

BARBADOS— SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

What kind of vacationer are you? Do you prefer to lounge on a sandy beach? Tackle a physically challenging adventure? Savor gourmet meals? Eat local fare out of a carryout paper bag? Tour a museum? Try your luck at the golf course? Whatever your fancy, Barbados satisfies.

Though it's an island that measures only 21 by 14 miles, Barbados offers something for everyone. It boasts so many enticements that you likely won't be able to pack everything that sounds appealing into one itinerary, whether you're staying a few days or several weeks. Even if, like me, you choose to discover Barbados over the course of several trips, it will continue to surprise with each returning visit. Among its many charms, here are 10 things you really shouldn't miss:

1 Swim alongside sea turtles. Take a five-hour cruise aboard the *Tiami*, a luxury catamaran among the Tall Ships fleet. During a scheduled snorkel stop, you'll have the unique opportunity to swim with sea turtles in their natural habitat.

2 Stroll along paths weaving through the Flower Forest, and discover some of the island's most spectacular blooms. Walk with a guide to learn which plants help adorn, nourish and medicate Barbadians.

3 Sip rum at one of the 1,600 rum shops. Blend it with Coke or a simple ocean breeze. Your best bet: Buy a bottle of rum, and share it with the locals at the rum shop. (Barbadians are generally very friendly and all speak English, since the island is part of the British Commonwealth.) Your new friends may share some insider tips about where to eat, what to do, where to shop and which beaches are best.

4 Fill up at Oistin's Fish Market. Popular with both locals and tourists, Oistin's is *the* place to be on a Friday or Saturday night in Barbados. Savor traditional Barbadian fare like grilled red snapper and rum punch. Then head to the dance floor and boogie to Calypso music, or shop the wares of local artisans.

5 Zip-line above the lush green canopy of a Barbadian forest with Aerial Trek. The tour encompasses eight zips of increasing challenge and passes over some breathtaking scenery.

6 Eat flying fish and cou cou. This tasty combination is the national dish. Whether steamed or fried, flying fish has a dense bite and a savory flavor. Cou cou is made using corn meal and okra; served soft or firm, it suggests polenta. Splash on some mustard-based hot sauce for extra zing. Many restaurants serve the dish, but Waterfront Café in Bridgetown is one great option.

7 Tour the Mount Gay Rum distillery. A 12-minute film clearly explains how rum is made. Afterward, sniff rum at different stages of the production process, taste different rums side-by-side, and learn how to make rum punch. Before you leave, visit the gift shop for products not available in the United States.

8 Visit George Washington House. During the tour, you'll learn this former sugar plantation housed the 19-year-old future president and his half-brother Lawrence for two months in 1751—and that the visit was Washington's only trip outside the United States. The docent explains how the histories of Barbados and the United States are linked in ways you might never have guessed.

9 Dine at the Cliff. It's ridiculously high-priced, yet worth a splurge because this restaurant pairs unmatched views of the Caribbean with great food. Plus, you can brag that you dined at number 28 of the 50 best restaurants in the world (as voted by Europe's industry magazine, *The Restaurant*).

10 Lounge on a beach. The sand is soft, the water crystalline turquoise and the sound of crashing waves mesmerizing. There are dozens of beaches from which to choose, and you can even decide between the calmer Caribbean Sea and more aggressive Atlantic Ocean. If you've got time, explore several beaches to find your personal favorite. Mine (so far) is the beach just steps outside my hotel room at Tamarind Cove. **SP**

Like seafood? Try the flying fish with cou cou.

PHOTOS: DIVER BY PAUL RICHINGS; FISH AND RUM SHOP BY MIKE TOY



IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

Delta offers several flights from Atlanta; nonstop flights are available during peak seasons.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

U.S. citizens need a valid passport. Camouflage clothing is not allowed on the island.

WHERE TO EAT

Reference the new Zagat Guide "2009 Best of Barbados," the first and only Zagat guide in the Caribbean. It rates hundreds of establishments, including restaurants, nightlife and attractions and golf courses.

WHERE TO STAY

■ **Tamarind Cove Hotel**
800-467-4519
www.tamarindcovehotel.com
www.eleganthotels.com

■ **Barbados Tourism Authority**
800-221-9831
www.visitbarbados.org