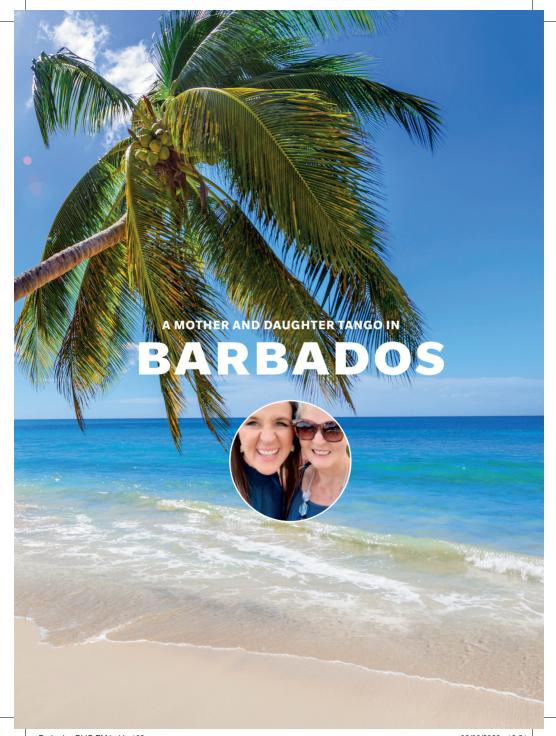


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y daughter Sara and I have always been close, and now that she has her own family it's rare to get one-on-one time. We get together often with our partners and her two adorable small children. Sunday dinners and riverside hikes are fragmented with snatched conversations in between shouts of "Nana, come play with me." During COVID-19 we dreamed of an escape to an island together. As we both have a love for the Caribbean, Barbados was calling and we finally answered, eventually making a plan for a seven-night getaway.

On the day we were leaving, my daughter had stayed overnight at my house and we were both feeling a bit groggy and apprehensive about the journey ahead. Our dance started during our 4am breakfast while chatting about our seat assignments on the plane, which had another passenger between us. I said, "I'll ask them to change seats, which would be in their best interest or we'll be chatting over their head."

"Mum, don't explain why, just ask," Sara replied firmly.

And so our trip began. Our charming seat mate jumped at the opportunity for an aisle seat, and was eager to share local intel of his home island. At one point we all laughed as I expressed remorse that I hadn't packed an extra sandwich for him.

"Oh, Mum," he said to me, "just give me half of yours."

We were warmly ushered into the O2 resort with welcome drinks as we checked in. After touring the property, Sara and I changed quickly and headed to Brisa, a bar on the eighth floor. "Can you believe that we're finally here?" she said.

I felt a rush of emotion, the culmination of planning, with multiple texts discussing what clothes to pack, and Sara repeating, "Really, we're just taking carry-on?". We clinked glasses and marvelled at how beautiful and surreal everything was.

That first night we settled into our luxurious suite, eager to begin the week's adventures. I quickly realised that we had to re-adjust to the realities of mother and daughter sharing space

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READER'S DIGEST



Clockwise from top: Sara leaps between two rocks on the beach; Brisa's pool and ocean view; Melody and Sara as a young mother and daughter





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together once again: me, listening to the hum of her watching TikTok videos from her hotel bed in the evenings; my not uttering any syllables before my back-to-back cups of tea in the morning.

THE FIRST MORNING, I

unintentionally slipped into mothering mode. "What are you thinking for breakfast?" I asked as we got ready in front of the mirror, knowing a lavish Caribbean breakfast buffet was waiting for us.

She replied "I'm craving fresh fruit." I suggested that she needed protein to fuel our busy day ahead. "Mum, I have been taking care of myself for years," she reminded me.

After breakfast, we set off for Earthworks Pottery. As driver Shawn whisked us past mango, coconut and breadfruit trees, Sara begged us to stop to climb a mango tree. I whispered that the travel insurance wouldn't cover that.

At the pottery studio, we met owner David Spieler, whose mother started the business over 40 years ago when she moved to Barbados from Canada. Former science teacher David has perfected their pottery-making process, while his mother continues to provide creative input. Sara observed that they worked together like they were both sides of the brain. David made the process look easier than it was, but led us through each intricate step. We took turns getting our hands

dirty, loving the experience, both of us filled with pride that we had cobbled some reasonable-looking bowls.

Stopping for a delicious lunch, neither us wanted to overeat as ziplining was next.

"I think I'm going to vomit," Sara said as she peered over the platform edge at the Chukka Adventures' zipline. I nodded in agreement. Even though I had ziplined in several countries before, my nerves were surfacing as well. I cheered loudly for Sara as she breezed across. I felt protective, ensuring she held on correctly even though our guide



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Malakai was on the job. On the landing platform, Malakai mentioned she would be fine on the other four lines.

"Holy crap," Sara blurted, "I thought there was only one." But the rest proved easier, effortless, and even enjoyable—the first time we bonded through a mutual fear.

From acrophobia to claustrophobia—both of us balked at the tram ride through Harrison's Caves. Shawn convinced us to do it. As the tram descended 150 feet, beautiful stalactites and stalagmites multiplied above and below, some dating back 7,000 years. Two large stalagmites

resembled a couple at an altar about to get married. As the man in front of us stood up with one hand in his pocket, we quietly gasped at exactly the same time. The guide then remarked that many tourists propose at that site, but that "proposals are discouraged as many rejections follow." The fellow sat back down, and we looked sadly at each other.

At the end of the day, weary from our adventures and filled with stories, we began the routine of evening drinks at Brisa on the eighth floor. With a pool and an ocean view that went on for days and comfy seating, Brisa became





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our go-to secret club house. Looking at the choice of venues at O2, we would glance at each other and say "Brisa?" We laughed over outrageous topics, building magical moments, and talked honestly. Sara noted our similarities and kept saying, "I am you."

ON LATER DAYS, Shawn drove us to several of the rugged, beautiful beaches in Barbados, with names such as the Soup Bowl, describing the carved-out curve of the beach. The immense rock formations frame the beauty. Sara scared Shawn when she threw off her sandals and leapt between two large rocks. My mothering mode returned as I shouted to her to be careful and then bit my tongue, watching her adventure.

Touring Andromeda Gardens felt like walking through a living children's

book. The Bearded Fig tree had curtains of vines dripping down, reminiscent of *Tarzan*. Single flowers on long, sturdy stems marked the trail like gateposts, while palm trees with elephant-like legs and hairy roots looked as though they might scuttle away. Long vines replicated witch's hair, hanging down to grab anyone walking by.

Sara picked up a fallen coconut and Shawn suggested that throwing it would break it. She threw it and it accidentally veered towards me, breaking in two, splashing coconut water onto my legs and skirt. Sara laughed loudly. Though I was worried about my skirt staining, I loved seeing her in a carefree moment, laughter spilling out of her.

We spent time touring PEG farms, speaking with the owner, champion rally-car driver, Paul "Surfer" Bourne. I told him, hand on heart, that I had



"MUM, DON'T LET THIS GO TO YOUR HEAD, BUT YOU'RE SOMETHING OF A BADASS"

always wanted to go in a race car. He said that he would make a couple of calls to see if he could make it happen, and to meet him at Bushy Park race track. That morning, I was nervous in anticipation. Sara said to me, "Mum, don't let this go to your head, but you're something of a badass."

I was strapped oh-so tightly in the car that I felt physically sick. Sara could see it in my eyes and she became the protector her own children know well, shouting, "Just breathe." I gave her a thumbs up to squelch our shared nervousness. She stood beside the racetrack with now-friend, Shawn, and took videos to show me later. Her nervous laughter can be heard on the videos over the roar of the race car.

Back in the pit, after six laps at over 100mph, I took off my helmet, and shook out my hair. Sara immediately asked how it was. "Amazing," I said and added, "I would go again right now if I could." She and Shawn looked at each other and he muttered, "She's good."

Late one afternoon we embarked on a sunset and snorkelling tour on a Calabaza catamaran. Snorkelling together was a novel experience for us and Sara's excitement was infectious.

When it was time to enter the water, I admitted to her that I wasn't a confident swimmer and opted for a buoyant noodle. Surprisingly, Sara said that she wasn't either and also grabbed one. As I slipped into the water, she guided me towards large sea turtles, rays and a huge tarpon. It was a lovely choreographed snorkel together. During our sail back, the promised sunset was dazzling and the skies surprised us all by showering us with rain that turned into a double rainbow. Nonchalantly, Captain Chad stated. "It's the Caribbean, we get rainbows every week."

Sara and I were both fuelled by rum punches at this point and she replied, "It's f***** magical".

EARLY MORNINGS, I would work on my laptop, sipping tea, when Sara's sleepy "Morning, Mum" announced her arrival on the balcony to watch the sunrise. Despite my attempts to get back to work, Sara urged me to join her outside. We would talk about our plans for the day or simply sit in companionable silence. Those quiet moments never lasted long, since we both love to talk.

After dinner one night, I was weary and ready for bed when Sara asked if I wanted to go to the beach and look at the stars. Squashing my exhaustion, I said "Absolutely!" with no hesitation. The stars above were waiting and it seemed as if I had some lucky ones to count.

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