

Beauty of the **BEACH**

WHEN THE FROST OF WINTER
PEAKS AND THE SEASON'S
NOVELTY THAWS,

warm weather beckons at several locales west
and south of the US mainland.

**Here, six headlining tropical paradises
to laze winter days away in full sun-drenched glory.**

by PAUL RUBIO

Photo: Cheval Blanc St-Barth, Isle de France.



St. Bart's

This past October, the 8.5-square-mile island's most sophisticated property, Hotel Saint-Barth Isle de France, officially joined LVMH's fashionable Cheval Blanc collection. Rechristened **Cheval Blanc St-Barth Isle de France** (from \$762 per night; stbarthisledefrance.chevalblanc.com), this new name brings an expansive new spa (a rarity for the island) that offers the Caribbean's only Guerlain treatments, a state-of-the-art fitness center (another island rarity), enhanced service staff in the form of "Alchemists" (the next level of concierge), and off-site pursuits, such as a full-day island tour on the property-owned 69-foot yacht. These amenities are part of the property's recently completed three-year renovation, solidifying its status as the apex of Caribbean glamour, which nonguests can experience at one of two beach restaurants, La Cabane de l'Isle, located directly on the sands of Flamands Beach, or La Case de l'Isle, set above the beach.

Over on the cerulean waters of Grand Cul-de-Sac Beach, another of St. Bart's 14 minimally developed white-sand beaches, **Hotel Guanahani & Spa St. Barths** (from \$767 per night; leguanahani.com) is also finalizing a major refurbishment—its vibrantly hued, classic Creole-style cottages are now decked out in tropically inspired excess from Miami-based designer Luis Pons.

Those looking for the space and privacy of a home while still enjoying 24/7 personal concierge service will find solace in one of **WIMCO's** 300-plus villa rentals (from \$2,100 per week; wimco.com) scattered throughout the island. Recent additions to the 30-year-old company's rental portfolio include Lagoon Vert, a three-bedroom home in Petit Cul-de-Sac surrounded by wild vegetation and rock; Villa Apache, a four-bedroom, Balinese-influenced estate overlooking St. Jean; and Casa Del Mar, a six-bedroom estate on two acres comprising two villas, each outfitted with items from B&B Italia, Dedon, and Valcucine. ▷

*Previous pages: St. Bart's.
Above: WIMCO's Villa Apache.
Opposite page: Cheval Blanc St-Barth Isle de France's restaurant La Cabane de l'Isle rests on Flamands Bay (top); one of the resort's beach suites (bottom).*

Photos: Courtesy WIMCO; (opposite, top) Stefano Candito; (opposite, bottom) Pierre Carreau.





Anguilla

The rise of luxury tourism in the 1980s propelled small, sleepy Anguilla into vacation stardom as a handful of ambitious, design-driven Caribbean resorts emerged and rose to distinction, among them Cap Juluca and Malliouhana. Slow-paced Anguilla presented the antithesis to its famous neighbors, casino-strewn St. Martin and see-and-be-seen St. Bart's. And its breathtaking, turquoise-enveloped bays, blanketed with downy coralline sands, soon surfaced as the Caribbean's own Shangri-la.

Photo: Courtesy Cap Juluca

Flash-forward to the present day, and Anguilla largely remains the naturally dazzling yet unpretentious and undeveloped island of three decades prior, brimming with fodder for gloriously long, lazy beach days, which can once again be enjoyed at the **Malliouhana** (from \$525 per night; malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com).

After shutting its doors for three years and completing a head-to-toe renovation, the property, originally built in 1984 by British entrepreneur Leon Roydon, has been reborn of Auberge Resorts Collection pedigree with new interiors by Todd-Avery Lenahan (known for his work

at Las Vegas' Wynn and Encore resorts and at Aspen's Hotel Jerome). A stately, Moorish-influenced enclave atop Meads Bay, this reimagined icon converges over 44 units splashed with pastel panache and vintage '60s flair. The 25-acre property peers over Anguillan beachfront, veering from its original blueprint with prolific open-air spaces that take full advantage of ocean views.

On a smaller scale, **Cap Juluca** (from \$495 per night; capjuluca.com), long appreciated for its pristine beach, has also recently been updated. All of its 70 guest rooms, scattered among 15 villas, are now outfitted with new décor and furnishings, while the three-bedroom Jonquil Suite—the property's only new build in decades—offers guests the space and amenities of a private home. ▷

Kapalua, Maui



Kapalua, Maui's crown jewel of real estate, has a coveted new address within its 5.8-square-mile mountain-meets-the-sea splendor. In early summer 2014 the palm-laced resort community in northwest Maui welcomed the highly anticipated **Montage Kapalua Bay** (from \$795 per night; montagehotels.com).

The 24-acre all-suite property—originally built and nearly completed as Ritz-Carlton Residences in 2009—has finally come to fruition after a \$15 million renovation by Montage Hotels & Resorts. Within its modern Hawaiian grandeur, Montage Kapalua Bay comprises a 50-key hotel of one- to four-bedroom units, and 54

privately owned three- and four-bedroom vacation homes separate from hotel inventory (released to the market in July 2014 with several still for sale).

Because Kapalua functions as a self-contained destination, the daily agenda here rarely strays from swimming in the 8,500-square-foot lagoon pool, luxuriating at the 30,000-square-foot spa, taking a short jaunt off-property to play on any of seven nearby championship golf courses, and not least enjoying the beaches, which feel completely private thanks to the low population and remote location, away from the crowds of Lahaina and Wailea.



Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico



Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula has been making waves in the travel circuit for decades. First came the explosion of the paradisiacal barrier island Cancún (followed by its tragic fall to Spring Break debauchery). Next came the Riviera Maya, the 60-plus-mile coastline stretching from Puerto Morelos (south of Cancún) to the town of Tulum with Playa del Carmen around its midpoint, which earned credibility thanks to its esteemed private resort communities like Mayakoba. Tulum then garnered destination status as celebrities flocked to this boho-chic town to escape any semblance of city life (even hotels void of air conditioning and standard flush toilets) and to stake bragging rights on Mexico's next "it" locale.

Now, all eyes have returned to the peninsula's north as Cancún regains its luster thanks to a heavy infusion

of ultra-luxury amenities. The first to debut has been **Nizuc Resort & Spa** (from \$380 per night; nizuc.com), a secluded 29-acre beachfront property on a peninsular offshoot of Cancún island, strutting a swagger on par with the Riviera Maya's most renowned showstoppers. This flagship property of the high-end, Mexican-owned Las Brisas Hotel Collection opened last year and recalls elements of trusted resort brands like Aman, Setai, and Andaz, strewn with reflection ponds and ubiquitous black marble lending an Asian-influenced sophistication.

Two dreamy beaches nestle against the expansive property, encompassing 274 suites and private villas, a 30,000-square-foot spa by Espa, six top-notch restaurants, a sleek adults-only zone (inclusive of a pool, Peruvian restaurant, and beach area), and just about everything imaginable for vacation bliss. ▶

Photos: Courtesy Montage Kapalua Bay and NIZUC Resort & Spa.



Rivas, Nicaragua

With the arrival of **Mukul** in 2013 (from \$500 per night; mukulresort.com)—Nicaragua's first world-class resort and focal point of the quarter-billion-dollar private community of Guacalito de la Isla—the stage was set for the rise of Latin America's newest “it” destination. Since then, the 1,670-acre property lining the Emerald Coast of the country's southern Pacific reaches has anchored a new thriving tourist industry, helping Central America's largest country shed its tawdry past and gain recognition for a rich cultural heritage, extraordinary biodiversity, and stunning landscapes.

Translating to “secret” in Mayan, Mukul is a self-contained world of decadence, featuring 37 ultra-luxe,

ocean-view, thatched-roof villas and bohios (each with its own pool and butler), a mammoth spa, multiple fine dining options, championship golf, and everything imaginable for endless fun in the sun (from surfboards to kayaks to complimentary minibars stocked with local delights like Toña beer and Flor de Caña rum). In the past year, the resort has added even more frills to its lineup, including the 31-foot, 600-horsepower *Spirit of Mukul* yacht, as well as the full-service Mukul Beach Club. Nowadays, Mukul's parent community, Guacalito de la Isla, is working on a private international landing strip, scheduled for completion in late 2015, which will allow those traveling on private jet to bypass the two-hour transfer from Managua airport. ▶



Photos: (Top) Roberto Valle; (bottom) Ryan Forbes.



Photo: Courtesy Mukul at Guacalito.

Providenciales, Turks & Caicos



Grace Bay's shorelines are some of the Caribbean's most fabled, and for good reason. This 5-mile stretch of velvety sand and blinding blue water along the northeast coast of British-steeped Providenciales is simply postcard-perfect. World-class resorts dot the bay, each delivering a bespoke incarnation of paradise.

And unlike neighboring Bahamian islands, stellar service here is the norm rather than the exception.

The grand dame of the bay, **Grace Bay Club** (from \$620 per night; gracebayresorts.com), has nipped and tucked each year of her 20-year reign, now undergoing an all-out facelift courtesy of Thom Filicia. Over the course of two years, which commenced in January 2014, Filicia will transform Grace Bay Club into a daily celebration of sophisticated island enchantment. He's already waved his wand in the lobby, delivering an eclectic space bathed in off-whites and light yellows, colored by live plants and petrified woods, and accessorized with conversation-inducing tufted chairs and striking light fixtures. Filicia's team has completely reinvented the interiors of the larger villa buildings, branding them design-savvy Caribbean cool, while refreshing the resort's myriad restaurants as singular personality-driven incarnations of tropical chic. On deck: enhancements to Grace Bay Club's principal low-rise hotel and the grander Estate residences (Grace's hotel-within-a-hotel), anticipating a completed renovation by the end of 2015. ♦



Photos: Courtesy Grace Bay Club.

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