



St. Lucia

by Eric Vohr
Photos Michaela Urban

When I first started chartering I would often make the mistake of trying to do too much in too little time. Let's face it, it's hard to look at a map of the Cyclades or the Leewards and not want to visit every island. The problem with those kinds of itineraries is you spend too much time sailing and not

A destination worthy of equal time spent sailing and exploring ashore

enough time enjoying the destination. And while I love sailing, I don't travel to beautiful places just to spend all my time out on the water.

On a recent trip to the Windward Islands, I found the ideal destination for this kind of relaxed sailing. With just the right number of amazing beaches and anchorages on its Caribbean coast, and countless great inland attractions and eco lodges, St. Lucia is the perfect spot for sailors

who are more about enjoying the experience than just clocking lots of sea miles.

Rodney Bay is the place where most charters start, as this is where the majority of the charter companies keep their boats. We chose Sunsail as they have one of the largest and newest fleets, great support, and I've had good luck with them in the past.

Rodney Bay is on St. Lucia's northern tip on the Caribbean side, so the anchorages you'll be hitting are all south of there. It has an inner bay, which is where you find the marinas and the Sunsail base, and a



much larger outer bay with a sandy bottom that has almost endless anchoring space. It's a good choice for a first/last night as there are great restaurants, clubs and resorts. And it's only a 10-minute motor from the marina so you don't have to stress out about getting out early. Aside from strolling the Bay's amazing beaches or hitting up some of the beach bars and beach parties, I recommend exploring Pigeon Island and Fort Rodney on the northern end of the Bay. From the top of the Fort you have a stunning view looking south across of the Bay and down the coast. To the north you

can just make out Martinique in the distance on a clear day, in fact, the British used this fort to spy on the French on Martinique.

If you like SCUBA, there's a great dive shop in Rodney Bay called Scuba Steve's. These guys run a class operation and will take you to some world class dive sites along the Caribbean coast. I did a wreck dive with them that was fantastic. Expect sea turtles, spiny lobsters, rays, moray eels and forests of brightly colored coral.

A couple hours sail south of Rodney is Marigot Bay. The site of the 1967 film *Dr. Dolittle*, Marigot is so picture perfect it still looks like a movie set. Just like in Rodney Bay, there's a lot to do here—restaurants, resorts, bars, shops and a full service marina. But unlike Rodney, Marigot is much more laid back, intimate, and low key. Expect to meet a lot of friendly sailors, as this is the island's only hurricane hole and a famous hang out. It's a great place to get some intel on St. Lucia and also some last minute provisioning as they have everything here.

I recommend taking a slip at the Capella Resort, just be sure to call ahead as they fill up. In the morning you can have a wonderful breakfast on their elegant outdoor dining deck. If you want to be on a hook, there's lots of good anchoring here and also mooring balls. The boat boys will meet you as you sail in and show you where to go.

A short sail south of Marigot is one of the nicest "natural" anchor-

ages on the island, Anse Cochon. There's a resort here, but it's up on a hill off the beach so it's relatively unobtrusive. Anse Cochon has great holding, dependable mooring balls and some of the best snorkeling on the island. It's also the most secluded private overnight spot you'll find, as the only access to Anse Cochon is the private road owned by the resort. So, tourist traffic is very limited here. If you have the time, I recommend a couple nights here, it's that good.

Just south of Anse Cochon is Anse Chastanet beach resort, arguably one of the most celebrated spots on island. There are two spectacular beaches here, Anse Chastanet and Anse Mamin. Anse Chastanet is the main beach and it's also where the resort has its SCUBA operation. A short walk north will take you to Anse Mamin where you will also find an 18th century sugar plantation. The resort has built some cool mountain biking trails here and you can rent bikes. Unfortunately, there are no moorings at these beaches, it's roly, and the holding was reported to be not very good, so it's not a great place to stay overnight. That being said, it's a perfect lunch spot.

To overnight, you'll have to go a little further south of Anse Chastanet to Petit Piton, which has mooring balls on its northern side in the Bay of Soufriere. Petit Piton is the smaller of the two iconic volcanic mountains that pretty much define St. Lucia (the larger one is called





Gros Piton). You'll need to hail a guy named Benny on channel 16 to reserve the moorings. We don't recommend anchoring in the harbor of Soufriere, as it's not considered safe.

From the mooring at Petit Piton, the town of Soufriere is a short dinghy ride. It's a fun town to explore and it has pretty much anything you need. I picked up some cheap and very effective fishing lures in the fish market at the end of town. I also bought fresh fruit and veggies at the open-air market in the center of town. If you're looking for inland tours, this is where you'll find them, as much of St. Lucia's popular destinations are close to Soufriere.

My favorite inland excursion is the Enbas Saut Waterfall Trail. A little off the tourist track, this is a great place to get away from it all and stretch your legs. You can either hike along a ridge trail, which wanders through a magical rainforest providing breathtaking views of ocean and island, or hike the hundreds of steps that take you down to the Enbas Saut Waterfall. The falls are the perfect temperature to cool you down after your hike, so pack a swimsuit. Keep your eye out for some of the local land crabs, I got

caught in a downpour and a herd of them came out of their dens and paraded around. The road that takes you to the start of the trail in Fond St. Jacques is a little beat up from the last big storm that hit the island, so make sure you arrange a car with four-wheel drive.

Another spot I enjoyed was the Soufriere Drive-in Volcano and Sulfur Springs. This is one of the few places in the world where you can actually tour the crater of a collapsed volcano—I'm talking bubbling hot gases, brimstone, power of God type stuff. They used to let you wander among the bubbling superheated pools, but a guide fell in a few years back and got badly burned, so now everyone stays on the observation platform.

I also liked the Diamond Falls Botanical Gardens. Located on the site of an old plantation, pretty much every kind of flora found on the island is growing here, and given how lush and rich St. Lucia is, that's saying a lot. There is also a beautiful falls and hot springs that you can enjoy, so, again, bring your bathing suit.

One of the places I enjoyed most was the hike up the Gros Piton. Be forewarned, though, it's a workout as

the trail goes straight up with very little relief. But the view is so worth it. You not only can see the expansive Caribbean coastline, but also deep into the island's mountainous interior.

If you're looking for an unbelievable place to have dinner, Dasheen restaurant at the Ladera Resort has the best view on island. A short taxi ride from the Pitons, the tables at Dasheen are perched high on a cliff looking down on Sugar Beach so you can watch your boat while you dine. And the food is some of the best in St. Lucia. You'll want to book ahead for this spot, it fills up quickly.

The last safe overnight anchorage on the island is in Pitons Bay. Tucked right in between Petit and Gros Pitons, this much-photographed bay is one of the most beautiful spots on the island. It also has a great reef for snorkeling and swimming and a magical white sand beach called Sugar Beach. There's a large resort here, but they share the beach with cruisers.

A great day sail from Pitons Bay is the town of Laborie. While not secure for overnights, this delightful fishing village is a great place to spend a day. Not as touristy and

busy at Soufriere, Laborie gives you an authentic taste of a typical St. Lucia fishing village. I spent half a day photographing the colorful fishing boats that line the bay.

Once you're done with Pitons Bay you can turn around and do it all again on the way north, or just shoot up to Rodney. Honestly, I had no trouble finding anchor space or free moorings at any of these places we visited, so you don't ever really need a plan, you can just play it by ear.

St. Lucia might not be the best destination for the "uber" sailors looking to cover a lot of miles and visit a lot of different islands. But if your goal is to relax and enjoy an easy sailing vacation that delivers great beaches, excellent snorkeling, amazing anchorages, and lots of cool stuff to see and do, St. Lucia is perfect. And given that it has a large international airport and a good selection of charter companies, it's so easy. Being that we used to really push it on our sailing trips and have now started to slow down and smell the roses, we're remembering why we got into this crazy sport in the first place—to enjoy life. **BWS**



Cruising Notes

The only ports on St. Lucia that are likely to be safe for overnight stops (good anchoring, mooring balls and security) are Rodney Bay, Marigot Bay, Anse Cochon, Petit Piton and Pitons Bay.

The boat boys we encountered were very helpful. For the most part they assisted us in locating a mooring ball or a good place to anchor. However, some also provide other services and provisioning. We had only good experiences in the five ports listed above. I cannot speak about boat boys in any other ports that are not on our recommended list.

Eric Vohr wrote his first travel story about mountain biking in Cambodia back in 1994 while working as a foreign news correspondent. Since then he has written travel, outdoor adventure and sail-

ing stories for many notable publications. When he's not traveling the world, he's sailing and racing his C&C 30 Mark II on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay near his home in Baltimore Md.



Anse Chastanet