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## St Kitts and Nevis: new hotels and restaurants on the Caribbean's isles of plenty

These are exciting times for St Kitts and Nevis, with new hotel developments and fine dining providing new reasons to visit this part of the Caribbean



Montpelier Plantation and Beach Hotel, a firm favourite with British travellers, has unveiled six redesigned rooms splashed with colour

By Nigel Tisdall

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Could this be the Noma of the Tropics? Sitting in the lofty dining room of The Kitchen, an airy new restaurant set high up in the green hills of St Kitts, I'm astonished by the rich and creative dishes being laid before me. Lemongrass-poached lobster with dasheen risotto, cinnamon-braised goat loin, passion fruit and coconut baked Alaska...

While the Caribbean offers everything you could wish for to create a sensational cuisine – abundant fish, luscious tropical fruits, myriad spices, excellent chocolate – eating out here has always been a mixed bag. At one end of the scale there's the pile-it-high school of devouring with its sauce-smothered mains and plates crammed full with rice and peas, macaroni cheese, boiled veg and industrial coleslaw.

At the other is the overpriced world of fine dining where high-class ingredients, from prime US dry-aged steaks to oysters from Arcachon, get flown in at absurd expense in the belief that the mother country knows best. Yet just outside the restaurant window lie fertile soil, bountiful seas and sugar cane fields that produce that most versatile and engaging of spirits, rum.

Charged with making the most of the 400-acre organic farm where The Kitchen rests, its Normandy-born executive chef, Christophe Letard, clearly appreciates all this. Throwing out all the cook books, he has created a locally sourced menu that is truly exciting with intriguing treats such as papaya gazpacho, guava-cured ham and spiced carambola with Scotch bonnet olive oil. No wonder The Kitchen has been a hit since opening in July, with its champagne Sunday brunch, featuring 30 dishes ranging from lobster fricassée to soursop sorbet, the pièce de résistance.

Last month a companion hotel, Belle Mont Farm, opened. Designed by Bill Bensley, best known for creating premier south-east Asian resorts such as the Four Seasons Langkawi in Malaysia and the Hotel de la Paix in Siem Reap, Cambodia, its one-bedroom, adults-only guesthouses are smart, style-savvy sanctuaries.

Traditional features such as verandas and wood shingle roofs are matched with 21st-century amenities – instead of a TV you get a tablet and a drop-down projection screen. The interiors have a colonial elegance with dark woods, louvred doors, roll-top baths and vivid works by local artist

Kate Spencer.

Each morning guests receive a box of farm-fresh fruit, while breakfast – another Letard sensation – is served beside your plunge pool, a tray of delights that might feature freshly-squeezed watermelon juice, coconut bread with cinnamon, hot frittata and yogurt with mint and Nevisian honey.



Belle Mont Farm and The Kitchen are part of a large and ambitious development, Kittitian Hill, that seeks to raise the bar in the world of sustainable luxury. So far 42 guesthouses are open with another 42 to come, followed by Yaya Groves, a collection of three and four-bedroom residences that will suit families.

There is an Ian Woosnam-designed golf course, with nine holes already open for play, and a rainforest spa on the way. There's no beach, but Kittitian Hill does have a seaside outpost beside the black sands of Dieppe Bay, with a laid-back bar, The Lime Behind The Lemon.

Will we want to stay here? That depends if you are an up-in-the-hills sort of traveller, who will relish Belle Mont Farm's terrific views across the island and sea to the neighbouring Dutch island of St Eustatius. At 1,000ft you'll probably need that Frette robe in the wardrobe in winter months, and for guests with concerns about mosquitoes, privacy and air conditioning, the fact that the bath, shower and WC are all outdoors may be off-putting.



Kittitian Hill is a colossal project costing \$400 million (£262 million) that will not be completed until 2019, and has been kick-started in part by the Citizenship by Investment programme, more crudely known as "property for passports". Find \$400,000 (£262,000), invest in some real estate, and in return, after vetting, you and your family can get a St Kitts & Nevis passport allowing visa-free travel to more than 120 countries, plus numerous tax benefits.

The islands pioneered this trade-off in 1984, and it is now offered by others such as Antigua, Grenada and Dominica, which are likewise seeking ways to beat the recession and stimulate growth. The scheme has gone down well in China, Russia and the Middle East, but is controversial, not least because some of the developments thrown up to feed this market are ugly and cynical affairs with bland apartments that will never be visited by their absentee landlords.

This isn't the case at Kittitian Hill, where the design values are impressive and there is an obvious commitment to respect natural beauty – and, as the blather goes, "avoid the repurposing of trees". As well as benefiting the islanders (some 650 jobs have been created in construction and staffing), it is welcome news for travellers to St Kitts.

Astonishingly, for the past six years – flights started in 2009 – the island has been served by a twice-weekly British Airways flight from Gatwick, yet in all this time there has only been one hotel that is, in my view, worth crossing the Atlantic for – the very civilised Ottley's Plantation Inn. Thankfully, its sister island of Nevis, just two miles east, has a wealth of fine places to stay, including several characterful plantation hotels and a beachfront Four Seasons resort with golf course.

Now, at last, St Kitts has two high-end properties, and within a year or so there will be three when a five-star Park Hyatt resort, the first in the Caribbean, opens on Banana Bay. The island's best beaches are all set on a south-eastern peninsula, much of which is now being transformed by another mega-development, Christophe Harbour.

This spring will see the opening of a superyacht marina, a Tom Fazio-designed golf course is in the pipeline, and a moneyed scene is already developing around its Pavilion restaurant and the new nautical-themed Salt Plage bar on Whitehouse Bay.

Premium travellers can also take advantage of Yu Lounge, a private terminal at St Kitts Robert L Bradshaw International Airport that opened in May. Initially launched in Mauritius, this offers a slick fast-tracking of immigration and customs formalities complete with limousine transfers, tapas and coupes of Veuve Clicquot. Its sleek Asian interiors will appeal to jet-setters, honeymooners and the queue-shy, while the outdoor pools and loungers could be handy for a last sunbathe before flying back to the chills of Blighty.

Across the water on Nevis, hoteliers are also raising their game this winter. Montpelier Plantation and Beach Hotel, a firm favourite with British travellers, has unveiled six redesigned rooms splashed with colour. Paradise Beach, just opened beside the sheltered sands of the west coast, is a British-owned boutique resort with seven three and four-bedroom thatched villas featuring attractive pebble-dotted pools.

Nevis is also making a name for itself for its easy-going events, such as the entertaining cross-channel swim between the islands every March, and a new Blues Festival will be launching the following month. Whether you're staying up in the hills or down on the beach, there are good things happening on these sunshine islands.

## Essentials

### Getting there

British Airways (0844 493 0787; [ba.com](http://ba.com)) flies from London Gatwick to St Kitts on Wednesdays and Saturdays – the flight includes an hour-long stop in Antigua each way (you do not have to leave the plane). This month return fares cost from £693. Use of the Yu Lounge (001 869 465 5726; [yulounge.com/stkitts](http://yulounge.com/stkitts)) costs £140 per person per arrival or departure.

## Where to stay

### On St Kitts:

#### Ottley's Plantation Inn £

Set on a 35-acre hillside estate with 23 plushly furnished rooms, Ottley's has a good restaurant, a spring-fed pool and spa treatments (465 7234; ottleys.com; from £216, minimum stay four nights).

#### Belle Mont Farm £££

Has one-bedroom guest-houses from £509 per night b & b, or a Signature Stay Package including use of the Yu Lounge, transfers, meals, golf and spa for £1,609 per night based on two sharing, minimum stay two nights (465 7388; bellemontfarm.com).

### On Nevis:

#### Montpelier Plantation and Beach ££

Tranquil 13-room inland escape with mature gardens and a beautiful pool (469 3462; montpeliernevis.com; from £351 with breakfast) .



*Paradise Beach*

#### Paradise Beach £££

Beachfront property with three-bedroom villas (469 7900; paradisebeachnevis.com; from £792,

minimum stay three nights) .

### **Tour operator**

Cox and Kings (020 7873 5000; [coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk)) offers packages featuring the above hotels.

### **Where to eat and drink**

#### **On St Kitts:**

##### **Salt Plage ££**

Open Wednesday to Sunday evenings for drinks and tapas (465 8304; [christopheharbour.com](http://christopheharbour.com)).

##### **Spice Mill ££**

Offers easy eats including pizzas from a wood-fired oven beside the island's best beach, Cockleshell Bay (661 5906; [spicemillrestaurant.com](http://spicemillrestaurant.com)).

##### **The Kitchen £££**

Open daily; a four-course meal costs £54, Sunday brunch £66 (465 7388; [bellemontfarm.com](http://bellemontfarm.com)).

#### **On Nevis:**

##### **Bananas ££**

Hidden in the hills; serves local specialities and international dishes (469 1891; [bananasrestaurantnevis.com](http://bananasrestaurantnevis.com)).



*The Rocks*

### **The Rocks ££**

Offers Caribbean-inspired comfort food in a zestfully-restored plantation hotel (469 3346; [goldenrocknevis.com](http://goldenrocknevis.com)).

### **Chishi Beach ££**

Norwegian-run restaurant on beach with a modern vibe (469 5959; [chishibeachclub.com](http://chishibeachclub.com)).

### **How we moderate**

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