

CARIBBEAN TEMPTATIONS

In a region admired for its laid-back tempo, change is happening at a rapid-fire pace. Here, our top picks for what's new and hot in the Caribbean—and excuses aplenty for your next sun-drenched, five-star vacation.

BY PAUL RUBIO

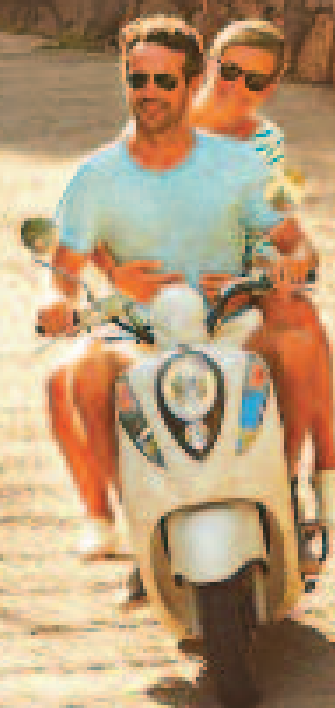


IMAGE COURTESY: HOTEL GUANAHANI

Hotel Guanahani & Spa, St. Barths

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As part of a four-year \$40 million refurbishment and expansion of Hotel Guanahani & Spa, designer Luis Pons has reshaped the entirety of the property's 67 cottages, 36 of which are suites, as modern incarnations of Caribbean luxury. Anchored by four-poster beds, pastel-tinted wooden walls and dark wood cabinetry embellished with woven straw, these seaside chalets are further accessorized with vintage luggage trunks, stacks of antique travel books and minimalist art. Pons also had a hand in creating two new signature suites: the Serenity Suite, complete with a private swimming pool, and the nautical-themed Admiral Suite, adorned with nods to Christopher Columbus' voyage to St. Barths circa 1493.

Baha Mar, Nassau, Bahamas

After much anticipation and pre-opening fanfare, Baha Mar, the \$3.5 billion oceanfront resort community inclusive of five major hotels and 284 luxury residences, is set to debut this spring on Nassau's north shore. Similar to its larger-than-life island neighbor, Atlantis Paradise Island, Baha Mar is a self-contained enclave of leisure, delivering just about everything fun-in-the-sun. But instead of water parks, lagoons and shark tanks, this island newcomer sports an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, a half-mile stretch of white-sand beach, two top-notch spas, a 100,000-square-foot casino (the largest in the Caribbean), prolific retail space and more. Of particular note to leisure travelers are the two luxury hotels in the portfolio: the 200-room colonial-inspired Rosewood at Baha Mar and the edgy 300-room South Beach-style SLS LUX at Baha Mar.

Grace Bay Club, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos

On the heels of its 20th anniversary, Grace Bay Club has embarked on a major renovation in partnership with celebrity interior designer Thom Filicia. Halfway through the two-year endeavor, Filicia has already transformed the lobby, restaurant spaces and the majority of the hotel units into his dreamy, high-design vision of tropical elegance. Additionally, Filicia has bestowed his refined aesthetic to the latest expansion at Grace Bay Club: The Residences. This new resort-within-a-resort, completed in December, takes shape as three 6,000-plus-square-foot, four-bedroom beachfront homes, now available as part of the Grace Bay Club inventory.

Amanyara, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos

Tucked into the far reaches of Providenciales Island, the Caribbean's sole Aman property has long been heralded as the region's most exclusive resort. Now, with the addition of the Jean-Michel Gathy-designed 14,450-square-foot beachfront Amanyara Villa—built around its own reflection pond and replete with amenities such as a black-lava stone swimming pool, a private Pilates studio and an in-house personal chef—the Caribbean's most coveted address has welcomed its most prized tenant.

Gansevoort Dominican Republic, Playa Imbert

Despite incredible natural beauty, palm-laced Puerto Plata has managed to evade the lexicon of most luxury travelers, mainly due to the prolific all-inclusive monoliths that once ruled its beaches. However, the debut of the 48-suite Gansevoort Dominican Republic, Playa Imbert, the area's first world-class resort, has opened this diverse destination to a new generation of jet-setters. A posh home base for sun-kissed pursuits such as kitesurfing, horseback riding, surfing, golf and tennis, the second Caribbean outpost of the Gansevoort brand also positions itself as an all-out unapologetic beachfront retreat, where days consist of little more than sun worshipping, lazing in and around the triple-tiered, cascading infinity pool and enjoying the good life in one of the elegantly appointed ocean-view suites.



IMAGE COURTESY JEAN-PIERRE PETER

Belle Mont Farm on Kittitian Hill, St. Kitts

Last December, Kittitian Hill—St. Kitts’ 400-acre, in-progress sustainable-development project at the foothills of Mount Liamuiga—unveiled its first phase: the 84-guesthouse Belle Mont Farm. Translating to “Beautiful Mountain,” this all-villa resort showcases the best of St. Kitts, from experiential farm-to-table cuisine sourced from surrounding farmlands, traditional Kittitian architecture (with the addition of private infinity pools and alfresco showers) and endless panoramic views of mountain and sea, to the par-71 Ian Woosnam-designed 18-hole golf course, interspersed with fruit trees and billed as the world’s first “edible golf course.”



Clockwise from above: the infinity pool at the Gansevoort Dominican Republic, Playa Imbert; view of the Caribbean from Hotel Guanahani & Spa, St. Barths; fruit basket from Belle Mont Farm, St. Lucia.



Capella Marigot Bay, St. Lucia

Following a year of extensive nips, tucks and overall modernization, Discovery at Marigot Bay has reemerged as Capella Marigot Bay, a 122-room bayside retreat where the azure waters and lush rainforests of St. Lucia unite, bathed in understated West Indies-inspired decor and featuring a signature Auriga spa, a swim-up bar, a world-class marina and four food and beverage outlets. With strong ties to the world of megayachts, this resort is more about socializing, meeting yachtsmen, admiring and employing water toys, shopping and enjoying the lavish, in-house five-star amenities rather than lounging on the beach itself (which, in fact, is just a two-minute ferry ride across the bay).

Rosewood Little Dix Bay, Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands

To celebrate its golden anniversary, the history-steeped Rosewood Little Dix Bay resort has unveiled the first phase of its three-year face-lift: five luxe high-in-the-sky Tree House Suites, a clever and sumptuous reinvention of the original collection of stilted Tree House Cottages constructed by Laurance Rockefeller, circa 1964. Each overhauled suite features 1,000 square feet of living space with wraparound terraces, doling out unobstructed panoramas of beach, sun and sky. Be sure to experience Little Dix's signature "Beach Drop": a complimentary drop-off/pickup service by the resort houseboat that whisks guests to a dozen or so desolate beaches across the island as well as The Baths of Virgin Gorda, undeniably consummating fantasies of Robinson Crusoe proportions.

TRADEWIND AVIATION Good news, island hoppers: inter-island travel just got an upgrade thanks to new regularly scheduled services by Tradewind Aviation. A fleet of contemporary Pilatus PC-12s—each equipped with two pilots, leather seating and food and beverage amenities—now connects the islands of St. Barths, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, Antigua, Anguilla and Nevis.



Above, the new Amanyara Villa at Amanyara resort in Providenciales, Turks & Caicos; below, the lobby of Grace Bay Club in Providenciales.



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IMAGES COURTESY AMANYARA AND GRACE BAY CLUB