

TravelLife

SUMMER 2023

Island Discoveries
Barbados

Making Memories in
Maui

Nashville
Speakeasies

Family Fun
Cruises

Plus

Weddings That
WOW



Beachside Bonding— Bajan Style

Four idyllic days in Barbados proved to be perfect for some mother-daughter time with a side of opulence and laid-back luxury

— By Tammy Cecco - Photos by Mackenzie Cecco

It had been several years since I last visited Barbados and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the infrastructure had continued to develop with sophisticated elegance, but the authentic hospitality I remembered had not been compromised.

On this trip, we had a specific agenda. I was travelling with

my 18-year-old daughter, Mackenzie and we were in search of some quality mother-daughter bonding while indulging in some of the best the island had to offer. From the moment we were greeted by our VIP concierge service and fast-tracked through customs, we entered a realm of discerning excellence.



► On the Water

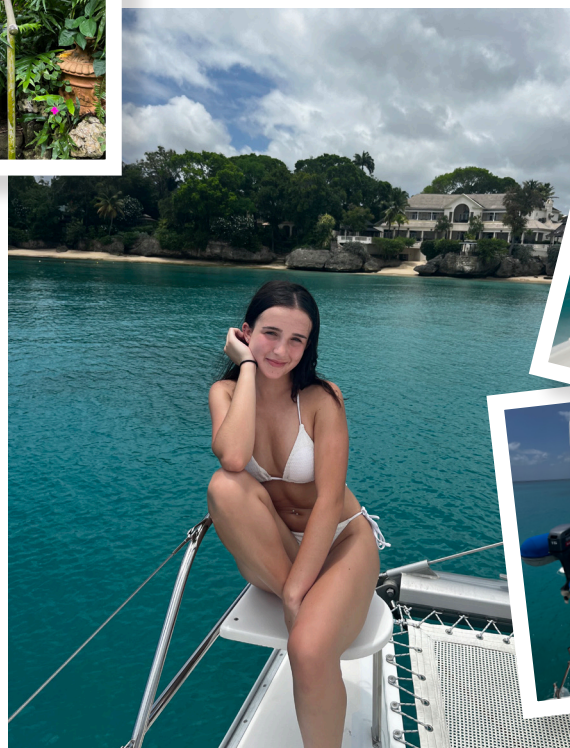
There couldn't be a better way to spend our first day in Barbados than by taking an extraordinary luxury catamaran around the island. The attentive crew of the Calabaza II were our hosts for a day on the water where we snorkelled amongst colourful coral reefs and a kaleidoscope of sea life. After a sumptuous lunch and a little tanning while taking in the gorgeous coastline, a second stop was made to dive in—this time alongside stingrays and turtles. All the while a crew member was by our side to ensure we didn't miss out on any of the undersea beauty around us. sailcalabaza.com

► All About the People

Known for their warm hospitality, Bajans as they affectionately call themselves, are as vibrant and welcoming as the island itself. A unique cultural tapestry influenced by African, European and Indigenous heritage is at the root of a contagious zest for life that lingers in the heart long after you leave. We had arranged for a driver to accompany us on our outings and Russell's genuine kindness and enthusiasm for sharing tidbits about life as a local gave depth to an already enriching experience. He was just one of many locals who made our visit so memorable.



a nod to Russell who schooled us on life in Barbados and had a #1 playlist for our island outings.



► Rum: A Signature Spirit

No visit to Barbados is complete without tasting some of their quality rum products, and while brands such as Mount Gay might be more internationally known, there are several independent distilleries worth a visit. We opted to indulge in the rich flavours and storied history of Barbadian rum with a tasting tour of St. Nicholas Abbey, one of the island's oldest surviving plantations. There we were able to explore the historic distillery and plantation grounds dating back to the 17th century which offered a fascinating glimpse into Barbados' colonial past. Knowledgeable tour guides captivated us with stories of past owners and occupants while maintaining a deep respect for the history and enduring legacy of the individuals who were enslaved.

The current owners of St. Nicholas, the Warren family share their secrets of the distillation process while you get the opportunity to taste the quality craftsmanship of generations. The medium-bodied 18-year (our favourite) is a molasses-based rum taken straight from the barrel and aged at St. Nicholas at bottle strength. Whether it's a more complex aged rum or a modest white, each product is hand-bottled and when purchasing from their rum shop, you can even have your bottle personally engraved as a special souvenir.

stnicholasabbey.com



Beachside and delicious at Calma

► Cuisine From Coast to Coast

Barbados offers a unique fusion of flavours that reflect the island's rich history and cultural diversity. Fresh seafood abounds, as do hearty plates of Caribbean staples. And whether it's an upscale restaurant, lively food market, or beachside shack, any level of foodie in search of a good meal on the island won't be disappointed.



Here are two of our favourite foodie finds:

► **Cocktail Kitchen**, located in the vibrant St. Lawrence Gap area known for its dining and nightlife is where you can eat alongside locals and tourists alike. Chef Damian "Day Day" Leach heads up a delightfully fresh menu that offers generous portions if you're hungry, but is also perfect if you want nibbles and creative cocktails. Try one of the many selections from their small bites or shareables menu, like Breadfruit Nachos or Chilli Lime Shrimp. ckbarbados.com

► **Calma Beach Club**, in the heart of Holetown on the west coast, was an unexpected find. Locally sourced ingredients and barefoot elegance are its claims to fame. Daily caught fish and produce that would be the envy of anyone back home come together in a menu offering island-inspired dishes served up with plenty of beach vibes. Hang out by day or dance under the stars at night—and don't miss one of their decadent dessert cocktails. calmabarbados.com



Cocktail Kitchen



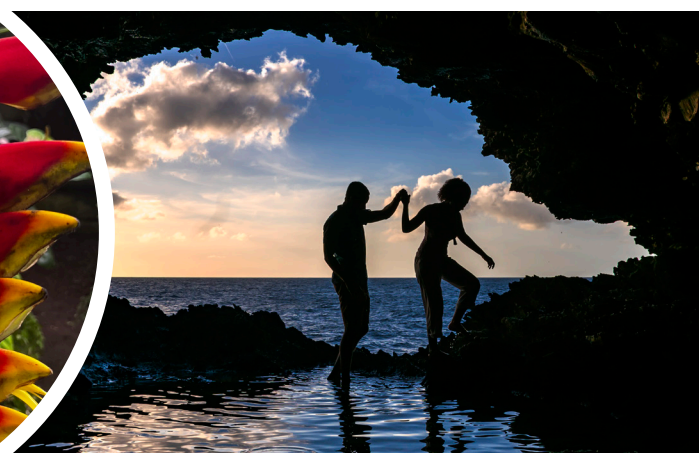
Animal Flower Cave



Hunte's Gardens



Animal Flower Cave restaurant



► Embracing Barbados' Natural Beauty

Our itinerary included stops all over the island, which allowed us to take in the lushness you might miss if you stick to the beaches. If you love tropical flowers, Hunte's Gardens is an oasis nestled in the heart of Barbados in St. Joseph's Parish. Photo opportunities are everywhere as you wander through this enchanting botanical wonderland. Created by legendary horticulturist Anthony Hunte, the gardens are a blend of tropical plants, trickling waterfalls and whimsical sculptures. It's a must-visit for any nature lover but you don't need a green thumb to appreciate the love and care that goes into maintaining this slice of paradise.

hunesgardens-barbados.com

Out and about around the island



Around the island

Our visit to the Animal Flower Cave was another testament that not all beautiful Bajan scenery has to include white sand beaches. On the rugged cliffs of the north coast, the enchanting cave is a natural wonder. The cave and property are owned by the Ward Family whose lineage in Barbados traces back to 1864. The cave's unique name originates from the delicate sea anemones that dot its crystal-clear pools, resembling vibrant flowers. The intricate rock formations majestically towering over crashing waves create a mesmerizing experience. Stunning coastal views create a perfect backdrop for lunch at the onsite restaurant, where fresh fish is caught daily onsite. animalflowercave.com

Where to Stay

The O2 Beach Club Barbados turned out to be the perfect place for a mother-daughter retreat. Luxurious but not pretentious, think Caribbean chic meets modern Miami. From the moment we arrived, the warm and attentive staff made us feel right at home. The rooms were spacious and contemporary and boasted breathtaking ocean views. Being a relatively small property (130 rooms) meant that it was merely steps before you were dipping your toes into turquoise waters. The size of the property packs a lot of punch with amenities that include three pools (two adults only), six dining options (indoor and outdoor) and seven bars including a rooftop deck. Offering an all-inclusive plan with this level of luxury means a hassle-free experience from start to finish and the boutique hotel style guarantees attention to detail and impeccable service.

Enjoy easy-going Bluefin restaurant with its casual Bajan essence, or order poolside from their menu if you can't tear yourself away from your lounge chair. Elements open-air restaurant and bar are at the heart of the action day or night, with live music most evenings. We enjoyed more than one stunning sunset on the rooftop while sipping cocktails and tasting tapas at Brisa lounge. For sophistication and elegance, Oro restaurant on the 9th floor is worth a visit whether you are a hotel guest or not. Experience a delectable blend of European and Caribbean flavours that put a unique twist on classic favourites. We indulged in a perfectly aged Porterhouse and the mouthwatering 48-hour braised lamb shank. Both rivaled any gourmet restaurant at home. With an impressive wine selection, vintage Hollywood vibe complete with baby grand and panoramic views, every aspect of our dining experience was perfection in paradise. o2beachclubbarbados.com





*Mackenzie's
work of art*



*My masterpiece,
inspired by the
Barbados chattel
houses found around
the island.*



*an adult take
on slushies!*

► Exceptional Extras

The O2 philosophy of "Breathe it all in" is reflected in the little extras they can arrange for guests. Oceanside dining takes on a whole new meaning under the stars in their "Beach Bubble" gastronomic adventure, and they are experts at making special occasions sparkle with bespoke events. Mackenzie and I were looking for something fun to do one afternoon and the hotel arranged a Paint and Sip Masterclass with Yasmin from @paintandgroove right on property. As the least artistic in our family initially I felt a little intimidated, but as our laughter filled the air and libations flowed, my creativity blossomed. I think even Mackenzie was impressed with my masterpiece. Thanks Yasmin and O2 for such a delightful experience!

► Serenity Found

As avid spa-goers, Mackenzie and I were seeking a couple of hours of relaxation but were hoping for something representative of our island surroundings. We didn't need to look far. From the moment we walked into Acqua Spa, we felt the elements all around us. Located on the 8th floor, this is the highest spa on the island and floor-to-ceiling windows take full advantage of stellar sea views. Real ocean waves blended with soothing spa sounds and scents, enveloping us like a warm hug. There are plenty of services to choose from, whether a mani-pedi or a unique body ritual.

We took advantage of the fact they have the only Hammam experience on the island which allowed us to have some heartfelt conversation and more laughs. The Bajan Body Blast also left us feeling pampered and lusciously nourished.



"Beyond the grandeur, it was the simple moments like these that made us appreciate that this journey was not just about the destination, but about connecting as mother and daughter on a deeper level."

*Enjoy VIP
escort through
the airport and
relax in the
lounge.*

► The Best for Last

A delightful surprise awaited us on our final night at the hotel—an enchanting encounter with some of nature's magic. As we savoured our last cocktail at Elements bar, immersed in the melodies of the live band, we struck up a conversation with our bartender. He asked if we had ever seen a mother turtle lay her eggs on the beach. We responded that we had not and he mentioned we might still have time. Filled with anticipation, we quietly made our way down to the beach where to our amazement, a majestic turtle was gracefully carrying out the cycle of life. After she carefully covered the eggs with sand, she turned and gently made her way back to the sea. It may not have been a planned part of our itinerary, but it couldn't have been a more perfect and poignant farewell to our four days on this idyllic island.



We may have indulged in some of the luxurious offerings on the island but beyond the grandeur, it was the simple moments like these that made us appreciate that this journey was not just about the destination, but about connecting as mother and daughter on a deeper level.



Curate your own unforgettable visit to Barbados

To ensure you make the most of your time on the island, it's worth engaging a premier concierge service like Blu Isles. From arranging exclusive yacht charters to securing reservations at the most sought-after restaurants, they can ensure every detail is taken care of whether you are travelling with two or two hundred. Elevate your stay with virtually any tailor-made experience you can dream up. After all, their philosophy is "Your dream....our reality".

bluises.com

How to get there?

Take advantage of direct flights with WestJet Toronto-Bridgetown and Air Canada from both Toronto and Montreal.

O2 Beach Club & Spa is part of Ocean Hotels Barbados oceanhotelsbarbados.com. They offer three distinctly different hotel experiences on the south coast.

For more information on Barbados: visitbarbados.org