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Caribbean Hideaway

➔ When Spanish explorers came across the cloud-encrusted Caribbean island peak pictured here, they dubbed it *Nuestra Señora de las Nieves*, which translates to “Our Lady of the Snow.” The observation led to the island being named Nevis, though rest assured that no snow graces this tropical paradise. Snow isn’t the only thing Nevis lacks: There’s also a dearth of tourists, making it an ideal getaway for those seeking quiet solace on the beach or an open trail up Nevis Peak. Spend some time on the island and you may come away wondering why native son and founding father Alexander Hamilton ever left. *Uncover more about the idyllic island on page 92.*





Nevis Naturally

Experience what the Caribbean was like before tourists discovered it

BY BECCA HENSLEY

The morning light on Nevis looks like an abalone shell's glossy inner chamber—pink, lilac and shimmering, with cotton candy mounds of gray. But the light may not even be the best part of early morning Nevis. At dawn, the sounds of donkeys braying wafts from farm to farm across emerald valleys. It seems almost cartoonish—something like the barking interplay in *101 Dalmatians*. But on Nevis, a former British colony and one of the lesser-traveled West Indies destinations, this sort of otherworldly good morning is all too real.

Just less than 36 square-miles-tiny and located 2 miles across a channel from its sister isle, St. Kitts, Nevis evokes the exotic allure and slowed down pace of the Caribbean of yore. Free from swanky high rise hotels and devoid of theme parks, homogenous seaside towns, cookie cutter condos and celebrity chef-helmed restaurants, Nevis is the island equivalent of slow food: wholesome, authentic, unpretentious and marching to its original drummer.

The throwback beauty of Nevis does mean that there are a limited number of places to stay—though scarcity translates into an exclusivity you'll savor. To tap into the rhythms of timeless Nevis, make your base at Montpelier Plantation & Beach, a former sugar mill turned luxury

hotel. A favorite destination of Princess Diana, the plantation is perched above the water and enveloped in lush green gardens and flowers. From the resort's balconies, you won't hear cars or traffic, but you may well see mischievous monkeys playing nearby.

As tempting as it is to linger and be pampered at Montpelier, Nevis is a paradise that should be explored. While the resort will provide a ride to its private beach, grab a bike instead and pedal the mostly downhill trip to its cordoned-off crescent of sand. The trip will take you through the capital of Charlestown. Once so flush with sugar plantation wealth that planters could be seen carted about in carriages and sedan chairs, Charlestown is now a sleepy place studded with Georgian-style cottages, where bursts of activity are triggered by the arrival of the ferry from St. Kitts. Along the way, you'll also pass the island's famous volcanic hot springs, which are located at the historic Bath Hotel and Spring House and have been drawing visitors in search of cures since the 1700s.

After lounging at Montpelier's private beach, explore some of Nevis' other sandy options. By far the most acclaimed is the idyllic Pinney's Beach, which stretches for 3 miles north of Charlestown. On its windward side, the water becomes limpid as a Tahitian lagoon, while the rest boasts the kind

WHEN YOU GO

FLY American Airlines and Delta offer service between San Antonio and St. Kitts, from where public or private ferries will get you to Nevis.

STAY Montpelier Plantation & Beach has 19 cottages adorned with antiques and modern amenities dotting its 60 acres. Try the five-course tasting menu at **Mill Privée**, located in what was once the sugar mill. montpeliernevis.com

DINE On Pinney's Beach, indulge in Nevis-style BBQ and a Killer Bee, the consummate rum punch at **Sunshines Beach Bar & Grill**. sunshinesnevis.com

DO Before he became a founding father and a 21st century theater and music icon, Alexander Hamilton lived on Nevis. See the ruins of the **Hamilton Estate** and his boyhood home in Charlestown. nevisland.com/historical-sites-landmarks



(Clockwise from left) Sunshines Beach Bar & Grill; the Mill Privée restaurant at the Montpelier Plantation & Beach hotel; downtown Charlestown, the capital of Nevis; Pinney's Beach; a green vervet monkey, one of many that roam the island

(Opposite page) Montpelier Plantation & Beach hotel



of rougher waves that call to surfers and boogie boarders. Pinney's is a place to while away the day, though there are reasons to stick around once the sun goes down. Try some of the locally owned beach bar eateries, like Turtle Time Beach Bar & Grill, Sunshines Beach Bar & Grill and Lime Beach Bar, all of which are known for their affordable lobster, tropical drinks and nighttime tunes.

Those inclined to strap on hiking boots can get an up-close look at Nevis' origins. First seen by Columbus in 1493 as he explored the new world, Nevis garnered its name from Spanish mariners who thought the clouds that encircled the spiky peak of a volcano looked like snow. They called it *Nuestra Señora de las Nieves*, which translates to "Our Lady of the Snow," and the name stuck.

Today, Nevis Peak is deemed "potentially active," though that doesn't stop hiking aficionados from scaling the 3,000-plus-foot mountain. The hike takes you through dense rainforests and up rocky trails to the island's highest point. It's challenging enough that hiring a guide is wise—and informative, particularly with the knowledgeable and affable guides from Sunrise Tours. But besides a good workout, the hike also provides a glimpse at what the island's natural terrain looked like in the days before so much of the land was gobbled up by sugar plantations.

Less vigorous rambles are plentiful on Nevis. A trek to Mount Pleasant involves wending your way through grassy meadows and over rolling hills to the stone ruins of an old estate. Or head to Saddle Hill, which leads you through a tropical forest where it's not uncommon to see vervet monkeys dangling from the trees. The walk is generous in rewarding spectacular vistas of the island below and the Caribbean on the horizon. Linger at Nelson's Lookout, which was named after Britain's famed Lord Horatio Nelson, whose men would scan the waters to warn of any approaching French warships.



You won't spot any approaching warships today from these heights—a billionaire's yacht is far more likely. But the view from this perch is a reminder of why Nevis is such a unique Caribbean destination. From here, you'll notice how the green of the forests and the blue of the ocean overwhelm the tiny reminders of civilization. Nevis is as it has largely always been: a quiet oasis to soak in the warm sun and ponder history or any other thoughts that might typically be crowded out by the noise of the world. The only thing that might knock you out of your reverie? The drifting sound of chatty donkeys. ★

COURTESY MONTPELIER PLANTATION & BEACH

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