

A Z of the Caribbean

writer michael nassar

Sun-kissed and cooled by gentle trade winds, the Caribbean, or West Indies, is America's backyard playground. Known for its sandy seashell-strewn beaches, high-end hideaways and sumptuous spas, the Caribbean is an island chain 2,500 miles long with more than 7,000 islands, reefs, and cays, both independent nations and affiliated territories of France, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Spain.

Find your own private paradise for an intimate rendezvous or bring along the whole family for a relaxing all-inclusive summer on the shore. Shop 'til you drop for designer duds or jaw-dropping jewels in some of the best duty-free ports outside Dubai or seclude yourself in a spa with infinite views of the Cerulean Sea. Come for New Year's when the yachts drop anchor and the parties never stop, or join the growing trendsetters taking full advantage of blissful summertime bargains. The Caribbean has it all for the asking.

Our Caribbean guide – from Anguilla to Zareeba – has everything you need to make your New World escape a reality. (Just don't forget the sunscreen.)

ANGUILLA

The sleepy British dependency of Anguilla has long been the well-kept secret of Anglophiles and devotees of an unpretentious colonial style epitomised by Malliouhana Hotel & Spa. Overlooking Meads Bay, Malliouhana delivers the ultimate in luxury with inside private spa suites, where you can stretch out in oversized air-jet hydrotherapy tubs and gaze at the sea while nibbling Michelin-starred spa cuisine.

www.malliouhana.com

But get here soon. Anguilla won't be sleepy for too long thanks to booming development. CuisinArt Resort & Spa has led the eco-charge, creating a botanical oasis with more than 37,000 plantings designed using the Xeriscape principles of conserving water and energy through creative landscaping. Unprecedented in the Caribbean, a state-of-the-art hydroponic farm and organic garden on property grow many

of the vegetables, flowers and herbs used by both the chefs and the therapists in the Venus Spa, where you must be sure to try the sun-soothing Hydroponic Cucumber and Aloe Wrap.

www.cuisinartresort.com

Also, be on the lookout for Viceroy Resorts & Residences opening later this year. The luxury resort community of villas and townhouses will have two of the best-serviced infinity-edge pools in the Caribbean, where a sunscreen menu, dedicated staff for polishing sunglasses and private video iPod viewers are just a few of the poolside treats. Co-ed Japanese soaking tubs and Arctic Ice and Oxygen Rooms will keep things balmy in the spa, scheduled to open at the end of 2009.

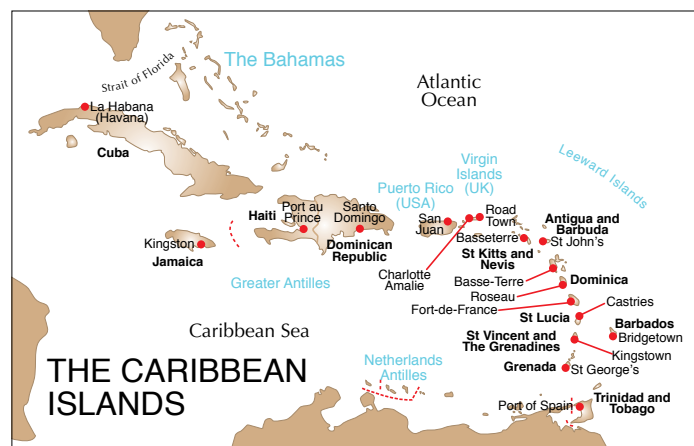
www.viceroyanguilla.com



BRIDES (AND GROOMS)

Scenic vistas, lush sunsets and a casual, carefree attitude (plus minimal red tape) have made the Caribbean tops for destination weddings. From a simple ceremony on the beach in Turks & Caicos to shared vows in a romantic cave in Jamaica to an eco-friendly extravaganza in Bonaire, anything is possible. Companies like Luxe Destination Weddings specialise in coordinating details like travel, invitations and the reception (as well as unique requests like blanketing a beach with local orchids or sending the happy couple off in a helicopter). They'll even calculate the event's carbon footprint and donate a percentage back to the environment.

www.LuxeDestinationWeddings.com



CELEBRITIES

Well known among A-listers, Parrot Cay is the original private island getaway for those seeking shelter from the paparazzi. Counting Bruce Willis and Eva Longoria as fans, the resort is modern and luxurious with flawless service and luckily for those with enough cash to live the dream – US\$11 million to be exact – three beachfront villas are now being offered for sale. The rest of us can rent fashion designer Donna Karan's personal villa or take solace at the COMO Shambala Retreat with its outdoor Jacuzzi for women only and one-on-one Pilates instruction. An Abhyanga package combines massage, Swedana (herbal steam) and Ubtan (a body mud mask) to enhance circulation and release impurities through the skin.

www.parrotcay.com

DIAMONDS (AND HEARTS AND CLUBS AND SPADES)

The Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino in Dutch St. Maarten is one of those 'destinations within a destination', that just happens to feature the island's hottest nightclub, Q-Club, the world-class Good Life Spa, and the Vegas-style Casino Royale, where you can live out your James Bond fantasies pulling over 300 slots amid roulette, craps, poker and blackjack tables. Power players need no longer suffer from stiff, aching muscles after long hours of going 'all in'. The Good Life Spa's Royale Relief Massage focuses on working out the kinks in your neck, arms and hands and sends you back to the floor ready to win.

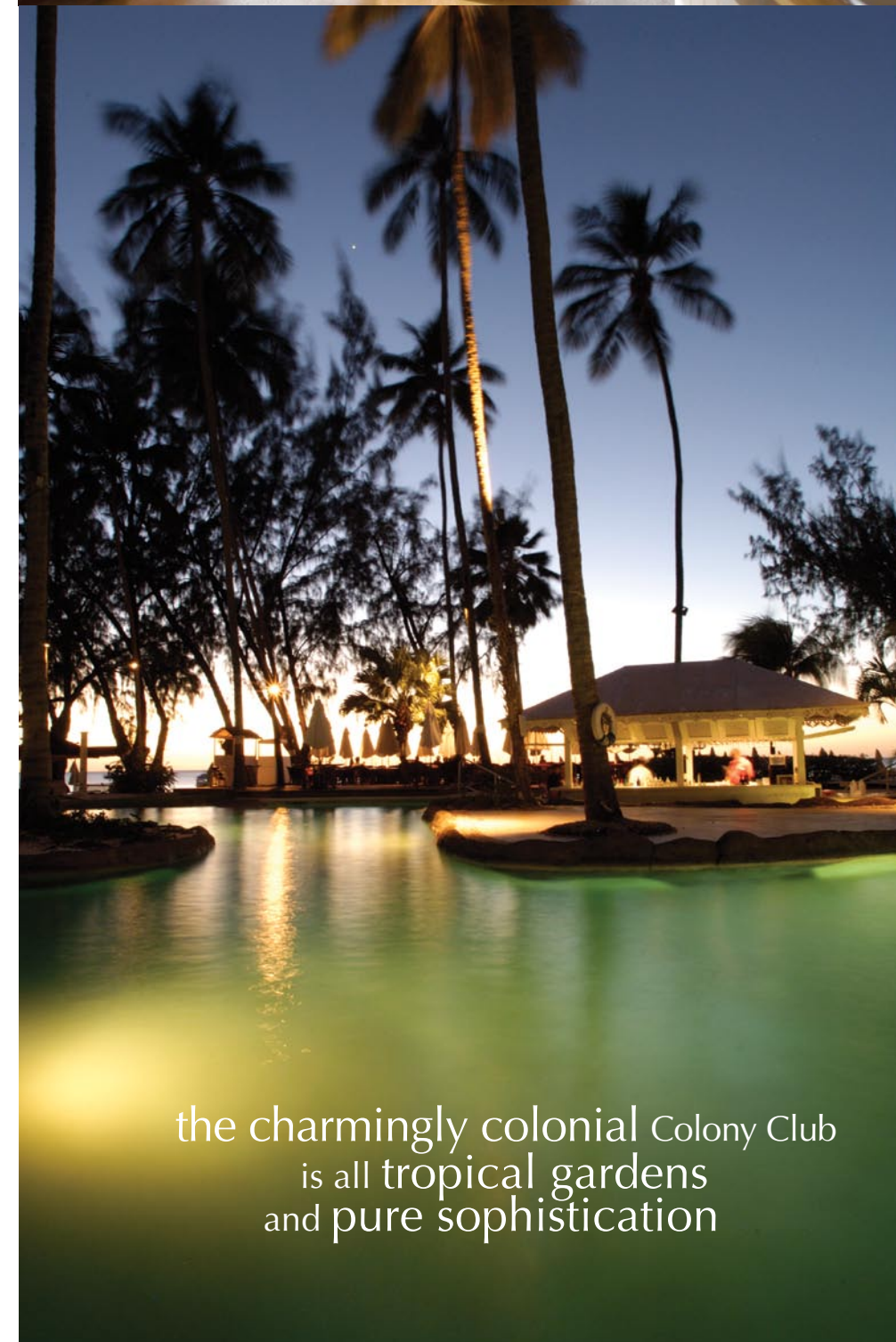
www.sonesta.com/MahoBeach

ELEGANCE

Carefree island elegance never goes out of style at the properties that constitute Elegant Hotels in Barbados. The House has the most stunning oceanfront sunsets – perhaps it is the dark wood beams and crisp white furniture and linens that make the colours in the sunset so striking. Colony Club is exquisite yet unpretentious and great for seafood addicts with their Thursday night Lobster & Jazz Fest, waves crashing just a few feet away. Turtle Beach Resort is a suites only haven along Barbados' vibrant south coast, while Crystal Cove is a frangipani scented, all-inclusive option that will appeal to families.

www.eleganthotels.com

THIS PAGE: The infinitely calming interiors of Parrot Cay; you could be looking at all this as the sun goes down on Elegant Hotels' Colony Club.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Dusky spa treatment at the Viceroy Anguilla.
OPENING PAGE: Stunningly insane blues at CusinArt.



the charmingly colonial Colony Club
is all tropical gardens
and pure sophistication

FRÉDÉRIC FÉKKAI

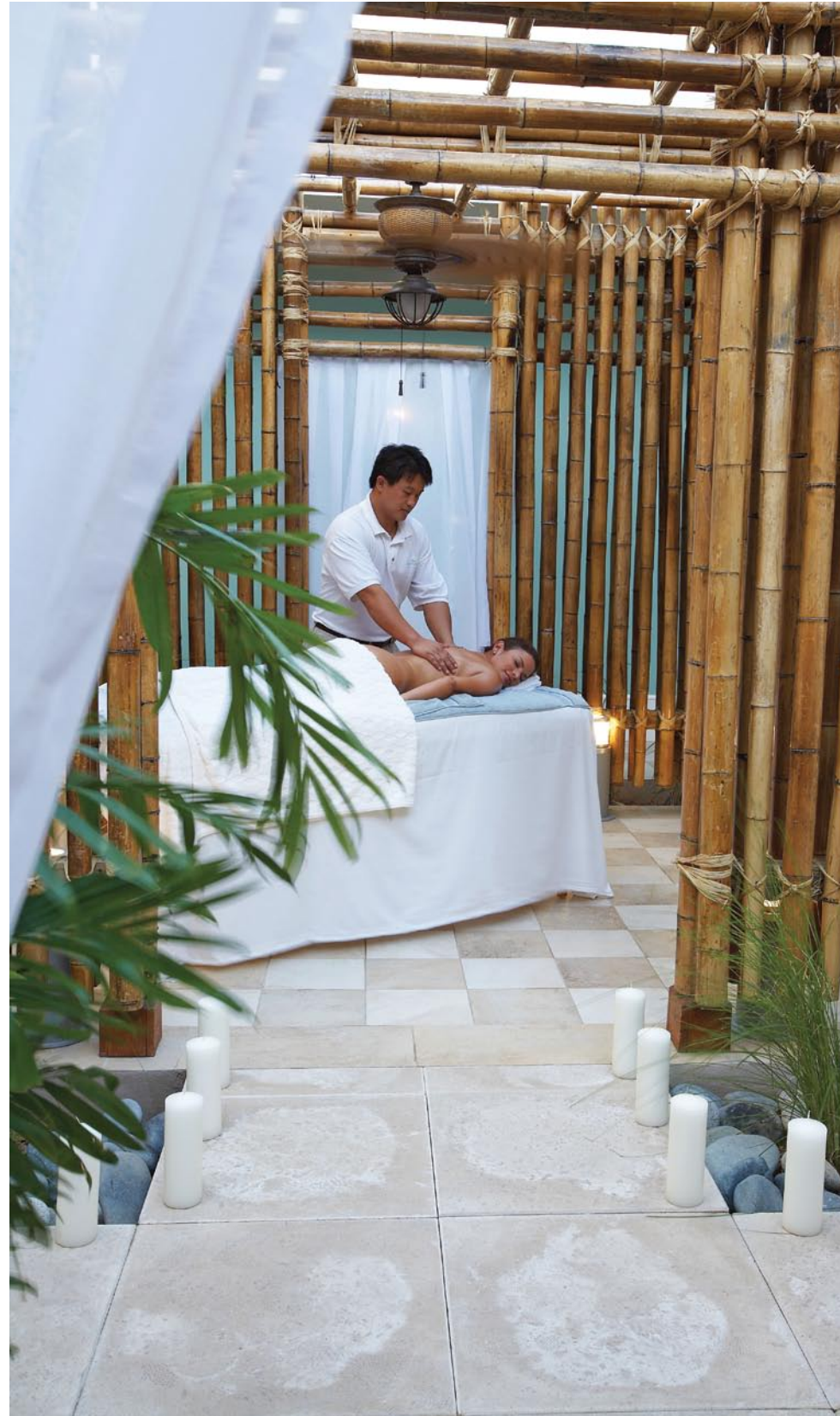
For famed celebrity stylist Frédéric Fekkai – of the eponymous salons in New York City, Beverly Hills and Palm Beach – choosing Hotel Guanahani on glamorous French-flavoured St. Barthélemy for his first salon outside the US was simple. “Guanahani is like a second home to me and many of my clients,” he says. Set on its own secluded 16-acre peninsula, this refreshingly discrete playground for the rich and famous also has two stunning beaches: one on the tranquil lagoon and another along a coconut grove facing the ocean. Within the bright colours of its Creole architecture, the Guanahani Spa provides the ideal ambiance above Marigot Bay for its Clarins-based treatments like Thai-inspired Nuad Bo Rarn or a Lavender Fruit Salt Body Scrub. It’s a welcome respite from a hard day’s shopping (the best in the Caribbean) and yacht-watching in nearby Gustavia. www.leguanahani.com

GOING GUIDED

Each year there seems to be a new buzzword added to the spa lexicon. This year it’s ‘guided’. No longer content to lie on a table and passively experience treatments, spa-goers want something more involved and they’re getting it in the beautiful oceanfront Larimar Spa at Radisson Aruba Resort in Aruba. During signature treatments, therapists guide you through Stream Breath Therapy to help your breath flow more freely and fully like a stream of water, helping to reduce stress and recharge the body on a cellular level. It’s a technique you can take away and practice any time daily pressures get to be too intense. Guided Meditation Journeys are also available, specifically focusing on muscle and joint tension. www.larimarspaaruba.com

HARBOUR

Christophe Harbour, sheltered by the soaring green hills of St. Kitts, has been called the most perfect safe harbour in the Western Hemisphere by marine experts. So it’s only natural that the mega-yachts are just around the bend. In fact Kiawah Island, the successful South Carolina golf destination also has a 2,500-acre master-planned resort, two five-star hotels (both Auberge and Mandarin Oriental will have hotels and spas here) and a Tom Fazio-designed championship golf course planned. Having just broken ground, however, you’ll have to wait until 2011 to dock. On the other hand, home sites and villas can now be snatched up at entry level prices, from \$500,000 to \$5 million. www.christopheharbour.com



ISLA MUJERES

Tiny Isla Mujeres, off the coast of Mexico, is known as the insider’s place for diving as shipwrecks litter the offshore waters. Now it’s about to become the insider’s pick for all-inclusive ease, too. Unik Island Resort and Spa blends contemporary architecture, gourmet food and unexpected luxury seamlessly. The indigenous Maya of the Yucatan Peninsula were the first to experience the aura of this island. For them it was sacred and they devoted themselves to the worship of Ixchel, the goddess of the moon and of fertility. Today guests can visit the remains of her nearby temple or find a little Mayan inspiration in the spa with treatments inspired by the islands original inhabitants. www.unikresorts.com

JAMMIN’

Music lovers will be jammin’ to their hearts content in the Natural Mystic Spa at Marley Resort, the former family home of Bob, Rita and the whole Marley clan. Treatments at the undeniably cool Nassau, Bahamas resort mix secrets from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean in a menu of family favourites, including Rita’s own herbal bath rituals infused with orange blossom, red clay and roses. After hours a Caribbean Mocha Rum Wrap will not only stimulate your appetite – try the gourmet cuisine at Simmer Down – but also have you singing “Let’s get together and feel alright” until it’s time to make your way back home. www.marleyresort.com

K KUR THERAPY

The largest private island in the British Virgin Islands, Peter Island is accessible only by boat or helicopter. A two-to-one staff ratio ensures attentive service and with only 52 rooms this out-of-the-way hiding place has acres of unsullied island to treat as your own. In the earthy ambiance of the Spa at Peter Island, however, you may end up spending all your time taking the Kur (or cure): a traditional European spa experience used to improve overall health using medicinal mud, mineral water, herbs, seaweed and essential oil massages. The Kur Odyssey begins under a Vichy shower with

a full body exfoliation followed by a re-mineralising body mask, acupressure face and scalp massage before a final rinse under the Vichy. Soak in a hydro-tub of mineral crystals and essential oils and end with a full body massage.

www.peterisland.com

LOVERS LEAP

Lovers Leap is a 1,700 ft cliff in Jamaica from which a pair of slave lovers leaped to escape their master who wanted the girl for himself. Equally romantic and infinitely more comfortable in nearby Negril is The Caves, perched on top of a volcanic cliff honeycombed with grottoes above the ocean: one strewn with flowers and candlelit for intimate dining, another harbouring a bubbling hot tub, others just portals into the crystal-clear sea below. Serenity holds sway here, where coral reefs, cliffs and the lush Jamaican greenery merge. Ten handcrafted cottages dot the landscape, crowned by a petite Aveda spa. Take a massage in one of the cosy candlelit grottoes for an experience unlike any other. www.thecavesresort.com

MOLASSES

Molasses Reef, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, on previously uninhabited West Caicos, opens late 2008 along a half-mile of pristine beachfront, blending traditional Caribbean architecture with English, French, Dutch, and Spanish influences. In fact, every aspect of the resort reflects the island’s history, befitting a location rumoured to be the final resting place of Columbus’ Pinta, including The Spa at Molasses Reef, which has been designed as a small spa village. Each individual cottage is a spa unto itself, with lounge, landscaped garden and outdoor relaxation area. Indigenous herbs and West Caicos salt (the island was a former salt mining site) play a role in many of the treatments. www.molassesreef.com

THIS PAGE: A timeless beautiful patio on Peter Island Resort; the gazebo at Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino in St Maarten. OPPOSITE PAGE: Try your spa treatment in the courtyard at Larimar Spa, Radisson Aruba Resort; soaking up the rays at Curtain Bluff, Antigua.

NIBBLES

The Spa at Curtain Bluff in Antigua has magnificent views of the volcano on neighbouring Montserrat. And if the rumbling you hear after an indulgent Caviar and Champagne Massage is coming from your stomach, you've no need to be alarmed: the Spa Bites menu has perfected organic vitamin-rich nibbles to compliment spa treatments while gently taming the beast within. Fruity Pineapple Gazpacho, Steamed Asparagus with Crème Fraiche and Hazelnut Dip, and Orange Slices with Cinnamon & Dates are a few of the small tapas-style plates that will satisfy your craving and bring you back to your senses. Plus the fresh-brewed lemongrass tea helps keep everything circulating so those toxins know where to go. www.curtainbluff.com

OUR LUCAYA

Bahamian-inspired signature treatments are all the rage at Senses Spa. The Westin Grand Bahama Island Our Lucaya Resort has a treatment list to revive sun-worshippers as well as one of the more tantalizing ways to enjoy a cocktail without the hangover: a concoction of local lime, rum and spices called the Bahamian Wrapsody, a combination scrub, wrap, massage and hydrotherapy treatment. Fun water-based treatments (it's an island, after all) include submerged massages, rain massages and hydro baths in seaweed, sea salt or algae. www.westin.com/ourlucaya

PINK SAND

Expect understated chic at the Pink Sands on Harbour Island in the Bahamas, where the three miles of rosy powder pink sand comes from tiny microscopic animals known as Foraminifera, which live on the reefs and sea floor. Designed by Biba founder Barbara Hulanicki, the 25 funky bohemian cottages are regularly home to celebs but management keeps it mum to preserve the relaxed vibe. No stargazing here, just a chance to enter their constellation. The simple island massage will leave you – well – tickled pink. www.pinksandsresort.com

QUALITY TIME

Sophisticated and sunny is the style of the brand new RockResorts Spa at The Landings in St. Lucia, where you are welcome to bring along the kids for their own hour (or day) of pampering. Catering to younger spa-goers is one of the newest trends in the spa industry, so why not introduce them to the good life with customised manicures and pedicures or a My Skin-101 facial, while enjoying their favourite tunes on MP3 players? The spa also offers an extensive gentlemen's menu, so you can enjoy the La Soufriere and Lime Body Treatment, incorporating Thai stretches, acupressure and Lomi-Lomi techniques to soothe and unwind aching muscles, safe in the knowledge that the rest of the family is being well tended to. www.rockresorts.com

THIS PAGE: The Landings Pool at the exotic Rock Resorts; quintessential Caribbean views at Jade Mountain, St. Lucia. OPPOSITE PAGE: A balcony view from Molasses Reef, West Caicos.

RAINFOREST

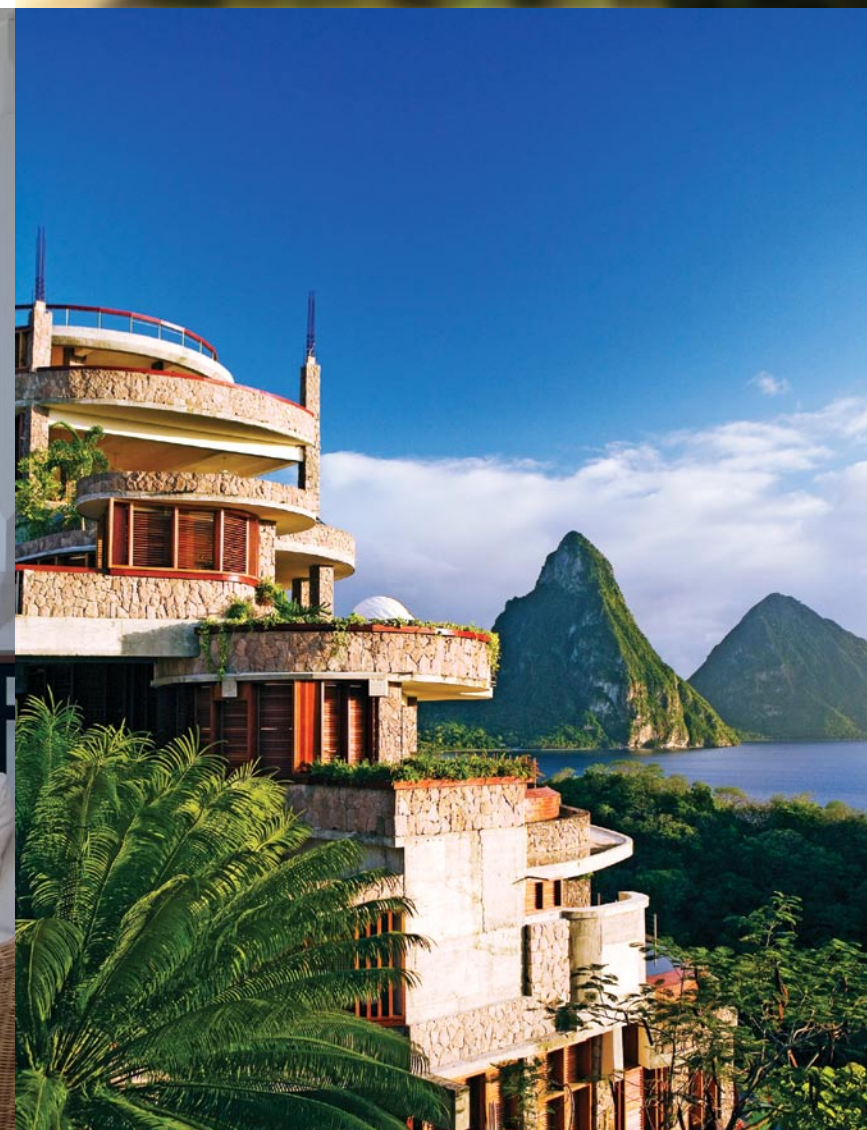
If Nevis is the Caribbean you see in your dreams – brightly painted houses and historic plantation homes – then the Spa at Four Seasons is the destination of dreams, highlighting healing remedies native to this rainforest paradise. Interactive Spa Sojourns lead you into the rainforest – with a local bush guide – to discover the many uses of indigenous plants. Fresh coconut water will sweep your colon clean while its jelly-like flesh can be used as an effective moisturiser. Love leaf steeped into a soothing bush tea – though lore has it that it must be pressed into a book if its love you're actually looking for. After a secluded West Indian organic picnic, retreat to the spa. In the outdoor gardens you can unwind by stringing together your trove of pocketed berries and plant seeds into a wearable souvenir while the spa director incorporates the rest of your morning's haul into a bespoke treatment designed to complement your individual sojourn. www.fourseasons.com/nevis

SANCTUARY

High on Morne Chastenet, overlooking St. Lucia's regal Piton peaks, Jade Mountain creates a benchmark for environmental sophistication with a collection of techno-free sanctuaries and new Ayurvedic spa. Grand sweeping spaces combine bedroom, living room, and an extravagantly sized infinity pool into a single stage-set gilded with tropical woods, crushed coral walls and bespoke tiles of recycled glass that shimmer amber, plum, and green. The ultra-luxe tree house effect is further magnified by the absence of a fourth wall, bringing the outside in and leaving you feeling like you're floating in space. Less ostentatious, but equally ennobling, the personalised Kai En Ciel Boutique Spa at Jade Mountain can only handle a few guests at a time, creating a great sense of private luxury. Dosha Balancing and Wholistic Facials are about as perfect a complement to this retreat as you can get. www.jademountainstlucia.com

TEAK

As readers of this magazine well know, there is something about teak that invites calm and peace. So it should come as no surprise to guests of Aman Resorts' first Caribbean outpost, Amanaya, that it is used to stunning effect in soaring architectural spaces that co-exist in harmony with the sea and surrounding scrub forest. Spacious yet intimate, Amanaya is open to the elements and its 40 timber shingled pavilions are set on the edge of a pond with a sundeck extending over the water or along the oceanfront, just above the water line, with pathways leading to the rock formations above the sea. Glass walls slide open to emphasise the intimate interplay with nature, or shutters roll down for when you want complete privacy. Though a free-standing spa is in the works, there's something to be said for taking a treatment in the private oasis of your own pavilion. www.amanresorts.com





XTABENTUN

Made using a traditional Yucatan recipe, itself based on a Mayan legend, Xtabentun is a delightful liqueur made from anise seed and fermented honey often served over ice as an aperitif or in coffee to make a warming Mayan coffee. At JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa however, it pulls double duty in the spa. Mixed with brown sugar and honey in the Xtabentun Body and Face Adventure, it aids in exfoliating the skin while toning and tightening pores. The addition of both a face and body mask by Nina Eden, the local Mayan laboratory, will leave you with firmer, more hydrated skin all over.

www.jwmarriottcancun.com

YACHTS

If the sight of all those yachts starts to make you envious, charter your own. The private 46ft Cap Maison 1 is available to guests of St. Lucia's new Cap Maison for sunset cruises, wedding parties, special events, and day or overnight excursions to any of the nearby Windward Islands. The air-conditioned luxury yacht is finished with

polished cherry interiors, a full galley, leather banquettes, and an expansive forward deck for sunbathers, along with two private staterooms and two spacious bathrooms. A skipper and private chef are on-board to prepare all meals, including line-caught fish reeled in from the deck. www.capmaison.com

ZAREEBA

The 26,000sqft Regent Spa inside The Regent Palms on Grace Bay Beach is one of Turks and Caicos' highlights. Completely renovated in 2007, the newly-built private treatment cottages are the perfect place to ratchet up the heat and indulge in one of the "coolest" spa experiences in the Caribbean: Zareeba, an indigenous steam cleansing and detox ritual that purges your pores with a bubbling brew of fresh herbs. Sit quietly and reflect in your private Zareeba (not unlike a personal sauna) while inhaling the aromatic steam and stirring a pot of herbs to moderate the heat. Once you've had enough, a cooling wrap and toxin-releasing body massage awaits.

www.regenthotels.com

ULTIMATE

Many places lay claim to ultimate status but there's no getting around the fact that tiny, privately-owned Mustique wears the crown. Gifted to Britain's late Princess Margaret on the occasion of her wedding, the 1,400-acre island in the southern Caribbean has only one hotel, The Cotton House, and a smattering of villas to disturb the peace. Mustique is such a serene island that even during peak season, there is little traffic or noise. Many of the roads remain unpaved and all of the power and telephone lines are underground, leaving you feeling like a castaway on a tranquil sandy beach. The Cotton House Spa on Endeavor Bay encompasses a wide selection of treatments using ESPA products and their signature treatments are fit for a princess. Invigorate and detoxify your body with the uplifting Lime and Pineapple Body Scrub and Wrap, a combination of local fruits, honey and freshly farmed sea salt that leaves skin glowing and soft, or restore your equilibrium via the Chakra Balancing with hot volcanic stones.

www.mustique-island.com

VILLA

On the scenic western coast of Virgin Gorda, in the British Virgin Islands, the three 8,000sqft private villas that comprise Aquamare have unobstructed views of the islets that dot the Drake Channel and afford a lucky few some of the most breathtaking sunsets in

the Caribbean. Who would want to trade that to head indoors? So instead of a free standing spa they bring the spa to you. These villas were designed to host a line of signature treatments in the privacy of your room, balcony, or even the lavish 9-by-12-foot outdoor rain showers that adjoin each master suite. Allow nature to do its work under a blanket of banana leaves in the signature Aloe and Lavender Wrap. Shredded coconut macerated with lime and sea salt make the Body Glow an especially exfoliating experience. And the experience continues long after your therapist has cleaned up the mess and left you alone to contemplate the limitless view.

www.villaaquamare.com

WATER

It's a bit like stating the obvious, but one of the Caribbean's chief attractions is its water. And if the Eskimos have one thousand words for snow, islanders have got them beat describing their precious water: azure, cerulean, indigo, aqua, cobalt, navy, the list goes on. Somehow "blue" just doesn't cut it. More to the point, it won't be until you're wading off the coast of Providenciales, snorkeling in Aruba or cliff diving in Jamaica that you'll understand how water can be sapphire, turquoise or lapis.

THIS PAGE: Contemplate the horizon from Villa Aquamare. OPPOSITE PAGE: Spa cottage at the Regent Spa, The Regent Palms.

rustic yet elegant are the white interiors
of the Regent Spa's treatment cottages

