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Adventure island

Saint Lucia offers action-packed excursions as well as luxurious lounging, finds India-Jayne Trainor

In the left of me, a sheer precipice is hidden by a dense bank of palm trees, while ahead, a flock of chickens scatters across the road. I don't even have time to make a joke about this as my ATV driver, Levi, revs the engine and hurtles us along a bumpy, rock-strewn path into the jungle.

Since arriving in Saint Lucia, I'd explored it in a multitude of ways – from the saddle of a horse to the deck of a catamaran and now on a pulse-racing journey by ATV – with each mode of transport revealing a new side to the paradise isle.

SADDLE UP

Our journey on Saint Lucia began far more gently. Having touched down at the airport, we drove less than five minutes – quite the selling point after a long-haul flight – to reach Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa, which has just emerged from a £10.5 million makeover.

Then, at nearby Atlantic Shores Riding Stables, we were each paired with a trusty steed for a coastal ride. My horse, Magnus, was a deep-chestnut gentle giant who had a habit of veering off whenever he spotted something edible, but after a strict talking to by our guide, Geannie, he fell into line. ➤

Gros Piton mountain in Saint Lucia
Picture: Shutterstock/Thomas

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Saint Lucia offers action-packed excursions as well as luxurious lounging, finds India-Jayne Trainor

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Pitons; ocean kitesurfing; writer India-Jayne Trainor in the saddle; ATV tour via the beach; mud's healing powers at Soufrière's Sulphur Springs **PICTURES:** David Warren; Roger Paperno

We plodded through open countryside and along cliffs towards deserted Honeymoon Beach, where we rode across golden sand as gentle waves splashed our feet. The two-hour tour kept a relaxing pace, and though it was almost everyone's first time on horseback, the guides were adept at teaching us how to handle the horses before setting off – ensuring that even beginners felt confident in the saddle.

VITAMIN SEA

Back at Coconut Bay, our base for the week, the afternoon was reserved for relaxation on the one-mile stretch of beach in front of the hotel. Dipping our toes into Saint Lucia's sun-warmed waters gave us high expectations ahead of our next excursion, a catamaran sailing combined with a tour on land.

Our vessel, *Majestic Reign*, flew a flag proclaiming us 'Team Cocktail', something we took to heart as the snacks and rum punch

“While we sailed, the crew pointed out fishing villages and the famous Pitons, rising like green-draped spires

flowed on board in true Caribbean style. While we sailed, the crew pointed out fishing villages and Saint Lucia's famous Pitons, which rose like green-draped spires from the ocean.

We disembarked at Jalousie Plantation Beach, equipped with life vests and snorkels. In the shadow of Gros Piton, the waters revealed shoals of fish in a spectrum of colours. The next anchor came at Anse Chastanet, where the water glowed blue and we spent more than an hour



COCONUT BAY BEACH RESORT & SPA

Split into two sections (Splash for families, and newly renovated, adult-only Harmony), Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa is a playground of pools, beach bars and restaurants.

My Harmony Junior Suite had a balcony overlooking the ocean, and having access to the adult-only pool and bar ensured a peaceful stay. The Sanctuary Spa has six new massage pavilions with ocean views, and across the vast hotel lawns are nifty loungers that rotate with the sun. On the Splash side is a lazy river, paintball course, an enormous kids' club and Saint Lucia's largest water park.

Dining options were just as wide ranging, from Asian-inspired dishes at Silk to local cuisine at Jerk Treehouse and themed dinners on the pool deck. As an extra selling point, the hotel's premium all-inclusive package also covers top-shelf spirits.

cbayresort.com

ASK THE
expert



Mia Chin, sales and guest relations manager, Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa

"Saint Lucia's biggest selling point is its dramatic landscape, which sets it apart from many other Caribbean islands. For an experience, Soufrière is a historically rich town on the southwestern coast. Saint Lucia has a vibrant culture with celebrations such as Jounen Kwéyòl on the last Sunday in October, Carnival in July and the Fish Fry every Friday night. And no trip is complete without hiking or exploring trails around the Pitons."

splashing among the marine life and sunning ourselves on deck.

On shore, we stopped at one of the island's most popular sites, Sulphur Springs, where geothermal energy heats a series of mud pools set in the heart of the jungle. We took turns scooping black-and-white mud from buckets to coat ourselves in, leaving it to set in the hope of benefiting from its reputation for improving health and longevity.

Next, we submerged ourselves in the bubbling mud pools to open our pores and cleanse our skin. There are bracing showers to get rid of the mud and we left feeling, if not younger, certainly more rejuvenated. Venture Ashore offers a Tour of Soufrière and the Mud Baths from £77.

EASY AS ATV

As someone who can't drive, an ATV excursion wouldn't usually be on my to-do list. Nevertheless, I

traded beach waves for helmet hair on a tour with Island ATV. Other anxious drivers will be pleased to hear about the practice track – a small circuit that's designed to help riders get to grips with their vehicle. After one minor collision and a stalled ATV, two of us opted to ride as passengers so that we could better enjoy the views.

Our little convoy sped from smooth tarmac to off-road track, snaking across fields fringed by banana trees before entering the cool, shady forest. The wheels on our vehicles turned up fresh spray as we drove through a shallow creek, then stopped to visit the ruins

of Riviere Doree Sugar Mill, which is being slowly reclaimed by the island's tropical foliage.

Our final stop was at Devil's Bridge. As we peered over the edge into a 60-metre ravine, our driver explained that according to local legend, it was built after a deal with the devil. With the sun trickling through the canopy, such spooky tales seemed hard to believe, but the view – along with many of the other amazing sights we'd seen along the way – would be enough to make you wonder whether there might have been magic afoot in the making of this endlessly surprising isle. **TW**

BOOK IT

Caribtours offers seven nights' all-inclusive in a Deluxe Garden Splash room at Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa from £2,315 per person, based on two sharing, including British Airways flights from Gatwick, private transfers and on-site activities, for travel between April 7 to June 30 or November 7 to December 19.

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