

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PHOTOS BY PETER PIERCE (MONKEYS), OSWIN BROWNE (BIRD), OTHERS BY DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Saint Lucia's pitons, mountainous volcanic plugs, are for climbing. From top left: Nevis tours may find African green vervet monkeys; Tobago bird-watchers may see white-tailed hummingbirds; Dominica's trails are for the sure-footed; and on Anguilla, Veya restaurant is a foodie destination.

A sea of paradises, each a perfect choice

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There are about 7,000 islands in the West Indies archipelago, and, like snowflakes, no two are alike. Here's how to find your Caribbean idyll.

Give me lush, green, and gorgeous

Saint Lucia is the obvious choice. Laced with leafy hiking trails that snake through the rain forest, including a (fabulous but challenging) hike that goes up the tallest piton (peak), the island is a can't-miss destination for outdoor lovers. Doff the boots and snorkel in the bay between the pitons; snow farms will seem very far away. www.stlucianow.com

Been there, done that? Pounded in August by tropical storm Erika, **Dominica** is ready for visitors again, and could use some tourist love. Hike

through it, hike around it, and cool off under a waterfall, or gain bragging rights by trekking to the 200-foot-wide Boiling Lake in Morne Trois Piton National Park. Later, relax at Rosalie Bay (www.rosaliebay.com), a top-rated eco-lodge with an organic restaurant, spa, and sea turtle-hatching program. www.discoverdominica.com

Give me incredible island cuisine

Food fanatic? Think **Anguilla**. Book a seat at the chef's table at CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa (www.cuisinartresort.com), one of the island's sublime indulgences, and feast on produce from the resort's hydroponic farm, sharing the plate with locally-caught tuna, mahi, and wahoo. Add restaurants daVida, Veya, and Coba to your list — plus the beach barbecue on Sandy Island — and you're in foodie heaven. www.visitanguilla.com

Been there, done that? Then this

year, consider **Grenada**. Called "the Spice of the Caribbean," thanks to its spice production (nutmeg appears on the flag), this aromatic island has a vibrant food scene featuring dishes like ginger pork and curried mutton. Local fare is authentically Caribbean, and British celebrity chef Gary Rhodes makes magic at his namesake restaurant at the Calabash Hotel & Spa (www.calabashhotel.com). www.puregrenada.com

Turks and Caicos is also coming on strong as a foodie destination. Host of the annual Caribbean Food & Wine Festival, the Grace Bay Club in Providenciales (www.gracebayresorts.com) offers splurge-worthy oceanfront dining. Go barefoot at Da Conch Shack, where the conch fritters are a must. www.turksandcaicostourism.com

Take me where the wild things are
Some of the things we miss in New

England in the winter: light, color, and chirping birds. Add some cackling monkeys to your winter soundtrack in **Nevis**. The tiny island and the federation's other half, **Saint Kitts**, are home to thousands of free-roaming African green vervet monkeys. The silver-bodied, black-faced monkeys have lived on the islands for more than 300 years. You might see (or hear) them on your own; book a sunset monkey tour at the Four Seasons Nevis (www.fourseasons.com/nevis) to increase your odds. www.nevisisland.com

Been there, done that? **Trinidad's** low-key sister island, **Tobago**, is birding central. The Main Ridge Forest Reserve rain forest is a haven for exotics like the collared trogon and the Tobago blue-backed manakin. Offshore, mile-long Little Tobago Island is one of the Caribbean's most important seabird sanctuaries. www.gotrinidadandtobago.com

Sign us up for family fun

Passports aren't needed (Puerto Rico's a US territory) and airfare tends to be affordable, so **San Juan** is wildly popular with vacationing families. Beachfront hotels have loads of amenities, but you'll want to venture out and explore El Yunque National Forest, the Toro Verde zip lines, plus caves and bioluminescent bays. www.seepuertorico.com

Been there, done that? Try something totally new and thrilling. Club Med Punta Cana resort (www.clubmed.us) in Punta Cana, **Dominican Republic**, recently launched "Creative" by Cirque du Soleil, featuring circus-y skills like acrobatic bungee, flying trapeze, and aerial silks. Parents can join their intrepid offspring, or escape to the serenity of Zen Oasis, an adults-only zone with a lagoon pool, in-water lounge chairs and cabanas, a yoga hut, and a secluded beach. www.godominicanrepublic.com

Bring on the watersports

Wander along 2-mile Palm Beach in **Aruba** with a heavy slick of sunscreen and a few bucks tucked into your board shorts, and choose from among every type of wet-and-wild activity imaginable, and then some (jet packs, anyone?) Or head out on a jeep tour and swim in a conchi (natural pool). Catch your breath with a local Balashi beer at a barefoot beach bar. www.aruba.com

Been there, done that? You won't find a huge selection of watersports in **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, but what's there is spectacular. The waters surrounding Saint Vincent and its north-south string of 32 islets are among the most beautiful sailing grounds in the world. Charter a boat (www.barefootyachts.com) and island-hop, with stops for snorkeling in turquoise lagoons and visits to Bequia and Mustique. www.discovervbg.com

Give us a grown-up getaway

Beaches and tropical sunsets are undeniably romantic. Add a dollop of night life and you've got vacation perfection, a combo they've fine-polished on **Saint Martin**. The Dutch side (**Sint Maarten**) of this island that is shared with the French rocks with the beat of beach bars and lounges, and the jangly vibe of a dozen casinos. (The French side, Saint Martin, has a more relaxed vibe and incredible restaurants, especially in Grand Case.) www.vacationstmaarten.com

Been there, done that? **Martinique**, the social and cultural capital of the French Antilles, offers an intriguing marriage of Creole culture and French flair. Beyond the beautiful beaches and waterfalls, count on excellent shopping and dining and a volcano museum. Bonus: Nonstop flights from Boston on low-cost carrier Norwegian Air Shuttle launch in December. www.us.martinique.org

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HERE

HOLIDAY TOURS OF HISTORIC VERMONT HOMES

Experience the charm of old-time New England on the Pentangle Arts Council's Holiday House Tour (Dec. 12, 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.). Now in its 14th year, the event is a beloved feature of the Wassail Weekend festivities in the historic village of Woodstock, Vt. This year's tour begins at the Town Hall Theatre, in continuous use since its construction in 1900 as the Woodstock Opera House, and culminates at Dana House, furnished to represent the home of a nineteenth-century merchant. Three additional houses are kept a secret until the first tour begins. At each location, docents provide historical information and answer questions; some homes feature performances by local musicians. For the full Holiday House Tour experience, take advantage of the horse-drawn wagon that loops along the Village Green. Tickets: \$30 advance; \$35 day of. 802-457-3981. www.pentanglearts.org/14th-house-tour/

NEW SHUTTLE FLIGHTS TO NEW YORK

Business and luxury leisure travelers are cheering Tradewind Aviation's new shuttle flights from Boston's Logan



Airport to the Westchester County Airport in White Plains. Offered as an alternative to driving or taking a bus, the train, or commercial carriers, the year-round service offers eight flights per day on weekdays, with availability scheduled to increase with demand. The new route offers the luxury and ease of a private charter, with no TSA security checkpoints at the airport, private gate entrance, exclusive FBO lounges, plus complimentary on-board snacks, drinks and checked baggage rolled into the cost of a single seat. Rates start at \$395 plus tax per one-way flight and \$295 when purchased in a commuter ticket book. 800-376-7922, flytradewind.com

THERE

TRAIL CELEBRATES ITALIAN MASTER PAINTER

Follow the footsteps of 15th-century artist Piero della Francesca (1415/20-1492) along the Terre di Piero, a route that visits museums and churches where his paintings can be seen in four regions of Italy that inspired his work — Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Marche, and Urbino (where "The Flagellation of Christ," above, is at the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche). Plan your travels through the website or, even better, download the smartphone app (available in English and Italian) for videos describing paintings on display, points of interest in featured towns as well as information on culture,

folklore, traditional food and wine, and more than 2,000 accommodation recommendations. Highlights include the artist's birthplace in Sansepolcro, home to the Piero della Francesca Foundation, and Madonna del Parto (a pregnant Madonna) in Monterchi. New exhibitions mark the trail's one-year anniversary, including the San Domenico Museum Complex in Forlì, Emilia Romagna (Feb. 13-June 26). The app's geolocation service suggests best routes. terredipiero.it/en/

LUXURY HUTS DEBUT IN JAMAICA

You won't find James Bond at GoldenEye — the luxe resort developed by Island Records founder Chris Blackwell — but you will discover new accommodations at this Jamaican property that was once the home of renowned author Ian Fleming. On Feb. 1, twenty-six new huts will open, all with beach or bay views. These free-standing one- and two-bedroom octagonal structures are positioned to maximize cool ocean breezes, and each will offer a private veranda, oversized louvered windows, crisp white linens, African fabrics, interior shower, and bamboo-enclosed outdoor shower and tub. Activities focus around Sha'been, a seafront bar with rooftop lounge and game room, and a whimsically designed freshwa-

ter pool. Steps away, Snorkeler's Cove offers access to GoldenEye's coral reef and the Oracabessa Fish Sanctuary. Book now for travel beginning Feb. 1. Rates from \$400 low season to \$600 high season. 1-800-OUT-POST (688-7678) goldeneye.com

EVERYWHERE

COMPACT UNIVERSAL BATTERY CHARGER

Tired of packing multiple cables and accessories for your various electronic devices when you travel? Spyder Digital Research has launched the Commuter, a 3-in-1 universal battery charger that combines a wall charger, car charger, and internal battery pack into a single device. The minimalist and compact design is optimal for those on-the-go, featuring a 2600mAh internal battery that works with any smartphone or tablet; on/off button controls power supply; USB port for compatibility with all tablets, smartphones, and other devices charged by USB cable; and rubberized nonslip coating for better grip. Slightly larger than a credit card, the Commuter fits easily in your purse, briefcase, or pocket. \$49.99. On [Amazon at amazon.com/dp/B015HJY8UG](http://amazon.com/dp/B015HJY8UG)

QUICK-DRY TRAVEL TOWEL

Designed for the outdoor enthusiast as well as the business traveler, Discover Trekking's Ultra Fast-dry Towels (below) are soft, thin, easy to pack, and versatile. The high-tech material absorbs moisture quickly, so it dries almost instantly, and is specially treated to repel bacteria that can cause odors. Four sizes offer multiple uses, including in-flight blanket or beach sarong (large); baby's bath or child's beach towel (medium); gym towel or sailboat/RV hand towel (small); and golf bag or personal face towel (extra small). The largest size weighs only 9 ounces and can easily squeeze into your suitcase or backpack. In more than a dozen colors. \$12.95-\$34.95. 1-877-551-6577, discovertrekking.com/ultra-fast-dry-towel

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