

Caribbean Islands Directory

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This chapter gives you a broad overview on all things practical in the Caribbean islands. This book covers hundreds of islands, so the information given here is based on collective generalizations to give you a sense of the region as a whole and to help you plan your trip. Start your search here (subjects are listed alphabetically) then turn to the Directory sections in individual chapters for more specific details.

ACCOMMODATIONS

A wide range of accommodations awaits travelers in the Caribbean, from inexpensive guesthouses and good-value efficiency apartments – which have refrigerators and partial kitchens – to elaborate villas and luxury beachside resorts. The bulk of our listings fall somewhere in between.

In this book the phrase ‘in summer’ refers to the low season (mid-April to December) and ‘in winter’ to the high season (December to mid-April). Throughout the book we’ve listed high-season rates unless otherwise noted. Keep in mind that hotel rates can be up to 30% cheaper in the low season and in most places they’ll fluctuate with tourist traffic.

The price structure we have followed applies to most of the islands. However, not all islands have rooms in all price categories – many have no budget accommodations at all, while other islands are less expensive across the board. The individual chapters outline any deviations but, in general, ‘budget’ means US\$75 or less, ‘midrange’ means US\$76 to US\$200 and ‘top end’ means US\$201 and up.

Some hotels close for a month or so in late summer, usually around September. If business doesn’t look promising, some of the smaller hotels and guesthouses might even close down June to September.

‘Private bath’ in this book means the room has its own toilet and shower – it does not necessarily mean that it has a bathtub and in most cases it will not. If having a TV or telephone is important to you, check, although satellite/cable TV is pretty common.

Camping

Camping is limited in the Caribbean and on some islands freelance camping is either illegal or discouraged – usually to protect nature or because of crime. This is certainly not the rule everywhere, however, and it’s best to check with the local tourist office for rules and regulations.

There are a number of camping possibilities throughout the US Virgin Islands and on Puerto Rico.

Guesthouses

The closest thing the Caribbean has to hostels, guesthouses are usually great value. Often in the middle of a town or village and rarely alongside a beach, they offer good opportunities for cultural immersion. Rooms usually have a bed and private bath and some have communal kitchens and living

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers** Most Caribbean islands have their own newspapers and these are well worth reading to gain insight into local politics and culture. International newspapers, such as the *International Herald Tribune* and *USA Today*, are available on only a few islands. International glossy magazines are more common.
- **Radio & TV** Most islands have their own radio stations, which are a great way to tune in to the latest calypso, reggae, soca and steel-pan music. Local TV stations offer mostly soap operas. The prevalence of satellite TVs means that CNN, BBC World, HBO and others are common.
- **Video Systems** The local system is NTSC, but videotapes are sold in various formats.
- **Electricity** The electric current varies in the islands. On many the current is 110V, 60 cycles (as in the US), but others have 220V, 50 cycles (as in Europe). Adapters are widely available at shops and hotels. Check the Practicalities boxes in the individual chapters.
- **Weights & Measures** Some Caribbean countries use the metric system, while others use the imperial system and a few use a confusing combo of both; check the individual chapters. Each chapter uses the system of measurement followed in that country..

rooms. In some areas you can arrange private homestays, where you stay in the home of a local family. These are most readily available in Cuba, where they are known as *casas particulares*.

Hotels

Looking at the Caribbean as a whole, you'll see that hotel rooms can range from flea-ridden hovels to massive 1000-room resorts, to glorious villas hovering over the sea. Prices run the gamut as well. Look a little closer and you realize that on the islands themselves the hotel options seem in short supply. On one island, for example, there will be a lot of budget accommodations but few 'nicer' hotels; elsewhere, you'll see dozens of top-end resorts but not a budget hotel in sight. If you're trying to plan a trip, it's a good idea to read through the Accommodations listings in each chapter to find out the range of hotels available on each island.

The **Caribbean Hotel Association** (www.caribbeanhotels.com) has helpful links that connect to the individual islands' hotel associations.

ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORTS

Born in Jamaica and now prevalent across the Caribbean, all-inclusive resorts allow you to pay a set price and then nothing more once you set foot inside the resort. You usually get a wristband that allows you free access to the hotel or resort's restaurants, bars and water-sports equipment. Many properties have jumped onto the 'all-inclusive' bandwagon, but don't necessarily supply the goods. Be

sure to find out exactly what 'all-inclusive' includes, the variety and quality of food available, whether or not all drinks are included and if there are any hidden charges. At some places the food is produced by the ton for mass consumption: think all-you-can-eat chicken McNuggets.

Rental Accommodations

If you're traveling with your family or a large group, you might want to look into renting a villa. Villas are great because you have room to stretch out, do your own cooking and enjoy plenty of privacy. Rentals cost anywhere from US\$600 per week for a basic villa with bedrooms, kitchen and living space, to US\$15,000 per night for a beachside estate with staff. For even more, you can rent an island. Agencies on the individual islands rent properties; the following rent villas throughout the region:

At Home Abroad (☎ in the USA 212-421-9165; www.athomeabroadinc.com)

Caribbean Way (☎ in the USA 514-393-3003, 877-953-7400; www.caribbeanway.com)

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

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