



Caribbean spring break: Ideas, prices, post-hurricane news



By BETH J. HARPAZ
Feb. 16, 2018

Thinking about spring break in the Caribbean?

Brian Hegarty of Travel Leaders Network says each Caribbean island offers a different vibe, from relaxing on the beach to adventures, shopping and dining. All-inclusive resorts “take the worry out of figuring out where to go for every meal and watching your budget. There are also some small luxury properties that really cater to the affluent traveler looking for a more curated local experience.”

Hopper.com says the most popular Caribbean destinations for spring break are Montego Bay, Jamaica (\$479 round-trip); Santo Domingo (\$500 round-trip) and Punta Cana (\$569 round-trip) in the Dominican Republic; Nassau (\$612 round-trip) in the Bahamas, and Oranjestad, Aruba (\$567 round-trip).

Dan Marmontello at CheapCaribbean.com says “there are still deals to be had on nearly every island, but Aruba, Curacao, and Grand Cayman are filling up the quickest,” while destinations like Turks and Caicos, St. Lucia, the Bahamas, Antigua, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic “generally have more rooms available last minute” and “potentially lower pricing for a spring getaway.”

HOTELS, EVENTS, EXPERIENCES

In the Bahamas, Baha Mar, a new resort complex in Nassau, includes the SLS Baha Mar and Grand Hyatt Baha Mar hotels, an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, the Caribbean’s largest casino and an ESPA spa. Atlantis Paradise Island completed a redesign of The Cove, a 600-suite hotel. And bloggers are raving about “glamping” in solar-powered tents at the Other Side on Eleuthera.

Barbados has “Sugar & Rum Season” events through April 15, including tours, parties and cooking classes.

The Cayman Islands’ Batabano festival, May 2-6, includes a charitable masquerade-themed dinner dance at the Pedro St. James castle and a street parade.

On Turks and Caicos, guests of The Somerset on Grace Bay can borrow a bike and pedal to Potcake Place for a puppy playdate.

A new online platform from the Professional Association of Diving Instructors offers an island-by-island guide to sightseeing, dive shops and “liveaboards” — when you spend a night or more on a boat, <https://travel.padi.com/d/caribbean/>.

HURRICANE-IMPACTED ISLANDS

A handful of islands were hit hard by hurricanes, including Puerto Rico, St. Bart’s, St. Martin, Anguilla, Dominica and the Virgin Islands. Cruise ships have returned to all ports, and several Princess cruises are offering passengers voluntourism opportunities to help recovery efforts.

Some hotels damaged by storms are still renovating. Others have reopened. Before you book, ask about conditions, beach erosion, debris and construction noise. Travel Weekly has been providing updates at <http://www.travelweekly.com/Caribbean-Travel/Caribbean-islands-affected-by-hurricanes-mapped>.

Fort Young Hotel, Dominica’s largest hotel, partially reopened in January and is offering a “voluntourism package” that starts at \$837 for five nights, double occupancy, including ground transportation to and from airports, breakfast and an island tour, <https://www.fortyounghotel.com>. The voluntourism involves helping to clear debris on a segment of the Waitukubuli National Trail. Dominica is known for its wild, rugged landscape of mountains and rainforests.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, many hotels are operating normally, though some like the Caribe Hilton are still undergoing repairs. San Juan Marriott marketing manager Joaquin Cruz says his hotel’s beachfront property is fine, and the neighborhood where it’s located, Condado, is “buzzing with nightlife, restaurants, bars and shops.” It’s located 10 minutes from Old San Juan by cab, but guests can also borrow bikes from the hotel and follow a bike path there. One of the hotel’s two towers is closed for repairs from water damage, but Cruz said the work in that tower is “invisible to guests” in the open tower. Rates start at \$289 with breakfast for two.

Fareness.com says average round-trip flights from the U.S. mainland to San Juan between March 24 and April 29 run \$367.

St. Barth Properties reports that more than half of its villas on St. Bart’s are ready for guests. Zemi Beach House, a luxury boutique hotel on Anguilla’s east end, reopened Feb. 15. And on Nevis, you can join the Nisbet Plantation Beach Club’s general manager on a 5-mile hike or visit Alexander Hamilton’s home and Mount Nevis.

On the British Virgin Islands’ Anegada, some properties are offering four nights for the price of three if you book by Feb. 28 for a stay through April 15, <http://www.bviturism.com/i-love-anegada> with promo code ANGW18.

On St. Martin, Rainforest Adventures Rockland Estate just opened the world’s steepest zip line. A second zip line will open soon, along with Schooner Ride, an inner tube ride down a mountain track.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, many hotels on St. Thomas and St. John are still recovering, though a number of restaurants and shops have reopened. At Magens Bay, St. Thomas’ most visited beach, hundreds of new trees were planted, and all beaches and trails at St. John’s Virgin Islands National Park have reopened. V.I. Carnival on St. Thomas is March 31-April 28. On St. Croix, which experienced less storm damage, lodging ranges from the family-friendly Buccaneer resort to a new boutique hotel, The Fred, in downtown Frederiksted. The St. Croix Food & Wine Experience is April 5-7.