



HIDDEN TRAVEL GEMS ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

ARTICLE AND IMAGES BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS

COULD THERE EVER BE SUCH A
THING AS TOO MUCH LOBSTER? IN
WHAT CULINARY FANTASY-WORLD
COULD SUCH A THING BE POSSIBLE?

“**Y**ou could eat lobster every day on Barbuda,” my host casually suggests. “I never thought I’d say it, but I think I’ve had my fill.”

Poor soul. For the rest of us, crave the sweet Caribbean crustacean and the locals will point you toward the lagoon, the chef will fire up the grill, and within an hour you’ll return, a net bulging with your next meal.

BEGUILING BARBUDA

Barbuda and its island twin Antigua present a bonanza of hidden travel gems. Easygoing Barbuda is a flat, limestone piece of land known for deserted sugary beaches as far as the eye can see—yet somehow it’s missed

the mainstream tourism radar. Here, 1,500 Barbudians share their narrow roadways with goats, wild donkeys, iguanas . . . and a smattering of visitors who arrive by small plane, helicopter or ferry.

“We have 14 miles of beach here,” enthuses John Roethel, who manages Lighthouse Bay, one of only two resorts on Barbuda and a property the *New York Times* ranked as one of “39 reasons to go to the Caribbean.”

Filling a narrow sandbar, Lighthouse Bay is more private island paradise than run-of-the-mill resort. The nine units face beachfront on both sides, catching the sunrise over Codrington Lagoon and sunset over the Caribbean Sea.

“It’s very dark here at night,” says

Roethel. “The stars are beautiful and we put out a telescope for guests. Dinner is served by candlelight. Evenings we do bonfires on the beach.”

Remote as it is, Lighthouse Bay might still be one of the more happening spots on Barbuda. Shifting gears into four-wheel-drive—a wise idea for exploring outside the only village—local guide Calvin Gore aims toward the Atlantic side of the island and Two Foot Bay, a rocky bluff that is a place of local legend . . . not to mention breathtaking views of turquoise waters and crescents of pink sand. As he turns off the key and the truck falls silent, the only sound is the whistling of the wind and the crash of the waves reaching the shore.



left: Stroll along the beach at Lighthouse Bay on Barbuda, where the pink-coloured sand feels like butter beneath your feet.
below: The view from the outdoor shower at Hermitage Bay on the island of Antigua offers a panorama of greens and blues.

“In the days of slavery, a man broke away—and when he got to the sand here, he turned his shoes around so that his footprints would look like he was headed the other way,” says Gore, explaining the bay’s namesake.

It’s a five-minute scramble through damp caves and over limestone boulders, following a trail to The Highlands, the highest point on the island. This wild, natural spot is known for the lookout, free camping and the beachcombing finds tossed ashore by the Atlantic surf.

“In February and March you can look from the top and see the whales—they’re travelling to the Windward Islands for the winter months.”

ALLURING ANTIGUA

The quiet and lookouts are traits shared by Antigua, the big-sister island to tiny Barbuda. A muddy, uphill hike through Wallings Forest Reserve to the lookout at Signal Hill crosses through one of Antigua’s last remaining stands of old-growth forest—spine-covered sandbox, silk cotton and bearded fig trees.

Almost at the top, the thick trees and vines thin out and fragrant lemongrass lines the open pathway. From Signal Hill I can visually decipher the last 250 years of island history: the busy, tourist sites of English Harbour, Nelson’s Dockyard (known in the 1800s as the “grave of the Englishmen”) and Shirley Heights are all in view.

And it’s just as quiet, although considerably more sumptuous, at the hidden resort of Hermitage Bay: a beachfront restaurant and

bar devoid of music, dinners by candlelight with a healthy respect for guests who only want to hear the waves and the sound of birds.

At night, the private plunge pool is a bright blue square on my deck—a perfect spot to slide into cool waters, lean back and watch the constellations pop out overhead. The only sound is the chirping of the tiny Caribbean tree frogs.

When the sun is up, there’s a screen-saver view from my outdoor shower: green hills, a long, lazy crescent of beach and azure waters, all rolled out in a single panorama. It’s such a civilized way to start the day and just a preamble to what Chef Dezi Banham has in store for me: a breakfast consisting of an Antiguan cinnamon and cashew nut sandwich (think French toast infused with flavours of toasted coconut and local black pineapple).

Banham, like many Antiguan chefs, works hard to showcase the foods of both islands. He sources out the catch-of-the-day at the St. John’s public market (a colourful spot often overlooked by resort-bound visitors), squeezes the avocados for ripeness and ponders over whether plantain will make it onto the menu today.

“I have no hesitation to expose people to our flavourful foods—it’s who we are,” says Banham. And, like the chefs on his sister island of Barbuda, that may even mean sending you out with a net to catch dinner.

I still hear the lobster calling me. This can only mean I haven’t maxed out my fill quite yet. And this, I decide, can only be a good thing. ■



TRAVEL PLANNER

Antigua and Barbuda are among the Leeward Islands situated right in the heart of the Caribbean. Air Canada (aircanada.com) offers direct service to Antigua from Toronto. Packages to Hermitage Bay are offered through Air Canada Vacations (aircanadavacations.com). For more information, visit or call: Antigua and Barbuda Department of Tourism: antigua-barbuda.ca; 416-961-3085 Hermitage Bay Antigua: hermitagebay.com Lighthouse Bay Barbuda: lighthousebayresort.com