

ADVICE

Budget Caribbean hotels, cricket in the West Indies

The Sunday Times Published: 12 October 2014



Jack Sprats shack

Is there such a thing as a budget Caribbean hotel?

Jeff Slade, Wolverhampton

Alessia Horwich replies

They're tricky to find, but they're out there. On Jamaica's trendy Treasure Beach, the newly opened Jack Sprats Shack is a hostel-style inn attached to the upmarket Jakes resort. It has all the colourful shabby-chic decor and air conditioning of its pricier big sister, but some bathrooms and the living room are shared, which cuts room rates to as little as £21 a night for a double. You'll have access to the facilities at Jakes, too, and the restaurant has the best pizza in town (jakeshotel.com).

On Grenada, sharing the popular Grand Anse beach with glitzier properties, you'll find Jenny's Place, a guesthouse with seven ensuite rooms and a beachside bar and restaurant, owned by a former Miss World. The rum punch is lethal, but will give you the courage to chat to the locals over your seared catch of the day (doubles from £47; jennysplacegrenada.com).

It's £56 a night at Beachcombers, a guesthouse overlooking the blanched sands of Villa beach, on St Vincent. The rooms are funky, and on Saturday nights the veranda turns into an impromptu dancefloor when the live music kicks off (beachcombershotel.com).

Can I island-hop in the Caribbean?

Rosamund Davies, Margate

Chris Haslam replies

You're nowhere near as spoiled for ferries in the Caribbean as you are in, say, the Med, but services have improved over the past few years, with demand driven by frustration with local airlines — nicknames for Liat include Luggage In Another Town and Leaving Island Any Time.

If you're in St Lucia, L'Express des Iles has up to three sailings a day from Castries to Guadeloupe, Les Saintes, Marie-Galante, Martinique and Dominica; returns start at £94pp (express-des-iles.com). From Antigua, the Barbuda Express sails five days a week to Barbuda; from £60 return (barbudaexpress.com). Funtime Charters offers regular shuttle crossings between St Martin and Anguilla; from £44 one-way (funtimecharters.com). In the British and American Virgin Islands, Speedy's runs fast, frequent services between Virgin Gorda, Beef Island, Tortola and St Thomas; returns cost £19-£44 (bviferries.com).

I would like to go to one or two of England's Test matches against the West Indies next spring. Is it possible to travel and book tickets independently, or will I have to go on an organised tour?

John Walker, Hatfield

Martin Hemming replies

England haven't played a five-dayer in the Caribbean since they lost 1-0 in 2009, so I understand your excitement. The series will start at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, in Antigua, on April 13. England will play their first-ever Test in Grenada on April 21, and Barbados hosts the third and final match from May 1.

Don't say "Test cricket's a dying art", but the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) isn't predicting a sellout, so booking tickets, or just buying them at the turnstyle, should be perfectly possible. Details will be announced on Windiescricket.com, or you can sign up for the ECB's supporters' club, Twelfth Man (ecb.co.uk/twelfthman).

If you're booking your own travel, however, you'd be wise to do it soon, as prices for cricket-friendly dates are rising. For example, with British Airways Holidays, the cheapest week flying out on the Saturday before the Antigua Test is £4,452pp, all-inclusive; the following week would cost just £1,004pp (ba.com/holidays).

Which makes the specialist cricket tour operators look decent value. The final Test in Barbados is the cheapest to get to. Thomson Sport will take members of the Barmy Army there for seven nights from £1,385pp (0845 867 0788, thomsonsport.com). Gullivers Sports Travel has six nights from £1,647pp (01684 878426, gulliverstravel.co.uk), and ITC Sports Travel has eight nights from £2,495pp (01244 355390, itcsports.co.uk). With all of these packages, tickets are not included, but they are guaranteed.