

Since opening in November 2011, the St. Regis Bahia Beach in Puerto Rico has won wide acclaim for its beautiful setting.

# The Best of the Caribbean

*Our panel of travel experts pick their favorite destinations across the region, and the best hotels, restaurants and golf courses on each island*

BY LARRY OLMSTED

Spanning hundreds of islands, thousands of miles of gorgeous turquoise waters and dozens of unique cultures, the Caribbean is a perennial vacation favorite. It is also incredibly diverse: From posh tiny private island getaways to cosmopolitan urban resorts, secluded beaches to bustling casinos, world-class diving to word-class golf, there is truly something for everyone. This variety is coupled with excellence—almost every island has 5-star potential, with sumptuous accommodations, first-rate spas, and gourmet cuisine.

This makes the biggest problem in planning a Caribbean vacation deciding where to go—and the problem keeps getting more complicated as excellent new properties open. While we cannot stop progress, we can do the homework for you. By polling our experts, we have narrowed down the very best the Caribbean has to offer (we also threw in the popular Bahamas). As always in our uniquely critical travel surveys, we take a different tact than most magazine polls: we do not rely on unknown voters who may or may not have actually been where they say, or employees of the properties, and we do not cater to advertisers. Instead, we have assembled a panel of renowned travel experts, including some of the world's best travel agents, the ones that celebrities and top executives use to plan their vacations, plus journalists, specialists and industry veterans, all of whom vote only on the places they know.

Because the Caribbean is composed of so many islands, cultures and economies, it is dynamic and always changing, and our poll reflects this. Perhaps the biggest story our experts told was the resurgence of Puerto Rico—on every front. Newer luxury resorts like the St. Regis Bahia Beach and W Retreat Vieques have proven immensely popular, while venerable properties have kept pace. Everyone in the travel business is eagerly anticipating the Ritz-Carlton Reserve at Dorado Beach (opening 12/12/12), which was called the next big thing, not just in the Caribbean but in the world, by several of our panelists.

Puerto Rico is also booming on the golf front, with Bahia Beach and Trump International joining the highest tier of Caribbean courses, while the island's grand dame, Dorado Beach East, was just revamped and is better than ever. The brand new Links at Royal Isabela, so new almost no one has been there yet, may end up stealing the show. "This rediscovered island is getting the attention it deserves with multiple new and exciting properties and investment in the area. San Juan is becoming a Caribbean hotspot again, and Puerto Rico is a great destination with the rain forest for eco-tours, kayaking on bioluminescent bays, and so much more for the adventure seeker. I am packing my bags already!" says Anne Scully, industry legend and President of McCabe World Travel, annually ranked as one of the nation's top 10 travel agents.





The new, redesigned pool and pool bar at Casa de Campo, which underwent a \$40-million renovation 2011 that restored it to all its glory.

One thing that quickly becomes evident is how strong the Caribbean is with small luxury resorts and hotels. On some islands there is no line between “large and small,” and since the Caribbean has relatively few luxury properties that would be considered large in other vacation destinations, the focus here is on intimate. Nowhere was this as evident as on tiny St. Barths, where virtually every top hotel—and there are lot of them—was named in both size categories by panelists, forcing us to abandon size as a criteria for that island altogether. After all, even the “biggest” hotel on St. Barths would be a boutique anywhere else. We saw similar confusion on Anguilla, where Cap Juluca and CuisinArt, with 95 and 93 rooms respectively, both got votes for best large—and best small—hotel.

There were a few things our panelists agreed on, and when it came to unanimity, the Four Seasons Nevis could not be beat: it got the most votes of any property and every vote cast for the Federation of St. Kitts & Nevis (and yes, there are other hotels). It also swept all the votes for best golf (yes, there is another high-profile golf course). Rosewood’s Little Dix Bay, British Virgin Islands, also won “best large resort” unanimously. On Grand Cayman, the hidden gem Cotton Tree proved not so hidden in sweeping every vote in the boutique category, and Ritz-Carlton’s Blue took every vote as best restaurant. While not quite unanimous, other landslide winners that bowled over all comers included Sandy Lane on Barbados, Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic and La Samanna on St. Martin. On other islands and in other categories, the results were much closer and harder fought, and our panelists even locked up for a couple of ties, which just shows how prolific the Caribbean is when it comes to hospitality.

Our biggest surprise came through an act of omission. Because there are so many possible destinations, we limited the poll to the most popular and developed islands, and some less-visited ones had to be left out, including Dominica, Saba and Grenada. One place left off our list was the largely undeveloped Turks & Caicos Islands. Though not technically part of the Caribbean, our panelists did not care and did not hesitate to exercise their write-in option. As Michael Holtz, a top-tier luxury travel agent and

founder of SmartFlyer exclaimed, “You left out Turks! It really is a MUST with Parrot Cay & Amanyara there.” Amazingly, the archipelago made a strong showing in several categories—as a write-in. The sands of Grace Bay tied for first in the best beach category for the entire Caribbean and yoga-centric Parrott Cay, a famed celebrity haunt, showed up in best resort and best spa categories.

Our panel proved to be as opinionated as ever when it came to Caribbean travel, and this is what they loved.

#### BEST LARGE RESORT OR HOTEL, CARIBBEAN

**TIE: St. Regis Bahia, Beach, Puerto Rico**  
**Casa de Campo, Dominican Republic**  
**Sandy Lane, Barbados**

This category was hotly fought, but these three winners have one thing in common: they are all “complete” resorts, with golf courses, lavish spas, multiple restaurants, other amenities and a wide range of lodging choices including villas. “Casa de Campo remains the Caribbean’s most complete and satisfying retreat...indulge in an incredible array of activities ranging from tennis—with ball boys—to shooting, horseback riding and even polo,” says *Golf Odyssey* publisher David Baum. Super-agent Scully is one of many fans of the St. Regis, “The resort is exquisite with two miles of private beach and 18-holes designed by Robert Trent Jones. Pamper yourself at the Remède Spa, dine at Fern, a signature restaurant of Jean-Georges Vongerichten.” As for Sandy Lane, “Since 1961 this Palladian-style beach resort has been setting standards in the Caribbean for elegance and grace. How does it stay fresh? With three premium golf courses, a 7,000-square-foot pool, state-of-the-art spa and tennis facilities and museum-grade art. It’s simply Barbados’ most luxurious resort,” notes *USA Today* travel editor Veronica Stoddart.

**Honorable Mention: TIE Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman; Viceroy Anguilla.** Both of these luxury resorts easily won this category for their islands.

CASA DE CAMPO



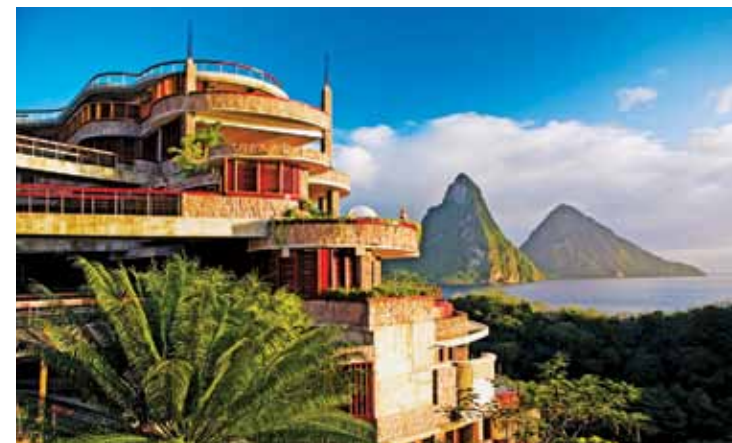
A beautiful interior courtyard and hot tub at Sandy Lane in Barbados, one of the Caribbean’s top destinations with excellent restaurants and golf courses.

#### BEST SMALL RESORT OR HOTEL, CARIBBEAN

**Jade Mountain, St. Lucia**

No newcomer to our list, Jade Mountain successfully defended its Caribbean title from our 2010 World’s Best Hotels Poll. Why? This fantasy brought to life by its architect owner features 24 “infinity pool sanctuaries,” or suites on steroids, all with cantilevered infinity pools, one wall opens to some of the most stunning views on earth, and each is connected to the main house by elaborate bridges, set high on a mountain peak. With true private butler service and everything included, even room service, it’s no surprise some couples don’t leave their “sanctuary” for days at a time. “People come for the stunning views of the Piton mountains, but are seduced by the resort’s warm service, delicious food and ultimate exclusivity,” notes honeymoon specialist Carrie Wallace of MoonRings.

**Honorable Mention: TIE Parrot Cay, Turks & Caicos; Le Toiny, St. Barths.** “Management’s deft touch and willingness to cater to every need, however unique, makes Le Toiny a go-to for the demanding



The 29 rooms at the Jade Mountain boutique hotel on St. Lucia have sweeping views of the Piton mountains from balconies or infinity pools.

TOP: SANDY LANE; RIGHT: JADE MOUNTAIN

Caribbean traveler,” notes Wallace. Parrot Cay, a favored private-island celebrity escape and home away from home for Bruce Willis, Donna Karan and Keith Richards surged as a write-in, since Turks & Caicos was not on the ballot.

#### BEST ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORT, CARIBBEAN

**The BodyHoliday LeSport, St. Lucia**

The all-inclusive category is huge in the Caribbean, but this one rose to the top with panelists from every niche, be it romance, luxury travel or spa lovers. Luxury travel guru Becca Hensley explains the appeal: “As elegant as it gets, this hardly feels like an all-inclusive until you get the bill and nothing additional has been charged. Included in the price you’ll find daily spa treatments, golf lessons, scuba, pool stewards, meals and premium cocktails. Ooolala.” At BodyHoliday the focus is equal parts wellness, with a vast array of yoga and fitness classes, and decadence, with first-rate cuisine and cocktails.

#### BEST PRIVATE ISLAND, CARIBBEAN

**Peter Island, British Virgin Islands**

There are two types of “private islands”: resorts occupying their own island and those allowing just one group at a time for private takeovers. Peter Island is both, a small resort on an 1800-acre paradise that is often taken in its entirety but does not have to be. There are three villas and 50 rooms and suites, a 10,000-square-foot spa, four restaurants and bars, and a full-service yacht club with charters, crewed sailing and dive shop. “Truly a private island resort, this intimate, family-owned resort hotel manages to be fancy and earthy at once...with excellent food and gorgeous beaches,” says pampered journalist Hensley. Fodor’s Travel Editor Arabella Bowen and luxury travel writer Kelly E. Carter were among Peter Island’s many vocal proponents.





Private retreats are not for everyone, but Peter Island is huge by any standard with over 50 rooms and 1,800 acres that you can call your own.

**Honorable Mention: TIE Necker Island, British Virgin Islands; Musha Cay, Bahamas.** This was a battle of celebrity owners, with Sir Richard Branson's Necker Island, a longtime favorite of our panel, against the newcomer, magician David Copperfield's Musha Cay. As top-tier travel agent Anne Sully explains, "I love Necker Island but Musha Cay is giving Sir Richard Branson heavy competition—you win whichever you choose."

#### BEST RESTAURANT, CARIBBEAN

### Blue By Eric Ripert, Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman

Our experts could not find enough good things to say about this sole Caribbean outpost by the chef of New York's Le Bernardin, acclaimed for his wizardry with all things seafood. "Some of the best seafood in the Caribbean—actually in the world," notes travel journalist Lynn Seldon, while travel agent to the stars Anne Scully quickly adds, "I am fortunate enough to have been invited to many of the great tables around the world and this was truly one of the best!" Blue showcases locally caught and responsibly fished seafood, with three-four-and seven-course tasting menus. With over 800 selections, Blue has won *Wine Spectator's* Award of Excellence annually since 2008.

**Honorable Mention: The Cliff, Barbados.** As its name implies, it occupies a gorgeous cliff-edge setting in St. James and features fresh seafood and other dishes with a Pacific Rim twist.

#### BEST SPA, CARIBBEAN

### TIE: Parrot Cay, Turks & Caicos The BodyHoliday LeSport, St. Lucia La Prairie Spa at Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman

Spas are high on the list of must-do activities in the Caribbean and just about every top resort large and small has one, but these three stood out.

Spa fanatic Becca Hensley describes Parrot Cay as "the most paradisiacal sanctuary. Deeply spiritual, airy and ethereal." BodyHoliday also won our best all-inclusive in large part because of its spa treatments and fitness classes, while La Prairie was just another winning touch for the oft acclaimed Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman, which panelists ranked among the best for overall facilities.



Blue, created by Eric Ripert of New York's four-star Le Bernardin, was touted as the best in the region for its world-class seafood dishes.

TOP: PETER ISLAND RESORT; LEFT: DON RIDDLE





The par-3 5th hole at Pete Dye's Teeth of the Dog golf course in Casa de Campo challenges golfers. It is one of three great courses at the resort.

#### BEST GOLF, CARIBBEAN

### Casa de Campo, Dominican Republic

Considering how much excellent golf there is in the Caribbean, on so many different islands—including the rest of the Dominican Republic—what is astounding was the scale of Casa de Campo's runaway victory. As our resident golf guru, Baum explains, "There's still no beating Casa de Campo. With its four Pete Dye courses, the resort could be christened the 'Kohler of the Caribbean,' but with year-round unbeatable weather. Dye has designed many world-class layouts, but Teeth of the Dog remains his absolute favorite. Enough said." The other three courses, including the excellent Dye Fore, don't hurt the resort's position as the Caribbean's king of golf.

#### **Honorable Mention: Green Monkey, Sandy Lane, Barbados.**

While Casa de Campo was heralded for its collection of layouts, our experts were blown away by the Tom Fazio-designed and very exclusive Green Monkey as a single course. "It's not just the best course in the Caribbean, it's one of the best in the world," said Larry Olmsted.

#### BEST BEACH, CARIBBEAN

### *TIE:* Shoal Bay Anguilla; Grace Bay, Turks & Caicos

While write-in Grace Bay was singled out for excellence by the same number of panelists as Shoal Bay, Anguilla, which easily ran away with the title of best beach island. In addition to the winners, our experts vocally argued for several other beaches here as the Caribbean's best, including Meads Bay, Rendezvous Bay and Cap Juluca. Former *Caribbean Travel & Life* editor, Veronica Stoddart describes Shoal Bay beach as, "Two miles of bone-white sand that is as soft as cotton, with translucent water featuring shimmering 'bands' of turquoise, aqua and azure. There are also beautiful iridescent offshore reefs, that are perfect for snorkeling, so is it any wonder this idyllic strand helped put Anguilla on the world tourism map?" MoonRings' Wallace calls Grace Bay, "Rivaled perhaps only by Whitehaven Beach in Australia's Whitsundays."



# Island By Island Best



The Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman towers over the famous white sands of Seven Mile Beach. Guests are pampered with great food, golf and service.

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Ritz-Carlton:** With nearly every vote cast there is no second place on Grand Cayman—the Ritz wowed with facilities, rooms, service, golf and most of all, food. As *USA Today*'s Stoddart puts it, "Combine British colonial architecture with Grand Cayman's famous Seven Mile Beach and add a dash of star chef Eric Ripert's cuisine. It doesn't get any better on Grand Cayman." She was not alone: top travel agents Stacy Small, Anne Scully, Carrie Wallace and Michael Holtz, along with golf experts David Baum and Brian McCallen, even spa and travel writers Hensley and Carter, all loved the place. As Scully sums it up, "The Ritz-Carlton it is clearly the best on the island, and their many repeat guests agree."

### Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Cotton Tree:** Our experts had little trouble debating the lodging merits of Grand Cayman—while the Ritz was nearly unanimous for best large hotel, the Cotton Tree got every single vote for smaller property. "Cottages comprise this intimate property—less Caribbean than high design, which actually really works for the Caymans, since it's a different sort of island in the first place," says Hensley, adding that, "It is as if you are visiting your rich uncle's house while he is out of town."

### Best Golf

**Blue Tip:** Not many 9-holers impress our experts, but this design by Greg Norman at the Ritz-Carlton won over our most diehard golf critics,

including former *Golf Magazine* editor Brian McCallen. No other course got a single vote.

### Best Restaurant

**Blue by Eric Ripert:** It's not surprising that our grand winner for best in the entire Caribbean was also best on its home turf, taking every vote cast—and a lot of votes were cast. "Blue, by Chef Eric Ripert of New York's Le Bernardin, is spectacular. Dining at the Ritz-Carlton may be expensive, but it is extraordinary," says David Baum. Our travel writers, food writers and travel agents were all in agreement.

## JAMAICA

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Half Moon:** It's the setting, with villas along a private crescent beach, and laundry list of activities that won the day for this long-established property that recently became a RockResort. "Although its golf is utterly forgettable, the Half Moon Resort & Spa is an amazing place to stay with an incredible offering of things to do," says David Baum. Journalist Michael Patrick Shiels adds: "This, old-fashioned, time-honored resort has a British Colonial feel to it, and it should—it's home to the Royals when they visit."

**Honorable Mention: Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall.** Our golfers and spa lovers preferred this more contemporary property. "With the best golf and the caliber of guest rooms Ritz-Carlton is known for, it does the best job here of overcoming service shortfalls typical of its neighboring properties," says *Cigar Aficionado* contributing editor Olmsted.



GoldenEye, the former private compound of James Bond creator Ian Fleming, has vaulted to the top of Jamaica's small resorts due to recent renovations.

## Best Small Resort or Hotel

**GoldenEye:** Guests can still sit at the desk where Ian Fleming, former owner of this private compound, typed away at his James Bond novels. Today GoldenEye, much refurbished and just reopened, is part of music impresario Chris Blackwell's Island Outpost collection of boutique resorts. "Music mogul Chris Blackwell's GoldenEye melds fun, funkiness and finesse into one vacation experience. Colorful cottages dot the lagoon's edge, guests have untold numbers of activities and experiences from which to choose," says Wallace.

**Honorable Mention: Round Hill.** This resort overlooking Montego Bay impressed our panel with its array of lodging options, a vast selection of rooms, villas and homes.

## Best Golf

**Ritz-Carnton Rose Hall:** While Half Moon narrowly edged out the Ritz for best resort, not even one of its fans spoke up for its golf course. Instead, every Jamaica vote went to Rose Hall, home to the excellent Cinnamon Hill course, and the marquee White Witch, the best on the island. "The White Witch casts a seductive spell cast with spectacular ocean views from 16 holes. The course weaves through rugged, heavily wooded hillside, reaching a peak elevation of 1,000 feet," notes *Golf Odyssey's* Baum.

### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

## Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Casa de Campo:** Just as it swept best golf in the Caribbean, Casa de Campo won this vote in a landslide—despite a rash of new, high-profile competition. Its vast facilities and choice of lodging remains unrivalled. "Huge and a world unto itself, Casa de Campo remains the Caribbean's most complete

and satisfying retreat," says David Baum, while honeymoon expert Wallace concurs: "This resort has everything you'd ever need."

**Honorable Mention: Punta Cana Resort & Club.** With three golf courses, two hotels and numerous villas, our experts were quite impressed. "Before I went I was doubtful about this sprawling resort that owns its own airport, has residences, several restaurants and primo golf—but I fell for it," said Becca Hensley."

## Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Tortuga Bay:** The new Oscar de la Renta-designed boutique hotel within the larger Punta Cana Resort & Club includes exclusive access to the resort's otherwise private golf course. "Oscar de la Renta's jewel in the Caribbean, Tortuga Bay. The property boasts 5 miles of beautiful beach and a Six Senses Spa...that's a vacation worth taking!," says travel agent extraordinaire Scully.

## Best Golf

**Teeth of the Dog—and the Rest of Casa de Campo:** Voters were stuck between choosing all four Pete Dye courses at Casa de Campo and singling out Teeth of the Dog, long the highest rated in the Caribbean. The choice was not hard for former *Golf Magazine* editor Brian McCallen who called Teeth of the Dog, "By far my favorite Pete Dye course." CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor Larry Olmsted added, "While Teeth of the Dog gets all the attention at Casa de Campo for its stunning oceanfront holes, the resort's newer Dye Fore, on the river highlands, may be even better."

**Honorable Mention: Punta Cana Resort & Club.** This is the most serious rival to Casa de Campo's golf eminence in the Caribbean. Golf writer Shiels says, "Tom Fazio's Corales course plays along the ocean and picturesque canyons. P. B. Dye, competing with his father Pete's work at Casa de Campo, designed the La Cana and Hacienda layouts.





La Samanna, above, on St. Martin, is one of the Caribbean's oldest and most revered resorts and has maintained its standing as one of the best. The Hotel El Convento (right), in Old San Juan, is a completely renovated, 366-year-old Spanish Colonial convent with all the modern amenities.

## PUERTO RICO

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**TIE St. Regis Bahia Beach; W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island.** While both are sprawling, full-featured resorts they have very different vibes, with the St. Regis capturing the bustling flavor of nearby San Juan, and the W being, as its name suggests, a retreat on an island long occupied by the US Navy. "The new St. Regis is a very welcome addition to Puerto Rico's otherwise mediocre resort scene. It's already drawing a celebrity crowd, and with time, this resort will be a 'go-to' in Puerto Rico," says MoonRings' Wallace. Our more escapist panelists including spa expert Ann Abel and Fodor's editorial director Arabella Bowen chose the W for its secluded charm and outdoor activities.

### Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Hotel El Convento:** This San Juan fixture was the choice of nearly every panelist, combining history, location and atmosphere. "This restored 366-year-old Spanish colonial convent, smack in the heart of Old San Juan, just oozes Old World charm. It's all mahogany beams, hand-carved furniture, and Andalusian floor tiles—but with 21st-century amenities," said Stoddart. "Its location is ideal," agreed travel agent Scully.

### Best Golf

**St. Regis Bahia Beach:** "Although Trump International gets all the publicity when it hosts a PGA Tour event, the best course in the Rio

Grande environs is Robert Trent Jones, Jr.'s spare-no-expense Bahia Beach Golf Club," says *Golf Odyssey's* Baum. Jones took advantage of the unique setting along a network of saltwater lagoons to bring waterfront exposure into play on 15 of the 18 holes.

**Honorable Mention: Royal Isabela Golf Links:** "It's brand, brand new so almost no one has been there yet, but once the word gets out, golfers will be flocking to the this layout, the Caribbean's version of Pebble Beach, with all the lodging in a handful of villas," says CIGAR AFICIONADO's Olmsted.

## ST. MARTIN/ MAARTEN

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**La Samanna:** Not a lot of drama in this choice, which got nearly every vote cast. Why? "La Samanna is the best on the island, period," says Anne Scully. The Orient-Express resort is a gleaming white temple of beachfront relaxation and elegance that might have been transported whole from the Greek Isles to the island's finest beach, complete with thatched roof palapas on the sand.



### Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Hotel l'Esplanade:** An insider's hidden-gem pick and the favorite of savvy panelists including Fodor's Arabella Bowen and honeymoon specialist Carrie Wallace, who says, "This immaculate small hotel in Grand Case has terrific water views and a variety of good restaurants. The owners are very involved and provide a personal touch to every guest experience. An excellent value as well in the typically overpriced Caribbean."

### Best Restaurant

**TIE: La Cigale; Le Tastevin:** On an island very well known for the quality of its food, these two have been longtime favorites. Romantic Le Tastevin has harbor views and its famous lobster bisque, while La Cigale sits right on the beach combining fine French cuisine with island informality. "It's hard to pick just one in the 'Culinary Capital of the Caribbean,' but Tastevin remains my favorite," says travel and food writer Lynn Seldon.



Abaco Club on Winding Bay is managed by Ritz-Carlton. It's a world-class resort on a series of bays, and has a Donald Steel, links-style golf course.

## BAHAMAS

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Atlantis, Paradise Island:** While food and service did not bowl over our very picky panelists, it proved impossible to argue with the mega-resort's unmatched one-of-a-kind facilities, including: hands-on dolphin, sea lion and stingray experiences; snorkeling the "ruins" of Atlantis; the 11 pools; extensive water park; over-water climbing wall; shark adventure; SNUBA; and the iconic "Mayan" temple. "It redefines large, is less relaxing than stimulating, but is the perfect place to party with multiple generations," says Becca Hensley. Michael Patrick Shiels echoed the sentiment: "With an innovative water park, shark-filled streams, underground aquariums, a casino and beach, Atlantis has something for everyone—except peace and quiet."

### Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Abaco Club on Winding Bay:** This unique island retreat is managed by Ritz-Carlton but with a network of cabanas and cottages on a small scale, it is not your typical Ritz. "Conceived by Peter de Savary in the tradition

## Our Expert Panelists

**Veronica Stoddart:** Editor in chief of the Travel Media Group at *USA Today*. Previously, she was founding editor of *Caribbean Travel & Life* magazine, which she edited for 10 years.

**Anne Scully, CTC:** Travel agent to the stars and president of McCabe World Travel.

**Arabella Bowen:** Executive editorial director at Fodor's Travel, Bowen has covered the Caribbean for over a decade. [www.fodors.com](http://www.fodors.com).

**Everett Potter:** Longtime panelist and top-tier travel journalist, he is editor of Everett Potter's Travel Report ([www.everettpotter.com](http://www.everettpotter.com)) and a contributor to *Travel + Leisure*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *ForbesLife*, and *The Daily*.

**Steve Jermanok:** A career travel journalist, Jermanok is a frequent contributor to *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*, has authored or coauthored 11 books, and now runs a Virtuoso-aligned travel consulting company, [www.ActiveTravels.com](http://www.ActiveTravels.com).

**David Baum:** The publisher and editor in chief of the renowned *Golf Odyssey* travel newsletter is also a frequent contributor to [www.golfvacationinsider.com](http://www.golfvacationinsider.com).

**Valarie D'Elia:** is a travel content provider for Time Warner Cable news and programming stations including the flagship NY1 in Manhattan. She is also the creator of [www.travelwithval.com](http://www.travelwithval.com).

**Stacy Small:** A longtime CIGAR AFICIONADO travel panelist, Small is a former journalist and past editor of *Elite Traveler* and *Travel Agent* magazines. She is the president/founder of Elite Travel International. [www.elitetravelinternational.com](http://www.elitetravelinternational.com).

**Becca Hensley:** Hensley reports on the toniest spots in the world for luxury lifestyle magazines and newspapers around the globe. See [www.beccahensley.com](http://www.beccahensley.com).

**George Ruff:** A longtime panelist, Ruff has more than 30 years in the hotel industry as senior principal of Trinity Hotel Investors LLC. [www.trinityhotels.com](http://www.trinityhotels.com).

**Lynn Seldon:** Seldon has been a full-time travel photojournalist for 25 years and has published more than 750 features in over 100 different publications. An avid diver, he often covers the Caribbean—above and below the surface. [www.lynnseidon.com](http://www.lynnseidon.com).

**Kelly E. Carter:** founder of [thejetsetpets.com](http://thejetsetpets.com), Carter is a contributing editor at *Elite Traveler*, the pet travel expert at AOL and has been featured on several Travel Channel Caribbean-themed shows.

**Carrie Wallace:** President of MoonRings Inc., a designer of luxury honeymoons and special occasion travel. [www.moonrings.com](http://www.moonrings.com).

**Janine Cifelli:** Specializing in the small-luxury-hotel market, the founder of Janine Cifelli Representation provides strategic consultation to world-class niche properties.

**Brian McCallen:** A former longtime senior editor at *Golf Magazine*, McCallen is a founding editor of [www.theaposition.com](http://www.theaposition.com) golf travel network and writer and consultant with a love of the Caribbean.

**Kim Fredericks:** This veteran travel writer has been a contributor to numerous luxury lifestyle and travel publications and writes the "Guide to Vacation Homes" for About.com.

**Michael Holtz:** Holtz is the owner and CEO of SmartFlyer, a high-touch Virtuoso agency catering to corporate and leisure travelers worldwide.

**Chad Clark:** Clark is the principal of Scottsdale, Arizona-based Chad Clark Travel, whose motto is "Privileged Access," [www.chadclarktravel.com](http://www.chadclarktravel.com).

**Ann Abel:** The former travel editor of *ForbesLife* and *Luxury SpaFinder* magazines, Abel writes regularly about luxury travel (and spas) for the Forbes website [www.blogs.forbes.com/Annabel](http://www.blogs.forbes.com/Annabel).

**Michael Patrick Shiels:** Michigan's "Radio Personality of the Year," is a syndicated morning radio and television host, golf and travel writer, and author of numerous books. His columns may be read at [www.traveltattler.com](http://www.traveltattler.com)

**Amy Ziff:** A longtime panelist, Ziff is the former creative director and cofounder of [www.jetsetter.com](http://www.jetsetter.com) and editor-at-large for Travelocity. She is the founder of Veritey, where she currently writes on spas, healthy living and escapes, [www.veritey.com](http://www.veritey.com).

**Patrick Gallagher:** This Wall Street road warrior and very frequent flyer is a longtime member of our panel, representing the frequent global business traveler—but he also takes a lot of vacations.





Since opening in late 2009, the Viceroy Anguilla quickly became the place to stay and continues to win out over venerable hotels like Cap Juluca.

of his Skibo Castle and Bovey Castle, the Abaco Club is pure Caribbean enchantment. No cars are allowed on club property, which extends two miles along curving bays with sugary sand beaches. The guest experience is all about relaxing ambiance, friendly service and barefoot elegance,” says David Baum.

## Best Golf

**Abaco Club on Winding Bay:** While the Bahamas have a few high-profile golf courses, they lack any concentration. Avid golfers are thus choosing a single standout experience and typically head here to experience what golf guru Baum describes as “the lightly played Abaco Club, a Scottish links inserted into a tropical landscape. Holes are laid out two-wide along Winding Bay. Only at the climactic finish does the routing leave the dunes for a bluff-top perch.”

## Best Restaurant

**Graycliff, Nassau:** This classic in-town eatery blends old-world charm with an upscale take on local cuisine. As travel writer Shiels describes it, “High ceilings, sofas and a parlor setting take you a million miles from any beachy thoughts of Jimmy Buffett. In a building dating to 1740, you’ll experience a historic meal of sophisticated Bahamian dishes, followed by cognac and cigars, in a residence once occupied by a governor.” CIGAR AFICIONADO’s contributing editor Olmsted puts it more bluntly: “A far better choice for a big night out than the overpriced and overrated resort eateries of nearby Paradise Island.”

## ANGUILLA

## Best Resort or Hotel, Any Size

**Viceroy:** The design, rooms, beach and low density of this fast-rising Caribbean star won over panelists of every ilk, from Fodor’s Arabella Bowen to travel agents specializing in high-income clients, such as Stacy Small and Anne Scully, who says, “This is a client favorite. Designer

Kelly Wearstler has put her mark on this resort and it could not be more beautiful.” It also won over journalists such as USA Today’s Stoddart and Becca Hensley who added, “The Viceroy rocks with 35 acres of beach-front space.”

**Honorable Mention: TIE: CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa; Cap Juluca:**

Cap Juluca is the island’s classic and thrives on its gorgeous setting, as Stoddart explains: “This place is all about the beach, a luscious mile-long curve of silky white sand called Maundays Bay. Strung along the beach is a Moroccan vision in white of one- and two-story domed, arched villas, some with private pools. Take me to the Casbah!” Much newer CuisinArt has the island’s best golf course and a focus on service and fine dining. “CuisinArt does everything really well, consistently. The food itself is a key reason to go—foodies will love their cooking classes, chef’s table and hydroponic farm,” says Bowen.

## Best Golf

**CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa:** This only recently became a golf resort when it took over Temenos, a spare-no-expense Greg Norman dream design originally built to anchor an enclave of high-priced villas. Because of its very limited access, Temenos, one of the best courses in the Caribbean, never got its due, but now as part of the larger resort it will quickly gain prominence—and already has for golfers David Baum, Brian McCallen and George Ruff.

## Best Restaurant

**Blanchard’s:** Famous for their line of Vermont-made gourmet dressings and sauces under the Blanchard & Blanchard label, this husband-and-wife team packed it all up to leave New England and open a restaurant on Anguilla. Nearly 20 years later, the fusion cuisine and barefoot attitude—or lack of attitude—has won legions of fans including USA Today’s Stoddart, Fodor’s Bowen, travel agent Small and other panelists. Next door is the even more casual Blanchard’s Beach Shack.





After a complete restoration following hurricane damage, Four Seasons Nevis was touted by our experts as better than ever before.

## ST. BARTHS

### Best Resort or Hotel, Any Size

**TIE: Guanahani; Eden Rock:** No island had as many hotels in contention as tiny St. Barths where the properties are small but the overall quality very high. “I can’t get enough of Hotel Guanahani...very French ambiance—such a romantic stop. As if Paris put on flip flops but still donned a little black dress,” says Hensley. “In an epicentral location in St. Jean’s Bay, this place is happening, particularly during high season. The beach is great, and foodies won’t be disappointed! If you want to be *au milieu de l’action*, Eden Rock is for you,” says Wallace. It also has one of the region’s most unique luxury lodging options according to travel agent Scully: “Their Ultra Luxe Villas are their trademark, especially ‘Rockstar,’ which houses the recording studio where John Lennon recorded ‘Imagine’. It is among the most coveted accommodations in the Caribbean.”

**Honorable Mention: TIE: Hotel Isle de France; Le Toiny:** The former has “location, location, location on the island’s longest, widest beach,” attracting jet-setters, according to Stoddart, while Le Toiny takes the opposite tact according to Wallace: “Intimate, quiet, secluded, romantic. For those who just want to escape the world, Le Toiny is the perfect choice.”

## ST. KITTS & NEVIS

### Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Four Seasons:** The champion of champions, this resort received more votes than any other in the poll—and was a unanimous choice. Many panelists remarked that it is better than ever following a multiyear

restoration from hurricane damage and it was already awesome before. “The legend has returned and our clients are packing their bags to revisit an all-time favorite,” says Scully. Wallace echoes the sentiment: “We’re thrilled this resort has reopened, and it’s looking better than ever. Four Seasons Nevis really offers everything a full-service resort should: golf, spa, villas, beach, activities, kids’ club, many restaurants and pretty facilities. Guests want for nothing!” More of the same from Kelly E. Carter: “This luxury resort is better than ever after the hurricane damage.”

### Best Small Resort or Hotel

**TIE Montpelier Plantation; Nisbet Plantation:** Several former sugar plantations on Nevis are now luxury boutique resorts and these two are the favorites. Nisbet is frozen in time, as Stoddart explains: “A restored 1778 plantation inn, this is the unhurried old-time Caribbean at its best—no phones, no TVs and afternoon tea served in a proper Great House.” Montpelier is a Relais & Chateaux property set in the mountains but also featuring a private beach club below, renowned for its culinary excellence.

### Best Golf

**Four Seasons:** Nevis and the Four Seasons again bowled over the larger sister island of St. Kitts and its newer properties, garnering every golf course vote along with every large hotel vote. Golf writer Michael Shiels explains the charm: “You’ll share the golf course with monkeys and the pool with celebrities, as Four Seasons Nevis is known as a Hollywood hideaway. Robert Trent Jones II took full advantage of the panoramic ocean views when he designed golf holes high above the resort and the neighboring island of St. Kitts, even incorporating old sugar mill ruins alongside the tee box.”





The views of the Pitons from the rooms at Jade Mountain are stunning, and keep the boutique hotel as the best choice on St. Lucia.

## ST. LUCIA

### Best Resort or Hotel, Any Size

**Jade Mountain:** Grand winner as the best boutique resort in the entire Caribbean, and our past Best Hotel of the Caribbean champ in our 2010 poll, Jade Mountain keeps piling up the accolades. But while it is best known for over-the-top luxury suites and secluded mountaintop intimacy, it also gives guests access to all of the amenities of its larger sister resort under the same ownership, including a 5-star dive shop, a private hiking and mountain biking plantation, private beach and many more bells and whistles than a resort Jade's size would ever have. "This place screams romance," says Stoddart, "Hard to find a more dramatic love nest."

**Honorable Mention: Cap Maison:** Its 49 rooms are all in villas, many with private plunge pools or hot tubs, and according to Wallace, "This small resort is great at exceeding expectations. Everyone has a 'can-do' attitude, food at their gourmet restaurant, the Cliff, is some of the best on the island, and the concierge, Keizah, is amazing."

### Best Restaurant

**Dasheene at the Ladera Resort:** Ladera is built tree-house style into the jungle, and its Dasheene restaurant is no exception, serving up nouvelle Caribbean fare—and stunning views of the Pitons. The focus is on locally harvested, sustainable ingredients, and the live music Sunday brunch is an island highlight.

## BARBADOS

### Best Resort or Hotel, Any Size

**Sandy Lane:** One of our big winners, this exclusive and very Anglo resort got nearly every vote cast. Some were wowed by its world-class golf, others by its huge ESPA, and others by the swanky rooms and white-glove butler treatment. "One of the world's most opulent resorts, it struts its attitude as an exclusive place," says Baum, who also warned that, "it looks out for some guests much more than others. If you're a name or a VIP, you'll have one of the times of your life. The guest experience begins literally the moment you step out of customs, as a Sandy Lane representative escorts you to a chauffeur-driven BMW, Mercedes or Bentley."





Caneel Bay has been a stalwart on the Caribbean scene since the 1950s, and remains a tranquil outpost surrounded by the Virgin Islands National Park.

## Best Golf

**Sandy Lane/Green Monkey:** Again it was unanimous, despite other high-profile courses on the island, and the only debate was between Sandy Lane's more accessible but excellent Country Club course and its pricey and very limited Green Monkey, unlike any other, "A spectacular Tom Fazio design that cost \$50+ million to build," according to golf writer Brian McCallen. Baum calls it a "technically and aesthetically superlative design, a dream come true for golf-course trophy hunters. Every hole either descends into a stunning limestone quarry or reveals a view of the Caribbean Sea."

## Best Restaurant

**The Cliff:** Our grand winner for best eatery in the Caribbean, the Cliff is perched on the edge of the sea and infuses Caribbean ingredients with Asian flair, such as Thai Red Curry Mussels or local swordfish chargrilled with yellow curry sauce and coriander vinaigrette.

### UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

## Best Resort or Hotel, Any Size

**Caneel Bay, St. John:** Back in the 1950s when Laurance Rockefeller created his Rockresorts chain by surveying land from the sea and air to find the most beautiful spots, he built Caneel Bay. Half a century later it is a Rosewood resort, and sits entirely within the pristine Virgin Islands National Park. Almost every voter commented on the quality of the resort's beaches. "Sure, it's in the middle of protected national park, guaranteeing a pristine environment forever. And yes, its 166 serene, tasteful rooms are well camouflaged by 170 acres of lush grounds. But in the end, it's the seven—count 'em—intimate beaches that make Caneel stand out," says Stoddart.

Honorable Mention: TIE Westin, St. John; Ritz Carlton, St. Thomas: Popular with families and divers, the Westin occupies a generous 47-acre secluded site, while the Ritz-Carlton was singled out for its overly gracious service, a standout for even the world-class chain.

### BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

## Best Large Resort or Hotel

**Little Dix Bay:** Rosewood's sister property to Caneel Bay, which won for the U.S. Virgin Islands, Little Dix Bay fared even better, sweeping the category for the British Virgin Islands. Super-agent Anne Scully calls it, "Another personal favorite, its crescent-shaped beach with powdery white sand and acclaimed Sense spa makes this a haven for adults and children alike. The resort is incredibly romantic, but has a fantastic children's program as well."

## Best Small Resort or Hotel

**Peter Island Resort:** This luxury property on its own 1,800-acres also won for best private island in the Caribbean and it is easy to see why with a full marina and wide range of watersports, lavish spa and deluxe accommodations. It was especially popular with our many high-powered travel agents, who recommended it enthusiastically, and one of them, Carrie Wallace, sums up the appeal: "Peter Island is an understated hideaway that pampers those who love the idea of private-island isolation."

## Best Restaurant

**Grilled Lobsters:** Our very opinionated panelists could not agree on exactly where to go, but they did note that when it comes to eating out in the British Virgin Islands, grilled lobster is the way to go, plucked fresh from the ocean, cooked with the least possible fanfare and ideally eaten with your toes in the sand. Popular choices included the Anegada Reef Hotel, which Stacy Small calls the "best grilled lobsters in the world!" Chad Clark loves Abe's Little Harbor on Jost Van Dyke, which the upscale travel agent described as "a dingy, small, dilapidated shack on the water that serves the most incredible lobster dinner *anywhere*." He even sent in personal photos to prove his point.

*Larry Olmsted: Celebrating 16 years of writing for Cigar Aficionado, where I am the Contributing Editor, Travel.*



## Index of Best of the Caribbean (in order of appearance)



### ANGUILLA

#### Viceroy

viceroyhotelsandresorts.com/anguilla  
(264) 497-7000

#### CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa

cuisinartresort.com (264) 498-2000

#### Cap Juluca

capjuluca.com (264) 497-6666

#### Blanchards

blanchardsrestaurant.com (264) 497-6100

### BAHAMAS

#### Musha Cay

mushacay.com (208) 309-1106

#### Atlantis, Paradise Island

atlantis.com (242) 363-3000

#### Abaco Club on Winding Bay

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/abaco/  
default.htm (242) 367-0077

#### Graycliff, Nassau

graycliff.com (242) 302-9150

### BARBADOS

#### Sandy Lane

sandylane.com (246) 444-2000

#### Green Monkey, Sandy Lane

sandylane.com/barbados-golf.php  
(246) 444-2000

#### The Cliff

thecliffbarbados.com (246) 432-1922

### CAYMAN ISLANDS

#### Blue By Eric Ripert, Ritz-Carlton

##### Grand Cayman

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/grandcayman  
(345) 943-9000

#### Le Prairie Spa at Ritz Carlton

##### Grand Cayman

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/grandcayman  
(345) 943-9000

#### Ritz-Carlton

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/grandcayman  
(345) 943-9000

#### Cotton Tree

caymancottontree.com (345) 943-0700

#### Blue Tip, Ritz-Carlton

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/grandcayman/  
golf/Default.htm (345) 943-9000

### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

#### Casa de Campo

casadecampo.com.do (855) 877-3643

#### Punta Cana Resort & Club

puntacana.com (809) 959-2262

#### Tortuga Bay

puntacana.com/accommodations/  
tortuga-bay (809) 959-2262

#### Teeth of the Dog, Casa de Campo

casadecampo.com.do/golf=courses/  
teeth=dog (855) 877-3643

### JAMAICA

#### Half Moon

halfmoon.rockresorts.com  
(800) 438-7241

#### Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/rosehalljamaica/  
default.htm (876) 953-2800

#### GoldenEye

goldeneye.com (876) 6229-007

#### Round Hill

roundhill.com (800) 972-2159

### NEVIS

#### Four Seasons

fourseasons.com/nevis (869) 469-1111

#### Montpelier Plantation

montpeliernevis.com (869) 469-3462

#### Nisbet Plantation

nisbetplantation.com (869) 469-9325

### PUERTO RICO

#### St. Regis, Bahia Beach

stregisbahiabeach.com (787) 809-8000

#### W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island

wvieques.com (787) 741-4100

#### Hotel El Convento

elconvento.com (787) 723-9020

#### Royal Isabela Golf Links

royalisabela.com (787) 609-5888

### ST. BARTHS

#### Le Toiny

letoiny.com (590) 590 27 88 88

#### Guanahani

leguanahani.com (590) 590 27 66 60

#### Eden Rock

edenrockhotel.com (599) 590 590 29 79 99

#### Hotel Isle de France

isle-de-france.com (590) 590 27 61 81

### ST. LUCIA

#### Jade Mountain

Jademountain.com (758) 459-5000

#### The BodyHoliday LeSport

thebodyholiday.com (758) 457-7800

#### Cap Maison

capmaison.com (758) 457-8670

#### Dasheene at the Ladera Resort

ladera.com/dining/restaurants  
(758) 459-6600

### ST. MARTIN

#### La Samanna

lasamanna.com (590) 590 87 64 00

#### Hotel l'Esplanade, St. Martin

lesplanade.com (590) 590 87 06 55

#### La Cigale

restaurant-lacigale.com/restaurant-  
lacigale.html (590) 590 87 90 23

#### Le Tastevin

letastevin-restaurant.com/tastevin-  
restaurant-en.html  
(590) 590 87 55 45

### TURKS & CAICOS

#### Parrot Cay

comohotels.com/parrotcay  
(649) 946-7788

#### Grace Bay

gracebayresorts.com/gracebayclub  
(649) 946-5050

### VIRGIN ISLANDS

#### Peter Island

peterisland.com (800) 346-4451

#### Necker Island

neckerisland.virgin.com  
44 (0) 208 600 0430

#### Caneel Bay, St. John

rosewoodhotels.com/en/caneelbay  
(340) 776-6111

#### Westin, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

westinresortstjohn.com (866) 716-8108

#### Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

ritzcarlton.com/en/properties/stthomas/  
default.htm (340) 775-3333

#### Little Dix Bay, British Virgin Islands

rosewoodhotels.com/en/littledixbay  
(284) 495-5555