

ROMANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN: BARBADOS

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There's a reason Barbados has long been considered one of the best, and most romantic, destinations in the Caribbean.

English is the official language, and it's a fairly small island with good roads, so it's easy to navigate. The banking system was built by Canadians, and you'll find plenty of CIBC, Scotiabank and other Canadian branches on the island.

The airport is located at the south end of the island, where you'll find a series of excellent resorts. Many are only a few minutes away, so you'll get to that romantic beach with your special someone that much quicker.

Sea Breeze Beach House is a marvellous, bright and breezy south coast resort with lots of bright, Caribbean colours and two beaches. The hotel can set up a private, candlelit dinner for two on the sand.

The Crane Resort sits high on a bluff overlooking a gorgeous, white-sand beach in southeast Barbados. You'll also find one of the prettiest swimming pool complexes in the Caribbean, great food and lovely rooms with dark, polished wood. It's the oldest resort on the island, so there's some great history and old-style architecture, too.

The west side of the island is obviously the best for sunsets and features several striking resorts, including the Fairmont Royal Pavilion and storied Sandy Lane. The west side also is home to the nation's capital, Bridgetown, which has a gorgeous legislative building you can tour, and a pretty harbour.

The west side also is where you'll find the big mansions (including one belonging to Rihanna) and the best shopping. The Limegrove Lifestyle Centre houses high-end shops such as Cartier and Michael Kors. You also can check out Chattel House Village in Holetown for boutique shops and nice, casual restaurants. The shops are built in what used to be small homes called chattel houses, and they're beautifully decorated in vivid shades of pink, blue, yellow and more.

The east side of the island is much more rugged and low-key, with hardly a resort to be found. The village of Bathsheba features gorgeous rock formations along the beach and several pretty, quiet coves. There are also casual rum shacks and restaurants where you can mix with the locals.

Further up the east side you can visit the Morgan Lewis Windmill, the last working one on the island. Not far away is St. Nicholas Abbey, where you can taste rum in a stunning old home that dates back to 1658.

Barbados is famous for its seafood, and you'll find several romantic restaurants on the water. The Cliff Beach Club sits just inches from the gentle waves on the island's west side and has excellent food. Champers is a fine spot on the south coast, with great food and lovely art on display.

Five things to do in Barbados:

1. Enjoy the luscious and wildly colourful tropical flowers and trees at Hunte's Gardens.
2. Try great food on Chef Michael Harrison's Island Markets and Food Vibes tour.
3. Take a tour of the Mount Gay Rum distillery, the oldest in the world (1703).
4. Check out the island's rugged northern coastline and the grottoes at Animal Flower Cave.
5. Tour the island on an open-air Jeep ride with Island Safari Barbados.



By Jim Byers

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