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Sugar Addiction

WOMEN
ON THE
MOVE



Touring the ruins at Caneel Bay, St. John USVI

the idea of visiting Switzerland in the winter evokes images of blizzard-like conditions, I can promise you it's not quite as cold as you think—at least not in March, when I visited. I packed for extreme temperatures, and was surprised to find that a nice warm sweater and boots kept me comfortable much of the time. I think I carried my coat more than I wore it!

Of course, you might be planning winter travel with the goal of getting away from frosty weather altogether. In that case, I have some wonderful properties in St. John, Playa del Carmen and Bermuda to tell you about.

First up is Caneel Bay on St. John. The great thing about St. John—and the entire U.S. Virgin Islands, really—is that there isn't a bad time to go. The climate is mild year-round, and there's no rainy season. To get to Caneel Bay, you'll actually fly into St. Thomas. When you arrive, head to the resort's reception area at the airport, and staffers will transfer you to St. John via private boat service. It's quite convenient, and the ferry ride takes less than an hour.

The resort occupies 170 acres on a private peninsula surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. The seven beaches that circle the peninsula offer varying views and activities, from Honeymoon Beach, which is free of resort accommodations, to Caneel and Little Caneel, with water sports and gentle waters that are popular with families.

Caneel Bay was originally a sugar plantation started by the Dutch in

the 1700s. (In fact, the ruins of the sugar mill are part of the resort.) However, Laurance Rockefeller rediscovered the area in the 1950s and envisioned the idyllic vacation spot it is today. Cottage 7, the former island home of the Rockefeller family, still stands on the island and has hosted a long list of celebrities and political figures.

If you don't feel like venturing into St. John for meals, a variety of dining options are available on the property. There's a very nice breakfast buffet at the Caneel Beach Terrace to start your day, and I had the best sushi ever at the Beach Bar & Grill's Sushi Bar. I'd also highly recommend ZoZo's Ristorante for stellar Italian food. Not only is the food great, but ZoZo's open-air setting high above the sugar mill ruins offers amazing views as well.

If you're willing to leave the resort, you'll definitely have a great time exploring St. John. The quaint town has a relaxing ambience, perfect for strolling through the downtown and visiting the shops. I found that many shops offered very unique, high-quality goods as opposed to the island tchotchkes I've encountered elsewhere. Once you've worked up an appetite, be sure to have dinner at the Waterside Grill—the food there is very impressive!

If you're a fan of country music, you might want to save your trip to Caneel Bay for May of 2016, when the Love City Country Music Festival returns for its second year.

Looking for a more bohemian feel for your beach getaway? You might enjoy the Mahekal Beach Resort. You'll follow stone paths weaving through lush, colorful foliage to arrive at one of 122 individual bun-



The Mahekal Beach Resort



Mahekal_Boli Bar



galows with thatched roofs. While the setting may evoke images of the Swiss Family Robinson, rest assured the bungalows have most modern conveniences, such as air conditioning, in-room safes and complimentary basic Wi-Fi. What you will not find in your room, however, is a telephone or a television!

The bungalows harken back to the resort's humble beginnings more than 50 years ago. A Mexican family built six thatched-roof palapas on the beach to rent to backpackers. They carefully reinvested every bit of profit from those first rentals, and eventually built 96 more over the passing decades. Now the bungalows are just one aspect of a multimillion-dollar "reimagination" at the resort, which is scheduled to be completed in December of 2015. Public areas, restaurants, guest rooms and the Mayan-inspired spa have been redesigned, and new amenities such as a fitness center and resort-sized swimming pool are also in the works.

I found the staff at Mahekal to be extremely friendly and helpful. In

fact, the concierge, Boli, is a bit of a legend. (So much so that the resort's "Boli's Bar" is named for him.) Boli can hook you up with excellent recommendations for food, dining, entertainment and tours off the resort. I took an outstanding half-day tour of the Tulum Ruins, and another half-day excursion to snorkel the famous cenotes (underwater caves).



Unlike some of the larger resorts that are somewhat isolated, Mahekal is just steps away from Quinta Avenida (5th Avenue), which is the heart of Playa del Carmen. There, you should be able to find anything you're looking for. I had an excellent meal at a Greek restaurant right across the street from the hotel, and a stroll down the avenue revealed a mix of high-end U.S.

shops as well as smaller local vendors. I didn't take advantage of the nightlife during my stay, but those options run the gamut from laid-back lounges to lively salsa dancing.

If you're not feeling that adventurous, the resort offers several restau-



rants that are included in their “Modified American Plan.” You’ll receive complimentary breakfast and either lunch or dinner each day of your stay. Room service is available and arrives in woven rattan baskets via vintage bicycle delivery. And, of course, somebody is always ready to serve you poolside as well. Overall, Mahekal is a great place to unplug, unwind and relax!

I’ve saved what could be my most surprising destination for last: Bermuda! If you think Bermuda is just for your grandparents, think again. In the 1950s (before the Caribbean even considered tourism), Bermuda was the destination for American travelers. In fact, everything the Caribbean knows about tourism, it learned from Bermuda. So it’s time to dispel any preconceived notions you might have and check it out. A generation of travelers is missing out on this jewel just a short flight from Fairfield County.



Fairmont's Hamilton Princess & Beach Club is the perfect place to "rediscover" Bermuda. Affectionately known as "The Pink Palace," the Hamilton has recently undergone a major renovation, but managed to retain a sense of the generational history commonly found on the island. It truly is the best of both worlds—an urban luxury resort in the city with secluded, private beach access.

The waters of Bermuda are an amazing azure blue that you won't find elsewhere. The Hamilton Princess is the host hotel for the 35th America's Cup in 2017, and I imagine the sight of the colorful boats against that deeply hued water will be breathtaking! Fortunately, you needn't be an accomplished sailor to enjoy the water yourself. A variety of tours are offered at the marina, or you can rent a boat or paddleboard and check out Sinky Bay (the resort's private cove on the South Beach) on your own. Or, just stretch out in one of the hammocks hung over the shallow water and enjoy the breeze!

But if you prefer to keep your feet on solid ground, there's still plenty about Bermuda for you to enjoy. Princess guests have the opportunity to golf at the Riddell's Bay Golf and Country Club, or you can try one of the many other courses on the island. There are a host of other opportunities for tours as well. I decided to investigate Hamilton a bit, and enjoyed the most unusual tour I've ever taken. Our guide—after giving us a tour of his own home—brought us to several lesser-known landmarks and offered us a special look at life on the island.

I was intrigued to learn that in Bermuda, houses and land are passed down through the generations. (Because of this, it has been so difficult to buy property there that even Oprah was rejected once!) On the other hand, everybody who lives there has been there forever and

knows or is related to everybody else. It creates a neat small-town vibe, even though there's a lot going on in Hamilton. I found Bermudans to be the most gracious, helpful and welcoming people I've ever encountered. So, if unparalleled service is a requirement of your travels, this is the place for you.

Whether your winter travels involve swimsuits or sweaters, ski boots or a snorkel, I hope you've found some intriguing suggestions on these pages.

Gstaad Palace
Gstaad, Switzerland
palace.ch

The Widder Hotel
Zurich, Switzerland
widderhotel.ch

Caneel Bay Resort
Caneel Bay, St. John, USVI
caneelbay.com

Mahekal Beach Resort
Playa del Carmen, Mexico
mahekalbeachresort.com

Hamilton Princess & Beach Club
Bermuda
fairmont.com/hamilton-bermuda/