



CARIBBEAN



Casting off in St Kitts
Little-known St Kitts is quiet, unpretentious and unspoilt. Holly Kirkwood finds out what's for sale on this, the first British settlement in the Caribbean

LOCATED in the Lesser Antilles between Anguilla and Antigua, St Kitts is a Caribbean island rich in British history. Until 1624, when it was, essentially, the first British settlement in the Caribbean. Also settled by the French, the island saw some pretty fierce fighting in the early 18th century, but the British prevailed and the island went on to prove extremely valuable to the Crown.

The many British family estates and plantations throughout the island are testament to this shared heritage – the wealthy Clares is a fascinating and, often, it's these links that attract UK visitors to this modest island's coastline in the first place.

The character of the island is particularly charming, and really hasn't been spoiled: it's not overly busy like the major parts of Barbados or St Lucia (which borders to the east) on a three-

day's and a large part of its appeal lies in its relaxing lack of pretension. As it's a mere 18 miles long by the water's edge, visitors hire cars and head along the coast road driving through entry towns and exploring the beaches, which escape from the vulgar perfection of Cook's Bay to the darker, more vibrant and laid-back Deep Bay.

Getting out to other islands, there aren't many planes that go to be used and some of the best food and wine can be found at nearby beach bars, such as the famous seafood bar, the local pub, which is run by local fishermen who cook their catch.

The island takes care of any maintenance, but the majority of visitors stay in small hotels, the best of which is Ocker's Plantation Inn, a one-of-a-kind institution that provides characterful rooms and cottages in a historic setting, as well as a top restaurant, where Sunday brunch is

shared and served. St Kitts is easy to enjoy.

Carroll, the St Kitts government knows it's onto a good thing and remains keen to encourage high-quality, low-density development that values sustainability, as well as retains an investment. This year's opening of the private jet terminal adjacent to the international airport is an indicator of the level of good the island is keen to attract.

Others come thanks to the benefits of economic citizenship: those who buy property worth more than \$500,000 (\$250,000) in a government-approved development receive dual nationality, economic citizenship and a passport that grants freedom status on foreign income, capital gains, gifts, wealth and inheritance taxes. It's a scheme now common throughout the Caribbean, but St Kitts runs the strictest programme of its kind.

There are excellent properties for sale on St Kitts, but only housing St Kitts is the main destination for private villas. Most owners on the island buy managed properties in developments included in the economic citizenship scheme. The first big project of this kind was Christopher Harbour (www.christopherharbour.com), which broke ground back in 2008, and comprises a luxury residential resort development covering 2,500 acres of the south-east peninsula, between the Atlantic and Caribbean coasts.

The development has been slowly progressing over its launch and offers properties for sale from \$300,000 (\$304,000) to about \$4 million (\$3,025,000). The Pavilion private beach club is well regarded and a currently active construction site a 200-acre marina and marquee harbor, an 18-hole golf course designed by Tom Fazio and the Caribbean's first Park Hotel. Despite its cost it is a great option to build, or buy a fully furnished property. Sales to date have been steady and, despite launching at a risky time for the international market, the project continues to develop on the island. When the marina is finished, there are hopes it will attract the even bigger eye of the high-net-worth overseas market.

The other big story on St Kitts is KITTUS Hill, up to the north-west of the island. Currently under construction on 400 acres of relatively level farmland, it sits high up between Mount Diamond and the Caribbean. It is a unique development of private villas, a luxury boutique hotel and a village filled with restaurants and shops in very much the tradition of Grand Staircase, located by its hotel in 'sustainable living that respects and celebrates the community and the environment'.

This notable effort runs through the water project, particularly when it comes to the landscaping and the cultivation of produce. 'We are happy to be blessed with such rich, volcanic soil that we can grow more (food) products than any other development I know of' explains Mr Sengul, who has been inspired by the global slow-food movement. 'Too many Caribbean islands rely on imports, but we're developing our agriculture – and using every inch of land we have, including the golf course – to ensure that we're self-sustaining when it comes to food, power and infrastructure'.



And I'm looking forward to the international standard of cooking we're going to offer as a result of getting top-of-the-range produce.' The proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating, but the settings are lovely too. A site visit reveals cottages already surrounded by lawns around the houses bearing passion fruit, sweet potatoes, yams, guavas, cherries, pineapples, bananas and more than 100 kinds of mango trees.

Designed by Ian Westmore, the 71-year-old hotel is a Palm Jumeirah assembly blends into its farmland surroundings and, unlike the theme, has a very low environmental impact at the same time as offering an international standard of play and living up to the island's 'the most exciting golf course in the world'.

FOR SALE \$4.9m

KITTUS HILL
The estate aims to combine elegant living with ecological principles and its golf course claims to be 'the most exciting in the world'.

Properties are available as a whole or as fractions and 20 have already sold to an international clientele, including French, Russian and American buyers.

The boutique hotel on site—Hill West Farm—will open for business this December, and those who love the beach will be happy to hear that the hotel's Dubois Lagoon Hotel on Deep Bay (10 minutes away) is undergoing renovation and will open next year. A destination spa that will add the magic of the hot springs (its spa and yoga) will also open in 2015, so there's plenty more to come for this beautiful island project. www.kittushill.com

NEED TO KNOW

Getting there is not always too hard to do. St Kitts with a short stop in Antigua. The new private airport terminal is adjacent to the Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport.

Things to do For more Great House & the former site of a Presidential command and the outdoor pool, tennis, tennis, very good local food (www.kittushill.com).

The Windward Estate and Honey Manse are both worth a visit. The former is the site of a huge 18th and 19th-century and the former of the site of a huge 18th-century house built in the 1700s and 1800s.

Where to stay Ocker's is \$31,888,485, 7200, www.ockers.com is the best value on the island, but the opening of the renovated Ocker's Lagoon next year will offer high-quality accommodation right on the beach.

Eat The legendary beach eatery with historic dining, keep an eye for Sunday lunch at the beach.