

INSIDER GUIDE TO SAINT LUCIA

A scenic view of Saint Lucia, showing lush green mountains, palm trees, and a coastal town. The image is the background of the entire page, with a green vertical bar on the left side.

By thinking a little about your holiday destination before you travel, and taking some simple steps when you are there, you can gain so much more from your holiday. You will also be making a positive contribution to the people and the places you visit.

Saint Lucia is part of the Windward Island Chain, a sub-group of islands within the West Indies. The island is 27 miles long and 14 miles wide with a combination of high mountains, lush rainforests, beautiful bays and palm fringed beaches. The two majestic volcanic cones on the Southwest coast, Gros Piton and Petit Piton, make this island truly unique.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Saint Lucia was first inhabited by the peaceful Arawak Indians, but they were conquered by their old enemies, the Caribs. Columbus was the first European to land on the island in 1499. Because of its strategic location in the Caribbean, the French and British fought endlessly for possession of the island. Saint Lucia changed hands 14 times between the two colonial powers before it was finally ceded to the British in 1814. Saint Lucia has been independent since 1979.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ask any Saint Lucian about their heritage and they will tell you about their Creole roots, something they are passionate about preserving. Their ancestors were expert hunters, farmers, fishermen, and

skilled artists. Their primary crops were cassava, yams and sweet potatoes, all of which still play a central role in the island's food. The Amerindians were decimated by the arrival of the Europeans, and only a small number of Saint Lucians can still trace their roots back to this group. Some of the few particular aspects of Amerindian culture that survive include farina and cassava bread, fish-pots and some local craft items. Some villages still practice the ancient art of fishing in dug-out canoes.

DISCOVER THE REAL SAINT LUCIA

The island is small enough to explore in a day but for a more leisurely itinerary we suggest taking two or three days out to discover the real Saint Lucia. Alongside the more popular attractions there are a number of community based tours where you can experience the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of Saint Lucia and learn about traditional Creole practices first-hand. For more information visit www.heritagetoursslucia.org



Saint Lucia has a little bit of everything - great food, beaches, forest, rivers and nightlife. It is the land of the people and the light - it is not fake - it is genuine hospitality.

Valance James, Tours Guide

GET OUT AND ABOUT

Taxis are a popular means of getting around. Drivers are well informed and friendly and are familiar with all points of interest. Before you hire a taxi settle on a price. All authorised taxis have special number plates, powder blue with a TX prefix.

One major road connects all towns and villages; it takes roughly one hour to drive from Vieux Fort to Castries along the east coast road, fifty minutes from Vieux Fort to Soufrière, and forty-five minutes from Soufrière to Castries along the west coast road.

If you fancy renting a car, driving is pretty easy as it is on the left hand side but for more environmentally friendly travel and a bit of an adventure you can always take the bus.

Travelling by local transport is a really fun way to get about and guests usually find that local people show great respect. If you ask people to assist it will be their pleasure. All bus stops have signs and the island is very well serviced. You can get information on bus routes from the Ministry of Transport or ask at your hotel.

With 29 miles of trails through 19,000 acres of rainforest there are some superb walks all over the island. For the more intrepid we recommend climbing Gros Piton.

SOUVENIRS

Saint Lucia has an abundance of spices with more diversity than any other island in the Caribbean. The communities of Soufriere and Choiseul are a great place to buy spices as well as place mats made from straw.

Bagshaw screen printing make wonderful prints, textiles and homeware. Typical wood carvings are available at the market in Castries and Eudovic Art Studio on the Morne.



The art of the people is an expression of the people - if you take something back made by their hands you will have something of your holiday forever.

Jallim Eudovic, Craft maker and artist



Photo: Saint Lucia Tourist Board



FLORA AND FAUNA

Saint Lucia is a rich botanical garden with an astonishing plant biodiversity of over 1300 wild flowering plant species and 150 species of fern. The island has 167 species of birds making it a fantastic destination for bird watching. There are over nine main birding sites and trained guides can help you to see the 6 bird species which are endemic to the island.

ENJOY THE LOCAL FOOD

For a real taste of Saint Lucia visitors should try the many varieties of local dishes including French Creole. Local specialities include the national dish – salt fish and green figs, one pot cooking or boullion with dumplings, plantain, bread fruit, white yam, green banana and dasheen. Stop by roadside kiosks to get a lunchtime roti or pick up the tropical fruits in season – coconut, mangos, watermelon, bananas, oranges – the list goes on...



Cooking in the traditional way with fresh seasonal food is what it is all about.

I am passionate about getting people to eat our amazing local produce.

Robby Skeete, Chef at Robby's Caribbean Pirate Restaurant and bar, Castries

AND RUMS

Saint Lucia is a rum drinking kind of place. You'll see the popular Chairman's Reserve and Bounty rum in supermarkets and shops and most bars serve a mean rum punch.

AND FRUIT JUICES

Many fruits in Saint Lucia have health giving properties. Try fresh juices made from passion fruit, tamarind, golden apple juice, guava, mangos, and lime .

PARTY LIKE A LOCAL

Every Friday night without fail two street parties take place in Saint Lucia. In Gros Islet tourists and locals alike descend onto the streets to eat barbequed food and dance to a mixture of reggae, pop, calypso and more. The party starts at around 9pm and goes on till the early hours.

Whilst further down towards the west coast, a fish fry is held in the pretty fishing village of Anse La Raye. The perfect night out for seafood lovers, who come here to listen to music and sample whatever the fisherman has caught that day.

Another street party can be found on a Saturday night, in the quaint fishing village of Dennery, on the east coast. Delicious freshly caught seafood is on the menu and local music fills the air as you dance to a backdrop of the Caribbean sea.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE...

While the island's azure-blue seas are one of the big draws for holidaymakers, the land itself can become very dry during the dry season, and water is a precious commodity.

You can help to conserve water levels by taking short showers, instead of baths and reusing towels.



LEARN THE LOCAL LINGO!

The official language in Saint Lucia is English. A French based Creole is also spoken, a result of the island's British-French heritage. Making an effort to say a few words in Creole patois will really impress the locals.

You might find the following phrases helpful:

Bonjou

Good morning

Sou plé

Please

Mèsi

Thank you

Padonn

Excuse me/sorry

Sa ka fete?

How are you?

Pappy Show

That's ridiculous! Foolishness or a fool (can be used as an adjective or a noun)

Bondyé

OMG

Sa nou menm

This is posted on every bus stop in Saint Lucia as part of the Piton Beer branding. It loosely means "It is ours."



Photo: Saint Lucia Tourist Board

HELP TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Hotels in Saint Lucia are increasingly environmentally aware, offering internal recycling options and encouraging visitors to keep waste to a minimum, for example through schemes which reduce use of plastic bottles or through reuse of towels. You can also help to do your bit on the island by:

- Re-using a plastic glass, rather than taking a new one for each drink. You can also help by only using straws when totally necessary.
- Taking a reusable shopping bag with you.
- Removing all unnecessary packaging before you leave home
- Be sparing with electricity - remember to switch off lights and air conditioning units when you leave your room, and don't leave the TV on standby
- Re-use your towels and bed linen - by not changing your towels every day, you'll be helping to save water, electricity and chemicals used for laundry.

HELP PROTECT CORAL REEFS

The coral reef around Saint Lucia is suffering from environmental damage. You can help protect it by not buying souvenirs made from corals and other marine species, being careful not to touch the coral whilst snorkeling or diving and choosing boat trips with environmental policies.



Every major community on the island will suffer if the reef is destroyed.

Ricky McDoom, Fisherman

HELP PROTECT TURTLE POPULATIONS

Leatherback turtles nest on the north coast of the island from March to August. You can do your part in helping to protect these species by...

1. Not shining bright lights onto beaches at night. This confuses turtles as they mistake the lights for the moon when making their escape to the sea.
2. During the day relax on your sunbed close to the sea. Turtles use the soft sand at the back of the beach for nesting, and

these nests can be crushed by umbrellas and beds.

3. Many turtles are injured by jet skis and other water sports equipment, so if you plan on having fun in the sea, please drive slowly!

For further information on how to make holidays greener, please visit www.makeholidaysgreener.org.uk



I know of no other place where there is such a wow factor on arrival whether by sea or air - to see the backdrop of mountains and lush vegetation especially when the flamboyant trees are in season.

Joseph Charles, Taxi Driver



SAINT LUCIA
Simply Beautiful



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