

Barbados

Half a million people can't be wrong. That's the number of visitors Barbados attracts annually, and it doesn't take long before you see why they come by the planeload: the coasts are ringed by the kinds of azure-water and white-sand visions that fuel the fantasies of Brits, Americans and Canadians stuck shivering away in some snowy winter clime.

Many Caribbean islands have beaches, but where Barbados differs is what lies behind the surf and sand. No matter your budget or style, you can find a place to stay that suits you, whether cheap, funky, restful or posh. All the comforts of home are close at hand if you want them as Barbados is one of the most developed islands in the region. The literacy rate approaches 98% and the capital Bridgetown and its surrounds are booming.

Away from the go-go west and south coasts, however, is where you'll find what makes the island special. Rather than clinging to the slopes of a steep volcanic centre, Barbados has a rolling terrain of limestone hills. Amid this lush scenery are fascinating survivors of the colonial past. Vast plantation homes show the wealth of these settlers and face up to the brutality of the slave trade. Museums document this engrossing history while several botanic gardens exploit the beauty possible from the perfect growing conditions.

The wild Atlantic-battered east coast is a legend with surfers; those looking for action will find wind-surfing, hiking, diving and more. Barbados is a great package, and despite its popularity, you'll have no trouble making it your own. Away from the glitz, it's still a place of classic calypso rhythms, an island-time vibe and world-famous rums.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 432 sq km
- **Capital** Bridgetown
- **Country code** ☎ 246
- **Departure tax** B\$25 for stays over 24 hours
- **Famous for** Beaches, rum, flying-fish sandwiches
- **Language** English
- **Money** Barbados dollar (B\$ or BBD); B\$1 = US\$0.50 = €0.32 = UK£0.25
- **Official name** Barbados
- **People** Barbadian (formal), Bajan (slang)
- **Phrase** Goodie (in response to most questions, eg 'how was your weekend?')
- **Population** 282,000
- **Visa** Not required for US, EU or Commonwealth visitors; see p698



HIGHLIGHTS

- **White-Sand Beaches** (p694) Unwind on the blissful beaches fringing the island such as Enterprise Beach
- **Bajan Sports** (p678) Join the raucous crowds at a cricket match, one of the island's sporting passions
- **Tropical Gardens** (p692) Enjoy the lush beauty of the island's rich floral wonders, such as the Andromeda Botanic Gardens.
- **Flying-Fish Sandwiches** (p679) Sample Barbados' most popular dish: cheap, tasty and always fresh
- **Plantation Houses** (p691) Experience the beautiful present and ugly past at grand homes such as St Nicholas Abbey

ITINERARIES

- **Four Days** Depending on your budget, stay on the mid-priced south coast or the fancier west coast, go diving or snorkeling and spend an afternoon in Bridgetown.
- **One Week** As above but spend a couple of days exploring the interior and the East Coast.
- **Wandering Barbados** Get lost! Head into the hills of Central Barbados and take roads at random. It's green, beautiful and full of sights and surprises. Plus you're on an island, so you can't get lost for long.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate in Barbados tends to be nice year-round: in January, the average daily high temperature is 28°C (83°F), while the low average is 21°C (70°F). In July, the average daily high is 30°C (86°F), while the average low is 23°C (74°F). February to May are the driest months (April averages only seven days of rain), while July is the wettest month with some 18 days of rain.

HOW MUCH?

- **Taxi from the airport to Bridgetown** B\$46
- **Flying fish sandwich** B\$10
- **One night in a moderate double on/near the beach** US\$120
- **Fee to use any beach** Free

The tourist high season runs from mid-December through mid-April. June through October is the hurricane season: September and October are the most humid months and have the highest hurricane risk – although many years see none.

Like the rest of the region, the temperate season is also high season, so expect prices to peak December to April. Other times Barbados is wetter and hotter but also much cheaper.

HISTORY

The original inhabitants of Barbados were Arawaks, who were driven off the island around AD 1200 by Caribs from South America. The Caribs, in turn, abandoned (or fled) Barbados close to the arrival of the first Europeans. The Portuguese visited the island in 1536, but Barbados was uninhabited by the time Captain John Powell claimed it for England in 1625. Two years later, a group of settlers established the island's first European settlement, Jamestown, in present-day Holetown. Within a few years, the colonists had cleared much of the forest, planting tobacco and cotton fields. In the 1640s they switched to sugarcane. The new sugar plantations were labor intensive, and the landowners began to import large numbers of African slaves. These large sugar plantations – some of the first in the Caribbean – proved immensely profitable, and gave rise to a wealthy colonial class. A visit to a plantation estate, like the one at St Nicholas Abbey (p691), will give some idea of the money involved.

The sugar industry boomed during the next century, and continued to prosper after the abolition of slavery in 1834. As the planters owned all of the best land, there was little choice for the freed slaves other than to stay on at the canefields for a pittance.

Social tensions flared during the 1930s, and Barbados' black majority gradually gained more access to the political process. The economy was diversified through the international tourism boom and gave more islanders the opportunity for economic success and self-determination. England granted Barbados internal self-government in 1961 and it became an independent nation on November 30, 1966, with Errol Barrow as its first prime minister. While not flawless, Barbados has remained a stable democracy.



Owen Arthur and the Barbados Labour Party were in power from 1993 to 2008. In a campaign that saw 'change' as the popular theme, David Thompson and the left-leaning Democratic Labour Party won the election (see boxed text, p679). Unlike other Caribbean islands, Barbados maintains its sugar industry; although the majority of the

economy is now based on tourism and off-shore banking. Condos are building as fast as the concrete dries.

THE CULTURE

Bajan culture displays some trappings of English life: cricket, polo and horse racing are popular pastimes, business is performed in a

highly organized fashion, gardens are lovingly tended, older women often wear prim little hats and special events are carried out with a great deal of pomp and ceremony. However, on closer examination, Barbados is very deeply rooted in Afro-Caribbean tradition. Family life, art, food, music, architecture, religion and dress have more in common with the nearby Windward Islands than West London. The African and East Indian influences are especially apparent in the spicy cuisine, rhythmic music and pulsating festivals. Like other Caribbean cultures, Barbadians are relatively conservative and the men are macho, but the ongoing bond with a cosmopolitan center like London has made Barbados slightly more socially progressive than its neighbors.

Bajan youth are now within the media orbit of North America. The NBA and New York hip-hop fashion are as popular in Bridgetown as in Brooklyn. The hugely popular singer Rihanna is an example of the links between Bajan and US culture. Her reggae-style rap was nominated for slew of Grammy awards in 2007 and she won for 'Umbrella,' which she performed with Jay-Z. It was number one on the charts in the US and the UK for many weeks.

Another similarity to the US is the suburban sprawl around Bridgetown. Traffic is often a problem and you can join the masses at a growing number of air-conditioned malls.

SPORTS

The national sport, if not national obsession, is cricket. Per capita, Barbadians boast more world-class cricket players than any other nation. One of the world's top all-rounders, Bajan native Garfield Sobers, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II during her 1975 visit to Barbados, while another cricket hero, Sir Frank Worrell, appears on the face of the B\$5 bill.

In Barbados you can catch an international Test Match, a heated local First Division

match or even just a friendly game on the beach or grassy field. Thousands of Bajans and other West Indians pour into the world-class matches at **Kensington Oval** (☎ 436-1397; 🕒 9am-4pm), in Garrison near Bridgetown, which was the site of the final in the 2007 World Cup. For information, schedules and tickets, contact the **Barbados Cricket Association** (☎ 436-1397; www.bcacricicket.org).

Horse races and polo are traditionally watched, while windsurfing and surfing are popular with locals and visitors alike.

ARTS

Barbadian contributions to West Indian music are renowned in the region, having produced such greats as the calypso artist the Mighty Gabby, whose songs on cultural identity and political protest speak for emerging black pride throughout the Caribbean. These days, Bajan music leans toward the faster beats of soca (an energetic offspring of calypso), *rapso* (a fusion of soca and hip-hop) and dancehall (a contemporary offshoot of reggae with faster, digital beats and an MC). Hugely popular Bajan soca artist Rupee brings the sound of the island to audiences worldwide. Bridgetown-born singer Rihanna has made a huge international splash (see left).

The foremost contemporary Barbadian novelist is George Lamming, who has written six novels and several collections of short fiction. His most acclaimed novel, 1953's *In the Castle of My Skin*, portrays what it was like to grow up black in a colonial Barbados that was struggling toward independence.

Island architectural styles have their roots in the colonial era, when virtually all land belonged to large sugar estates. The island still has a number of grand plantation homes as well as numerous chattel houses, the latter being simple wooden homes built for easy disassembly and portability. The **Barbados National Trust** (☎ 436-9033; http://trust.funbarbados.com; house visit B\$15; 🕒 Wed) runs an Open House program offering visits to some of the island's grander private homes. In addition, many houses, especially those in the central highlands, have regular opening hours.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Barbados lies 160km east of the Windward Islands. It is somewhat pear-shaped, measur-

A HAIRY ENCOUNTER

The explorer Pedro Albizu Campos stopped on Barbados in 1536 en route to Brazil. He had no interest in settling the island, but it was he who named the island Los Barbados (Bearded Ones) – presumably after the island's fig trees (*Ficus citrifolia*), whose long, hanging aerial roots resemble beards.

BARBADOS HAS AN ELECTION

The January 2008 national elections in Barbados were a moving example of how democracy can function when everybody plays by the rules. Although it had been in power for 15 years, the Barbados Labour Party and their long-time leader Owen Arthur lost 20 to 10 in terms of seats. Despite having ruled all aspects of Bajan life for 15 years, Arthur and the BLP were gracious in defeat and congratulated the victorious Democratic Labour Party and the new prime minister, David Thompson. There were no riots, claims of malfeasance or any other high jinks to spoil an orderly transition. On election day itself, Bajans in their Sunday best went to the polls, which were free of politicking. Many of the polls were in historic sites and extremely polite monitors explained to tourists that things were closed due to the election. The entire process can best be described as civilized. Barbados should be proud.

ing 34km from north to south and 22km at its widest. The island is composed largely of coral accumulations built on sedimentary rocks. Water permeates the soft coral cap, creating underground streams, springs and limestone caverns. Most of the island's terrain is relatively flat, rising to low, gentle hills in the interior. However, the northeastern part of the island, known as the Scotland District, rises to a relatively lofty 340m at Barbados' highest point, Mt Hillaby. The west coast has white-sand beaches and calm turquoise waters, while the east side of the island has turbulent Atlantic waters and a coastline punctuated by cliffs. Coral reefs surround most of the island and contribute to the fine white sands on the western and southern beaches.

The Andromeda Botanic Gardens (see p692), in a gorgeous setting above Bathsheba, have a huge range of beautifully displayed local flora.

Wildlife

The majority of Barbados' indigenous wildlife was overwhelmed by agriculture and competition with introduced species. Found only on Barbados is the harmless and elusive grass snake. The island also shelters a species of small, nonpoisonous, blind snake; plus whistling frogs, lizards, red-footed tortoises and eight species of bat.

Hawksbill turtles regularly come ashore to lay their eggs, as does the occasional leatherback turtle. As elsewhere, the turtles face numerous threats from pollution and human interference. The **Barbados Sea Turtle Project** (☎ 230-0142; www.barbadosseaturtles.org) is working to restore habitat and populations.

Most if not all mammals found in the wild on Barbados have been introduced. They

include wild green monkeys, mongooses, European hares, mice and rats.

More than 180 species of bird have been sighted on Barbados. Most of them are migrating shorebirds and waders that breed in North America and stop over in Barbados en route to winter feeding grounds in South America. Only 28 species nest on Barbados; these include wood doves, blackbirds, bananaquits, guinea fowl, cattle egrets, herons, finches and three kinds of hummingbird.

Environmental Issues

The forests that once covered Barbados were long ago felled by the British planters. One of the knock-on effects is that the country now has a problem with soil erosion. This loose dirt, along with pollution from ships and illegally dumped solid wastes, threatens to contaminate the aquifers that supply the island's drinking water.

FOOD & DRINK

Bajan food is similar to other West Indian cuisines, in that it has African and East Indian influences, but it also has unique ingredients and variations. Make sure to try the ubiquitous and iconic flying fish, which is served fried in delicious sandwiches all over the country. It's a mild white fish that is great sautéed or deep-fried.

Some of the local dishes include *conkies* (a mixture of cornmeal, coconut, pumpkin, sweet potato, raisins and spices, steamed in a plantain leaf), *cou-cou* (a creamy cornmeal and okra mash), *cutters* (meat or fish sandwiches in a salt bread roll), *jug-jug* (a mixture of Guinea cornmeal, green peas and salted meat), *roti* (a curry filling rolled inside flat bread), pumpkin fritters and pudding and *souse* (a dish made out of pickled pig's

head and belly, spices and a few vegetables). Surprise your taste buds with the fiery 'Hill's Hot Balls', which aren't a creation of *South Park's* Chef but rather spicy cheese puffs. Sooth your palette with one of the many varieties of local bananas that are green even when ripe (look for them in markets).

In touristed areas, you'll find every kind of cuisine you desire (and some you may not) from fast food to inventive, creative fare from chefs with international reps. Seafood in all its forms is most popular as is Italian, Asian...you name it.

Those who have been stuck with instant coffee in the Windward Islands will welcome a good range of real coffees in Barbados. Tap water is safe to drink; it comes from underground reservoirs that are naturally filtered. For those who prefer something a little harder, Barbadian rum is considered some of the finest in the Caribbean, with Mount Gay being the best-known label. The island beer, Banks, is refreshing after a day in the hot sun.

Tours of rum factories are a very popular visitor activity. Among the more notable are those run by Malibu Beach and Mount Gay on the north side of Bridgetown (see p682).

BRIDGETOWN

pop 97,000

Barbados' bustling capital, Bridgetown, is also the island's only city and is situated on its only natural harbor. Its many sights and old colonial buildings can easily occupy a day of wandering. Head along the side streets of the main drags to discover residential neighborhoods scattered with rum shops and chattel houses.

Many enjoy taking a respite from their day at one of the cafés or snack stands along the south banks of the Constitution River. There is good shopping, especially along Broad St and on pedestrian-only Swan St, which buzzes with the rhythms of local culture.

ORIENTATION

Bridgetown sits on attractive Carlisle Bay on the southwest corner of Barbados. The city is developed around an inlet from the bay known as the Careenage, and connects directly to most highways across the island. There's a nice beach and a several bars along Bay Street south of the center. The entire area is in St Michael Parish.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Cave Shepherd (☎ 431-2121; Broad St) This department store has a wide selection of Caribbean and international literature plus the UK's *Sunday Times*.

Cloister Bookstore (☎ 426-2662; Hincks St) Carries local and international literature and best-sellers.

Internet Access

Connect (☎ 228-8648; Shop 9, 27 Broad St; per 10min B\$3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-4pm Sat) Upstairs in the Galleria Mall behind Nelson's Arms (enter from Lancaster Lane). Laptop connections and cheap calls.

Gig@bytes (☎ 435-6893; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) near Fairchild St and Swing Bridge; has drinks and snacks, plus wi-fi.

Libraries

National Library (☎ 426-3981; Coleridge St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) To check out books here you'll pay a refundable deposit of B\$20. The deposit is valid also at Holetown, Speightstown and Oistins branches.

Medical Services

Collins Pharmacy (☎ 426-4515; 28 Broad St) Prescriptions, sundries, shoe and watch repair.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital (☎ 436-6450; Martindale's Rd; ☎ 24hr)

Money

Banks are generally open 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to 5pm Friday, and most have 24-hour ATM access.

Barbados National Bank (☎ 431-5700; Broad St) At the west end. There's a branch on Fairchild St.

Scotiabank (☎ 426-7000; Broad St) At the west end. There's also a branch on Fairchild St.

Post

Post office (Cheapside; ☎ 7:30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Information

Barbados Tourism Authority (☎ 427-2623; www.barbados.org; Harbour Rd; ☎ 8:15am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Answers questions, offers brochures; a branch office at the cruise-ship terminal opens when ships are in port.

Travel Agencies

Going Places Travel (☎ 431-2400; ground fl, Speedbird House, Independence Sq) Branch of regional agency.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

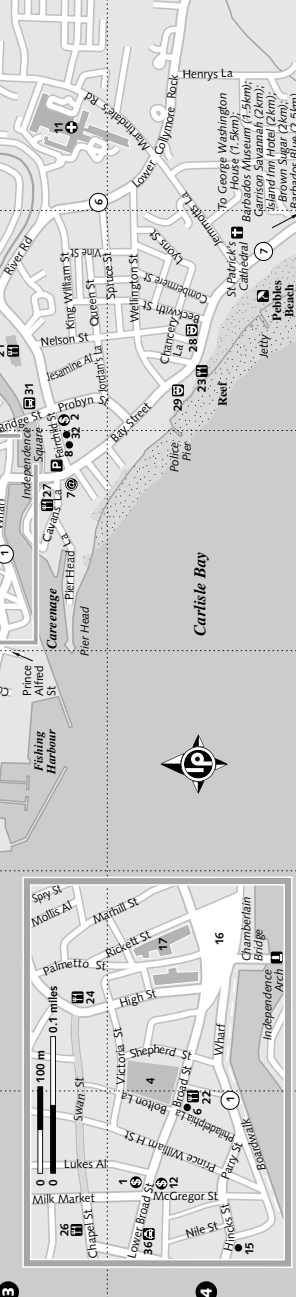
Central Bridgetown

All of the following sites can be reached on foot.

BRIDGETOWN

INFORMATION		POST OFFICE	10 C3
Barbados National Bank.....1	A4	Queen Elizabeth Hospital.....11	F3
Barbados National Bank.....2	E3	Scottabank.....12	A4
Barbados Tourism Authority.....3	B2	Scottabank.....13	A2
Cave Shepherd Department Store.....4	B4	Tourist Office Branch.....13	A2
Cloister Bookstore.....5	C3	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Collins Pharmacy.....6	A4	Barbados Synagogue.....14	D2
Connect.....7	D3	Carlisle Wharf.....15	A4
Grid@Bytes.....8	D3	National Heroes Square.....16	B4
Going Places Travel.....9	D2	Nidhe Israel Museum.....17	B4
National Library.....9	D2	Parliament Buildings.....17	B4
Post Office.....10	C3	St Michael's Cathedral.....18	E3
Queen Elizabeth Hospital.....11	F3		
Scottabank.....12	A4		
Scottabank.....13	A2		
Tourist Office Branch.....13	A2		
SHOPPING			
Galleria Mall.....19	C3		
Pelican Craft Village.....20	B3		
TRANSPORT			
Carnibbean Airlines.....21	E3		
Fairchild St Bus Terminal (South & Eastbound).....21	E3		
LIAT.....22	D3		
Minibus Terminal (Northbound).....22	C3		
Princess Alice Bus Terminal.....23	C3		
River Bus Terminal.....24	E3		
Route Taxi Terminal (Southbound).....25	E3		
Minibuses.....26	E3		
Waterfront CaféX.....27	E3		
EATING			
Barbados Public Market.....19	C3		
Cave Shepherd Balcony Restaurant.....20	C3		
Cheapside Market.....20	C3		
Galleria Mall.....21	E3		
Lobster Alive.....22	A4		
Palmetto Market.....23	E3		
Paris Bakery.....24	B3		
Pure Food Café.....25	C3		
Waterfront Café.....27	D3		
Bajan Pub.....28	E4		
Boatyard.....29	E4		
Lobster AliveX.....30	E3		
Waterfront CaféX.....31	E3		
Taxi Waiting Area.....32	A4		

ENTERTAINMENT			
Bajan Pub.....28	E4		
Boatyard.....29	E4		
Lobster AliveX.....30	E3		
Waterfront CaféX.....31	E3		
Taxi Waiting Area.....32	A4		



St Michael's Cathedral (St Michael's Row; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is the island's Anglican cathedral. It was originally completed in 1665 to accommodate 3000 worshippers, but came tumbling down in a hurricane a century later. The scaled-down, but still substantial, structure (it's also a hurricane shelter...) that stands today dates from 1789 and seats 1600. At the time of construction it was said to have the widest arched ceiling of its type in the world. Among the island notables tightly packed into the adjacent churchyard are Sir Grantley Adams (Barbados' first premier and the head of the West Indies Federation from 1958 to 1962) and his son Tom (prime minister of Barbados from 1976 to 1985).

The triangular **National Heroes Square** (formerly known as Trafalgar Sq) marks the bustling center of the city. The square once celebrated Battle of Trafalgar hero Lord Horatio Nelson (whose statue still stands on the west side of the square), but was eventually changed to honor 10 Bajan heroes – from cricket heroes to slave leaders.

Built in 1833, the small **Barbados Synagogue** (Synagogue Lane; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), between James St and Magazine Lane, near National Heroes Sq, was abandoned in 1929 and beautifully restored in 1986. The island's first synagogue was built on this site in the 1600s, when Barbados had a Jewish population of more than 800. Over the following years the population dwindled to one in 1929 owing to emigration and Christian conversion.

In 1931 the population rebounded when a large group arrived after fleeing discrimination in Poland. The community now numbers about 100 and their entire history is well documented in the beautiful new **Nidhe Israel Museum** (☎ 436-6869; Synagogue Lane; adult/child: B\$25/12.50; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat). It is housed in a restored 1750 synagogue that is just across from the one from 1833 above. It's massively built from cut coral blocks that glow in the sun.

The **parliament buildings** (☎ 427-2019; ☎ tours 10am & 2pm Mon-Fri) on the north side of National Heroes Sq are two stone-block, neo-Gothic-style buildings constructed in 1871. The west-side building with the clock tower contains public offices; the building on the east side houses the Senate and House of Assembly and is adorned with stained-glass windows depicting British monarchs. It is best to call ahead for tours.

Carlisle Wharf (Hincks St) is a small commercial building. The real attraction is at the back where benches overlook the harbor and plaques chart the local maritime heritage.

Around Bridgetown

The following sites are within a mile or two of Bridgetown's center.

The excellent **Barbados Museum** (☎ 427-0201; Garrison; adult/child B\$11.50/5.75; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) is housed in an early-19th-century military prison. It has engaging displays on all aspects of the island's history, beginning with its early indigenous residents. The most extensive collections cover the colonial era, with exhibits on slavery, emancipation, military history and plantation-house furniture, all accompanied by insightful narratives.

Just west, the **George Washington House** (☎ 228-5461; Bush Hill, Garrison; adult/child B\$20/5; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) can truly claim that the great man slept here. After decades of research and debate, it was finally shown that this 18th-century estate had been the home of the future US president and his brother Lawrence (see opposite) during their fateful stay in 1751. The beautifully restored home shows what it must have looked like during their stay. A large museum brings 1750s Barbados to life. Lush gardens include a herb patch and café.

About 2km south of central Bridgetown, spreading inland from the south side of Carlisle Bay, is the **Garrison area**, the home base of the British Windward and Leeward Islands Command in the 1800s. A focal point is the oval-shaped **Savannah**, which was once parade grounds and is now used for cricket games, jogging and Saturday horse races. Standing along the west side of the Savannah are some of the Garrison's more ornate colonial buildings, where you'll find the world's largest collection of 17th-century iron cannons.

Barbados Blue (☎ 434-5764; www.divebarbadosblue.com; Hilton Hotel, Needham's Point) dive shop is located at Needham's Point.

Rum has longed been a critical part of local life and you can make it part of your life as well at two facilities run by famous local distilleries:

Malibu Beach Club & Visitor Centre (☎ 425-9393; Brighton Beach; tours B\$20; ☎ 9-4pm Mon-Fri) Coconut-flavored Malibu is more of an export to Americans barely old enough to drink than a Bajan drink, but the company has a popular tour at the beachfront distillery. Spend time

in a beach chair after the tour/samples. About 3km north of the center.

Mount Gay Rum Visitors Centre (☎ 425-8757; www.mountgay.com; Spring Garden Hwy; tours B\$14; ☎ 9am-3:30pm Mon-Fri) The aged rums here are some of Barbados' best – the visitors centre is about a kilometer north of Bridgetown Harbour. Other tour options include transport and food, from B\$60.

SLEEPING

Few visitors stay in Bridgetown and there are few accommodations available. Aquatic Gap, just south of town, is the first spot with any hotels to speak of; however, it is recommended that you head the few minutes further to Hastings, Rockley, Worthing, St Lawrence Gap or beyond for a more relaxed beach atmosphere.

Island Inn Hotel (☎ 436-6393; www.islandinnbarbados.com; Aquatic Gap; r from US\$160; ☎ ☎ ☎) This 23-room hotel is partially built in a restored 1804 garrison building that was originally a military rum store. It is near the beach off Bat St, close to town and has all-inclusive rate options. It's a relaxed option – just don't look at the hideous nearby Hilton or you'll turn into a pillar of salt.

EATING

Paris Bakery (☎ 436-0504; Cheapside; snacks from B\$3; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) Enjoy take-out banana bread, coconut bread and other treats at this delectable little bakery.

Balcony Restaurant (☎ 227-2121; Broad St; lunch B\$10; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) The in-house restaurant at the landmark Cave Shepherd Department Store has a small daily buffet of island favorites like curries and salads. Ask a local where they go for lunch and they point here. The fresh juices are excellent.

Pure Food Café (☎ 436-4537; Chapel St; lunch from B\$10; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) Unadorned, like your

arteries after a meal here. Enjoy excellent fresh fruit juices and wholesome fare like the popular split pea soup.

Gallery (☎ 435-7053; Galleria Mall, 27 Broad St; meals B\$15-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) You can literally look down upon the gem-seeking tourist hordes from the popular balcony at this pub. English breakfasts morph to burgers and airborne Pisces sandwiches at lunch.

Waterfront Café (☎ 427-0093; Carenage; meals from B\$25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Always packed, especially at the breezy tables on the river. Lunches include a fine version of a flying fish sandwich; dinners are more elaborate and have Mediterranean color and flair. There's live music ranging from steel pan to jazz.

Lobster Alive (☎ 435-0305; Bay St; meals from B\$40; ☎ lunch & dinner) The name is only true until you order. Lobster bisque and grilled lobster are just some of the choices on the crustacean-heavy menu at this ramshackle joint on the beach. On many nights there's smooth jazz.

Brown Sugar (☎ 426-7684; lunch buffet B\$40, dinner B\$45-80; ☎ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner daily) The much-loved Brown Sugar, next to the Island Inn Hotel at Aquatic Gap, is a lush paradise inside and out. The excellent West Indian buffet is popular; dinner is off a menu that includes shrimp Creole, lobster, flying fish and much more. The Bajan bread pudding is a rummy delight. Book at dinner.

Even if you're not intending to buy, the **Cheapside Market** (Cheapside) is a fascinating place to browse local produce in a grand old market hall recently restored by the thoughtful Chinese government. It has some nice snack stands on the second floor. Southwest across Princess Alice Hwy, the Public Market has all things briny fresh from the boats.

Palmetto Market (Swan St), at the east end, is another good place for fresh produce and snacks. But for a meal or a cheery drink with amiable and voluble locals, **Fairchild St**

GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

In 1751, at age 19 – some 38 years before he would become the first US president – George Washington visited Barbados as a companion to his half-brother Lawrence, who suffered from tuberculosis. It was hoped that the tropical climate would prove therapeutic.

The two rented a house in the Garrison area south of Bridgetown and stayed on the island for six weeks. The newly restored George Washington House (opposite) gives fascinating look at the trip and the time. As it was, Lawrence never recovered and died the next year.

The legacy of another American founding father, Alexander Hamilton, can be found on Nevis (see p507).

Market (Fairchild St) has snacks stands, cafés and rum shops in a long row along the river. The markets are usually open 7am to late afternoon Monday to Saturday.

DRINKING

While visitors are welcome in Bridgetown's many rum shops, these watering holes don't cater to foreigners. Along Baxters Rd, just north of the center, you'll find a concentration of these bars, where alcohol flows and fish is fried up until late at night. Although women will not be turned away, be warned that rum shops are a macho haunt.

Bajan Pub (☎ 436-1664; Bay St; ☹ 5pm-late) For an accessible rum shop-style experience, check out this old place which is one of several on the stretch. Note how old cannons are now used as posts.

Boatyard (☎ 436-2622; Bay St; ☹ 11am-2am) An over-amped beach bar that pushes the sex-on-the-beach angle hard, the boatyard gets visitors by the busload who come for the daytime drinking contests and beach activities. During sunset there is a three-hour all-you-can-drink deal (US\$25). Late night it's a club with DJs and live music (cover varies).

ENTERTAINMENT

Sports

Cricket matches are played throughout the year at the **Kensington Oval** (☎ 436-1397; ☹ 9am-4pm) in Garrison near Bridgetown, which was the site of the final in the 2007 World Cup. The **Barbados Cricket Association** (☎ 436-1397; www.bcacricket.org) is the source of all things cricket.

Horse races are held at the Garrison Savannah on Saturday afternoons throughout the year, except April and September. **Barbados Turf Club** (☎ 426-3980; www.barbadosturfclub.com) offers seats in the grandstand starting at B\$20, but for no charge you can also watch the races from benches under the trees around the outside of the track – you can also place a bet at booths on the south or west side.

Live Music

The Waterfront Café (p683) has live music every night but Sunday; Lobster Alive (p683) has jazz many nights.

SHOPPING

Pelican Craft Village (☎ 426-0765; Princess Alice Hwy) This ever-evolving complex of galleries and workshops, between downtown and the

cruise-ship terminal, features the works of many local artists. The Barbados Arts Council has a shop here with the works of more than 30 of its members usually on show.

The island's grand old department store, **Cave Shepherd** (☎ 227-2121; Broad St), has a well-priced rum and quality souvenir section.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

As most people stay along the southern coast they will arrive and depart in minibuses from the **Route Taxi Terminal** (Nursery Rd) along the river. A little closer in toward the center of town is the **River Bus Terminal** (Nursery Rd), which sends minibuses along central and eastern routes.

Public buses going south and east leave from the **Fairchild St Bus Terminal** (Bridge St), north of Fairchild. Public buses and minibuses going north up the west coast leave from the **Princess Alice Terminal** (Princess Alice Hwy), at the west end.

GETTING AROUND

Bridgetown is easily covered on foot, although taxis can be flagged on the street if necessary, or hailed from the waiting area.

SOUTH COAST

The south coast is the island's tourism epicenter, with most of the budget-to-midrange accommodations along its fine white-sand beaches. This virtually uninterrupted stretch of development runs from the outskirts of Bridgetown all the way to the airport.

Hastings, Rockley and Worthing are part of one long commercial strip. St Lawrence Gap and Dover Beach is a surprisingly appealing area off the main road. East of Oistins, development begins to thin. Starting with Silver Sands the coast is fairly sedate (except for the surf and wind). All are linked by the main road along the coast, which, while designated Hwy 7, is never called that. The entire area is in Christ Church Parish.

Getting There & Away

Frequent No 11 minibuses from the route-taxi terminal in Bridgetown run along Main Rd (Hwy 7) on the southern coast and link the south coast villages. Private taxis are relatively easy to find in the main tourist areas.

HASTINGS & ROCKLEY

pop 22,000

Just a 15-minute bus ride from Bridgetown are the first major tourist areas of Hastings and Rockley. They are home to a lot of midrange hotels and some attractive, popular beaches, the largest being Accra Beach. Commercialism rules and the streetscape is a Babel of signs. The center of activity is Rockley Beach, a roadside white-sand public beach with shade trees, snack kiosks and clothing vendors. About halfway between Bridgetown and Rockley is Hastings Rock, a nice spot to enjoy views of the ocean. On weekends, community groups set up flea markets and hold activities around the gazebo in the small park above the water.

Information

There are plenty of banks and ATMs along the main road. Most have 24-hour ATMs.

Net Shack (☎ 228-5841; Hastings Plaza; per hr B\$12; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun) Surfing, laptop connections, printers & DVD rentals.

Sleeping

Tree Haven Beach Apartments (☎ 435-6673; kentolaya@caribsurf.com; Main Rd, Rockley; apt from US\$75; 🏠) This affordable, laid-back option has three OK units just across the road from the beach and right near Bubba's bar. This is one of the cheapest options here; try for the second-floor unit.

Coconut Court Beach Resort (☎ 427-1655; www.coconut-court.com; Main Rd, Hastings; r from US\$160; 🏠) Coconut Court is a five-story beach-front 125-room hotel filled with package tourists – good for families. In the right light, the institutional green paint can take on a turquoise hue from the azure waters right out front. Look for deals on the internet.

Eating & Drinking

Mojo (☎ 435-9008; Main Rd, Rockley; meals under B\$20; ☎ 11am-late) A big old house by the side of the road, Mojo has a wide veranda plus all sorts of nooks inside for nuzzling your companion or listening to the excellent music. Monday is open-mike night and some of the island's best acoustic players drop by. Food ranges from burgers to bar snacks.

Opa! (☎ 435-1234; Hastings; mains from B\$40; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's Greek favorites right on the water here, and the sea breezes will put you in mind of some other lovely islands half a planet

away. Groups enjoy frittering the night away between waves of small-plate treats. A gelato stand next door awaits your indulgence.

Champers (☎ 435-6644; Rockley; meals from B\$60; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This long-time favorite has a dreamy new location off the main road right on the water. There's barely an obstruction between you and the view. Elegant meals are served on cream-colored tablecloths and include the usual range of grilled seafoods plus fresh pastas. Brits will understand the name means 'Champagne' – drink some at the lower level lounge.

WORTHING

pop 8000

Worthing sits between the developed tourist areas of Hastings and Rockley and St Lawrence Gap. It's a good base if you're on a tight budget but still want to be near all the action. It has relatively inexpensive places at which to eat and a handful of lower-priced guesthouses that are either on the beach or a short walk away. The creatively named Sandy Beach, which fronts Worthing, is a nice strip of white powder. Several budget places are stashed away on the small nearby streets. It's a nice little scene. St Lawrence Gap is nearby, but the walk at night on the narrow, busy road can be perilous.

Information

The **Big B Supermarket** (☎ 430-1366; Worthing; ☎ 8am-6:30 Mon-Thu, 8am-7:30pm Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) literally offers one-stop shopping. It has a deli, bank, ATM, pharmacy and a good bookstore. It's just north of the main road at the central intersection.

Sights

Just east of Worthing, the **Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary** (☎ 435-9727; www.graemehall.com; Main Rd; adult/child B\$25/12.50; ☎ 8am-6pm) provides a wonderful respite from the developments. Lush gardens are spread over 14 hectares, which front the vastly larger mangroves and swamp. Boardwalks, trails and displays detail the many species of bird living in one of the island's last wild places.

Sleeping

House Cleverdale (☎ 428-3172, 428-1035; karibik@sun.beach.net; 3rd Ave; r from US\$28; 🏠) Set back just a bit from the beach and away from the main road, this large wooden home is a popular budget

spot. The three rooms and two apartments have mosquito nets, fans and wi-fi. Bathrooms and a large kitchen are shared. The owner has other cheap places nearby.

Maraval Guest House (☎ 435-7437; 3rd Ave; r from US\$35) Down the street from Cleverdale, Maraval has attractive, simple rooms with shared bath and in-room sinks. There's access to a well-equipped kitchen and a pleasant living room with TV and stereo. This friendly and comfortable place is good for longer stays.

Southern Heights Holiday Accommodation (☎ 435-8354; <http://southernheightsbarbados.com>; Worthing; ☎) There are 12 one-bedroom apartments in this custom-built complex that is a 15-minute walk from Sandy Beach. Go up the road that passes the Big B Supermarket and look for the sign to the right. Units have kitchens and cable TV.

Eating

Worthing has some good inexpensive dining choices and a few garish midrange themed restaurants. For a nice dinner you are better off heading down the road to St Lawrence Gap.

Carib Beach Bar & Restaurant (☎ 435-8540; 2nd Ave; lunch B\$12-16, dinner B\$24; ☎ restaurant lunch & dinner) This open-air eatery right on Sandy Beach is the hub of local holiday life. Seafood and burgers are the main items on the menu, enjoy 'em at picnic tables on the sand while you watch waves break on the reef offshore. The bar boogies long after the kitchen closes.

CaféBLUE (☎ 435-7699; Main Rd; meals from B\$11; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This popular way-casual café has made-to-order sandwiches and rotis, good tea and coffee drinks (including iced versions of both), fruit smoothies, salads and baked goods.

ST LAWRENCE GAP & DOVER BEACH

pop 25,000

The town of St Lawrence is almost lost along the busy main road. Instead the real action lies along a mile-long road that runs close to the beach. Lined with hotels, bars, restaurants and shops, this street is actually more pleasurable than it sounds. It's not commercialized to the point of being gross and it's mostly free of traffic, allowing night-time strolling.

The west end is known as St Lawrence Gap; the east end carries the Dover Beach moniker.

The latter has a nice, broad ribbon of white-sand beach that attracts swimmers, bodysurfers and windsurfers.

Information

The street has several internet places, ATMs, convenience stores and small groceries.

Sleeping

Rio Guest House (☎ 428-1546; www.rioguesthouse.net; St Lawrence Gap; s from US\$40, d from US\$55; ☎) This backpacker special has nine unpretentious fan-cooled rooms. Singles share a bathroom and some rooms have air-con. It's in a tranquil location, off the main drag but about one minute from the beach and nightlife.

Dover Woods Guest House (☎ 420-6599; www.sandygroundbarbados.com; Dover Beach; s/d from US\$55/65) Huge trees keep this large house shaded and cool. Located on estate-sized grounds at the east end of the strip, it has four large rooms which share a kitchen TV lounge and covered patio.

Sandy Ground (☎ 420-2720; www.barbados.org/rest/davids/gallery.htm; St Lawrence Gap; s/d from US\$90/130; ☎) This modern, two-story block has 10 rooms that are both tidy and nicely equipped with fridges and cable TV. It's just across from the Rio Guest House.

Little Bay Hotel (☎ 435-7246; www.littlebayhotelbarbados.com; St Lawrence Gap; r from \$130; ☎) Right at the entrance to the Gap off the main road, the Little Bay is also right on the water. Opt for a room with a balcony for the full seashore effect. The rooms aren't large but are good-value for the price. There's wi-fi, but not all rooms pick it up.

Southern Palms Beach Club (☎ 428-7171; www.southernpalms.com; St Lawrence Gap; r from US\$250; ☎) A traditional, older beach resort that is stays in the pink – literally. Most of the various three-story blocks are decked out in a cheery pink tone. Interiors are closer to motel standard but the balconies and patios are large. Off at one end there are bungalows (from US\$400) that look like something out of Hollywood. Offers wi-fi.

Eating & Drinking

One of the pleasures of the Gap is wandering the street at night comparing the many restaurants. Your hunger will be spurred on by the many street vendors who set up at night selling juicy burgers, grilled chicken and the ubiquitous macaroni pie. Bars range from

humble to vaguely swank. Blues and show tunes at many of them keep the chatter mellow until past midnight.

our pick **Café Lanoara** (☎ 236-4334; Dover Beach; ☎ noon-11pm) Really a collection of outdoor furniture served from a small stall, this completely open-air bar is run by Abdul, a true gentleman and a scholar. Lots of local professionals gather at the candle-lit tables and discuss the day's events while jazzy strains play in the background.

Bean & Bagel (☎ 420-4606; Dover Beach; meals from B\$20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) As the name implies, this is the place for fresh bagels. American-style breakfasts are also the thing – enjoy a scrumptious, sumptuous omelette on the large shaded deck. Lunch brings salads and sandwiches. There's wi-fi here.

McBride's Pub & Cookhouse (☎ 435-6352; St Lawrence Gap; meals B\$30; ☎ dinner, bar until 2am or later) Fuel up with classic deep-fried bar chow to the strains of sports on TV. Later, enjoy a changing line-up of live music that mixes salsa, techno, karaoke and reggae. If you want a read on the crowd, note how often the theme is 'greatest hits of the '70s and '80s'.

Pisces (☎ 435-6564; St Lawrence Gap; meals from B\$70; ☎ dinner) This large restaurant stretches right along the waterfront; waves lap against the foundations below. The view at sunset followed by the twinkling lights of the coast and fishing boats is captivating. Little candles illuminate fine seafood dishes (as you'd expect from the name). The wine list favors the US, France and Australia. Its always busy – come at 9pm for a relaxing time after the rush.

David's Place (☎ 435-9755; St Lawrence Gap; meals B\$85; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) One of the most romantic choices in the Gap, you first encounter a proper bar as you enter. Further in the lights dim and you're at tables overlooking the bay, which laps gently below. Waiters glide about with seafood and steak dishes that feature accents of Creole and curry.

Entertainment

Several popular venues in the Gap jam with live bands and DJs. Most have a cover charge, sometimes up to B\$30 and sometimes partially redeemable for drinks. Several of the bars have live music one or more nights, or like McBride's (above), have live music most nights.

Consider starting off in St Lawrence Gap and then heading to the wild pleasures of the Boatyard in Bridgetown (see p684) or nearby Oistins (below) on weekend nights for a wilder and more Bajan experience.

Reggae Lounge (☎ 435-6462; St Lawrence Gap; cover varies; ☎ 9pm-late) The Reggae Lounge not only plays classic reggae, but dancehall, hip-hop and more. Although the cover charge can hit B\$30 everything's gonna be all right, especially on Mondays when the cover includes unlimited drinks.

OISTINS

pop 16,000

This decidedly local yet modern town a few miles east of St Lawrence is best known as the center of the island's fishing industry. Oistins' heart is the large, bustling seaside fish market, which on Friday and Saturday hosts the island's best party, with soca, reggae, pop and country music, vendors selling barbecued fish and plenty of rum drinking. It's roughly 80% locals, 20% tourists and makes a fun scene, whether you're out for partying or just getting a solid local meal at a fair price. The height of the action is between 10pm and 2am. Also look for **Lexie's** (☎ 428-1405; Oistins Beach; ☎ 24hr), a never-closes beach bar that spins, of all things, ballroom music.

Immediately east of Oistins, **Enterprise Beach** is a long and shady public beach with full facilities. Right behind the sand, **Little Arches Hotel** (☎ 420-4689; www.littlearches.com; Enterprise; r from US\$250; ☎ ☎ ☎) is one of the most characterful choices on the South Coast. Once a Mediterranean-style mansion, the hotel now has 10 rooms in a variety of shapes and sizes, some with private whirlpools. Privacy is at a maximum and there are lots of arty touches throughout. It's on the quiet beach access road. Offers wi-fi.

SILVER SANDS

pop 11,000

At the southernmost tip of the island, between Oistins and the airport, is the breezy Silver Sands area. Although you'll need to avoid some characterless large resorts there are good small choices popular with kitesurfers and windsurfers. In January and February, everything fills up for the Windsurfing Championship. Most of the No 11 route taxis continue to Silver Sands from Oistins.

deAction Beach Shop (☎ 826-7087; www.irieman-talma.com/actionstore.htm; Silver Sands) is run by local board-legend Brian Talma; board rentals average US\$200 per week; windsurfing and kitesurfing lessons begin at US\$40 per hour.

Zed's Surfing Adventures (☎ 428-7873; www.barbadosurf.com; Surfer's Point) runs beginners' surf classes (US\$80), as well as surf tours around the island. It's affiliated with Surfer's Point Guest House.

In addition to the following listings, there are a number of private places in the Silver Sands area that can be rented by the week. Many windsurfers stay a night or two in a hotel and then, through word of mouth, find a shared house or apartment nearby. The appeal of Surfer's Point at the east end speaks for itself.

Set on a rocky shore and near the beach, family-run **Round Rock Apartments** (☎ 428-7500; www.barbados.org/apt/a40.htm; Silver Sands; r from US\$95) has seven large self-catering units in a well-maintained older building. A pleasant ocean-view restaurant serves a full breakfast and meals through the day (from B\$12).

ourpick Peach and Quiet Hotel (☎ 428-5682; www.peachandquiet.com; Inch Marlow; r from US\$120) is ripe for your booking (fruity name aside). The 22 airy rooms come with sea-view patios set around a secluded pool. There's an oceanside bar and a restaurant. The owner, Adrian Loveridge, leads excellent walks across the island.

The HQ of Zed's Surfing Adventures, **Surfer's Point Guest House** (☎ 428-7873; www.barbadosurf.com; Surfer's Point; apt US\$100-180; 🚽 📺) is on a little point amid a very good break. The seven units here come in various sizes; some have balconies with views, all have kitchens and wi-fi. There's a small protected pool out front for kids.

SOUTHEAST COAST

St Philip, the diamond-shaped parish east of the airport, is sparsely populated, with a scattering of small villages. Along the coast are a couple of resort hotels and fine beaches.

Getting There & Away

Minibus 11 continues into the southeast of Barbados after heading east from Oistins.

CRANE BEACH

Crane Beach, situated 7km northeast of the airport, is a hidden beach cove backed by cliffs and fronted by aqua blue waters. It is generally regarded as one of the best beaches on the island. An adventurous trail over rocks along the water accesses the beach from the end of a small road about 700m east of the Crane Beach Hotel. Parking is bad but the sands are simply wonderful. Bring a picnic and make a day of it.

You would never guess that the **Crane Beach Hotel** (☎ 423-6220; www.thecrane.com; r from US\$210; 🚽 📺 📺) was once a small inn in an old mansion. Those roots can still be found in the lovely restaurants that overlook the beach and ocean (L'Azure, for example, has upscale Caribbean fare, with lunch and dinner from US\$20; book in advance). Elsewhere hundreds of condos and resort facilities have appeared. If you like the kind of place that has an entire shop devoted to items bearing its logo, you'll love this sprawling, swank Shangri-La. Offers wi-fi.

WEST COAST

Barbados' west coast has lovely tranquil beaches that are largely hidden by the majority of the island's luxury hotels and condos. In colonial times, the area was a popular holiday retreat for the upper crust of British society. These days, the villas that haven't been converted to resorts are owned by wealthy and famous people from all over the world. Although all the beaches are all public, the near constant development means that you only get a few coastal glimpses.

Hwy 1, the two-laner that runs north from Bridgetown to Speightstown, is bordered much of the way by a close mix of tourist facilities and residential areas.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses along the west coast depart from near the general post office on Cheapside in Bridgetown and follow Hwy 1.

PAYNES BAY

Fringed by a fine stretch of white sand, gently curving Paynes Bay, in St James, is perhaps the west coast's most popular spot for swimming and snorkeling. Beach access walkways are clearly marked by roadside signs. The main

public beach site at the southern end of the bay has picnic tables, rest rooms and a laid-back Friday-night fish fry. Follow your nose to the public fish market at the north end of the strand.

Angler Apartments (☎ 432-0817; www.anglerapartments.com; Clarke's Rd 1, Derricks; r from US\$120; 🏠) is an unpretentious place with 13 older, basic apartments. Studios in an adjacent old plantation house are similar but smaller. There's a little patio bar. It's at the south end of Paynes Bay, off a road east of the main road. Right on the beach at Paynes Bay, everything at **Tamarind Cove Hotel** (☎ 432-1332; www.tamarindcovehotel.com; Paynes Bay; r from US\$350; 🏠 📺 📺) is discreet about this understated luxury resort. The 110 rooms are decked out in a restful palette of beachy pastels. All have balconies or patios and views of either one of the three pools or the ocean. The beach is right out front, a new spa inside.

Crocodile's Den (☎ 432-7625; Paynes Bay; 🕒 4pm-3am) is a good option for an evening fish *cutter* to accompany a cold Banks and a game of pool. There's frequently a live band, sometimes with salsa music. Other good options where locals and visitors mix are nearby.

HOLETOWN

pop 32,000

The first English settlers to Barbados landed at Holetown in 1627. An obelisk **monument** along the main road in the town center commemorates the event – although the date on the monument, which reads 'July 1605,' is clearly on island time.

Despite being the oldest town on the island, Holetown is a rather bustling place. There's a cute little nightlife area squeezed into a wedge between the main road and the beach. Shopping areas include the West Coast Mall, right across from the beach. It has an internet stand, ATM, pharmacy and a branch of **Cave Shepherd** (☎ 419-3110; 🕒 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) which includes a good book department.

Sights & Activities

At the north end of Holetown, **Barbados Marine Reserve** (☎ 425-1200; Folkstone) has its headquarters on a nice shady public beach at Folkstone. The **visitor centre** (admission B\$5; 🕒 9:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) includes a small museum with displays on the reserve, which extends for a few miles north and south. You can rent

snorkeling gear (from B\$10) and there are lockers. From here you can walk along the water to Holetown.

The dive shop **Hightide Watersports** (☎ 432-0931; www.divehightide.com; Coral Reef Club) is located at the Coral Reef Club.

Sleeping & Eating

The Holetown area can be a black hole for those on a budget. Many of the island's poshest resorts, such as the Fairmont Glitter Bay (the former home of the Cunard family), occupy vast swaths of beach while charging the moon.

Coral Reef Club (☎ 422-2372; www.coralreefbarbados.com; Holetown; r from US\$450; 🏠 📺 📺) This family-owned 88-room luxury hotel has 12 acres of gorgeous landscaped grounds surrounding an elegant gingerbread fantasy of a main building. Unlike some other top-end places around Holetown, this place oozes with character. You may actually find yourself needing to be convinced to leave the grounds. Offers wi-fi.

Surfside Beach Bar (☎ 432-2105; lunch from B\$10, dinner from B\$25; 🕒 9am-late) A typical beach bar with picnic tables set on wood platforms that are one storm away from qualifying as driftwood. Cheap drinks, burgers, grilled flying fish are on offer. There's steel-pan music and barbecue Sunday nights.

Ragamuffins (☎ 432-1295; 1st St; mains from B\$45; 🕒 dinner) One of several delightful little nightspots in this enclave, Raggamuffins is in a 60-year-old chattel house painted a stylish olive and turquoise. Dishes are all Caribbean with some added attitude: the blackened fish with aioli is pure joy. On Sunday there's a drag show.

NORTH OF HOLETOWN

Mt Standfast is home to hawksbill turtles that feed on sea grasses just off its shore. Most snorkeling tours make a stop here to offer fish to the turtles and to allow customers to swim among them. Without a tour, you can rent snorkeling gear at the beach and get advice for your own freelance turtle viewing. **Dive Barbados** (☎ 422-3133; www.divebarbados.net) is a well-known dive shop located at Mt Standfast.

Mullins Beach is a popular family-friendly beach along Hwy 1 between Holetown and Speightstown. The waters are usually calm and good for swimming and snorkeling. Parking is good all along this postcard-perfect crescent.

SPEIGHTSTOWN

pop 45,000

Easily the most evocative small town on Barbados, Speightstown combines old colonial charms with a vibe that has more rough edges than the endlessly upscale precincts to the south. The town is a good place for a wander, soaking it up and chatting with its characters. Since the main road was moved east, traffic is modest, so take time to look up at the battered old wooden facades, many with overhanging galleries. During the sugarcane boom, Speightstown was a thriving port and the main shipping line ran directly from here to Bristol, England.

There are ATMs, pharmacies and other shops. **Jordan's Supermarket** (☎ 422-2191; Queen St; ☎ 8am-8pm) has sundries, supplies and goods for picnics and expeditions along the coast or up into the hills to the east.

The **Reefers & Wreckers** (☎ 422-5450; www.scuba diving.bb) dive shop is located here.

Among the many shops, **Livia's Hat Shop** (☎ 245-4312; Queen St) has the best selection of chapeaus on the island. Prices average B\$30 and Livia decorates many herself – think restrained Carmen Miranda.

A radiant vision in white stucco, **Arlington House** (☎ 422-4064; Queen St; adult/child B\$25/12.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is an 18th-century colonial house that now houses an engaging museum run by the National Trust.

If you are interested in staying on here for a longer period of time, apartment and house rentals can be arranged for reasonable rates (from around US\$40 per night) through the amiable Clement 'Junior' Armstrong, who manages the Fisherman's Pub (below). **Sunset Sands Apartments** (☎ 438-1096; www.sunsetsands.com; Sand St; ste from US\$110; 📶) Just north of the town center across from the beach, the Sunset Sands has four attractive suites in a building with solid colonial charm. The upstairs apartments have stunning ocean views and there's a secluded garden.

Eat's Bar (☎ 422-3462; cnr Mango Ln & Queen St; meals from B\$7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a simple stand in a little house that serves up chicken – fried, stewed or in a curry – rotis, steamed fish and other flavorful local dishes.

ourpick Fisherman's Pub (☎ 422-2703; Queen St; meals B\$12; ☎ 11am-late Mon-Sat, 6pm-late Sun), on the waterfront next to a pint-sized beach, is a local institution that serves up fish from the boats floating off the back deck. Like a seal with a

new ball, it's always lively and unpredictable. On Wednesdays, there is steel-pan music. As the evening wears on, the scene gets more Bajan. Try the national dish of *cou-cou* and flying fish here.

Look for a mango-colored wood building tucked down a little alley: **Mango's by the Sea** (☎ 422-0704; Queen St; mains B\$50-90; ☎ dinner Sun-Fri). Overlooking the water, the interior mixes elegant (white tablecloths, candles, local art) with the casual (thatched decor). Dinners comprise the usual shellfish and steaks with nightly specials. The herb and garlic shrimp are an explosion of local flavors.

SHERMANS

Just past the road that turns inland to St Lucy, Shermans is a narrow enclave of fine holiday homes and lovely local places; most seem to be competing to grow the most flowers. The narrow road runs through the tiny fishing village of **Fustic**, which has a couple of good rum shops.

The boutique hotel **Little Good Harbour** (☎ 439-3000; www.littlegoodharbourbarbados.com; Shermans; villas from US\$300; 📶 📺 📶) has 21 one-to-three-bedroom villas in a little compound near the water. The decor combines wicker with linens in units that open completely to the outside and flowering trees.

The **Fish Pot Restaurant** (mains B\$30-70; ☎ lunch & dinner) is in an 18th-century sugar warehouse that once was connected to a wharf. The service is smart, the dishes were swimming out front not that long ago and the wine list is long.

CENTRAL BARBADOS

Several important roads cross the rolling hills of the island's interior. There's a wealth of historical and natural sights here and you can spend days winding around small roads far from the hustle crowds of the west and south coasts. What follows are three main routes that take in major attractions and which can be combined in various ways to produce some delightful circle tours of the Barbados.

Getting There & Away

Having your own transport will give you total freedom on the routes that follow. However you can also cover most of them by public

bus, as all follow major routes. There will be some walking to access sites off the main road. One real hike, but a beautiful 6.5km one, is necessary to access the St Nicholas Abbey and Cherry Tree Hill off Hwy 2.

SPEIGHTSTOWN TO BATHSHEBA

The road going into the hills east of Speightstown steadily climbs through historic sugarcane fields. The ruins of mills dot the landscape. Including the jaunt to St Nicholas Abbey, this route covers about 26km.

Eventually after about six miles you'll come to a fork in the road – if you continue on Hwy 2 to the east, you'll encounter **Farley Hill National Park** (☎ 422-3555; Hwy 2; per car B\$3.50; 🕒 8:30am–4:30pm), which has 7 hectares of lovely gardens surrounding the ruins of an old estate. Barbadians love this park for its views to the Atlantic and picnic here in droves on Sundays. It's also one of the venues for the Barbados Jazz Festival (see p697).

Barbados Wildlife Reserve (☎ 422-8826; adult/child under 12 B\$23/11.50; 🕒 10am–4pm) is a walk-through zoo opposite Farley Hill, with short paths that meander through a mahogany forest. The main attraction here is a colony of green monkeys. From September to January, the monkeys go marauding across the countryside in search of food and monkey business. If they're out when you're there, you'll get a ticket so you can come back again. Note that if the monkeys seem on good behavior, it's because the reserve is run by the Barbados Primate Research Centre, whose activities are just what the name implies.

Just above the reserve, good trails lead to the 19th-century **Grenade Hall Signal Station**, which has been restored. It was used by British troops for communications using flags and semaphores and was part of the chain that included one at Gun Hill (p692).

Back at the fork in the road, if you turn to the left (north) you are on one of the best little scenic drives on Barbados. The narrow road winds under a cathedral of huge trees arching overhead to **St Nicholas Abbey** (☎ 422-8725; admission B\$25; 🕒 10am–3:30pm Sun–Fri), a Jacobean-style mansion that is one of the oldest plantation houses in the Caribbean and must-see stop on any island itinerary. Owner and local architect Larry Warren has undertaken a massive improvement program. The grounds are now simply gorgeous, with guinea fowl wandering among the flowers.

The interior recreates the mansion's 17th-century look, right down to the furniture. An old steam engine has been restored and the plantation is again bottling its own rum and molasses; you can taste some and enjoy a snack at the serene café.

About 700m southeast of the abbey, the road passes **Cherry Tree Hill**, which has grand views right across the Atlantic coast. From here the road heads downhill through fields of sugarcane that seem to envelop the car.

Look for **Morgan Lewis Sugar Mill** (☎ 422-9213; adult/child B\$10/5; 🕒 8am–4pm Mon–Fri), 2km south-east of Cherry Tree Hill, which claims to be the largest intact sugar windmill surviving in the Caribbean. The interior has a simple display of historic photos, a few artifacts of the plantation era and the original gears, shaft and grinding wheel.

The road continues on a sinuous path downhill until it rejoins Hwy 2. Heading towards the coast, you pass through the little town of Belleplaine where you veer east to the road to Bathsheba. Running along the rugged coast through low sand dunes, this is one of the prettiest roads on Barbados. Look for **Barclays Park**, which has picnic tables under the trees, immaculate bathrooms and constantly roiling waves pounding the seemingly endless beach. Many who try to swim here wash ashore in South Africa.

The coast road continues another 5km south to Bathsheba.

BRIDGETOWN TO BELLEPLAINE

This route takes you past sites that show the beauty of the myriad plants that thrive on Barbados. It also goes near Harrison's Cave, a subterranean attraction that has been closed while new whiz-bang gewgaws are added. The road, Hwy 2, runs for about 16km to Belleplaine.

Tyrol Cot Heritage Village (☎ 424-2074; Codrington Hill; adult/child B\$11.50/5.75; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) is a somewhat contrived 1920s Bajan village centered on the former home of Sir Grantley Adams, first premier of Barbados. The site, on Hwy 2 just north of Bridgetown, is complete with chattel houses where artists work on their crafts.

About 8km northeast of the Everton Weeks Roundabout on the bypass, look for a road crossing Hwy 2. Just west, **Welchman Hall Gully** (☎ 438-6671; Hwy 2, Welchman Hall; adult/child B\$15/7; 🕒 9am–5pm) is a thickly wooded

ravine with a walking track that leads you through nearly 200 species of plant, including spices like nutmeg. Such gullies were too difficult for growing crops and as a result preserve some of the tropical forests that once covered the island.

Just east of Hwy 2, **Flower Forest of Barbados** (☎ 433-8152; Hwy 2; adult/child B\$14/7; ☎ 9am-5pm) is another natural sight. The 20-hectare botanic garden is on the site of a former sugar estate which has many stately mature citrus and breadfruit trees. Paths meander among examples of almost every plant growing on the island. Who knew there were this many kinds of flower?

Hwy 2 curves down through more sugarcane before reaching Belleplaine. Here you have a decision: turn west for the beauty of St Nicholas Abbey (p691) or turn east for the wild beauty of the Atlantic coast (p691).

BRIDGETOWN TO BATHSHEBA

Hwy 3 is a lovely road that goes up and over the middle of Barbados, on a 16km route that links the west and east coasts. Along the way there are some historic sights and some bucolic scenery.

Driving Hwy 3, 3km east of the Clyde Wolcott Roundabout on the bypass, look for signs for **Gun Hill** (☎ 429-1358; Fusilier Rd; adult/child B\$10/5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) on a small road turning south. There's a couple of twists and turns as you travel 1.5km to this 1818 hilltop signal tower with its impressive views of the surrounding valleys and the southwest coast. The island was once connected by six such signal towers that used flags and lanterns to relay messages. The official function of the towers was to keep watch for approaching enemy ships, but they also signaled colonial authorities in the event of a slave revolt.

About 8km after the Gun Hill turn on Hwy 3, you'll see squat little **St Joseph's Church** on the left. Turn on the road that goes south to the right and after only 250m you'll see the unrestored 1819 **Cotton Tower**, another of the signal towers. From here it is a short drive downhill on Hwy 3 to Bathsheba.

EASTERN BARBADOS

The wild Atlantic waters of the east coast are far removed from the rest of the island. The population is small, the coast craggy and

DETOUR

Hwy 3B runs northeast of Gun Hill through some small verdant valleys and plains. It's worthwhile to literally lose yourself here amid the pretty farms punctuated by the odd colonial-era building. Turn north on one of the many small roads any time you want to rejoin Hwy 3.

the waves incessant. It's a place of beautiful windblown vistas and a real haven for surfers. For sights along the coast road north of Bathsheba, see p691.

BATHSHEBA

pop 5100

Bathsheba is the main destination on the east coast although there's no real 'there' here as things are scattered along about 1 mile of sandy, wave-tossed shore and in the hills immediately behind. This is prime surfing country. It's also good for long beach walks as you contemplate feeling you've reached the end of the world. At the south end of Bathsheba's beach, reefs afford enough protection for limited swimming. Note the iconic 'Mushroom Rock', one of several rocks carved into shapes that will cause mycologists to swoon.

At night, it's very quiet here. For excitement there are the lyrical croaks of whistling frogs and the flash of fireflies.

Sights & Activities

ANDROMEDA BOTANIC GARDENS

At the top of the southern entrance to Bathsheba, the splendid **Andromeda Botanic Gardens** (☎ 433-9261; andromeda.cavehill.uwi.edu; Hwy 3; adult/child B\$17.50/9; ☎ 9am-5pm, last admission 4:30pm) cover 2.5 hectares and have a wide collection of introduced tropical plants, including orchids, ferns, water lilies, bougainvillea, cacti and palms. Self-guided walks of various lengths enjoy the floral beauty and splendid views.

SURFING

The world-famous reef break known as **Soup Bowl** is right off the beach in northern Bathsheba. It is one of the best waves in the Caribbean islands. Don't underestimate the break just because the region is not known for powerful surf – Soup Bowl gets big.

Moreover, the reef is shallow and covered in parts by spiny sea urchins. This is not a spot for beginners. Soup Bowl hosts the world's top surfers in international surf competitions in November when the Atlantic is at its strongest. Overall, the best months are August to March. You can rent boards (per day US\$40) and get info at Smokey's Soup Bowl Cafe (right).

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is limited in Bathsheba and that's good. Who wants crowds? Note that until it is renovated, we can't recommend the Edgewater Inn despite its prime location.

Atlantis Hotel (☎ 433-9445; www.atlantisbarbados.com; Tent Bay, Bathsheba; s/d incl breakfast from US\$85/110) One cove south of Bathsheba, Atlantis was the original hotel in the area. It has 10 simple rooms in a solid old wooden building facing the sea. Breakfast is included and you can arrange for other meals, which you can enjoy on the patio. Fabled Bajan author George Lamming is often in residence.

ourpick **Sea-U! Guest House** (☎ 433-9450; www.seaubarbarados.com; Tent Bay, Bathsheba; r incl breakfast from US\$140; ☑) The pick of Bathsheba lodging, the Sea-U has a mannered main house with an addictive porch looking out to sea from the hillside location. Cottages and a restaurant pavilion round out the verdant site. The seven units have kitchen facilities,

wi-fi and a noncliché island motif. There's no TV, kids under eight or smoking. Dinner is served Monday to Saturday.

Smokey's Soup Bowl Cafe (☎ 254-1018; meals from B\$10; ☒ 10am-late) The eponymous Smokey enjoys million-dollar views from his simple joint across from the famous surf break. When not surfing, he cooks up local foods and raps with folks over drinks late into the night.

Roundhouse Restaurant (☎ 433-9678; meals from B\$40; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular touristy restaurant has customers throughout the day who sit around, sip cocktails and savor the views south over Soup Bowl. You can enjoy banana bread with your breakfast, sandwiches and salads at lunch, and specials such as breadfruit soup at dinner.

Getting There & Away

A taxi can be negotiated for about B\$60 from Bridgetown or the south coast, or catch one of the regular buses from Bridgetown that travel Hwys 2 and 3. The trip takes about 45 minutes.

BATHSHEBA SOUTH TO CHRIST CHURCH PARISH

Few people take the time to follow the coast south of Bathsheba. They should. Look for signs on the roads, which stays well up the hillside, for **Martin's Bay**, a little notch in the

A SPOONFUL OF A SOUP BOWL SURFER

Ken Mayers is a lifelong resident of Bathsheba and one of the area's best surfers. He's been surfing for 30 years, teaches the sport to others and is on the Barbados national surf team.

Your father surfed?

In the late 1940s he would cut down trees and use those to go belly boarding. In the 1950s tourists – hippies really – started hanging out here in Bathsheba. They would go down to the cow fields in the morning looking for mushrooms. They brought board surfing along with them and the local guys like my dad picked it up.

What makes Bathsheba's Soup Bowl a good place for surfing?

It's a strong right-handed break which has three takeoff points that can be surfed point to point if you are fast and can read the wave.

When should people surf here?

For good surfers, it's September to November when it is the hurricane season and the start of cold fronts. Kelly Slater calls it a 9+ on a scale of 10. For beginners March to May is best.

And why?

Besides the great surfing, you can interact with local guys. They're all pretty friendly and good about helping you figure the place out. Plus for visitors it's a good place to enjoy the local culture.

What do students worry about?

Will the board hit me? Is the wave too big? What's under the water? I tell them, trust me in my field.

coast that features a sliver of a beach and a sweet little rum shop. Like elsewhere, this isn't swimming country, but the ceaseless surf is captivating. After about two more miles look for another steep road, this one leading down to **Bath Beach**. It's about 1.5km and has a long beach of golden sand. Unlike other parts of this coast, a reef makes swimming possible. Oodles of picnic tables are empty on weekdays, but are crowded with laughing families on weekends.

The road continues south before turning inland through canefields. Look for an iconic Anglican pile of rocks, **St Philip Church**. Here you turn south, following signs to **Sunbury Plantation House** (☎ 423-6270; www.barbadosgreathouse.com; tours adult/child B\$15/7.50; 🕒 10am-4:30pm). Built in the mid-17th century, it was painstakingly restored after a fire in 1995. The house has 60cm-thick walls made from local coral blocks and ballast stones, the latter coming from the ships that set sail from England to pick up Barbadian sugar. The interior retains its plantation-era ambience and is furnished in antiques. The grounds serve as mere backdrops to the busloads of tourists who come for the lunch buffets (B\$37.50).

Continuing south from the plantation house, you reach the busy village of Six Cross Roads, where your route options live up to the promise of the name. You can head southeast to Crane Beach, southwest to Oistins or west to Bridgetown.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

You can find some place to stay at every price point on Barbados, although there are quite

a few more places at the top end than at the budget end.

The west coast, or tellingly the 'Platinum Coast', is home to most of the posh resorts and boutique hotels plus rental apartments and a smattering of more affordable places. The south coast aims for the masses and there are many places to stay, ranging from simple guesthouses to beachfront hotels. Your money will go further in the south; the west is where you go if money is no concern. Throughout the rest of the island you'll find a number of interesting places, including cool and funky places in and around Bathsheba.

In high season (December to April), expect to spend at least US\$100 per night for a nice midrange double on, or more likely near, a beach. But shop around online as there are deals to be had.

The tourism authority maintains a list of families that rent out bedrooms in their homes, from about US\$25 per person per night. Camping is generally not allowed.

Most hotels add a 7.5% government tax plus a 10% service charge, and many have a minimum stay. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, rates decline by as much as 40% outside of high season.

ACTIVITIES Beaches & Swimming

Some of the island's prettiest beaches and calmest waters are along the west coast. Top spots include Paynes Bay and Mullins Bay – lovely white-sand beaches that are easily accessible.

The southwest side of the island also has some fine beaches, including Sandy Beach in Worthing, Rockley Beach, Dover Beach and Enterprise Beach. On the southeast side is Crane Beach, a scenic stretch of pink-tinged

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** Barbados has two daily newspapers, the *Barbados Advocate* and the *Nation*. The UK's *Daily Mail* is sold in touristy areas for those who need a dose of Middle England.
- **Radio & TV** The government-owned TV station CBC broadcasts on Channel 8. Local radio is on FM 92.9 and 98.1 or AM 790 and 900; there's soca music on FM 95.3; and gospel on FM 102.1.
- **Electricity** The current used is 110V, 50Hz, with a flat two-pronged plug; many hotels have 240V converter outlets in the bathrooms.
- **Weights & Measures** Barbados uses the metric system; however, many islanders still give directions in feet and miles and sell produce by the pound.

BEST BAJAN BEACHES

- **Crane Beach** (p688) This isolated beach with brilliant white sands is a tranquil paradise.
- **Bath Beach** (opposite) On weekdays this long ribbon of sand is all but empty *and* you can go swimming.
- **Paynes Bay Beach** (p688) North of Bridgetown, this calm, sandy bay is a family favorite.
- **Enterprise Beach** (p687) Just east of Oistins, this lovely beach has fine facilities.
- **Bathsheba Beach** (p692) This rugged coastline is gorgeous to walk and hairy to surf.

sand that's popular with bodysurfers but rough for swimming.

Around Bridgetown, the locally popular Pebbles Beach on Carlisle Bay and the area around the Malibu rum distillery are appealing.

The east coast has dangerous water conditions, including shallow reefs and strong currents, and only the most confident swimmers and surfers should take to the waters. Most of the Bathsheba area is best enjoyed from shore.

Boat Trips

Day cruises are a popular way to explore the island. Many of the larger boats are floating parties, while the smaller operations tend to be more tranquil. For those who want the scuba experience without getting wet, there are submarine cruises.

Atlantis (☎ 436-8929; www.atlantisadventures.com) Operating in most of the Caribbean's major destinations, the *Atlantis* is a 28-seat submarine lined with portholes. Departs from Bridgetown and tours the coral reef off the island's west coast for US\$100.

El Tigre (☎ 417-7245; www.eltigretravels.com) Offers a three-hour cruises with snorkeling from B\$120.

Harbour Master (☎ 430-0900; www.tallshipscruises.com) Four-deck party vessel with a water slide attached. Voyages average US\$80 and include lunch and water activities. Also offers pirate-themed party cruises. Arrrrr!

Diving & Snorkeling

The west coast of Barbados has reef dives with soft corals, gorgonians and colorful sponges. There are also about a dozen shipwrecks. The largest and most popular, the 11m freighter *Stavronikita*, sits upright off the central west coast in 42m of water, with the rigging reaching to within 6m of the surface. In Bridgetown's Carlisle Bay, the coral-encrusted tug *Berwyn* lies in only 7m of water and makes for good snorkeling as well as diving.

One-tank dives with gear average B\$110, and two-tank dives B\$180. For beginners, most dive companies offer a brief resort course and a shallow dive for B\$120 to B\$160. Many also offer full PADI certification courses for B\$700 to B\$900. Rates often include free transportation from your hotel; many dive shops can arrange cheap accommodation for their clients.

Some better-known Barbadian dive shops are found near Bridgetown (p682), Mt Standfast (p689), Speightstown (p690) and Hometown (p689).

Snorkeling sets can be rented for about B\$20 per day at beach water-sports huts, dive shops and some hotels and restaurants. Snorkeling tours are common; many dive shops offer good ones. The Barbados Marine Reserve (p689) has good snorkeling and you can rent gear there. Carlisle Bay is also popular and the beach bars will rent gear.

For indepth information on local diving, get a copy of *Barbados Dive Guide* by Miller Publishing (www.barbadosbooks.com).

Golf

The well-heeled of Barbados support several golf courses. The oldest public course is the **Barbados Golf Club** (☎ 428-8463; www.barbadosgolfclub.com; Durants) where greens fees begin at US\$120, although top-end hotels often offer discounts to guests. It was redesigned in 2000 by Ron Kirby and is 6km long.

Hiking

The **Barbados National Trust** (☎ 436-9033; <http://trust.funbarbados.com>) leads guided hikes in the countryside. Hike leaders share insights into local history, geology and wildlife. Locations vary, but all hikes end where they start, cover about 8km and are run on Sundays at 6am and 3:30pm. There is no fee. Route information can be found in the free tourist publications and is also available by calling the trust.

Adrian Loveridge at the Peach and Quiet Hotel (p688) near Silver Sands, leads nature hikes during the high season.

A nice hike to do on your own is along the old railroad bed that runs along the east coast from Belleplaine to Martin's Bay. The whole walk is about 20km, but it can be broken into shorter stretches.

Horseback Riding

Wilcox Riding Stables (☎ 428-3610) near the airport offers one-hour rides. The trails are in Long Beach on the southeast coast, and cost around B\$100, including hotel pickup.

Surfing

Barbados has some surprisingly good waves for the Caribbean. The biggest swells hit the east coast, with prime surfing at the Soup Bowl (p692), off Bathsheba, and another spot called Duppies, up the coast. South Point and Rockley Beach on the south coast are sometimes good as is Brandon's, which is next to the Hilton Hotel at Needham's Point.

There are local guys renting out boards on the beach at some of the popular surf spots. Prices are negotiable depending on the quality of the board, but even the nicest board should never be over B\$15 to B\$20 per hour.

There are two good surf schools of note: Zed's Surfing Adventures, based at Silver Sands (p688); and **Surf Barbados** (☎ 256-3906; www.surf-barbados.com), which transports clients to various spots depending on conditions. Surf Barbados' beginners class costs US\$75 for two hours.

Windsurfing & Kitesurfing

Barbados has good windsurfing and kitesurfing, with the best winds from December to June. Silver Sands, at the southern tip of the island, has excellent conditions for advanced boarders, while Maxwell, just to the west, is better for intermediates. Most beginners also take lessons in Silver Sands, where there is also board rental available (p688).

BOOKS

The most common type of book on Barbados is the coffee-table photograph book. *Barbados: Portrait of an Island*, by Dick Scoones, is one of the better choices should you need extra weight in your baggage.

Numerous books cover Barbadian history and sights. *The History of Barbados* by

Robert H Schomburg examines mice breeding in 1950s Rhodesia...well no, it's a thorough study of the island's past. *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland* by Sean O'Callaghan traces the scores of Irish sent by Cromwell to work as slaves on sugar plantations.

Treasures of Barbados by Henry Fraser, president of the Barbados National Trust, surveys island architecture.

Books on Barbadian political figures include *Tom Adams: A Biography* and *Grantley Adams and the Social Revolution*, both by local historian FA Hoyos.

Those interested in the natural features of Barbados may enjoy *Geology of Barbados*, by Hans Machel, or *A Naturalist's Year in Barbados*, by Maurice Bateman Hutt.

The Barbadian Rum Shop: The Other Watering Hole, by Peter Laurie, is an overview of the history of the rum shop and the role that it has played in Barbadian life. A variety of Bajan cookbooks can also be found at most bookstores.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most banks are open from 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday, and until 5pm on Friday. A few branches are also open Saturday morning. Most stores are open at least from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and until noon Saturday. Larger supermarkets and shops aimed at visitors stay open until at least 8pm.

CHILDREN

Barbados is generally a family-friendly destination. A number of resorts have organized children's activities or in-house daycare/baby-sitting.

Most beaches are safe for children to play on and many of the south- and west-coast beaches are calm enough for younger swimmers. The east-coast surf is too powerful for novice swimmers of any age.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime, including assaults on tourists, is not unknown on Barbados. Most crimes, however, are simple tourist scams – normal precautions should suffice.

Beware of pickpockets in Bridgetown – keep your valuables secure around the bustling center on Swan and Broad Sts. There

are some slick hustlers who hang out at the entrance to St Lawrence Gap and also around south coast nightlife venues. Steer clear unless you want to invest in someone's habit.

Sidewalks are narrow or nonexistent and roads are curvy, so use caution even while walking along quiet streets.

Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish are occasionally encountered in Barbadian waters (although they are large, slow and usually easy to spot), and poisonous manchineel trees grow along some beaches.

Truth be told, the greatest risk is a bad sunburn.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Australia (☎ 435-2834; www.embassy.gov.au/bb.html); Bishop's Court Hill, St Michael

Canada (☎ 429-3550; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/barbados); Bishop's Court Hill, St Michael

Cuba (☎ 435-2769; embacubalcg@sunbeach.net); Palm View, Erdiston Dr, St Michael

France (☎ 435-6847; Bulkeley Great House, Bulkeley, St George)

Germany (☎ 427-1876; Dayrell's Rd, Pleasant Hall, Christ Church)

UK (☎ 430-7800; www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk/Barbados); Lower Collymore Rock, St Michael

USA (☎ 436-4950; <http://barbados.usembassy.gov>); Wildey Business Park, Wildey, St Michael

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Barbados has visitor-friendly events throughout the year. Some of the larger ones:

Jazz Festival (January; www.barbadosjazzfestival.com) Celebrates Barbadians' historic love of jazz with major performers from the US, UK and Caribbean.

Holetown Festival (February) This festival celebrates the February 17, 1627 – the arrival of the first English settlers on Barbados. Holetown's week-long festivities include street fairs, a music festival at the historic parish church and a road race.

Oistins Fish Festival (Easter weekend) Commemorates the signing of the Charter of Barbados and celebrates the skills of local fishermen. It's a seaside festivity with events focusing on boat races, fish-filleting competitions, local foods, crafts and dancing.

Congaline Carnival (late April) This is a big street party with music and arts. The focus of the event is an all-day band parade and conga line that winds its way from Bridgetown to St Lawrence Gap.

Crop-Over Festival (mid-July) The island's top event. It originated in colonial times as a celebration to mark the end of the sugarcane harvest. Festivities stretch over a three-week period beginning in mid-July with spirited

calypso competitions, fairs and other activities. The festival culminates with a Carnival-like costume parade and fireworks on Kadooment Day, a national holiday, in August. **National Independence Festival of Creative Arts** (November) Features talent contests in dance, drama, singing and the like. Performances by the finalists are held on Independence Day (November 30).

There is also a handful of international sporting events in Barbados, including the International Windsurfing Championships in February; the Reef Surfing Championship in November; and the early December 10km marathon, Run Barbados.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Barbados is a conservative and religious place that is generally opposed to homosexuality. That said, there are a few openly homosexual Bajan couples (although they still tend to be discreet) and even the rare transvestite.

Homosexual visitors to Barbados will need to be judicious outside of international resorts and especially in smaller, more traditional towns.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Barbados:

New Year's Day January 1

Error Barrow Day January 21

Good Friday late March/early April

Easter Monday late March/early April

Heroes' Day April 28

Labour Day May 1

Whit Monday Eighth Monday after Easter

Emancipation Day August 1

Kadooment Day First Monday in August

UN Day First Monday in October

Independence Day November 30

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet places in Bridgetown, most of the tourist centers and larger towns. Wi-fi is increasingly common at hotels and many have a computer guests can use.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (www.bhta.org) The Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association is a great resource for accommodation needs.

Barbados National Trust (<http://trust.funbarbados.com>) The Barbados National Trust website has links to the many historic sites around the island.

Barbados.org (www.barbados.org) Omnibus website with lots of travel-related links.

Fun Barbados (www.funbarbados.com) General travel information site with links to offers and hotels.

National News (www.nationnews.com) *National News* is Barbados' daily newspaper.

Visit Barbados (www.visitbarbados.org) Official site of the Barbados Tourism Authority; more flash than substance.

Yellow Pages (www.yellowpages-caribbean.com) Follow the links to a searchable version of the Barbados *Yellow Pages*.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Barbados has a high standard of health-care. Your accommodation can direct you to local doctors, all of whom speak excellent English. The country's main hospital is in Bridgetown (p680).

MONEY

You'll certainly want some Barbados dollars on hand, but larger payments can be made in US dollars, frequently with a major credit card. Hotels and guesthouses quote rates in US dollars (as do many dive shops and some restaurants), although you can use either US or Barbadian currency to settle the account.

The common street exchange rate is B\$2 to US\$1 for traveler's checks or cash, although true rates can fluctuate a couple of cents either way.

ATMs and banks are easy to find in larger towns and major tourist areas. Cash is displayed in Barbados dollars.

TELEPHONE

The area code for Barbados is ☎ 246. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1-246 + the local seven-digit number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international access code + ☎ 246 + the local number. We have included only the seven-digit local number for Barbados listings in this chapter.

View your room phone (or a pay phone in tourist areas) with the same skepticism you would a person with a knife in a dark alley. The more it is emblazoned with 'Call Home' come-ons, the more likely you'll end up paying US\$3 or more per minute for your call. Buy phone cards from vendors or use internet call centers where the rate averages US\$0.50 per minute.

If you have a GSM mobile phone you can purchase a SIM card for local service for B\$50, which includes B\$25 in calling credit. Rates within Barbados start at B\$0.10 per minute;

to the UK and US from B\$0.80 per minute. The two carriers are Bmobile from Cable & Wireless (www.bmobile.com.bb) and Digicel (www.digicelbarbados.com). Both has shops across the island.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The free annual, *Ins & Outs of Barbados*, is encyclopedic, filled with watch ads and so large that your holiday will be over if you drop it on your toe.

Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (☎ 426-5041, 429-2845; www.bhta.org; 4th Ave, Belleville, St Michael; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Barbados Tourism Authority (www.visitbarbados.org); Bridgetown (☎ 427-2623; Harbour Rd; ☎ 8:15am-4:30pm Mon-Fri); Grantley Adams International Airport (☎ 428-5570; ☎ 8am-10pm or until the last flight arrives); Cruise ship terminal (☎ 426-1718; ☎ when ships are in port)

TOURS

Most tour companies offer a variety of half- and full-day options that either provide an overview with stops at key sites or emphasize special interests such as nature and gardens. There are a huge range of choices, as you'll see from the brochure racks. Most, however, follow very set routes and you may well feel part of a herd. The various 4WD options are for those with Hummer-envy.

One delightful option is run by the **Barbados Transport Board** (☎ 436-6820; www.transportboard.com; adult/child B\$15/10; ☎ tours 2-7pm Sun). These delightful tours of the island are popular with locals and the itinerary varies each week. Buses depart from Independence Sq, Bridgetown.

The going rate for custom tours by taxi drivers is B\$50 an hour, but you can usually negotiate with individual drivers to work out your own deal. Hotels usually have drivers they work with.

See p695 for information on boat trips.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

International resorts generally have good accommodations for people with disabilities. Otherwise much of Barbados is something of a challenge.

VISAS

Visas are not required for stays of up to six months for citizens of the US, Canada, Australia, Japan and the EU. Other should confirm their status.

WORK

Foreigners will find it difficult to get a job without sponsorship.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women won't find anything especially concerning about a visit to Barbados.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Barbados

Nearly all visitors will enter the country through Grantley Adams International Airport or Bridgetown's cruise-ship terminal. All foreigners entering Barbados should be in possession of a valid passport and a return or onward ticket. Cruise-ship passengers who stay less than 24 hours are not required to carry a valid passport.

Air

Grantley Adams International Airport (BGI; ☎ 418-4242; www.gaiinc.bb) is on the island's south-east corner, about 16km from Bridgetown. It is the largest airport in the Eastern Caribbean and the major point of entry for the region.

The **Barbados Tourism Authority** (☎ 428-5570; ☎ 8am-10pm or until the last flight arrives) booth can help you book a room and is a good place to pick up tourist brochures. There are a number of ATMs in the departures area of the airport (we'd put them near arrivals ourselves...) as well as the **Barbados National Bank** (☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) which exchanges money.

Once through security, departing passengers will find numerous shops, including a good bookstore and a food court.

Unless noted otherwise, airlines have offices only at the airport. The following connect Barbados with these cities (some services are seasonal and only weekly):

Air Canada (☎ 428-5077; www.aircanada.com)

Montreal, Toronto

American/American Eagle (☎ 800-744-0006; www.aa.com) Miami, New York, San Juan

BMI (☎ 800-788-0555; www.flybmi.com) Manchester

British Airways (☎ 436-6413; www.britishairways.com) London

Caribbean Airlines (formerly BWIA; ☎ 800-744-2225;

www.caribbean-airlines.com; Fairchild St, Bridgetown;

☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Kingston, Trinidad

Delta (☎ 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) Atlanta

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

■ **Ambulance** ☎ 511

■ **Coast Guard Defense Force** ☎ emergencies 427-8819, nonemergencies 436-6185

■ **Fire** ☎ 311

■ **Police** ☎ 211

LIAT (☎ 428-0986; www.liat.com; Fairchild St, Bridgetown; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Antigua,

Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent, Tobago, Trinidad

US Airways (☎ 800-622-1015; www.usairways.com) Charlotte, Philadelphia

Virgin Atlantic (☎ 228-4886; www.virgin-atlantic.com;

Parravicino Office Complex, Hastings; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) London

XL (www.xl.com) London

Sea

CRUISE SHIP

About 450,000 cruise-ship passengers arrive in Barbados each year as part of eastern Caribbean itineraries. Ships dock at Bridgetown Harbour, about 1km west of the city center. The port has the usual duty-free shops and a branch office of the **Barbados Tourism Authority** (☎ 426-1718; ☎ when ships are in port).

See p830 for details about cruise ship travel throughout the Caribbean.

YACHT

Because of Barbados' easterly position and challenging sailing conditions, it is well off the main track for most sailors.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

If you're traveling light, it's possible to walk out of the airport to the road and wait for a passing bus. Look for buses marked 'Sam Lord's Castle' (or just 'Castle') if you're going east, 'Bridgetown' if you're going to the south coast. For the west coast, occasional buses run to Speightstown, bypassing the capital; alternatively, take a bus to Bridgetown, where you'll have to change to the west-coast terminal.

Make sure the bus driver knows your destination.

Taxis are plentiful, the 'official' prices (subject to negotiation) from the airport to the island's main destinations include: Bathsheba

B\$73, Bridgetown Harbour B\$46, Holetown B\$58, Prospect B\$53 and Speightstown B\$73. Many hotels offer pick-up services for only somewhat more.

Bicycle

Barbados is predominantly flat and is good for riding. Most shops require a credit card or B\$100 deposit for rentals. Your hotel can hook you up with a rental, there are also usually bikes available at the cruise ship port.

Bus

It's possible to get to virtually any place on the island by public bus. There are three kinds of bus: government-operated public buses, which are blue with a yellow stripe; privately operated minibuses, which are intermediate-size buses painted yellow with a blue stripe; and route taxis, which are white, individually owned minivans that have 'ZR' on their license plates. All three types of bus charge the same fare: B\$1.50 to any place on the island. You should have exact change when you board the government bus, but minibuses and route taxis will make change.

Most buses transit through Bridgetown, although a few north-south buses bypass the city. Buses to the southeast part of the island generally transit through Oistins.

Bus stops around the island are marked with red-and-white signs printed with the direction in which the bus is heading ('To City' or 'Out of City'). Buses usually have their destinations posted on or above the front windshield.

Buses along the main routes, such as Bridgetown to Oistins or Speightstown, are frequent, running from dawn to around midnight. You can get complete schedule information on any route from the **Transport Board** (☎ 436-6820; www.transportboard.com).

Car & Motorcycle

RENTAL

Barbados doesn't have any car-rental agents affiliated with major international rental chains. There are, instead, scores of independent car-rental companies, some so small that they are based out of private homes.

Despite the number of companies, prices don't seem to vary much. The going rate for a small car is about B\$150 a day including unlimited mileage and insurance. Most companies rent out strange, small convertible bug-

gies called 'mokes,' which are usually cheapest (they look like the odd car in *Fantasy Island*). Rental cars are marked with an 'H' on the license plate.

While most car-rental companies don't have booths at the airport, most will deliver your car there or to your hotel. Note that among the small agencies, some aren't especially professional and complaints are common.

Some of the larger, more established companies include:

Courtesy Rent-A-Car (☎ 431-4160; www.courtesyrentacar.com)

Direct Rentals (☎ 420-6372; www.barbadoscars.com)

Stoutes Car Rental (☎ 416-4456; www.stoutescar.com)

Top Class Car Rentals (☎ 228-7368; www.topclassrentals.com)

ROAD CONDITIONS

Highways are not very well marked, although landmarks are clearly labeled, as are some roundabouts (traffic circles) and major intersections. The most consistent highway markings are often the low yellow cement posts at the side of the road; they show the highway number and below that the number of kilometers from Bridgetown.

All primary and main secondary roads are paved, although some are a bit narrow. There are plenty of gas stations around the island except on the east coast. Some stations in the Bridgetown area are open 24 hours.

Expect rush-hour traffic on the roads around booming Bridgetown.

ROAD RULES

In Barbados, you drive on the left. At intersections and narrow passages, drivers may flash their lights to indicate that you should proceed. Temporary driving permits are required; they cost B\$10 and can be obtained through your car-rental agency.

Taxi

Taxis have a 'Z' on the license plate and usually a 'taxi' sign on the roof. They're easy to find and often wait at the side of the road in popular tourist areas.

Although fares are fixed by the government, taxis are not metered and you will have to haggle for a fair price. The rate per kilometer is about B\$2 and the flat hourly rate B\$50. 'Official' fares from Bridgetown include: Bathsheba (B\$58), Oistins (B\$31) and Speightstown (B\$46).

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