

HOT LIST

# The Best New Hotels in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central & South America: 2021 Hot List

*For the 25th edition of the Hot List—Condé Nast Traveler's picks of the year's top hotel and industry openings—these eight winners represent the best of the best.*

BY CNT EDITORS

May 6, 2021

This year's annual Hot List of the best new hotels from around the world is a story of resilience. Despite enormous hardship in the travel industry, exceptional properties have continued to open across the globe (nearly a thousand last year, in the U.S. alone). As always with this endeavor, each of the 69 picks on this year's list was safely vetted by our international network of correspondents. But as we've learned in the past year, everything is connected, which is why we've also expanded the scope of hot to include **restaurants**, **transportation**, and destinations, as well as more news we're excited about set for later this year. In spite of it all, these eight properties represent a success story all their own. Read on for the best new hotels in the **Caribbean**, **Mexico**, and Central and **South America**—we think they're a pretty great way to mark the 25th anniversary of this list.

HOTEL

## Hôtel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf →

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Those who knew and loved Le Carl Gustaf the first time around will have even more reason to fall for it now that the Barrière group has taken over. The hotelier company—known for reviving particularly beloved but withering properties—has made sure to keep the spirit of Le Carl, as its known, chic and easy. The raw wood and petite terraces still makes it feel like the beach house of a fabulous French friend, yet the hotel's reimagined approach to the environment gives it a 21st century edge. Paris design firm Gilles and Boissier gussied up the 21 rooms with creams, stone, and linen, as well as a profusion of palms separating various spaces with a curtain of greenery. Suites have been reconfigured to catch sea breezes, providing natural air conditioning. And a fleet of electric bikes brings guests down the hill upon which the hotel stands like a lookout, over the town and coastline, to nearby Shell Beach, the perfect place for a picnic prepared by the hotel's staff that feels, appropriately simple and chic—much like Le Carl itself. *From \$1,085 per night. —Dan Koday*

<https://bit.ly/2R2YLVc>

REVIEW:

# Hôtel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf

*Perched above St. Bart's luxurious playground of Gustavia, French sophistication meets simple, tropical elegance at this recently reimagined hotel with a longstanding story.*

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Fabrice Rambert

## AMENITIES

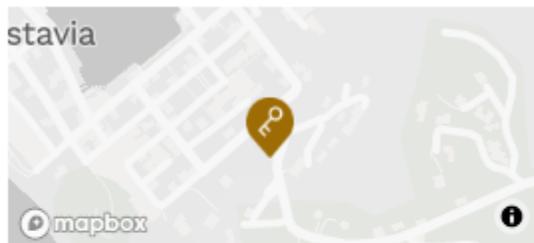
Bar  
Beach  
Free Wifi

Gym  
Spa

## ROOMS

23

## LOCATION MAP



Reviewed by **DAN KODAY**

Rue des Normands

St. Barts, 97133

St. Barts

+590 (0) 590 297 900

<https://www.hotelsbarriere.com/en/saint-barth/le-carl-gustaf.html>

### **Why book?**

St. Barth is packed with luxury hotels that appeal to every type of traveler, but what sets “Le Carl” apart is its views, location, and intimacy. You’ll have a bird’s eye view over Gustavia—St. Bart’s glittering port town—with a location mere steps away from the glitzy bars and shops it has on offer. Yet, because the property is set up like a compound of private bungalows, it feels far from town, private, and secluded. On a more intimate level, the resort does a great job of marrying indoor and outdoor spaces. The expansive decks feel like outdoor living rooms and many have plunge pools. But the views across the Caribbean make it seem as though you are on a luxury yacht or ocean liner.

### **Set the scene**

Common spaces are filled with attractive 30s and 40s-somethings, dressed in flowing Diane von Furstenburg dresses and surplice-necked rompers. These are the tall, tanned off-duty models and their cohort, vacationing from Paris and New York and Beirut. People come here to mingle but also to meet, even for business. (See those two in the white slacks and Gucci belts? Executives in from London and Milan to discuss, say, next season’s Fashion Week.) Regardless of why the guests are here, cocktails are always a hit right at sunset.

### **The backstory**

The hotel is part of luxury French hotel group [Barrière](#), known for Les Neiges in Courchevel, Le Normandy in Deauville, and Le Royal in La Baule, amongst others. The group takes historic properties and brushes off the dust to further reveal their splendor. The previous Le Carl Gustaf hotel, owned by entrepreneur Jacques Laurent, went into decline before Hurricane Irma and was slated to be rebuilt as apartments, but locals said no way. So Barrière came in; they’ve since spent the last four years updating and re-imagining the footprint of the property.

### **The rooms**

There are 21 guestrooms in total, including the villas. French design firm Gilles & Boissier helped design the 21 guestrooms, inserting green spaces of palm trees and other tropical flora to make each living space feel ultra-private. The ones to book are the spacious [“Prestige” one-bedroom bungalow suites](#), towards the very top of the hill of the property near the main building, which have private plunge pools and the most arresting views on offer. The Caribbean sea stretches to the left, and, in front of the suites, other bungalows and the entire port town of Gustavia dazzle. The interiors are appropriately relaxed and chic: think soothing creams, dark wood and stone details, and plenty of linen. The sitting areas are adorned with large mirrors and historical photographs of St. Bart, whereas the main living spaces and bedrooms are punched up with tropical flora and fauna prints that tie in the beauty of the island. (My room featured a bold green floral headboard.) The light here is magical, and the way the architects have played with shade and light manages to give the resort a perpetual Golden Hour glow. Bathrooms are marble and have L’Officine Universelle Buly 1803 bath products, which come packaged in beautifully ornate bottles. Not having a tub was a disappointment, but the shower was huge. A big draw, though, is the wet bar, stocked with teas, snacks, and a ton of stemware should you want to open up that bottle of champagne. A nice touch is the Aquabikes, which come in rooms with plunge pools.

### **Food and drink**

One of the most interesting aspects of the bar is the edible fragrance program that has been incorporated into the cocktail menu. It's a complete experience: The master mixologist comes by with a leather suitcase of fragrances, lets you select a favorite, and can incorporate that scent into a bespoke cocktail (or, pair it with an on-menu drink, all of which are delicious). A highlight from the menu is the Pisco Disco, which includes pisco, icing sugar, lavender bitters and fragrance, and lime. The private restaurant and beach club of the hotel, Shellona, is somewhat of an institution on St. Bart's—be warned, though, that it feels like an upscale tourist trap, with the essence of Las Vegas's Tao or Lavo, with a see-and-be-seen crowd to match. Instead, I'd argue that the highlight of Le Carl's dining experiences is Le Fouquet's; the food is so good, you'll be tempted to blow off a hard-to-book table in town so you can return a second time. The restaurant is modeled after an Old World Parisian dining, but refreshed for the Caribbean with lighter plates and farm fresh ingredients. A few highlights include the Wahoo fish carpaccio and lobster ravioli. Executive chef Gil Dumoulin often makes the rounds in the dining room, stopping to discuss the food with guests, which is a nice touch. Breakfast is very well done here, and includes decadent breads, pastries, beautifully sliced fruits, and an açai bowl, plus charcuterie and a variety of cheeses served on tiered silver platters.

### **The spa**

Mirroring the rest of the property, Spa Diane is intimate, with just three treatment rooms in which guests are offered personalized experiences. (In fact, due to its size, you're almost guaranteed to have the spa to yourself during a treatment.) Named after the daughter of the Barrière group's founder, this spa makes exceptional use of technology. Therapists begin facials with face-scanning wands and other probes, to measure your lipid shield, pigmentation, hydration and elasticity, and then cater their approach to the precise needs of your skin in that moment. To offer something truly unique, the spa looked to [Biologique Recherche](#), for a robust menu of prestigious products that are sophisticated but never fussy—an approach that fits well with Le Carl's overall vibe.

### **The neighborhood/area**

Gustavia is the epicenter of St. Bart's, a posh enclave of boutique and high-end retailers, fine restaurants, and all types of nightlife, from the rowdy Bagatelle to more elevated and exclusive spots for aperitivo, and even a goes-late neighborhood bar, Quarter Kitchen & Cocktail Bar. The *quartier* is extremely walkable, safe, and relatively easy to navigate, hugging both sides of the port with tiny alleys. A short walk down the hill from St. Bart's is Shell Beach, one of the Caribbean's most celebrated beaches, known for the tiny seashells that wash up, covering the sand completely; due to shallow, natural coral, this is also a particularly great beach to try snorkeling or an electric Seabob (which the hotel can help set up through Seabob St. Bart).

### **The service**

The service is five-star, though that renders low-key and personal, with a meticulous focus on detail, rather than pretentious. The concierge can secure reservations for all of St. Barts's most coveted tables and will not skirt on recommendations for leisure-time activities. They know the island well and they love it—and the staff wants to share it with you the way a great local guide would. In terms of mobility, there are courtesy Le Carl Gustaf electric bikes to get around on, and an electric Moke car parked out on the street, for guest use.

### **For families**

There are several room types perfect for families, like the larger bungalows with separate sleeping spaces, and the five-bedroom private villa that is directly across the street from the hotel's entrance. The latter originally served as the former owner's home, but today has been gut renovated and has a standout but still cohesive design from the rest of the accommodations. It also has a private pool, and large living spaces to spread out in. That said, Le Carl Gustaf certainly caters more to couples than families. It's perhaps most ideal for a honeymoon. Parents be warned: there are lots of stairs which may pose risks for small kids.

### **Eco effort**

Green living is definitely a theme here. All of Le Carl's buildings were designed with the environment in mind, with optimal ventilation meant to reduce the need for air conditioning. There is also a water retention tank for rain collection under the bungalows, whose water is then recycled for laundry and the watering of plants. Thanks to the location of the hotel, soft mobility—going to the beach by foot or going to Gustavia with an electric bike or electric car—is encouraged.

### **Accessibility**

A network of steps link the common areas to the bungalows and guest rooms. In my opinion, not a great option for those with mobility issues, although I'm sure the staff would make every effort to accommodate accessibility needs.

### **Anything left to mention?**

While you will have access to a Shell Beach and loungers at Shellona can be reserved for hotel guests, the hotel does not have a private beach, unlike many in the 5-star category in St. Bart's. It's not a dealbreaker, but a consideration.

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