

St. Lucia, Small in Size. Big on Adventure

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Waves washed over me making me scream at the suddenness and surprise of their size. Our kayak rode up and lurched down the steep crest of the wave as screams turned to laughter. I turned to my kayak partner at the back and said, "I'll never be able to kayak on a lake again." We were kayaking on the Atlantic side of the island and the Atlantic Ocean is known for being choppy, especially in areas where it meets up with the Caribbean.

St. Lucia is one of twenty-six Caribbean countries that spans several-hundred miles of North America's Caribbean region. About seven hundred Caribbean islands exist, but only twenty-six of them are considered sovereign states and dependent territories.

Starting with The Bahamas and Cuba, located off the tip of Florida, the string of Caribbean countries arc down towards Venezuela. St. Lucia is set between Martinique on one side and St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Barbados on the other. Primarily British, as it was under

British rule seven times, and under French rule seven times. French is still spoken throughout the island and driving is on the other or British side of the road.

For those who want more than sea and sand from their vacation, St. Lucia couldn't be more ideal. Get away from the beach and see the sights. Approximately 77% of it is covered in rain forest, compared to nearby Barbados with just 19 percent.

St. Lucia has 180,000 people and touring the entire island non-stop would take three hours as it is only 250 square miles, 14 miles wide and 17 miles long, with tourism and agriculture being its main industries. As it is a volcanic island, the soil is very fertile with bananas as the main export. In addition, Hershey's buys 60% of the cocoa beans grown there. There are seven villages throughout the island with Castries as the capital. Soufriere was the French capital and remains the activity center of the island.



Plantation house still in active use by family.
PHOTO CREDIT: Melody Wren

Most of the hotels are in the north part of the island on the Caribbean side, however I stayed at the only hotel in the south , Coconut Bay Beach Resort, which meant a short five-minute drive from the airport.

Few coastlines have been photographed more than St. Lucia's. The Pitons are a pair of jagged volcanic peaks that planes must bypass to touch down at the island's international airport. They are instantly recognizable, but up close they look surreal, like a child's science project that went a bit wonky.

There are many adventures to choose from and our hotel had a desk serving that very purpose. It's a chance to see other parts of the island and spike the adrenaline at the same time.



View of the Pitons and town of Soufriere. PHOTO
CREDIT:Melody Wren

Our first choice was the Catamaran Sea and Land Adventure which started off with boarding a 46' Catamaran with twin 55-HP inboard engines. Captain Neville Labadie – "Call me Nerv" – has three boats and the business keeps him hopping. His enthusiasm was

contagious as he shared information about the island and its history. We sailed along the west coast towards the Pitons, the largest of which is 2600 ft. Anchoring at the Anse Piton Marine Reserve, we snorkeled through the reserve and were delighted by huge coral, sponges, parrot fish, gar and angel fish. We sailed further along the coast and snorkeled again seeing different types of fish.

After leaving the boat, we drove in a small van through Soufriere to a local restaurant, The Beacon Restaurant, for authentic Caribbean food. The view of the Pitons and the ocean was fabulous and although tempted to stay all afternoon, the only drive-in volcano in the Caribbean was calling, so we set off to tour one of 19 active volcanos in the Caribbean. La Soufriere Volcano is still bubbling away giving a strong sulphur smell to the air. Twelve kilometers across, the entire town of Soufriere sits in the middle. The guide told us that that the last eruption was in the 1700s and according to geologists, it is will be another 53 years before the next one. Two boxes near the bubbling centre trace the geology and show the effects of the volcanic activity. La Soufriere literally means sulphur in the air and oh how it stank!

Many went into the adjacent sulphur springs mud bath smearing themselves with the mud to enjoy the revitalizing, renewing properties.

Another day of adventure took us to the Morne Coubaril Estate where we toured the Cocoa plantation on 250 acres owned by French family. A replica of an 18thC Caribbean village gave visitors a glimpse into the history of the island. Beautiful flowering trees and bushes that attract many beautifully coloured hummingbirds. Cocoa beans are harvested on the plantation where we learned about the processing of the beans into cocoa powder, paste and chocolate. They are all sold in the gift shop making for a great souvenir to take home.

Following the tour, we were set up in harnesses, helmets and gloves, then effortlessly zipped between an eight platform zipline



Active volcano bubbling. PHOTO CREDIT: Melody Wren



Entrance to Cocoa Plantation. PHOTO CREDIT: Melody Wren

through the lush canopy of trees and across a bamboo-shadowed gorge. There was a view of the Pitons; one zipline had a clear view of Soufriere and one passed across a pond. The onsite restaurant had a lunch buffet with authentic Creole food.

Even though St. Lucia is considered one of the smaller Caribbean islands, it offers as much to see and do as many of the larger islands. Picking one Caribbean island to suit your holiday needs can be tricky. There are islands for those with a penchant for history, naturalists, those who love luxury and young couples that travel with small children. St. Lucia offers a little of everything making it ideal for the first-time visitors to the region.

St. Lucia Tourism

