

# LUXURY TRAVEL

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

## OFF-SEASON TRAVEL THAT IS RIGHT ON TARGET

*Live the Good Life Without the Crowds at Le Sereno in Saint Barth's*



Le Sereno is a true boutique hotel, featuring 37 suites and villas, all of which boast a view of the ocean and some of which sit directly on the soft sandy beach.

I am sitting in my Grand Suite Plage at the posh Le Sereno on stunning Saint Barthélemy, fully understanding why this hotel, just like this star-struck island, has become the It Place for the in crowd.

Saint Barth's, as it is affectionately known, has, over the past 20 years or so, established itself as a favorite spot for jet setters to drop anchor from their 150-foot yachts and frolic over the holidays. But like that saying about partying that claims "weekends are for amateurs," I have realized that there is far more to this island than a couple of weeks in winter and that it can most fully be appreciated in the so-called "low season" for any number of reasons: Visitors can take advantage of beaches that are virtually empty; the weather is sublime (sunny and dry with temperatures in the low 80s with a light breeze); the shopping is marvelous, filled to the brim with world-class boutiques (think Bulgari, Dior, Chanel and Hermès, among others) which all seem to be having major sales; and there is never a wait for a table at any of the island's wonderful restaurants. Saint Barth's also seems to be filled with charming and good-looking people, so

much so that you might wonder if residents had to submit head shots and audition in order to be allowed to live here. And contrary to what you might think, they make visitors feel so welcome that leaving becomes the last thing to enter your mind.

Le Sereno (formerly the Sereno Beach Hotel) is located on the famous Grand Cul de Sac Beach, which was rated by the Travel Channel as one of the world's 10 most beautiful beaches. Redesigned and

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furnished by world-renowned Parisian designer Christian Liaigre, the resort is a boutique hotel in the truest sense, with only 37 suites and villas, all of which boast a view of the ocean and some of which sit directly on the soft sandy beach. A freshwater pool—with stones imported from Laos that give it the same turquoise sheen as the sea that is mere steps away—is surrounded by cushy wooden chaises

and mature palm trees, making it the perfect spot for sunbathing.

The rooms are at once modern and classic, outfitted with every modern amenity such as an in-room safe, plasma television with satellite channels in English and French, electric mosquito swatter, portable iPod docking station, high-speed Internet with Wi-Fi (available throughout the resort), and a complete minibar. Add to this the Liaigre-designed décor, which features extensive use of teak, and creature comforts including remarkably comfortable king-sized, four-poster Zanzibar canopy beds with linens designed especially for Le Sereno by D. Porthault and sumptuous bathrooms with large bathtubs, rain showers, extralong vanities and fabulous bath products from Ex Voto Paris.

Suites that are not directly on the beach are nearby on a small bluff, surrounded by bougainvillea in vibrant shades of yellow and pink, and have wooden terraces with hedges on both sides for privacy (designed, along with the supple gardens, by Chilean landscape maestro Fernando Tabora) and comfy



Clockwise from above: The tranquil pool area offers stunning views of the Caribbean Sea; Le Sereno Bar and Lounge; Christian Liaigre-designed guest suites feature extensive teak accents, king-sized, four-poster Zanzibar canopy beds and custom-designed bed linens by D. Porthault; a decadent spa treatment by the capable hands of a Ligne St Barth professional is available in your suite or outside, with a breathtaking view of the water.



wood chaises as big as queen-sized beds.

Food is serious business at Le Sereno (we *are* speaking of the French, after all), and like everything else at the property the concept is casual luxury. Restaurant des Pecheurs features seafood so fresh that it is virtually impossible for non-hotel guests to get a table during high season, but this is one of the great aspects of being here in the summer, because there is no waiting. In addition, everything on the restaurant's menu is available from room service 24 hours a day and, because of the intimate size of the resort, it is never long before a convivial staff member

But what truly sets Le Sereno apart is the service. Staff members seem to take satisfaction in making their guests happy, and there is nothing they will not do to ensure that guests of Le Sereno derive as much pleasure as possible from their stay. I experienced this firsthand: My flight to Saint Barth's out of JFK was delayed by three hours, causing me to miss my connection in Saint Martin. I thought I was going to have to call and explain the problem to the hotel when I landed, but the staff had requested my travel itinerary and had actually kept abreast of my situation. Consequently, when I turned on my mobile phone

thereby allowing me to go through customs and immigration in Saint Barth's. It made what could have been a miserable situation pleasant—and I had not yet even arrived at the hotel.

Off-season in Saint Barth's is also a wonderful option for people looking to escape Miami's humidity and get away for the weekend, as flying time by way of Saint Martin is about three and a half hours.

The French Ministry of Tourism has rated Le Sereno a four-star luxe property, and while it may not possess all of the ultraluxuries required to classify it a five-star destination, it is that lack of pretension that

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is knocking on your door with your tray of food. The beach menu is also served throughout the day around the pool and on the beach, while Le Sereno Bar and Lounge, which is adjacent to the restaurant, offers gorgeous views of the lagoon.

And if you like the comforts of professional spa treatments, then you need not even leave your room. The specialists from Ligne St Barth come to you and perform everything from manicures and pedicures to massages and body wraps featuring local ingredients and relaxation treatments.

there was already a message from my driver saying the hotel was aware of the flight issue and that if I was not able to make my connection they would arrange for me to spend the night in Saint Martin. It turned out I was able to snag the last seat on the last flight out to Saint Martin, and a representative from Le Sereno greeted me when I arrived. Because of him, I was able to avoid the line of people on my flight going through the arduous customs lines. Instead, he took me directly to the waiting area, where I relaxed while he took my claim tickets and pulled my bags,

makes it so appealing. One of the marvelous things about Le Sereno is the sense of peace and tranquility—and lack of superficial formality—it bestows upon its guests from the time they arrive, and in some cases, like mine, even before they hit Saint Barth's sultry seaside.

Between the resort's clean yet supple design, luxurious amenities and remarkably friendly staff, Le Sereno manages to be a slice of heaven just a short flight away from our shores. When the resort's staff members say, "*Bienvenue*," they really mean it. 🏠