

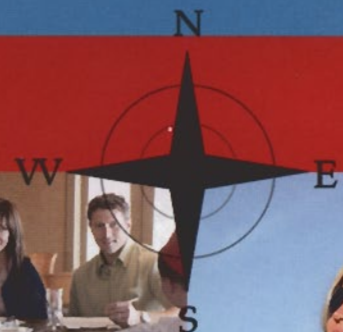
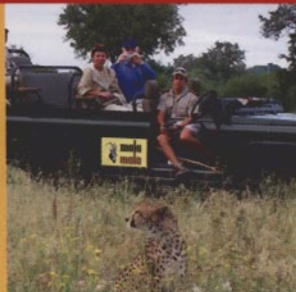
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a wild, rugged beauty

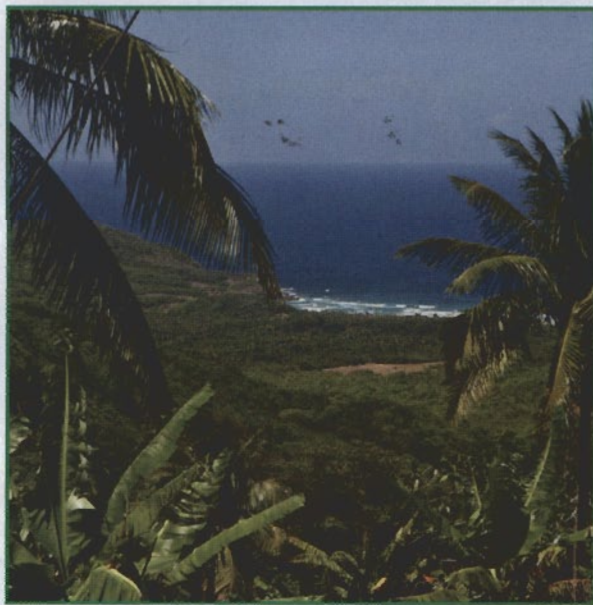
ST. LUCIA'S VITALITY EXTENDS FROM ITS RAW NATURE TO ITS SMALL TOWNS

If your clients are looking for a well-manicured Caribbean haven with lawns neatly edged, St. Lucia is not for them. A Windward Island in the Lesser Antilles, St. Lucia expresses a wild, rugged beauty that seems to channel the residual volcanic force that pushed its majestic Pitons up out of the sea. It's a vital landscape that has what Dylan Thomas called, "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." St. Lucia's dramatic vistas give the island a perpetual aura of virgin discovery. Though it has such beaches as Reduit Beach, Jalousie Beach and Anse Chastanet, it's not just a fly-and-flop scene. You can do that, but there's too much to do, and the raw beauty of the place speaks much more to an inspired serenity than to mere relaxation.

The Pitons, two volcanic peaks on the island's southwestern shore, give it a skyline from the sea that compares even with Bora Bora's jaggedly beautiful profile. The Pitons are the central image in the new logo recently launched by St. Lucia's Ministry of Tourism as part of its new brand. The value pillars in the brand target what St. Lucian officials call the "discovery traveler." As Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Sen. Allen Chastanet says, discovery travelers see the island's "limited air access as making it off-the-beaten-track." St. Lucia's lack of development makes it a "boutique island," and these travelers would see its low profile as bestowing upon it a "best-kept secret" allure.

The 24 suites offered by Jade Mountain (www.jademountain.com), a "resort within" the Anse Chastanet Resort (www.ansechastanet.com), have guests going into their suites for days at a time without coming out. Who can blame them? The spaciousness of each suite is brought to near infinity by the fact that the fourth walls are entirely missing so that each suite's large infinity-edged pool seems to float somewhere between the bed, and the sea and the Pitons beyond. The suites are priced at \$1,100; \$1,450; \$1,650; and \$1,950 through April 15. Low-season prices range from \$850 to \$1,650.

Ladera (www.ladera.com) presents a slightly more romantic hideaway and a great kitchen as well. Ladera's six villas and 26 suites are situated at 1,100 feet above the sea and port town of Soufrière. Ladera's suites also forego that unnecessary fourth wall, allowing guests in their ensuite, open-air Jacuzzis to view the Pitons and the coastline below. Though still targeting a high-end client, Ladera's prices are lower than Jade Mountain's. Ladera's "Great Escape" package, for instance, valid through April 30, includes three nights in a one-bedroom Gros Piton Suite, drinks, all meals, massages, transfers and taxes. The all-inclusive rate is \$3,000, based on double occupancy.



ST. LUCIA'S DRAMATIC VISTAS GIVE THE ISLAND A PERPETUAL AURA OF VIRGIN DISCOVERY.

Cap Maison (www.capmaison.com), a luxury residence-style boutique in Rodney Bay, opened in late 2008 with 50 rooms, 22 private residences, villa suites, studio suites and rooms. The Landings St. Lucia (www.rockresorts.com), a RockResort, opened in late 2007 on the northern coast. It unveiled its Phase Two last December, incorporating 60 additional one-, two-, and three-bedroom villa suites, and bringing the suite count to 122. Each accommodation offers a kitchen and two large balconies or a landscaped terrace; many feature heated, jetted plunge pools. The all-suite resort offers a private yacht harbor, three pools, two tennis courts, a spa and more. The Landings is opening in four phases and will have 231 suites when complete in 2010. The "Invest in Yourself" deal provides \$1,000 in resort credit for travelers who book a five-night stay through April 30.

St. Lucia's Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort (www.eliteislandresorts.com) is located on 56 acres on the island's northwest point. The resort recently debuted 12 new 1,570-square-foot Hibiscus Suites along with 42 new luxury 1,100-square-foot Anthurium Lily Suites. St. Lucia is home to two properties in the Elite Islands' collection. The 76-room Village Inn & Spa, near Rodney Bay Village, is a private haven, separate from the village's nightlife, shopping and other entertainment, but still easily within reach of these attractions.

Situated on four acres overlooking Bonaire Bay,

Calabash Cove Resort & Spa (www.calabashcove.com) opened last November on the northwest coast. The 26-suite, five-star boutique comprises Water's Edge Cottages and Manor House Suites, each with ocean views.

About 275,000 visitors per year come to St. Lucia. Though the island has beaches, it's known more for its lush interior, quality lodging and a bounty of water-based and land-based activities. Your clients can choose from 29 miles of rainforest trails. The Forest & Lands Department offers guided tours for all levels of experience. You can even climb the Pitons (not for amateurs), which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004.

Clients can also drive into an active volcano near Soufrière, which had been the French capital of the island, starting in 1746. At the nearby volcano, some people allow the hot sulfuric waters to run over them and to cover themselves in the hot mud that bubbles up out of hissing, gasping holes. In southwestern St. Lucia, they can also renew themselves at the Diamond Waterfalls, which spill out of several sulfuric springs. Nearby botanical gardens circle the ruins of an 18th-century estate. Tell your clients to catch the Friday Fish Fry on Friday nights at Anse La Raye, just north of Soufrière.

Clients can explore a bit of colonial history and enjoy some sun and sand at Pigeon Island National Park, a 40-acre islet that has been restored and designated a National Landmark. It has two beaches, the remnants of an 18th-century British naval garrison, and Fort Rodney, a fortified hilltop. The Pigeon Island Museum and Interpretive Centre is housed in the former British officers' mess, which has been restored to its 1808 plans.

Barefoot Holidays (758-450-0507, www.barefootholidays.com), Cox & Company (758-452-2211, www.coxshipping.com), Heritage Tours (758-451-6058, www.heritagetourstlucia.org), Solar Tours (758-452-5898, www.solartoursandtravel.com), Spice Travel (758-452-0865, www.casalucia.com) and St. Lucia Reps/Sunlink Tours (758-452-8232, www.sunlinktours.com) all are locally based land operators. Hotel desks also feature tours, but obviously the commission is fatter when you book the tour for clients. Plantation tours conjure up the time when European planters ruled the roost. Some of the best include Fond d'Or Nature Historic Park, Fond Doux Estate and Mourne Coubaril & Marquis Estates.

The island's living culture is best experienced in its towns. Castries, the big town, is home to some 60,000 people, and its market is at its bustling best on Saturdays. Rodney Bay is one of the island's best night spots, mixing both the local crowd and the yachters who cruise out on the town from the marina.

Sailors can hire both bare boat and crewed charters from St. Lucia to the Grenadines and other destinations. The two most popular marinas are Marigot Bay and Rodney Bay. Destination St. Lucia (758-452-8531) and Moorings St. Lucia (758-451-4256) are among the yacht companies.

Local farmers have embraced organic produce just as the island's chefs are on a mission to present local culinary traditions. The quality of produce grown in volcanic soil becomes obvious with the first bite of your salad. Though rooted in French and Creole cooking, St. Lucia's restaurants also draw on Asian, British and American influences.



THE PITONS, TWO VOLCANIC PEAKS ON ST. LUCIA'S SOUTHWESTERN SHORE, ARE THE ISLAND'S CENTRAL IMAGE.

St. Lucia's tourism ministry spent a couple of years creating a "National Vision Plan." The plan is an ambitious and expensive development road map to improve roads, dig tunnels, add cruise infrastructure and more. Originally estimated to take three to five years, the current banking crisis and economic doldrums may slow the plan, but the road map is set and includes the beautification of Castries, the development of village tourism emphasizing culture, and the addition of more ferry service connecting points around St. Lucia, and connecting St. Lucia to Barbados and Martinique.

Hotel developments also have carved themselves an ambitious set of challenges. In 2010, The Tides (www.thetidesresorts.com) will reopen The Jalousie Plantation, located on the west coast, as The Tides Sugar Beach after a \$100 million renovation.

Pascal Mahvi, the developer of the Jalousie Plantation Resort & Spa, and hospitality expert Monty Zullo will also develop an exclusive residential resort community in the Val des Pitons, called The Jalousie Enclave (www.jalousie-enclave.lc).

Le Paradis Beach, Golf & Marina Resort (www.leparadisstlucia.com) is a multi-phased luxury residential resort that will feature the Westin Le Paradis St. Lucia Residences, a Greg Norman signature golf course, an internationally branded spa and various other luxury amenities. Phase One is slated to open in December.

St. Lucia has two airports: Hewanorra International in the southern part of the island is served from the mainland U.S., while George F.L. Charles Airport in the northern part of the island near Castries is served from Puerto Rico. Obviously, everyone prefers a direct flight, but if your resort is in the north and you fly into Hewanorra in the south of the island, the roads being what they are, you may find it better to travel via San Juan, Puerto Rico, and avoid a long transfer. American Airlines (800-433-7300), Delta (800-241-4141), US Airways (800-428-4322) and Virgin Atlantic (800-862-8621) all fly into Hewanorra, while American Eagle (800-433-7300) flies into George F.L. Charles Airport. ☉

for more information
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