

Taking it back to the beach in St Barths

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The start of the path to Columbier.

GUEST DIARY • BY: **BARBARA HODES**

Our January trip to St Barths was booked a long time ago. Upon booking, we knew the island would be jam-packed as we were only able to score the house of our choosing for the first week of January; and only for ten days. Normally, we go at the end of January/early February, so I was curious to see how the island would feel so soon after the holidays.

<https://bit.ly/3rNvRqF>

As we packed our bags, Aggie, our Westie, saw her carrier come upstairs and she started to smile. Aggie likes flying now, as she knows that when she lands it will be someplace fun. Despite Covid-mania, the Delta flight was pretty full. When we boarded our Tradewind flight from San Juan to St Barths, Aggie was so excited that she could sit on my lap and was soon mesmerized by the sea and the clouds, just as I was.



Are we there yet?!

You cannot set foot on St Barths unless you are vaccinated and tested a day prior to flying. The number of Covid cases over the holiday had been minimal, despite the island being completely full. We were looking forward to visiting all our favorite beaches, and exploring new restaurants and shops.

We got to our house, perched above Flamands, very late in the afternoon. The view was still picture perfect. We headed to town to pick up some food, and soon ran into a Covid novelty. The government had banned the sale of alcohol after 6 p.m. in grocery stores. On the bright side, the store was full of Christmas goodies like caviar and foie gras, although whole milk and fresh fruit were hard to find. After a long day, a simple BBQ was the answer, with some wine that our thoughtful host had left for us in the fridge.



A late afternoon view of Flamands.

We love our house. It is compact, well designed and impeccably placed. The Collectivité, the local government, has been busy for the last few years making sure fiber optic wiring is being buried — meaning that overhead lines will start coming down. The Collectivité has also been protecting its green space. There are huge houses being built all over the island, and on the hillside on the right in the photograph above (they do spoil the view). Going forward there are strict limits on the size and height of new buildings. 66% of the island is currently “zone naturelle” or green space. The new laws will keep that space fixed, and focus on permits for houses that do not overwhelm the island. Respect for its natural beauty is needed — and appreciated.



Some of the last Christmas yachts.

The next morning we headed to one of our favorite beaches. A must-use website and app is windy.com for St Barths. The app was developed for boaters, but can easily tell you which side of the island will have less wind and calmer beaches. Another fun website is Marinetracker.com. You can locate all the super yachts, and many of them were in St Barths over the holiday. 305 boats were anchored, 127 of them were more than 40 meters, and seven of them were 90 meters or longer. On the 31st, there were more than 5,000 people celebrating on boats. While many yachts had moved on, a few BIG boats were still hanging around.



Bring your own tent.

Gouveneur is one of my favorite beaches. Normally families with children sit at this end of the beach, although I had never seen such an elaborate setup in place. The towels indicated that the tent and guests were from Eden Rock (hotel). Most people, including the owners of the estate behind the beach, sit on towels or in small beach chairs with a modest umbrella stuck in the sand.



Wine and food for the yachting crowd.

We stopped at **Foodland** on the way home. On the harbor, the store is happy to provision yachts and do gift baskets for villas. They offer luxury foods and wines. Sushi and sashimi grade fish, and Japanese specialties are one category that is stocked only here. They call themselves fine food concierges.

***Foodland**, rue Bord de Mer*

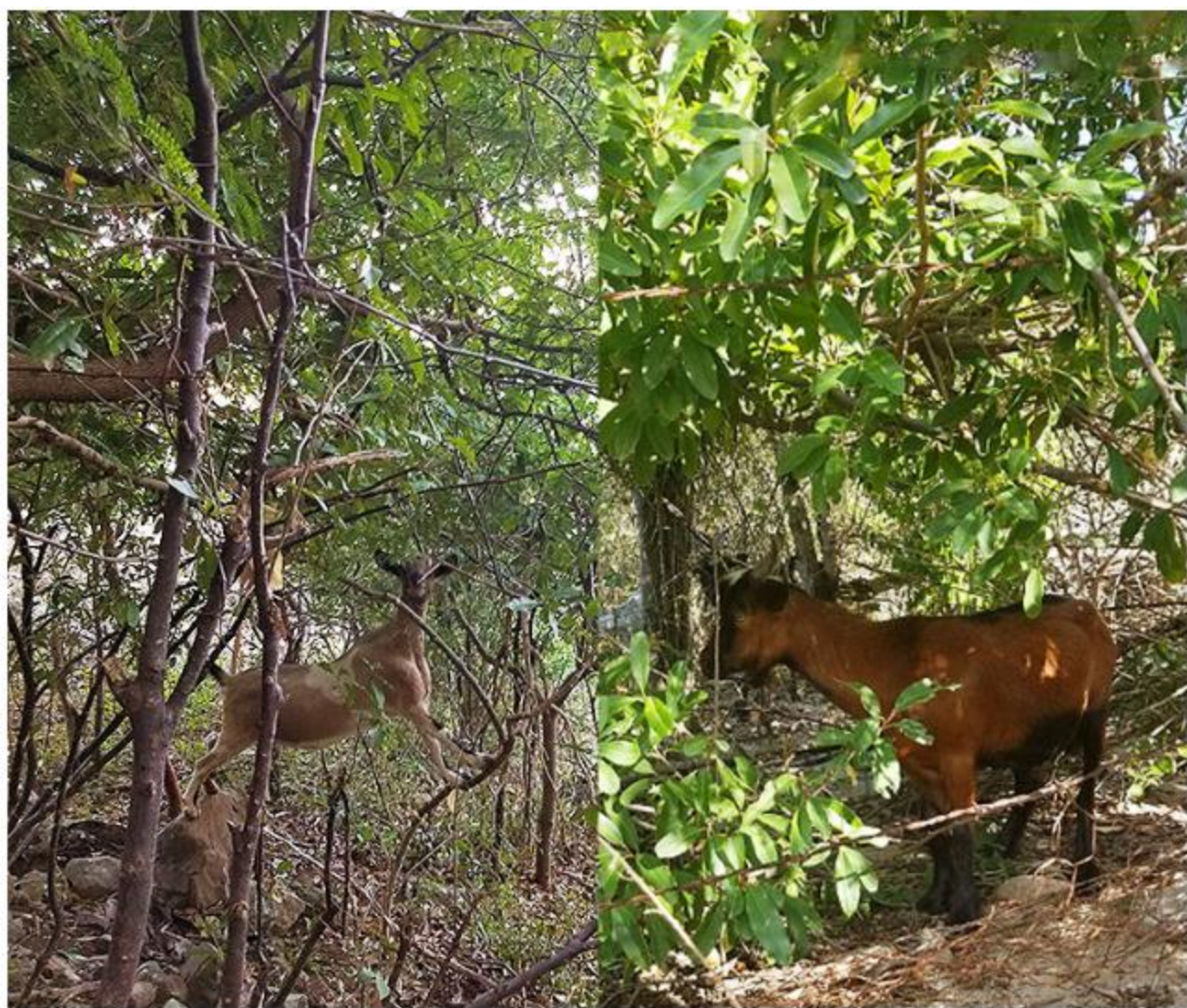
La Langouste is located in the small **Baie des Anges Hotel** on Flamands beach. The restaurant is set next to the hotel's pool. A large tank full of langoustes, the local spiny Caribbean lobster, is located at the back near the kitchen. They are grilled to perfection, and are beyond delicious. If langouste is not your thing, there is a full menu with French and Creole specialities.

La Langouste, Flamands Beach



On the way to Columbier.

The next afternoon we decided to go to Columbier. It is a secluded beach that can only be reached by one of two hikes, or by boat. We hiked along the edge of the rocks and cliffs on the other side of the bay.



Wild goats are all around.

The path is rocky and narrow, with steep drops to the sea many feet below. It can be crowded, and joggers also have adopted it. Late afternoon is a good time as the sun is lower and it is cooler. St Barths may be a rich one-percenter paradise, but they share the island with lots of wildlife. Wild goats are everywhere, even up in trees. Turtles and chickens wander across paths all over the island.



Columbier Beach late in the day.

Columbier is a beautiful and calm beach. It is often full of boats. The peninsula at the the back is the old Rockefeller estate now owned by **Steve and Linda Horn**. The beach is their private paradise.



The harbor view from L'Atelier Joel Robuchon.

Monday we had lunch at the new **L'Atelier Joel Robuchon**. There is a dining room and counter downstairs, and a wide open beautiful terrace upstairs. The view is dreamy. Of course the food is perfect. I still had langouste on the brain, and ordered a delicious Spaghettis aux langoustes. Deserts rock, too. There is also a lovely space at the back of the building for special breakfasts and tea.

L'Atelier Joel Robuchon, rue Bord de Mer



Sunbarth for men.

Down the street is **Sunbarth** for men. The clothing is modern and functional. I love the tee shirts and hats printed with vintage photos of the island, the airport, Eden Rock, Gustavia and other views. Linen pants, shirts, swim trunks and more. All designed for the easy island life.

Sunbarth, rue Bord de Mer



Gypsea boutique is full of Boho looks.

Gypsea, a haute Boho boutique, moved from **Le Tamarin** restaurant to a new location in town. Designed and owned by a local mother-daughter team, the merchandise is made in Africa with a French touch. There is a nice selection of jewelry using uncut precious and semi-precious stones.

Gypsea, rue du Roi Oscar II



The villa pool above the beach.

Hurricane Irma devastated St Barths in 2017. **Le Sereno** was one of the many hotels destroyed. It built back better, with a chic new look, and many new additions. There are now three private three-bedroom villas that sit at the top of the hill overlooking Grand Cul-de-Sac. The library can become a bedroom, too.



A corner of the living room.

The redone hotel was designed by the late **Christian Liagre**, he of impeccable taste. The villas consist of two buildings. The one out the window has some of the bedrooms. The main part of the villa overlooks the pool and the lagoon. It is all very low key luxe.



The streamlined dining area and kitchen.

The dining area and the kitchen are also super chic. Cook for yourself, order room service from Al Mare, the hotel restaurant, or have a private chef who will do all sorts of BBQs and festive dinners.



A suite with the Liagre touch.

At the other end of the property is a newly built configuration of rooms. Designed with Covid seclusion in mind. This large room opens out onto a private terrace overlooking Grand Cul-de-Sac.



A private pool in the Suite Piscine.

The terrace has a small pool that mimics the main pool. Overlooking the beach, it can be combined with an adjacent bungalow with additional bedrooms. A private life made for families and friends.



Treatments with a view.

Also on Grand Cul-de-Sac is the spa. One of the private treatment rooms opens to the ocean. A large gym is nearby. You can also get treatments in your room or suite.



The perfect plunge pool.

The Villa du Pecheur is a sleek one-bedroom suite on the beach. Go from the beach to the pool with ease.



A beachside lunch.

Al Mare is the stylish beachside restaurant. The food and most of the waiters are Italian. I had another lovely spaghetti con aragosta. Perhaps repetitive, but I cannot get that in New York. There are tables on the beach, and a lounge and bar area. Italian food and sunny days and starlit nights go well together.



Relaxing at the main pool.

The pool sits on the beach adjacent to the restaurant. There are kayaks and paddleboards available. Grand Cul-de-Sac is known for its kite surfing. When the winds are right, you can hit the water and fly.

Le Sereno, Grand Cul-de-Sac



Ti St Jean in the morning.

Pelican Beach or Ti St Jean, as it is now known, is on the right side of Eden Rock. It is a bathtub beach, and is quiet and empty in the morning. The beach is home to two beach clubs, Nikki Beach and the new Gyp Sea. The water can be full of people bobbing with glasses of rose in hand in the late afternoon.



A lazy day at Gyp Sea.

Gyp Sea is the newest addition. Created by the owner of the Villa Marie hotel in Columbiér, it shares its name with the Gypsea boutique in Gustavia (whose owner regrets she did not trademark the name for restaurants). Both celebrate the gypset lifestyle. Choose from many grilled delicacies for lunch. Rent a matelassé and spend the day overlooking the calm beach, with music rocking the afternoon.



Approaching the airport.

The island was pretty much fully booked. There were flights landing all day as most people arrive by plane, scheduled or chartered (private jets are not allowed on the island). The planes normally come down right over one of the main roads and more than a few times a low landing plane has swiped the roofs of cars on the road.



The harbor at night.

The harbor in Gustavia is always teeming with boats. In front of the large sailboat in the center is a very popular boat. It is named the *Gene Machine*. Owned by **Dr. Jonathan Rothberg**, a gene sequencing scientist, it has its own Covid testing lab. Needless to say, it was a popular boat over the holidays.



La Petite Plage on the harbor.

Le Petite Plage is a hot new restaurant and is the sister to restaurants in St. Tropez and Biarritz, owned by Michelin starred chef **Eric Frechon**. Families dine early, and later in the night the music cranks up so the guests can party. The two discos on the island are temporarily closed, so people let loose here.

La Petite Plage, rue Bord de Mer



Johnny Hallyday's resting place.

I had never seen **Johnny Hallyday's** grave. The French rock star died in 2017, and fans flock to the cemetery in Orient to pay homage. Many wonder why he is buried here and not in France. Large rocks with messages of love line the sides, and guitars made of plastic flowers decorate the tomb. Johnny lived high above Marigot Bay in the huge, luxurious Villa Jade. The villa is for rent, and you too can enjoy an icon's lifestyle. An air conditioned gym, a home theater with 4,000 films, and views for days make it a special property.



Pop St Barth is full of finds.

More shopping was to be found on the way to dinner. **Pop St Barth** is an island lifestyle shopping experience. For some reason mohair sweaters are the thing to wear this year. The yellow and blue pair on the bench are happily hand embroidered with St Barth themes.

Pop St Barth, rue de la Republique



Poupette St Barth is full of prints.

Poupette St Barth is now open in St Barths with a large collection of clothing for women and girls. Jewelry and accessories lend island chic to your look. The brand already had stores in the Hamptons.

***Poupette St Barth**, rue de la Republique*



Inside Zadig and Voltaire.

If you are not into gypset prints, **Zadig and Voltaire** offers a cleaner contemporary look with a rock attitude. And this boutique also offers a men's collection.

***Zadig and Voltaire**, rue du General de Gaulle*



The harbor view at Le Fouquet's.

We were headed to dinner at **Fouquet's** in the l'Hôtel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf. **Pierre Gagnaire** created the menus and dinner was delicious. We shared a huge duck with an orange sauce. The duck legs were made into a confit samosa. The hotel sits above the harbour and the view is pretty spectacular.

Le Fouquet's, rue des Normands



The newly refurbished Petit Anse.

Our house had two beaches a very short walk away. Flamands is dramatic, but Le Petit Anse is a snorkeling paradise. An access road and steps down to the beach were added recently. Local kids learn to swim in the shallow area. When the wind is right you swim out past the rocks and you are in a world of rocks, coral and creatures of the sea. Much of the time you have the beach to yourself.



The pool at Beach House.

The **Rosewood Le Guanahani** reopened in mid-December 2021, four years after Irma left. It is the largest hotel on the island. The hotel was redesigned, but it kept much of its island style look. The main pool is located in the Beach House on the edge of the lagoon. Loungers are also on the beach below.



The poolside beach bar.

The Beach House has a bar, lounge, indoor and outdoor restaurants, and a beach bar with traditional St Barths gingerbread trim. The hotel has 66 rooms and suites, and more suites than rooms. And it was full.



A paws-in-the-sand lunch.

We had lunch with our feet in the sand. Aggie joined us, of course. Grand Cul-de-Sac is full of huge sea turtles, and we snorkeled out to see them after lunch. I had a juicy burger and Aggie got the fries. We also taste-tested a cookie-like dessert, as the menu is still a work-in-progress. The food was very good.



Relaxing on Marechal Beach.

The hotel sits on a peninsula between Anse de Marechal and Grand Cul-de-Sac. Marechal is one of my favorite deserted beaches. In France, all beaches must have public access, and you can go through Guanahani to get to Marechal. The hotel purchased the peninsula during the renovation, and added shade and loungers. Kayaks, paddleboards and snorkeling equipment are available for guests.



A view from the Lagoon Suite.

The Lagoon Suite, located very close to Beach House, is a beachfront suite steps away from the lagoon. The hotel's decor was done by **Luis Pons**, and is very contemporary with a clean vintage feel.



Inside the spa.

The Sense Spa is in a large complex. Along with treatment rooms, there is a full gym and a quiet adults-only pool. Refreshments are served in the bungalow on the tranquil pond. Guanahani is very family friendly. Near the spa is the Rosewood Explorers, an indoor and outdoor space for children with games and activities. Babysitting can also be arranged.



The vintage living room.

This Pool Suite is located at the top of the property overlooking the lagoon. What resembles luggage on the right is actually the minibar cleverly disguised. The living room and the bedroom open to the terrace.



The suite's bedroom.

All the rooms and suites are built using the local St Barths *case* structure, and each room has its own peaked roof. All the buildings are single story, and everything feels a bit hidden and private.



A quiet pool with a view.

The deck and the private pool are surrounded by lush plantings. The entire property is beautifully landscaped. There has been quite a bit of rain in the past year, and the island is extremely green.



Inside La Boutique.

La Boutique is located in the Beach House. The clothing and accessories for men, women and children are carefully chosen. Raquel Allegra and Norma Kamali from the States and American Retro and Alanui are some of the women's brands. And yes, there are mohair sweaters here too. La Boutique is also doing pop-ups with selected designers on an ongoing basis. Next up is Pompom Paris from Lola Rykiel.

Rosewood Le Guanahani, Grand Cul-De-Sac



A calm morning at Marigot.

Last year Marigot was full of invasive sargassum. You could not swim in it. This year the disgusting bloom is mostly gone. This was once the best snorkeling beach on the island, but life was choked out of it. Some small fish and plants have started to come back. The swimming is delightful, and the beach is almost always empty. Hopefully the sea plant invaders will stay away from this beautiful destination.



"I am not going home."

Aggie gave me a disconcerted look when she saw the suitcases reappear. She did not want to leave, and neither did we. Life by the turquoise waters had been so pleasant. I explained to her that that we would be back next year, and she would get her perch back. She is still dubious and a bit sulky these days.