

# Travel Scene

Iris Sanderson Jones editor



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## 'I saw the lights'

# Caribbean island an ideal spot for fantasy

By Iris Sanderson Jones editor

I saw the lights as I walked down-hill to the swimming pool at Windjammer Landing. A resort train will take you up-mountain to your villa or down-mountain to the sea, but I was still in my mainland mode, too impatient to wait, so I took the red lycian off the artistically-folded cotton robe, tucked the flower behind my ear, and walked.

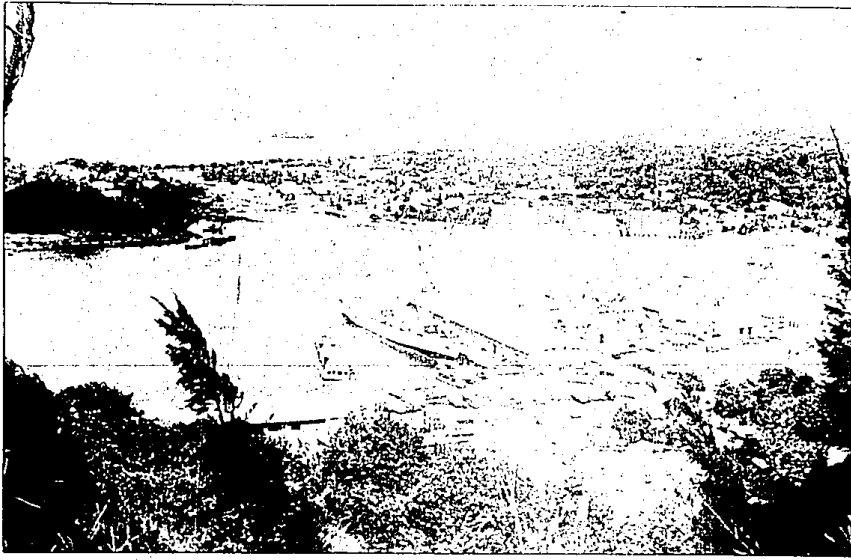
Lights climbed up and down the hill around me, following the road that switch-backed between the two-story white villas down the hill to the main complex around the pool. Lights climbed the peninsula across the bay in Castries, capital city of the island of St. Lucia. Far out on the horizon, a tall-masted sailing ship and a modern cruise ship were wrapped in lights against a darkening sea.

I was really into lights by then, so I floated on my back in the long curved swimming pool and counted them: "Lights" on the terrace bar, lights in the open-sided dining room, lights in the minarets that capped the red roofs and a universe of lights in the sky above, at least two of them moving.

All this stuff about lights was a fantasy, of course, but that's why people come to the windward islands, to spend hot days and warm nights amid white sand, emerald green seas and palm trees.

St. Lucia is a small mountainous island in the eastern Caribbean, with resorts of various kinds tucked into emerald-green coves around its edges. The green slopes rise straight out of the sea without preamble and culminate in rain forest, home of the endangered green parrot.

The only flat land on this 27-by-14-mile island seems to be at Hewanorra airport on the southern tip. The U.S. built an airstrip there during World War II and the St. Lucians



Here in Castries, capital city of St. Lucia, an island in the eastern Caribbean Sea, tourists tend to spend most of their time at the many resorts, taking taxis to town for shopping and restaurants, visiting the colorful market and the historic citadel rebuilt their modern airport on top of it.

One of the ironies of paradise is that you must taxi for two hours

across potholed mountain roads to get to your resort, unless you stay south at Club Med, because most resorts are at the north end of the is-

lands on Morne Fortune, Hill of Good Luck. One can also walk through the island's rain forest and look for the endangered green parrots.

Land near Castries. Smaller planes like the American Eagle and inter-island planes land right in town at Vigie Airport, but the big planes

come in to the south. The French and the English fought over this island 14 times, their boys dying for empire, so the voices you

hear along the road and in the small villages are speaking a French patois and a lilted Caribbean English, sometimes both in the same sentence.

Children in school uniforms carry their books home along the road. Banana workers wave from the back of a truck. Old women sit on the steps of wooden houses set in a tangle of flowers and trees beside the road.

There are cows chewing the grass in a plantation of coconut palms. Colored wooden boats are pulled nose first into a bay. Women carry baskets on their heads. Boys ride bicycles down the road. If you measure wealth by television sets and cars, what you see along the road are poor people. If you measure it by fresh food and water, sunshine and beauty, they are rich.

The logistics of island travel make your choice of resort important on St. Lucia. The bus that goes at "no particular time" and arrives "whenever" could be part of the fun if you have the time and inclination. Taxis, available at every resort, cost about \$30 from one end of the island to another. Car rentals are available.

Visitors tend to spend most of their time at the resorts, taking taxis to Castries for shopping and restaurants, visiting the colorful market and the historic citadel remains on Morne Fortune, Hill of Good Luck.

They take at least one tour by boat from Castries to the town of Soufriere and the nearby resort of Anse-Chastenet on the southwest coast, where you can tour the few special attractions of the island. The Sulphur Springs at Diamond Falls/Baths, one of the old plantations, and the two cone-shaped Pitons which are the mountain landmarks of St. Lucia. Hikers walk the rain forest in search of the elusive green parrot.

If you really want to experience the fun and laughter of the island,

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## Lucking out in Puerto Rican town

It never ceases to surprise me. You go to the far corners of the Earth and you meet somebody from Michigan. That's what happened when I sat down at a beautiful table in a lovely pink dining room at the St. Lucien Hotel in St. Lucia.

The deputy general manager, Zolton Csete, sat next to me at the end of the table. We discussed the tasty food, the gorgeous beaches of this eastern Caribbean island and sundry other things before I asked casually, "Where are you from?"

He had a very slight lilt to his voice that I couldn't identify. I soon learned that he was born in Budapest and moved in the 1960s to what you guessed it, Michigan. Rochester, Mich.

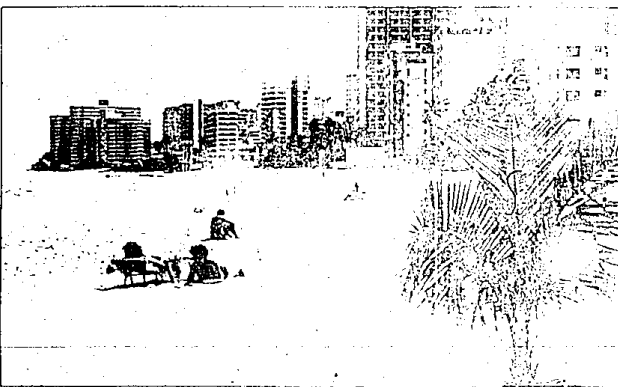
Csete went to Southfield High School, was on the fencing team under the well-known fencer Istvan Danos, worked at the Hyatt hotels in Dearborn, Chicago, Atlanta and New Orleans before a stint at hotels in the Bahamas and Antigua, and here he is.

Another thing that often surprises me is that travelers often luck out in spite of the horror stories you hear to the contrary. I lucked out in San Juan, Puerto Rico recently when I made an overnight stop en route to St. Lucia.

I knew about the expensive high-rise hotels of Isla Verde and Condado Beach, but I didn't want to pay those prices since I couldn't enjoy the beach anyway. My American Airlines plane flew at 7:30 p.m. one night and left at 1:25 p.m. the next day for St. Lucia. It wasn't worth a \$250 room for an 18-hour stopover.

I found the three El Canario bed and breakfast inns listed in a travel magazine. I didn't know what they would be like, but if worse came to worse I could taxi to one of these expensive hotels couldn't I?

There were three of them. El Canario Inn, 1317 Ashford, (809-722-3851), El Canario by the Sea, 4 Condado (809-722-8640), and El Canario by the Lagoon, 4 Clemente (809-722-5058). They were all listed for \$50 to \$60 a night in the Condado area, which is the popular



If you stay at the El Canario by the Lagoon bed and breakfast in San Juan, Puerto Rico, you'll not only benefit from inexpensive room charges, but be within walking distance of

Condado Beach (pictured here), where you can join the sunbathers of Lake a dip in the warm Caribbean waters.



CROSSFORDS  
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beach area fairly close to Old San Juan.

The Inn was full all week. El Canario By the Sea was full for the night. So I reserved a room for at El Canario by the Lagoon. I wasn't quite sure where it was or what kind of accommodation I had reserved, but I could always change my mind when I got there.

Sharing a van or limousine is usually cheaper than taking a taxi alone, so I joined a \$5 per person shared limo from the airport and found myself next to a young couple who had also pulled El Canario by the Lagoon out of a hat.

The chauffeur told us where the modern kitchen that certain travelers tend to go back to the third bed and breakfast inns. Beach islanders love to go to the El Canario Inn, El Canario by the Sea, and El Canario by the Lagoon. El Canario by the Lagoon is a three-story, cream-colored building with small balconies, a cheerful lobby, a breakfast room, and a creaky elevator to the beds-once-upstairs. If you have ever stayed in a small, simple European hotel, you will recognize it.

The rooms were clean, had one or two double beds, a bath and shower, television and a tiny balcony. The people who stay here want moderate room cost and no amenities. There are no bars, dining rooms, room services, etc. The hotel is a short block from

## Make arrangements before tropical visit

American Airlines flies from Detroit through San Juan, Puerto Rico, to St. Lucia. Midweek, high season fares are about \$600. If you make your flight early afternoon, you can arrive in San Juan at approximately 11 a.m.

You can fly on to St. Lucia aboard an American Eagle commuter plane with 34 seats and arrive at Vigie Airport in Castries just before midnight. You can stay overnight in Castries and take a Boeing 707 into Hewanorra Airport at the south end of the island with an afternoon arrival.

This is a two-hour, 140-taxi ride from Hewanorra to meet St. Lucian resorts. There is a low departure tax when you leave the island.

You can use U.S. currency or exchange it for U.S. dollars for approximately three Eastern Caribbean dollars to one U.S. dollar. There are many small guest houses and apartments. Most travelers stay at the various beach resorts along the west

WHEREVER YOU stay in St. Lucia, you develop call muscles you must use to climb steps of tropical beauty.

It was a day at LeSport, the best body therapy on 15 hilly seaside acres at the northwest tip of St. Lucia, you climb a long stairway up to the gym and spa with its pools. Massage and red roofs. It's called "body therapy" and it's called "LeSport."

Everything you see from the hill-top is included in the all-inclusive rate of \$200 to \$300 per person per night, except in the hotel block, 10 percent in 20 percent, muscle-cussing in the open-air dining room, all refreshments and bar drinks, recreation (except from golf and windsurfing) (except from therapy in the spa).

Very expensive, all-inclusive hotels are just south of LeSport is Club St. Lucia, low buildings set on slight hills along a sand beach. Rates are \$130 to \$245 a night and are of special interest to families. Couples who marry there plant a tree in their name.

A third all-inclusive hotel is Couples, a farm house of the better-known couples resort in Jamaica. It is for couples only. No beach, grounds and other buildings in gardens by the sea. Rates start at \$2,000 per couple per week and cover everything.

THE HIGHEST occupancy on the island may be at Hotel St. Lucien, a spread of motel-type buildings south again at a fine strip of sand called Reduit Beach. Room rates are \$135 to \$185 for two, add \$12 each for breakfast and dinner.

The Royal St. Lucien opened on the same grounds in December, providing an elegant upscale small-suite alternative at rates of \$300 to \$400 a day without meals.

One of St. Lucia's least expensive resort hotels, a 300-yard walk from Reduit Beach, is the Islander Hotel, which has several two-story buildings set in gardens around a swimming pool for room rates of about \$100 for two. Additional meal plans are available.

WINDJAMMER LANDING, where I stayed, is a different concept. It has three three-bed room condominiums wrapped in white stucco and red roofs on the side of a hill by the sea set for \$200-\$300 and up and rent for \$260 to \$500 a night in season, meal plans optional.

The Halcyn Beach Club, south again on Choc Beach, has cabana and chalet type rooms looking across the bay. You'll find steel bands near the dock and lots of good sand beach for room rates of \$120 to \$165 a person, meal plans extra.

The best, known and one of the longest-running resorts is Canary's Hotel La Tou, with luxury hotel rooms and suites stacked downhill to the sea at room rates from \$230 to \$265 per night, with meal supplements of \$44 a day for breakfast and dinner.

All rates are considerably less after April 15. Ask about weekly packages and check tour packages. For more information, contact your travel agent or call toll-free (800) 456-3884.