



[Left: The InterContinental Montelucia at the foot of Camelback Mountain
Below: Dale Chihuly lavender "flora" compliment live cacti at the Desert Botanical Garden]



Courtesy of Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

Scottsdale:

Eye-candy scenery, culinary delights, and a luxury spa in America's Southwest

White truffle French fries tossed in Reggiano. Banana French fries with Malaysian sauce. Moroccan French fries with cilantro and babaganoush dip.

These are but three of the dozen tantalizing, exotic styles of French fries served at the poolside Kasbah restaurant in the freshly minted InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa in picture-postcard-perfect Paradise Valley near Scottsdale. Indulge yourself (remember, it's a vacation), with any of the other mouth-watering delectables at another of the hotel's eateries, the Crave Café. It's aptly named: Most of the tempting menu items seductively hypnotize diners with food groups that are—let's just say—at the polar extreme from cruciferous vegetables on a nutrition chart. But, hey, you can always work the carbs off at the resort's 31,000 square-foot gym/spa/wellness center. (And, yes, the Montelucia does have restaurants that specialize in nutritious, Mediterranean-inspired cuisine!)

Spread out across 34 acres, at the foot of scenic Camelback Mountain, the 293-room, \$300-million-dollar resort seduces with endless four-star amenities: Five pools, six restaurants, and striking architecture that resonates with the tones and textures of Southern Spain, with a mix of Roman, Greek, and Moorish influences. It's Andalusia in the American Southwest, replete with spa treatments that are more Moroccan than Main Street.

And if the spa and the on-premises activities (the children's facilities are excellent here) don't keep you tethered to a poolside *chaise longue*, there is plenty to do in nearby Scottsdale, including top-flight golf everywhere. The Desert Botanical Garden is a must-see, with its extraordinary Dale Chihuly glass cacti at the entrance to its 50 acres of mesmerizing outdoor exhibits of desert plants (including 139 rare or endangered species). For nearly the entire month of December, *Las Noches de las Luminarias* will be staged, in which thousands of luminarias illuminate the Garden.

While you might have missed the largest hot rod and custom car show in the world (November 20-22), you can check out "transportation" of another sort later in the season—when the 50-year-old Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show comes to town, in mid-February. Also that month is the weeks-long *Parada del Sol*, a celebration of Western influences, kicking off with a wondrous event, the Hashknife Pony Express, featuring two dozen riders delivering 20,000 first-class letters the old-fashioned way! ■

For more information:
icmontelucia.com; scottsdalecvb.com; dbg.org;
scottsdaleshow.com; paradadelsol.org

Warm Up at Four Luxury Locations... *hot spots* for chilling out

By Ruth J. Katz



Courtesy of Coral Reef Club

Barbados:

Old-world British propriety and service, inviting beaches, and compelling history

You'll realize that Barbados is very British (it is, after all, an independent country within the British Commonwealth with its manners, decorum, politesse) because of two sports-related facts: On this 166-square-mile, pork-chop-shaped island, there are four, yes four, polo fields and cricket is played just about everywhere. Back in the day, celeb-spotters could spy the likes of Jackie O, Maria Callas, Greta Garbo, and T. S. Eliot; today, it's the Blairs, the Beckhams, Sting, and Tiger Woods, who was married at the über-luxe Sandy Lane Hotel.

This most easterly of the Caribbean islands is steeped in fascinating history and has a rich cultural legacy, vestiges of which are everywhere: Not to attempt to weasel a little American narrative into Barbadian heritage, though, for Yankees, it's noteworthy that George Washington, on his only trip outside the States, slept here and that his restored Georgian home has been reopened to the public. There is the remarkable St. Nicholas Abbey (no religious bloodline), one of only three houses of Jacobean architecture (Drax Hall is another and it is also on the island) still standing in the entire Western Hemisphere; there is also the stunning Sunbury Plantation House & Museum, a 350-year-old restored structure, featuring rare Caribbean collectibles.

But visits here are not just about history. There is the Mount Gay Rum Tour (there are over 1,600 rum shops in the 11 parishes); Harrison's Cave, drenched with stalactites and stalagmites, streams, and waterfalls (visited by electric cart); and there is the rebuilt Bridgetown Synagogue, with its restored 17th-century cemetery. Performing arts are significant, too: January 11-17 the Jazz Festival takes center stage, while in March, the exceptional Holders Season, featuring a month's worth of cultural presentations (opera to reggae) reigns. The Holders Plantation House grounds are converted to accommodate a stage, chandeliers are hung from the trees, while guests sip Champagne—all very grand and terribly civilized.

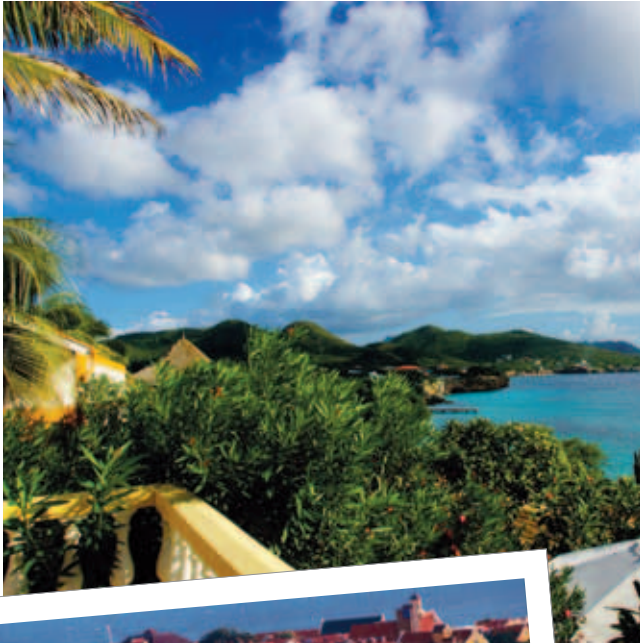
For hotels, the genteel Coral Reef Club is a study in classic island style and offers a brand-new sybaritic spa. And for dining, it's a journey into an epicurean groaning board, flavored by countless cultures. Do not miss dinner at The Cliff, arguably, along with Daphne's, the best the island offers. It overlooks the crashing waves of the sea and is lit by majestic lanterns. For lunchtime treats, The Fisher Pond Great House and the Lonestar (on the beach) cannot be beat. ■

For more information:
visitbarbados.org; mountgay.com;
georgewashingtonbarbados.org;
barbadosgreathouse.com;
coralreefbarbados.com



Maria For

[Top: The Luxury Plantation Suite at the Coral Reef Club
Left: The dining room at the Fisher Pond Great House]



Curaçao:

Discovered by a Spaniard, ruled by the Dutch and the English, the vibrant island is a cherished destination



[Top: The view from a suite at the Lodge Kurá Hulanda and Beach Club
Center: The waterfront in Willemstad with its famous pastel buildings
Bottom: Fruits and vegetables at the floating market]

Nations have fought over Curaçao, but it is its Dutch heritage and dominance that have triumphed, despite the influences of Indian, African, Asian, and Arabic settlers. It's a colorful island—literally—and this is apparent from the moment one sets eyes on Willemstad, the capital of the 170-square-mile isle (and not coincidentally, a Unesco World Heritage site.) Lining the harbor of St. Anna Bay is a still life come to life, captured in countless pictures—a neat row of charming, sorbet-colored homes along the harbor front. Spanning that bay is the picturesque, renowned Queen Emma Bridge, a man-driven, hinged pontoon crossing that connects the Punda and Otrobanda sections of town. In the latter neighborhood is where you will find a little jewel, Hotel Kurá Hulanda Spa & Casino, an 80-room resort comprising restored 18th- and 19th-century Dutch Colonial Caribbean buildings, spread along cobblestone alleys, and nestled among inviting courtyards, rock-lined pools, award-winning restaurants, and a brand new spa.

Kurá Hulanda is the work of Jakob Gelt Dekker, a Dutchman of extraordinary vision and business acumen (a practicing dentist with *two* MBA degrees.) Dekker has circumnavigated the globe some 50 times, an endeavor that has broadened his sense of philanthropy, and so, when he first visited the island a dozen years ago, he was inspired to create a museum. To that end, he purchased 16 Dutch Colonial homes and transformed them into an outstanding anthropological museum that chronicles, among other things, the African slave trade; it is at the heart of the resort. If you are fortunate enough to visit when he is in residence on the island (he has several homes around the world, but when in Curaçao, he lives in a magnificent tree house, yes, really), try to get his ear over a beer; you will not be disappointed.

Realizing tourists might want a beach at their fingertips and not be content with his in-town hotel, Dekker purchased another 150 acres at the northwestern tip of the island and created the Lodge Kurá Hulanda and Beach Club and visitors can split their vacation between the two nirvanas.

Aside from superb shopping (and loafing), there is much to do on the island: The adventurous should hop on an ATV from Eric's ATV Adventures, whose staff will take you on a fabulous guided route in the hills and the byways (including to a bat cave). There is also a fascinating ostrich farm to visit (with an extraordinarily large menu of "interesting" cuisine for the audacious), and a fragrant aloe vera plantation. For history, visit the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue, the oldest congregation in the Western Hemisphere.

For dining, you may not want to leave Kurá Hulanda, with its diverse cuisines, but if you do, then head for Angelica's Delight for coffee, Champagnes, sweets, and the famous Sunday brunch. ■

For more information:
kurahulanda.com;
curacao.com;
curacao-atv.com;
ostrichfarm.net;
angelicasdelights.com

Warm Up at Four Luxury Locations...
hot spots for chilling out



[The Palm Court at the Boca Raton Resort & Club]

Palm Beach County:

A narrow strip of Florida is a little slice of heaven

If you visit Old School Square (site of a former school and now a cultural arts center and National Historic Site), at the pulsating heart of revitalized Delray Beach, you'll find turn-of-the-century report cards on exhibit, embellished with ornate Palmer-style penmanship. What will strike you, though, is that the students of yesteryear were graded in such amusing categories as: Selection of Proper Food; Proper Eating Habits; Chews Food Well; and Eats Sweets Only After Meals. It is all the more ironic because today, 100-plus years later, the restaurants in Delray, like Boston's on the Beach, 32 East, and Vic & Angelo's serve portions that even Paul Bunyan would have trouble finishing. And don't get me started on some of the cascading-over-the-plate-but-oh-so-delicious desserts! (But, then, again, as I noted, it is a vacation, right?)

Outstanding among the fine-dining choices is Cielo, by Angela Hartnett, the co-star with the infamous Gordon Ramsay on *Hell's Kitchen*, and the proud possessor of a Michelin star for her gastronomic efforts at the Connaught in London. Cielo is the high-in-the-sky gourmet restaurant at the Boca Raton Resort & Club (part of the Waldorf Astoria Collection), where it isn't only the view that achieves breathtaking heights. Have drinks in the adjoining chic bar at sunset then adjourn to dinner, as the lights start to twinkle all around and dusk metamorphoses the never-ending panorama into, well, *cielo*.

The Boca Raton Resort & Club has added a new beachfront hotel property (the Boca Beach Club), and guests are free to shuttle back and forth be-

tween them and to enjoy all the pleasures of both, including (again) cricket, and the magnificent new 50,000-square-foot spa, with 44 treatment rooms, two Jacuzzi waterfalls, and indulgent pampering that will make you feel like you died and went to, well, one more time, *cielo*.

For anyone not wanting to veg out pool- or ocean-side, but who still wants water, there are pleasant cruises up and down the Intracoastal Waterway, where the "backs" of homes are really the "fronts." There is also the first-rate Boca Raton Museum of Art (in Mizner Park, an absolute mecca for shopping), where mid-January two exciting exhibits, *The Magical World of M.C. Escher* and *Mary Cassatt: Works on Paper* both open. Another cultural must is the astonishing Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, with exhibitions, tea ceremonies, and traditional Japanese festivals. In summertime, the Bon Festival is a huge draw—when thousands of lit lanterns are floated on the lake, honoring ancestors.

But if it's glittery lights and glamour you are seeking *now*, and not next summer, head to Delray, where for the month of December, the legendary 100-foot-tall Christmas tree in Old School Square will be lit. All month long there will be activities, including ice skating, a carousel, and yes indeed, all accompanied by food galore. ■

For more information:
palmbeachfl.com; oldschool.org; bocaresort.com;
bocamuseum.org; morikami.org; downtowndelraybeach.com