

39 Reasons to Go to the Caribbean This Year



Alex Quesada for The New York Times

Jamaica is just one of many Caribbean islands that is offering vacationers new choices this year.

By AUSTIN CONSIDINE
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THIS has not been a great year so far for the [Caribbean](#) tourism industry. Seven named [hurricanes](#) have hit the region this fall, with Gustav and Omar wreaking the most damage. An earthquake registering 6.1 rocked parts of [Puerto Rico](#), the U.S. Virgin Islands and the British Virgin Islands. And, of course, the global financial meltdown has made Americans increasingly skittish about taking a vacation this winter. What's next, locusts?

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Lighthouse Bay Resort occupies a

Well, things haven't gotten that bad, and in fact, with new hotels continuing to open, high-end resorts raising the bar on amenities, family-oriented getaways expanding their offerings and talented chefs starting restaurants that are transforming the region's culinary scene, there are plenty of reasons for vacationers to seek some solace in the sand and [surf](#) of the Caribbean this winter.

Thirty-nine of them, in fact.

1 [Anguilla](#), already the home of famed upscale resorts like [Cap Juluca](#) and [CuisinArt](#), gets yet another big-name player in April when the Kor Group, whose Viceroy brand has planted its flag in places like [Palm Springs](#), South Beach and the Riviera Maya, officially opens the **Viceroy Anguilla**, (800-357-1930; [www.viceroyanguilla.com](#)). Accommodations include a 486-square-foot room with an ocean view and a private pool. Rooms start at \$550 a night. (Unless otherwise noted, all prices quoted here are for double occupancy and for low season.)

2 Does the Viceroy sound too posh for you? Then, for a bit of old-school-style Anguilla flavor, check out the new [Elvis Beach Bar](#) (264-476-0101; [www.elvisbeachbar.net](#)), a Class C racing sailboat that in 2007 was converted into a bar and restaurant, and features live [music](#) every weekend.

3 The neighboring islands of _____

sandbar off Barbuda.

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the reinvented Bajan Blue restaurant at Sandy Lane.

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Chris Ramirez for The New York Times
Dominica is known for its rusticity and nature-oriented getaways.

to the local scene are a major expansion of Sandals Antigua Caribbean Village and the opening of the **Lighthouse Bay Resort** (888-836-5427; www.lighthousebayresort.com), on the pink sands of Barbuda's Palm Beach, a narrow sandbar a mile and a half off the mainland in Lower Bay, right in the Caribbean. Rooms start at \$679, with all meals included.

4 On the southeast coast of Antigua, **St. James's Club and Villas** opened its [Mamora Bay Divers scuba center](#) (800-345-0356; www.scuba-antigua.com) last spring, giving guests of the secluded, 100-acre resort a chance to explore the marine life teeming around the reefs and shipwrecks off the coast. Dive packages start at \$75, with equipment rental.

5 The [Bob Marley](#) legend may have been born in [Jamaica](#) but it lives on in the [Bahamas](#) at the **Marley Resort and Spa** (242-702-2800; www.marleyresort.com), which was opened on [Nassau](#) Island in July by members of the Marley family. It has 16 luxury villas, an organic produce restaurant and an extensive spa. Rooms start at \$450.

6 On [Paradise Island](#), the Atlantis resort (888-877-7525; www.atlantis.com) unveiled a 497-room tower, **Reef**

Atlantis, last December, and continues to burnish its eco-friendly reputation with the expansion of its Blue Tourism project: a collaborative effort aimed at studying and conserving natural reef habitats. Rooms at the tower start at \$340 a night, with \$10 from each booking going toward the conservation program. (Perhaps even more important to younger members of traveling families: the [Jonas Brothers](#) — heartthrobs of the tween set — will appear at the resort on Dec. 13.)

7 Bigger is better seems to be the philosophy of the **Divi Aruba Phoenix Beach Resort** (800-367-3484; www.diviarubaphoenix.com), in the Palm Beach area of [Aruba](#), which is more than doubling the size of its resort. It is adding a new complex of accommodations, restaurants, pools and landscaped grounds, giving it the largest room count on the island. Rooms in the new complex start at \$350.

8 Visitors to Aruba also have a couple of new dining options. The 325-seat beachfront restaurant **La Vista**, at the Aruba Marriott Resort and Stellaris Casino (297-586-9000; www.arubaplayground.com), features contemporary Italian fusion cuisine; and at the **Old Man and the Sea** (297-735-0840), in Savaneta, you can enjoy the catch of the day right on the beach or in a private dining room at the end of the pier.

9 Long a playground for the rich and famous, [Barbados](#) continues to build upon and enhance its luxury offerings. The legendary **Sandy Lane** (866-444-4080; www.sandylane.com), a resort known for its celebrity clientele and for rates that start at \$1,000 a night, has upgraded (if that's possible) in the off-season, with the renovation of the Bajan Blue restaurant — with a different theme every evening — and of its spa.

10 But what if you aren't [Mick Jagger](#)? Or even K-Fed? Try the **Settlers' Beach Hotel** (246-422-3052; www.settlersbeachhotel.com), which just opened a beachside Italian restaurant and bar in February, Spago. Rooms at the hotel start at slightly less than those at Sandy Lane, at \$134 a night.

11 Also on Barbados, the 267-room **Almond Casuarina Beach Resort** (246-620-3600; www.almondresorts.com), an eco-friendly resort that uses _____

12 Wall Streeters who still have a job in 2009 might want to celebrate in [Virgin Gorda](#), at the new [Aquamare Villas](#) (787-461-2638; www.villaaquamare.com), a tiny, three-villa cluster on Mahoe Bay. Each beachfront villa is 8,000 square feet, with three master bedrooms. As one might expect, such opulence doesn't come cheap. "Discounted" introductory rates are available until Dec. 15: \$12,500 a week. They jump to \$25,000 a week during the holidays

13 Known above all for its rusticity, [Dominica](#)'s newest developments are characteristically nature-oriented and eco-minded. On the luxury end, opening in late January is **Rosalie Bay - A Nature Resort** (767-440-4439; www.rosaliebay.com). The 28-room boutique property is on a 22-acre plot along a black-sand beach that is a "prime nesting area" for endangered turtles, the hotel says. The resort also features what it says is the first utility-scale wind turbine in the eastern Caribbean. Introductory rates for the new resort start at \$200 a room until June 1, when turtle nesting season begins, and rates go up to \$250.

14 Also on Dominica, **Sea Cliff Cottages** (613-756-3116; www.dominica-cottages.com) has opened the fifth of its quaint, seriously affordable cottages perched on a cliff overlooking the [beaches](#) of Hodges Bay. Off-peak rates for a studio cottage start at \$70 a night and increase to a whopping \$90 a night during the winter season.

15 Change has been coming to the [Dominican Republic](#) in recent years. First, five-star resorts transformed this longtime budget getaway; now, it is the "resort within a resort" concept, giving guests a sense of seclusion — often with private pools and restaurants while still offering all the resources of a bigger resort. **Tiara, at the Club Med Punta Cana** (809-686-5500; www.clubmed.us) on the easternmost tip of the island is among them, a development geared toward families, offering a cluster of 32 spacious oceanfront suites and a private infinity pool and bar. Opened in May, it is part of a \$34 million makeover that also includes a full service spa; an upgraded, more healthful menu; and a new mini-water park and upgraded skate park. Suites at the Tiara start at \$3,010 for a seven-night stay, and includes dining, drinks and activities.

16 Also in Punta Cana, look for the **Moon Palace Casino, Golf and Spa Resort** (800-635-1836; www.palaceresorts.com), opening in two phases in 2009, the first in January. When completed, it looks to be the largest resort in Punta Cana, with 2,103 rooms, with rates from \$466 a night.

17 Eco-tourists may want to check out the **Cayman Diving Lodge** (800-852-3483; www.divelodge.com), on the east end of [Grand Cayman](#) Island, which is set to open in March, and which management is claiming will be the first totally green building in the Grand Caymans. Built of recycled materials and powered by solar panels and a wind turbine, the lodge's dive facilities are complemented by 12 rooms and 12 condos. Prices are not yet set.

18 Also coming to Grand Cayman, on West Bay, is **Lighthouse Point** (345-946-5658; www.lighthouse-point-cayman.com), another environmentally friendly resort that hopes to generate 17,000 watts of its own power daily. Condos and rentals are scheduled to open in March, starting at \$2,800 a week.

19 The British developer Peter de Savary is calling [Grenada](#) the new [St. Tropez](#) — in no small part because of the millions he is pouring into developing several properties on that famously rustic island. Among them is **Mount Cinnamon**, (866-720-2616; www.mountcinnamongrenada.com), which opened last March on Grand Anse Beach. The resort climbs a quiet hillside that overlooks the sea and features an extensive spa, steeped in traditional West Indian remedies. Rooms start at \$500.

20 Also, on Grenada, an old favorite is back. **LaSource** (888-527-0044;

island's southwestern tip, the resort offers a relaxing atmosphere (no children under 16 are admitted most of the year), with room rates starting at \$315 per person, including daily spa treatments and a host of outdoor activities.

21 The intimate, nine-room **Villa St. Pierre** (596-596-786-845, www.hotel-villastpierre.com) is a recent addition to **Martinique's** hotel scene, having opened just last month in the heart of historic St.-Pierre, which, in 1902, was destroyed by the eruption of nearby Mount Pelée. Also coming to Martinique: **Cap Macabou** (596-596-742-424; www.capmacabou.com), a so-called "hotel de charme," with 44 rooms, set to open this month.

22 Although **Guadeloupe** won't see much in the way of new accommodations this year, several established locations have undergone renovations for the coming season, as the island continues to modernize. Notable examples include the **Blue Season Hôtel Fleur D'Épée** (590-5-904-000; www.hotel-fleur-depee.com), which recently renovated all its rooms and reconstructed its diving center.

23 Jamaica is experiencing staggering growth, with a bevy of new developments, particularly at the higher end, bringing hundreds of new rooms to the island. And just when you thought it couldn't get any more extravagant, it just did. On a lagoon near Port Antonio, **Kanopi House** (www.kanopihouse.com), sister property to the posh Kamalame in the Bahamas, opens Dec. 12, with 10-person-maximum suites running \$5,000 a night.

24 Also on Jamaica, **Iberostar Hotels and Resorts** (876-680-0000; www.iberostar.com), a Spanish resort chain, opened the first phase of its Rose Hall complex in Montego Bay in 2007, recently completed Phase 2 and expects to complete Phase 3 this month, bringing the total number of its rooms to 978. Rates start at \$110 a person a night.

25 On the north shore of Jamaica, about 25 miles from Montego Bay near Lucea, two **Grand Palladium** resorts (876-620-0000; www.fiestahotelgroup.com) — both claiming five stars, but relatively affordable — opened in July: the Grand Palladium Jamaica Resort and Spa, and the Grand Palladium Lady Hamilton Resort and Spa. Rooms for each start at around \$200 a night.

26 With just six rooms (each of which can accommodate four guests), the no-frills, beachside **Coral Paradise Resort** (877-267-2572; www.coralparadise.com) on **Bonaire**, is surely an antidote to the big-resort trend sweeping the rest of the Caribbean. But the resort, which opened in April, doesn't stint on service, offering 24-hour shore-dive access, daily boat dives and next-door proximity to the popular Captain Don's Habitat diving center. At \$160 a night for two guests (and \$35 for each extra person in a room) in peak season, it's also eminently affordable.

27 On **Curaçao**, the largest of the Netherlands Antilles, the **Renaissance Curaçao Resort and Casino** (599-9-435-5000; www.renaissancecuracao.com) is set to open Dec. 1 in Willemstad, making it one of the first full-service resorts to appear on **Curaçao** since the early 1990s. The Renaissance sits on the waterfront at the 19th-century Rif Fort, which is part of a [Unesco World Heritage site](#). Rooms start at \$267.

28 Families thinking about a vacation in Puerto Rico this winter might want to check out the new **Coqui Water Park** at El Conquistador Resort and Golden Door Spa (866-317-8932; www.elconresort.com), part of a \$110 million renovation that was completed last February.

29 Just east of Old San Juan, in the beachside community of Condado, P.R., **La Concha**, a Renaissance Resort (787-721-7500; _____)

30 Originally scheduled to open last summer, the **Radisson St. Martin Resort** (888-201-1718; www.radisson.com/stmartin) is now set to open on Dec. 8 on the secluded beach cove of Anse Marcel, on the French side of the island. With 63 suites and 189 rooms, the resort will feature a beachfront restaurant, a tapas bar in the lobby and a 150-slip marina. Rooms start at limited introductory rates from 309 euros, about \$393 at \$1.30 to the euro.

31 On [St. Kitts](#), the **Beach House Restaurant** (869-469-5299; www.stkittsbeachhouse.com) ramps up the luxury quotient on the local dining scene, offering panoramic views of [Nevis](#), and a kitchen headed by George Reid, of Cap Juluca fame.

32 On [St. John](#), stop in for a bite at the new **St. John Waterfront Bistro** (340-777-7755; www.thewaterfrontbistro.com), on Cruz Bay beach. Opened last February, this French-Caribbean hybrid offers items like poached Caribbean lobster tail with tomato-fennel broth, roasted sweet corn, leeks, crispy garlic and creamy white corn polenta.

33 [St. Lucia](#) continues to attract developers looking to expand on the high-end of the market. The latest arrival: **Cap Maison**, (44-208-812-4734; www.capmaison.com), offering 50 luxury rooms and 22 private residences atop a seaside cliff in Cap Estate, overlooking a secluded beach. Rooms start at around \$405 a night.

34 Also on St. Lucia, **Calabash Cove Resort And Spa** (758-456-3500; www.calabashcove.com) opens its doors next month, offering oceanside accommodations at Mason Point overlooking Bonaire Bay. Rooms start at \$295.

35 Usually a safe bet during hurricane season, parts of the **Turks and Caicos** were hit hard by [Hurricane Ike](#) this summer. But the vast majority of the country's resorts and most popular beaches received just a few bumps and bruises and the damage was cleaned up quickly. Not only are the resorts on track, there are several new offerings this year — unsurprising given the island's meteoric rise as a hot vacation spot. Among them: the **Grace Bay Club**, which in February is opening the Estate (649-946-8323; www.estateatgracebayclub.com), a group of 22 residences, as part of its \$250 million expansion and renovation; the 22-acre **Seven Stars Resort** (866-570-7777; www.sevenstarsresort.com) on Grace Bay beach, which opened in July; and the **Nikki Beach Resort** (649-941-3747; www.nikkibeachhotels.com/turks), a 432-acre gated resort that opened in April and that now includes the Turks and Caicos Yacht Club Marina, able to accommodate megayachts with 110 slips.

36 Due to open in January at the **Beaches Turks and Caicos** (649-946-8000; www.beaches.com) is the \$125 million Italian Village. It features 162 luxury family suites and a renovated 45,000-square-foot waterpark.

37 Well-heeled travelers have long considered [St. Barts](#) their winter playground, with a popular getaway being the 14-room **Carl Gustaf Hotel** (590-590-29-79-00; www.hotelcarlgustaf.com), where a seven-room villa can go for as much as 48,000 euros a night. This December, this swank hotel is opening a new restaurant, Victoria's, headed up by Emmanuel Motte, who plans to infuse his traditional French cuisine with Caribbean and lighter Asian fare. The hotel has also completely refurbished its popular Carl Gustaf Lounge and added a new Boutique Spa by Carita, created by the sisters behind the deluxe Carita spa in [Paris](#).

38 On [Tobago](#), the **Bacolet Beach Club** (868-639-2357; www.bacoletbeachclub.com), which opened in June, is being billed as an exclusive boutique with an Asian-Cuban restaurant. Rooms start at \$190. Just a few minutes away, a multimillion-dollar expansion of Scarborough Jetty was completed last December, and it can now accommodate Voyager-class ships (which hold up to 3,114 passengers), and should raise Tobago's profile as a vacation destination.

39 Despite the name, the _____

www.virginislandscampground.com) on Water Island, just off Charlotte Amalie, is actually an affordable collection of eco-friendly, wood-frame-and-canvas cottages overlooking the sea. It is adding two cottages, for a total of seven, by Dec. 1, and plans to have 12 a year later. They use wind-generated electricity and have a solar-heated hot tub. Rates start at \$75 a night.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: November 23, 2008

Because of an editing error, an article on Nov. 9 about 39 places to go in the Caribbean misstated the phone number of Aquamare on Virgin Gorda. It is (787) 461-2638.

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