

## Sister Islands: Off the Caribbean's Beaten Path

January 06, 2012

Josephine Matyas

HILLSBOROUGH, CARRIACOU—There is no one on my beach. Not a living soul. No swimmers, no loungers, no beach vendors. No one. This is the Caribbean experience many winter-weary Canadians crave.

Finding the deserted beach experience off the beaten path (OTBP) is not difficult, but it does require a little extra travel—usually a short ferry ride or a short inter-island flight. OTBP destinations are often small sister islands to the mainstream brochure destinations. In all cases, it's worth the extra effort, especially if you embrace the mantra that the journey is part of the overall travel experience.

The good news is the OTBP Caribbean destinations still come in all snack brackets. If you want all the bells and whistles, five-star service and Frette linens, there's a property waiting for you. If you're spending your waking hours in (or under) the water and just want a basic bed to fall into at night, there's the perfect destination for you as well.

Here are a few samplers of OTBP properties in the high, medium and low price range.

### PRICEY

#### Anguilla

Stats: 35 square miles; population 15,000.

Connect through: St. Maarten, [www.ivisitanguilla.com](http://www.ivisitanguilla.com)

Getting there: Take the 25-minute ferry service from St. Maarten. Or, if you've got deep pockets, you can land a private jet at Anguilla's small airport.

Best deserted beach: Sandy Island ( [www.mysandyisland.com](http://www.mysandyisland.com)), a tiny offshore cay with one building, the open air Sandy Island Restaurant. Before it was an idyllic distraction for a couple-dozen tourists a day, local fishermen would pull ashore on the uninhabited sandbar for a break from their day on the water. There's a generator to provide necessary power for the kitchen, cases of rum, beer and soft drinks, and a menu of lobster, chicken, baby back ribs and local red snapper. Happiness, a small water taxi, shuttles guests back and forth from the Anguilla mainland.

Don't miss: The Heritage Collection Museum, the personal collection of local historian, Mr. Colville Petty. Armed with a Masters degree in History, Petty has archived the days of colonization by the English, the era of plantations, and the installation of electricity in the 1970s.

Where to stay: Viceroy Anguilla ( [www.viceroyanguilla.com](http://www.viceroyanguilla.com)) is a stylish, design-driven slice of pure luxury. The A-list of guests include Paul Simon, Alec Baldwin, Paul McCartney and Michael Jordan (who likes to shoot hoops on the resort's court). There are guestrooms and self-sustaining villas (including some with a pilot suite) staffed by butlers and chefs. Daily rates from \$995 in the high season.

### MODERATE

#### Barbuda

Stats: 62 square miles; population 1,500



From the hilly north part of Carriacou, there are beautiful views towards Petit Martinique, an even smaller, more remote sister island to Grenada.

Josephine Matyas photo/for the Toronto Star

Connect through: Antigua, [www.antigua-barbuda.org](http://www.antigua-barbuda.org)

Getting there: The Barbuda Express ferry does one return trip a day Tuesday through Saturday ( [www.antiguaferries.com](http://www.antiguaferries.com)) – \$41 each way for the 90-minute trip. In 15-minutes you can be there by air: ABM Air has two flights a day ( [www.abm-air.com](http://www.abm-air.com), \$95 round trip).

Best deserted beach: Low Bay was voted The #1 Beach in the Caribbean by Caribbean World Magazine. Bring sunscreen.

Don't miss: Barbuda's Frigate Bird Sanctuary is accessible only by boat. The sanctuary is home to over 5,000 frigate birds, known for their enormous wingspan and colourful courtship manners.

Where to stay: The four secluded beachfront bungalows at North Beach are on 20-kilometres of deserted pink sand beach, accessible only by boat. No concierge, gift shop, spa, jet skis, swim-up pool bar or Internet. Daily all inclusive rates from \$500 in the high season. [www.barbudanorthbeach.com](http://www.barbudanorthbeach.com)

## BUDGET

### Carriacou

Stats: 13 square miles; population 7,000

Connect through: Grenada, [www.grenadagrenadines.com](http://www.grenadagrenadines.com)

Getting there: The Osprey ferry service ( [www.ospreylines.com](http://www.ospreylines.com)) connects Grenada and Carriacou twice a day (less on weekends). Return fare for the two-hour trip is \$62. The ferry is a great way to meet the friendly locals and get some tips about the island. There's also small plane service ( [www.svgair.com](http://www.svgair.com)) two or three times a day.

Best deserted beach: Paradise Beach, just a few kilometres south of the town of Hillsborough. Paradise is a long curve of mostly deserted white sand with clean, clear turquoise waters. You'll share the space with a few fisherman and some locals.

Don't miss: Rent a 4WD jeep to explore the island. Head to the village of Windward, where you'll find McLeods and McKenzies – Scots settled here and started a wood boat building tradition now considered among the best in the Caribbean. Water taxi operators offer tours to the Marine Protected Area, encompassing oyster beds and some fantastic snorkelling off Sandy Island.

Where to stay: There are no resort properties on Carriacou, just small local inns and guesthouses. Ade's Dream Guesthouse ( [www.adesdream.com](http://www.adesdream.com)) on the main street in Hillsborough is über-budget (\$31 and up) for a clean but basic room with kitchen access. The island's home-stay program is an authentic local experience – for about \$50 (double room) visitors stay with a local family ( [www.carriacoumaroon.com](http://www.carriacoumaroon.com)).

**Josephine Matyas** is a Kingston Ont. based freelance writer whose trip was subsidized by Anguilla Tourism and Antigua & Barbuda Tourism. She can be found online at [www.writerwithoutborders.com](http://www.writerwithoutborders.com).