

Opt for ocean-facing accommodation

The clue is often in a name and the three hotels (I love to move around) that I stayed in, are in the south of the island and known collectively as Ocean Hotels Barbados. The south, I was told, is famous for its surfing, larger public beaches and authentic local culture.

The Rockley

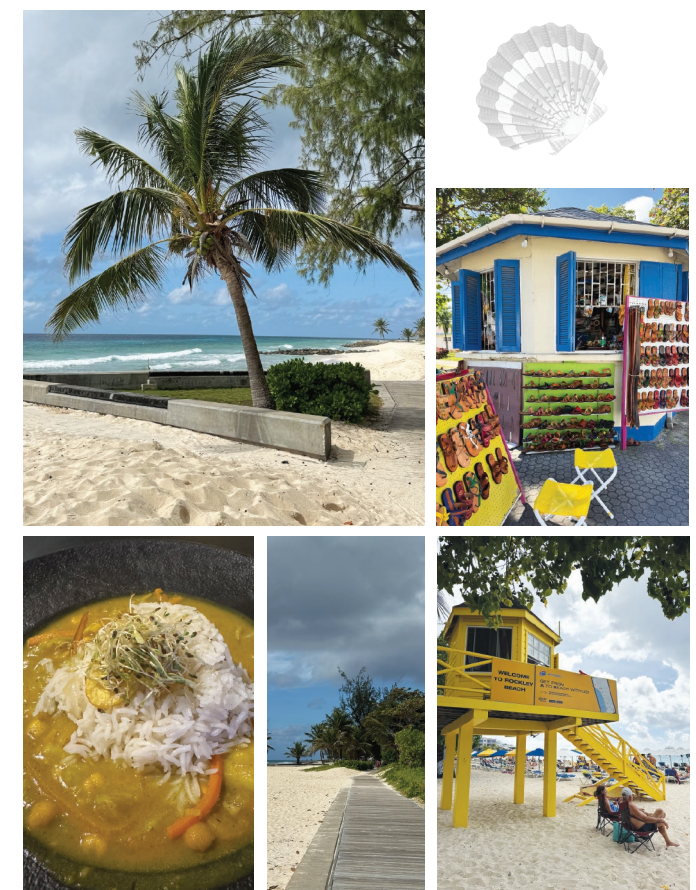
A nod to the local colourful culture is seen everywhere throughout this warm and welcoming hotel, situated a stone's throw from the ocean – which is the backdrop from my balcony. You literally cross the road, past a quaint, locally owned artisan shop and you're on the sand, the ocean at your feet. As you enter reception there's a mural pillar taking centre stage donning local scenes, local artwork on the walls for sale and local sayings such as 'part yah brom?' framed on the walls. I had a one-bedroom suite which had its own kitchenette and lounge, colourful rug on the floor, yet more local artwork on the walls and a cosy feel. The first thing I did was walk the long boardwalk, sparkling ocean on my left and on my right every now and then - cute local eateries, bars and cafes. I dined at the hotel, starting with succulent shrimp with tamarind, followed by the most delicious island vegetable curry - a creamy coconut spiced sauce featuring chickpeas, plantain and local greens, served with fluffy rice and topped with crispy fresh cress, there was karaoke that night, clearly popular with guests and locals alike, which I enjoyed on the sidelines (too shy to sing) with a fiery ginger beer in hand.

Located in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies in the Caribbean, Barbados is one of those places chums have holidayed in, but I hadn't yet been, so when the opportunity arose for me to visit, I was raring to go. Naturally, I always seek out nature, healing, spa, food and hotel hotspots and my trip did not disappoint!

Feeling good with sun,
sea, hikes & healing in

Barbados

By Yasemen Kaner-White





Sea Breeze Beach House

This Caribbean Sea facing resort is much bigger, dressed in aqua blue and crisp white, there's an easy breezy feel throughout. I stayed in the spectacular ocean front junior suite, open plan – always a big plus for me, with a super-sized bed perfectly situated so I could sit in bed and look straight out at the dramatic blue sea. Wooden flooring, driftwood style bedhead, bamboo armchair and a tree trunk shaped glass topped coffee table, added a natural touch to the refreshing whitewashed walls and flashes of colour from local artwork, ample seating encouraged relaxation, from the long comfortable modern white sofa, to the terracotta and turquoise cushions on the balcony reclining rattan chairs. The crisp white bathroom is roomy and the White Company toiletries smelt delicious. I adored the lush gardens which were tastefully lit in the evenings in an array of colour, steel band in the background, the bartender conjured up a local hibiscus infused mocktail (don't miss the cocktail making class with Arden – their resident herbologist, with produce from the garden) which I enjoyed with a starter of seared scallops – Bajan pepper sauce, cauliflower puree and crispy ham, followed by rosemary crusted lamb rack, creamed sweet potato, wilted spinach and mint jus, live piano playing in the background. Water activities are included and I took the opportunity to go out on a hobby cat, spotting turtles as we rode the calm waves then dived in myself. I was really impressed by the Ageless facial I had at Drift Spa, being someone who is really rather picky when it comes to facials, the experience from beginning to end was pure indulgence and the therapist combined with Vivant products – a line created by a doctor and made in small batches in the US, really did deliver soft, illuminated and refreshed skin.



O2 Beach Club & Spa

This chic property is again water facing, so your toes can be in the sand and sea within minutes. I stayed in a one bedroom suite, the colour palette of deep sea blue from the blue foliage framed painting on the wall, to blue scatter cushions on my lengthy cosy stone coloured sofa, to the wavy mixed blue rug on the floor. I had my own kitchenette, and my delightful bedroom, which was separate featured attractive white ceramic textured lamps, blue bed throw, blue shell patterned bolster cushion, and a pale blue scalloped velvet bedhead, my balcony had views over the vibrant orange and pink umbrellas, eye-catching wavy pool (which hosts fun aqua aerobic classes) and out to the sand and sea. Their natural light flooded Acqua Spa is a real treat to visit, I kicked off with a private 'How to make a Body Scrub' session, my therapist who had immense knowledge on body scrub styles around the world to individual ingredient benefits, made the class both enjoyable and informative and I got to take my creation home, next she took me through to a glass walled room, with views of the sea shining in, for a sumptuous HydroHeat Massage – think waterbed comfort, soothing warmth and a massage that soothed any stiffness from late-night typing on my laptop – melt away. The food offerings include delectable dishes such as hummus and colourful purple and orange sweet potato crisps, followed by a coconut shrimp roll – spicy sambal, pickled red onion and mayo aiding to its unctuousness at Blue Fin restaurant – be sure to try the local drinks, I particularly liked the tamarind juice, Brisa is best for tapas style dishes and cocktails, Elements has an extensive buffet plus menu, I really enjoyed the orecchiette al pomodoro alongside the colourful salad that I selected from the salad bar, their pièce de resistance however is Oro restaurant, which is also included for all-inclusive guests at no extra cost and is fine dining with a local twist. My pre-mocktail was called High Society and featured zero proof rum, sorrel syrup, lime juice and bitters – tangy and delicious, I started with the crispy crab fritti which was magnificent, alongside the sweet, crunchy mango slaw and gochujang mayo, for my main I went for the aburi flying fish – flame grilled meaty fish, creamy polenta and chargrilled okra, with notes of coconut and avocado, the dish is an elevated version of this incredibly local dish and doesn't disappoint.

www.oceanhotelsbarbados.com



Nourish your soul with these dishes

Madisson Landis Bistro

The first thing you notice when you approach is that this local restaurant in Rockley is housed in a stunning colonial-style building, a blend of old and new from antiques to a contemporary, well-stocked vibrant bar, the space beckons you in. The lady behind its creation - Danny Rivers-Mitchell is Southern American which shines through in the extensive deep south and Bajan fusion menu. You are spoilt for choice, but my dining companion and I went for some fresh juices - in-season golden apple and in-season green mango, to accompany numerous dishes including 'Nuthin but a fish thang' - flavoursome crisp fish fritters, smoky pickled pineapple and moreish scotch bonnet and lime aioli, tasty 'Forever my deviled' eggs, the 'You waffle me' - crisp to perfection seasoned boneless chicken breast sat on a delightful pumpkin waffle, gingered maple sauce and - could not get enough of them - steamy ginger greens.

www.madisonlandisbistro.com



The Sipping Room

This is certainly a venue to feel the local vibe, there was live jazz music - the singer was fantastic and as I sat at the bar to dine alone, rum sour in-hand - if you are going to drink rum, then Barbados is your best bet, a chatty local and the barman and I had fun discussing life and Bajan culture. The owners are a couple, one from New Jersey and the other Bajan, though he didn't last more than a year in New Jersey, missing the social aspect of Barbados, so she agreed to up sticks and they opened the bar. I started with a generous prawn cocktail, succulent prawns and yummy sauce, followed by the catch of the day; fresh tuna on a bed of perfectly cooked rice and vegetables on the side, with a pot of dipping sauce - excellent.

www.sippingroom246.com

The Atlantis Historic Inn

The views over the ocean here are immense, famous for its authentic Barbadian buffet every Sunday, you are sure to taste local flavour here. I went for a midweek lunch and had a refreshing fresh sorrel juice, followed by the catch of the day - I just could not get enough of the local fresh fish in Barbados - I had mahi mahi blackened with roasted veg, swapped out the basil-whipped mash for some plantain, citrus salsa and lemon and saffron aioli, simply delicious.

www.atlantishotelbarbados.com



Local & Co

This very sweet beach facing restaurant has a chic shop attached selling local artisan products, books on Barbados, jewellery, local herbs and spices and more. We shared some local crisps and chadon beni aioli, catch of the day ceviche with coconut sauce, chili, chadon beni and memorable - want to create at home - pickled aloe vera. Crisp cornmeal coated okra, colourful house pickles - even pickled watermelon featured, mahi & lobster with breadfruit cou cou (similar to mash), buttered delicate purslane and a curried chickpea burger with aubergine chutney, mint aioli, fried onions and pickles, no room for pudding but the mocktails infused with local botanicals were a treat.

www.thelocalbarbados.com



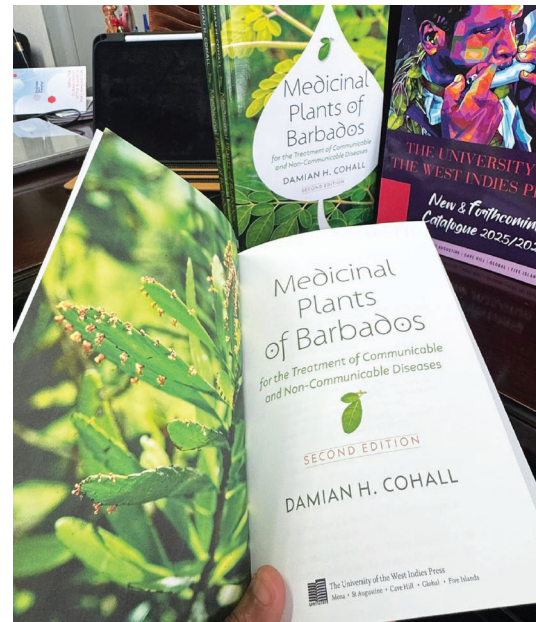
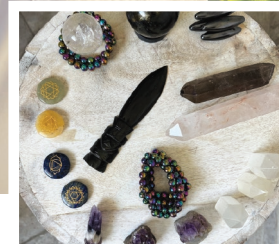
Heal the local way

Holistic Doctor Barbados

Always intrigued by local healing practices, I was excited to have a session with local healer -Everton Clarke aka Holistic Doctor Barbados. He came to the hotel and set up a massage bed then proceeded to place a plethora of healing crystals around my body and performed quantum and crystal healing, the session was very soothing, inexplicably so, at some points I felt that he was tugging at my dress on my back area but actually it was just pulsating, which practitioners often describe as the movement of chi or prana (life force energy) through the body, indicating that energy is clearing blockages. Since arriving back home I have had a zoom healing session with him, which gave the same profound sense of peace in my body. Everton is very knowledgeable about plant medicine and sells a range of homemade local natural remedies.

<https://campsite.to/holisticdoctor>

You can watch a clip of me interviewing him here:



Dr. Damian Cohall, pharmacologist

Having done some research on key people to meet to learn more about the indigenous healing systems in Barbados, Damian's name popped up, when we met, he explained the multilayered wellbeing influences and approaches, from the African roots due to the slaves imported years ago, to the Asian influence when cheap labourers were brought over to work, as well as of course the indigenous communities. He covered practices, as well as natural herbal remedies utilising local plants. His book, newly published, entitled Medicinal Plants of Barbados for the Treatment of Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, is out now.



Ocean Acres Animal Sanctuary

We all know the benefits of doing good, outside of the 'good' itself, is the feeling of wellbeing received when you know you are making a difference, so why not do as I did and visit the sanctuary where you can see the resident happy doggies, donate, or even look into adopting, they have some really cute merchandise as well, so you can give gifts that keeps giving. "Rescue alone isn't enough. We do it all with no government support, no guaranteed funding - only the compassion and generosity of kind and caring people allow us to continue our work, saving lives and creating lasting change." Karen Whittaker, CEO & Founder



Coco Hill Forest

The nature in Barbados is immense and one of the ways to immerse yourself is to book a guided tour at Coco Hill Forest, I was joined by the inspirational founder Mahmood Patel - a pioneer in regenerative agriculture and regenerative tourism. His 53-acre agrotourism project houses 3kms of hiking trails in what is my favourite part of the island – the East Coast. He is determined to bring back as much of the vegetation, both edible and inedible, as possible and is making great waves. Walking around his land is a feast for the eyes, picturing what the island was like many moons ago, a visit is important, not only for context but also to appreciate the sheer importance of biodiversity and our duty to the land.

www.cocohillforest.com



Get close to nature



Forest Experience at Naniki

Another nature hotspot to visit with breathtaking views is Naniki, I had the pleasure of a private tour of the forest and valley with Tom Hinds, the owner and someone who passionately talks about the healing properties of the forest, which I agreed is undeniable whilst walking around and looking up to palms towering above, stretching out to the blue, blue sky. Tom works with local schools to enable children to access the forest and benefit from the grounding it can give them. As well as the walks and Sunday lunch – local fare, you can also book into one of the ten quaint self-contained cottages on-site.

www.nanikibarbados.com



Lastly, one of the beautiful perks of Barbados is that wherever you are on the island you're close to either the Atlantic Ocean or Caribbean Sea with seemingly endless beaches, it's no wonder so many people visit, and now I have too and would definitely go back to explore more of this bijou island brimming with culture, curiosities and culinary must-eats.

