



# *A Sumptuous Escape to* **St. Barts**

CHEVAL BLANC ST-BARTH ISLE DE FRANCE





## Finding a little piece of France in the Caribbean.

Story | **HALEY SHAPLEY**

I'm going to make a confession: I don't like sand. While I don't let that fact of life stop me from spending time oceanside (because I do enjoy the water), it's limited the number of beach getaways I've taken. So when I step onto Flamands Beach in St. Barts, I expect to feel the same way I always do—a grudging acceptance of that gritty little substance under my feet. But here, it's different. Here, it's softer and smoother, with a silky texture. I'm in love at first touch, already mentally calculating how many hours I have left to spend on the beach before a plane takes me back to the U.S.

And the sand is far from the only thing I fall in love with. In just a few days, I learn that much is superlative on this little volcanic island 2,500 miles from Texas.





✈️  
*escape*



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## A Grand Entrance

St. Barthélemy (more commonly known as St. Barts or St. Barths) has been on my hope-to-visit list for years. With a reputation as being the poshest island in all the Caribbean, St. Barts rarely goes a week without being photographed in some celebrity magazine, with an A-list movie star frolicking on its beaches or a chart-topping singer plying the waves in a yacht. Here, the budget category doesn't exist—it's all luxury, all the time.

That starts for me on the way there, when I switch from commercial flying to the boutique airline Tradewind Aviation, which offers scheduled shuttle service to St. Barts from a few spots in the Caribbean, including San Juan, Puerto Rico. I'm personally escorted from my connecting gate by an attendant who calls me "Miss Haley" to the Tradewind lounge, where I grab a snack while waiting for my departure.



It's an old-school experience—no security to pass through, no baggies of 3-ounce toiletries to stow away in a purse, no worries about half-full water bottles.

By the time I've safely landed in St. Jean (something of a feat given the tiny runway with a sloping hill on one end and the Bay of St. Jean on the other), I'm exhausted from a long day of travel, but I perk up once I arrive at my home for the next few nights: Cheval Blanc St-Barth Isle de France. It's tough to know where to begin when describing this charming, ultra-luxe retreat, so I'll start with the first thing I notice: the adorable seersucker outfits the staff wears, designed especially for the hotel. I'd purchase the pink-and-gray striped dresses donned by the ladies if I saw them in a store, and when I ask to take a photo of one of the girls, she's kind enough to assure me I'm not the first person to feel this way.

## Detail Oriented

I take a moment to sip the welcome glass of Champagne and survey my room (gorgeous, high-ceilinged, decorated in whites and grays) before I grab one of the perfectly footed macarons waiting for me under a tall glass dome and retire to my balcony overlooking the water. I take a nap on the plump-cushioned rattan sofa, quickly sent to sleep by the soft breeze and calming sound of the waves.

When I wake up, I'm refreshed and ready to explore the hotel, which manages an understated elegance worth aspiring to. Throughout the property, a shade of salmony blush pink—not previously in existence among Pantone's hundreds of shades until it was created for Cheval Blanc—accents the otherwise







neutral color palette, showing up in spots like flower-shaped napkin rings, votives and throw pillows. In addition to the signature color, there's a signature scent called "Tropical Chic." Crafted by Guerlain's Thierry Wasser, the floral concoction comes in a body lotion, pillow mist and countless other forms.

Cheval Blanc's setting on Flamands Beach couldn't be prettier—it's arguably the island's best beach—but where the hotel really excels is in the small details. Notes are written by a quill pen hand-dipped in ink. At dinner, a folding table arrives for my purse the second I'm setting it down; poolside, the gray straws are stamped with tiny white horse logos; and in the evenings, I always return to find a sleep-enhancing elixir by my bed, served on a silver platter.

### A World Away

While I'm prone to stuffing my vacations as full as my carry-on

bag, St. Barts lulls you into a lovely sense of unhurriedness—which is probably why so many people from France holiday here and never end up going back. The hotel is happy to make accommodations for anything you need, and I let them set me up with a tour of the island, a spa treatment that rejuvenates sun-kissed skin, and the quintessential St. Barts experience: a yacht trip that's filled with snorkeling, glasses of rosé and food that seems far too delicious to have been prepared aboard a ship.

I go on a hike and spend a little time in Gustavia, home to both small boutiques and bold-faced names like Louis Vuitton and Hermès. But mostly I'm content to move between the beach, my room and the outdoor deck, sipping Sancerre, reading and simply relaxing.

"It's coddling," I hear a fellow guest say. "It's like we're being engrossed in this gossamer cape." I like the image—everything here

is beautiful and gauzy and, yes, impermanent, but it's as cozy as can be while it lasts.

My first night home, I pad around in my souvenir pink slippers and spray my pillow with the scent of Tropical Chic. It doesn't magically transport me back to St. Barts, but it does give me sweet dreams. ✦

