



Middleham Falls, top, is one of the stops on the 184-kilometre Walfukubuli National Trail. Travellers can float down Indian River, left, near the city of Portsmouth. Fort Young hotel, above, has undergone post-hurricane renovations. VALERIE STIMAC.

Island update

New services are being restored daily in the Caribbean. **Alyssa Schwartz** details the status of some of the hardest-hit islands

One year after parts of the Caribbean were battered by hurricanes Irma and Maria, resorts are being rebuilt and reopening.

"New tourism products and services are being restored daily in the destinations impacted by last year's hurricanes," says Hugh Riley, secretary-general of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). "Affected countries are at various stages of recovery. All have done remarkably well under the circumstances and some are completely recovered."

According to the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), 75 per cent of resorts and hotels in the Caribbean are "fully open." On the hardest-hit islands, where restoration efforts are continuing, some closings are still in effect: 80 per cent of rooms on Puerto Rico have reopened, while on Saint Martin and the British Virgin Islands, about 40 per cent are open. "We anticipate these percentages to increase significantly over the next three months as more hotels open, many of them completely refurbished and upgraded," says Frank Comito, the CHTA's director-general.

Here's what you need to know about Caribbean resort destinations that were most affected by last year's hurricanes:

SAINT MARTIN Home to Princess Juliana International Airport, a busy connection hub for smaller Caribbean destinations, the island was among the hardest hit last year. WestJet has resumed flights to the French/Dutch island, while Air Canada and Transat will be restarting direct service in December. While 60 per cent of hotel rooms on the island are still not operational, according to the CHTA, notable upcoming reopenings include Sonesta Ocean Point Resort in November and Belmond's La Samanna in December. Other properties, including Sonesta Maho Beach Resort, Casino and Spa and Oyster Bay Beach Resort, are expected to be fully operational early in 2019.

ANGUILLA Sixty-five per cent of hotel rooms on Anguilla are open after last year's storms. While properties such as the Four Seasons Resort and Residences Anguilla and Zemi Beach House Hotel and Spa will be operating as usual this season, The Reef by Cuisinart and Belmond Cap Juluca are among those that will reopen in the coming weeks. Additionally, the ferry terminal on Saint Martin, which provides some of the easiest regular access to Anguilla, reopened this summer. Night operations at Clayton J. Lloyd International Airport, which were suspended after Hurricane Irma, resumed in September.

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS The commissioner of tourism reports that the U.S. Virgin Islands - St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas - have largely finished cleaning up from last year's hurricanes: all beaches have been fully restored and airports are open (no Canadian airlines fly direct to the islands, although St. Croix and St. Thomas are serviced by American Airlines, Delta, United and other U.S. carriers). However, only about 50 per cent of rooms on the islands are operational and some properties are still mostly housing relief workers. Those that are up and running include The Buccaneer and The Palms at Pelican Cove on St. Croix, Estate Lindholm on St. John and Emerald Beach Resort on St. Thomas. Westin St. John Resort & Villas is expected to reopen in the first quarter of 2019. Meanwhile, a number of larger resorts on the islands - including Renaissance St. Croix Carambola Beach Resort & Spa, Caneel Bay on St. John and Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort - are not scheduled to reopen until late 2019 or early 2020.

CRUISES While Hurricane Florence, in September, required some temporary itinerary modifications, according to the cruise industry website Cruise Critic, as of July "every single Caribbean cruise port is open and welcoming cruise ships and visitors."

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Fortunately, hiking isn't the only option for inland exploration. River floating (on large inflatable tubes), canyoning (no prior rappelling experience required) and soaking in volcanic hot springs are all popular ways to pass a day. These activities can range from leisurely to adventurous depending on how much work you want to put in. On a relaxing float down the Indian River near the northern city of Portsmouth, our captain points out filming locations from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise along with huge ghost crabs among the palms and mangroves that line the banks. It's essentially the ultimate lazy river ride.

Dominica's coast offers plenty to do as well. Scuba diving is popular, with myriad spots to choose from. Stretching the length of the island's west side are sites for beginner to advanced-level divers. Turtles, rays and seahorses are seen regularly near the reefs, wrecks, caves and lava chutes that form the underwater ecosystem around volcanic Dominica. Whale watching is also an option for non-divers, as 10 different species have been spotted in the area.

Of course, this being the Caribbean, beaches are also popular - with a caveat. "Our beaches are not like all the other beaches. We are unique because of our volcanic nature. We have black sand beaches," Beno explains when I ask about tourist hot spots. This

dark sand is notoriously hot on bright days, so sunbathing is one of the least common activities on Dominica. Still, visitors "are bent on wanting to do one of the beaches," Beno says. "So why not do a combination with the natural sites?" This might include horseback riding on the beach - or even in the water - before heading to the rain forest.

Here, the wild jungle is a prominent feature no matter what activity you choose. But two new hotels will give travellers the option of a more traditional island escape. In 2019, both the Cabrits Resort Kempinski Dominica and the Anchi Resort and Spa, an Autograph Collection Hotel, are planned to open in the city of Portsmouth. These will be the first two international brands to develop properties on the island; right now, much of the accommodation is small guesthouses and rustic eco retreats. "There are not many hotels because people never really payed attention to tourism and travellers," Beno explains.

Perhaps these openings will be enough to jump-start the local tourism economy and woo visitors who find a day in port isn't long enough. "They come on a cruise and as a result of the nature on the island, more and more people are coming and staying for a week," Beno says. "If somebody is a nature lover, they probably want to come back."

YOUR TURN

HOW TO GET THERE More than two dozen cruise companies make port in Dominica's three ship terminals (Roseau, Woodbridge Bay and Cabrits near Portsmouth), including large ship cruise companies such as Carnival Cruise Line, Holland America Line, Norwegian Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean. International flights typically pass through other islands (including Barbados) to reach Dominica. LIAT airlines is the most common airline for island-hopping in the region; other regional airlines include Air Antilles, Winair and Seaborne Airlines.

WHERE TO STAY Fort Young Hotel in Roseau is one of the island's top properties. It is undergoing post-hurricane renovation and currently has 42 of its 71 rooms available (fortyounghotel.com; from US\$193 in low season). On the wild Atlantic coast, Pagua Bay House offers a six-cabana boutique hotel with a restaurant and pool area (paguabay-house.com; from US\$210 in low season). In 2019, both Kempinski and Marriott are expected to open spa resorts.

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The writer's travel was partly subsidized by Discover Dominica. It did not review or approve this article.



WALKING ON SUNSHINE

If you're more about hiking pitons than sunning on the beach, you'll need to pack more supportive footwear than just flip-flops. The Merrell MQM Flex hiking shoe will keep your feet cool but still provide the grip you need to conquer a piton. Available in multiple colours - but the "fruit punch" version is by far the most fun for a tropical escape. \$150 through merrell.com



IN YOUR EYES

As you slather on sunscreen, don't forget to protect your eyes as well. Shades from Serengeti reduce the effects of UV rays while also helping you see better in bright sun: Polarization reduces glare, Spectral Control filters enhance colours and photochromic lenses adjust to the amount of light (a great bonus if you have extra-sensitive eyes and wear sunglasses even on overcast days). Anteo sunglasses, \$300 at optical stores across the country - DOMINI CLARK