

## This St Lucia resort has no TVs, air-con or phones, but Mum just loved it, says Marina Fogle

**L**AST Christmas, my sun-loving mother opened a small box, which had a Virgin Atlantic luggage tag inside it.

We were off to St Lucia together. Specifically, to Anse Chastanet, in the jungle on the west coast of the island near Soufriere. It doesn't allow children, and so this promised to be a proper break for both of us.

Embracing St Lucian culture, the rooms and restaurants are decorated with native fabrics and the smiling staff are resplendent in traditional dress, with small numbers in their hats that reflect their marital status; one for single and looking; two for engaged; three for happily married.

The hotel sits on a steep hill. On one side, rooms look over a perfectly formed sandy cove; on the other, the view is the Pitons — dramatic mountains that rise out of the sea like prehistoric fangs.

The ethos is to embrace the outdoors: there is no glass, rather shutters that allow the gentle breeze to drift in.

**N**O phones, no TVs, no air-con, not even any curtains. We were woken each morning by the jungle cacophony, as though the birds were screaming for us to get up and make the most of every moment.

A gentle routine started to emerge.

After breakfast in the tree-house restaurant, I'd put on my gym gear, but instead of pounding the cross-trainers, I'd spend a sweaty hour exploring the jungle trails behind neighbouring beach, Anse Mammet. That took care of any guilt about spending the rest of the day horizontal.

My mother normally loves nothing more than exploring the

local markets, finding a great fishmonger and creating abundant feasts for her extended family. Here, she had little choice but to relax.

One afternoon, seduced by the promise of colourful reefs and abundant marine life, we boarded a boat for a snorkelling safari at the foot of the Pitons.

Julia, our guide, led us for an hour, wending our way above the underwater rock formations, signalling to creatures hiding in dark crevices or camouflaged in the coral.

She taught us how to dive to

the shallow sea floor to get a better look at the shy puffer fish and pointed out a turtle drifting past.

Above Anse Chastanet lies Jade Mountain, a sister hotel that is different in character. It's a modern structure that looks like something from the sci-fi series *Lost*, with a maze of walkways and bridges leading to the 24 huge rooms.

Our week was spent eating our way through the menus of the different restaurants. Our favourite evening was spent at Apsara, on the torchlit beach, the waves a few metres from our table. The food is a fusion of Caribbean Indian, like nothing we'd tasted before

**Island escape:** The resort of Anse Chastanet on St Lucia and (right) Marina with her mother

and utterly delicious. A week of eating, sleeping, swimming, snorkelling, reading and chatting passed in a flurry.

The bond between my mother and me has always been strong, but to spend a whole week together in such glorious surroundings was a rare treat.

My mother said it was one of the best holidays she's ever had

— and I don't think she was just being polite.

### TRAVEL FACTS

SEVEN nights all-inclusive at Anse Chastanet from £2,749 pp with ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527, [itcluxurytravel.co.uk](http://itcluxurytravel.co.uk)), based on two sharing a superior hillside room, including flights and transfers.



### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

As a colony, St Lucia switched frequently between the control of France and Britain and was ruled by each seven times

## Thrills and spills of freewheeling in Wales

'IT'S A bit like skiing,' says Jason Mulvey, my guide, as we prepare to ride our bikes down a slope strewn with ruts and rocks.

'Use your edges to turn a corner, face your exit — and always look ahead.' And with that advice he's off, pedalling hungrily down the bumpy, winding track and deeper into the forest.

Taking a breath of pine-scented air, I launch myself into my mountain-biking break in Carmarthenshire.

The thrill generated by splashing through mud, jolting over boulders and dodging trees as you race downhill is similar to a descent on skis.

And the comparison between the sports doesn't end there — because I'm staying with MudTrek, which offers 'ski chalet-style' holidays for mountain bikers.

Former soldier and singer Jason provides the guiding, which he tailors to ability and fitness, and varies from man-made trails to 'off-piste' riding.

His wife, Nikki, is the 'chalet girl', cooking all meals in the fully-catered package.

My base for the weekend is their latest

by Ellie Ross

accommodation — The Old Bike Shed, a beautifully converted stone annex with a kitchenette, shower room and courtyard overlooking rolling fields and woodland.

It is cosy, sleeping two comfortably, and features homely touches such as bunting, bicycle-themed cushions and a vintage travel trunk for a coffee table.

At night, I climb a ladder to the mezzanine bedroom, tucked under the sloping roof beams, where the occasional sound of a bleating sheep reminds me that I'm deep in the Welsh countryside.

In the morning, I fuel up for the ride on bacon and eggs, delivered on a wicker tray by Nikki.

With a good breakfast inside me, packed lunch in my backpack and the prospect of a homemade chilli con carne for dinner, it's time to set off.

Jason shows me how to switch the



Off-road: Deep in the Brechfa Forest

full-suspension bike I'm hiring from uphill to downhill mode at the push of a button.

We pedal past wild ponies, beneath a

soaring red kite and into Brechfa Forest, a major supplier of timber for the trenches in World War I. Within minutes, my legs are slathered in mud.

We freewheel along bridledways, before punishing climbs and quick descents — and all the time Jason checks that I'm OK and gives me tips.

After 28 miles and almost eight hours on two wheels, I'm back at the Old Bike Shed, saddlesore but triumphant.

I spend the evening reliving the day — watching the action unfold again in a video Jason has made of the ride.

It's a lovely touch — and seeing my less-than-perfect style on screen gives me all the more reason to come back and improve on it.

### TRAVEL FACTS

A TWO-NIGHT mountain biking break with Mudtrek (01267 202423, [mudtrek.com](http://mudtrek.com)) from £250 pp, based on two sharing the Old Bike Shed. Price includes meals and one day's free 'off-piste' guiding. More information at [discovercarmarthenshire.com](http://discovercarmarthenshire.com).