

The Caribbean

Foodie Barbados: where the cool crowd eats

From clifftop fine dining to a fast-food stall by a beach, **Tom Chesshyre** knows where to go

In the centre of Bridgetown I'm eating chicken stew with dirty rice and hot sauce, with a palate-soothing side salad. I'm at a diner named Mmm: I Like I Like, which I stumbled upon after going for a stroll in Barbados's colourful capital. Reggae plays and office workers drop by for similar stews (fish is also on offer), as

well as vegetable dishes made of sweet potato, plantain and kidney beans. I'd been walking by, but the spicy smell of good-quality cooking — as well as the wonderful name — had enticed me inside. I knew I would not be disappointed. It was my second week on the island and I had already fallen in love with the local cuisine and Mmm: I Like, I Like looked like a surefire winner. It was indeed — as were so many other local diners, stalls and neighbourhood joints that I came upon during my fortnight on the island, many of them open late at night with plenty of ice-cold Banks beer and, of course, rum from the local distilleries. But there is more to Bajan cooking than excellent places such as this. Barbados is in the midst of a food revolution, with top-class restaurants, many of them independent of hotels,

opening up and down my favourite Caribbean island. Here's my selection of some of the best places to go for a bite away from your own hotel or villa, covering upmarket and mid-range — as well as some classic neighbourhood joints by the beach that are always worth a detour for a spicy portion of flying fish (and gossip). **L'Azure, Crane Resort, St Philip** There are great views of Crane beach from the clifftop terrace of L'Azure, on Barbados's south coast. This fine-dining restaurant has a whitewashed look and a refined atmosphere. It's the perfect place for a romantic meal, with dishes such as conch ceviche, crab cakes, tandoori tiger prawns and pork loin with chutney and jerk sauce. My rocket salad



A west-coast beach



The centre of Holetown



Mangobay in Holetown

with mango, shallots and a vinaigrette got the tastebuds going, while the herb-crust barracuda had a lovely creamy, basil-infused mash and a tomato and red onion salsa. The vanilla cheesecake came with juicy tangerine slices. Afterwards go for a drink at the cosy Bar 1887, which also offers tapas. **Details** Three courses are from about £37 (lazurebarbados.com)

Julian Restaurant, Mangobay resort, Holetown

Chill out with a rum punch by the little beach, with its brilliant west coast sunsets, at this charming hotel. Non-residents may purchase dinner passes that include unlimited drinks — the signature rum cocktail with pineapple and mango is marvellous. The food has a light touch, with spicy dishes served with salads. The seafood is first-rate. Mangobay is unpretentious and relaxed with very friendly service. Each night live music is played, performed on a stage right by the beach. **Details** A three-course dinner, with drinks included, is from £64 (mangobaybarbados.com)

Champers, Rockley beach

On a headland on the eastern edge of Rockley beach, Champers is a Bajan institution. Most of the great and the good of the Caribbean have dined here, including the cricketers Brian Lara and Chris Gayle, and the Duke of Edinburgh also once visited (according to my gossipy waitress). Bright modern art adorns the walls, ceiling fans stir the air and the waves crash on the rocks below. After a glass of fantastic fresh mango juice, I tucked into delicious crunchy coconut chilli shrimps (a Champers trademark dish), followed by red snapper with green bananas, pumpkin and mangos. My

coconut pie with vanilla ice cream was light and more-ish. **Details** Three courses are from £40 (champersrestaurant.com)

The Tides, Holetown

The best restaurant on Barbados? It was certainly very good on my visit and the atmosphere is laid-back, even though the decor is super-smart and modern. There are two dining areas — one in an open-sided room facing the west coast sea and another in an air-conditioned room also with a sea view (favoured by locals). After a superb rum sour with lime, I kicked off with oysters with a spicy salsa sauce followed by a "rustic seafood stew", a lovely mix of jumbo shrimps, scallops, salmon, mussels and clams served in a sharp garlic and tomato sauce, accompanied by saffron potatoes, carrots and radishes. Next up came a good slab of salted caramel cheesecake. This is fine dining, Barbadian-style. **Details** Three courses are from £60 (tidesbarbados.com)

The Beach House, Holetown

With sea views, but much lower prices than its neighbour the Tides, the Beach House is a chilled-out option with some of the best pork chops seasoned with jerk sauce on the island. You sit outside on a wooden deck surrounded by tropical plants and facing the water. There's an old red UK telephone box by the entrance. Service is swift and friendly. A jerk-seasoned pork chop with sweet-potato mash, mango chutney and vegetables is from £14. Wash it down with a chilled Carib beer. The restaurant has a renowned Sunday buffet featuring beef stew and fried flying fish from noon to 3pm.



L'Azure, Crane Resort

Details A buffet meal is from £34 (thebeachhousebarbados.com)

SoCo Hotel, Hastings

Just south of Bridgetown, the capital, the SoCo is a friendly new all-inclusive hotel with a small kidney-shaped pool and a cocktail bar overlooking a pleasant promenade that runs for about a mile to Rockley beach. This is one of the favourite restaurants of Sir Garfield Sobers, the cricket legend, who is friends with the owner, with whom he plays golf regularly. Non-residents can book a table and dishes are fresh and zinging with flavour, with lots of peppery spices, herbs and salsas — pots of fiery hot sauces are provided. I loved the split-pea soup and the blackened chicken, served with cajun spices, mash and a fine apple and onion sauce. **Details** Three courses are from £60 with drinks included (thesocohotel.com)

Tapas, Hastings

Between Hastings and Worthing, Tapas is perhaps the island's coolest new restaurant. It is spread over two floors, with open sides overlooking the narrow beach. Cicadas screech and waves break close to the boardwalk. It's a perfect spot for a sundowner followed by tapas, soups or seafood. My main course of spiced swordfish with plantain, sweet-potato mash and pineapple salsa was first-rate, accompanied by a delicate white-fish ceviche and quinoa salad. The mango sorbet was packed with flavour. It's good value and popular with locals and tourists. **Details** Three courses with half a bottle of wine is from £37 (tapasbarbados.com)

Blakey's on the Boardwalk, Hastings

This much-loved bar, which plays reggae and old-school hip-hop, is tucked

between the beach and the main coast road and is the perfect place for an inexpensive relaxed lunch. Buffalo wings, steaks, burgers, pizzas and macaroni pie (a staple of the Barbadian diet) are on offer. I can recommend the chicken pelau (a spicy chicken stew), which comes with a big pile of rice, fried plantain, kidney beans and a side salad (£8). It's best with "grandma's traditional hot pepper sauce" and a cold Banks beer (£2.20). **Details** Three courses are from about £20 (blakeysrestaurantbarbados.com)

Marshall's Bar, Holders Hill

Marshall's is a popular hangout for former West Indian cricket greats in Holders Hill, a local neighbourhood without hotels but with plenty of character — it's on a corner just across from a little cricket ground where many of the big names honed their skills. Cricket memorabilia adorns the walls and chances are that, if you want to, you'll be able to "talk cricket" with a barfly or two. The chicken stew with rice was great. **Details** A main dish and a drink is from £10 (no website)

Oistins market

On the southwest coast, Oistins is a fishing village with a bustling market selling fast-food snacks including fried flying fish and jerk pork stew. It's a great place to hang out for an hour during the day, watching locals play dominoes — the sound of participants slapping down their pieces reverberates across the food stalls. On Friday nights there's a "fish fry" event featuring tuna, swordfish, marlin, mahi-mahi and flying fish. It's a bustling event and most hotels arrange shuttle buses to take you there. **Details** A plate of fish and a beer is £12 (barbados.org/oistins-fish-fry.htm)

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