

St Kitts & Nevis

Near-perfect packages – that's how you might think of St Kitts and Nevis after a visit. The two-island nation combines beaches with the beauty of the mountains, plenty of activities to engage your body and some rich history to engage your mind. The legacies of the sugar industry have been recycled into pleasant plantation estates good for lunch or just a stay. And the local culture is almost a Caribbean cliché: mellow, friendly, familiar and with a pulsing soca beat.

But if the pair offer much that's similar, they also differ in the details. St Kitts is the larger and feels that way, from the hustle of intriguing Basseterre to the resort enclave of Frigate Bay. You could spend a few days exploring all of its beaches, with their cool bars, water activities and pure vacation vibe. Circling the main part of the island, there's plenty to see: the languid charms of the plantations and the astonishing bulk of Brimstone Fortress.

Nevis is a neater package. It has one volcanic mountain rather than a range and its one main road is a circle that takes you around the island in under two hours. There's a handful of beaches with the usual fun, and Charleston, the charming main town, can be walked end to end in 15 minutes. History here centers on the big names of Horatio Nelson and Alexander Hamilton. Nature walks take you into the verdant upper reaches of the peak.

Even if you just stay on one island, frequent ferry service means that you can easily enjoy both.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** St Kitts: 68 sq miles; Nevis: 36 sq miles
- **Capital** St Kitts: Basseterre; Nevis: Charlestown
- **Country code** ☎ 869
- **Departure tax** St Kitts: US\$22; Nevis: US\$21
- **Famous for** Languid days, historic plantation inns
- **Language** English with a Creole or patois accent
- **Money** Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$); EC\$1 = US\$0.38 = €0.24 = UK£0.19
- **Official name** Federation of St Christopher & Nevis
- **People** Kittitians, Nevisians
- **Phrase** Menono (I don't know); get dat do (get that done)
- **Population** 46,000 (35,000 on St Kitts; 11,000 on Nevis)
- **Visa** Not required for most nationalities; see p515



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Brimstone Hill Fortress** (p505) Explore the only Unesco World Heritage site in the Leeward Islands
- **Plantation lunches** Take a long lunch at a plantation estate while touring either island, even if you don't stay at one
- **Basseterre** (p499) Explore the intriguing, shambolic and surprising vibrant capital of St Kitts
- **Frigate Bay Beach** (p502) Enjoy the mood – fun-filled by day, rum-fueled at night
- **Nevis hikes** (p511) Surmount the volcano, sample wild fruit, spot a monkey and more

ITINERARIES

- **Two Days** On either island, spend your first day at the beach (Frigate Bay on St Kitts, Pinney's on Nevis) then spend your second day circling the island and exploring the capital.
- **Four Days** Do the two-day highlights for both islands.
- **One Week** Split your time between the two islands. Add in a lot more beach time as the extra days let you explore the sandy shores at will, looking for a favorite. Consider a night or two at a plantation inn.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There's really no bad time to go to St Kitts and Nevis. The hot Caribbean summer contrasts with cool low-season deals at the resorts.

Winter days average a temperature of 81°F (27°C) while summers shoot up to a still respectable 86°F (30°C).

Annual rainfall averages 55in and is fairly consistent throughout the year. The driest months are February to June, and the hurricane (and rainy) season is July to November, although even during this period the weather can be gorgeous.

High-season rates start from around mid-December and go to mid-April. The best time to visit, price- and weather-wise, is November and early December.

HISTORY

The island known today as St Kitts was called Liamuiga (Fertile Island) by the aggressive Carib people, who arrived about 1300 AD and chased out the peaceable agrarian bands who'd been in the area for hundreds of years. When Columbus sighted the island on his

second voyage to the New World, in 1493, he named it St Christopher after his patron saint, later shortened to 'St Kitts.'

Columbus used the Spanish word for 'snow,' *nieves*, to name Nevis, presumably because the clouds shrouding its mountain reminded him of a snowcapped peak. Native Caribs knew the island as Oualie (Land of Beautiful Waters).

St Kitts and Nevis are the oldest British colonies in the Caribbean. Sir Thomas Warner founded a colony way back in 1623, only to be joined soon after by the French, a move the British only tolerated long enough to massacre the native Caribs. In one day, 2000 Caribs were slaughtered, causing blood to run for days at the site now known as Bloody Point.

A century and a half of Franco-British battles culminated locally in 1782, when a force of 8000 French troops laid siege to the important British stronghold at Brimstone Hill (p505) on St Kitts. Although they won this battle, they lost the war and the 1783 Treaty of Paris brought the island firmly under British control. During this era sugar plantations thrived on the islands.

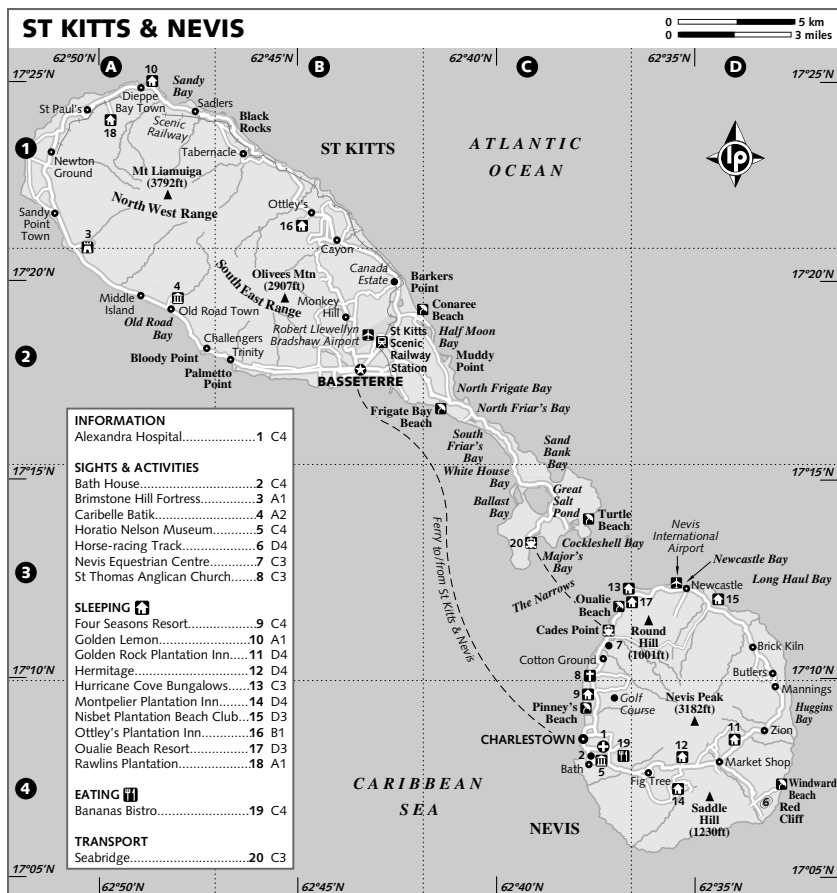
Nevis had a colonial history similar to St Kitts. In 1628 Warner sent a party of about 100 colonists to establish a British settlement on the west coast of the island. Although the original settlement, near Cotton Ground, fell to an earthquake in 1680, Nevis eventually developed one of the most affluent plantation societies in the Eastern Caribbean. As on St Kitts, most of the island's wealth was built upon the labor of African slaves who toiled in the island's sugarcane fields.

By the late 18th century, Nevis, buoyed by the attraction of its thermal baths, had become a major retreat for Britain's rich and famous.

In 1816 the British linked St Kitts and Nevis with Anguilla and the Virgin Islands as a sin-

HOW MUCH?

- **Cold Carib beer** EC\$5
- **Exotic fruits growing wild** Free
- **Two-tank dive** US\$85
- **Visit to Alexander Hamilton's birthplace** US\$5
- **Night in a historic plantation inn** US\$200+



gle colony. In 1958 these islands became part of the West Indies Federation, a grand but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to combine all of Britain's Caribbean colonies as a united political entity. When the federation dissolved in 1962, the British opted to lump St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla together as a new state. Anguilla, fearful of domination by larger St Kitts, revolted against the occupying Royal St Kitts Police Force in 1967 and returned to Britain as an overseas territory.

In 1983 St Kitts and Nevis became a single nation within the British Commonwealth, with the stipulation that wary Nevis could secede at any time. A period of corruption on St Kitts and pro-independence on Nevis in the 1990s almost brought an end to the federa-

tion. Nevis – a major offshore tax haven – now has an economy stronger than that of its larger neighbor. This, coupled with the constant irritation of having only three members in the 11-member governing assembly, may cause Nevis to hit the eject button soon.

St Kitts and Nevis is one of the 54 members of the Commonwealth and still retains a governor-general, appointed by the ruling monarch of Britain. The buck actually stops at the prime minister, who is the leader of the ruling political party, which at present is the center-left Labour Party. In its foreign relations, the region's smallest country has proven itself wily: by remaining one of the last nations to recognize Taiwan it has reaped benefits from the Taiwanese such as donated police cars.

A BITTER END TO SWEET SUCCESS

Sugar and slaves built St Kitts and Nevis. But the course of the industry on the islands diverged early on. French attacks in the early 18th century collapsed the sugar industry on Nevis and it never fully recovered. Many plantation families left and small plots of land were distributed to slaves freed at emancipation. On St Kitts, however, the plantations continued right up until 2005. In fact as you drive around the island, you will be struck by mile after mile of cane fields growing wild. Distribution to the masses, replacement by time-share condos, more golf courses – these are just some of the options for the land being debated now.

Although it had struggled for decades, time was finally called for the sugar industry on St Kitts by the EU, which moved to eliminate its huge subsidies and price supports. Its legacy is easily seen today. Besides the wild cane fields and abandoned mills that dot the land, there's the legacy of billions of British cavities and rotted teeth. St Kitts sugar was gobbled up in sweets as fast as it hit the English piers. On St Kitts, many of the former cane-field workers now work as security guards, protecting against those former workers who've yet to find jobs.

THE CULTURE

Although the population is predominantly (90%) of African descent, culturally the islands draw upon a mix of European, African and West Indian traditions. Architecture is mainly British in style and cricket is the national sport.

St Kitts, more than Nevis, still feels like a place where people live and work, rather than just a tourist spot. Walk through a residential area on St Kitts on any given night and most residents will be out in the streets, listening to reggae or calypso blaring out of homes and chatting with friends. On weekend nights, many villages on Nevis have communal barbecues.

St Kitts and Nevis have an interesting mixture of leniency and propriety. You can get fined for using foul language in public, but you can drink while driving (note that doesn't mean you can drive drunk!), so keep an eye out on the road at night. Swimwear should be restricted to the beach and pool areas of resorts.

ENVIRONMENT

Both islands have grassy coastal areas, a consequence of deforestation for sugar production. Forests tend to be vestiges of the large rainforests which once covered much of the islands, or they are second-growth.

Fairly narrow, darkish beaches are found around both islands but they are by no means ringed with sand. Away from developed areas, the climate allows a huge array of beautiful plants to thrive. Flowers such as plumeria, hibiscus and chains-of-love are common along roadsides and in garden landscaping.

Nevis is fairly circular and the entire island benefits from runoff from Nevis Peak. St Kitts' shape resembles a tadpole. The main body is irrigated by water from the mountain ranges. However, this is of little value to the geographically isolated, arid southeast peninsula which is covered with sparse, desertlike cacti and yucca.

The most popular wildlife on the islands is the skittish vervet monkey. Imported by French settlers from Africa, these monkeys can now be seen fairly regularly all over both islands. Even more ubiquitous is the mongoose, imported by plantation owners to curb rats from munching on their sugarcane (luckily for the nocturnal rats, mongooses hunt during the day, and rarely the twain did meet). Both islands provide plenty of avian life for bird-watchers.

Reefs around the two islands face the same threats as elsewhere in the region. On St Kitts, some of the best reefs ring the southeast peninsula. A new project is underway to limit the range of feral goats, whose overgrazing leads to increased runoff of reef-killing silt and organic matter.

FOOD & DRINK

Excellent fresh fish is the norm on St Kitts and Nevis. From exotic shellfish to mild and succulent varieties of white fish, the denizens of the deep do their best to feed locals and visitors alike. Piquant stews are popular locally while many beachside joints serve simple preparations like grilled lobster to appreciative crowds.

Beef, chicken, goat and other meats are also common, especially in the simple eateries that

can be found by wandering the side streets of Basseterre. Look for pepperpot, a rich stew with as many recipes as cooks. Excellent restaurants with creative menus can be found right across both islands. Of special note are the many plantation inns which serve romantic candle-lit dinners under the stars.

Tap water is safe to drink everywhere on the islands. Cane Spirit Rothschild, more commonly known as CSR, is a clear sugarcane spirit distilled on St Kitts. CSR is often served on the rocks with Ting, a popular grapefruit-flavored soft drink. Refreshing Ginseng Up and a crisp lager, Carib beer, are also bottled on St Kitts.

ST KITTS

St Kitts definitely has a beat, and it's not just the one blasting from the many minibuses hauling folks hither and yon. Basseterre is a fascinating place to wander and it is still very much the commercial heart of the island. Locals bustle shop to shop making their purchases and there's only a bit of compromise offered for tourists and that's at the cruise-ship dock.

To the south on the arid peninsula, the island's best beaches have attracted both crowds of visitors and developers. The area around Frigate Bay is thick with condos and resorts. It's also thick with a lively band of beach joints on the west side, many of which rock on until well after midnight.

Around the main part of the island, abandoned sugar-cane fields climb hills dotted with plantation inns and sleepy villages. In the northwest, the country's one Unesco World Heritage site, Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, preserves a vast 18th-century fort on a stunning hilltop setting.

That everything is slightly shambolic just keeps the island feeling more authentic.

Getting There & Away

For details on transport options to St Kitts, see p515.

There are ferry services between St Kitts and Nevis; for further information, see p516.

Getting Around

BUS

Buses are privately owned minivans and are fairly new. But that doesn't mean they don't

zip around the island at breakneck speeds. Decor is sedate but many have names such as 'Mr Strong.' In Basseterre, most leave from the bus stop on Bay Rd. Fares range from EC\$2 to EC\$6.

Bus service is fairly sporadic and there's no schedule, although buses are generally most plentiful in the early morning and late afternoon. The last bus is usually between 10pm and midnight. To avoid competition with tourist taxis, buses do not normally run to Frigate Bay (or points southeast).

CAR & SCOOTER

Car-rental agencies:

Avis (☎ 465-6507, in the US 800-228-0668; Bay Rd, Basseterre)

Caines Rent a Car (☎ 465-2366; Princes St, Basseterre)

TDC Auto Rentals (☎ 465-2991; West Independence Sq, Basseterre) Affiliated with Thrifty.

For scooter hire, **Islandwide Scooter Rentals** (☎ 466-7841; midasscooter@caribsurf.com) will meet up with you wherever is convenient.

Basseterre has quite a few one-way streets, some of which are not clearly marked. Keep an eye out for road signs, and when in doubt, simply follow the rest of the traffic.

TAXI

A taxi from the airport costs EC\$20 to Basseterre, EC\$35 to Frigate Bay, and EC\$50 to St Paul's.

From the Circus (the main taxi stand in Basseterre), it costs EC\$10 to anywhere within town, EC\$20 to Frigate Bay and EC\$85 to Brimstone Hill round-trip. Rates are 25% higher between 11pm and 6am. There's an EC\$3 charge for each 15 minutes of waiting. To call a taxi, dial ☎ 465-4253.

BASSETERRE

pop 12,800

Keep your distance from the cruise-ship port and plunge into this heady mix of commerce and culture. Nothing in the capital has been overly gussied up, which means that surprises abound. Shops have names like 'Bold, Black & Beautiful.' Take time to pick out the surviving colonial buildings with their wide porches; nod to folks lounging on their stoops, Carib in hand. If nothing else, you should buy a local beer in thanks for not turning feral at the hordes of tubby tourists clogging the streets near the port.

Information

Basseterre is a flop when it comes to buying books. Your best bet is the pot-boilers on offer at the Marriott Resort in Frigate Bay.

A number of international banks and ATMs can be found around the Circus.

City Drug Store (☎ 465-2156; Bank St; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 11am Sun) Pharmacy; also sells magazines and newspapers.

JNF General (☎ 465-2551; ☎ 24hr) The main hospital on St Kitts is at the west end of Cayon St.

NR Services (☎ 466-5925; Bay Rd; ☎ 8am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Internet access (per minute EC\$0.25), internet calling, public phones and phonecards.

Philatelic Bureau (Pelican Mall, Bay Rd) Colorful commemorative stamps are sold here, next door to the post office.

Post office (☎ 465-2521; Bay Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon & Tue, to 3:30pm Wed-Fri) Next to Pelican Mall. Postcards to the US/Europe cost EC\$0.80/1.20.

St Kitts Tourism Authority (☎ 465-4040; www.stkittstourism.kn; Pelican Mall, Bay Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Small office that can answer questions.

Sights

The focus of town is the **Circus**, a circular intersection surrounded by quaint buildings and storm-ravaged palms. In the center is a non-working fountain that continues the theme of tropically accented Georgian splendor.

One block east, **Independence Square** is a scruffy park surrounded by some real architectural gems like the battered old beauty on the northwest corner. Once called Pall Mall Sq, it was used in the 1790s for slave auctions. On the east side, **Immaculate Conception Cathedral** has an austere interior that belies the ornamented facade dating from 1928.

Wander the streets west to the imposing bulk of **St George's Anglican Church**, which dates from 1869 and is the fourth church built on this site. The French built the first one, called – you guessed it – Notre Dame, in 1670.

Head down to the water to the 1894 colonial **Treasury Building**. Its imposing form topped by a dome is a sign of the importance the British Empire placed on the plantations of St Kitts. Inside, the **National Museum** (☎ 465-5584; adult/child EC\$5/free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) has a gaggle of displays of widely varying quality on the 2nd floor. The historic displays do a good job of capturing some of the island's dramatic events. Just below, the gift shop has a few knick-knacks and some books.

Just beyond Cayon St, **Warner Park Stadium** (☎ 466-2007; office ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) shines after a massive refurbishment for the 2007 Cricket World Cup. Stop by to find out if any test matches are scheduled.

Activities

Pro-Divers (☎ 466-3483; www.prodiversst Kitts.com; Basseterre) offers single-tank boat dives without equipment for US\$60, two-tank dives for US\$85, night dives for US\$80, a three-day Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification course for US\$400 and a half-day snorkeling trip for US\$40. Equipment is available for rent. It's located at the Ocean Terrace Inn's Fisherman's Wharf.

Kenneth's Dive Centre (☎ 465-2670; kdcsk@yahoo.com; Bay Rd) is on the east side of Basseterre and offers similar services and rates.

Sleeping

Most people will opt for something near the beaches but there's a certain energy to staying in town.

Seaview Guest House (☎ 466-5298; www.seaviewinnsk.com; Bay Rd; s/d from US\$62/75; ☎) Conveniently located opposite the harborfront and the ferry terminal, the Seaview has 10 rooms that are simple and clean, with private bathrooms. While away your trip on the flower-covered veranda.

Trinity Inn Apartments (☎ 465-3226; www.trinityinnapartments.com; apt US\$80; ☎) Four miles west of Basseterre, at Palmetto Point, is this two-story modern apartment block. The 10 one-bedroom units have kitchens and a timeless, basic decor.

Palms Hotel (☎ 465-0800; www.palmshotel.com; the Circus; ste US\$85-180; ☎ ☎) Rooms in this rambling wooden colonial building overlooking the Circus are popular with business travelers. All 12 are large and won't challenge the blandest of expectations. The location is the best feature. Offers wi-fi.

Ocean Terrace Inn (☎ 465-2754, in the US 800-524-0512; www.oceanterraceinn.com; Wigley Ave; r US\$165-325; ☎ ☎ ☎) Elegant and dignified, this 71-unit hotel sprawls over a hillside overlooking the harbor. It stops just short of being idiosyncratic (although the cannons on the roof qualify) and has a range of rooms and pools. Nos 30 to 43 are fronted by a broad lawn and are the most restful. Get a room near reception or the pool bar for the best wi-fi experience. There's not much else here

at the west end of town but the hotel can fill your hours.

Eating & Drinking

Caribe Café (☎ 465-5282; The Sands, Bay Rd; snacks EC\$5; ☎ 8am-9pm) Climb up to this 3rd-floor café and enjoy a superb coffee made from locally roasted beans, use the wi-fi or chill with a sublime iced tea. Baked goods are equally fine and the views over the water may distract you from your laptop.

Redi-Fried (☎ 465-1301; Bay Rd; meals EC\$11; ☎ 10am-midnight) Next to the cinema, this hole-in-the-wall is a mere half-step beyond stall-status, but that just adds character to the excellent fried chicken. The slogan says it all: 'We're ready when you're ready.'

ourpick Stone Walls (☎ 465-5248; Princes St; meals US\$11-50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Basseterre's best restaurant is also its most appealing. Surrounded by its namesake walls, the open-air dining area features luxurious chairs, white tablecloths and a small fountain that takes the spikes out of the street noise. Breakfasts range from saltfish and johnny-cakes to bagels and cream cheese. Lunch and dinner feature boldly prepared seafood and steaks. The bar provides just the right lubrication and many diners close out their night here.

Kalabash (☎ 466-2398; Cayon St; meals from EC\$12; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Fri) Don't let the fascinating screed about what the pilgrims *really* did to the Indians (the turkeys got off easy) that's played across the wall divert your attention from the excellent casual fare in this narrow café. Salads, veggie curries, falafel sandwiches and luscious baked goods will have you shouting in the streets.

Potential (☎ 475-8373; Pond Rd; mains EC\$15-50; ☎ 8am-8pm) A totally open-air corner café, the Potential lives up to the full promise of its name with a long and varied menu of salads, local curries, burgers, pasta and more. It gets extra credit for its daily blackboard of specials that can include local faves like crushed green bananas and breaded chicken. There's a full bar too.

Fisherman's Wharf (☎ 465-2754; meals US\$20-30; ☎ dinner) The waterfront restaurant of the Ocean Terrace Inn is a fun place. Dinners, including freshly caught snapper fillet and lobster, are cooked to order over an open grill and accompanied by a self-service side buffet. The Friday fish fries are always jammed.

There are a number of good stalls along the waterfront selling tasty street fare. The green-walled, tin-roofed **public market** (Bay Rd) is worth a wander for its displays of local fruit and veg.

Shopping

Avoid the malls lurking around Port Zante unless you are overcome with the need for a new watch. However, in the plaza behind the Old Treasury Building, there's a strip of stalls selling locally made crafts that are worth a browse.

Spencer Cameron Gallery (☎ 465-1617; 10 N Independence Sq) In a suitably brightly colored building on the north side of the square, this gallery celebrates the works of local artists such as Rosey Cameron Smith.

Getting There & Around

Besides the main bus stop at the ferry terminal, you can stop minibuses going up the coasts on Cayon St and Wellington Rd.

AROUND BASSETERRE

One of the island's better bargains, **Bird Rock Beach Hotel** (☎ 465-8914; www.birdrockbeach.com; Bird Rock; r from US\$90; ☎ ☎ ☎), is 3 miles south along the shoreline from Basseterre. This well-maintained older motel-style 46-room property has its own small beach. It's not fancy but it is affordable and many rooms have ocean views from the balconies.

About 1 mile east of Basseterre, 0.5 miles south of where Bay Rd dead-ends into S Pelican Dr, your nose may lead you right to **Fancy Loaf Bakery** (☎ 465-5415; S Pelican Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), which sells top-notch bread, muffins, filled rolls and more from a low-end location.

Just north of Bay Rd, **Ram's Supermarket** (☎ 466-6065; S Pelican Dr; ☎ 8am-8pm) is one of the island's best food stores and has a wide selection.

FRIGATE BAY

Frigate Bay, located 3 miles southeast of Basseterre, is an isthmus with the calm Caribbean-side Frigate Bay Beach on one (the west) side. Here you'll find the sun chairs and water-sports gear for rent during the day. On the Atlantic side, there are resorts and condos, although north of the Marriott the beach remains wild and uncrowded. Condos are sprouting everywhere.

Frigate Bay is the center for resort development on St Kitts and you know you're getting

close by the blight of jewelry-store billboards lining the road. The area has several good restaurants but the real highlight is the dozens of beach bars lining the placid bayside sands. Many serve excellent food, others party all night.

Buses generally don't run to Frigate Bay, so if you don't have your own rental car you'll have to plan on doing some hefty walking or rely on taxis.

Activities

For diving trips and equipment hire, try **Frigate Bay Divers** (☎ 466-8413; enquiry@frigatebaydivers.com; Frigate Beach).

Mr X's Watersports (☎ 465-4995; www.mrxwatersports.com), near the Timothy Beach Resort, hires snorkel equipment for US\$10 a day and also offers a snorkeling tour from US\$25. It also rents Sunfish and Hobie Cat sailboats for US\$20 to US\$30 an hour, offers water skiing for US\$15 a circuit, and provides a shuttle to South Friar's Bay for US\$5 round-trip. Unlimited snorkeling, sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and boogie boarding for one day is available for US\$60, or four days for US\$150.

Sleeping

The following places all offer wi-fi access.

Frigate Bay Resort (☎ 465-8935; www.frigatebay.com; r US\$100-200; 📶 📺 🚿) Located on a knoll slightly above Frigate Bay Beach, this low-key place has 64 good-sized rooms and apartments wrapped around a sunny pool area. It's always worth spending the extra US\$40 or so a night for the poolside view as the 'hillside' view can mean 'road' view. There's wi-fi at the bar.

Timothy Beach Resort (☎ 465-8597, in the US & Canada 800-288-7991; www.timothybeachresort.com; r US\$120-250; 📶 📺 🚿) The best deal in Frigate Bay, this simple 60-unit low-rise hotel has rooms and apartments in several sizes which sleep up to six people. The cheapest rooms face the hill, most others have large balconies with sunset views. This is the closest place to the joys of Frigate Bay Beach.

St Kitts Marriott Resort (☎ 466-1200; www.marriott.com; 858 Frigate Bay Rd; r from US\$175; 📶 📺 🚿) Utterly out of scale from the rest of Frigate Bay, we hope nothing else comes along to dwarf it. This 513-room behemoth is the one major resort on the island and comes with every sort of activity and service. It also comes with plenty of opportunities to buy Marriott's time-share condos. Look for big discounts on the web.

Sealofts (☎ 465-1075; www.sealofts.com; units US\$200-360; 📶 📺 🚿) For two couples sharing, the two-bedroom two-level townhouse-style units here are good value. Each is a condo so decor can vary widely but all have balconies, cable TV, kitchens and wi-fi. The best have good views of the waves on the Atlantic Ocean. It's on the beach, and there are two tennis courts and a pool.

Eating & Drinking

BEACH BARS

The string of joints on the sand on Frigate Bay Beach should be a top destination no matter where you stay on St Kitts. Styles vary: at some your feet are in the sand and at others you're at a real table in an open-sided pavilion. At all the mood is just plain happy. Hours are as casual as the vibe – some close at 10pm, others at dawn.

Mr X's Shiggidy Shack (☎ 663-3983; meals from EC\$32) Lanterns on battered picnic tables on the sand create the ambience at this very popular joint on the south end of the strip. Most opt for the tasty grilled lobster (EC\$72). On many nights bands hook up to the generator and jam, on others, karaoke drives many to drink (more).

Monkey Bar (☎ 465-8050; meals from EC\$40) The tables here are elevated above the sand and even feature tablecloths – that still doesn't mean anybody is wearing shoes. You can work up your own puns in relation to the signature drink, the Magnetic Monkey, although it does have appeal. Presiding over the cheery crowds chowing on grilled seafood and ribs is famed ex-boxer Roy Gumbs.

Ziggy's (☎ 662-3104; meals from EC\$35) The party starts early at this jamming shack and goes late. Always a must-stop when bar-hopping across the sand.

RESTAURANTS

The Atlantic side of the Frigate Bay development has several excellent restaurants. Although not the bacchanals of the bayside, they are wonderfully casual.

PJ's Pizza Bar & Restaurant (☎ 465-8373; mains from EC\$30; 🍷; dinner Tue-Sun) Everything is fresh, from the pasta to the pizza, at this bistro run by two talented Canadians. The deceptively simple exterior gives little hint of the bold flavors within.

Rock Lobster (☎ 466-1092; mains US\$15-40; 🍷; dinner Thu-Tue) Like the clam shells, you'll be clappin' for the Mediterranean-style seafood and tapas

dishes at this relaxed open-sided patio and bar. Start with a plate of crispy calamari, follow up with the silky lobster bisque or maybe hold off for the namesake menu star. Just remember: watch out for that piranha!

SOUTHEAST PENINSULA

St Kitts' southeast peninsula is a scrubby wild plain filled with expansive white-sand beaches, grassy hills, barren salt ponds and the occasional meandering cow. However, this is changing as condos begin to sprout along the beaches. Meanwhile, there still are some beaches that offer the kinds of idyllic escape that brought you to the Caribbean in the first place.

Heading south on the main road, which runs for 8 miles from Frigate Bay, you cross over a hill with good views back to Frigate Bay and hit the narrowest part of the isthmus. To the east, a dirt path takes you to the beach on **South Friar's Bay**, a calm bay with a refreshingly uncluttered beach and a couple of beach bars.

On the Atlantic side, the beach on **North Friar's Bay** is utterly wild, with stiff swells and not so much as a cold-beer vendor in sight. Park along the road and search out one of the narrow trails for access. There's good hiking throughout the area.

Further on, the road curves around the **Great Salt Pond**; watch the sides of the road for the island's greatest concentrations of green vervet monkeys. Look for the narrow track to the south (left) that leads to **Cockleshell Bay**, a gray-sand beach with a stunning view of Nevis.

Follow the signs down a dirt track for the **Reggae Beach Bar** (☎ 762-5050; Cockleshell Beach; meals from US\$13; ☎ 10am-dusk), a sprawling beach bar that's a destination for day-tripping cruise-shippers. Burgers and conch fritters are big, as is the cocktail list. The staff are charm-ers, although they take a dim view of the conniving monkeys out to steal your lunch. There are free beach chairs, as well as snorkeling gear (US\$10), kayaks (US\$20) and more for rent.

At the west end of the beach, **Lion Rock Beach Bar** (meals US\$15; ☎ 10am-dusk) is a low-key alternative. Feast on platters of fresh fish or ribs in between volleyball matches.

AROUND NORTHERN ST KITTS

The green hills and abandoned cane fields spill down the mountains right to the shore

all around the main part of St Kitts. Circling the northern part of the island is a must, the only real decision you face is 'which way?' The entire circuit is about 35 miles and, with various stops and lunch at one of the plantation houses, can easily fill a day. Lunch may well be the deciding factor: if you get going early (say before 10am) start with the sight-heavy west coast, which will put you at the lunch spots on the far north and east coasts at about midday. Otherwise, with a late start, head first around the east, find some tasty food and then, well-sated, hit the sights in the west.

Rental car is the best way to make this trip. You can use minibuses but they stick to the main coast road and many of the places you want to visit are a hike inland. Without a car you can also take a tour (there are many) or hire a driver.

One interesting tour involves the **St Kitts Scenic Railway** (☎ 465-7263; www.stkittsscenicrailway.com; Bay Rd, Basseterre; adult/child from US\$100/50), which follows the tracks of the old narrow-gauge sugar railway that circled the island. Sadly, the train only runs on 18 miles of the tracks along the east and north coasts. The other 12 miles is by bus, but this lets the attraction sell tickets in both directions.

Passengers ride in custom double-decker cars. You can sightsee from the open-sided upper deck or kick back with rum punch on the air-con lower deck. The tour takes three hours in total and schedules vary depending on when cruise ships are due. The station is a three-minute walk south of the airport.

West Coast

About 4 miles west of Basseterre, look for **Bloody Point**, the site where more than 2000 native Caribs were massacred by joint British and French forces in 1626. Legend has it the place received its name because so much blood was spilled – it ran for three days straight.

After Bloody Point the road swings down to the seaside village of **Old Road Town**, the landing site of the first British settlers in 1623. On a narrow sliver between the road and the sea, **Sprat Net Bar & Grill** (☎ 465-6314; Old Road Bay; meals from EC\$60; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) is a popular place starting at sunset. A festive mix of visitors and locals chow down on succulent grilled lobster and ribs.

Just above Old Road Town, the 17th-century Romney Manor sugar estate has been turned into **Caribelle Batik** (☎ 465-6253;

☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri), which has a small workshop where you can watch the colorful fabric being made (and buy some in the form of T-shirts etc). The grounds feature lush formal gardens.

The short drive to the batik shop is a history lesson in itself. Immediately past the nursery school on Wingfield Rd are several large black stones with **petroglyphs** left by Amerindians. The road then passes the ruins of a mill and goes through a vestige of rainforest before it reaches the old estate.

Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park

Imposing **Brimstone Hill Fortress** (☎ 465-2609; foreign visitors adult/child US\$8/4; ☎ 9:30am-5:30pm) is the historical highlight of any visit to St Kitts and has been recognized by Unesco. Far larger than you'd think, this vast old military stronghold offers a personal glimpse into the violent and tumultuous past of the former Caribbean colonies.

The rambling 18th-century compound, which in its day was nicknamed the 'Gibraltar of the West Indies,' is one of the largest forts in the Caribbean. As a major British garrison, Brimstone Hill played a key role in battles with the French, who seized the fort in 1782 after the 1000 British soldiers inside were besieged for 30 days by 8000 French troops. The British regained it through the Treaty of Paris the following year and by the 1850s the fort was abandoned.

After a fire swept through Basseterre in 1867, some of the fort structures were partially dismantled and the stones used to rebuild the capital. In the 1960s major restoration was undertaken, and much of the fortress has been returned to its earlier grandeur. Queen Elizabeth II inaugurated the fort as a national park during her visit to St Kitts in October 1985. There is an excellent small museum as well as good displays scattered throughout the complex. The US\$5 audioguide is worthwhile.

The main hilltop compound, the **Citadel**, is lined with 24 cannons and provides excellent views of Sint Eustatius and Sandy Point Town. Inside the Citadel's old barrack rooms are displays on colonial history that do a fine job of documenting life back in the day. In one hilarious cartoon, an enlisted man offers commentary on an officer who's just had a poop.

Also worthwhile is the short stroll above the cookhouse to the top of Monkey Hill, which provides excellent coastal views. A

small theater next to the gift shop plays a brief video on the fort's history; a nearby canteen sells drinks and sandwiches.

Brimstone Hill, upon which the fortress stands, is an 800ft volcanic cone named for the odoriferous sulfur vents you will undoubtedly detect as you drive past the hill along the coastal road.

There's a good little café near the parking area. Winsome cats will appreciate any donation.

There is a 2-mile steep and winding uphill drive to the fort from the main coast road. Parking is near most of the important sights. If you want to use public transportation, minibuses from Basseterre to Sandy Point Town can drop you off where the access road meets the coast road. From there it's an energetic walk up to the fort.

North Coast

As you continue from Brimstone Hill Fortress, you'll pass through **Newton Ground**, a long and bustling town strung along the main road. This part of the island is slated for tourism development and plans call for a golf course, condos, a strip mall or two and undoubtedly a Starbucks. The lowlands are covered with abandoned sugar-cane fields that run up the hills to **Mt Liamuiga**, the 3792ft volcano that dominates the island's interior.

Driving along the north coast, about 2 miles past Newton Ground, you encounter **St Paul's**, a former village of cane workers that retains its rural charm and has a couple of cute groceries for refreshments.

A half a mile east, look for signs that take you up through the cane fields on a 1-mile dirt road to **Rawlins Plantation** (☎ 465-6221; www.rawlinsplantation.com; r from US\$300; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), a former sugar estate that is among the most gracious of St Kitts' plantation inns. Accommodation is in comfortable cottages with wooden floors, four-poster beds and separate sitting rooms or verandas. Rates include breakfast and afternoon tea. This is an excellent stop for lunch on your tour of the island. There's a lavish and creative West Indian buffet (US\$30) which you can enjoy from the tables on the broad veranda with views down to the coast and beyond to Sint Eustatius. At night, dinner (mains US\$35 to US\$50) features a creative menu of the expected seafood plus chicken and beef. Many of the seasonings are grown in the kitchen garden. The inn offers wi-fi.

Just west of the plantation, longtime local artist **Kate Spencer** (☎ 465-7740; www.katedesign.com; ☎ 11am-5pm) has a dream studio-gallery that enjoys fine views out to sea. Spencer's work embraces a variety of styles, and the results range from lush to stark. Prints of her evocative scenes of island life are a comparative bargain as are the postcards made from old island photos (EC\$10).

The coast roads continues to the village of **Dieppe Bay**. The open Atlantic is east and the surf can often be spectacular. There are frequent thin strands of grey-sand beach.

Right in town, the **Golden Lemon** (☎ 465-7260; www.goldenlemon.com; r from US\$200, villas from US\$325; ☎ ☎) is a vision in yellow right down to the color of the walls and the hibiscus flowers. If you like the idea of staying at a historic property but want to be at the beach, this fits both bills. Each room in the 17th-century manor house is decorated differently. A long porch lined with proper, comfy wooden chairs looks across the small lawn to the surf. An adjoining villa has rooms and apartments that are modern and posh. The common areas have wi-fi. The restaurant in the manor house serves up tasty casual lunches (mains US\$9 to US\$20) that include salads, burgers, sandwiches and seafood. Dinner is more elaborate with a changing set four-course menu (US\$35 to US\$60). Reserve in advance for dinner.

East Coast

Much of the east coast is thinly populated. Endless fields of sugar cane wave in the trade winds, never to decay a tooth again. The constant rustle of the leaves and the underlying roar of the surf are punctuated by the calls of songbirds. Signs reading 'Disasters... Swift, Sudden, Deadly. Let's get ready now!!!' add a sense of foreboding (we assume they mean hurricanes, but...).

At the south end of Sadlers, look for an old stone church down in the cane fields. There is a small melancholy cemetery; shortly beyond that a sign points to **Black Rocks**. A short drive down that side road ends at coastal cliffs and a view of some seaside lava rock formations. The cliffs are only a five-minute walk from the circle-island road.

Just north of Ottley's village, the coast road passes under a long stretch of beautiful mature plumeria trees. About a mile up a bumpy track above town, look for

Ottley's Plantation Inn (☎ 465-7234, in the US 800-772-3039; www.ottleys.com; r from US\$300, cottages from US\$500; ☎ ☎ ☎) A carefully manicured lawn fronts the 24 rooms scattered about in historic buildings and villas (some with plunge pools). 'Spot of croquet, old bean?' will seem appropriate in these gracious surrounds which include a high-end spa. Guests enjoy breakfast in the elegant open-air Royal Palm Restaurant, which makes a mean banana pancake. Lunch (US\$12 to US\$40) is popular with those touring the island. Choices include lobster wraps and excellent, inventive sandwiches. Dinner (three courses US\$66) is a more formal affair with fine steaks and seafood.

Just below Ottley's village, you may notice what appears to be a high-security old sugar mill. Signs reveal that it is not the HQ of Dr No but rather a research facility doing experiments on the local monkeys. No wonder the simians favor the remote southeast peninsula.

NEVIS

Nevis (nay-vis) is a smaller, neater version of St Kitts. It combines history, beauty and beaches in one tidy package; many – especially the locals – prefer it to its larger sibling. The only road of importance circles the island and you can make the circuit in a couple of hours. Stop to see the sights and have lunch at a plantation house and it can take all day.

There are good hikes in the hills and plenty of water sports at the beaches, which, like the rest of Nevis, are just large enough to suffice. Many people visit Nevis as part of a day trip but those in the know stay much longer. Sorting through the sights and activities, there's just enough to add spice to the day but not so much that important rest and relaxation are impeded. (Horatio Nelson fans, however, are likely to be so stimulated that they'll feel like they've died and been pickled in a barrel of brandy.)

The island's forested interior rises to scenic Nevis Peak, which is often cloaked in clouds. The coastal lowlands, where the larger villages are located, are much drier and support bougainvillea, hibiscus and other flowering bushes that attract numerous hummingbirds. It's a beautiful place.

Getting There & Away

For details on transport options to Nevis, see p515.

There are ferry services between Nevis and St Kitts; for details, see p516.

Getting Around

BUS

Buses run south and east from Memorial Sq in Charlestown; there's also no problem catching a minibus north from here. Fare ranges from EC\$1 to EC\$5. The service almost circles the island except for a short stretch between Mannings and Zion.

CAR & SCOOTER

Car-rental agencies:

Nevis Car Rental (☎ 469-9837; Newcastle).

Parry's Car Rental (☎ 469-5917; Charlestown).

TDC Auto Rentals (☎ 469-5690; tdcrentals@caribsurf.com; Bay Rd, Charlestown) Has an office across from the ferry dock; affiliated with Thrifty.

For scooter hire, **Forbes Scooter Rental** (☎ 469-2668) will meet up with you wherever is convenient.

TAXI

Nevis taxi rates include the following: airport to Charlestown and Pinney's Beach hotels US\$20, to Montpelier Plantation Inn US\$32; from Charlestown to Four Seasons US\$10, Oualie Beach Hotel US\$15. Service between 10pm to 6am adds 50% extra. For taxis call ☎ 469-1483 or ☎ 469-5631 in Charlestown and ☎ 469-9790 in Newcastle or have your hotel arrange one.

CHARLESTOWN

pop 1800

The ferry from St Kitts docks next to the center of Charlestown, Nevis' cute little capital, where all of the government and business structures coexist with tourist facilities and gingerbread Victorians. It's a fun spot for a stroll and is rarely overcrowded as large cruise ships bypass Nevis. Tourist tat is refreshingly limited.

The greater Charlestown area can be readily explored on foot – the museums and the Bath House are within walking distance. Just a 15-minute jaunt north of the center will put you on a lovely stretch of Pinney's Beach that's lined with coconut trees and invites languid strolls.

Information

You will find banks north of the tourist office on Main St, including First Caribbean and Scotiabank.

Alexandra Hospital (☎ 469-5473; Government Rd)

Chapter 1 Bookstore (☎ 469-0607; Cotton Ginney Mall) The nation's best bookstore has a small but inspired selection. Also magazines and newspapers.

Downtown Cybercafé (☎ 469-1999; Main St; internet per 15min US\$5, long-distance calls to US or Europe per min EC\$1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Friendly house with laptop connections, CD burning, snacks and drinks.

Nevis Tourist Office (☎ 469-7550, in the US 866-55-NEVIS; www.nevisisland.com; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) A two-minute walk east of the pier in the old colonial-era treasury building. It's packed with staff and helpful brochures.

Philatelic Bureau (☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Commemorative stamps are sold here, near the public market.

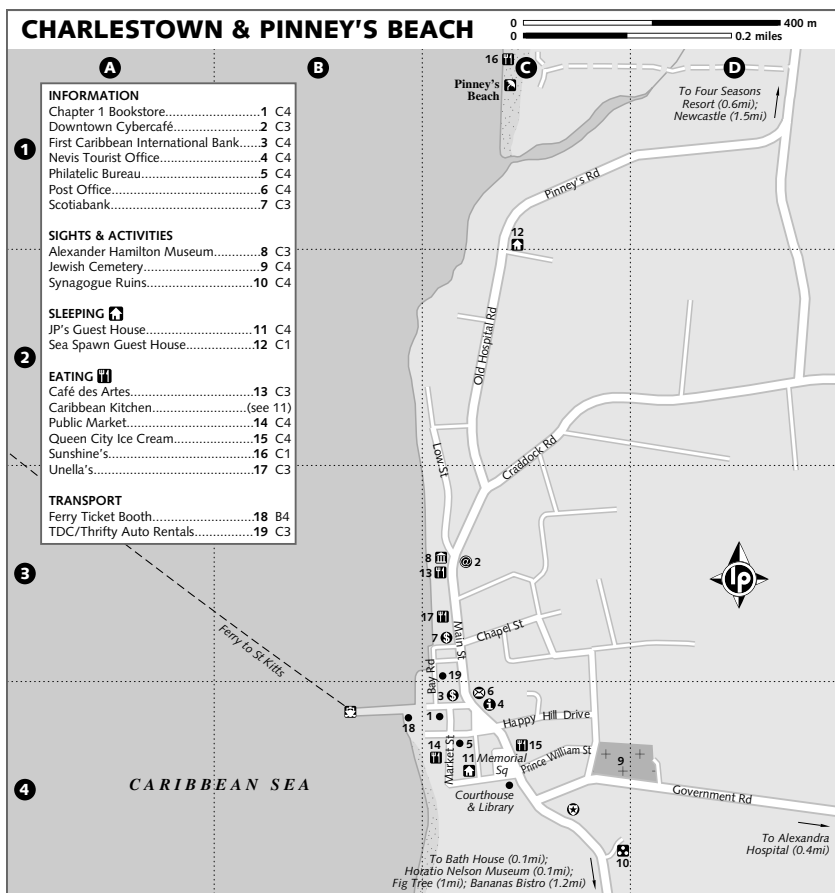
Post office (☎ 469-5521; Main St; ☎ 8am-3:30pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

Occupying a reconstructed Georgian-style building at the site where American statesman Alexander Hamilton was born in 1755, is the **Alexander Hamilton Museum** (☎ 469-5786; www.nevis-nhcs.org; Main St; adult/child US\$5/2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat). The US founding father was born out of wedlock and there has always been debate about the identity of his father. His childhood (he moved to St Croix in 1765) was tumultuous: death, suicide and abandonment were all factors. Exhibits trace Hamilton's life. Shady grounds offer a lovely picnic or rest spot.

A couple of minutes' walk up Government Rd from the town center is a small and largely forgotten **Jewish cemetery**, which consists of a grassy field of horizontal gravestones. The oldest stone dates from 1679, and quite a few others date from the early 18th century, when an estimated 25% of the nonslave population on Nevis was Jewish. In addition, it's now believed that the site of the original synagogue, which may be the oldest in the Caribbean, has been identified. An ongoing excavation is about 75yd south of the cemetery; to get there, take the dirt path that begins opposite the cemetery's southwest corner and follow it to the **ruins** just beyond the government offices.

The **Horatio Nelson Museum** (☎ 469-0408; Building Hill Rd; adult/child US\$5/2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), about 100yd east of the old Bath House,



contains memorabilia relating to Lord Nelson, whose fateful visit to the island in 1787 led to his unhappy marriage to Fanny Nisbet, the niece of the island's governor. Among the items on display is a plate from their wedding. It has a crack. Other exhibits relate to local history; there's an excellent selection of Nevis-related books for sale.

The **Bath House** was the first hotel built in the Caribbean, in 1778. Now restored, it is used for government offices. Its name comes from the mineral-laden springs just below. Popular with the spa set in colonial days, it's now a popular spot for locals to take a dip. Although spiffed up, the pools are still a bit rough and you may share your visit with a goat.

Sleeping

Charlestown is home to the only budget options on Nevis.

Sea Spawn Guest House (☎ 469-5239; seaspawn@yahoo.com; r US\$50-65; 🚽 📺) Rooms here are simple, clean and less than 0.6 miles from both the town and Pinney's Beach. Rooms upstairs have cable TV and fridges and share a kitchen. Two budget rooms downstairs (EC\$100) lack air-con and are 'aimed at older people.'

JP's Guest House (☎ 469-0319; jpwalters@caribsurf.com; r US\$65) Two minutes from the ferry dock, this tidy place is on the 2nd floor of a commercial building. The 10 rooms have fans and fridges and look a bit like your sister's bedroom. The lounge has cable TV.

Eating

Queen City Ice Cream (☎ 469-5989; Memorial Sq; cone EC\$5; ☎ 11am-7pm) Choose from five or six flavors (coconut, yum!) that go down easy on a hot day.

Caribbean Kitchen (☎ 469-0572; dishes EC\$10-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) The name sums it up nicely: jerk chicken, steamed fish, fungi and more are offered. Other menu items are more prosaic: English breakfasts, burgers, sandwiches etc. This is a local lunchtime fave.

ourpick **Café des Arts** (☎ 469-7098; meals EC\$15-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Right next to the Hamilton museum, this quirky café serves local fare in a quiet garden courtyard shaded by banana trees. Pancakes, omelettes, many salads, paninis and more highlight the menu. Inside the old house there is a two-level gallery with local works.

Bananas Bistro (☎ 469-1891; mains from US\$20; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Perched a bit up the mountain on the ruins of the Hamilton Estate, Bananas is a state of mind not a fruit. Run by Gillian Smith, who also owns the delightful Café des Arts, this hand-built plantation-style house features a veranda that's the perfect place for both for smooth tropical drinks and ambitious Caribbean fusion cuisine. Think guava-barbecued shrimp and marinated tuna fillets. Expect to be happily surprised throughout the evening.

Unella's (☎ 469-5574; dishes EC\$40-60; ☎ 8am-late) A 2nd-floor open-air restaurant, it has good views of the harbor and St Kitts. Dishes range from breakfasts to salads and sandwiches at lunch. At night the grilled seafood is the thing as are the potent drinks from the bar.

The **public market** (Market St; ☎ 7am-4:30pm Mon-Sat) is a great place to feel the fruit, low-hanging or otherwise. Huge bunches of bananas, rosemary, ginger, oranges are sold by local farmers.

Getting Around

Charlestown is tiny so everything can be reached on foot. Buy tickets for the ferries at the booth located at the pedestrian area in front of the pier.

PINNEY'S BEACH

Pinney's Beach is a decent stretch of tan sand that runs along the west coast within walking distance of Charlestown. The beach, which is backed almost its entire length by spiky coconut palms (many lost their tops during

recent storms), has lovely views of St Kitts across the channel.

Some low-end beach bars coexist happily with a posh resort.

The 196 rooms at the luxury **Four Seasons Resort** (☎ 469-1111, in the US 800-332-3442; r from US\$800) are discreetly set in low-rise buildings deeply spaced on the lush ground fronting the beach. The decor is a rich blend of muted tropical colors, and each room has a large patio. Amenities are many: three free-form pools, 10 tennis courts, a championship 18-hole golf course, full spa and several restaurants. Rates plummet to 50% in the low season.

Ten minutes' walk north of Charlestown on Pinney's Beach (and 30 seconds south of the Four Seasons) is **Sunshine's** (☎ 469-5817; meals US\$14-30; ☎ 11am-late), a classic beach joint that's been getting people in a party mood for decades. It's home to the much-hyped Killer Bee, a loaded house punch whose effects are recorded in the hundreds of photos on the walls. The platters of grilled seafood are quite good.

The beach boozier for a new generation, the reggae shack/bar **Chevy's** (☎ 3pm-late) gets a good mix of locals and visitors who party 'til late just south of Sunshine's.

OUALIE BEACH

Oualie Beach takes its name from an Indian word meaning 'beautiful waters', or so they say. It's a long, laid-back strip of gray sand fronted by waters that are indeed beautiful and are generally calm and good for swimming. There is a dive, water-sports and bike shop; you can rent beach chairs and enjoy the views of St Kitts.

Between here and Pinney's Beach, there are many low-rise condos cropping up. About midway, **St Thomas Anglican Church** stares serenely – and stolidly – out to sea. Goats keep the cemetery grounds trimmed.

Windsurfing Nevis (☎ 469-9682; windsurf@caribsurf.com; Oualie Beach) rents out bikes from US\$25 per day. The owner, Winston Crooke, leads the island's mountain-biking team. It also rents out windsurfing boards from US\$20 per hour and US\$75 a day, and offers beginner lessons for US\$55.

Scuba Safaris (☎ 469-9518; www.scubanevis.com; Oualie Beach) offers single-tank dives for US\$65, two-tank dives for US\$95, night dives for US\$90 and also a half-day snorkeling trip for US\$45.

TWIST MY ARM: THE SPOTS THE AUTHORS WANTED TO KEEP SECRET

On a quiet bit of Nevis coast just south of the airport, **Nisbet Plantation Beach Club** (☎ 469-9325; www.nisbetplantation.com; r from US\$400; 🏠 📶 🚿) is an upscale beach resort on one of the island's nicest and least-visited beaches. Rooms have a plantation motif drawn from the site's history: it's the location of the old Nisbet plantation. The family here included Fanny Nisbet, who for little better and mostly worse, married Horatio Nelson on Nevis in 1787. The beachside café is a fine spot for a casual lunch (US\$15) with views out to the stormy Atlantic.

Perched on a knoll at the north end of Oualie Beach, the accommodations at **Hurricane Cove Bungalows** (☎ 469-9462; www.hurricane Cove.com; 1-/2-bedroom cottage from US\$200/300; 🏠 📶 🚿) are in 12 angular wooden cottages. Units have sublime views as well as kitchens, porches and ceiling fans. The view from the pool is captivating; snorkeling gear is free.

The family who runs **Oualie Beach Resort** (☎ 469-9735; www.oualiebeach.com; r from US\$250; 🏠 📶 🚿) has been on Nevis for over 350 years. Rooms are scattered about the site in a several low-rise buildings. The architecture is humble but the units are comfortable and well equipped (including wi-fi). The many activities available make this a good spot for anyone who wants the beach as a holiday focus. (Anyone?)

SOUTH NEVIS

The main circular road crosses the southern part of Nevis between cloud-shrouded Nevis Peak and Saddle Hill, passing through the districts of Fig Tree and Gingerland. This area was the center of Nevis' sugar industry in colonial days, and there are many crumbling sugar-mill stacks to evoke that era. A few of the former plantation estates have been converted into atmospheric inns. The entire area is lush and green; watch for mongooses darting across the road in search of rodents.

As the main road hits the east coast, the population thins out and the sloping, green flatlands – once sugar-cane plantations – run down to the turbulent Atlantic. It's desolate and dramatic. The road itself is much improved and smooth for most of its 22-mile route circling the island.

Sights & Activities

The following sights are signposted along the main road.

ST JOHN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

St John's, on the main road in the village of Fig Tree, is a stone church that dates from 1680. A

copy of the church register, dated March 11, 1787, which records the marriage of Horatio Nelson and Fanny Nisbet, can be found in a glass case at the rear of the church. If you peek beneath the red carpet in the center aisle you'll find a continuous row of tombstones of island notables who died in the 1700s. Note that the Nelson marriage foundered in 1798 when Nelson met the notorious Lady Emma Hamilton.

BOTANICAL GARDENS OF NEVIS

Covering 8 acres of land only a few minutes' drive southwest of Montpelier Plantation Inn and just southeast of Charlestown, the **Botanical Gardens of Nevis** (☎ 469-3399; adult/child US\$10/7; 🕒 9am-4:30pm Mon-Sat) displays an attractive array of tropical greenery, orchid and rose gardens, and a rainforest conservatory. Modern sculpture of varying taste accents the flora. On the grounds is the 1787 restaurant, see p512.

HORSE RACING

On the way to Windward Beach is the **horse-racing track**, the setting for a Nevisian pastime that takes place on various holidays during the year. The jockeys train throughout most of the year. Whether you're lucky enough to arrive during a race holiday (contact the tourist office in Charlestown for dates) or you just happen upon a training session at this makeshift track, the view of Windward Beach in the background is stunning.

To get there, turn south at the Gingerland post office in Market Shop and follow the signs.

WINDWARD BEACH

Windward Beach, also known as Indian Castle Beach, is the only easily accessible beach on the southern part of the island. Backed by beach morning glory and low scrubby trees, it has fine gray sand and fairly active surf. Unless it's a weekend, the odds are good that,

with the exception of a few rummaging goats, you'll have the beach to yourself.

NEVISIAN HERITAGE VILLAGE

This open-air **museum** (☎ 469-5521; Stoney Grove; adult/child US\$3/1; 🕒 9am-3:30pm Mon-Sat), located 500m west of Zion, is a collection of cottages that gives visitors a view of the social evolution of Nevisian history dating back to Carib times. See a simple thatched Arawak shelter; try to lift a chattel house (simple wooden structures sugarcane workers would move from job to job – literally an early mobile home). It's not to be missed during Culturama (see p514) when residents engage in the old traditions.

Sleeping & Eating

Three plantation estates offer elegant stays that are among the finest on the island. You can sample some of the vintage atmosphere at a casual lunch.

Golden Rock Plantation Inn (☎ 469-3346; www.golden-rock.com; r from US\$200; 📺 📶) The funkiest

choice among the plantation inns, the owner's great-great-great-grandfather built this lava-stone sugar plantation by hand in the 1810s. The seven rooms stress casual comfort over elegance and vary greatly in size and style. There's a spring-fed pool, tennis court and nature trails. Guests can use a shuttle to Charlestown and the beaches. Enjoy lunch (US\$8 to US\$22) on a cobblestone patio. Lobster salads and sandwiches are always crowd-pleasers. Dinner (from US\$50) features a seasonal four-course meal and requires advance reservations.

Montpelier Plantation Inn (☎ 469-3462; www.montpeliernevis.com; r from US\$290; 📺 📶) This 17th-century inn, just southeast of Charlestown, has hosted Horatio Nelson's doomed marriage to Fanny Nisbet in 1787 and much later, the doomed Princess Diana. Happily, the past is past and this beautiful estate evokes a relaxed contemporary elegance in addition to its long history. The luxuries are real but understated – you can select a book from the library, use the wi-fi and then loll

HIKING BUCOLIC NEVIS

Many think Nevis has some of the best hiking in the Caribbean for its blend of nature and history. A Peace Corps volunteer on Nevis over 20 years ago, Jim Johnson fell in love with the island in more ways than one. He married his wife Nikki and stayed. Today he leads hikes through the highlands above the coast via **Top to Bottom** (☎ 469-9080; www.walknevis.com). There are over a dozen hikes, ranging from walks to estate ruins, monkey-spotting hikes in the jungle and the more strenuous hikes to the top of Nevis Peak. Each outing costs US\$20, except for the challenging treks to Nevis Peak, which cost from US\$30 to US\$40. The fruit-spotting hike is a fave.

For hiking what makes Nevis different from other nearby islands?

The wide choice of trails and guides, from simple to extreme.

Why is it a good place to hike?

It still has much of its history in the form of hidden ruins as well as many nature areas for birds, butterflies and flowers.

What's your favorite wild fruit and why?

I like coconuts because of the taste and the challenge of opening them without a machete!

And how do you do that?

You put the coconut on a flat rock with the pointed end up and hit it at the right spot with a 10-pound stone; the husk should come off in one or two hits. Then poke a stick in and suck out the water. Hit the coconut right again and the meat comes loose from the shell. The tricky part is not hitting your foot with the stone as the coconut can bounce.

What fruit surprises people?

Most are surprised by tamarinds as they taste like very sour candy.

What still surprises you as you hike Nevis?

We often find new plants, bugs or birds even after doing the trails thousands of times. And I'm still surprised by how much has been lost or forgotten, but still exists in the form of hidden places up the mountain.

Most amazing discovery in your years of walking that still makes you go 'wow'?

I still find the bats (we have over eight species) amazing.

back for a snooze in the gazebo. Mealtimes, however, will perk you right up. Lunch (meals US\$10 to US\$20) is served on a shaded terrace and includes salads and sandwiches. Dinner (three courses from US\$60) is a more elaborate affair featuring a changing menu of island produce, steak, duck and seafood. The wine list is extensive.

Hermitage (☎ 469-3477, in the US 800-682-4025; www.hermitagenewis.com; Gingerland; r from US\$325; 📍 📍) The solid-wood plantation house, which is over 260 years old and furnished with antiques, serves as a parlor and evening gathering spot. The various cottages and villas mirror the rustic construction. You can't help but feel transported to another era as you sit on your little porch (or swing in a hammock) taking in the views from the plantation's 800ft elevation. Lunch (US\$10 to US\$20) here is the usual casual affair with fresh fare like salads and sandwiches served on a lovely veranda. Dinner (four courses US\$65) is more elaborate. The changing menus meld the Mediterranean with the Caribbean. Think molasses, rum, garlic, sun-dried tomatoes and more. The inn has wi-fi access.

1787 (☎ 469-2875; Botanical Gardens of Nevis; mains US\$10-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) A good place for sundowners, 1787 (the name recalls the year of the ill-fated Nelson-Nisbet marriage, so don't pop the question here) has views from a broad veranda of the botanical garden and Nevis Peak. Lunches feature creative sandwiches like a grilled brie and prosciutto number, while dinner offers crowd-pleasing steaks and seafood.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotels on St Kitts and Nevis add a 7% government tax, a 2% island enhancement tax, and normally a 10% to 15% service charge onto room rates.

There are large resorts on each island, but most accommodations are still small-scale hotels, grand plantation inns, inexpensive guesthouses or condominiums. However, a resort building boom is underway in St Kitts.

Camping is technically allowed, but neither island is set up with facilities. Contact the tourist office on either island to inquire.

ACTIVITIES

Beaches & Swimming

The islands' beaches have a hard time competing with the stunning white stretches found on Anguilla and Antigua, but there are reasonable strands on St Kitts and a couple of attractive options on Nevis.

St Kitts' best beaches are on the south end of the island at Frigate Bay, Friar's Bay and in the sheltered bays of the southeast peninsula. Beaches along the main body of the island are thin strands of black and gray sands.

On Nevis, Pinney's Beach, which runs north from Charlestown, has a Robinson Crusoe look and feel. It's long and lovely, backed by coconut palms.

There's also a pleasant little beach at Oualie Bay.

Boat Trips

There are no shortage of water-born fun boats aimed at the rum-guzzling, buffet-ravaging cruise-ship crowd. Most circle St Kitts or make a jaunt to Nevis. The following are somewhat less mob-minded and do allow you to enjoy a sail on the azure sea.

Blue Water Safaris (☎ 466-4933; www.bluewatersafaris.com; St Kitts) Full-day catamaran cruises for US\$75, with snorkeling, lunch on Pinney's Beach and an open bar thrown in. Sunset and moonlight cruises are US\$40 per person, plus there are fishing charters.

Leeward Island Charters (☎ 465-7474; bookings@spiritofstkitts.com; St Kitts) This class act offers a full day of snorkeling and lunch on the *Spirit of St Kitts* catamaran for US\$80/40 for adults/children, as well as sunset cruises for US\$45.

Cycling

For information on cycle rentals on Nevis, see p509.

Diving & Snorkeling

Most beaches popular with visitors will have some place for you to rent snorkeling gear, usually for about US\$10.

NEVIS

Nevis' diving scene is a low-key affair, and features undisturbed coral reefs that are seldom visited by divers.

Two popular diving sites off Nevis are Monkey Shoals, a densely covered reef close to Oualie Beach, and Devil's Caves, on the western side of the island, with coral grottoes and underwater lava tubes in 40ft of water.

For diving and snorkeling trips and hire, see p509.

ST KITTS

St Kitts has healthy, expansive reefs and varied marine life that includes rays, barracuda, garden eels, nurse sharks, sea turtles, sea fans, giant barrel sponges and black coral.

One popular dive spot is Sandy Point Bay, below Brimstone Hill, with an array of corals, sponges and reef fish as well as some coral-encrusted anchors from the colonial era. Among a handful of wreck dives is the 148ft freighter *River Taw*, which sank in 50ft of water in 1985 and now harbors corals and fish.

There are diving outfits at Basseterre (p500) and Frigate Bay (p503).

White House Bay, on the southeast peninsula of St Kitts, is a favorite place for snorkeling. All of the dive companies rent snorkel gear for around US\$10 a day.

Hiking

Both St Kitts and Nevis have an abundance of untouched native vegetation, a good selection of easy and tough treks, and great views from the mountainous interiors. Tracks on St Kitts and Nevis are not well defined, but there are moves to improve the tracks, and it's advisable to do any major trekking with a guide.

For hikes on Nevis, see the boxed text, p511.

Greg's Safaris (☎ 465-4121; www.gregsafaris.com) has a half-day hike into the rainforest of St Kitts for US\$60. The guide moves at a measured pace, identifies flora and fauna, and stops to sample fruits along the way. Among three other hikes is a full-day tour of Mt Liamuiga volcano for US\$90, including lunch.

Horseback Riding

Nevis is the place for saddling up and exploring the verdant and sandy scenery. Rides typically start at around US\$40 for one hour.

For riding on Nevis, try **Nevis Equestrian Centre** (☎ 469-8118; alitalk@caribcable.com; Cotton Ground), or head out to the beach, up to the mountain or both with **Hermitage** (☎ 469-3477; nevherm@caribsurf.com), which also offers carriage rides.

Windsurfing

Oualie Bay, at the northwest side of Nevis, catches the trade winds and offers a sandy launch in shallow waters that's good for beginners. There are also opportunities for wave jumping and other advanced techniques. See p509 for rental and lesson information.

Other Water Sports

For water skiing, sailing, kayaking and boogie boarding on St Kitts, see Mr X's Watersports (p503) at Frigate Bay.

For kayaking on Nevis, check with Windsurfing Nevis (p509) at Oualie Beach.

BOOKS

Creating the Better Hour: Lessons from William Wilberforce by Chuck Stetson looks at the life of the important 18th-century British abolitionist who found his voice after he learned of the horrible conditions of the slaves on St Kitts.

Out of Crowded Vagueness: A History of the Islands of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla by Brian Dyde is a recently published and highly readable history of the islands.

Swords Ships and Sugar: A History of Nevis to 1900 by Vincent K Hubbard is an enthusiastic if rough-around-the-edges account of the island's past. It's widely sold on Nevis.

BUSINESS HOURS

St Kitts and Nevis follow Caribbean conventions. Businesses are open 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and often on Saturdays until about 2pm. Shops are open until 6pm or 7pm weekdays and until late Saturday afternoon. Touristy places will be open later

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** Local newspapers include the weekly *Sun*, *Democrat* and *Observer* and the biweekly *Labour Spokesman*.
- **Radio** For local radio try FM 90.3, 96.0 or 98.9 for reggae, soca, calypso or island music.
- **Electricity** Most electric current is 220V, 60 cycles; many hotels supply electricity at 110V, and North American two-pin sockets are common.
- **Weights & Measures** Imperial. Speed-limit signs are in miles, as are rental-car odometers.

and if not already open on Sunday, will do so if a cruise ship is in port.

Restaurants are good until 9 or 10pm (in general, breakfast is 7am to 10am, lunch noon to 2pm, and dinner 6pm to close); bars close somewhat later, especially on weekends. Nevis in particular is not an island for partying until dawn.

CHILDREN

Reefs in resort areas protect the beaches making for gentle swimming conditions, while larger hotels often have programs for kids.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Common sense should prevail while walking around Basseterre at night. If the area looks dodgy, it is.

Driving at night on either island is a time for great caution: kids, dogs, goats and yes, enormous potholes, can appear out nowhere. And the law lets people swill beer while they fly over the lanes.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

The **Honorary Council** (☎ 466-8888; Basseterre) for the UK is on St Kitts. For the main embassy representing the region, contact the UK embassy on Antigua (p536).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

St Kitts Music Festival (www.stkittsmusicfestival.net)

This four-day festival in the last week in June brings together top-name calypso, soca, reggae, salsa, jazz and gospel performers from throughout the Caribbean.

Culturama Nevis has been celebrating this week-long event for over 30 years. Held in late July to early August, it features music, crafts, and beauty and talent pageants, culminating with a parade on Culturama Tuesday.

Carnival Running from December 24 to January 3, this is the biggest yearly event on St Kitts, with 10 days of calypso competitions, costumed street dances and steel-pan music. Many businesses are closed during this period.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

While there is no real gay scene on St Kitts and Nevis, there is no overt discrimination either.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays on St Kitts and Nevis include the following:

New Year's Day January 1

Good Friday Late March/early April

Easter Monday Late March/early April

Labour Day First Monday in May

Whit Monday Eighth Monday after Easter

Emancipation Day First Monday in August

National Hero's Day September 17

Independence Day September 19

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

Basseterre has internet cafés and most hotels offer wi-fi and computers in the lobby.

MAPS

On St Kitts, the tourist office's *Road Map & Guide* will suffice for most visitors. On Nevis, the excellent *Journey Map* covers practically every crevice on the island and has a detailed road map of both the island and Charlestown. Both maps are available at most hotels, the tourist offices and many shops.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Both islands have well-equipped hospitals. For St Kitts, see p500; for Nevis see p507.

MONEY

The official currency is the Eastern Caribbean dollar, and although US dollars are accepted almost everywhere, ATMs don't dispense them. Instead, most large banks will issue dollars from a teller for a US\$5 fee.

Hotels and restaurants add a 7% tax and usually a 10% service charge as well. When a restaurant doesn't add a service charge, a 10% tip is appropriate.

POST

When mailing a letter to the islands, follow the addressee's name with the town and 'St Kitts, West Indies' or 'Nevis, West Indies.'

TELEPHONE

The St Kitts and Nevis area code is ☎ 869. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1-869, followed by the seven-digit local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international access code + ☎ 869 + the local phone number. We've included only the seven-digit local number in St Kitts and Nevis listings in this chapter. St Kitts numbers start with ☎ 465 or ☎ 466 and Nevis numbers with ☎ 469. Mobiles begin with ☎ 7.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 911
- **Police** ☎ 911

Phone calling cards are widely available. Local cell phones use the GSM system.

Avoid credit-card phones, as they charge a rapacious US\$2 per minute or more locally, US\$4 to other Caribbean islands or the US, and up to US\$8 elsewhere.

For directory assistance, dial ☎ 411.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Nevis Tourist Office (☎ 469-7550, in the US 866-556-3847; www.nevisnaturally.com; Main St; Charlestown; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Highly useful.

St Kitts Tourism Authority (☎ 465-4040; www.stkitts tourism.kn; Pelican Mall, Bay Rd, Basseterre; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) A small office.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

International resorts generally have good accommodations for people with disabilities. Otherwise much of the islands are something of a challenge. Fortunately most everything of interest can be reached directly by car. The must-see Brimstone Hill Fortress has both accessible and inaccessible areas.

VISAS

Visas are not required by most nationalities for stays of less than six months.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women won't find anything especially concerning about a visit to these islands as long as normal caution prevails.

TRANSPORTATION**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Entering St Kitts & Nevis**

Visitors from most countries need only a passport to enter St Kitts or Nevis (US citizens see the boxed text, p830), as well as a round-trip or onward ticket.

Air

St Kitts has regional service plus nonstop flights to the US while Nevis has service that is mostly regional; to get here you'll need to change planes somewhere.

NEVIS

Nevis International Airport (NEV; ☎ 469-9040), in Newcastle, is a small operation with an ATM.

The following airlines connect Nevis with these cities (some services are seasonal and only weekly):

American Eagle (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com)

San Juan

LIAT (☎ 469-9333; www.liat.com) Antigua

Winair (☎ 469-5302; www.fly-winair.com) Sint Maarten

ST KITTS

St Kitts' modern international airport, **Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw Airport** (SKM; ☎ 465-8121), is located on the northern outskirts of Basseterre. The departure area is bright and airy but amenities are limited to a bare-bones snack bar. There is an ATM before security.

The following airlines connect St Kitts with these cities (some services are seasonal and only weekly):

American/American Eagle (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Miami, New York-Kennedy, San Juan

Delta (☎ 800-221-1212) Atlanta

LIAT (☎ 465-8200; www.liat.com) Antigua, St Thomas, Sint Maarten

US Airways (☎ 800-622-1015; www.usairways.com) Charlotte, NC

Winair (☎ 465-2186; www.fly-winair.com) Sint Maarten

Sea

Other than the ferries linking St Kitts and Nevis, there are no services to other islands.

CRUISE SHIP

Scores of cruise ships on eastern Caribbean itineraries visit St Kitts, docking at Basseterre's deep-water harbor. It can be a good idea to email the tourist office when you know your travel dates to get the cruise schedule, as certain places such as the beaches in the south or the St Kitts Scenic Railway are mobbed. Nevis lacks a dock that can handle the enormous boats so visits are limited to passengers brought ashore by tender from small ships (usually under 300 passengers) anchored offshore or those on flying visits as part of excursions from St Kitts.

See p830 for information about cruise-ship travel throughout the Caribbean.

YACHT

St Kitts and Nevis are right on the Eastern Caribbean yachting circuit, although their lack of natural harbors like those on Antigua

keep the numbers of people mooring for any period of length low.

The two ports of entry are Basseterre and Charlestown. On both islands, customs is near the ferry dock and is open 8am to noon and 1pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. Boaters will need permits to visit other anchorages and a special pass to go between the two islands.

GETTING AROUND

Boat

Several passenger-only ferry companies provide service between Basseterre and Charlestown. The trip takes 35 to 45 minutes and is both a pleasant and scenic way to travel. Fares are set at adult/child EC\$20/10 one way. In each port, be sure to pay the EC\$1 port tax before you depart. Tickets are sold starting about 30 minutes before sailings. It's a good idea to arrive early as some boats sell out.

Each ferry company operates by its own schedule. Some are more reliable than others. It is a good idea to confirm schedules in advance, which you can do at the ports, tourist offices or by calling ☎ 466-4636. Between the various boats there's service roughly every two hours (much less frequently on Sundays). Boat quality varies: some lack open decks, forcing passengers into close proximity, which may or may not be a good thing when you hit swells.

Ferry boats include the following:

Carib Breeze/Carib Surf (☎ 466-6734; mmtscaribe@hotmail.com) The most reliable service. Both boats are large, with enclosed cabins and large, sunny upper decks.

Carib Queen (☎ 664-9811) Two trips daily.

Mark Twain (☎ 469-0403) No open deck.

Sea Hustler (☎ 469-0403) No Sunday service; children under five free.

People with cars can use the new **Seabridge** (☎ 765-7053; www.seabridgeskn.com) car-ferry service. It links Major's Bay in the south of St Kitts with Cades Point on Nevis. It operates every two hours during daylight hours and trips take 45 minutes. The one-way fare is EC\$75 for one car and a driver. Additional passengers cost EC\$15. Round-trips cost EC\$125. If you have a rental car on one island, this can be a good way to explore the other island on a day trip without having to rent another car.

You can also freelance your way across the 2 miles that separates the islands. At most of the southern beaches on St Kitts you're likely to find a fisherman willing to run you over to

Nevis or even St-Barthélemy or Sint Eustatius for very negotiable rates that start at US\$30. The rides can be wet and wild.

Bus

Buses on both islands can resemble minivan taxis, so check the front plate to be sure. An 'H' means private bus and a 'T' means taxi (an 'R' is a rental car and a 'P' or 'PA' is a resident's car).

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVER'S LICENSE

Foreigners must purchase a visitor driver's license, which costs US\$24 and is valid for 90 days. Most rental companies will issue you one when you fill out your contracts, and a license on one island is good for the other.

On St Kitts, you can also get a license at the **police station** (Pond Rd; ☎ 24hr) on the east side of Basseterre. It has a separate window designated for issuing visitor licenses.

RENTAL

Rental companies will usually meet you at the airport, ferry port or your hotel. Daily rates start at about US\$40. You really won't need a 4WD for going anywhere – unless it's rainy season. Most of the major firms have local affiliates. Cars tend to be in good shape on St Kitts but apparently go to die on Nevis. Many on the latter are left-hand drive which can add to the challenge of left-side driving.

ROAD RULES

Drive on the left side of the road, often around goats, cows and pedestrians. Speed limits are posted in miles per hour, and are generally between 20mph and 40mph. Gas costs over EC\$12 per gallon.

Scooters

Scooters are good ways to get around either island. Distances are never far and there's always a good excuse to stop and explore a beach or historic ruin. Just watch out for the minibuses. Daily rates start at US\$35 and there are discounts the longer you rent.

Taxi

Taxis meet scheduled flights on both islands. See p499 and p507 for sample fares.

Taxi island tours on both islands cost around US\$75. Those short on time can take a two-hour half-island tour for US\$50.

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