



THE ALTERNATIVE 'WHITE CHRISTMAS'

By Caroline Preston

A last minute dash around the congested isles of the supermarket, several near miss trolley incidents later and feeling slightly bewildered you head to the endless checkout queue...



...finally making it home you realise in blind panic you forgot the sprouts.... you now hear an unfamiliar faint voice "pardon me" and now louder "excuse me, hello..." As your eyes open you hear "welcome back, your cocktail?"...ah relief, having dozed off and experienced 'the nightmare before Christmas' you find yourself in the pleasant surroundings of your sun lounger. The only white covering here is the pristine gleaming white sands of the Caribbean.

At the end of 2018 global travel firm Expedia reported that over 9 million Brit's would be venturing overseas for the festive season. Over a quarter of these would be travelling to see family, and one in six would plan to spend it languishing on an exotic beach. Being a massive fan of the Caribbean and having spent festivities here myself, I decided I must enlighten you to ditch dreary, dump dark, swerve sweltering shops and pack for paradise.

Let's get one thing straight, the weather. High season in the Caribbean runs December to April and so Christmas is one of the best times to visit. Low humidity, low rainfall and plenty of sun means northerly islands average a luscious 25°C in daytime and a balmy 19°C after dark. Further south things get a little hotter and average day temperatures of 30°C are the norm in the paradise islands of Grenada, St Lucia and Barbados.

As if the Caribbean isn't already colourful enough, in December and in the run up to Christmas, festivities are in full swing with different traditions and celebrations gracing each island. From 13 December St.Lucia honours the Patron Saint of light, St. Lucy. Towns and villages are adorned with homemade lanterns and decorated with colourful lights.

In the Bahamas for the four days from Boxing Day to New Years Day the famous Junkanoo Festival is in full swing. During this time and especially on the main holiday days downtown Nassau comes alive with vibrant street parades. Even though Nassau is the main hub of the festival Junkanoo is celebrated across all the islands and it's even

big and bold enough to rival the famous Trinidad Carnival. Junkanoo is a celebration of life, heritage and tradition and revellers celebrate with dancing, music, singing and drumming, definitely a step up from pandering to the demands of the in-laws.

In Jamaica Christmas Day echoes a more familiar celebration. A big day of feasting begins with breakfast then late afternoon brings families together with foods that include traditional turkey, chicken, goat curry, baked hams, rice and peas and fruit cakes. Many Jamaicans paint their homes, hang new curtains and get dressed up for their visitors.

Another legendary seasonal Carnival takes us to Aruba with a slightly different offer. Aruba's population is a melting pot of cultures, this means that here alongside hearing traditional Antillean "tumba" music you can also experience English Caribbean Calypso, Latin salsa beats, Venezuelan 'gaita' songs and the sounds of the Dutch omm-pa-pa.

Searching for a place to stay in the Caribbean brings multiple choices. If you prefer to have everything laid on a plate then choose a resort that will surely spoil you over the festive period. One that stands out is the Bucuti & Tara Resort in Aruba. Boasting multiple awards, and TripAdvisor #8 Hotel for Romance in the world it often sells out up to a year in advance. This spectacular beachfront property really treats its guests. At Christmas chefs prepare menus that celebrate not only the cultures of Aruba but those of its worldwide guests. A favourite local dish you can sample is Olliebollen, a fried donut stuffed with raisins and dusted in icing sugar. bucuti.com

Caribbean islands embrace the festive season as enthusiastically as the British, traditional Christmas decorations are commonplace in most hotels. In St.Lucia I recall the excitement of staff adorning the hotel with decorations while sunning myself and listening to well known Christmas 'tunes' though poolside speakers. On this particular occasion 'I wish it could be Christmas every day'.



Travel Notes

Caroline travelled with British Airways from Newcastle via London Gatwick to St.Lucia staying at the Smugglers Cove Resort now owned and operated as Smugglers Cove Resort & Spa by Blue Diamond. All Caribbean destinations are available via major carriers connecting via London and Paris. Package holidays are available from multiple online holiday agents and with Virgin Holidays, TUI, Kuoni, Sandals and Caribbean Warehouse via major UK airports and some regional hubs.