

THE MOST UNDERRATED CARIBBEAN DESTINATIONS

BY MATT MELTZER

[@mmeltrez](#)

8834

SHARE



COURTESY OF USVI DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

You feel that? Yeah, that's the first bone-chilling cold of winter sneaking up on you, and unless you are [unfortunate enough to live in Florida](#), the next four-to-six months are going to consist of layered clothes, ice scrapers, and long power-walks at the mall.

But not all is lost. Just to the southeast of this great nation sits the Caribbean Sea, and in it dozens of tiny islands with gorgeous beaches on which you can relax while refreshing your phone weather to see *exactly* how cold it is back home. The problem, though? A LOT of other people are gonna be there, too. And who wants that?

So to *really* get away, you need to need to find the awesome, under-the-radar spots that either nobody knows about or, for whatever reason, visits. These eight destinations might not be the most famous in the Caribbean, but it'd be hard to argue against any of them being among the best.



MATT MELTZER/THRILLIST

St. Croix, USVI

Whenever you hear the words “Virgin Islands,” you giggle; then you remember you’re 30. And you imagine places with resorts that you can never afford full of people judging you by the type of Casio watch you still wear. Not the case in St. Croix, the most laid back of all the Virgin Islands.

Here you get a real feel for what life in the Caribbean means. You won’t find big, luxury resorts but rather, an endless collection of funky, waterside bars and restaurants. You can hike through the green hills to tropical tidepools, or watch the sunrise from the eastern-most point in the United States. It’s also home to Buck Island, a national Marine preserve and one of the [best snorkeling destinations in the world](#).

The people of St. Croix keep things [authentic](#) and the food and drinks are as good as anywhere in the islands. [Zion Modern Kitchen](#) in Christiansted crafts delicious cocktails and serves locally sourced dishes, while Cast Iron Pot plates up the best Crucian food in St. Croix.



COURTESY OF CARNIVAL CORP

Costambar, Dominican Republic

While the Dominican beaches in Punta Cana and Boca Chica are all the rage, they’re actually not even the best in the country. That award goes to the ones in and around Puerto Plata, the largest city in the DR’s “Amber Coast.” Think green mountains flush against pure white sand.

Made famous in *Jurassic Park*, the region is known mostly for its amber mines and is home to an entire museum dedicated to the precious stone. It’s also the home of [Ocean World](#), a nice-guys’ version of Sea World where they let the dolphin talent actually roam in massive man-made lagoons before their daily shows. Or you can hit the water park at the brand new Amber Cove port complex, and after you’ve water-slid your face off, enjoy a fruity cocktail at its mountaintop bar overlooking the entire coast. But definitely not before.



[FLICKR/MWERIKSSON](#)

Haiti

The most underrated of the underrated, sure, but people forget a mere 60 years ago this country was one of the most glamorous vacation destinations IN THE WORLD. And guess what: Haiti's still got the same white sand, palm trees, and turquoise waters of the rest of the Caribbean. Between the beaches at Jardin sur Mer. B and destination surfing at Pistons Beach in Jacmel (or further north at LaPointe), you could almost call Haiti the Hawaii of the Atlantic.

Beyond the natural draw of the "Pearl of the Antilles," Haiti boasts Afro-Caribbean art and music that you won't find on the other islands. And the recent opening of the Marriott Port-au-Prince and an impressive collection of fine boutique hotels in the capital city indicate that Haiti is poised for a return to glory – so you should probably go before it gets too expensive.



[FLICKR/PAZZANI](#)

Briland (Harbour Island), Bahamas

When the cruise ships dock and floods Freeport and Nassau with [sunburned Midwesterners](#), where do the Bahamians go to escape? Harbour Island (or Briland as the locals call it) and its 3.5 miles of packed pink sand beaches considered some of the best in the Bahamas.

Beyond the beaches, though, Briland is special because it's managed to build luxury resorts, hotels, and enough bars and restaurants to keep visitors from getting bored, but didn't ruin the place with overdevelopment (cough*Bimini*cough). There's even a club – Gusty's – with a sand dance floor. Inside. And while Briland might be hard to reach during your six-hour port call, it's definitely worth a separate trip.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Dominica

Typical conversation when you get back from Dominica:

"So how was the Dominican Republic?"

"I went to Dominica."

"Right, so did you see Sammy Sosa?"

"No, no Dominica. You know what, never mind – let's just order."

First off, this island in the lesser Antilles is pronounced "Dominique-uh," and it has absolutely nothing to do with the country that produces half of Major League Baseball. It's known as "the nature island of the Caribbean" and rocks some amazing [black sand beaches](#). It's also a perfect destination for hiking enthusiasts, as Morne Tois Pitons National Park boasts some of the highest mountains in the Caribbean and trails that run through thick jungle and outlet at the picturesque Victoria and Trafalgar Waterfalls. The park's also home to Boiling Lake, which as the name might imply, actually reaches boiling temps in the middle.

And finally, across the island is Champagne Reef, a reef set on hot springs where the bubbles create a sensation of scuba diving in champagne. Take THAT, Kim K.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Santa Catalina, Providencia, and San Andrés, Colombia

The geography here might be a little confusing since these islands are actually closer to Nicaragua and Panama than they are to Colombia. In fact, as they're in the Caribbean Sea, they're obviously NOWHERE near Colombia. Then again, the Jets and Giants play in New Jersey, so whatever.

That said, you'll forget all about stuff like "geography" when you visit this archipelago known collectively as the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve. At some points, the water is so shallow between islands that you can actually walk through the Caribbean to get from one to the other. And with multiple beachside bars, this makes for one of the coolest bar crawls in the world.

If drinking in the water isn't your top vacation priority, the islands are fairly undeveloped and offer some of the best snorkeling and shallow-water diving around. And the hikes on volcanic Providencia provide photo ops that will guarantee you lose friends on Instagram.



FLICKR/PUOTICORICO

Saba, Dutch Antilles

Getting to Saba can be a little nerve-racking, as you have to land on the [smallest commercial runway in the world](#) (that also happens to be on the side of a cliff). But as you leave the airport on the island's lone road, you realize it may be the most scenic drive in the Caribbean. Expect to traverse through peaks, valleys, and tiny villages, all while enjoying panoramic views of the sea throughout the entire ride.

Void of chains or luxury hotels, Saba's a tiny hamlet where you can relax surrounded by friendly people and turquoise water. But what *really* sets this place apart is the food: while you won't see many Yelp reviews, locals from other Caribbean islands will tell you The Brigadoon and the restaurant at Queen's Gardens are two of the top, non-tourist restaurants in the region.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Culebra, Puerto Rico

If your idea of a tropical vacation involves luxury resorts with WiFi and air conditioning, well, Culebra is not for you. While its sister island, Vieques, already has a W, tiny Culebra maintains only a handful of boutique hotels and guesthouses, and A/C isn't a guarantee.

But you don't go here for the accommodations. You go for the quiet, secluded beaches where you can snorkel with sea turtles or lay out next to rusted old tanks. Or you go for hikes and kayak paddles through the pristine Caribbean wilderness. This island 19 miles from Puerto Rico was once a US Navy bombing range but is now the perfect destination if you're running from the law/looking for seclusion, and don't want to leave the United States.