



PARADISE WITHOUT THE CROWDS

*The Caribbean island of Nevis is for life, not just for Christmas,
as Cheryl Markosky discovered*

Traditionally, mad dogs and milky-limbed Englishmen hotfoot it to the scorching Caribbean when our winter can only be labeled as officially lousy. Anything to catch some rays, we leap on planes, boats and every transportation mode known to man for balmy breezes and sunlit shores, but I think they're missing a trick. One of the best-kept secrets is that clever holidaymakers are starting to warm up to Nevis, sister isle to St Kitts, in the quieter summer season when it costs less and there are fewer crowds.

That's not to say that the 'busy' winter season on diminutive Nevis is like elbowing your way through rush hour at Waterloo Station – the island's only 36 square miles and has a population of 12,000, (about the same size as Blandford Forum). It's a pretty chilled spot anytime, but it's even more easy-going



Above: Cheryl at Mango Restaurant Four Seasons

when sunbirds take wing.

I thought I would bum to a plantain crisp in roasting mid-summer heat, but year-round the temperature varies by just seven degrees and there are cooling tradewinds. "The real

difference between summer and winter in Nevis is that summer nights tend to be warmer and you probably won't need that wrap when going out to dinner," suggests Suzanne Gordon, owner of Sugar Mill Real Estate and a resident on the island for 17 years. She points out that prices of hotels and holiday-homes drop by as much as half in the summer. "Beautiful villas which appear unaffordable are suddenly within reach. Others may be cheap enough so you can add another week to your holiday." For instance, villas at SEASIDE at Cliffdwellers cost only £1,580 a week off-season – or what I call on-season, due to summery advantages - rather than £2,110 in winter.

So, what to do on my all-time favourite tropical island when you're not jostling up against the opposition? Here's my hush-hush guide to summer Nevis. In the off-season, it just might seem like your own private paradise.



FOUR SEASONS

Managing director Sven Wiedenhaupt is offering 'summer of love' packages – book for two weeks and you get a third week for free – and special summer camps. "We've designed summer camps where families do activities, such as golf clinics, meditation, hunter-gatherer cookery classes and deep-sea fishing."

Other Four Seasons summery offerings include a lighter menu at beachside Mango restaurant – I recommend lobster ceviche, mango gazpacho and conch fritters – and a new bud-tingling rum tasting. "We're collecting rums from all round the Caribbean and are aiming for 101 varieties," adds Wiedenhaupt. www.fourseasons.com/nevis



The golf course at Four Seasons

THE FACTS

It's an eight-and-a-half-hour flight from Gatwick to Antigua (British Airways, www.ba.com), then a 15-minute hop to St Kitts, followed by a 10-minute water taxi. Virgin Airways flies direct to Antigua (www.virgin-atlantic.com).

On Nevis, monkeys (more than 20,000) outnumber people (12,000).

Golfers can play at the Four Seasons, or at the Marriott on St Kitts (www.marriott.co.uk/hotels/travel/skbrb-st-kitts-marriott-resort-and-the-royal-beach-casino).



Above: Cliffdwellers' sugar mill real estate

PLANTATION INNS

A summer sugar mill tour is a must. Most starry is Relais & Chateaux Montpelier Plantation AND Beach (www.montpeliemevis.com), where Princess Diana and the princes stayed, and Horatio Nelson wed his Nevisian bride, Fanny Nisbet. Relax with a rum punch in the Great Room before an upper-crust meal on the terrace.

Uber-groovy Golden Rock (www.goldenrocknevis.com) has the island's best edge-of-rainforest garden and coolest mill-meets-modernism design, thanks to artist

owners Brice and Helen Marden. Sample the signature lobster sandwich and dessert chef Annelise's chocolate-chip ice cream.

Family-run The Hermitage boasts the 17th-century Main House, the oldest surviving wooden house in the Caribbean and a library where you can sip rum and smoke a cigar. The Caribbean's only seaside plantation inn, Nisbet Plantation (www.nisbetplantation.com), provides wonderful old-school afternoon tea and a parade of coconut palms leading down to the Atlantic.

The island of Nevis



CLIMB NEVIS PEAK

Book triathlon-winner and guide Reginald 'Reggie' Douglas (www.nevisadventuretours.com) to take you up the 3,232ft Peak.

Round the island there's plenty of free-range wildlife: vervet monkeys, donkeys, sheep, goats, chickens, giant frogs and moths.

TIME TO LIME

The livin' is easy at Sunshine's beach bar (www.sunshinesnevis.com) - drink a Killer Bee cocktail and ask Pinky to grill you a snapper, or slide over to Bananas (www.bananasrestaurantnevis.com). Then join expats and locals at Lime to dance to Jazzique. And there's Nevis's own summer carnival, the Culturama Festival, from 5 August. Move over Notting Hill.

BEACHES

Pinney's Beach is the main coastal hangout, where you can relish a Grouper fish burger or seared tuna at Chrishi Beach Club (www.chrishi-beachclub.com). Other oceanfronts where you can pitch your beach mat include Herbert's, Windward and Lover's Beaches.