



DELICIOUS ST LUCIA

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Saint Lucia, an extravagantly green Caribbean island in the Eastern Caribbean Sea named after Saint Lucy of Syracuse (AD 283 – 304) one of two countries in the world named after a woman.

It's not hard to see why, this lush and beautiful island bathes in 19,000 acres of rainforest, she's a real natural beauty.

The most striking feature of this island is St Lucia's mountainous peaks 'the Pitons' at 978 and 743 meters respectively, these two mighty spires are connected by the Piton Mitre Ridge and the entire 2,909 hectares including land and sea was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004. This is mother nature at her best.

I'd previously spent time holidaying in St Lucia and like any Caribbean island there are beaches to enjoy however along with silver sands the natural beaches here are volcanic. St Lucia actually has its own live volcano and its sulphurous gasses are said to benefit those with sinus problems, when near you certainly notice the aroma that's for sure.

A holiday here may seem unaffordable to the average budget and while it's not cheap, there are affordable options as well as exquisite luxury. One such luxury, The Jade Mountain Hotel www.jademountain.com offers architectural opulence, views to die for and the ultimate in tranquillity, a snip from around £1200 per night. Okay, this might blow the budget for most, but elegance and stunning views can be found in elsewhere and a good way of experiencing it all is a few days in tranquillity combined with a week beachside. My visit this time was just for a day, my cruise ship calling here as part of a trip around the Caribbean.

Not being one for being ferried around in large groups I organised my own day of exploration. The port city of Castries is simply a busy working and shopping area and not particularly picturesque. In the port there's tax free shopping such as 'Diamonds International' but as I'm not in the market for diamonds, I wanted to see the natural gem of St Lucia.

Before leaving the UK, I'd read about the chocolate making workshops that UK hotel brand 'Hotel Chocolat' offers at their hotel high in the Pitons. The workshop is in two parts, Tree to Bean and Bean to Bar. The location, their boutique hotel, Boucan, part of the 140-acre Rabat Estate and a good 1.5 hours' drive from port.

The first thing I needed was suitable transport and not liking the idea of driving on St Lucia's rural roads I needed a local expert. I shopped around a little and contacted St. Lucia Shuttle www.saintluciashuttle.com, offering private tours and transfers they swiftly arranged our transportation.

After arrival in St Lucia our uniformed driver for the day arrived in an immaculate 4x4, so off we headed beyond Castries into rural St Lucia. As we marvelled at the scenery, we realised the value of having a local driver, we learned so much about the island and its people.

Finally arriving safely at our venue, we joined our group as I glanced around at my surroundings, I could see this was indeed a very special hideaway that I'd explore later, right now there was chocolate to make...

Armed with a warm mortar the first step was to add our roasted cacao nibs and start the grinding process. A hot 40 minutes later mine was just about getting there, phew this was hard work, but amazingly the oily paste emerged. Our 'drill sergeant' instructor made sure nobody cheated, the paste had to be smooth... next we added sugar and cocoa butter and finally, it started to look more like melted chocolate! The final step was to pour out our creation into the Hotel Chocolat mould and refrigerate...

While the chocolate bars set, we toured the hotel. You'll not find TV's at this adult only tranquillity retreat but relax there is Wi-Fi if you happen to stop gazing at the astonishing views. The 50 ft black quartz infinity pool offers jaw dropping views of Petit Piton, I was blown away. Rooms here are airy lodges boasting luxurious bathrooms, rainforest showers and fine linens. Romantic nets drape over four posters as simple fans above cool the humidity. This place is the ultimate in 'time out' and slightly more affordable at around £500 per night.

Now hungry we ventured to the hotel restaurant serving cacao (cocoa/chocolate) infused food, this is a must try, I was intrigued. We chose the Boucan "Roti" with chicken (chicken curry wrap) and George ordered the Cacao Pod Hamburger. The food was simply yum, chocolate Roti bread for me and ground beef infused with cocoa for him, outstanding. In addition, complimentary bread with cocoa infused dips, incredible, my favourite? chocolate salted butter...oh my.

After lunch we cooled off in 'that pool' sipping ice-cold Piton beers and eventually collecting our chocolate bars as sadly it was time to head back to the ship. The chocolate? Not bad...but not a career move for me...as we headed back the views were even more staggering, this was one escape I'd never forget.

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Caroline Travelled with British Airways to Miami joining Crown Princess www.princess.com for a 10-night Caribbean cruise calling at St Lucia in November 2019. Tree to Bar workshop booked directly with Boucan by Hotel Chocolat www.hotelchocolat.com/uk/boucan/the-experiences/tours with transfers by St Lucia Shuttle www.saintluciashuttle.com/booking essential.

