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Best Caribbean hotels under \$150 a night **Nothing is budget about these hideaways — except the price**

When is a vacation not a vacation?

When you can't relax because you're worried about spending money. The current economic crisis is forcing many to be financially creative, and that includes travelers, many of whom are researching destinations, boning up on travel tips, and scouring the Internet for deals like never before. Think you can't afford a winter getaway this year? Think again.

The slowing global economy has a silver lining for vacationers: increased competition among travel providers. The Caribbean—where high season officially begins on December 15—is a prime example.

"Travelers are the great beneficiaries, as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators become more aggressive [this high season] in their pricing, offering enticing, value-added offers," says Rick Newman, chairman of the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau.

Hugh Riley, interim secretary general of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, agrees. “All the Caribbean nations have one overriding mandate in the current economic climate: to provide incentives to travelers.”

While airlines like American are cutting the number of daily flights to the region, hotels are where the real bargains are. For example, the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#)—made up of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John—have joined forces in offering a “Winter Escape” promotion with more than \$500 in savings off of holiday stays at more than 25 hotels, including The Buccaneer, Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa, and Frenchman’s Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort.

The luxurious [Parrot Cay](#) resort in the [Turks and Caicos](#) hasn’t yet had any cancellations (that it knows of) because of the economic crisis, but bookings are down due to a 50 percent drop in scheduled flights to the island. The property is trying to entice travelers with special deals, like its “7 for 5” offer, where guests get two free nights with a five-night stay through January 31, 2009.

As most experienced travelers will tell you, accommodations are often the most expensive part of a vacation—especially during high season in the Caribbean—which is why [travelandleisure.com](#) decided to take the work out of finding a tropical hideaway by selecting 10 surprisingly luxurious and authentic hotels, resorts, and guesthouses across the Caribbean where nightly rates are less than \$150.

A longtime secret among budget-minded cool-hunters, the [Rockhouse Hotel](#) in Negril lives up to its name. Carved into pocked stone cliffs on the island’s western edge, the hotel villas overlook the see-through waters of Pristine Bay, and there’s a 60-foot horizon pool. Or, take [Chez Pierre](#) on Long Cay in the [Bahamas](#), with its breezy cottages and barefoot comfort. Days at this resort, founded by a Canadian chef and his wife, are about swimming, fishing, and taking it easy. Incredibly, the already reasonable rates also include breakfast and French-inspired dinners featuring the daily catch.

In the [Dominican Republic](#), the character-filled 16th-century colonial mansion [Hotel Doña Elvira](#) has a palm-shaded pool and is just steps from Old Santo Domingo. And, off of French-speaking Guadeloupe on Terre-de-Haut, one of the island's top properties, [Hôtel Auberge Les Petits Saints](#), is surrounded by Saintes Bay, named by UNESCO as one of the most beautiful bays in the world. Its rates right now? A low \$115 a night.

Luxury, in many forms, *can* be had for less. There's never been a better—and more affordable—time to take off to the Caribbean.



[The Rockhouse Hotel](#)
Negril, Jamaica

What's It's Like: Thatched-roof stone villas with private outdoor showers and four-posters draped in mosquito netting. A 60-foot horizon pool, daily yoga classes, snorkeling equipment, and the hotel's Spa Pavilion all make leaving the grounds, where Bob Dylan and Bob Marley once stayed, unnecessary. Don't miss a 30-foot dive off the craggy cliffs of Pristine Bay—Jamaica's westernmost point.

Why It's a Bargain: Your dollars do double duty; your vacation helps build and repair local schools and expand libraries. Since 2004, the Rockhouse Foundation has donated over \$500,000 to its community.

Doubles from: \$125 (until Dec. 15)



Hôtel Auberge Les Petits Saints
Terre-de-Haut, Guadeloupe

What's It's Like: The top choice on Terre-de-Haut is the intimate hotel has guest rooms filled with antiques (they're for sale) and one of the isle's best restaurants (the grilled fish with vanilla sauce is a standout). Surrounding Saintes Bay was named the second most beautiful bay of the world by UNESCO.

Why It's a Bargain: Terre-de-Haute, the largest of the French-speaking islands of Les Saintes, off the coast of Guadeloupe, is an often overlooked, barefoot version of St. Bart's, dotted with small hotels where the doors are still left unlocked.

Doubles from: \$115 (until Dec. 15)



Chez Pierre
Long Island, Bahamas

What's It's Like: There's nothing flashy on this 3,000-person island situated where the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea meet (connections are made via charter plane in Nassau). The hotel's six elevated cottages blend into the solitary stretch of beach with calm crystal blue water. Not surprisingly, swimming and fishing are this island's main activities. The namesake owner, a Canadian named Pierre, is also a chef who adds a French twist to fresh catches of the day, rock lobster and conch fritters.

Why It's a Bargain: Breakfast and dinner are included in the price of your stay.

Doubles from: \$150 per night with a five-night minimum (less than five nights rate are \$170)



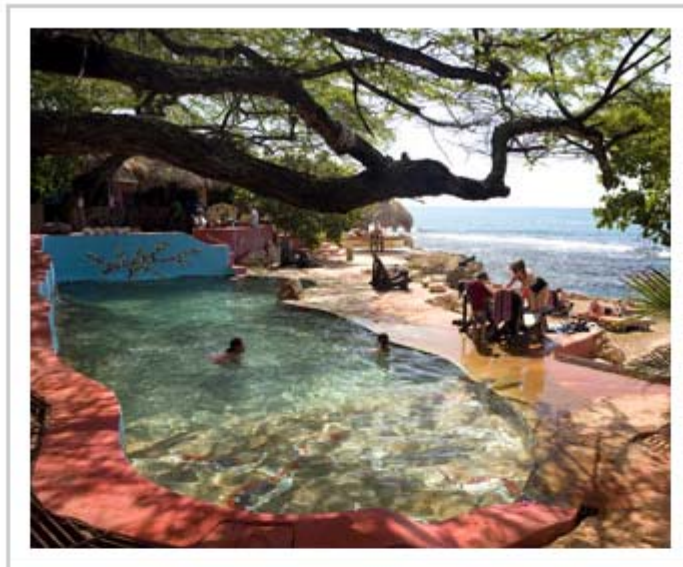
Natura Cabañas

Cabarete, Dominican Republic

What's It's Like: Just 10 minutes from the small bustling beach town of Cabarete, the 10 bungalows, with roofs made of palm fronds and stone-and-bamboo interiors, blend into the jungle-like environs. The earthy spa menu includes mud wraps and salt scrubs; the two restaurants prepare organic dishes, from ceviche to fish stir-fry. Activity-seekers can turn to the helpful staff, who will arrange scuba diving in Sosúa Bay and horseback riding through nearby villages.

Why It's a Bargain: The lush north coast of the island has fast become a favorite destination for windsurfers who enjoy the authentic vibe-and lack of tourists.

Doubles from: \$90 (year-round)



Jake's
Treasure Beach, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica

What's It's Like: Get away from the gated all-inclusives of Negril and Mo'bay at this funky resort with Moroccan-style villas and surfside shacks on stilts. Conceived by set designer Sally Henzell, each of the 29 rooms and suites has its own unique features: second-story private patio with daybed, private garden with lily pond, even an infinity plunge pool.

Why It's a Bargain: It's hard to find so much style for so little. Plus, you don't have to travel far for nighttime entertainment: there's a poolside bar and a media room that screens films in the evenings. Bonus: Pelican Bar, a hangout in the middle of the ocean, is a 20-minute boat ride away.

Doubles from: \$95 (until Dec. 15)



Hotel Doña Elvira
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

What's It's Like: This rambling 16th century former colonial mansion was transformed into a 15-room guest house in 2004 but it hasn't lost any of its old world charm. Twenty-foot ceilings with original wood beams adorn the entrance and the courtyard in back has a pool and a 100-year-old mango tree. Rooms are a bit old fashioned and kitschy, but in this setting it works. The hotel even offers Spanish lessons.

Why It's a Bargain: Located in the middle of Old Town Santo Domingo, sidewalk cafés, museums, churches and theatres provide days worth of activities all within strolling distance.

Doubles from: \$59 (until Dec. 15)

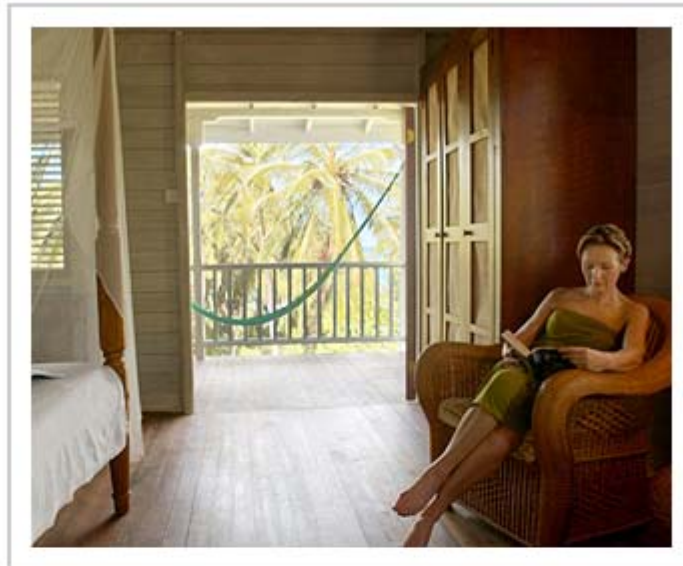


Coco Palm
Rodney Bay, St. Lucia

What's It's Like: The French Creole–inspired Coco Palm resort has Wi-Fi service, yoga cruises, and “swim-up rooms” (at a higher cost), which open directly into the grand swimming pool and Caribbean bistro. The hotel arranges trips through the 19,000-acre rain forest on the new zip line, and can book sunset catamaran cruises and day trips to Martinique or the Grenadines.

Why It's a Bargain: Guests can make all manner of customized requests: type of airport transfer, color of room, champagne and snack preferences.

Doubles from: \$145 (until Dec. 22)



[Sea-U Guest House](#)
Bathsheba, [Barbados](#)

What's It's Like: From the front, this hideaway on the island's east coast doesn't look like much, but out back is a two-story plantation-style hotel with seven simple rooms cooled by island breezes. Opened by friendly former travel writer Uschi Wetzels, this place isn't for everyone—there's no air-conditioning or television, guests share a single phone, and mosquito repellent can come in handy at sunset. Easygoing Americans and Europeans get to know each other over family-style meals, and entertainment is provided by the wandering resident cat and monkeys playing in the trees.

Why It's a Bargain: Located in the fishing village of Bathsheba near beaches with stunning rock formations and some of the best surfing in the world.

Doubles from: \$129 (until Dec. 15)

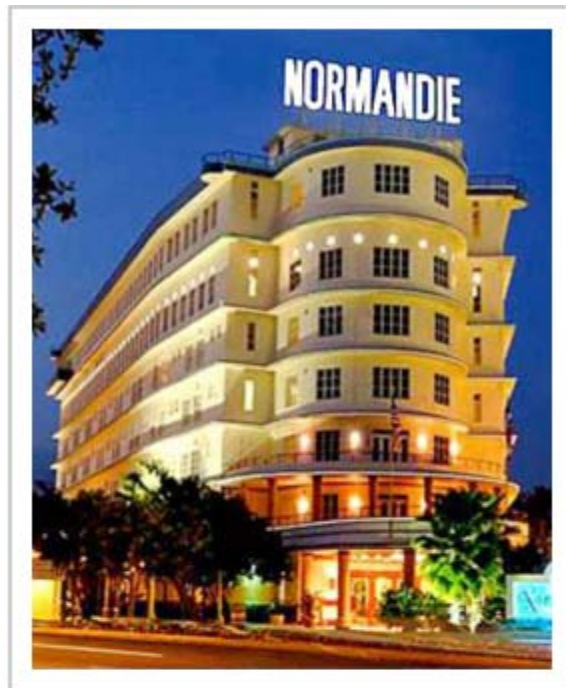


Numero Uno Guest House
Santa Ana, Puerto Rico

What's It's Like: A renovated 1940's beach retreat, this guesthouse presides over a wide stretch of sand between San Juan's resorts and casinos. The 14 rooms are decorated in light woods and muted colors. Room No. 12 has the best ocean view; all have cable TV and high-speed Internet access. But you'd be a fool to stay inside and miss the sunsets from the library's terrace.

Why It's a Bargain: Centrally located in the Ocean Park neighborhood, the guesthouse is just steps from the surf and the San Juan casinos and nightlife.

Doubles from: \$102 (until Dec. 15)



Normandie Hotel
San Juan, Puerto Rico

What's It's Like: Built in 1939 by a native engineer enamored of a French cancan dancer he'd met on an ocean liner, the 173-room hotel's retro Art Deco curves and Jazz Age detailing complement a 21st-century design (blond-wood bed frames, flat-panel TV's, ergonomic desk chairs). The swank N-Lounge has an outdoor terrace looking out onto the city streets, while Cru, with its own carpaccio bar—the only one on the island—puts a sophisticated spin on Italian seafood classics.

Why It's a Bargain: The hotel sits right on the beach but is only a short walk to old San Juan; which means you can break up your time sunning and sightseeing cathedrals and forts, or spend an evening at the opera.

Doubles from: \$119 (until Dec. 15)