

What to expect in St Lucia and at Villa Grand Piton

If you are not from the Caribbean, you will most likely find life at Villa Grand Piton in St Lucia is different from your everyday life. But that's what vacation (or a honeymoon, or anniversary celebration) is supposed to be – something different from your “same old, same old” life. Here's what you'll find in St Lucia and at Villa Grand Piton:



Villa Grand Piton pool and view

The Culture

St Lucians are friendly and helpful - but pretty laid back. “Don't worry; be happy” could be their national motto. Rain is merely “liquid sunshine”. “Island time” is real and prevalent, but plan on being on time or a little early for tours – the sunset sail catamaran won't wait for you for very long. If you are getting very hungry or thirsty shortly before leaving for a restaurant, eat a little snack and drink something – it can take a while to get served your food or beverages (or sometimes to even get your order taken).

The economy is built on tourism and fishing and agriculture, all low-paying industries. So the standard of living is not very high, especially when it comes to big-ticket items such as homes or cars. But the cost of living is not as high, either. It is possible to live off the land entirely – plenty of fish in the ocean, fruits and vegetables grow year-round, and no need for protection from cold weather. What St Lucians don't have, they are frequently content to do without. Many people do not own cars, and are very happy.

People will appreciate receiving a tip for their services, but the service culture in St Lucia is not built around tipping individuals. Since the typical hourly wage for service people in St Lucia barely buys a Starbucks tall latte, we generally leave some cash as a token of our appreciation for their friendliness and help.

The Weather

Yes, it will be warm and a bit humid. St Lucia is a rainforest island surrounded by water not too far from the equator. Days will have highs in the mid 80's (January - April) or upper 80's/low 90's (rest of year). Nights will be about 10 degrees cooler. We can get some strong breezes at the villa. If you get a little chilled after the sun goes down when a breeze blows across you (even with the temperature in the upper 70's), you may want a very light long-sleeved shirt with you for the evenings, especially in the "winter" (December – April).

Your days should mostly be full of bright sunshine with passing clouds, and possibly brief showers (especially in the rainy season). Many times, the rain occurs overnight or in the early morning. We are frequently blessed with double rainbows early in the morning as the sun rises over the mountains to the east of us. However, if there is a storm front passing through, you may have a full day of rain – although complete rain-outs are infrequent, even in the rainy season.



Sugar Beach – a 20-minute drive away

The Views and Experiences

St Lucia is a volcanic and mountainous island, with lush and tropical vegetation (particularly green and thick in the rainy season). Bougainvillea and flamboyant trees splash brilliant pinks, oranges and reds against the green backdrop. Banana plantations line the roads and hillsides, with huge dark green leaves and bright blue bags protecting the heavy bunches of bananas from the birds. Breadfruit trees are laden with large globes of fruit, and mango trees with glossy leaves drop hundreds of ripe orange mangoes alongside the road in season, waiting to be collected and eaten. You may even come across someone climbing a coconut tree to harvest the green coconuts that vendors, with their pickup truck by the side of the road, use a machete to open so you can drink the refreshing coconut water.



Brilliant bougainvillea, and views of Soufriere and the Pitons

As the roads wind through the island, the view plays peek-a-boo with the Caribbean and mountains and deep valleys. Every few miles, you'll drive through small villages of colorful houses, with the residents walking along the streets with their children. Don't be surprised to come across goats or dogs on the road, or even a few chickens crossing the road (to get to the Pitons, of course!).

St Lucia is a nature-lover's dream – snorkeling, diving, beach-bumming, hiking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, visiting waterfalls and gardens, ziplining, whale and dolphin watching, deep-sea fishing, sunset sailing, mud-bathing, and driving through a volcano are some of the activities within a short drive from Villa Grand Piton. (We have several pages of activities with contact information on our website: www.villagrandpiton.com .)



Snorkeling at Sugar Beach; Dolphin and Whale-Watching with Mystic Man Tours

The Food and Beverages

The climate in St Lucia is wonderful for growing tropical fruits and lots of fresh vegetables. Mangoes, papaya, guava, passion fruit, pineapples, watermelon - and the most delicious bananas you've ever eaten – are just the beginning of the fruits grown on the island. Lots of vegetables thrive here, too – the farmers' market in Soufriere has a wide selection of just-picked vegetables, especially on Saturday mornings. Fish (mahi-mahi, kingfish and tuna are very common), caught by local fishermen in Soufriere, may very well be the freshest fish you've ever had. Chicken, goat, lamb, pork and grass-fed beef (flavorful, but best for stews or braising) are raised locally. However, good steaks and ground beef are hard to find, so we recommend you either plan to go without those during your stay, eat them at a high-end restaurant, or bring your own from home (ask us how) and cook them on our outdoor propane grill.

Local cooking is strongly influenced by Indian and Creole cuisine. Curries, chutneys, hot sauces, and creole sauces are prevalent. In the welcome basket for your first night dinner, our housekeeper makes wonderful chicken roti (pronounced row-tee) – curried chicken with potatoes, onions, and carrots, wrapped in a very thin flatbread reminiscent of a tortilla, but less heavy. Delicious with mango chutney and her homemade hot sauce, but watch out – a little hot sauce goes a long way! The roti are equally delicious without chicken if you are a vegetarian. Of course, if your taste buds are less adventuresome, grilled fresh fish with fresh lemon or lime and butter is delicious, too.

For your sweet tooth, local bananas are delicious flambéed with butter, brown sugar, and local rum, served over ice cream or just splashed with heavy cream. Local cocoa or lemon provides the flavor for delicious

cakes, and the local coffee is smooth and mild, perfect for sipping with a slice of Doxie's chocolate cake, or first thing in the morning as you watch the fishermen head out to sea.

Rum is the "adult" drink of choice, with numerous variations produced on the island. Everywhere you go, you will be greeted with rum punch – a mix of tropical fruit juice, strong rum, and locally-grown spices. Delicious – but watch out, as it is very easy to drink a little more than you intended. Doxie will have some of her special recipe ready for you when you arrive at the villa. St Lucia also produces "Piton" beer – an easy-drinking light lager, similar to Corona, usually served ice-cold. We include some Piton beer in the welcome basket so you can try it at your leisure.



Spice of India (restaurant in Rodney Bay); Spice of India samosas

The "Outdoor-Indoor" Lifestyle

St Lucia is extremely temperate year-round, with the lowest temperatures in the low 70's and the highest in the mid-90's. This is ideal for "outdoor-indoor" living, and St Lucian architecture evolved around this approach. Most of the villas and hotels in the Soufriere region are built with an open-architecture design. This style emphasizes harmony with the outdoors, and does not try to create an impenetrable barrier between the interior and exterior (for instance, windows are not covered with glass). Some villas are entirely open to the outside, missing one full wall in the common areas. It's very common to have a friendly (hungry?) bird visit you in the kitchen or see a shy gecko dart under the furniture. Do keep in mind that this means other small creatures (such as insects) can get in, too, particularly if you leave the doors open at dusk or after dark with the lights on, or leave food out to attract them.

Because of the temperate climate, the houses are positioned and designed to capture the cooling trade breezes, instead of depending on air conditioning. Heavy wooden louvers, covering numerous and large windows, are easily adjusted to capture the breezes while blocking the direct sunlight to keep the house cool. Ceiling fans and high-speed standing fans assist the natural breezes, when needed.

Villa Grand Piton is built in this open-air style. The interior walls do not go all the way to the ceiling, allowing a cross-breeze through the house. The villa is completely enclosed, but has six sets of double doors on the back wall that can be thrown wide open to enjoy the stunning view of the Pitons. Open all the doors to savor the sunrise while you eat breakfast and plan your day.

The inside temperature of open-air houses is dependent on the outside air temperature. So as the outside cools down in the afternoon, turning on all the ceiling fans in the house will draw the cooler air inside.

Opening the louvers on the windows and using the standing fans to augment the outdoor breezes are the most common ways of keeping open-air houses cool.



Our living room; our kitchen

Some people, especially from cooler climates, have a little difficulty adjusting to the warmer sleeping temperatures of open-air homes. To make sleeping more comfortable for our guests we have installed wall-unit air conditioners in the bedrooms. With no glass on the windows and interior walls that do not reach the ceiling, the air conditioners are not capable of and were not intended to cool the entire room – they are positioned to blow cool air on the bed in order to make sleeping more comfortable.



The master bedroom; the guest bedroom

The Serenity

St Lucia is not a populous island – only about 150,000 people reside here. Most of the people live in the north of the island, either in the capital city of Castries or the tourist hub of Rodney Bay. Numerous resorts line Reduit Beach, and the area has been built up to meet tourists’ demands and resembles many other Caribbean beach locations.

Located in the southwest part of the island, Soufriere is home to the iconic Pitons, and the drive-in volcano and mud baths. There are a few resorts in the area, and some vacation villas, as well as the village of Soufriere, but everything is spread out, dotting the hillsides. In the village of Soufriere, most of the people you see will be St Lucian residents, not other tourists.

Villa Grand Piton is about 2 miles outside of Soufriere, perched on top of a hill, 550 feet above sea level. The area is sparsely populated – in the drive from Soufriere to Villa Grand Piton, you’ll pass less than a dozen villas.



Soufriere; “The Hillside” – our community of homes (we are at the top)

The roads from Soufriere to Villa Grand Piton are rough – cut into the side of the hill, single lane (with areas to pull over for passing), unpaved, with potholes, and some fairly steep sections. The final road up to the villa dead-ends at the top of our hill. There is one villa about 100 feet down the road from us (separated by a thick barrier of vegetation), and another villa about 500 feet further up the hilltop. All these factors contribute to a very quiet location, with very few other people nearby and little traffic.

But the destination is worth the drive (as one of our guests said, “The road to heaven is never easy”). Once you arrive at Villa Grand Piton, you’ll feel like you are in your own private world. Surrounded by lush tropical foliage, you won’t see anyone else and they won’t see you. You’ll look down on the other villas and resorts in the area. Most of the time, all you will hear is the breeze rustling the leaves, the birds, the crickets, and the tree frogs singing the music of the night. Your visitors will be the birds begging for some breadcrumbs or bananas, the hummingbirds drinking from the flowers, the dragonflies darting around, and a few small, shy geckos. Soufriere is hidden from view by the top of the hill, so you’ll only know it is there by the glow of their lights at night. If you look heavenward, you’ll be rewarded with the beauty of the night sky, with more stars than you’ve probably ever seen. If you are patient, you may see shooting stars.



Sunset through the gazebo; Dusk –almost more spectacular than sunset!

The Staff

Our staff will be there to ensure your stay is memorable. Doxie keeps the villa spotless and makes the best rum punch around. She can cook a fabulous dinner for you, help you make arrangements for a massage, give you directions to the volcano, or just plain make you smile with her infectious laugh. Kerryus, a young man with a song in his heart and on his lips, is our groundskeeper, keeping the pool sparkling clean and maintaining everything. John, our cheerful night caretaker, spends his time outside the villa, but nearby in case you need something, and can give you great advice on climbing the Pitons. Jacqueline also helps us, filling in for Doxie or Kerryus, doing whatever needs to be done. But don't worry – her cooking is excellent, too! If there is something you need, any one of them is ready and willing to help you.

We invite you to be our guests at Villa Grand Piton and experience St. Lucia!

