luxury scene, it offers up sleek new hotels, novel experiences and interesting events to lure in affluent travellers.

AUTHOR: GARY NOAKES

Last winter’s Billionaire’s Paradise TV documentary about Necker Island showed how the other 0.9% live and doubtless turned the thoughts of those who can afford it towards emulating this lifestyle, if only for a little while.

But the Caribbean also provides plenty of options for those who can’t quite stretch to the £39,000 a night needed for Richard Branson’s hideaway. And while alternative luxury destinations have emerged, the Caribbean will always have the edge in the UK market.

The islands have their own attractions, but individual upscale properties have the power to lure clients in themselves, something...
Hotel developers are well aware of the rising demand for luxury travel, and the Caribbean is no exception. "We've seen an increasing interest in luxury resorts, beachfront villas, and private properties," says a hotel developer.

"Last year alone, a number of new luxury properties were launched or refurbished, including Grenada's Petit Katari and the Ocean Tenants Inn Resort in St. Kitts. Accommodation in strolls is of course important to luxury holidaymakers, but the unique experiences they won't find in the average holiday brochure are also paramount," Hay adds.

"Luxury travellers want bespoke, understated luxury and to enjoy the lifestyle they have at home. This includes being able to partake in a yoga class, enjoy a private dinner or go for a massage when they feel like it."

She adds that other issues important to luxury travellers in choosing the Caribbean include privacy and sustainable travel. "Our members have responded positively to this by building, for example, the eco-resort Castara in Tobago, and by supporting sustainable initiatives, like the Marine Reserve in the Tobago area," she says.

"Properties and destinations such as these have a certain resilience to recession, but when economic circumstances improve, things really do well, operators say."

"The luxury sector is strong," says Azure Collection's product and marketing manager Paul Brichford. "January was a fantastic month and there has been a positive vibe from the agents we work with. A sign of this strength, he added, was that sales were "much more spread out" and ranged from last minute to 2016 festive bookings.

"What happened during the economic crisis was that people would spend later, now they are much happier to go back into this pattern of booking a lot more longer term. The interesting thing to watch will be the general election in May, because people tend to wait for the result before they spend," Brichford says.

"Playing the field."

This confidence signals a bounce back for the region, but the days of the Caribbean being the only luxury offer for aspirational travellers to strive towards are long gone.

"Nowadays, the area has to compete with the likes of the Maldives, Mauritius and Dubai, all of which play high stakes in the luxury sector."
have invested huge amounts of money in hotels,” says Tainted Rainance, managing director of resort marketing company A.I.I.A. “But the Caribbean has been left behind because it has a lot of old stock and needs to invest in quality.”

There is a silver lining to this, according to the CTO’s new efforts to grow interest in the Caribbean from Middle East and Russia – something that can only encourage the luxury sector to raise its game even further.

“I see it as a trend; it’s very early days, and it’s very early days,” says Mr. “I see it as a trend; it’s very early days, and it’s very early days.”

Every single destination is performing well for us, and we are seeing increased interest in books over the summer, because the family market is coming back,” she adds.

It might be a small pool for the luxury market, but family pricing will get slightly more attractive in the coming months, she says.

**Premium**

A key factor is confidence in the luxury sector when a mainstream brand moves more into it. Virgin Holidays is better known for its mid-scale properties, but Cabo is one of the operator’s key purchasing directors, says this is about to change.

“We are looking at our luxury position and we are going to be coming out with more product at the end of this year,” says the. “The focus is on the premium plus market, and that is where the value can be found.”

Mr. says the brand is seeing a four-year increase in its presence in the Caribbean to around 200,000. Key destinations are also up in the luxury end. “The focus is on the premium plus market,” she says. “That is where the value can be found.”

**WHALE OF A TIME**

Suggest a trip to see whale sharks and stay at a resort in the Dominican Republic. “The sharks are mostly seen during the full moon each April and again late May to June 22,” suggests. For more information, call 001-800-544-3867 or visit.

**DON’T PANIC, IT’S ORGANIC**

Four Seasons’ Meets has launched a Dive & Dive package as part of the group’s Extraordinary Experiences. Guests can choose to join a chef and dive master to catch their own spiny lobster using a handline and then have it roasted on a spit over open fire.”

**DRIVE LIKE A LEGEND**

In the year of your life, plan a trip to the Caribbean. Sandals Resorts International is welcoming guests with its exclusive all-inclusive resort experience. And for the land lover, there are also tours of the island’s most famous sites.

**PICS SHOWS**

(Left) Bob Marley’s 75th birthday, was celebrated in style at the Sandals Royal Barbados. (Above) Bob Marley’s 75th birthday, was celebrated in style at the Sandals Royal Barbados. (Below) Bob Marley’s 75th birthday, was celebrated in style at the Sandals Royal Barbados. (Right) Bob Marley’s 75th birthday, was celebrated in style at the Sandals Royal Barbados.
THE SPA TREATMENT

What? The exclusive Cheval Blanc St Barths Isle de France became an official part of the L’OCCITANE-owned collection last year and the French touch is already evident: new that the hotel is home to the Caribos’ first Guerlain spa.

The Cheval Blanc, St Barths is an idyllic garden setting with four new treatment rooms, and outdoor relaxation pavilion and hammam. Two signature Guerlain treatments have also been created exclusively for the hotel. Including the St Barth Solar Escape facial and body treatment to use after sun-kissed skin and Sun Energy for active guests – hot and cold compresses alternate on the face, followed by massage that stimulates circulation and releases tension. Guerlain’s anti-ageing Orchidée Imperiale treatments are also on offer.

How to book: Urgent Resorts has seven nights from £4,395pp including breakfast, international and inter-island flights, private car transfers and UK airport lounge passes, urgentresorts.co.uk

GO GETTERS

What? Feeling energetic? The BodyHoliday, St Lucia offers a full programme of activities daily, including watersports, archery, water polo, beach volleyball and tennis. At St Lucia’s Saluting Battery Band, sign up paddleboarding (1.5 hours) or take a walk. To explore the island’s interior, with exclusive jeep tours – paddle boards are also available with water sports to help paddlers navigate the Chichester Bay area towards a torchlit beach BBQ. Guests at Park Hyatt St Kitts can opt for more relaxed kayaking tours of the picturesque nature reserve in neighbouring Pinney’s Beach. The spa at English Harbour is one of the best places to take in the annual Antigua Sailing Week (April 25 - May 3), which raises more than £400,000 for all ages and destinations.

How to book: Bestcruise.com offers seven nights from £2,795pp, including flights and private transfers (valid for travel: November 1 - December 31), bestcruise.com

KIDS COME FIRST

What? At Cheval Blanc St Barths Isle de France, kids can explore underwater adventures with a marine instructor and meet ‘Dolphin the mermaid’ Visionary Artist of a Generation. Including children ages 6-12, includes cookies and cupcakes decorating, treasure hunts, beach Olympics, painting and sand art. They can hang out in the kids’ club with a media centre and magazine library, Jumeirah Kids space for its direct flights and an official on-airport at St Thomas. Jumeirah Kids Club, Carribean Rome’s Kids Club, Montego Bay’s Kids Club and Princess Cruise’s Kids Club for 4-12 years old in partnership with the World Wide Kids Company.

How to book: Seven nights at Jumeirah Bay, a Rosewood Resort, with a Jumeirah Collection card for £10,500 per family of three (all inclusive) in a one-bedroom suite, including breakfast, World Traveller Flights and private resort transfers, jumeirahcollection.com

STYLE SEEKERS

What? Carrier features the sleek Oualie Bay in the British Virgin Islands, with its Funky designed penthouse, and also strolls Sugar Beach in St Lucia, home to the Cane Bar, one of the coolest bars in the Caribbean and with resident saxophonist. But amidst the hottest new spots in the Caribbean is the renovated Le Guanahani (pictured) in St Barthélemy which has just revealed the results of a $60 million renovation by Miami-based designer Luis Pons. The vibrantly coloured circle-style coffee tables are backed up by a new website and on-board rezidor, while French designer Francoise Leloup is implementing wellness programs and serving menus for those seeking a detox week as part of their holiday at the hotel.

How to book: Manhattan offers seven nights at Le Guanahani from £3,070pp including breakfast, flights with British Airways, onward connecting flights and transfers, carrier.co.uk