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# In the Caribbean, Good Deals but Not a Fire Sale



Chris Ramirez for The New York Times

The beach at CuisinArt Resort & Spa on Rendezvous Bay on Anguilla. The resort is offering a deal of four nights at a villa for the price of three.

By MICHELLE HIGGINS

Published: November 15, 2009

AFTER a year of dismal bookings and deep discounts, travel to the [Caribbean](#) is beginning to pick up, allowing resorts to be more selective with sales this year. But it's still possible for travelers to nab a deal, especially if they're flexible.

Prices are higher over Thanksgiving, [Christmas](#) and New Year's. But hotels are still offering bargains, often in the form of free nights, [spa](#) treatments and other perks.

"We are now seeing the new normal," said Steve Heydt, president of Elite Island Resorts, which operates upscale hotels in [Antigua](#), the Grenadines and elsewhere. "All travel rates have been re-established to offer savings."

Outright discounts, while not hard to find, aren't quite as robust as last year's, however. Hotels that had slashed rates 50 percent or more are now offering savings of only 20 to 30 percent. For example, [Elite Island Resorts](#) made a small splash last year when it accepted payment in stocks, based on their pre-bust value. This year, it is only offering 20 percent off seven-night vacations in January, 10 percent in February and 30 percent in March.

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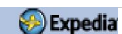
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But don't procrastinate. While some islands like [St. Lucia](#) and [Aruba](#) are welcoming new air service, which usually means cheaper airfare, flights to the Caribbean are still tight, making it difficult to find a seat and bargains, especially on popular travel dates. As the winter season gets under way, said Mr. Heydt, travelers "are now making their reservation commitments in fear that even these current deals could evaporate in the coming months."

## LUXURY

High-end hotels don't like the word "deal." They prefer euphemisms like "enhanced value" or "added amenities." And on [Anguilla](#), known for its luxury resorts and villas, there is no shortage of them. For example, stay four nights at the [Malliouhana Hotel & Spa](#), and get a range of perks including a four-course dinner, four hourlong massages and a [snorkeling](#) trip; the Getaway Package for two is \$4,995. Or get [four nights at a villa for the price of three](#) at the [CuisinArt Resort & Spa](#).

[Parrot Cay](#), on a private island in the [Turks and Caicos](#), has extended its seven-nights-for-the-price-of-five deal, which it introduced last year when the recession hit. The price — \$4,650 in January for a garden-view room including taxes and fees — is the same as last year. Even on popular [St. Bart's](#), which rarely has the need to discount, hotels are offering incentives. For example, [Hôtel Guanahani](#), which has rooms from 615 euros (about \$940, at \$1.53 to the euro) a night, will throw in a free car rental for guests who stay six nights or more.

For cut rates, check [Luxurylink.com](#), which offers unpublished discounts on luxury hotels and villas through online auctions and special deals. The site recently offered a four-bedroom villa at Round Hill in Jamaica — complete with a cook, laundress, housekeepers and gardeners — for \$5,900 a week, or about \$845 a night.

There are still vacancies for Christmas elsewhere, but be willing to pay full price. "Every hotelier that has come into our office has said there is Christmas space available," said June Sloane, a luxury travel specialist at Sue Brown Travel in [Boca Raton](#), Fla. "But they're not going to give it away."

## ON THE CHEAP

If a beach bargain is all you care about, consider [Grenada](#), St. Maarten or the [United States Virgin Islands](#), which are all running islandwide promotions that include extra hotel nights, spending credits and discounts for island attractions and tours.

[VisitJamaica.com](#), run by the Jamaica Tourist Board, [lists hotel discounts](#) ranging from 40 percent off at the Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort in Montego Bay, to 60 percent off [Beaches](#) Sandy Bay in Negril. To avoid the tourist strips, head to Jake's in Treasure Beach, on the southwestern coast, which is offering a [fifth night free](#) through Dec. 18 with the code 5NTFREE.

It's also possible to mingle with the elite for less. Anguilla may have some of the most expensive resorts in the Caribbean, but you can stay at a small guesthouse for less and still hit the best beaches. Indeed the island's 33 beaches, including the finely combed sands in front of the fanciest resorts, are all open to the public. [Sydans](#) Apartments & Villas in the village of Sandy Ground has winter rates from \$95 a night for a basic room with kitchen. [La Vue](#), a bed-and-breakfast in South Hill, has 17 rooms, with rates starting at \$90 a night.

## FAMILIES

Affordable lodging is just one consideration for families planning a Caribbean vacation. Child-friendly food is another, especially for picky eaters. And unless your children are content just to play in the sand all week, a wide variety of activities is in order. That may be why many families turn to all-inclusive resorts, which typically offer several restaurants, adult-friendly offerings like spas or casinos, and enough activities to exhaust even the most energetic child.

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[Liberty Travel](#), the travel agency chain based in Ramsey, N.J., is offering a range of all-inclusive specials including 55 percent off at Dreams [Punta Cana](#) in the [Dominican Republic](#), which has seven restaurants, an enormous free-form pool and daily activities for children. Rates, which include airfare from New York, start at \$655 a person for a four-night stay if booked by Nov. 30. The all-inclusive Almond Casuarina in [Barbados](#) is 50 percent off until Dec. 20; a four-night package, which includes airfare from New York, starts at \$979 a person.

The Atlantis in the [Bahamas](#) is offering two-night stays for as low as [\\$199 a night](#) that include a round of [golf](#) and admission to the resort's water park. The deal, which must be booked by the end of November, is good for stays through Dec. 16.

### **[CRUISES](#)**

It used to be that a cruise for \$100 a person a day was a good deal. Now, \$75 a day is not unusual.

This year, an inside room on a seven-night Caribbean cruise costs an average of about \$520, according to [Surecruise.com](#), an online cruise agency. But deeper discounts are available for travelers who act fast. Last week, Royal Caribbean had a one-day sale on an eight-night southern Caribbean cruise in November for an unbelievable \$199 a person, not including taxes and fees. Norwegian has seven-night western Caribbean cruises in November and December starting at \$299 a person.

Interestingly, some of the most attractive deals this winter are being offered on newer ships. [CruiseCritic.com/bargains](#) lists seven-night western Caribbean cruises on the three-year-old Crown Princess for \$479 and the popular Norwegian Jewel for \$329. Both depart in January.

"If I'm going to spend the same kind of money on a cruise," said Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor in chief of CruiseCritic, "I'll take the newer ship, with better restaurants, more amenities, bigger spa, pool, sun deck, and broader entertainment — any day."

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

#### **Correction: November 15, 2009**

*The Practical Traveler column on Page 8 this weekend, about deals and discounts on Caribbean hotels, using information from a publicist, refers incorrectly to the cost this year for a seven-nights-for-the-price-of-five deal at Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos. The price of \$4,650 in January was the same as last year's price — not higher. (The price quoted for last year, \$3,875, omitted taxes and fees; with those, the cost comes to \$4,650.)*

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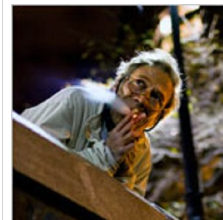
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