

St-Barthélemy

The mere mention of St-Barthélemy conjures up fanciful dreams such as having cocktails with supermodels, sampling caviar with a four-digit price tag, or dropping some serious bling on a Dior bathing suit...for your miniature schnauzer. Does this stuff really happen in St-Barth? It sure does.

So how, you may ask, did St-Barth become *the* playground for the rich and famous? The question is answered simply by seeing the island. From afar, dozens of sky-scraping mountains dramatically rise to the heavens. As you get closer, these craggy peaks start to reveal their sexy beaches like a dirty secret. Then, when you arrive, the possibilities for decadence become obvious: perfectly positioned bays beg for shmancy restaurants and rolling hills yearn for rambling villas.

For the rest of us, St-Barth still has plenty to offer. Under its star-studded surface, the island has a quiet community of locals who can trace their ancestry back to rural Brittany or Normandy – and even the rugged coastal terrain dotted with lonely cottages feels bizarrely French. Rent a seaside villa with an ocean view and spend your days basking in the warm Caribbean sun. Escape in the evening to sample some savvy French-Creole fusion cuisine, or head to a vibrant local market for some floppy fish and legumes.

Whether you're after the glamorous life of the jet-setting glitterati, or simply a hushed bucolic village vibe, St-Barth can supply it. Just remember: while the two cultures of the island are almost diametrically opposed, they are ultimately united by their love of the Madonna (albeit different ones...).

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 21 sq km
- **Capital** Gustavia
- **Country code** ☎ 590
- **Departure tax** €4.50
- **Famous for** Being the ridiculously expensive playground of the rich and famous
- **Language** French
- **Money** euro (€); €1 = US\$1.56 = UK£0.79
- **Official name** Collectivité de Saint-Barthélemy
- **People** French
- **Phrase** I would like to thank the Academy...
- **Population** 7500
- **Visa** Not necessary for most nationalities; see p467



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Beaches** (p464) Try Anse de Colombier in the far west for powdery white sand or head to Anse de Gouverneur in the east for a perfectly rugged stretch of beach – it's so hard to pick just one!
- **Gustavia** (p458) Strut your stuff while window-shopping and yacht-ogling in St-Barth's stunning fort-flanked capital
- **Fine Dining** (p457) Bust out the plastic – the island's legion of world-class chefs dedicate their careers to eliciting a visceral 'mmm!' from guests
- **Corossol** (p463) Step back in time to this charming village ripped straight from the tranquil western coast of France
- **Staying in Style** (p464) Set your Louis Vuitton luggage down at an opulent resort, such as the Guanahani, or slip away to a hidden beachside villa

ITINERARIES

- **One Day** Take a puddle jumper or the ferry over from St-Martin/Sint Maarten and spend the day ogling giant yachts and shopping in Gustavia. For an early dinner try popular Le Select, or head to Public and eat at Maya's. Adventurous types with plenty of energy may consider grabbing a cab to the western lookout point at the end of Colombier and walking back to Gustavia.
- **Five Days** Get a room at the Guanahani in Grand Cul-de-Sac (if you've just won the lottery) or at Saline Gardens in Anse de Grande Saline and spend three blissful days by the beach. In the evenings try out some of the internationally acclaimed restaurants that pepper the island. On your last two days, undergo some retail therapy in Gustavia followed by a couple of hours roaming the quiet west coast, particularly around quaint Corossol.
- **Two Weeks** Snag one of the many private villas scattered around the island, and spend your first week at a different beach each day. Then get your adrenaline pumping with a sailing day trip and a scuba dive, plus some hiking in the east, and round out the week swiping your plastic at the boutiques in Gustavia.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

St-Barth has two seasons: the *carême*, the dry season; and the *hivernage*, the hurricane

season from July to November, when heavier rains are expected.

During Christmas the rates skyrocket from pricey to outrageously ridiculous, so this may be a time to avoid.

HISTORY

Due to its inhospitable landscape and lack of freshwater, St-Barth never had a big Arawak or Carib presence.

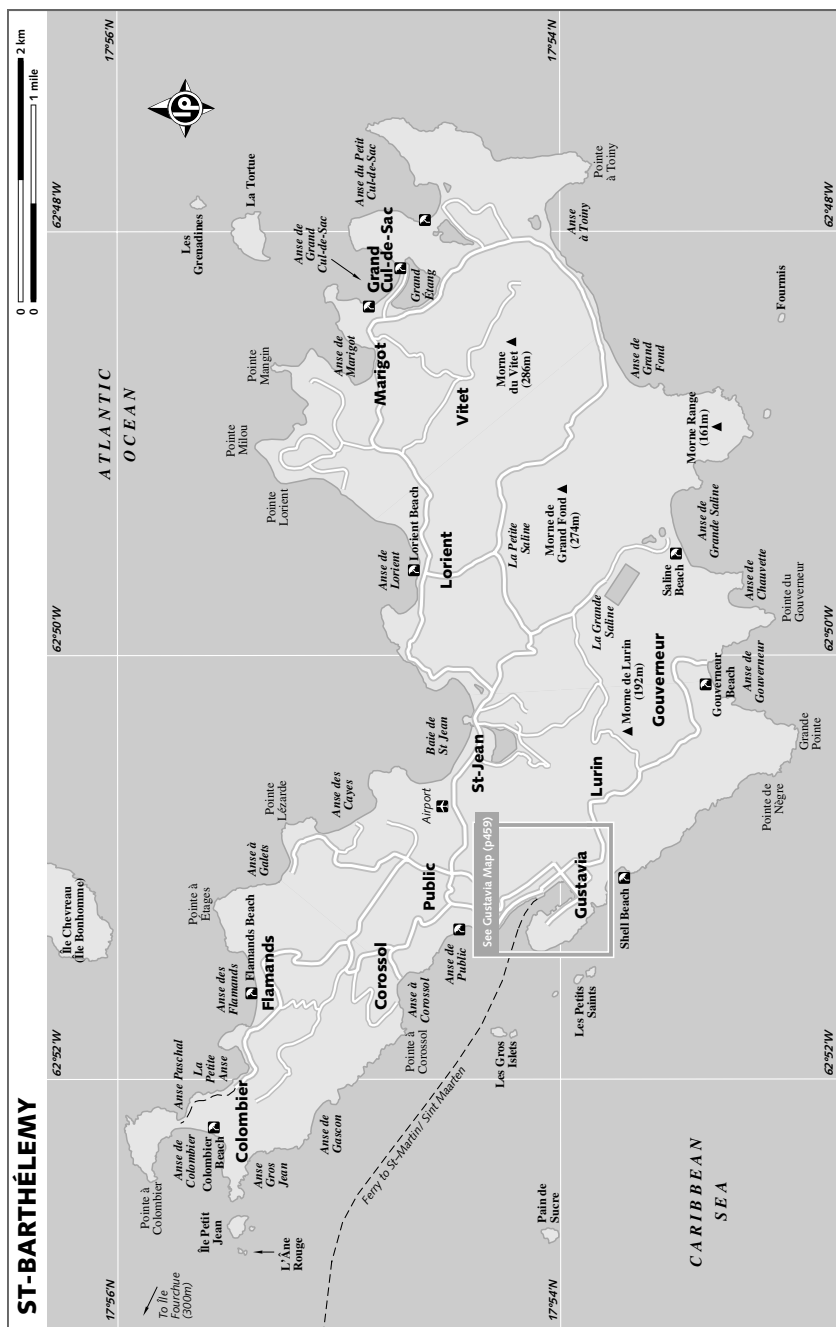
When Christopher Columbus sighted the island on his second voyage in 1493, he named it after his older brother Bartholomeo. The first Europeans who attempted to settle the island, in 1648, were French colonists. They were soon killed by Caribs. Norman Huguenots gave it another try about 25 years later and prospered, not due to farming (which was near impossible) or fishing, but by setting up a way station for French pirates plundering Spanish galleons. You can still hear traces of the old Norman dialect in towns such as Flamands and Corossol.

In 1784, the French king Louis XVI gave St-Barth to the Swedish king Gustaf III in exchange for trading rights in Göteborg. There are still many reminders of the Swedish rule – such as the name Gustavia, St-Barth's continuing duty-free status, and several buildings and forts – on the island. However, Sweden sold St-Barth back to France in 1878 after declining trade, disease and a destructive fire affected the island.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, St-Barth wasn't much more than a quaint French backwater, and life was tough for residents. Without the lush vegetation typical of the Caribbean, farming was difficult. Many former slaves emigrated to surrounding islands to find work, leaving St-Barth one of the only islands in the region without a substantial African population.

In the 1950s, tourists slowly started arriving at the tiny airport on small planes and private jets. The scrubby island suddenly found new natural resources: beaches, sunsets, quiet. Quick-thinking islanders created laws limiting mass tourism to guard their hard-earned lifestyle; as a result, you won't see casinos, high-rise hotels or fast-food chains, but you will pay for the atmosphere.

On December 7, 2003, an overwhelming 90% of the population of St-Barth voted to grant themselves more fiscal and political



independence from France and Guadeloupe. As a member of Guadeloupe, St-Barth was part of an overseas *région* and *département*. After separation, the island became an 'overseas collectivity,' which meant that the island gained a municipal council rather than having a single islandwide mayor. Despite the separation, the island has remained part of the EU.

THE CULTURE

Most residents of St-Barth fall into one of three categories: descendants of the pioneers from Normandy who have called St-Barth home for over 300 years; mainlanders setting up expensive shops and restaurants; or foreigners looking for a more relaxed lifestyle. As tourism blossomed, the first group of residents largely traded in their fishing careers for tourism-related jobs, so virtually everyone is working in hospitality of some sort.

The locals protect their slightly time-warped way of life while the glitzy Hollywood types strut around next door – many natives haven't seen their house key for years, and nor do they care whether Beyoncé is being bootylicious at the next table – but neither group seems too bothered about the other's presence.

Despite the island's location, the general atmosphere is much more that of a quiet seaside province in France than a jammin' Caribbean colony.

ARTS

For hundreds of years, St-Barth's residents were too busy toiling in near-impossible conditions to create much art, thus the traditional handicrafts were largely utilitarian. Head to Corossol, St-Barth's most 'local' area, you'll find hats and baskets woven by local women from the leaves of the lantana palms. These small woven concoctions sit at the front gates to many homes, and make a much more authentic souvenir than the €200 bathing suits on sale in Gustavia.

There are about 20 art galleries and spaces around the island devoted to exhibiting local paintings, photography and sculpture. For more information about visiting artists' studios, stop by the **Office Territorial du Tourisme** (☎ 27-87-27; Quai Général de Gaulle, Gustavia) for a detailed list of contact information. In recent years, as the island's luxury tourism continues

to boom, several lines of exclusive designer products (everything from jewelry to moisturizers) have become available.

ENVIRONMENT

St-Barth's total land area is a mere 21 sq km, although its elongated shape and hilly terrain make it seem larger. The island lies 25km southeast of St-Martin/Sint Maarten.

St-Barth has numerous dry and rocky offshore islets. The largest, Île Fourchue, is a half-sunken volcanic crater whose large bay is a popular yacht anchorage, and a destination for divers and snorkelers.

St-Barth's arid climate sustains dryland flora, such as cacti and bougainvillea. Local reptiles include lizards, iguanas and harmless grass snakes. From April to August, sea turtles lay eggs along the beaches on the north-west side of the island. The islets off St-Barth support seabird colonies, including those of frigate birds.

In recent years St-Barth has taken environmental concerns very seriously and has committed to sustainable methods of energy production. The island utilizes a color-coded recycling system; be sure to toss glass in green containers and plastic in blue containers.

In 2001 St-Barth pioneered the first trash incinerator of its kind in the Caribbean. The incinerator is able to simultaneously burn trash, create energy and produce drinkable water, all with less pollution than older incinerators. It comes with a higher price tag, but islanders feel the result is worth it.

FOOD & DRINK

An undisputed destination for foodies, St-Barth is the kind of place where every meal can be a work of art, and it's worth planning ahead to get the most for your money (because let's face it – this place ain't cheap!).

HOW MUCH?

- **Rental car per day** €60
- **Main course at a local restaurant** €20
- **Burger at Le Select** €5
- **A beach chair and an umbrella on St-Jean beach** €30
- **Relaxing on your towel at Anse de Gouverneur** Free

Food is taken seriously here – many restaurants dish out meals made from recipes that have been kept secret for decades. A fusion of French and Creole tastes is common, giving each plate a certain St-Barth kick.

You'll find dozens of high-end restaurants on St-Barth, some attached to big-name hotels, others hidden on mountain peaks or tucked away in a residential neighborhood. Perhaps the best part of dining here is that each restaurant has a story to tell – a quirky history, a tale about the chef, or a tidbit of information relating to the eatery's founding.

GUSTAVIA

pop 1500

About 50 years ago, Gustavia was a wind-swept fishing village; today this stunning port town is nothing short of majestic. Although relatively small when compared to other capitals in the Caribbean, Gustavia has plenty of places to 'see and be seen,' including myriad high-end boutiques, upmarket restaurants and a couple of historical sights.

INFORMATION

Most places in Gustavia are open from Monday to Friday from 8am to noon, then from 2pm to 3:30pm.

Gustavia has wi-fi throughout town; to access it, buy a wi-fi card and email contact@saintbarth-telecom.com.

Public toilets are available behind the Office Territorial du Tourisme, and include showers for boaters.

Banque des Antilles Française (☎ 29-68-30) Has an ATM.

Banque Nationale de Paris (Rue Bord de Mer) Has an ATM.

Bruyn Hospital (☎ 27-60-35; Rue Jean-Bart) A small hospital.

Change Caraïbes (Rue du Général de Gaulle) Has an ATM.

Doctor (☎ 27-76-03) For after-hours medical attention.

Funny Face Bookstore (☎ 29-60-14; Carré d'Or) Stocks English-language books.

Municipal Police (☎ 27-66-66; Rue du Roi Oscar II)

Office Territorial du Tourisme (☎ 27-87-27; Quai Général de Gaulle; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Will help with accommodations, restaurant recommendations, island tours and activities. Has a map for a self-guided Gustavia walking tour.

Pharmacie St Barth (☎ 27-61-82; Rue de la République; ☎ 8am-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm & 3:30-7pm Sat & public holidays)

Post office (☎ 27-63-63; cnr Rue Jeanne d'Arc & Rue de Centenaire; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to noon Wed & Sat)

SIGHTS

There aren't loads of sights on St-Barth, but it's worth stopping by the Office Territorial du Tourisme (left) to grab its small pamphlet, which offers a nuanced caption to some of the older structures in Gustavia, including the **Catholic church**, the **Swedish belfry**, the **Wall House** (La Pointe) and the **Anglican church**.

The site of old **Fort Gustave** has a couple of cannons and a slightly bottle-shaped lighthouse, but most people come here for the fine view of Gustavia and the harbor. A plaque points out local sights and landmarks. Across the harbor to the south is **Fort Oscar**, which is still used as a military installation, and from where you can see the islands of St Kitts and Sint Eustatius on a clear day.

At the **Musée Territorial** (☎ 29-71-55; admission €2; ☎ 8:30am-1pm & 2:30-5:30pm Mon, 8:30am-1pm & 2:30-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 8:30am-1pm Wed, 9am-1pm Sat) you can take a look at historical St-Barth, from the Carib settlements to the Swedish occupation, with old photos and traditional clothing.

After years of coaxing from his family, André Berry, the island's pack rat, finally opened a museum of oddities called **Le P'tit Collectionneur** (☎ 27-67-77; admission €2; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat). His collection features a diverse array of objects ranging from 18th-century British pipes to the island's first phonograph. In a roundabout way, these objects tell the story of St-Barth's colorful history.

ACTIVITIES

A number of activities operators are located in Gustavia. Try the following places:

Big Blue (☎ 27-83-74) A dive center.

Marine Service (☎ 27-70-34; <http://st-barths.com/marine.service>; Quai du Yacht Club) A full-service center offering snorkeling and diving (tank dive €55, 10-dive package €480); shore and deep-sea fishing; and half- and full-day private and public boat charters. One popular boat trip is a half-day snorkeling trip aboard a catamaran.

Ocean Must Marina (☎ 27-62-25) Offers fishing trips.

Totem Surf (☎ 27-83-72) Rents surfing gear.

SLEEPING

Accommodation in Gustavia is focused on the harbor rather than a powdery beach. The two cheapest places on the island are located here, as is one of the most expensive.

star-studded island, of course. Located in the heart of Gustavia, it's a casual place where you can chill out for a few hours with a cold beer and order some greasy grub without breaking the bank.

Wall House (☎ 27-69-43; La Pointe; lunch mains €9-26, dinner mains €14-29; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed lunch Sun) Located along the waterfront near the museum, with plenty of outdoor seating, Wall House has a view of the harbor that's as good as the view of the exquisitely presented dishes. The meals combine Creole ingredients with traditional French cuisine, resulting in recipes such as duck breast with sweet onion marmalade, and scallop carpaccio. The €9 daily special is a rare cheapie for St-Barth.

Eddy's (☎ 27-54-17; Rue du Centenaire; mains from €12; ☎ lunch & dinner) This fusion restaurant blends Creole, Caribbean, Cajun and French influences in a Southeast Asian setting (Eddy Stakelborough, the owner, actually went to Thailand to build the pavilion, which was then disassembled and shipped to this site, where it was reconstructed). Look for the teeny doorway across from Le Sapotillier.

Caviar Island (☎ 52-46-11; Carré d'Or; mains €16-48; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Sat) A lounge, a bar and a restaurant all rolled into one, Caviar Island is a celebrity hangout where stars can easily drop a cool €750 on 100g of beluga caviar.

Jao (☎ 29-52-24; Rue Jeanne d'Arc; mains €21-38; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun lunch) If you can forget that the same Thai dishes cost €1 in Southeast Asia then you'll love this moody fusion restaurant along the port. Pascal, the amiable owner, has designed a hip space stuffed with meditating deities and lipstick red pillows. The food is simply delicious.

If you've got your own kitchen, come to the **Fish Market** (Rue de la République; ☎ 6am-10pm) to pick up still-wriggling supplies. Local fishers bring in the catches of the day, including marlin, wahoo, dorado, tuna and langouste. Stop by the tiny **Produce Market** (Rue du Roi Oscar II) for your local fruits and vegetables.

SHOPPING

Gustavia is a duty-free port and features the most exclusive labels in the world: Dior, Bulgari, Rolex etc. But there is also a slew of small, locally owned boutiques and labels, such as Made in Saint-Barth and Ligne Saint-Barth.

BEST ITUNES DOWNLOAD FOR ST-BARTHÉLEMY

If you're travelin' on the cheap, or if you're looking for a bit of atmosphere, you'll probably eat at least one meal at Le Select in Gustavia. This burger stand, affectionately known as Cheeseburger in Paradise, is said to have inspired the Jimmy Buffett song by the same name, although he claims that the joint was named after his song...

AROUND GUSTAVIA

Check out pretty **Shell Beach**, where tennis star Yannick Noah co-owns **Do Brazil** (☎ 29-06-66; lunch sandwich €7-9, dinner mains €16-27, menu €29/42), a casually trendy sandwich bar fronting the beach. The dinner menu is Brazilian, featuring exotic tastes such as *moqueca* (shrimp, lobster and fish marinated in coconut milk; €32). Drinks, snacks and ice creams are available during the day. Go for a Brazilian *saravah* cocktail – a mix of pineapple and ginger with a dash of cachaça.

On the road to Corossol, **Public** (pronounced with a French accent) is a village centered on a small beach that's popular with locals and a desalination plant. Here you'll find **Maya's** (☎ 27-75-73; mains €31-43; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat), a place that people return to time and time again for Randy and Maya's personal service; it's like that bar on *Cheers* where everyone knows your name (because you're either a local or a celebrity). Simultaneously upscale and unpretentious, the waterfront restaurant has a menu that changes everyday and can include tropical salads, fish dishes and Maya's world-famous coconut tart. It's worth nabbing a spot in advance.

EASTERN ST-BARTHÉLEMY

East of Gustavia are dramatic sky-scraping mountains and isolated stretches of powder-soft sand. St-Barth's only airport is located here, as are most of the island's opulent hotels.

ST-JEAN

Many hotels and restaurants line the main stretch of road in this tourist-heavy village, making parking difficult. Once you're off

the road, the beach is delightful, the hotels comfortable and the dining eclectic, ranging from delis to tragically hip, techno-infused attitude factories.

Information

St-Jean has a small branch post office, near the airport.

American Express (☎ 52-97-06; La Savane Commercial Center) Handles transactions in euros and dollars.

Pharmacy (☎ 27-66-61; La Savane Commercial Center).

Activities

Carib Waterplay (☎ 27-71-22; caribwaterplay@wanadoo.fr) offers windsurfing lessons, as well as kayaking, surfing and snorkeling trips. It also rents kayaks.

Hookipa Surf Shop (☎ 27-71-31) rents surfing equipment.

Sleeping

Hotel Le Village St Jean (☎ 27-61-39; www.villagestjean.hotel.com; r €200, 1-bedroom cottage from €260, 2-bedroom cottage €620; ☞ ☑ ☒) Comfort, charm and a yummy Italian restaurant: this place has it all. Patriarch André Charneau built the Village himself in 1968, and it has been lovingly run by his family ever since. Rooms vary from basic hotel rooms to deluxe cottages with kitchenettes and patios (the two-bedroom cottage has its own pool), ensuring good value on any budget – for St-Barth, that is. It's a five-minute walk uphill from the beach.

Emeraude Plage (☎ 27-64-78; www.emeraudeplage.com; Rue de St-Jean; r €350-855; ☞ ☑ ☒) This gaggle of ghost white cottages, bungalows and studios is set in a sandy patch directly on the St-Jean beach. Tiled suites all have large bedrooms and come with a private terrace. Recent renovations include funky plasma-TV-cum-computer contraptions (there's also wi-fi), and minimalist whitewashed decor that looks a bit hospital-like from the wrong angle.

Eden Rock (☎ 29-79-89; www.edenrockhotel.com; cottage €615, ste €1095-1750; ☞ ☑ ☒) St-Barth's first hotel stretches out and over a rocky promontory down to the white-coral St-Jean beach below. Each suite and cottage is luxuriously appointed with fine antiques, swashbuckling colors and an unbeatable view. Offers wi-fi access.

Eating

Kiki-é Mo (☎ 27-90-65; Rue de St-Jean; light meals €6-15; ☞ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) In the heart of St-Jean,

this full-service deli has delectable pizza, pasta and desserts, but the real draw is the scrumptious paninis.

Sand Bar (☎ 27-90-65; Eden Rock; mains €15-45; ☞ lunch) If you're in the mood for a lunchtime splurge, look no further than Sand Bar, the elegant beach bar at the Eden Rock Hotel. The presentation of the food is artful and you'll be nibbling on your gourmet beach grub alongside an assortment of celebrities.

If you're preparing food at your villa or organizing a picnic, head to **Match** (☎ 27-68-16; ☞ 8am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun), located in the complex across from the airport. Packed with tropical fruit, and European and American food, it's also the best place to pick up reasonable French wines.

GRAND CUL-DE-SAC

Beautiful Grand Cul-de-Sac yawns across a large horseshoelike bay, and has a sandy beach with good conditions for water sports. Fronting the open cove are several hotels and restaurants.

Activities

There are a couple of activity outfitters in Grand Cul-de-Sac. **Ouanalao Dive** (☎ 0690-63-74-34) runs diving trips, while **Wind Wave Power** (☎ 27-82-57; St-Barths Beach Hotel) gives 1½-hour windsurfing lessons (about €60) and rents kayaks.

Sleeping

Les Ondines (☎ 27-69-64; les.ondines@orange.fr; r €350-690; ☞) You can practically touch the incoming tide from your apartment-style suite at this motel-like structure. When you start dropping €500-plus per night you should head to the Guanahani next door, but the cheaper rooms aren't bad, especially because they have a full kitchen and a living room, not to mention a prime spot on the sand.

Le Sereno (☎ 29-83-00; www.lesereno.com; ste/villa from €480/1130; ☞ ☑ ☒) Le Sereno is back with a vengeance. After a bit of time off to get a much needed face-lift by Parisian designer Christian Liaigre, the property is now dedicated to relaxation and serenity through Zen-like decoration. Some would say that it's a bit too minimal (and thus not worth the price); others are awestruck at how the staff keeps the sheets so darn crisp and white. Offers wi-fi access.

our pick **Hotel Guanahani & Spa** (☎ 27-66-60; www.leguanahani.com; ste from €580; ☞ ☑ ☒)

'Guanahani' can only be uttered with an accompanying sigh of content and relaxation. The ultimate retreat and, with 70 rooms, the island's largest hotel, this stunning resort is a hidden village of brilliantly bright bungalows (with private plunge pools) flung across jungly grounds. Offers wi-fi.

Eating

Across from the entrance to Le Sereno there's an open area with some picnic tables and a grill. At one time it was called Cocolobo, and since then it's changed hands a couple of times, but it's still worth checking out as there's usually somebody cooking up some cheap barbecue fare. If you get lost, ask someone for directions to 'where the old Gloriette used to be' and they'll almost definitely know the way.

LORIENT

Lorient, the site of St-Barth's first French settlement (1648), is a small village fronted by a lovely white-sand beach. The town has a charming collection of old stone structures, including a small Caribbean-style convent and one of the island's three Catholic churches. Most of the island's small Portuguese population lives in the area – try the goat stew if you stop by one of the local haunts.

Information

Lorient has a small **post office** (☎ 7-11am Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat).

Sleeping

Les Mouettes (☎ 27-77-91; lesmouettes@domacces.com; cottage €140-199; 🏠) Les Mouettes' seven beachy bungalows sit in a row along Lorient's creamy flaxen sands. Prepare a relaxing dinner in your kitchenette and dine on your private terrace, then fall asleep to the sound of crashing waves gently wafting in through your slatted blue shutters.

La Normandie (☎ 27-61-66; normandiehotel@att.net; r from €158; 🏠 📺 📶) With a fresh coat of paint and a shopping spree at IKEA, this dance hall of yore has been transformed by its friendly new owners into a quaint stay. Tucked away in the interior of Lorient, it's a bit pricy for what you get – a small room and not a whole lot of sunlight – but this spick-and-span place is a comfortable choice when the seaside hotels in the same price bracket are already full. Offers wi-fi.

MONTBARS 'THE EXTERMINATOR'

In addition to having quite possibly the coolest name in history, Monsieur the Exterminator was a French-born pirate – and not a very nice one at that. He was present when his uncle was killed in a battle with Spanish conquistadores, and he spent the rest of his life exacting revenge (and borrowing a bit of plunder). Legend has it that Montbars buried treasure somewhere between Anse de Gouverneur and Anse de Grande Saline, but it has never been found. If you've been looking for a reason to borrow Grandpa's metal detector...

Eating

Maya's to Go (☎ 29-83-70; Les Galeries du Commerce; dishes €5-20; ☎ 7am-7pm Tue-Sun) Maya's, the oh-so popular restaurant in Public, has a small *traiteur* (delicatessen) in St-Jean for those who don't have enough time to visit the legendary restaurant (read: those who can't afford it). If you're toying with the idea of doing a beach picnic à la gourmet, it's worth stopping in for some *petits creux* (snacks). There's wi-fi access here.

Le Ti St Barth (☎ 27-97-71; www.ksplaces.com; mains €25-68; ☎ dinner) Like an evening in Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*, Le Ti St Barth is a sumptuous jumble of dangling wrought-iron chandeliers and gushing velvet drapes. The menu features a mix of upscale barbecue options such as 'Zen tartare' (a tuna steak with guacamole), and in the late evening a local DJ swings by to give the place a li'l edge. It's located between Lorient and Marigot.

K'Fé Massai (☎ 29-76-78; set dinner €29-52; ☎ dinner) With warm orange light emanating from pillars made from adobe and wicker, in the evening this restaurant-cum-lounge feels a bit like a hunting lodge at sunset. While the name and decor hint at an African theme, the cuisine is decidedly French. The €29 set dinner is a fantastic deal and features a choice of one starter, main course and dessert. Try the goat's-cheese salad and a main of mahimahi, then mix things up with a serving of *pain perdu* (French toast) with ice cream for dessert.

VITET

Up the steep hill from Grand Cul-de-Sac is Vitet, where you'll find the oldest continu-

ously operating restaurant on the island, **Hostellerie des Trois Forces** (☎ 27-61-25; www.3forces.net; rUS\$270-390). Called a 'holistic New Age inn' by owner Hubert Delamotte (a dead ringer for Salvador Dali, and the island's resident astrologer), this place has 12 rooms named after the signs of the zodiac; all have ocean views. The restaurant's famous menu, with its top-notch wine list, is a regularly rotating assortment of goodies including pesto frog legs, herbed chicken and St Tropez pie (brioche with a light orange-flower cream sauce). The restaurant is open for lunch and dinner. Astrological readings can be organized with Hubert if you know the exact time of your birth.

ANSE DE GOUVERNEUR

This is a gorgeous, sandy beach lining a U-shaped bay that's embraced by high cliffs at both ends. It's one of the broadest and most secluded spots in the region, and it makes a splendid spot for sunbathing and picnics. The lack of visitors – even in high season – means that you'll often see sunbathers in their birthday suits. Join in and get rid of those tan lines!

Perched high on craggy **Morne de Lurin** (192m), just before the mountain tumbles into beautiful Gouverneur, sits **Santa Fe** (☎ 27-61-04; lunch mains €12-19, dinner mains €18-30; ☎ lunch & dinner). The owner (who was the former sommelier at ritzy Le Sapotillier in Gustavia), has designed a broad menu with a French-Creole twist, and while the food is fantastic throughout the day, it's best to come before sunset so you can appreciate the stunning oceanic views. Try the scallops daintily covered in flakey pastry (€23), and the molten chocolate cake with pear sorbet (€10).

ANSE DE GRANDE SALINE

A long, lovely beach, broad and secluded, Anse de Grande Saline is named after the large salt pond nearby. The locals consider the beach to be one St-Barth's best, and it's a favorite spot for nudists and gay visitors. The nudists go right and the gay visitors go left, and if you're both, well, you can sunbathe in the middle.

our pick Salines Gardens (☎ 41-94-29; www.salinesgarden.com; cottages €140-190) is the only accommodation in the area and is, without a doubt, the best deal on the island. Nestled slightly inland on the Grande Saline's parched terrain, five semidetached cottages

huddle around a small plunge pool shaded by thick stalks of bamboo. Each unit is styled with knickknacks and drapery from a far-flung destination: Essaouira, Pavones, Padang, Cap Ferret and Waikiki. The owner, Jean-Phillipe, with his gravelly French tones and chilled-out demeanor, creates a truly inviting and friendly ambience.

Bedecked with stone pillars and hidden behind thirsty desert shrubs, **Le Grain de Sel** (☎ 52-46-05; lunch mains €12-24, dinner mains €16-28; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is fantastic spot to savor traditional French and Creole meals before hitting the powdery sand for the day. The chef (who worked for many years at Maya's in Public) prepares a colorful assortment of palate pleasers such as crab-and-lentil salad (€16), conch fricassee (€25) and homemade lychee-mango ice cream (€8).

WESTERN ST-BARTHÉLEMY

A quaint pastoral vibe is revealed as the cobble roads curve west of Gustavia. Craggy, windswept cliffs and scrubby green hills with stone fences look like a postcard from the quiet coasts of western France.

COROSSOL

This is one of the last remaining traditional villages on St-Barth. The villagers still speak in an old Norman dialect; the brown-sand beach is lined with blue and orange fishing boats, and stacks of lobster traps; and women still weave the leaves of the lantana palm into straw hats, baskets and place mats, which they line up on the walls in front of their homes to attract buyers.

This is where you'll find **Le Musée International du Coquillage** (☎ 27-62-97; admission €3; ☎ 9am-12:30pm & 3-5pm Tue-Sat), with over 9000 seashells on display. Owner Ingénu Magras started the museum half a century ago, many years after his father and he collected seashells during their fishing trips when he was in his teens.

Carib Waterplay (☎ 27-71-22; caribwaterplay@wanadoo.fr) offers windsurfing lessons, as well as kayaking, surfing and snorkeling trips.

FLAMANDS

A small village on the northwestern side of the island, Flamands retains a pleasant rural character. The village stretches along

a curving bay whose long, broad white-sand beach and clear waters are very popular with beachgoers. There's easy beach access with streetside parking at the westernmost end of Anse de Flamands.

Ranch des Flamands (☎ 39-87-01; Merlette) offers 1½-hour horseback-riding excursions for beginner and experienced riders. Rides depart most days at 3:30pm and cost about €35 per person.

On the way down into Flamands, you'll pass a group of flagpoles marking the entrance to quiet **Auberge de Terre Neuve** (☎ 27-75-32; fax 27-78-99; gumbs.car.rental@wanadoo.fr; cottages €135-145; 📞). Technically the front desk is located at the airport – the owners of this cluster of cottages also run Gumbs Car Rental, and a car rental from its lot is included in the lodging price. The cabins are painted in a pinkish color and the interiors have basic-but-comfy furniture set on sparkling white tiles. Balconies with barbecues abound, and the units higher up on the hill have scenic views.

As the snaking stone road starts to peter out at the far end of Flamands, little **Auberge de la Petite Anse** (☎ 27-83-09; apa@wanadoo.fr; cottages €120-180; 📞) will emerge. Its clump of green-and-pink semidetached bungalows squat on a small ledge over the cerulean waters many feet below, and from behind the tattered drapes, guests can appreciate quiet vistas of rugged, rocky islands. The quirky shedlike reception area is strewn with curling paperbacks and thousands of brochures lauding the island's merits.

ANSE DE COLOMBIER

Anse de Colombier is a beautiful secluded white-sand beach that's fronted by turquoise waters and backed by undulating hills. It's reached by boat or via a scenic 20-minute walk that begins at the end of the road in La Petite Anse, just beyond Flamands. The

sandy bay is ideal for swimming, and there's fairly good snorkeling at the north side.

Perched high on the hill overlooking the sea, **Le P'tit Morne** (☎ 52-95-50; www.timorne.com; cottages from €139; 📞 📺) offers dated, apartment-style cottages at a reasonable price. Each room is stocked with a kitchenette, TV and DVD player, and there's swimming pool for a dip.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

St-Barth's largest hotel has a mere 70 rooms and the island's second biggest has barely half that number. The others are small, with usually less than a dozen rooms. This can be a wonderful thing – lots of intimacy, and unique design details – but it also means that during high season everything gets booked up fast. Virtually all hotels are priced in euros and there's a 5% tax surcharge added to your quoted rate.

There's no easy way to do St-Barth on the cheap, but with some advance planning you can scout out great deals on private villas, which are almost always a better choice than paying for a hotel room by the night.

ACTIVITIES

St-Barth is so tiny that services from around the island can be organized at a moment's notice. Most activity-providers will come to your hotel or villa.

Beaches & Swimming

With its numerous bays and coves, St-Barth boasts nearly two dozen beaches, which is quite impressive considering the island's miniscule size. Those looking for 'in-town' beaches will find that St-Jean, Flamands, Lorient and Shell Beach all have beautiful,

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** Newspapers include the *Weekly*, published in English on Friday from November to April, and *Today*. Tourist magazines include *St-Barth Magazine*, *Discover Saint Barthélemy*, *Tropical St Barth* and *Ti Gourmet*.
- **Radio** For local radio, try Radio Transat on 100.3FM, and Radio Saint-Barth on 98.7FM.
- **Electricity** The current used is 220V (50/60 cycles); standard Western Europe plugs are used. Many hotels offer American-style shaver adapters.
- **Weights & Measures** The metric system and 24-hour clock are used here.

sandy strands. The most famous secluded beaches – Colombier, Grande Saline and Gouverneur – are as close to the picture-perfect Caribbean beach as possible, with long white expanses of sand and gently lapping warm waves.

Boat Trips

Half-day trips cost about €65 per person, full-day trips €100 and sunset cruises €55. They usually include a meal or buffet, plus drinks and all snorkeling gear.

There are operators in Gustavia (p458), or try the following:

Coté Mer (☎ 0690-45-06-00; www.st-barths.com/cote-mer) Half- and full-day snorkeling trips, plus sunset cruises. Includes open bar, champagne and cold buffet.

Splash (☎ 0690-56-90-24; splash@stbarth.fr) Runs full-day snorkel trips with gourmet buffet to Île Fourchue.

Diving & Snorkeling

If you dive on your own, you must pay a fee and register with the **St-Barth Natural Marine Reserve** (☎ 27-88-18). The **Mairie** (Town Hall; Gustavia; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-3:30pm Mon-Fri) or any dive outfitter will be able to send you through the proper channels.

The most popular diving spots are off the islets surrounding St-Barth, which are rich in marine life and coral. Almost all of the dive sites and surrounding islands are managed by the marine reserve. There are dive centers in Gustavia (p458) and Grand Cul-de-Sac (p461), or try **Splash** (☎ 0690-56-90-24; splash@stbarth.fr).

Most of the dive centers can organize a snorkeling excursion, and many boat trips (see above) provide snorkeling gear.

Fishing

Operators in Gustavia (p458) offer shore and deep-sea fishing, where catching tuna, wahoo or blue marlin is common. Renting a 21ft skippered motorboat for deep-sea fishing starts at about €400 for the day for four to seven people.

Horseback Riding

Ranch de Flamands (opposite), near Flamands, runs horseback-riding trips.

Kayaking

Tour operators in St-Jean (p461), Corossol (p463) and Grand Cul-de-Sac (p461) rent kayaks and organize trips.

CONCIERGES

Tired of planning every last detail of your vacation? Why not hire someone else to do it? There are many concierge services on the island that can, for the right price, organize everything from your accommodations and flights down to babysitting and massages.

Try one of the following options:

Caribbean Concierge (☎ 27-72-39; www.thecaribbeanconcierge.com)

Concierge (☎ 49-43-55; eric@theconcierge.fr)

Destination Management Services

(☎ 29-84-54; melanie.stbarths@wanadoo.fr)

Premium IV (☎ 29-00-07; www.premiumiv.com)

Surfing

The main surfing spots are at Lorient, Anse des Cayes, St-Jean and Grand Cul-de-Sac. If you need to rent equipment, stop by St-Jean (p461) or Gustavia (p458), or try to finagle your way onto the property at one of the five-star hotels (although the prices are noticeably inflated.)

Daily prices run to €15 for a short board, €20 for a long board and €10 for a boogie board. Discounts can be arranged for longer rentals.

Windsurfing

Grand Cul-de-Sac, the main windsurfing center, has a large protected bay that's ideal for beginners, and some nice wave action beyond the reef for advanced windsurfers. See p461 for outfitters.

There are also windsurfing outfitters located at St-Jean and Corossol; see p461 and p463 respectively.

BOOKS

For an interesting and intelligent perspective on the island's local culture and cuisine, check out *Case et Cuisine*, written by two loyal tourists, David R Anderson and Dennis E Carlton, in cooperation with the head of the tourism board, Elyse Magras. The book explores the stories behind a variety of colorful dining options on the island, and often includes recipes. The dream-inducing photography lends additional flair to the text. The book can be purchased at several locations around the island; stop by La Normandie hotel (p462) in Lorient if you're having a hard time finding a copy.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses are open from 9am to 3:30pm, Monday to Friday, with a lunch break between about noon and 2pm. Shops tend to be open on Thursdays until late and, in high season, may stay open till 5pm on weekdays and may open on weekends. Many places shut on Wednesday afternoons; almost everything is closed on Sundays.

In general banks are open on weekdays from 8am to noon and from 2pm to 3:30pm. Post offices are generally open 8am to 11am from Monday to Saturday.

Restaurants serve breakfast from around 7am to 10am, lunch from 11:30am to 2:30pm and dinner from 7pm to 11pm.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Although the island is practically autonomous, consular services are still linked to France. A Swedish diplomatic figurehead is the only foreign representation on the island.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

A number of festivals are celebrated on St-Barth throughout the year. The **Office Territorial du Tourisme** (☎ 27-87-27; Quai Général de Gaulle) has a handy list of important events – it's definitely worth picking up as it's quite detailed.

St-Barth Music Festival Held in mid-January, this festival features two weeks of jazz, chamber music and dance performances.

Carnival Held for five days before Lent. Includes a pageant, costumes and street dancing, ending with the burning of a King Carnival figure at Shell Beach. Many businesses close during Carnival.

St-Barth Film Festival (☎ 29-74-70; www.stbarthff.org) The only festival of its kind, this showcases Caribbean talent in film and documentary. It's held in late April.

Festival of St-Barth August 24, the feast day of the island's patron saint, is celebrated with fireworks, a public ball, boat races and other competitions.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The website www.gay.com points out, 'St-Barth is the most gay-popular spot on earth...without a gay bar,' and this pretty much sums up the nature of the island's gay tourism. Locals and other travelers are very laid-back and it's not uncommon to see gay couples holding hands at the beach or having a romantic dinner. But if you're looking for a bumpin' nightlife scene, you won't find it here.

HOLIDAYS

St-Barth has the following public holidays:

New Year's Day January 1

Easter Sunday Late March/early April

Easter Monday Late March/early April

Labor Day May 1

Ascension Thursday Fortieth day after Easter

Pentecost Monday Seventh Monday after Easter

Bastille Day July 14

Assumption Day August 15

All Saints Day (Toussaints) November 1

All Souls Day November 2

Armistice Day November 11

Christmas Day December 25

INTERNET ACCESS

Most hotels on the island offer some form of internet access, either via a computer terminal or via wi-fi; upscale venues offer both. There is wi-fi access throughout Gustavia; see p458 for details. Many restaurants around the island are starting to offer wi-fi connections as well. The tourism office in Gustavia has a list of wi-fi-friendly cafés.

INTERNET RESOURCES

St Barths Online (www.st-barths.com) is the go-to place for anything you'd ever want to know about the island. It has links to accommodations and restaurants.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are medical facilities in Gustavia (p458) including a small hospital and eight local doctors. There are two pharmacies on the island, one in Gustavia (p458) and one in St-Jean (p461).

MONEY

The currency used in St-Barth is the euro. US dollars are widely accepted, although you will not find the one-for-one dollar-to-euro trading that occurs on St-Martin/Sint Maarten.

There are six banks around the island, and an American Express office in St-Jean (p461). None of the ATMs on the island accept American Express.

POST

The main post office is in Gustavia (p458), and there are two smaller branches – one in Lorient (p462) and the other near the airport in St-Jean.

TELEPHONE

The telephone system has been a bit confusing since a changeover in 1996. The country code is ☎ 590, but to call St-Barth from abroad, you need to dial your country's international access code + St-Barth's country code *twice*, ie ☎ 590-590, + the local six-digit number.

Cell phones start with ☎ 0690; to call a cell phone from overseas, dial ☎ 590 + the number.

To call from within the French phone system, add '0' in front of the (single) country code, ie ☎ 0590 + the local number. We have included only the six-digit local number for St-Barth listings in this chapter.

Public telephones take all major credit cards and prices are listed. Prepaid phone cards are available for purchase throughout the island as well.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 16
- Fire ☎ 18
- Police ☎ 16
- Sea rescue ☎ 70-92-92

TOURIST INFORMATION

The island's ultrahelpful tourism office, the Office Territorial du Tourisme, is located along the water in Gustavia (p458).

VISAS

Citizens from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Japan and New Zealand don't need visas. Citizens of several CIS, African and South American countries require visas valid for a French collectivity. Contact the **border police** (☎ 29-76-76) for more information.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering St-Barthélemy

Residents of EU countries need only a national identity card to enter St-Barth. Passports are needed for all other nationalities. See above for information on visas.

Air

Located near the village of St-Jean, St-Barth's only airport, **Aéroport de St-Barthélemy** (SBH;

☎ 27-65-41), has the second-shortest runway in the world (the shortest is on Saba). Only teeny-tiny puddle jumpers can land on the island, ensuring the impossibility of mass tourism.

The following airlines fly to and from St-Barth:

Air Antilles Express (☎ 27-71-77; www.airantilles.com)

Fort-de-Franc, Pointe-à-Pitre, St-Martin/Sint Maarten

Air Caraïbes (☎ 87-14-80; www.aircaraibes.com) Fort-de-France, Havana, Marie-Galante, Panama City, Paris, Pointe-à-Pitre, Port-au-Prince, Santo Domingo, St-Martin/Sint Maarten, San José, St Lucia

St Barth Commuter (☎ 27-54-54; www.stbarthcommuter.com) St-Martin/Sint Maarten; charter flights throughout the Caribbean also available

Winair (☎ 27-61-01; www.fly-winair.com) Anguilla, Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Nevis, St-Martin/Sint Maarten, St Kitts, Sint Eustatius, Tortola

Charter airlines are also available:

Carib Aviation (☎ in Antigua 268-462-3147)

Inter Island Express (☎ in Puerto Rico 253-1400)

Sea

FERRY

The ferry service between St-Barthélemy and St-Martin/Sint Maarten is often very choppy – it's a good idea to take motion-sickness pills beforehand. Your accommodation can usually reserve a seat for you on the boat for a minimal deposit; you simply pay the remaining part when you arrive at the pier for departure.

The main company is **Voyager** (☎ in St-Martin 87-10-68, in Sint Maarten 542-4096; www.voy12.com), which has two modern high-speed boats. One leaves Marigot, St-Martin, at 9am and 6:15pm for the 1½-hour journey; it departs Gustavia at 7:15am and 4:30pm. On Sunday and Wednesday, the boat leaves from Captain Oliver's Marina in Oyster Pond, St-Martin, and the ride is only 40 minutes. Fares are €58 one way, €67 for a same-day round-trip and €83 for a round-trip.

Also available is the high-speed catamaran, the **Edge** (☎ in Sint Maarten 544-2640), which makes the 45-minute trip to Gustavia daily from Pelican Marina on Simpson Bay, Sint Maarten, at 9am; it returns at 4pm. You need to check in 15 minutes in advance. A one-way trip costs US\$45, a same-day round-trip is US\$65, and a round-trip US\$90. The US\$15 departure tax is not included in the ticket price.

YACHT

Those arriving by yacht can clear immigration at the **port office** (☎ 27-66-97), on the east side of Gustavia Harbor.

GETTING AROUND

There is no bus system on St-Barth. Taxis are pricey, so strongly consider renting a car.

Bicycle

Cycling around the island can be arduous, even for the healthiest individuals. The roads can be exceptionally steep.

Car, Motorcycle & Scooter

DRIVER'S LICENSE

A driver's license from your home country is valid in St-Barth.

FUEL

There are only two gas stations – one in St-Jean and one in Lorient – on the island and both are closed on Sundays. During the week they are open during daylight hours (with the obligatory two-hour lunch break from noon until 2pm). If you're a desperate, there's an all-night gas pump at the airport, which only works with a credit card (although not usually with American plastic).

RENTAL

There are loads of car- and scooter-rental agencies throughout the island, with about a dozen concentrated in the airport terminal in St-Jean. The others mostly sit around Gustavia, although the cars are kept near the airport. In general, you will be discouraged from renting a scooter or motorcycle as the terrain is quite rugged and steep (and scooters aren't really that much cheaper than cars, especially as you won't spend that much on gas since the island is so tiny.) Prices between December and April hover around €60 for cars, while off-season prices drop to a less outrageous €35 to €40. Try the following options:

AVIS (☎ 27-71-43; avis.sbca@wanadoo.fr) Located at the airport.

Barth'Loc (☎ 27-52-81) Located in Gustavia; also offers scooter rentals.

Budget (☎ 27-66-30; budgetsaintbarth@wanadoo.fr) Located at the airport and in Gustavia.

Chez Beranger (☎ 27-89-00; chezberanger@wanadoo.fr) Located in Gustavia; leases cars and scooters.

Dufau (☎ 27-54-83; nilsdufau@yahoo.com) Based in Public, mainly offers motorcycle rentals.

Gumbs Rental (☎ 27-75-32; gumbs.car.rental@wanadoo.fr) Located at the airport. Is also the front desk for Anse de Terre Neuve.

Meca Moto (☎ 52-92-49; mecamoto3@wanadoo.fr) Located in Gustavia. Specializes in motorbikes.

Soleil Caraibes (☎ 27-67-18; soleil.caraibes@wanadoo.fr) Located at the airport; offers some of the best deals on the island.

Tropic All Rent (☎ 27-64-76; tropicall.rent@wanadoo.fr) Located in Gustavia; offers cars and motorbikes.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the right-hand side, and the speed limit is 45km/h, unless otherwise posted. Some of the older roads are quite narrow so be mindful of other cars coming in the opposite direction.

Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is easy and relatively safe in St-Barth, although substantially more difficult the closer one gets to the far corners of the island. As always when hitchhiking, be cautious and obey your instincts.

Taxi

Taxi prices go from pricey to outrageous. There are no set fares, so prices are all over the board. Generally prices increase by about 50% when it's dark out.

From Gustavia to the airport costs €10, while from Gustavia to Petit Cul-de-Sac it's around €25. From the airport it's €10 to St-Jean and around €12 to Lorient.

To book a taxi in Gustavia, call ☎ 27-66-31; at the airport, call ☎ 27-75-81. There's a taxi stand in Gustavia. You can also contact drivers directly – a list of drivers and their phone numbers is available at the Office Territorial de Tourisme (p458) in Gustavia.

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