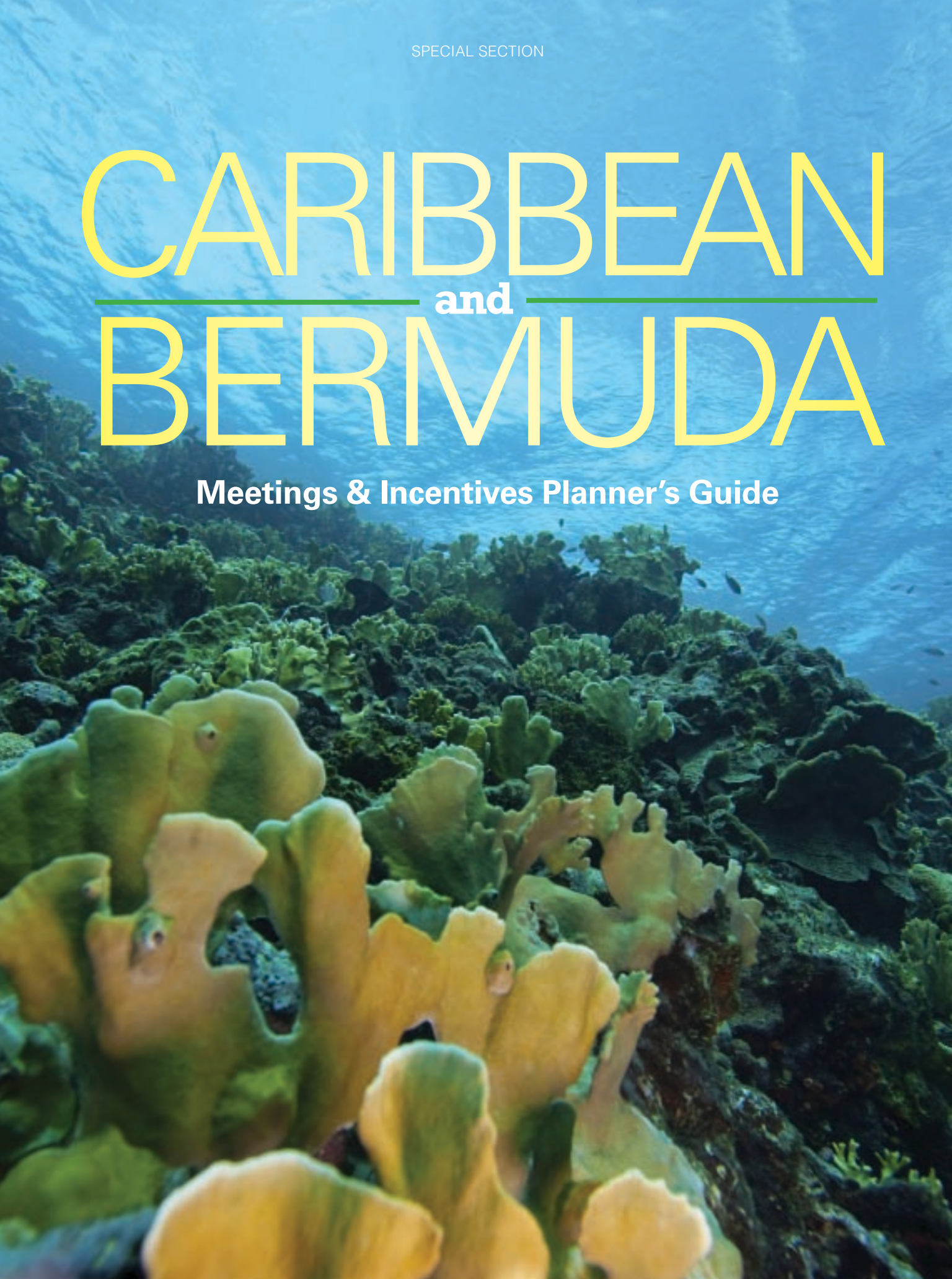


SPECIAL SECTION

CARIBBEAN and BERMUDA

Meetings & Incentives Planner's Guide



Tropical RETREATS



The Caribbean and Bermuda boast new resorts, increased air service, and island appeal — all priced to fit meeting budgets for 2010 and beyond.

—BY CARA CLINTON

It's amazing how eager meeting delegates become when sessions are held in sunlit boardrooms and grand receptions spill out onto lush, tropical lawns. An alluring combination of warm temperatures, stun-

ning scenery, and state-of-the-art meeting space keeps the Caribbean and Bermuda in high demand among convening groups—if the price is right.

In many cases, it is. Several destinations, hotels, and tour operators are offering special group rates and packages for 2010 and 2011 to cater to those seeking greater value in their meeting and incentive itineraries. "Group requests and bookings have increased significantly over a year ago, but companies are more concerned about pricing and

value than ever before," says Gus Tejeda, vice president of group sales at Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas. "They are looking for the best deal that meets their budget."

The best part: those deals don't necessarily come at a compromise. Many of the destinations extending group offers are busy adding new convention centers, resorts, and amenities, while their existing hotels upgrade their meeting spaces and guest rooms.

In Aruba, "hotels are committed to the groups market," says Jim Hepple, president

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and CEO of the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association (AHATA). "They are aiming to have 20 percent of their business come from groups, and are making every effort to ensure that their properties meet group needs."

Aruba hotels like the Hyatt Regency are living up to that goal, according to Beverly Read, sales director at EGENCIA Meetings & Incentives, an Expedia, Inc. company. Furthermore, she says, "the destination is unique and has a diverse culture, and the weather is practically guaranteed to be great based on the geographic location"—all selling points for the 100-person meeting she planned on the island in February.

The same can be said for many of the Caribbean's islands in the sun, which also boast increased air service and convenient proximity to East Coast cities in the U.S. It's enough to make planners think twice before ruling out paradise in the near future.

ABSOLUTE VALUE

Think fast! Planners looking to book a 2010 meeting in the Caribbean can take advantage of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) group rewards program—but hurry, it only runs through the end of June. The program includes a credit of up to \$45 per person toward group transfers booked through one of six authorized DMCs. Booking is for 40 to 200 persons, with a four-night minimum. Luckily, the USVI just made it quicker to submit group requests and plan events on its newly revamped website, www.visitusvi.com.

Planners can also cash in on various deals when they book by December 31, 2010. Palace Resorts, with

all-inclusive properties throughout Mexico and the Dominican Republic, has launched a new group program featuring up to \$1,500 in spa and golf credits as well as other amenities. The promotion applies to travel for the remainder of 2010 and 2011 with a minimum five-night stay.

Hilton Worldwide is extending a Book Now & Save promotion for its Caribbean hotels, including sites in Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, the Bahamas, and more. Groups that book and stay at participating properties can choose from incentives like a complimentary room for every 35 paid rooms, 25 percent allowable attrition, and double Hilton HHonors base points for attendees. The number of incentives earned increases with the number of paid group room nights, starting at 50.

Attendance-driven incentive promotions such as this are available across the Caribbean. The most requested group offers at the Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas, are the hotel's Unprecedented Offers, says Tejeda, where "the larger the group, the greater the benefits." In Jamaica, Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort, Spa & Conference Center and Sunset Beach Resort, Spa & Waterpark announced a Sunset Resorts Group Perks Program, where groups that book more room nights earn more perks. And the Be Creative package at the Rio Mar Beach Resort &

Spa - A Wyndham Grand Resort in Puerto Rico also allows planners to customize their own concessions program, choosing from a 10-percent discount on catered food and beverage, a one-hour welcome reception, and one complimentary room per every 35 paid rooms.

Elsewhere in Puerto Rico, the Ritz-Carlton San Juan Hotel & Casino has 2010 rates starting at \$159USD and a Meetings Within Reach package featuring a \$100USD daily hotel credit, a teambuilding activity, free Internet, and suite upgrades. The luxurious El Convento, a converted convent in Old San Juan, also has special group room rates starting at \$130 as well as a Corporate All Day Meeting package for \$30 a person, per day. And the Verdanza Hotel, San Juan's only independent full-service hotel, offers a group package, free add-ons, and a planner's reward program for groups with minimum revenue of \$15,000.

The Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino, the Aruba Renaissance Resort & Casino, and the Radisson Aruba are all offering a wide range of concessions for meetings booked in 2010 and actualized in 2010 or 2011. The Radisson concessions apply to groups with at least 15 rooms per night and a three-night minimum stay, while the other two properties are targeting groups with at least 50 cumulative room nights. Groups that book at the Westin Aruba by December 17, 2010 will receive a 4-percent credit off the master account and a signing bonus of up to 100,000 Starpoints.

At the 50-acre Elbow Beach resort in Bermuda, "the value is in exceptional public spaces/venues and the service," says Danielle Doyle, events manager at the Boston-based Castle Group. That value will be enhanced later this year when the





property completes a series of upgrades including the addition of a business center and complete renovation of the Bermuda Room, one of four on-site meeting rooms. The Castle Group managed an event at Elbow Beach in August 2007 and will bring an incentive group to the resort this October. "The director of sales is fantastic to work with, very accommodating and open to getting creative during negotiations to help secure the best possible value for groups," says Doyle.

MEET MARKETS

Besides offering enticing deals, many Caribbean destinations are welcoming fresh convention facilities and hotel meeting space. In June, attendees at the 10th annual Jamaica Meetings Expo (JAMEX) at the Ritz-Carlton Golf & Spa Resort will get a preview of Jamaica's new multi-million dollar Montego Bay Convention Centre, set to open in January 2011. The facility will accommodate groups of up to 6,000, touting more than 50,000 square feet of exhibition space, more than 20,000 square feet for banquets, and 11,000 square feet of meeting space.

"The development of the Montego Bay Convention Centre will boost Jamaica's position as a meetings mecca for convention groups," says Marcia Bullock, the Jamaica Tourist Board's regional director, groups and conventions. "The Centre will be located in close proximity to five major hotels, duty-free shopping, attractions, and some of the best golf in Jamaica."

Meanwhile, development is under way in the District, anchored by Puerto Rico's 5-year-old, 580,000-square foot convention center—the largest facility of its kind in the Caribbean. The District will include three hotels, office and retail space, restaurants, and entertainment complexes. The 503-key Sheraton Puerto Rico Convention Center Hotel opened here in November 2009 with 35,000

square feet of meeting space, including a 16,300-square-foot ballroom divisible into eight rooms, a 7,700-square-foot ballroom, a casino, and flexible outdoor function areas. Still to come within the District are two hotels, a 300-room Marriott Courtyard Convention District Hotel, and a 252-room Aloft hotel, both set for completion in 2012. The Aloft, an extension of the main Sheraton property, will feature 16,000 square feet of commercial space.

Development in Puerto Rico doesn't stop there. The five-star Bahía Beach, St. Regis Resort is slated to open later this year in Rio Grande with 139 suites, more than 5,000 square feet of meeting space, a 10,000-square-foot Rémede Spa, a Trent Jones Jr. Golf Course, and a Jean Georges restaurant. Puerto Rico's first W property, W Retreat & Spa - Vieques Island, opened in April 2010 following a \$137 million redesign project. The 156-room property offers 3,800 square feet of meeting space for corporate retreats and small meetings. And in the Condado area, the 305-room Condado Vanderbilt Hotel, scheduled to open in November, will feature 15,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

Bermuda welcomed its first new resort in nearly four decades, Tucker's Point Hotel & Spa, in spring 2009. Ideally suited for top-tier incentive programs, the 200-acre luxury resort, private club, and residential community sits above Castle Harbour and offers a 5,000-square-foot conference center and two ballrooms (2,700 square



Eco Explorations

On St. Thomas, Sharlene Brenkus, director of sales and marketing at the Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort and Spa, has partnered with Virgin Islands Eco Tours to design "an easy and fun way to have group participants and leisure guests contribute to the environment," explains Brenkus. New Voluntourism Excursions, priced at \$79 per person, start at Frenchtown Marina, where guests take a 20-minute kayak ride to the previously inaccessible ruins on Hassel Island.

Guests also visit the site of Creque Marine Railway, one of the earliest steam-powered marine railways in the Western Hemisphere; don leather gloves to collect flotsam from the beach; trim bushes along the hiking trails; and take a swim at a secluded beach. As part of the package, participants receive a complimentary annual membership to the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park and St. Thomas Historical Trust.

feet and 560 square feet).

Another first—the world's premier "ultimate all-inclusive" Hard Rock Hotel & Casino—has opened in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Moon Palace Casino, Golf & Spa Resort was fully converted to create the 1,790-room Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana, a fusion between Palace Resorts and Hard Rock International. The new property gives groups 65,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space equipped with state-of-the-art technology, for everything from intimate events to large-scale musical performances. It joins other local meeting resorts like the Meliá Caribe Tropical All Inclusive Beach & Golf Resort, which holds up to 1,000 guests in its banquet halls, amphitheaters, and garden and beach area. The resort is part of the Sol Meliá international chain, whose brands include Gran Meliá, Meliá



Take a Hike

Caribbean destinations like Grenada and Aruba are offering new or improved options for delegates wishing to explore the landscape.

In addition to traditional hikes to Grand Etang, Seven Sisters Waterfall, Mt. Qua Qua, and Concord Waterfall, visitors to Grenada can now visit the Morne Longue Fedon Camp Eco-Tourism attraction. Funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, the camp is structured to restore livelihoods in a post-Hurricanes Ivan and Emily context. The new trail allows visitors to experience a range of birds and monkeys in their natural habitat and take in views of the Eastern seascape and the ruins of Fedon Camp.

In Aruba, the government-funded Arikok National Park focuses on the island's geography and culture. Visitors can check out the interpretive center or take a guided hiking tour for a different perspective on the area's flora and fauna. "The park has become quite popular with groups, as it showcases 'natural Aruba,'" says Jim Hepple, president and CEO of the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association (AHATA). It also boasts a scenic hilltop, a limestone cave, a natural pool, and a white sand beach.

Hotels & Resorts, Sol Hotels, and Sol Meliá Vacations Club.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Center has undergone a multi-million-dollar makeover. The Port of Spain hotel now includes 418 newly renovated guest rooms, a new 1,400-square-foot executive lounge, a 24-hour business center, and more. Last year, the hotel hosted two major global meetings—the Fifth Summit of the Americas, including President Obama, and the Commonwealth Heads of Government, which Queen Elizabeth II attended. The destination's largest amount of meeting space is at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad, with more than 43,000 square feet of versatile function space including the 16,000-square-foot Regency Ballroom. The property can host up to 2,500 guests.

The most exciting news at Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa in St. Thomas, USVI is that as of July 1, 2010, it will become the only 100-percent, all-



Inclusive resort in St. Thomas. "We are genuinely excited and looking forward to what this change will bring to the resort and to our guests and partners," says Sharlene Brenkus, director of sales & marketing at the Wyndham. "The focus and responsibility of a true All-Inclusive Resort is to provide an all-encompassing guest experience, which includes activities, entertainment, guest rooms, and great service."

EASY ACCESS

The Caribbean is known for its easy-to-reach destinations. Heavy airlift from the mainland is a huge draw for the U.S. Virgin

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Islands, notes Brenkus. “The other big bonus is that as a U.S. territory, passports are not required”—a perk her islands share with Puerto Rico, says Brenkus. “It doesn’t get easier than that when considering a unique and exotic Caribbean getaway.”

Meeting hotspots in the Caribbean are only getting easier to reach, as they respond to heavy passenger traffic. Lynden Pindling International Airport (LPIA), the largest airport in the Bahamas, is undergoing a major three-phase expansion. The first phase, a 247,000-square-foot terminal and pier for U.S. departures, is slated for 2011. The second two phases, to be completed in 2012 and 2013, entail a complete renovation of the current U.S. terminal, the addition of a departures terminal for domestic and international passengers, and a new terminal exclusively for domestic arrivals.

Several airlines are also expanding their service to the Caribbean region. American Airlines recently added daily flights to Puerto Rico from Boston, Chicago, and Washington/Dulles and an additional weekly flight to Los Angeles. Spirit Airlines, JetBlue, Insel Air, American Eagle, and Virgin Atlantic have also increased service to Puerto Rico.

Last year, American Airlines, US Airways, and Delta Airlines increased nonstop service to the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Croix and St. Thomas. American added

flights between Miami and St. Croix; US Airways announced new, weekly non-stop service from Boston’s Logan International Airport to St. Thomas’ Cyril E. King Airport; and Delta increased service between Atlanta and St. Croix, Atlanta and St. Thomas, and New York and St. Thomas. Meanwhile, next month, Delta will add direct service between New York and Grenada, one of the three Spice Islands, with two weekly flights expected to depart from John F. Kennedy Airport.

LEISURE PURSUITS

With five-star restaurants, abundant nightlife, golf, and first-class spas, the Caribbean and Bermuda don’t lack for downtime options.

St. John, USVI has the perfect answer to a long day of meetings: the Drift Away Day Spa, which opened last year. The spa offers an array of soothing treatments, and is designed to offer guests all the luxuries associated with destination spas at a price range within reach.

In Aruba, meeting-goers will find ongoing development in Palm Beach, where high-rise hotels continue to debut and the new Palm Beach Plaza opened last month. Boasting nearly 50,000 square feet in four buildings, it comprises shopping, entertainment venues, and seven restaurants—all within walking distance of area hotels.

Aruba’s downtown is also getting a facelift, says Hepple of AHATA. “The government is investing in substantially upgrading the environment down there, and retail is matching that by providing upgrades.”

Furthermore, Aruba is home to “a great selection of restaurants,” says Read of EGENCIA. The group she managed in February dined at Papiamento Restaurant, which offers a Palm Terrace for small gatherings of up to 50 and a larger pool area that can seat 150.

Dining options also abound in St. Martin, where the cuisine ranges from traditional French to spicy Creole. Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino—the



island’s largest property with 537 rooms and more than 25,000 square feet of meeting space—is inviting groups to “take a bite out of St. Maarten.” Its new Bon Appétit at Maho Beach promotion, valid for travel booked by December 18, 2010 and actualized through January 31, 2012, allows groups to earn up to 40 percent off room-only stays, plus a 15-percent discount at seven restaurants in the Maho Village. And at the Radisson St. Martin, guests can indulge in distinctive cuisine prepared masterfully by onsite chefs. Diners can immerse themselves in gourmet French-Caribbean fare at the resort’s seaside C Le Restaurant, which is also an upscale lounge. For the casual guest, small plates and tapas or a light poolside lunch are good choices.

Of course, the Caribbean Sea is home to some of the world’s premier snorkeling and scuba diving sites, like Cozumel’s National Marine Park. Scuba Du Reef Snorkeling Tours is among the operators that give guided reef tours, which can be arranged at the area’s major meeting hotels like the 220-room Presidente InterContinental Cozumel Resort & Spa.

Annual festivals also take center stage in destinations like Trinidad and Tobago. The area’s two-day Carnival is held annually on the Monday and Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday and features diverse music and elaborate costumes. Tobago Heritage Festival, which occurs from mid July to early August, is a two-week celebration including song and dance productions, feasts and more.

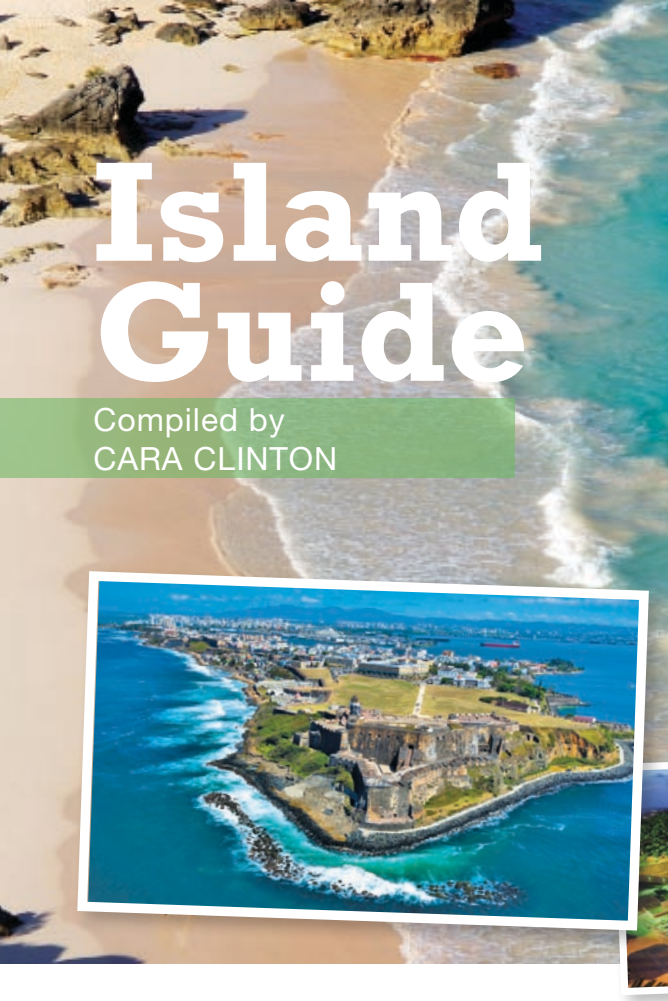
Whether it’s that island heritage or the wealth of amenities, attractions, and facilities throughout the region, there is, indeed, a lot worth celebrating in the Caribbean and Bermuda. ■

View from Above

Adventure-seekers can spend their free time swinging through the trees Tarzan-style with Rainforest Trams, offering full immersion into St. Lucia’s rainforest. Groups can choose from five tours. The newest option, the three-hour Adrena Line zip line tour, begins with a short hike through the forest and quickly sends guests zipping up through the canopy from tree to tree and rappelling back down.

The Tranopy Tour is a slower, four-hour zip line experience gliding from one tree platform to another, followed by a hike and gondola ride back to base camp. Open-air gondolas transport guests past vivid rainforest trees, flowers, and birds in the Aerial Tram ride, which is two hours in length.

Those who wish to keep both feet on the ground can still partake in one of two hikes, a bird-watching hike guided by naturalists or a trek on the scenic Jacquot trail, which runs through the heart of the rainforest.



CARIBBEAN BERMUDA



Island Guide

Compiled by
CARA CLINTON



ANGUILLA

Known for its five-star resorts, the welcoming British West Indies island also satisfies with more than 70 dining experiences. Anguilla recently reopened its first and only golf course, the Temenos Golf Course, a \$50 million creation of Greg Norman.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Antigua's coral reef attracts snorkelers and scuba divers from all over the world, and Barbuda is home to one of the region's most significant bird sanctuaries.

ARUBA, BONAIRE, CURACAO

The ABC islands make their differences known. Travelers can head to Aruba for miles of beaches, and the glamorous can take in casinos and shopping. Bonaire's large national park and the Hato Caves in Curacao are true natural wonders.



BAHAMAS

More than 700 islands, each with their own spirit, draw lovers of nightspots and enticing beaches with crystal-clear water. Lynden Pindling International Airport (LPIA), the Bahamas' largest airport, is undergoing a major expansion to cater to increased U.S. traffic, with completion set for 2013.

BARBADOS

Although the island—known for its white sand beaches—is relatively flat, the North coast's coral and sandstone cliffs are sights to be seen.

BERMUDA

The temperate climate reels in lovers of sailing, fishing, horseback riding, and golf to this Caribbean getaway, a convenient trip from the East Coast. Last year, Bermuda welcomed its first new resort in nearly four decades, the 200-acre Tucker's Point Hotel & Spa.

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

An appealing experience of scenery and water activities, the British Virgin Islands are accommodating and diverse.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Located just over an hour from Miami, world-class hotels and underwater sports put a



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spotlight on the island. Two dive resorts on Grand Cayman—Cobalt Coast and Compass Point—recently became Green Globe Certified after participating in the Cayman Islands Environmental Project for the Tourism Sector (CEPTS).

COZUMEL

Famous for its coral reef, a national park and ecological reserve strengthen the exotic locale's harmony with nature. Many hotels are refreshing their business offerings and dedicating new facilities to meeting and incentive groups.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The beaches and stand-out shopping take up the day, while diverse cuisine, and thrilling casinos and clubs rule the night. Punta Cana has welcomed the premier "ultimate all-inclusive" Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, a 1,790-room property with 65,000 square feet of meeting space.

GRENADA

The quiet island attracts hikers and sightseers to its visual landscape of rich mountains, waterfalls, and historical sites.

JAMAICA

The regal island promises high-end resorts and

golfing, as well as an abundance of cultural and natural attractions. The new, multi-million dollar Montego Bay Convention Centre is set to open in January 2011.

MARTINIQUE

The French-Caribbean island is a cove for scenic, artistic, and historic exploration.

PUERTO RICO

White sand beaches, golf, and tennis call out to visitors, and Puerto Rico's lush rainforest and historic significance enrich their stay. Development is underway to add two hotels, retail, restaurants, and entertainment to the District, anchored by the island's 5-year-old convention center.

ST. KITTS & NEVIS

The duo is a tropical paradise, highlighted by a dormant volcano on St. Kitts and stunning wildlife and flora on Nevis.

ST. LUCIA

The island of St. Lucia is as varied in its draws—from deep sea fishing and snorkeling to golf and entertainment—as it is in its physical makeup. Its high mountains and volcanoes beautifully combine with forests, lush greenery, and enticing beaches.

ST. MAARTEN/ST. MARTIN

Gourmet restaurants are the toast of the Dutch-French island, which is also dotted with luxurious hotels and casinos.

GRENADINE ISLANDS

Sailing and yachting lure delegates to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Adams Bay is tucked away on Bequia, the largest Grenadine island.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The famed Carnival and other festive culture and nightlife top off a trip to the multiethnic island chain, an ideal spot for diving and ecotours. The 418-room Hilton Trinidad and Conference Center has undergone a multi-million-dollar makeover.

TURKS AND CAICOS

Known for its stretches of beach and water activities, Turks and Caicos' elegant hotels and spas complete the tranquil atmosphere.

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

The diverse St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John's varied landscapes, activities, and cuisine merge with an American influence. Major airlines increased air service to the islands last year to cater to U.S. travelers. ■