



## Festivals in St. Barts: 7 Island Parties You Don't Want To Miss

[FESTIVALS](#), [CARIBBEAN](#)



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May 16, 2023

St. Barts is a Caribbean gem that sparkles with beauty, luxury, and adventure. It also has a reputation for being a playground for extremely rich vacationers, and while it's true that it is rather high-end (and expensive), it has the same free activities you'd find at more "affordable" Caribbean islands. That includes snorkeling, [soft beaches](#), mountain hikes, and beach bars and kayak tours.

But because St. Barts is known for being a bit, well, old-money, it has a few things you won't find on other nearby islands. That includes sailing regattas in which owners race multi-million dollar yachts around the island (accompanied by a cadre of free spectator events and outdoor parties), and jazz festivals with totally free performances on the beach. Festivals in St. Barts are especially fun because they offer a chance to live like a millionaire, even for people who are decidedly non-millionaires.

The sailing festivals are especially fun, especially as most owners are very anxious to show off their impressive boats to anyone whose interested (and the sight of 50 mega-yachts sailing on the island's blue water is as pretty as can be). But what's especially great about most of the festivals in St. Barts is that many are free to attend, from the annual Gustavia Book Swap to a New Years Eve party on the water.

These are the best festivals to attend in St. Barts, even for travelers on a tight budget.

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## Carnival of St. Barts: February



The Carnival of St. Barts, also known as the Saint-Barthélemy Carnival, is celebrated over the course of several days in February or early March, depending on when Easter is. It started in the 18th century as a way to celebrate Mardi Gras, but has since become more secular, with music, dancing, parades, and other festivities.

Today, it's a major event in St. Barts, beginning with a parade of colorful costumes and floats through the streets of Gustavia (the island's capital). There are also various parties, concerts, and other events throughout the week, culminating in the Burning of Vaval. The Burning of Vaval is on the last night of the festival on a public beach, and the "Vival" is a large effigy of the devil, decorated with beads and boas. Burning it rides the island of negative energy and bids farewell to the "party" season.

The party is open to all throughout the country, and it's a popular time to visit. Expect music, dancing, and mini-festivals throughout the Carnival season. In 2024, Fat Tuesday (the final day of celebrating) is on February 13.

## **St. Barts Bucket Regatta: March**



This St. Barts event is one of the most prestigious sailing competitions in the world. It's open to all sailing yachts, as long as they're at least 100 feet long. It happens over three days in March and attracts some of the most impressive and luxurious sailing vessels from around the world. It's a chance for owners to show off their sailing skills, but also includes chances to socialize, show off their newest yachts, and talk to sailing enthusiasts who are eager to see the newest boats in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

The St. Barts Bucket Regatta features a number of different race courses, ranging from short, intense sprints to longer, more endurance-based races. The courses are designed to take advantage of the island's unique geography and prevailing winds, providing an excellent spectator experience. There's also a full calendar of glamorous social events for racers and visitors alike, including boat parties, cocktail receptions, and plenty of elite, one-percenter hobnobbing.

## Saint B'Art Book & Jazz Festival: April



The [Saint B'Art Book & Jazz Festival](#) is an annual cultural festival in St. Barths that celebrates all things literature, music, and the arts. Events during the festival include book readings, author discussions, jazz performances, art exhibitions, and more. Most of the actual literature events are limited to authors, but there's a huge book exchange that happens on the main pier in Gustavia. Books are classified by category and are in English and French, and visitors can help themselves to anything they like — perfect for when you've finished your beach read and need something new.

The other aspect of the festival for attendees is the Jazz Concert Series, with live performances from musicians around the world. There are both private and public shows; the latter of which are at beaches and public squares and spaces. There are usually also art gallery exhibitions and showings during the festival, though admittedly, most of the price tags on the pieces will likely be a bit high for the average traveler.

## Les Voiles: April



[Les Voiles de St. Barth](#) (or simply “Les Voiles”) is another prestigious sailing event, just in case the annual regatta wasn't enough. Participants race their sailing yachts around the island and on offshore courses, so it's an easy event for spectators to watch. It's very festive and social, with lots of outdoor parties and concerts. There's no fee for spectators, so if you're on the island during this time, it's worth spending an afternoon enjoying the on-water events (and an evening enjoying the parties).

# St. Barts Film Fest: May



The St. Barts Film Fest is a completely free event with no tickets required. It used to have a fee, but the organizers did away with that in 2017 to make the festival into an accessible way for everyone to learn about the culture, music, and heritage of the Caribbean region. Films are in French or their original languages; any film not in French will have subtitles. Additionally, some of the French films have English subtitles. You can see the list of films ahead of time on the [festival website](#).

# St. Barts Food Festival



The St. Barts Food Festival, officially the [St. Barts Gourmand Fest](#), is an annual November event that welcomes a dozen chefs from around the world for cooking competitions. Most of the chefs work with local restaurants to offer tasting menus, and there are also local contests for accolades like “best bartender” and “fastest waiter.” Many of the chefs invited are from Michelin-starred restaurants around the Caribbean.

This festival in St. Barts isn't ticketed, but you will need reservations at the participating restaurants. You can find the participating chefs and restaurants listed on the [St. Barts Food Festival website](#), along with menu details and instructions for reserving a table. Make your reservation as soon as you know your travel dates.

## New Years Eve: December



While not technically one of the festivals in St. Barts, New Years Eve is a popular time for tourism on the island. As such, many of the restaurants on the island organize special events, parties, and dinner menus, some of which can book out months in advance. [Nikki Beach Resort](#) is known for its lively NYE beach party, and restaurants like [L'Isoletta](#) and [Atelier Joel Robuchon St Barth](#) offer fantastic (and expensive) special menus.

There's also a free outdoor concert and NYE party on the General de Gaulle dock in Gustavia, which also happens to be the best viewing spot for the island's surprisingly large fireworks display.

# Where to stay on St. Barts

Yes, St. Barts has some exceedingly expensive hotels — and if you can afford them, they're likely to be the best hotels you've ever stayed in. But it also has more budget-friendly options especially if you visit in the off-season (summer, generally speaking).

## Hotel Le Village St Barth



Hotel Le Village is shockingly inexpensive given that it's on St. Barts: the four-star hotel starts at just \$227 a night. The small hotel is family owned and most of the rooms have kitchens, which can help you save quite a bit of money on breakfast and lunch. It's also only a five-minute walk to a public beach.

## St. Barts Beach House



This two-bedroom beach house looks like a hotel, but it's actually a private home rental, complete with a large, private pool and outdoor shower. It's in Anse de Cayes, which means beautiful Anse de Cayes beach is just a five-minute walk from the home. It's \$712 a night, which isn't too bad if you split it four ways.



# Hotel Manapany



Book even a basic “tropical room” at [Hotel Manapany](#), and you’ll get access to amenities that would make anyone feel like a celebrity. That includes two gorgeous pools with loungers, direct beach access, and bungalow rooms decked out in a luxurious island style. It’s also within walking distance of several other beaches, and the professional staff can offer assistance with booking airport transfers, scuba diving trips, private sunset sails, and anything else you could dream about doing on the island. Rates start around \$800 per night.

## Where is St. Barts?

St. Barts (full name: Saint Barthélemy), is an overseas collectivity of France, but it’s in the Caribbean. It’s on the leeward side (i.e. the less windy side) of the northern group of islands to the east of the US Virgin Islands. St. Barts is part of the Lesser Antilles chain of islands and is very close to Saint Martin as well as [St. Kitts](#) and Nevis. It’s also close to smaller islands you may not have ever heard of, like St. Eustatius and [Saba](#).

# How to get to St. Barts



While most travelers to larger Caribbean islands arrive via plane, it's usually easier to get to [St. Barts by a ferry](#). That said, the island does have a small airport (Gustaf III Airport), which accommodates planes of up to about 20 people. However, the flight to the island can be expensive and add a good deal of travel time. For most people, it's probably easier to fly to Princess Juliana International Airport on St. Maarten, which connects to major cities in the US and other Caribbean islands. From there, you can take a 45-minute ferry to St. Barts.

There are two options for ferries from St. Maarten. If you're on the French side of the island (Saint Martin), you'll want to take the [Voyager Ferry](#). The ferry has an airport pickup service and rates start around \$60 (and includes a free drink). From the Dutch side (Sint Maartin), you'll take the [Great Bay Express Ferry](#). No matter which ferry you take, try to buy your tickets in advance, as that's usually cheaper than buying them on-site.

## Is St. Barts expensive?

St. Barts does tend to be more expensive than other Caribbean islands, but it's a misconception to think it's only for the wealthy. Sure, it's best-known for luxury accommodations and high-end restaurants, but that's not all it has. There's also a wealth of outdoor activities that are free, like hiking, snorkeling, birdwatching, and exploring the island's many beach-covered coves. ☺