

## FAMILY TRAVEL

# BARBADOS MORE THAN JUST FLAWLESS BEACHES

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

My six-year old's delighted squeals are carried to shore on the wave she's riding. Her tiny face, partially obscured by a pair of oversized fuchsia goggles, is a beacon of joy. After appeasing me with a quick thumbs-up and photo, she returns to the shimmering sea in search of her next clean break. A solid hour of boogie-boarding and there's no sign of her tiring. Fine by me. After all, we booked Barbados for its silken sand beaches and balmy crystalline water, and the quiet bay in front of Sea Breeze Beach House — our boutique all-inclusive on the southern tip of the island — is holiday perfection. The resort's protected location also makes it ideal for beginners' body surfing and swimming. And, when you consider its two flawless beaches, three pools, multiple rum bars, kids club and brand new, two-bedroom family suites, I'm shocked we ventured off-property at all. However, Barbados offers exceptional cultural, adventure and culinary attractions that are worthy of some serious attention.

**BEACH CLUBBING**

Boatyard Beach, in Carlisle Bay, is all about water play. Our daughter spent most of her time bouncing on the ginormous ocean trampolines and zooming down the extreme waterslide. Admission also includes a snorkel trip — inclusive of life vests and gear — to see the island's shipwrecks and sea turtles. The tour takes about 45 minutes, which is the perfect amount of time for small children. Free Wi-Fi, beach volleyball, a rope swing and assortment of kid's sand toys are additional Boatyard perks. Order lunch beachside and take advantage of the various happy hour specials offered throughout the day. As the beach club is a top spot for cruisers, try to arrive early, or plan your visit outside of port days to ensure you snag chairs and an umbrella.

**SAIL BARBADOS**

Cool Runnings catamaran cruise surpassed all expectations. We booked the half-day lunch snorkel tour, which includes round trip transfers from your hotel to the dock in Bridgetown. As snorkelling takes place in the same location as the Boatyard Beach trip, we spent most of our time dancing on-board with the captain and crew, who are brilliant with children and work tirelessly to create a magical experience for all guests. Anchor is dropped in Payne Bay — just outside Rihanna's home at One Sandy Lane — and a delicious buffet Bajan lunch is served. After, you'll have



The quiet bay in front of the Sea Breeze Beach House in Barbados is perfect for swimming and boogie boarding.



Writer Mhairri Woodhall's six-year-old daughter collects shells on the beach in Barbados. CURT WOODHALL

about an hour for swimming and beachcombing. If you only choose one off-resort activity in Barbados, Cool Runnings is my top recommendation.

**GO CAVING**

The most popular off-the-water attraction in Barbados is Harrison's Cave in St. Thomas parish. Here, we ventured underground to witness this natural phenomenon. During the hour-long guided tram tour, you'll explore the active stream cave and learn about its history and geology. Throughout the 2.3-km tunnel network, we discovered breathtaking waterfalls, emerald pools and visually stunning caverns en-

crusted with countless stalactite and stalagmite formations. Given our daughter was fully engaged for about 80 per cent of the tour before her attention waned, I recommend Harrison's for ages six and up.

**HISTORIC RUM TASTING**

Tour the 350-year old Jacobean-style plantation house at St. Nicholas Abbey for a unique history lesson and specialty rum tasting. The sprawling property covers 400 acres encompassing swaying sugar cane fields, towering mahogany groves and verdant tropical ravines. With its beautiful gardens, adorable abbey cats and chatty resident Moluccan

cockatoos, Lance and Baby, it's a paradise for little explorers. For the adults, sampling the Abbey's award-winning rum and touring the distillery is a must-try. Complete your visit with a true Bajan lunch of fried flying fish at the Terrace Cafe.

**BARBADOS MUSEUM**

To delve deeper into the island's history, take a self-guided tour of Barbados Museum in Bridgetown. This hidden gem, housed in a historic military prison, features an eclectic mix of galleries showcasing local ecology, art and social history dating back 4,000 years. Exploring the extensive wildlife

## IF YOU GO

All-inclusive packages for the Sea Breeze Beach House are available through Air Canada and WestJet Vacations, via Toronto. To avoid the red-eye on the outbound, we overnighted at the Toronto airport. I also recommend booking 10 days as, given the longer flight times, a week felt a little short.

displays and learning about the island's reefs, seagrasses and mangrove swamps was the highlight for our daughter. You'll need about an hour for touring, and it's best to visit early in the day as the galleries are not air-conditioned.

**DANCE PARTY**

After beach play, the Harbour Lights dinner show on Carlisle Bay was our daughter's top experience in Barbados. The alfresco entertainment extravaganza is a colourful spectacle of Bajan costumes, music and dance. Pre-dinner you'll enjoy the open-bar under a starlit sky. After the buffet, barbecue is served and a carnivallike atmosphere ensues, with performers encouraging audience participation. Throughout the remainder of the evening all of the kids — and many rum-enthused adults — hit the floor to attempt signature West Indies dance moves. It's a fun-filled night suitable for every age.

**CULINARY CRAVINGS**

Barbados delicious culinary offerings are another one of the island's major draws. From fresh-catch plates at Oistins' famous Friday night fish fry to the flawless fine-dining fare prepared by world-renowned chefs, you'll find plenty of dishes to thrill your palate. Waterside dining at Changers is an island staple. The elegant restaurant is surprisingly kid-friendly and offers a special pint-sized menu and colouring supplies. Although the menu is extensive, if you love seafood I have three words for you: Parmesan crusted barracuda. You're welcome. Cocktail Kitchen is another shining star. Our daughter devoured most of our ahi tuna poke rice bowl and chargrilled octopus share plates. For entrees, we loved the blackened fresh catch of the moment (brought in that morning) and Caribbean seafood curry. Wash it all down with a coconut mojito or mango chow, made with scotch bonnet infused Mount Gay rum. If you've saved room, the spiced banana sticky toffee pudding is decadently divine.

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