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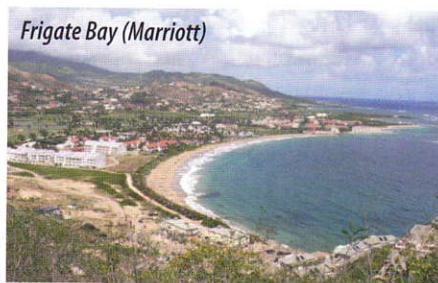
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Weekend Warrior: ST. KITTS

By Margit Bisztray

From most American cities, a jaunt to the Caribbean means layovers and puddle-jumpers, or direct flights to cruise ship ports, tax-free shops, and fast food. But less than three hours nonstop from Miami International, the Leeward Island of St. Kitts offers a different, undiscovered Caribbean—perfect for a weekend getaway.



WHERE TO STAY

A weekend getaway is all about maxing relaxation in the minimum amount of time. The 450-room Marriott Resort and the Royal Beach Casino lends itself perfectly. The rooms are tropical-yet-spiffy, quiet as aquariums, and have private balconies overlooking pool, garden, and ocean. Though equipped with conveniences like Internet, espresso, and cable T.V., the Marriott makes being lazy easy. The sprawling pool includes a bar you can swim up to, the beach has clever chairs that are adjustable for shade all day, and the 15,000 square foot Emerald Mist Spa offers soothing treatments like the Cinnamon Black Rock massage. For unstoppable, active types, there is a fitness center and an 18-hole golf course. **Through December 20, 2009, the resort is offering a special rate of \$79/ night for Florida residents, 869.466.1200, stkittsmarriott.com and request promo code N9R.**

WHAT TO DO

Shed your shoes, climb aboard a sunset catamaran cruise with Leeward Island Charters, and let the lull and rock of sea replace whatever frantic pace you've come from. Cruise the undeveloped coastline of southeastern St. Kitts and its nearest neighbor, Nevis, and let the friendly crew do all the work (like keeping your cocktail topped).

The only reason to exert yourself might be to climb Liamuiga, St. Kitts' dormant volcano. Greg's Safaris picks you up by Land Rover and drives you past sugar cane fields to the trailhead. From there, it's a fairly hefty climb through the rainforest jungle on muddy paths. Guides break up the trek by describing uses for trees along the way (sarsaparilla for tea, and silver trumpet for stomach pains) and pointing out the camouflaged wild green vervet monkeys. At the top, the rewards are sharing your picnic with mongoose and gazing at the lush bowl of the crater.



WHERE TO EAT

BLU, one of the Marriott's seven restaurants, prepares seafood dishes with West Indian flavors and ingredients, like lobster and Christophene squash fritters, and cumin-dusted

mahi with plantain sweet potato mash and tamarind glaze. The undulating banquettes and aquamarine color scheme enhance the experience.

Walking distance from the Marriott is The Strip—a row of beach bars including Mr. X's Shiggidy Shack and Buddie's, offering Kittian cuisine and local color. Tourists and islanders alike sidle up for cold Kaliks, rumrunners, and fresh seafood slapped onto a hot grill and served with sides like dirty rice and sautéed vegetables. Make a night of strolling the strip for drinking and dancing, and bonfires when the moon is full.

It is, however, worth a cab ride to Reggae Beach. Set in a small, tranquil bay, Reggae Beach feels like that rare place that's been left alone and might even stay that way. Perhaps this is why the food (lobster sandwiches, salad with BBQ shrimp, chicken roti) is so memorably tasty. Frozen rum drinks and Wilbur the pig add to the lovable ambience.

For the time being, it's possible to slip into a quieter Caribbean in St. Kitts, where waves crash against dramatic lava formations at a place called Black Rocks, the beaches are all public (and cannot be privatized), and panoramic views at every bend are so undisturbed, it's like they'll stay that way forever.

Reggae Beach



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