

# to keep in touch (or not) from st. lucia resorts

By Cathie Arquilla

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAP MAISON

I sat there, soaking up the sun and wondering, should I blog, get on Facebook, or maybe send out a tweet or two? What about sending a postcard? When you're escaping the wet-cold of late fall in New York on an island in the Caribbean, you may want to let a few friends know your lounge-itude and attitude, whoops, I mean longitude and latitude. It is either your chance to sadistically rub it in, "I'm basking in the sun, sucker!" or to say a friendly "Hello, here's where I am, wish you were here..."

My intentions were a combination of those sentiments. I considered posting a comment on Facebook answering that way too generic question, "What's on your mind?" with this:

"My mind is on this heavenly strawberry daiquiri I'm sipping while gazing at the setting sun as it melts into the sea, framed by the Piton Mountains here at Ladera Resort in St. Lucia..." but then, I'd have to stop sipping.

I gave serious thought to tweeting. But then I'd have to ignore my companions and start thumbing away on my iPhone answering the equally blah question, "What's happening?" Nothing's happening but I can hear the tree frogs as they chirp incessantly like a kid with a pleasant-sounding Chinese clicker toy as I sip my strawberry daiquiri... Stop. I've hit the red negative numbers. That answer is too long for Twitter. I start thumbing again, brows furrowed. The conundrum: How do I make everyone who follows me appreciate how globally chic I am in 140 characters or less? Perhaps it's best to just send a postcard of a lovely sunset in St. Lucia; it doesn't actually have to be the one I'm looking at... or does it?

If you're very tech-savvy or under 40, how to travel boast probably isn't a question you're asking yourself. It's organic for you folks, you're connected, and all those communication tools are your friends — not so for me. But I'm trying. I went to St. Lucia to check out the island and visit three different hotel properties. I wanted to blog, tweet and Facebook (that's not really a verb, unless you're a Neo-Luddite) while there. It was about time I embraced these communication tools for my own self-promotion as a writer and fashion stylist. After all, new media is supposed to be "all that" for staying in touch with potential clients. Friends and family, they're just gravy.

I started blogging during my four and a half-hour, non-stop flight from JFK to Hewanorra International Airport in Vieux Fort. Certainly this fulfills the new media requirement for my first day of travel. Facebook and Twitter would have to wait.

Arriving in St. Lucia, you are immediately cloaked with the warm air and sunshine that is indicative of a Caribbean island. Intellectually, you know it's going to be that way, your suitcase contents holler it, but somehow when you step off the plane, it's a surprise.

We headed northeast on a coastal road from Vieux Fort to our first destination, the Ladera Resort. The island is more mountainous and jungle-like than I expected. Every green Pantone

color hangs in view. It feels rugged and freeing; local kids are riding horses bareback on the beach, goats are nosing roadside.

*Tweet: A humming bird just flew into my suite at Ladera Resort*

Ladera is an open-air resort. Situated on a hillside, rooms face an ocean view that's open to the sky. In other words, the fourth wall is not there, giving guests completely unobstructed views of the cove far below and St. Lucia's iconic Piton Mountains right and left. The decorating and architectural choices are "Swiss Family Robinson" deluxe. Conch shell faucets, fanciful native carvings and tropical tile motifs work together to create your own personal tiki paradise. Each of the 32 suites is different. All have a wading pool, provide total privacy (except for maybe a spectator with binoculars on one of the yachts below, but you certainly can't see him!) and are multilevel allowing you to appreciate the view from many different perspectives, even from the shower.

When I got to my room, I grabbed my camera and went crazy. I should post these photos, I thought, or I should Twitter about these swings hanging over my wading pool. But all I wanted to do was to take it all in for myself. Like wallpaper coming to life, a humming bird came right into my room and sucked from a lavender flower whose vine was climbing the south wall. The color of the water, clouds, sky and sun were changing by the minute. And if I moved around the room, climbed the stairs, sat on the bed, laid down on the sofa or sat in the chairs, the view changed again. No way was I going to miss this for the internet.

Dasheene is the name of a tropical root vegetable in St. Lucia that's similar to a potato. It has generous big, fat, "fun" leaves. Named after the plant, Ladera's Dasheene restaurant has a welcoming, generous, fun vibe too. The food was good and particularly well plated. I appreciated that the menu had a lot of choices authentic to the island. But for me, the real draw is the setting. Like Ladera's rooms, the restaurant also provides spectacular open-air views. It's exactly what you might expect, once you allow your island fantasies to run full rein.

*Travelgirl tip: Dasheene's Chef Orlando Satchell hosts a fun excursion for guests who want a deeper experience into local cuisine culture. Guests can go to market with him in the morning, come back to Dasheene for a cooking lesson and later eat what they prepared for dinner. This offers farm, or shall I say market-to-table dining that so many travel foodies are excited about right now. Apparently Orlando embraced the farm-to-table concept, even before it was cool.*

I had to send several tweets out about the "Little House of Rest" — the quaint spa on the property. The name is a soothing and fitting description for what is a small, colonial-style structure with lattice details. On their menu is a "Massage Your Mate" class, which is a private lesson in a small, tented room behind the spa.

Because Ladera is situated high up overlooking the sea, there is no immediate beach access, but they do have a beach shuttle that goes to the cove below.

*Opposite page: Relaxing on Cap Maison Resort's private yacht.*

## >eco escape: st. lucia

Thanks to wi-fi, I successfully blogged from my room and I even posted pictures! I managed to do it in less than an hour and was very impressed with myself. This quote from my blog waxes poetic about Ladera and doesn't overstate: "Flora, fauna and fruit of exotic varieties are hanging and winding and boasting their way throughout the resort. The word paradise comes to mind."

### *Facebook update: I just swam up to the pool bar for a fruity cocktail at the East Winds Inn*

Once we arrived at the East Winds Inn, I realized blogging would be more challenging. But this is one of the advantages of the resort, it is low key and off the grid. If I were one of those uber-adventure travel writers who live for those moments when they secure internet access next to a croc in the Amazon, I'd have to leave the room, pool or beach! Actually, to be fair, the resort does have access in the office and at Bamboo Lounge. However, the lounge is one of the hippest places to hang at East Winds, and a computer seemed out of place. Here, guests can enjoy nightly cocktails or champagne, or a morning coffee. It is a round room, known as a rondoval, with built in "coves" for seating. The style, combined with the aqua and coral color combination of the upholstery fabric and the rattan furniture, creates an ideal contemporary "West Indian" hangout. Sit here, and you relax in harmony. Walk out to the beach and your escape is complete.

Contrary to most resorts on the island, East Winds is situated right on the shore, providing easy beach access to its guests. The Ocean View Suites are, well, the name says it all. A stroll through the resort grounds yields an exquisite tropical garden just steps from the Caribbean Sea (no stairs!). "Out there" in the water is a small reef for snorkeling and the hotel has canoes or kayaks for bobbing around the calm waters of the bay.

No matter what your request, the East Winds staff seems to accommodate. Most employees have been at the resort for years and their hospitality has a personal feel, as if they've invited you into their own homes, but they are also sensitive enough to know when to back off. Picky travelers are pampered as well. A vegetarian may check out the chef's menu by 2 p.m. If there isn't anything that piques his or her fancy, the chef will meet with said vegetarian to create additional menu choices for that evening. Gluten-free travelers can bring their own gluten-free flour and the East Winds kitchen will bake bread for them. Tea is served every afternoon.

I was tickled with the level of the service and elegance of our evening meal. Proper and traditional cutlery was used and I appreciated my fish knife and fork. The only Steinway grand piano on the island is at East Winds. So imagine the feeling of dining in this big "beach hut" a la Moon Doggie's hide-away, but with all the elegance of the Savoy. You can literally hear the lapping sea beneath the piano music, coupled with the wine, fresh fish, linens and candlelight. Watch out, you're swooning like Annette Funicello.

Did I "post" much from East Winds? Truth be told, no. But

there was still hope to do so at Cap Maison, provided I could stop "partaking" in the island experience to let my peeps know just how much fun I was having.

### *Blog topic: A great morning starts with coffee and homemade croissants overlooking the sea at Cap Maison*

Arriving at Cap Maison mid morning, we felt like royalty, checking into a luxe villa. The first residential, villa-style hotel on St. Martin, Cap Maison is on the northernmost tip of St. Lucia, perched on four acres overlooking the convergence of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Accommodations look out onto a never-ending "front lawn" of blue sky and sea, dotted with island formations in the distance, and rocks up close. The most posh option for taking it all in is from one of the 22 villa suites, each with its own pool, outdoor shower, professional grade kitchen and luxuriously appointed trimmings. The resort has 49 rooms total, with one, two and three bedroom options.

Cap Maison is best described through the story of its owners. Theo and Helen Gobat purchased a vacation home here years ago. From the outside it looks like an Indian long house, but island style, with a front porch running its full length, and a peaked roof. Sons Ollie, Rufus and Adam grew up frolicking about the rocky coast and daring each other to dive, swim and jump. Their childhood ocean cove is now the Cap Maison beach. It's the stuff modern travelers dream of: thatched umbrellas, lounge chairs and a beach hut bar serving fruity drinks in front of the blue-green sea — perfect.

In 2005 the family (the sons now adults) traveled to Mexico and began talking about what they might do with the parcel of land adjacent to their St. Lucia home. They decided to build a co-operative residence-style boutique luxury hotel.

"They wanted to apply the best elements of where they had stayed," said General Manager Ross Stevenson. This translated to exceptional service, creative cuisine and luxurious accommodations. But they didn't abandon their personal connection to, and family history with the Island. It was evident in the homemade cookies I received at check-in, the artisan signage at the villa entrances, the handmade sewing kits in each room and the indigenous plants used throughout the landscaping. Stevenson explained that on Christmas Eve little stockings, made by a staffer's mother and friend of the family, are placed on guestroom doorknobs. Wow! Not a corporate touch; rather the family's sincere expression of welcoming someone home for the holidays.

Helen Gobat (Mum) is the decision maker behind both the exterior and interior design choices at Cap Maison. She is described as being open to life, an adventurer, elegant and tasteful. She managed to create a combination of architectural styles you might find while cruising the Mediterranean — a little bit of Morocco meets Greece. Throw in some Southern Spain, and add a little Malta. However, the overall flavor of the resort puts you in Mexico, San Miguel de Allende to be specific.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LADERA



PHOTO BY CATHIE ARQUILLA

Clockwise from above: The Black Water sulfur Baths at Ladera are said to be restorative; The view from a Ladera hilltop suite with private pool below; East Winds Inn pool and swim-up bar.

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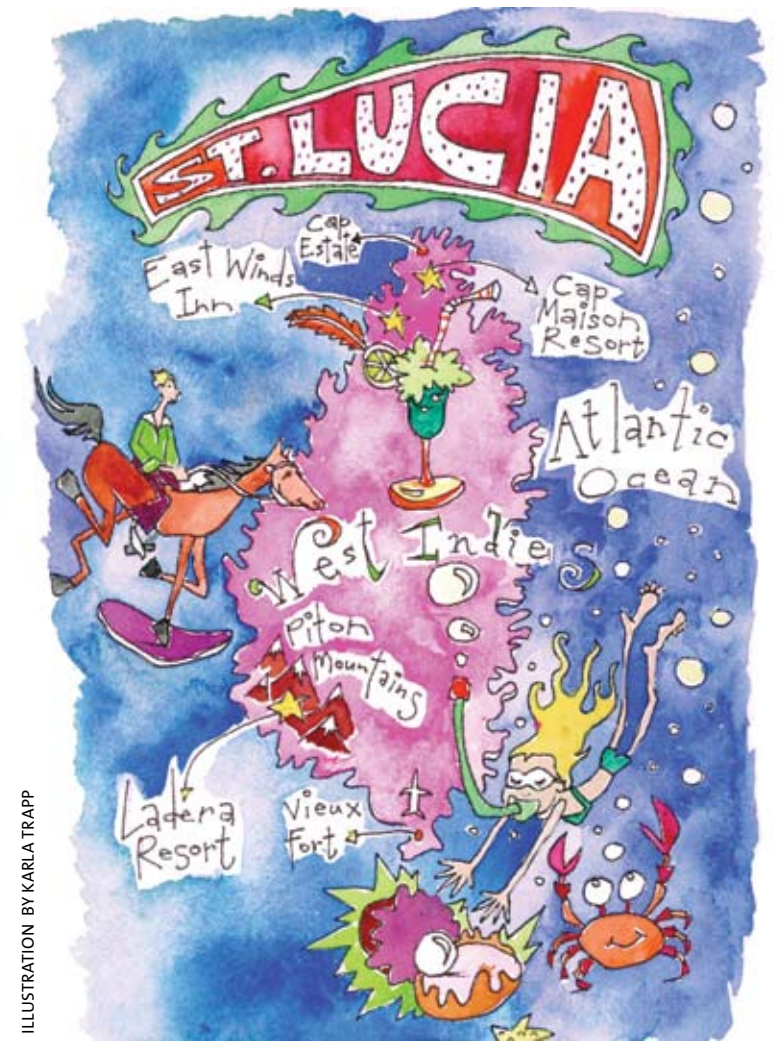


ILLUSTRATION BY KARLA TRAPP

The buildings are stark white stucco, and their edges curve and slope, caressing the sky. The interior choices: Spanish tiles, natural woods, plantation furnishings and not-too-busy fabrics, are constrained but serene. Perhaps this is Helen's Austrian heritage peeking through her island inspiration.

As for the Gobat boys, Ollie, Rufus and Adam — not only are they international, tan and handsome, but they also are involved in resort operations and take their work very seriously. *Cap Maison 1*, the resort's private 46-foot yacht, James Bond worthy and available for guest use, is probably a brainchild of the brothers. Perhaps the champagne zip line was their idea too? Believe me, I appreciated both. Aboard the *Cap Maison 1* at sunset, the morphing clouds and watercolor sky mesmerized me. As for the champagne zip-line, cool, but I opted for a "bar fresh" passion fruit margarita, the color of said sunset, and delicious.

**Travelgirl tip:** *The Cap Maison 1 can be available for a morning cruise to Martinique for shopping Parisian style at Fort de France. Duty-free boutiques include Hermès and Chanel. Or perhaps local island markets are more your style. The boat returns to Cap Maison in time for cocktails or, in keeping with the Parisian theme, Chef's selection of artisanal cheeses with French wine.*

Completing the perfect picture of hospitality are GM Ross Stevenson and Chef Craig Jones, both driving forces behind

the Cap Maison experience. Stevenson is responsible for the whole show, but he seemed to be most passionate about "his" wine cellar. He's obviously thrilled by guests who know and love wine. Guests can arrange for a romantic dinner right in the walk-in cellar. And Chef Jones is one cool cat! This big guy wears all-black chef togs and seems to exude artistic energy. His menus are French West Indian-inspired, super creative and based on local bounty.

I wanted to send pictures via my phone of the views from the Cliff at Cap restaurant. I should have "Facebooked" about the dinner I had here; a starter of lobster consommé, followed by a tapas selection including foie gras and duck confit, rounded out with a lovely William Fevre Chardonnay. Perhaps I could have sent a tweet or two about my pre-dinner massage. Did I make time to blog about my own villa with roof top pool? Nope, turns out this new media stuff was going to have to wait. Wait until I was back in frigid New York and at my home computer. Then I would have plenty of time to relive the journey and let friends know about my adventures. For now, it was all about living in the moment.

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Opposite page: A private pool and rooftop lounge area at Cap Maison Villa. This page, top to bottom: Ahh... the magnificent Cap Maison courtyard pool; The comfy East Winds Inn Bamboo lounge is the perfect spot to relax with a good book.

## st. lucia 411

Ladera: [www.ladera.com](http://www.ladera.com)

East Winds Inn: [www.eastwinds.com](http://www.eastwinds.com)

Cap Maison: [www.capmaison.com](http://www.capmaison.com)

>Jet Blue started non-stop service from JFK to St. Lucia in October. The word is out, because our flight both ways was full.

>Ladera and Cap Maison have teamed up to offer two different St. Lucia experiences under one vacation umbrella. Stay three nights at Ladera's open-air hotel followed by three nights at boutique hotel Cap Maison with a possible savings of 20%. This "Best of Saint Lucia" package is all-inclusive and allows you to "flip flop" at both ends of the Island!

>Grab your iPod and ear buds and head for East Winds Inn's 3,000-square-foot Yoga and Fitness Pavilion. If group (or private) classes are more your style, East Winds offers both Pilates and yoga classes for all fitness levels.

>Any travelgirls putting a ring on? Check out Ladera's new Paradise Pavilion. Accommodating up to 100 wedding guests, the Paradise Pavilion is located on Ladera's rainforest ridge and offers sweeping romantic views in every direction.

>Looking to de-stress? Spa Maison's Wellness Package at Cap Maison combines indigenous spa treatments with Executive Chef Craig Jones's healthy high-taste meals. Add on a yoga session in quiet resort setting or a guided hike along St. Lucia's Atlantic coast... and the tension simply floats away.