

Adventure Guide to Barbados

Lynne M. Sullivan

Hunter Publishing, Inc.

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Barbados

3rd Edition

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HUNTER

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IN CANADA:
Ulysses Travel Publications
4176 Saint-Denis, Montréal, Québec
Canada H2W 2M5
☎ 514-843-9882 ext. 2232 / fax 514-843-9448

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM:
Windsor Books International
The Boundary, Wheatley Road, Garsington
Oxford, OX44 9EJ England
☎ 01865-361122 / fax 01865-361133

ISBN 1-55650-910-3
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From the Author

Adventure is my favorite subject, and my goal is to give readers something extra to make a destination real and exciting. I'm an avid walker and backroad biker who always wants to see what's around the next corner and over one more hill. Beaches, forests and mountaintops draw my attention, and I never keep a remote discovery secret. As a certified scuba diver, I often opt for destinations that offer underwater excursions and sign on for trips to the best sites with a variety of guides.

Since shopping is the favorite activity of many travelers, I spend days hunting for one-of-a-kind treasures and outstanding bargains in artists' studios, craft workshops and unique stores. I tour all the attractions and evaluate the museums, peek into off-limits studios behind dusty windows, follow the locals to out-of-the-way sites, eat in comfy family-run joints as well as the best restaurants, inspect quaint little inns as well as upscale resorts, and stay out late to hit the trendiest nightspots.

In the end, I've discovered the best places to shop, visit, eat, sleep and hang out on a stingy budget as well as on unlimited funds. I've seen sites and visited places that aren't usually mentioned in travel guides and talked to experts and average citizens who know the destinations well. Then, I write it all down for you.

Travel guides are ever-evolving projects, and I welcome your comments and suggestions. Updated information appears regularly on my website, www.travelynne.com, where you can also ask me questions by e-mail.

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Hunter's full range of guides to all corners of the globe is featured on our exciting website. You'll find guidebooks to suit every type of traveler, no matter what their budget, lifestyle, or idea of fun.

Adventure Guides – There are now over 40 titles in this series, covering destinations from Costa Rica and the Yucatán to Tampa Bay & Florida's West Coast, New Hampshire and the Alaska Highway. Complete information on what to do, as well as where to stay and eat, *Adventure Guides* are tailor-made for the active traveler, with a focus on hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding, trekking, skiing, watersports, and all other kinds of fun.

Alive Guides – This ever-popular line of books takes a unique look at the best each destination offers: fine dining, jazz clubs, first-class class hotels and resorts. In-margin icons direct the reader at a glance. Top sellers include: *The Cayman Islands, St. Martin & St. Barts*, and *Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao*.

Our ***Rivages Hotels of Character & Charm*** books are top sellers, with titles covering France, Spain, Italy, Paris and Portugal. Originating in Paris, they set the standard for excellence with their fabulous color photos, superb maps and candid descriptions of the most remarkable hotels of Europe.

Our ***Romantic Weekends*** guidebooks provide a series of escapes for couples of all ages and lifestyles. Unlike most "romantic" travel books, ours cover more than charming hotels and delightful restaurants, with a host of activities that you and your partner will remember forever.

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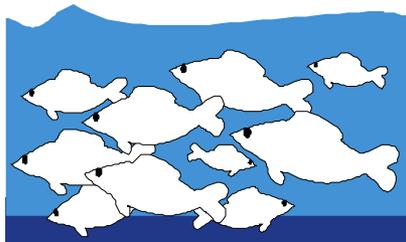
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Introduction

Visitors are lured to Barbados by year-round sunshine, miles of splendid palm-fringed beaches, a bounty of excellent places to stay, world-class cuisine, and enticing activities to occupy unhurried vacation days.

The same could be said about many other tropical islands, but don't make the mistake of thinking Barbados is just another gorgeous piece of Caribbean paradise.

Nah, mon – she be mo' den dat.

For starters, the island doesn't fit neatly into the archipelago that curves gracefully, like a backward C, between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. It stands proudly to the east, like a brilliant star that's fallen from its constellation.

This arrant positioning puts the independent English-speaking island-nation entirely in the Atlantic Ocean – but residents refer to the west coast as the “Caribbean side.” Almost 100 miles separate it from St. Vincent, its nearest neighbor to the west. Trinidad, off the coast of Venezuela, is 200 miles south, and Miami is 1,611 miles to the north.

In addition to being out of place, Barbados was created differently than other islands in the southeastern Caribbean and has a distinct appearance. Some islands are heaps of magnificently disguised volcanic debris, but Barbados is made of coral. Gentle plains wrap around the western and southern shore. Dramatic ocean-carved cliffs dominate the east coast. Diverse natural wonders fill the rolling green hills of the interior countryside.

Parts of Barbados are densely populated. Approximately 268,000 Bajans live on 166 square miles. The island is shaped somewhat like a distorted pear that measures 21 miles north to south, and 14 miles east to west between the widest points. Most of the population is concentrated in the south, around **Bridgetown**, the lively west-coast capital.

Caribbean Islands





Bajan (say bay jun) is a contraction or alteration of Barbadian, which was first shortened to Badian. Now, say Badian quickly with a lazy tongue. You may use either Barbadian or Bajan to refer to anything that is indigenous to the island, including both black and white citizens.

The island retains traces of the three centuries it spent as a British colony, but its soul is undeniably West Indian. Calypso music floats in the air over cricket fields, *cou-cou* (a thick mush-like island favorite made of cornmeal and okra) and flying fish show up on the menus of sleek Euro-style restaurants, and Bajan slang dominates conversations among the highly educated population.

Barbados doesn't pretend to be crime-free, but it appropriately presents itself as a *safe* tourist destination. Travelers are warmly welcomed by the proper, but easygoing, Bajans, and visitors rarely encounter harassment or rudeness. Beach vendors and street hawkers are scarce and politely retreat when told "No, thanks."

The People & Their Culture

■ Language



The official language of Barbados is English, and the well-educated residents use perfect grammar and smooth diction – when they want to.

Visitors often notice that the hotel staff and tour guides, both blacks and whites, speak pure, lightly accented English when speaking with tourists, but a completely different language when chatting with other Bajans. This unique hybrid jargon developed over more than two centuries as people from many African tribes mixed with various ethnic groups from Europe.

At first the Africans from different tribes struggled to learn English so that they could communicate with their field bosses and owners as well as each other. Not surprisingly, the language they learned in the fields wasn't always the King's English since overseers were often poorly educated working-class people or indentured servants.

The Bajan Dialect

As this Africanized and adulterated English was passed around and taught to children, it developed consistent patterns. For example, Bajans began to habitually substitute the letter *d* for the diphthong *th*, so that *this* became *dis*, and they contracted common English contractions even further, so that *isn't* became *en*. Bajans also confused English pronouns and verb tenses, so that subject pronouns were used as possessive or object pronouns, plural endings were omitted, and the present tense served just as well for the past or future. Instead of using comparative or superlative forms of adjectives, they simply repeat the descriptive word.

He en sleepin' late late dis mornin'. He be cookin' up she brekfas'.

It be we bag o fish? Dem big big big.

We good good good musik gine mek yuh dance like a nest o snakes.

Most Bajan sentences are made up of English words used in a different way. Tourists will find it fascinating to listen to Bajans chatting on the street or calling to one another from their cars. However, most residents will switch seamlessly to proper English when they speak to visitors. Those who don't may be making a statement, demanding respect for their culture, or simply displaying a little good-natured Bajan humor.

■ Architecture

Three Centuries of Style

Many examples of Barbados' early architecture remain as either renovated masterpieces or neglected ruins. As you drive around the island, watch for grand stone structures, overgrown windmills, preserved Victorian homes, and humble chattel houses. Their architectural styles and building materials are excellent reminders of an intriguing history with diverse influences.

Chattel Houses

These prefab mobile homes are a colorful part of Bajan heritage. You see them everywhere – small, wooden structures painted in bright tropical colors. The first *chattels* (the word means “moveable property”) were constructed by slaves and indentured servants on their boss’s plantation. The pre-cut pine came from North America, and Bajans could put them up on stone foundations with few tools and little building experience. When the worker was sold, fired, or evicted from the landowner’s property, he could disassemble his house in sections and move it, along with his family, to the next location.

All the houses looked alike right out of the box, but as Bajans earned a little money, they added to the basic plan that consisted of a tiny two-room structure topped by a corrugated metal roof. The front of the house usually had a central door flanked by two windows. Gradually, the homes took on individual personalities. When Bajans began to earn enough money to buy their own land, they added real foundations and floors, attached rooms to the back, built covered front porches, put canopies over the windows, and decorated with bright paint and elaborate fretwork.

Today, some Bajans with enough money and land to build any type of home they want still prefer a chattel-style house. Several of the island’s tourist attractions, restaurants, and bars are located in or designed after these original workers’ homes. The simple design has an amazing ability to withstand storms and hurricane-force winds.

You’ll find the quaint, attractive homes all around the island, but particularly handsome chattel-house shopping villages are located in St. Lawrence Gap on the south coast, at Sunset Crest on the west coast, and at Tyrol Cot, north-east of Bridgetown.

Don’t expect the flamboyant styles seen on many Caribbean islands. With very few exceptions Barbados is, and always has been, strictly, uniformly, and properly, British. No Spanish flair. No

French folderol. Just magnificent designs inspired by **Jacobean** (from the reign of James I of England, 1603-1625), **Georgian** (pertaining to the reigns of the first four Georges of England, 1714-1830), and **Victorian** (associated with the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901) notions of elegance. The most conspicuous exceptions are the lowly chattel houses that brighten the countryside with eye-catching colors.

Most of Bridgetown's first structures were built of wood taken from the island's dense virgin forests, which was unfortunate for two reasons. The forests were quickly obliterated; and most of the buildings were destroyed by fires that broke out in 1688, 1766, and 1860. The city has been rebuilt over the centuries in a mix of architectural styles, with most buildings constructed of stone.

Speightstown, the second largest town on Barbados, is small compared to the capital, and has declined since its heyday as a major seaport during the peak of the sugar boom. However, its sleepy streets are lined with old shops and houses that feature jalousie windows, wrought-iron gates, and overhanging balconies. The parish church has been renovated, and the post office and library are appealing examples of the Georgian style favored by early British settlers. More renovation and preservation is expected during the next few years through programs fostered by the National Trust.

Many of the finest historical structures on the island are the parish churches, military forts, and rural plantation houses, built primarily of stone – cut either from the native coral or from the ballast used in shipping. The **Savannah Hotel** in the Garrison area south of Bridgetown is a good example. The main building is actually two historic houses, with the eastern portion being the more interesting. It is built of brick that had been used as ballast, and features ornate, New Orleans-style wrought-iron balconies.

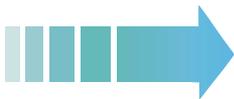
Drax Hall and **St. Nicholas Abbey** were built around 1650 in the popular Jacobean style; they are two of the three remaining mansions in that style in the western hemisphere (the third is Bacon's Castle in Virginia). Drax Hall is still a private residence and is open to the public only once a year, during the Open House program sponsored by the National Trust (see page 34; for information ☎ 246-426-2421). The house is surrounded by trees and sits secluded at the end of a long driveway off Highway 4B in eastern St. George Parish, out of view from the road.

Visitors are welcome at St. Nicholas Abbey near Cherry Tree Hill, off Highway 1 in St. Peter Parish (see page 109). This grand plantation house was never an abbey; it was built as a residence for Colonel Benjamin Berringer during the early phase of the English Renaissance.

The Georgian period followed the Jacobean, and the style that became popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries is dominant in many government buildings, churches and private homes dating from that time. Distinguishing features of the style include regal arcades, open courtyards and grand staircases in the Palladian style (named for Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, 1508-1580, and made popular during this period by English builder Inigo Jones).

The Garrison area, off Highway 7 to the south of Bridgetown, has several good examples of Georgian-era military structures. **Pavilion Court**, originally Hastings Hospital, was built in 1780; the **Barbados Museum**, once a military prison, was constructed in sections from 1817 to 1853; and the **Savannah Club**, an old guard house, has a clock tower that bears the date 1803.

Romantic Victorian features show up in both plantation mansions (greathouses) and chattel houses scattered about the island. Many of these homes have survived in excellent condition because they were never subjected to damage from the kinds of territorial conflicts that took place on most Caribbean islands.



The Barbados National Trust lists more than 300 houses of historic interest that merit notice.

Tyrol Cot Heritage Village is centered around the accurately restored former home of the late statesman Sir Grantley Adams. The lovely house was built in 1854 by Bajan builder William Farnum. While the house is considered to be of Georgian design, it has some atypical features, such as a roof fashioned to catch rainwater. A replica of a 19th century slave hut sits nearby, and a museum on the property holds relics from a typical island home at the beginning of the 20th century.

Tyrol Cot also has several newly constructed buildings designed to look like old, uniquely Bajan, chattel houses.

See *Exploring the Island*, page 87, for more information about Tyrol Cot.

The New Building Wave

Building is booming on Barbados. Several large residential developments are in the works; both Bridgetown and Speightstown have redevelopment plans; and new or renovated hotel complexes are opening continually.

One of the most exciting projects is the huge, traffic-stopping, multimillion-dollar renovation at **Sandy Lane Resort and Golf Club**, on the west coast. Reopening dates have been set and reset, and still the work goes on. When it is complete, Sandy Lane is expected to be a fabulous resort with world-class golfing (see page 140; or keep track of their progress by calling ☎ 800-225-5843 (in the US and Canada) or 246-432-1311, fax 432-2954.

The new **Royal Westmoreland** and **Port St. Charles**, both sprawling, multi-use developments, and **Millennium Heights** and **Sugar Hill**, which are residential compounds, are open – but still expanding or improving. All four complexes are raising the standards of Bajan-style design, which traditionally features steep roofs, roomy verandas, and wooden jalouise doors and windows. The newer buildings incorporate air conditioning, plenty of shaded glass, updated construction materials and high-tech electronics.

More than a million square feet of new office space is under construction or recently completed in response to demands from international businesses. Much of this development is planned for the waterfront area of Bridgetown, but multi-use industrial parks are springing up in strategic locations along major highways connecting the capital with Speightstown and St. Lawrence. A project at **Apes Hill** is expected to bring a resort, a conference center, offices and villas, and a championship golf course to the currently undeveloped Scotland district in the northeast.

The chattel house motif is featured at **Kings Beach Village** and **Little Good Harbour** on the west coast. Both developments incorporate traditional Bajan looks with modern amenities, while preserving the natural surroundings. At Little Good Harbour, developers have taken special care to restore 300-year-old Fort

Rupert, and to maintain the distinct character of the local fishing community.

While all of this development is welcome, Barbadians are ever mindful of the need to preserve their past and protect their irreplaceable natural resources. Visitors may rightly assume that the island paradise will change, but only in a controlled and environmentally responsible manner.

■ Art

Barbados has produced some incredibly talented artists. Many are influenced by their African roots and island culture, which results in colorful creations with diverse themes. Art lovers, collectors, and souvenir hunters will want to visit several of the island's museums, galleries, and studios to see the variety of works by local artists and craftsmen.

As you tour the island, watch for the kaleidoscopic murals painted on the exteriors of buildings. These life-size paintings are brilliant creations depicting everyday life, and the **National Cultural Foundation** (☎ 246-424-0909) assists local artists who wish to paint these lifescapes on public buildings.

The **Barbados Arts Council** (☎ 246-426-4385) runs a respected gallery at Pelican Village (☎ 246-427-5350) on Hincks Street in Bridgetown. Nearby, the **Barbados Investment and Development Corporation** (☎ 246-426-7802) oversees the island's handmade crafts industry, with outlets at the airport, Harrison Cave, and selected hotels, as well as Pelican Village.

The Controversial Pelican

A large, rusting, avant-garde sculpture called *Pelican in Flight* is on display in the courtyard. The controversial piece is loved by some and detested by others; stop by to take a look.

Fine art is on exhibit at **The Barbados Gallery of Art** on Bush Hill in the Garrison area south of Bridgetown. Permanent collections include paintings, sculpture, prints, and mixed-media works

by Barbadians as well as artists from other Caribbean islands and South America. Visitors may arrange tours through the museum office or explore on their own; the gallery is open Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10-5. Admission is B\$10 on weekdays and B\$4 on Saturdays for adults; B\$4 on weekdays and free on Saturdays for children (☎ 246-228-0149, fax 228-5371).

Renowned Bajan Artists

Among the old-timers of the Bajan art world, **Fielding Babb** and **Karl Broodhagen** stand out. Babb's early works are watercolors, but for more than 20 years he has painted traditional island scenes in brilliant oils. He is credited with playing a key role in the growth of fine art on the island. Broodhagen's most famous work is *Freed Slave*, a sculpture (also known as *Bussa*) that stands in the center of the traffic circle on the ABC Highway where St. Michael Parish meets St. George Parish. Broodhagen also created the bronze figure of Sir Grantley Adams that is displayed in the Government Headquarters building on Bay Street in Bridgetown.

Whether you're buying or simply admiring, look for works by these highly touted Bajan artists and craft designers.

Goldie Spieler and her son **David Spieler** work from their studio/workshop/store, **Earthworks Pottery** (☎ 246-425-2334), turning out functional and artistic Caribbean-style pottery.

Geoffrey and **Joan Skeete** and their son and daughter-in-law, **John** and **Monica Skeete**, carve and draw birds of the Caribbean.

Winston Kellman's simple watercolors and charcoals are easily recognized and respected by Caribbean art fans.

Courtney Devonish, a Chalky Mount native, now works from his gallery/studio on Anguilla and is internationally recognized for his abstract sculptures.

Michael Adams creates hand-pulled silkscreens from his wildly colorful paintings.

Neville Legall is an award-winning painter who works in oils and watercolors.

David Alleyne is known for his oversized paintings that depict everyday Bajan life.