as the island's bus system. They are inexpensive and travel along the major roads.	
LANGUAGE English is the official language of St. Lucia. In addition, French Creole is widely spoken by most nationals.	
NOTES	
	This information has been compiled for the convenience of our guests and is intended solely for the purpose. While we work to ensure that the information contained herein is correct, we cannot acce

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GENERAL INFORMATION Beautiful St. Lucia is a luxuriant volcanic island set among the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles. The highest peak rises over 3,000 feet above the Caribbean Sea. St. Lucia is known for its sandy beaches and the lush tropical rainforest spreading out over much of the island. The most famous natural features of the island are the towering twin peaks of the Pitons.

Castries, located on the northwest coast, is the capital and primary port for St. Lucia. Finding the calm harbor a perfect place to repair their ships, the town was founded by the French in the mid 1600s. As the English and French struggled for control of the island, St. Lucia and Castries changed hands many times between the mid 17th and early 19th centuries. The city has been virtually destroyed numerous times by hurricanes and fires. In June, 1948 a small fire which started in a tailor's shop grew into an uncontrollable conflagration that burned most of Castries to the ground. The situation became so desperate, firefighting teams from the small U.S. Air Force base at Vieux Fort, over 20 miles to the south, joined in the efforts to save the city. The damage was tremendous, many were left homeless, but miraculously no lives were lost.

Today, with its wonderful cafes, restaurants, shops and boutiques Castries serves as the cultural, political and economic center of the island nation of St. Lucia.



## PORT EXPLORER & SHOPPING GUIDE

## Castries

HISTORY As was the case with most of the islands throughout the Caribbean, by 300 AD St. Lucia had been settled by a peaceful Indian tribe commonly known as the Arawak. Over the centuries these gentle people had slowly made their way north, island hopping from the coast of Venezuela. The Indians led a simple, bucolic lifestyle of subsistence farming and fishing. The Arawak women were famously industrious, dignified and beautiful. A few centuries later the warlike Carib Indians followed the same path up the archipelago from South America. They slaughtered the Arawak men, took the women as their own and occupied the islands of the Antilles. It was the same fierce Carib tribes who met Columbus and the first European explorers and settlers.

Depending upon the historian, St. Lucia was (A) "discovered" in 1499 by Captain Juan de la Cosa, the famous explorer, conquistador, cartographer and former navigator of Christopher Columbus, or (B) first sighted in 1502 by the great Admiral himself on his fourth (and final) voyage to the New World, or (C) happened upon by shipwrecked French sailors later that same year. Regardless of who gets credit for St. Lucia's "discovery" it is certain no physical evidence would have remained of any marooned and hungry Frenchmen once they accepted the Carib Indian's gracious "invitation" to join them for dinner.

In the mid 1500s the first European confirmed to have come ashore on St. Lucia was the dastardly and disreputable French pirate, François "Peg-leg" le Clerc. Le Clerc used the island from which to launch attacks against the Spanish Treasure Fleets, to the anger and consternation of the Spanish Crown.





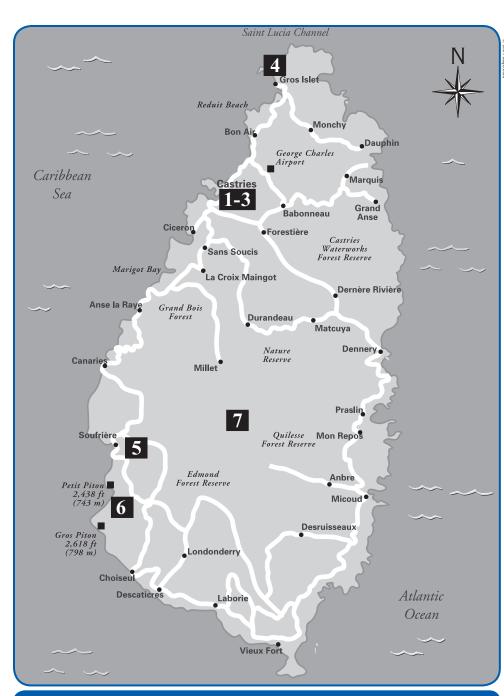




English settlers came ashore (actually abandoned by a British ship's captain) in 1605. They endured less than a month before the welcoming committee of Carib warriors forced the few remaining survivors to flee by rowing out to sea. The English tried again in 1639. They too came under continual attack by the Caribs who were simply defending an island they had captured from the harmless Arawaks. A few lucky and hard-paddling Englishmen who were not killed outright escaped to sea.

Realizing the fate and wisely applying the lesson of the English, the French got clever. On orders from his government in 1651 a young French officer, his pretty new wife and a few terrified and trembling settlers arrived on St. Lucia. The officer greeted the Caribs (here taking a bit of historic and literary license) with the following salutation: "Ne me mangez pas s'il vous plaît. Je suis marié à une de vos femmes." This basically translates as; "Please don't eat me, I'm married to one of your women." Laugh perhaps if you will, but it was true. The ingenious French officer had come with his Carib bride and it worked. The tribal leaders, who by now had become rather fond of Europeans, to their everlasting regret and repentance, allowed the French to settle on St. Lucia. The Caribs were soon outnumbered by French and English and their days, their very survival as a people on St. Lucia and throughout all the islands of the Caribbean, shortly came to an end.

With the elimination of the Caribs, the French and English proceeded to spend the next century and a half fighting for control of St. Lucia. Despite the turmoil, sugarcane plantations flourished on the back of African slave labor. Eventually, in 1814 England won final control of the island and it remained an English possession until granted independence in 1979. There is no little irony in the fact that today, following the Caribs, French, Dutch and English, this free and sovereign state has a population the vast majority of whom are proud, direct descendents of the island's African slaves... the only people who had no desire to come to St. Lucia in the first place.



PLACES OF INTEREST

## CASTRIES AREA PLACES OF INTEREST

**Derek Walcott Square** is in the heart of Castries. Named in honor of the city's 1992 Nobel Laureate for literature, the square is surrounded by some of Castries' few remaining colonial era buildings. The wonderful open market is nearby.

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception looks out over Derek Walcott Square. It was built by the Catholic parish in the late 1800s. Pope John Paul II visited the cathedral when he came to St. Lucia in 1995.

**3** Fort Charlotte is now the Governor General's House and government building. Visitors can tour some of the original battery and structures. Over 800 feet up on Morne Fortune hill, with great views of Castries, this is the location of many battles between the English and French. A monument raised in honor of Britain's 27th Iniskilling Regiment graces this site. The nearby cemetery is the final resting place for soldiers from both sides of the conflict. It is a bit ironic the mountain's name means "The Hill of Good Luck".

## **Beyond Castries**

Pigeon Island National Historic Park is a protected reserve. Within the park is the historic Fort Rodney. Located near the northern tip of St. Lucia, this fort and the waters surrounding it were the site of numerous land and sea battles between the English and French. Ruins of some of the old fortifications, cannons and war related items can still be found on the islet. The park has two quaint beaches and a couple of snack bars.

5 The **Diamond Botanical Garden** is an absolute jewel. Within the beautiful tropical setting there are numerous waterfalls, nature trails and hot, spring fed mineral baths all set among a large variety of exotic plants and flowers.

Petit and Gros Pitons are undoubtedly the most widely recognized landmarks on St. Lucia. The twin volcanic lava domes rise over 2,500 feet out of the sea. The peaks are home to a wide variety of plant and animal life, and at their base the water of the Caribbean is filled with sea life.

7 The **St. Lucia Rainforest** is a nature preserve that covers nearly 20,000 acres. There are close to 30 miles of well maintained hiking trails winding throughout the mountains and valleys with degrees of difficulty that range from easy to challenging. The rainforest is home to a wide variety of tropical plants and birds including the Amazona Versicolor, St. Lucia's National bird and found only on this island. The panoramic views of the lush green island set against the surrounding blue waters of the Caribbean are spectacular.

St. Lucia has some of the most beautiful beaches in the Caribbean. Among the most popular are Reduit, Ans Becune, Anse Chastanet and Anse Cochon.

SHORE EXCURSIONS To make the most of your visit to Castries and the surrounding island of St. Lucia we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS Bargaining: Prices are generally fixed. Local vendors may bargain.

Tipping: Some restaurants may add a 10-15% service charge. The same percentage is appropriate for taxis.

Local Cuisine: The cuisine of St. Lucia is a combination of traditional West Indian, French, English and West African. Staples of local "home cooking" include plantain, breadfruit, dasheen (taro root) and yams. Fish is abundant and fresh. Some favorite local dishes include: Salt Fish and Green Fig combines boiled green figs (bananas), sautéed garlic peppers, parsley, celery, and boiled salt fish. Petit Piton is a cooked mixture of chopped meat with potatoes, vegetables, onions, garlic and lime juice. It is served over a steaming bed of rice. Banana Chicken is flattened chicken breasts covered with thinly sliced ham and bananas then rolled like a tortilla or egg roll. The roll is then dipped in an egg wash and covered in flour and shredded coconut and baked.

Drink Specialties: In local markets visitors can find vendors offering coconut water right from the shell. Ti Tasse and La Belle Creole Black are locally popular coffee rum liqueurs that are little known outside the islands. Piton is the national beer and Bounty is the national rum. A special drink known as "ah bar kontwer" is a mixture of spices and white rum.

SHOPPING FACILITIES La Place Carenage, in town, and Pointe Seraphine, across the bay, are Castries' duty-free waterfront shopping areas. Jewelry, perfumes and locally made arts and crafts are just some of the items available

LOCAL CURRENCY The official currency on St. Lucia is the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$). U.S. dollars and major credit cards are widely accepted. ATMs are widely available.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES The Post Office is located on Bridge Street.

Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card from a public phone:

AT&T: 1.800.225.5288 MCI: 1.800.888.8000

TOURIST INFORMATION A Visitor's Center is located at Point Seraphine.

TRANSPORTATION Taxis have standard fares set by the St. Lucian Taxi Association. Establish the fare prior to departure. Car rentals are available. Privately owned minivans operate