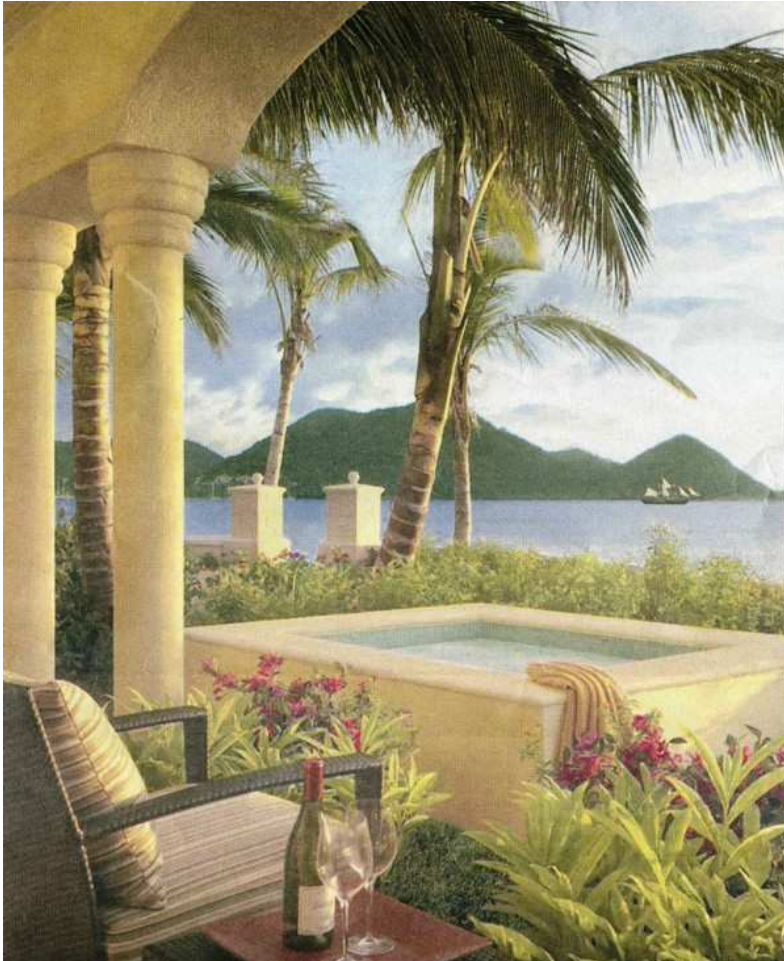




THE SCOTSMAN



# Fast and St Lucia

Fiona Macleod is tempted by a Caribbean profit-sharing holiday villa scheme

Emerging from the grey cocoon of British winter, for a few seconds you carry the sterile, chilly air with you. You're three or four steps down towards the runway before you suddenly realise you are too warm.

Like an intoxicating bath or a good whisky, the Caribbean night seeps over you, instantly relaxing tense muscles and immersing you in a heady perfume of bursting life.

It never dips below 70F, my taxi driver tells me, as we hurtle along streets shored up by ranks of banana trees. The fruit bolsters this island community, and today St Lucia is still one of the leading banana exporters in the Caribbean.

In the 18th century the island became home to colonial struggles between the French and British, eventually becoming British in 1814 after changing hands 14 times. In February 1979 it gained independence and retains a French influence, though English is spoken alongside the local Patois.

Shaped like a mango, St Lucia is the second largest of the Windward Islands on the West Indies' Lesser Antilles between St Vincent and Martinique to the northwest of Barbados, halfway down the chain of the eastern Caribbean archipelago.

Just 27 miles long by 14 miles wide, it has a hilly terrain, the world's only drive-in volcano, sulphur springs and a proliferation of holiday resorts.

Windjammer Resort has all you'd expect of a beach resort - blonde sand and turquoise sea within a gentle stroll, aqua-marine swimming pools, rattan furnished eateries and coconut tree-shaded cocktail bar.

Hibiscus villas offer access to a charming two-tier swimming pool with views over the ocean, and some even have their own balcony with hot tub. It's no wonder holidaymakers here are looking to make their stay a little more permanent.

Increasingly, resorts are creating profit-sharing schemes where you purchase your holiday villa but rent it out most of the year. Such schemes allow the owner to stay in their property for a fixed number of weeks each year and the resort will manage it the rest of the time, finding holiday-making tenants, maintaining it and cutting you a share of the profit.

Despite the worldwide economic downturn, the romance and appeal of the Caribbean seem unshakable.

Resort developers report a few units becoming available again as some in the banking sector find themselves on shaky

ground, but with sales still buoyant, despite the falling value of the pound and US dollar, the investment potential of properties here is not diminishing.

St Lucia is not offering the kind of ostentatious, extravagant luxury that Russian billionaires demand or the architects of the global economic crisis can only dream of from their prison cells (we wish) such as in Grenada or Antigua, but is aiming to offer something different such as quirky features, rooftop or infinity swimming pools, Moroccan architectural chic, or just plain family friendliness to attract clientele.

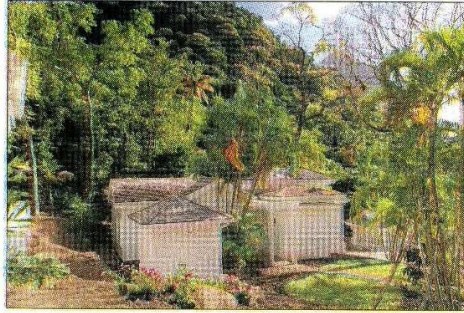
Convenience is crucial to this small island's appeal and it can be reached in seven hours directly from the UK. Virgin Atlantic offers direct flights from London Gatwick.

BA also offers direct flights, and the combination of high year-round temperatures and English being spoken ensure St Lucia ticks many holidaymakers' checklist of the ideal destination.

The Landings resort, near Rodney Bay on the north west of the island, offers St Lucia's first residential private yacht harbour and has 50 berths.

Opened in 2007, this resort is built on reclaimed land offering an unusual

**Opposite: The Landings St Lucia, main, lower and middle; Jalousie, which will become a Tides Sugar Beach resort after a revamp, top and, this page, right; Cover: The Landings**



## FACTS

- The official currency is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar, you can use US dollars but you'll get a better exchange rate on EC dollars, plus many shops offer cheaper prices for EC.
- Temperatures never dip below 70F and the wet season stretches from June to December.
- The Landings, [www.thelandingsstlucia.com](http://www.thelandingsstlucia.com); e-mail [info@thelandingsstlucia.com](mailto:info@thelandingsstlucia.com); sales line 0845 217 7851
- Sugar Beach, [www.sugarbeachvillas.com](http://www.sugarbeachvillas.com) or call 020 88124773 currently known as Jalousie Plantation [www.thejalousieplantation.com](http://www.thejalousieplantation.com); [reservations@thejalousieplantation.com](mailto:reservations@thejalousieplantation.com).

- [thejalousieplantation.com](http://thejalousieplantation.com).
- St Lucia Tourist Board, 020 7341 7000 [stlbinfo@stluciauk.org](mailto:stlbinfo@stluciauk.org) [www.stlucia.org](http://www.stlucia.org).
- St Lucia is four hours behind GMT, valid passports must be carried by all visitors except US and Canadian citizens. Identity visas not necessary for citizens of the US or the commonwealth.
- High season 20 December to 5 January, mid-December to the end of April and the Easter Jazz festival is in the first ten days in May. The majority of visitors are from the UK and North America.

opportunity to buy a freehold Caribbean beachfront property – normally all land within 20 metres of the shore is owned by the government and can only be leased.

Owners also have membership at the St Lucia Golf and Country Club, there is a beach-side restaurant and, of course, space to park the yacht.

Currently phase three properties from one-bedroom at £429,200 to three-bedroom "grande residences" and four-bedroom town houses at over £2 million, will be ready by end of this year or early next year.

Given the propensity for hurricanes and the volcano just up the road, these properties are built to withstand a category four hurricane, with special hurricane glass which can stop a two inch by four-inch projectile flying through the air at 60 miles an hour.

Choose from a beach-side villa with bedroom patio doors opening straight onto your private terrace complete with your own pillar-lined entrance to the sandy shore, or if you want to keep an eye on your pride and joy, opt for a marina-facing, flat-style villa looking out over the yachts.

The Tides Sugar Beach (a reference to the area having once been a sugar plantation) will be the new name for the Jalousie Plantation resort, with a secluded exclusive beach sunk between the two Piton mountains, in one of the world's 174 natural Unesco world heritage sites.

Lord Glenconner, a friend of the late Princess Margaret, was once owner of this site, three miles from the town of Soufriere, 45 minutes from the international Hewanorra airport.

The Tides brand already has resorts on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, on Playa la Ropa on the Mexican Riviera and on Florida's South Beach.

If you buy a villa here, ownership guarantees you a minimum five per cent rental income from the completion of sale to 12 months after the hotel's planned completion in 2011. You will also be entitled to use the villa for four weeks each year.

Rental is split on a revenue basis. 37.5 per cent of room revenue goes to the owners, which offers an unusually good deal compared to the normal cut of the profits deal on offer in the Caribbean.

Three to four-bedroom villas here vary

from US \$2.8-6 million all with varying sizes of pool and furniture is extra

Property values in St Lucia have experienced an annual rise of 15-20 per cent value, but, of course, no-one can predict what will happen in future.

Marco Bonini, managing director of Prestigious Properties in the UK, says: "St Lucia is becoming the lifestyle destination of choice in the Caribbean for those who want a piece of paradise.

"With its superb location, properties are continuing to achieve 15-20 per cent annual appreciation, and with the dollar rate still favourable to British and European buyers, I'm confident that those with intelligent money will recognise Sugar Beach's investment outlook."

Some development owners admit there have been cancellations and people pulling out of deals, but not in large numbers. And that is creating a buyers' market, with resorts not cutting prices of property but offering extras such as personalised butler services, iPod docking stations, personal chef, free activities from scuba diving to watersport lessons, spa treatments and golf club memberships.

Jalousie is currently offering a free wedding package if you stay for seven nights, and in comparison to Barbados, prices on this island are 30-40 per cent cheaper than the equivalent accommodation.

Amy Winehouse might have embarrassed some during her well-documented two month stay here, but not St Lucia's tourism minister. "She raised awareness of St Lucia, and every time there is a picture of her here, she's smiling. There's an automatic halo effect. It's intrigued people what has made her happy," said Allen Chastanet.

Cricketers, footballers, DJs and well-kept UK TV faces have all invested in property on the island, so even in these uncertain financial times, it's unlikely that holidaymakers would ever turn their back on the Caribbean and with a strong North American and British clientele, they seem unwilling to let go of the idea of this group of islands as a paradise.

With St Lucia cunningly fostering its image as a honeymoon destination or that once in a lifetime holiday many take, people still want to splash out on this place with such a romanticism and like, Amy, stay smiling.