

BRIDAL GUIDE

November/December 2014

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QUIZ: ISLAND TIME

PICK UP YOUR PENCILS. IT'S TIME TO DISCOVER THE RIGHT CARIBBEAN DESTINATION FOR YOU.

BY SUSAN MOYNIHAN

Aruba's Bucuti & Tara Beach Resorts.

Dreaming of sand, sun and surf on an island honeymoon?

The Caribbean is a natural for that, but let's face facts, it can also be confusing to decide where to go; after all, there are 33 different nations and countless islands to choose from! Take this quiz, then get ready to pack your bags for the beach vacation of a lifetime at the island best suited for you.

1. This puts the "happy" in your happy hour...

- A. Biodynamic wine. All natural and pure imparts a superior taste.
- B. Champagne. Life is always better with bubbles.
- C. There's nothing like an ice-cold beer on a hot, sunny day.
- D. Chef's choice. A handcrafted cocktail made by a master mixologist is always an excellent experience.

2. Your perfect date night...

- A. A quiet dinner at an understated, yet elegant restaurant.
- B. A VIP box at the ballet.
- C. Cocktails with a sunset view.
- D. Tickets to the season's hottest arena show.

3. Must-follow celebrity Instagram...

- A. Eco-products entrepreneur and effortlessly chic actress Jessica Alba.
- B. The Queen B., Mrs. Shawn Carter.
- C. Model Chrissy Tiegen. She's active and fun in addition to being gorgeous.
- D. The always sexy and stylish Jennifer Lopez.

4. Honeymoon must-pack shoes...

- A. Espadrilles. They're beachy with a hint of class.
- B. Strappy designer sandals—the higher the better!
- C. Birkenstocks. They're comfy for touring, look good with a maxi dress and are easy to kick off at the beach.
- D. Dancing shoes for nights in the club. →



San Juan Marriott & Stellaris Casino.



Hotel Guanahani & Spa.

Hotel Guanahani & Spa is the only resort on **St. Barths** to offer motorized water excursions from the property. Join fishermen before **sunrise** and your catch will be prepared by the hotel chefs for your **lunch or dinner**.

**IF YOU PICKED MOSTLY A'S
TRY TURKS & CAICOS**

This collection of islands southeast of the Bahamas is made for beach days and mellow yet sophisticated nights enjoying dinner by the sea. It's easy to get to—less than 600 miles from Miami—but feels a world apart from the mainland U.S., as well as the rest of the Caribbean. This isn't your expected island destination of beach bars and t-shirt shops; it's decidedly understated, with minimal nightlife beyond after-dinner nightcaps and live music that winds down by midnight on the weekends. Pampering resorts are lined along Providenciales' Grace Bay Beach, which spans 12 miles of powder-white sand edged by translucent green water of the Princess Alexandra National Marine Park. Wade in to snorkel the reef just offshore, home to sea turtles, parrotfish, eagle rays and dolphins. If you've ever wanted to scuba dive, this is an especially good place to do it, thanks to dramatic vertical walls and swim-throughs, not to mention the humpback whales who migrate through in February and March.

WHERE TO STAY: Check into the **Hotel at Grace Bay Club**, where every suite comes with a kitchenette, a private ter-

race and a minimum of 1,000 square feet of living space. (It's also limited to guests aged 12 and up; families with younger children are welcome in the neighboring Villas.) Speaking of space, Grace Bay fronts the longest stretch of beach of any hotel—1,100 feet for strolling, swimming and sunning. Dining options include romantic gourmet cuisine at open-air Anacaona, which faces the ocean, or tapas and cocktails at the striking outdoor Infiniti Bar, said to be the longest in the Caribbean. All-natural Elemis treatments are on tap at the Anani spa, or just kick back at one of three pools, including one reserved for guests age 12 and over. The property offers a slew of eco-activities that show off the locale, and are also invested in social sustainability through their Adopt-a-School program on neighboring North and South Caicos islands (room rates start at \$750 a night; gracebayclub.com).

**IF YOU PICKED MOSTLY B'S
CHECK OUT ST. BARTHS**

The Caribbean doesn't get more glam than on this French island, especially during high season in December and January thanks to a slew of visiting celebrities such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z,

Derek Jeter and Rachel Zoe (caveat: the island basically shuts down in September and October). Just an hour's flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico—Tradewind Aviation offers a timely schedule and great service—this small (eight square miles) isle is not a place you go to hide out. Instead it's a beautiful backdrop to a see-and-be-seen scene. The charming port town of Gustavia is filled with chic, red-roofed storefronts that house art galleries, cafés and shops and both Euros and U.S. dollars are accepted. Enjoy any one of the island's 17 beaches: St. Jean beach gets props for the liveliness at open-air Nikki Beach restaurant while secluded Colombier is only accessible by boat or walking trail.

WHERE TO STAY: When it comes to backdrops things don't get much prettier than **Hotel Guanahani & Spa**, set on its own 18-acre peninsula by Marigot Bay. The 67 colorful, Creole-style cottages tucked amidst lush foliage range from standard garden-view rooms with private terraces to three-bedroom villas with A-list amenities such as in-room hammams, garden Jacuzzis and private swimming pools. Check out the pool scene at the beachfront restaurant Indigo and enjoy a variety of activities from ten-

PHOTOGRAPHY: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) SAN JUAN MARRIOTT & STELLARIS CASINO; HOTEL GUANAHANI & SPA



Grace Bay Club.

nis and kite surfing to paddle boarding, kayaking and snorkeling. At night, enjoy a romantic dinner at Bartolomé where Executive Chef Philippe Massegia offers a diverse menu with noteworthy seafood dishes. Guanahani not only has a fitness center and two beaches but also a stunning spa by French brand Clarins where another pool is available for guests (room rates start at \$390 a night and include breakfast; leguanahani.com).

IF YOU PICKED MOSTLY C'S

AIM FOR ARUBA

YOUR DESTINATION: Active, free-spirited Aruba is not your postcard Caribbean island, lush with palm trees and bougainvillea. Instead it's surprisingly arid, with a landscape that recalls Arizona—that is, if the state were buffeted by tradewinds and surrounded by sparkling blue sea. Which all adds up to Aruba's unique appeal (coupled with the fact that the isle is located outside of the hurricane zone). Lack of rain keeps the typical tropical foliage down but gives it more sunny days than anywhere else in the Caribbean, making this a year-round spot for fun. The island also draws a diverse crowd, from pro windsurfers and kiteboarders drawn by the near-constant

tradewinds, to groups of party-seekers lured by frequent air and hotel specials to international families enticed by the island's safe reputation. The latter is also why it has the highest return-guest rate in the Caribbean. Getting around is a breeze, either by taxi, public bus or the island's own unique Kunukoo party buses that circuit among Oranjestad and the hotel zones. But don't just stick to the beaten path; take a tour to the unpopulated east coast for striking rock formations and endless views.

WHERE TO STAY: Aruba hotels are parceled into three main areas: downtown Oranjestad, marked by colorful Dutch-Caribbean architecture, shopping and a 24/7 casino; Palm Beach, with big brand name properties like Hyatt, Radisson and Marriott; and our pick, Eagle Beach, where resorts don't rise above three stories tall. It's home to one of Aruba's most romantic hotels, **Bucuti & Tara Beach Resorts**. This eco-conscious, 104-room resort only accepts guests aged 18 and over, making it ideal for honeymooners. There's not a bad room on property, but the Tara Suites are best positioned, with cushy bedrooms that face the ocean and separate living areas. Reserve a table in a beachfront cabana or sign up for their

unique dine-around program that lets you sample various restaurants on and off property (room rates start at \$331 a night and include breakfast; bucuti.com).

IF YOU CHOSE MOSTLY D'S PACK FOR PUERTO RICO

YOUR DESTINATION: Although technically part of the United States, this spicy island has a personality and culture all its own. It's also diverse, with strikingly different aspects depending on where you go across the island. We love historic Old San Juan, where cobblestone streets date to the 17th century, and the narrow alleyways hold treasures like courtyard restaurants, small shops selling cigars and Panama hats, and locals playing dominoes under shady tables in public plazas. Just seven miles away are the thoroughly modern resort strips of Condado and Isla Verde, where beachfront hotels come with casinos, landscaped pool decks and late-night lounges that recall South Beach. This isn't a place where locals stay on one side and tourists on the other; everyone mingles and dances, usually to live salsa or merengue. Outside of the capital, you'll find more surprises, from the westernmost surfer paradise of Rincón, where thatched-roof beach bars serve up fresh fish and *mofongo* (a fried plantain-dish) to the sexy offshore island of Vieques, where hip boutique hotels draw style seekers looking to get away from it all.

WHERE TO STAY: For a little bit city and a little bit beach, you can't beat the **San Juan Marriott Resort and Stellaris Casino**. This 525-room hotel sits on a gorgeous stretch of Condado Beach, perfect for swimming or just strolling if you'd rather hang by the pool. The property is also a happening nightlife destination, with a multi-piece salsa band taking center stage in Bar Rouge from Wednesday through Sunday nights, drawing partiers from other hotels and a loyal set of locals who come to show off their moves on the floor. You're also just a quick taxi ride to Old San Juan, and easily positioned for day trips hiking in El Yunque rainforest, beach horseback riding in Isabella and nighttime snorkeling in Puer to Rico's bioluminescent bay (room rates start at \$185 a night; marriott.com). ■