

# Nevis: A Spot of Paradise in the West Indies

By Ruth Bashinsky  
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There are still some places to travel in the Caribbean that is unspoiled and authentic. One of these places promising solitude, tranquility and RUM... lots of it is Nevis, a sleepy island in the West Indies that sits in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean seas. Unlike its sister island, St. Kitts, Nevis offers an entirely different vibe.

And this is why. Stepping onto the ferry at St Kitts friendly faces greet me and and my traveling companion/spouse, Bill. We were greeted with a bottle of Ting, a sparkling grapefruit drink, definitely the perfect pick me up after a long day of travel. Gliding along the water as the boat took off, I was taking in all the beauty surrounding me and the majestic views of Nevis Peak, a dormant volcano that soars 3,232 feet, the highest peak on the island. When we came upon Nevis, I could already see that this would be the perfect destination to celebrate our twentieth anniversary. There were no crowds ... no kids... just sand ... sun ... and adventure ahead.

The first stop on our journey began with host Yvette Jackman of the Nevis Tourism Authority and Hubert Jeffers our driver. Both greeted us warmly and were eager to share and spread their love of the island they call home. I was ready to explore Nevis that is also the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, whose life is based on the popular Broadway show, "Hamilton," and learn more of it's rich history. I couldn't wait to find out more about this Killer Bee, a rum punch that is an island favorite. Apparently, this cocktail goes down so smoothly that if you actually got stung by a bee it doesn't seem like you would feel it. As we drove along, Hubert pointed out that there are more than seventy churches of varying denominations than adds with a chuckle, "Don't ask me how many bars though."

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Nevis was called "Queen of the Caribbean," because of its flourishing sugar trade. Today, the island relies heavily on tourism. Many of the old sugar mills have been converted into hotels and restaurants that we had the pleasure to visit.

Unlike St. Kitts, Nevis offers a different type of atmosphere. There are no fast food establishments. Not even a Starbucks. There is no Main Street. No theater district. No cinemas or casinos. The Four Seasons Hotel & Resort, in fact, is the only commercial chain on the island.

“Nevis is not for everyone,” says Jackman. “It was like the Caribbean was 25 years ago. We don’t want to change the feel of the island and changing what Nevis is. When you travel to the Caribbean now there are fast food chains. In Nevis we don’t want that. We don’t have any buildings taller than a coconut tree. We don’t have large cruise ships that dock here only the smaller boutique cruise ships.”

A population of 12,000, the Nevisians share the island with the African green vervet monkeys that are very much part of the Nevis landscape. Some locals joke that there are more monkeys on the island than there are people. It is not uncommon to see a group of monkey’s peeking through a tree looking back at you or a pack running around the golf course at the Four Seasons Hotel. There is only one main road and no traffic lights in Nevis and seeing a line of goats, donkey, sheep, chicken and their chicks crossing the road is their idea of a traffic jam.

## **WHAT TO EXPLORE**

Put on your hiking boots and enjoy a nature hike with naturalist Alfred “Baba” Tyson of Baba’s Scenic Tours. During the two and half hour walk, we picked cinnamon, all spice and bay leaf and learned about the healing properties of St. John. Baba, whose company also offers different hiking packages shared stories of several of his rescue missions at Nevis Peak. We learned that the climb up to the peak is for the more experienced hiker. We didn’t have the proper gear, but do plan on returning and tackling that mountain next time around.

Another great way to see the island is on an ATV. Wazim Allie our guide, whose father owns the Funky Monkey Tour company, gave us a three and a half hour ride through Nevis and was quite knowledgeable. We stopped at Owallie Beach, a cove where sailboats and yachts stop because of its shallow waters. Lover’s Beach that surprisingly was quite remote, but a perfect place nonetheless to take photos. We did. I even took a picture with our tour guide. Not quite what I would call romantic, but still fun. From the shoreline we admired the Blue Footed Booby Island, an uninhabited island that sits in the middle of the Atlantic ocean. All you could hear are the waves crashing which put me in a bit of a trans. The only way to get there is by boat or to swim. Not necessary observing by where I was standing was enough. We traveled to Eden Brown Estate, an estate that some locals say is haunted since there was a murder in the estate during the 18th century. There was also the New River and Coconut Walk Sugar Estate, a historical site and place people go when fishing for butter fish. Cottle Church, an was another spot along the way. The Anglican Church built by Thomas Cottle, a Nevisian lawyer completed in 1824, the grand architecture has become a destination for weddings. Wazim mentioned that he also gives tours on jet skis, not a lover of the water, I was happy to be on land.



During the ride, there were a variety of modest homes to fancy estates. As developed as the island was in some areas, I was surprised to see so many underdeveloped portions. This was perfectly fine with the locals. Some that I had a chance to described Nevis as “ ... unspoiled, charming, genuine, embracing ... just home.”

Pointing to a quarter long mile strip on the side of the road, Wazim explains that the strip turns into a drag racing event every Sunday. Wazim explains, “It’s a way to discourage racing on the regular roads. Whoever gets to Charlestown last has to buy everyone a round of drinks.”

We explored historic Charlestown on foot, the center of Nevis’s commercial activity. The Jewish Cemetery was one site not to be missed. The cemetery that is open to the public is one of the oldest established cemeteries in the Caribbean with its earliest graves dating back to 1679. Less than twenty graves are at the cemetery. Our guide, Earla Liburd of Earla’s Eco Tours, mentioned that the Jewish population of Nevis was always small but, the people took pride in the burial ground. The cemetery has since been restored by a small group of residents and the government put up a fence to protect the area. Visitors come all year round when the cruise ship docks in Nevis.

We visited Alexander Hamilton’s birthplace which is now a museum. Inside the Georgian-style home there is lots of memorabilia, interesting artifacts, photographs and history to view.

The Bath Hotel was another stop. This hotel was the first in the Caribbean and shares the property with the Spring House, a smaller stone structure that was once used by the Amerindians. The hot springs that are open to the public we were told still produce the same temperature (108 F) as it did in the 1870’s. A group of people were enjoying the hot-spring. Not much of a water enthusiast, I observed from afar.

“Nevis is kid and family friendly. It is very romantic too. You can feel that seclusion you are looking for,” says Greg Phillip, Chief Executive Officer of the Nevis Tourism Authority.





We experienced that firsthand at The Four Seasons when we enjoyed our own personal cabana complete with a picnic lunch of fresh fruit, pasta salad and bottle of wine.

And, for those who love to garden, the Nevis Botanical Gardens is a rainforest conservatory that features six gardens to view, photograph and enjoy.

## **WHERE TO STAY**

The island prides itself on the personal attention visitors get. “You can come here and get that feeling of exclusivity. It is the essence of Nevis,” says Jackman.

However, those people, she says that are looking for all-inclusive will not find it here on Nevis. She adds, “We are not inclusive.”

Accommodations on the island can be in the hills or on the beaches with a variety of luxury hotels, colonial style inns, villas (perfect to rent for a large family) and condos to choose from.

### **The Golden Rock Inn**

A private oasis that has only eleven rooms hidden among lush vegetation and offers unlimited privacy. The tropical gardens and historic estate stone work makes the inn truly magical. An ideal place for a wedding, special event or a romantic getaway. New York artists, Helen and Brice Marden own Golden Rock. The couple purchased the inn eight years ago, one of Nevis’s four plantation inn’s, and in that time completely transformed the property. “We want a landscape that looks natural,” says Golden Rock owner Helen Marden. “We don’t want that manicured look it should be right on the edge of nature taking over.”

The gardens designed by Florida-based landscape designer Raymond Jungles along with the Marden’s artistic genius can be found all over the property. Water lily ponds and modern



sculpture are scattered throughout the gardens. “Phase Three which we just finished is all about bamboo,” says Brice. “I really like the work of Chinese painter Shitao (early Qing dynasty, late 17th century). He painted these stunning pictures of boulders and bamboo, and that was our inspiration.” Today, there are thirty different types of bamboo in the garden along with seventy-five different palms, as well as orchids, bougainvillea and the other tropical exotica. Anytime of day, the views are just breathtaking.



Our hosts, Genevieve and Roger Meier, the general managers of the Golden Rock Inn made our stay that much more enjoyable. Dining at ‘The Rocks,’ restaurant we enjoyed the views of Monserrat while dining on mahi, mahi, fresh legumes and the most decadent carrot cake I ever tasted. Breakfast was an assortment of tropical fruits, french toast and eggs made to perfection that I could never cook as well when home. The lobster roll, another incredible bite, that was one item I did not indulge in, but one of the more popular items on the menu that tourists come near and far to try. The Golden Rock Inn was just the right mix of privacy and pleasure and definitely a favorite that was so special place it was hard to leave.





To experience your own paradise first hand, The Golden Rock Inn is offering a package that is valid July 1st. through July 20th. For \$999.00, visitors can enjoy a four night stay at the Hillside Room (there is a complimentary room upgrade that is subject to availability); two Mango Prosecco on arrival, two full body massage and free wifi. Note: The rate will increase if client wants to book a higher room category in advance.

### **The Four Season Hotel & Resort**



A luxury hotel that features 196 rooms and suites and more than fifty rental villas that are beautifully decorated and feel like your hollow away from home. Luscious grounds that include a championship, par 71-golf course, ten tennis courts, three infinity-edge pools with beach and pool side service. A few private cabanas sit on Pinney's Beach and we had the luxury to enjoy, The Reggae, situated right near a towering palm tree. The cabana was so spacious it seemed like the size of some studio apartments in New York with its indoor and outdoor area. An assortment of cheese, fresh fruit and chilled bottle of wine was served. My guest and I were completely intoxicated by our surroundings making it easy to succumbed to the sun, sand and beach.

For dining, there was so much to choose from you cannot go wrong. Mango, their newest venue, offers Caribbean-inspired cuisine and 101 different varieties of rum. Patrons can enjoy a rum martini while dining along the open air dining porch that overlooks the Caribbean. When it is dark you can see the fish swimming under the lights at the edge of the restaurant.

The Four Seasons Resort also has a state-of-the-art gym that is open 24 hours. Their wellness center called, The Spa is a gorgeous place to visit. The Spa features its own aromatic herb garden with lemongrass, basil, rosemary, sage, aloe and other seasonal herbs. These herbs are part of the treatments that pay homage to the Nevisian art of natural therapies and plant remedies that locals say is based on the island's fertile, volcanic soil.

I had the pleasure of enjoying The Four Seasons Nevis Naturally Massage, a massage that infuses aromatherapy into the massage movements. The treatment definitely awakened my senses, relaxed every limb, balanced my energy and basically put me in a zen like state I

enjoyed being in. The spa also offers a special evening called, Spa Under the Stars: Your Own Private Paradise, and it is just that. The ultimate romantic experience that can be reserved for one couple nightly. The intimate setting includes the volcanic-stone whirlpool, Japanese-inspired cold plunge pool and two hydrotherapy pools. There is a deck for lodging and stargazing and for those who would like to eat under the stars, a candle-lit dinner can also be arranged.



The Four Seasons has some upcoming offers worth taking a look at with emphasis on their "Live Large Villa Experience - 40% off (Families)" and "Nevis My Way- Daily Resort Credit with Breakfast (Couples). For more details, click on the the links below.

Live Large: <http://www.fourseasons.com/nevis/offers/live-large-villa-experience-40-off/> and Nevis My Way: <http://www.fourseasons.com/nevis/offers/nevis-my-way/>.

### **Nisbet Plantation and Beach Club**

This 30-acre plantation inn features charming yet casual cottage-style rooms and suites with terraces that are scattered across the grounds and surrounded by lush palm trees. Once a coconut and sugar plantation before becoming a hotel in the 1950's, the beach front property offers gorgeous views, white sand between your toes and an authentic Caribbean experience. Guests can enjoy a spa treatment, lounging poolside with a cocktail or dining in style in the Great House built in 1778.

Tom Thuell, who was general manager of Nisbet Plantation and Beach Club from the early to mid nineties, loved it so much he returned a year ago with his wife, Tina, to reconnect with the island and resume his role as GM. Many of the employees, he says, are like family with some working at the plantation for more than twenty-five years. The Maitre D, Patterson Fleming is one of those people.

Patterson has a collection of 6,000 plus ties he has gotten as gifts from guests. Sharing stories and memories, Thuell, points to a photo of a young Prince Charles that hangs from the wall or the grandfather clock whose hands have been on the same time since Queen Elizabeth made a visit. Our time at Nisbet was all about meeting interesting people paired with great conversation, exotic drinks and enjoying fresh sumptuous island fare. Many people we met have been visiting Nisbet Plantation and Beach Club for the last decade and keep returning because of its true authentic island experience and personal attention. Tom Thuell who truly is such a gracious host, I am not surprised that visitors keep returning over and over.

### **The Montpelier Plantation & Beach Inn**

The inn that was once a 300-year-old sugar mill has been described as “laid back chic.” Filled with beauty and history, former guests include Princess Diana and her two young sons - William and Harry— who vacationed at the plantation back in 1993. The inn has its own private beach and a variety of electric places to dine. We enjoyed a five-star meal at the Indigo, pool side restaurant. One of my favorite sights was the mill privet that is absolutely gorgeous that offers a special menu for patrons to enhance the island experience.

### **NIGHTLIFE**

Sunshines Beach Bar and Grill dominates the beach bar scene. The bar that was built by a local 20 years ago with one grill under a few palm trees has become one of the hot spots for locals and tourists that is nearby The Four Seasons Hotel and Resort. There is a feeling of familiarity when visiting, photographs of celebrities cover the walls while colorful flags from various countries hang from the ceiling. We didn't get a chance to meet Sunshine, the owner, but we did get a chance to try the local beer and barbecue. I had a salad, not terribly exciting, but my partner here had the burger and fries that looked divine. Since were fueling up for our hike through the hills, we unfortunately had to pass on the Killer Bee. Not an easy decision for me since I wanted to get stung. I really did, no joke, but hiking and rum never seem like a good idea. Especially for me, I assure you one drink and I would have been rolling down the trail not hiking it.

For food enthusiasts, Bananas Bistro & Art Gallery hidden away above historic Hamilton Estate, is the place to go. The restaurant that is designed in old plantation style with shingle wells and wooden shutters is filled with character. Colorful Caribbean art from various artists line the walls. We sat out on the veranda dining on fresh fish, hummus, chickpea and curry and tried the popular Nevisian dish, “Goat Water,” a stew made with goat meat, sweet peppers, potatoes, garlic, cloves and breadfruit. I don't fancy goat, but my husband loved the taste. After dinner it was dancing the night away at the Lime Beach Bar with my new friends — Genevieve and Roger from Golden Rock Inn- and some of the locals. Hubert, the driver even made his way down. Located on Pinney's Beach, one of the newest beach bar restaurants on the island that was buzzing. It was Friday night and everyone was lime-ing. Definition: to chill out and do nothing, and we did just that.

### **EVENTS**

December through April is the island's busy season; however, there are events all year round according to Greg B. Phillip, CEO of Nevis Tourism Authority.

During our stay the Cross Channel Swim, an annual event that is in its tenth year, was taking place. The swim draws many people from other parts of the Caribbean. April was their Blues Festival and July 6 through 9 is their Food Festival with two celebrity chefs participating Judy Too, Iron Chef and Celebrity Chef Seamus Mullen. Since Nevis is home to forty different



species of mango, the tropical fruit will make its debut at the festival. Attendees will get to taste and learn about this delicious fruit that will be incorporated in so many fabulous dishes you can even learn to make at home.

Other upcoming events that you may want to include in your upcoming visit include: Culturama Festival July 27-August, 8th; 5K run- Nevis Marathon and Running Festival September 7th; 10K Run, Nevis Half-Marathon and Nevis Marathon September 9th; Triathlon, November 11th. and Oualie Fest November 23rd. - 26th.

## **GETTING HERE**

There are many ways to get to Nevis. One is to fly to San Juan, Puerto Rico and connect with an airline that services Nevis. Seaborne flies direct to Nevis daily and Tradewind Aviation flies direct from Puerto Rico to Nevis Thursday to Monday. Another option is to fly to Antigua and then catch a charter plan to Nevis. Or fly to St. Kitts and then connect to Nevis, via ferry, which is what we did. Also, from St. Maarten visitors can reach Nevis on WINAIR flights daily and from the US Virgin Island on demand, via Air Sunshine or on Coastal Air on specific days.

Happy Travels ... and see you in Nevis.