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TRAVEL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Pickup's press trip

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# CITY A.M.

BUSINESS WITH PERSONALITY

## Discover the twin islands of Saint Kitts and Nevis, where peckish golfers can tuck into local flora



Belle Mont Farm's golf course is a sustainable, fruit-laden paradise

With its hazy azure waters lazily lapping the white-sand beaches, and sun seekers pondering which rum-based cocktail to slurp next in the penumbra of a palm tree, the West Indies remains an alluring destination to escape London's dreary winter.

But why stick with one Caribbean island when you can easily fit a couple into the same holiday? After all, it seems rude to only visit St Kitts when its little sister Nevis is just a five minute speedboat ride away.

"Two islands, one paradise", reads the huge sign proudly greeting passengers at Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport, situated towards the northeast of St Kitts' capital, Basseterre. These two islands form one paradise, whose two nuanced flavours combine to offer the discerning traveller a richer cultural experience than the outdated Caribbean picture-postcard stereotype.

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Notably, St Kitts (more formally named 'Saint Christopher', after Mr Columbus, the Italian-born explorer who spied the island in 1493), and Nevis is regarded as "the mother colony of the West Indies", being the first English colony in the area, and a gateway to the other resourceful landmasses dotted around.

Since gaining independence from the United Kingdom on September 19, 1983, great effort has been made to instil and nourish local confidence and culture, with the thumb pushed on the reset button.



For instance, on the exact day of independence one of the first things the Kittitian government did was rename the tallest peak on the island, changing Mount Misery – a reference to nearby massacres of Caribs by both the French and English colonial masters – to the more positive Liamuiga, which translates to "fertile land". It's an apposite title, given that St Kitts' rich soils produce abundant vegetation and tropical crops that make it the envy of other, more arid Caribbean lands.

Fittingly, on the verdant slopes beneath the awesome Mount Liamuiga, a 3,792ft dormant stratovolcano, a pioneering food revolution is beginning to bear fruit. Belle Mont Farm, part of Kittitian Hill, is a high-end, ultra eco-conscious resort which started welcoming visitors in late 2014 and is helping to shift perceptions and alter tourism in the West Indies, by offering farm-to-table cuisine in opulent surrounds.

Any food lover would adore Belle Mont Farm, which is conceptually unique in the Caribbean. With 25 (and counting) different varieties of avocado to forage for in the 400-acre organic farmland, not to mention 125 types of mango, and 65 different variations of banana.

With so many options to choose from, there are plans to label everything grown here with QR barcodes for the curious to scan with their smartphones.

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Dishes are changed daily and according to what's ripe. This is determined by Christophe Letard, a veteran of Relais & Châteaux properties, and his sous chef Xavier Castella, formerly of elBulli in Spain, known for many years as the best restaurant in the world. Furthermore, every Sunday there is a lengthy, champagne-fuelled brunch (also attended by well-dressed locals), where you can tuck in to as many of the locally sourced creations you can stomach.

The resort even boasts the world's first edible golf course. Designed by Welsh legend Ian Woosnam, you can't quite eat the clubs yet, but pretty much everything else is fair game.

Every tee overlooks the Caribbean Sea and, if you feel peckish, you can reach up to pluck some fruit before wielding your driver. Typically, it's a chemical-free zone, with the greens and fairways weeded by hand once a week.



And there is a beach club, should one wish for a sandcastle fix, though guests are encouraged to kick back and relax in the spacious one-room villas set back from the coast, and wait for the next delicious meal. Here you can indulge in infinity pools and wash in the outdoor, freestanding baths and showers (using body scrub you can make yourself with a little help from the staff in the spa), with the surrounding bamboo shielding you from prying eyes.

"We want guests to lose their inhibitions," says Val Kempadoo, the Trinidad-born entrepreneur whose grand vision has already garnered some \$600 million in investment capital, with the first sixth being used to erect 84 one-room houses in time for next season. Eventually, his plans will include an artists' village, 10 larger villas, four vast farm houses and six restaurants.

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"We want Kittitian Hill to be a vehicle for change in the Caribbean. Most resorts in the area have a thin veneer of sustainability, but we are the reverse. This is a different model of tourism. From St Kitts we feel that we can influence future tourism. It's about empowering people, shifting the needle, and creating a sense of local pride."

When completed, it will be some story. While Kittitian Hill is writing its first few chapters, one resort, across the scenic channel from St Kitts in nearby Nevis, is somewhat more established and traditional in its values.

Indeed, Montpelier Plantation & Beach, a refined, hillside hotel is set on a former sugar plantation where, in 1787, British [Admiral](#) Lord Horatio Nelson married Fanny Nisbet. More recently – 1993 to be exact – this was where Diana escaped to with princes William and Harry, having announced her separation from Prince Charles.



"If it's good enough for Diana, I expect it's good enough for you," my taxi driver suggest playfully as I'm transported from the speedboat harbour at Oualie Beach to the hotel. Fair enough, I think as we speed past grazing wild donkeys. We reach the harbour easily in 25 minutes, which may have something to do with the fact there are no traffic lights on the whole island.

Soon I was wheeling into the cobblestone entrance of the Relais & Châteaux venue, where a gigantic weeping fig tree shelters the great house at Montpelier, sitting adjacent to the scenic Nevis Mountain, which seems perpetually cloaked in mist.



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Here too, food is an essential part of the experience. Chef Stephane Caumont, another Frenchman, serves up hearty fare, including plenty of freshly caught seafood, in three top-notch restaurants.

The jewel in the crown is Mill Privée – supposedly the only eatery of its kind on the planet – where diners can enjoy a candlelit, six-course tasting menu in a charming, dilapidated sugar mill. And it would be remiss of me not to mention Kaddy, the head bartender at Montpelier, who is widely regarded as the best rum-punch maker in the land. His drinks are seriously impressive and dangerously potent, too.

Away from the mega cruise ships which dock daily at Basseterre, Nevis is perhaps more relaxed and less touristy than St Kitts, its big brother. Though given how easy and stress free it is to travel from one to the other, experiencing both of these islands is an absolute must.