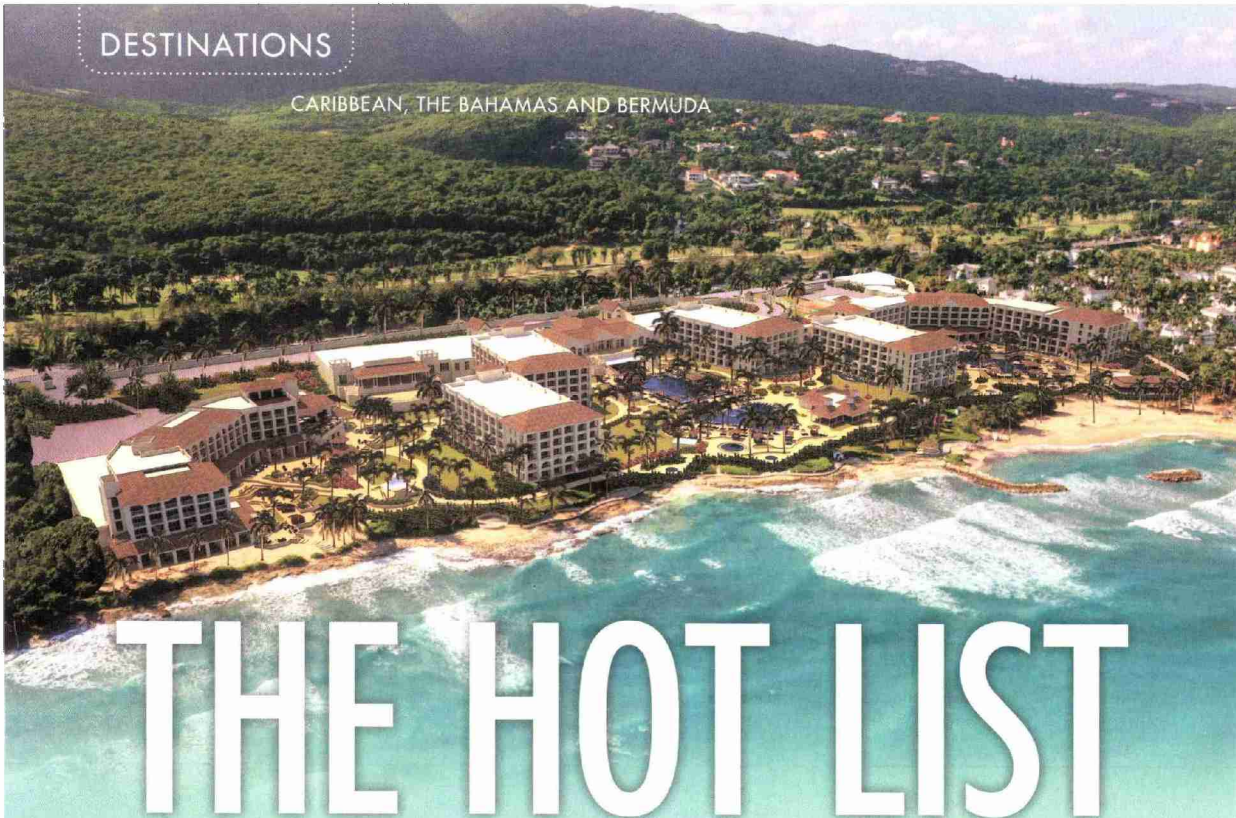


DESTINATIONS

CARIBBEAN, THE BAHAMAS AND BERMUDA



THE HOT LIST

Significant developments made these five isles the most buzzworthy of 2014.

WITH SO MANY NEW and emerging islands popping up every year in the Caribbean, it is vital for the region's strongest, most notable tourism options to stay relevant and fresh. And boy did all five of these islands do just that. Using the amount of buzzworthy news to come out of each island this year as our criteria, **Travel Agent** profiles the five islands we feel made the biggest splash in 2014 and are well set for 2015.

Jamaica

When three brands expand to your island in the same year, you are automatically the hottest island in the Caribbean in our book.

The trio of brand expansions to Jamaica technically began in December of 2013 when **Karisma Hotels & Resorts**, known traditionally for its all-inclusive properties in Mexico, expanded to Negril in the form of the **Azul Sensori Jamaica**.

The Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall officially opened in Jamaica in December.

On July 7, **Palace Resorts** then assumed ownership of Ocho Rios' landmark property, the **Sunset Jamaica Grande**, and closed on September 1. Expected to open in early 2015, the property, which will undergo a multi-million-dollar renovation, is situated in the north coast of Jamaica, at the head of famed Ocho Rios Bay.

The third brand expansion came in the form of the **Hyatt Hotels and Resorts**. The company opened its first ever all-inclusive resort and chose Jamaica as its flagship destination. The **Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall** and **Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall** officially opened in December on the grounds of the former **Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall** property.

St. Lucia

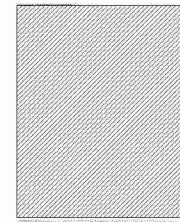
Perhaps the biggest hotel news out of St. Lucia came as recently as December when the owners of **The Landings St. Lucia**, an all-suite, luxury villa Caribbean resort, announced they had acquired the assets of the insolvent development

company associated with the property. **The Landings St. Lucia** recently announced that the more than 140 owners of the resort have successfully pooled their resources to create a fully owned, operated and managed hotel and residence community.

In other huge news from the island in 2014, **Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa** officially unveiled in October its \$5 million makeover after completing a month-long renovation project. Perhaps the biggest upgrade of the property was at the resort's adults-only **Harmony Wing**, which now offers an expansive new pool and Jacuzzi-style hot tub, bringing the number of **Coconut Bay** pools to five, the second at **Harmony**.

Arguably the most important news, however, came from the sky. In June, the **St. Lucia Tourist Board** announced **Delta** will add nonstop service from New York's **JFK International Airport** to **St. Lucia's Hewanorra International Airport (UVF)**. The weekly service, which

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began December 20, operates every Saturday, throughout the year. The flight marks an expansion in service by Delta to UVF; earlier the airline only operated nonstop flights from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Dominican Republic

For a destination predominantly known for its all-inclusive hotel product, the Dominican Republic showed a wide range of product by spending most of 2014 announcing upcoming openings of some very notable luxury brands with EP plans.

Marriott International, Inc. continues to grow its luxury JW Marriott hotel brand with the recent grand opening of the 150-room JW Marriott Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. This marks the brand's first hotel in the Caribbean. The hotel is located in the upscale Piantini financial district and located inside the luxurious Blue Mall, which features several fine-dining restaurants and high-end shops such as Cartier, Carolina Herrera and Louis Vuitton.

The Gansevoort Hotel Group officially opened its latest oceanfront resort, Gansevoort Playa Imbert, on December 15. Occupying a stretch of the Dominican Republic's north coast, the new hotel has 48 suites comprised of one- and two-bedroom lofts; three-bedroom apartments with private plunge pools and terraces; and a collection of four-bedroom penthouses, each with a private rooftop Jacuzzi.

On the all inclusive front, Club Med made a splash in October when it announced that Club Med Punta Cana would be the first of its hotels to host a collaboration on a unique concept in experiential travel, Club Med Creative by Cirque du Soleil. When it is launched in June, guests will be able to learn many of the acrobatic disciplines showcased in the Cirque's productions.

St. Maarten/ St. Martin

This was the year of the luxury all-inclusive in St. Maarten/St. Martin. In May, Riu Hotels & Resorts purchased The Radisson Blu in Anse Marcel, a luxury



Junior Suite in the adults-only Harmony wing at Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa, St. Lucia



Gansevoort Playa Imbert opened December 15 on the Dominican Republic's north coast.

hotel on St. Martin, with a \$45 million investment. Riu Palace St. Martin welcomed its first clients in June.

Sonesta Ocean Point Resort, which opened this winter, is the newest five-star property in St. Maarten. This all-suite resort sits on the southernmost point of the island, adjacent to the Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino.

After a multimillion-dollar renovation to the former Ocean Terrace building, the 129-room Sonesta Ocean Point emerges as a sophisticated, adults-only, all-inclusive resort. Blending contemporary design with a Caribbean vibe, the resort evokes a chic, inviting atmosphere from the public spaces to each of the spacious accommodations ranging from the 480-square-foot Junior Suite King to the lavish 2,600-square-foot Luxury Penthouse.

Curacao

This island has always been an under-the-radar hot spot in the Caribbean, but

it officially hit the mainstream in 2014 when Jet Blue announced nonstop, direct flights to Curacao from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. Also, Ascend Hotel Collection from Choice Hotels International, Inc. announced in October its Caribbean growth with the addition of the ACOYA Hotel Suites & Villas on Curacao.

Where we expect Curacao to benefit the most is within the gay and lesbian markets. The island is incredibly gay and lesbian friendly. There are not a lot of Caribbean islands that are welcoming to the gay and lesbian community. Some are flat out against gay and lesbian travelers while others simply tolerate the market, but don't necessarily welcome it. Curacao not only tolerates the gay and lesbian client, they welcome them with open arms. And New York, to name one key market, is full of gay and lesbian travelers looking to go somewhere warm without being harassed.

—JOE PIKE