

A swirl of Bajan dialect amidst English savoir-faire is the first hint of this island's Caribbean potpourri of history and culture. Modern, yet colonial, one soon feels torn between the present and the past. Travelers to Barbados don't merely visit history; they are immersed in it.

The Island of Bearded Trees

Barbados Classical Maritime

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As an early trading route between Europe and the new world, Barbados was a stopping-off point, of sorts, for many of the early trading ships of the 15th to 17th centuries. This eastern-most island of the Caribbean held little promise of gold and other riches for the earliest of these rogue explorers. The only distinctive feature of this otherwise flat limestone and sand-washed island was the bearded fig trees, whose aerial roots are reminiscent of a long, thick beard. *Barba* means beard and *barbados* translates to the *bearded ones*; thus the island of Barbados acquired its unique name.

Steeped in maritime history, the ensuing result connotes nearly unrivaled diving possibilities for artifact hunters. Carlisle Bay, an elliptical turquoise anchorage, is the embodiment of an

antique bottle-hunter's dream. Every dive shop on the island offers a chance to explore this moderately shallow harbor in search of these antiquities. Hand-blown to embossed, these bottles were cast astray by English, Dutch or other transient sailing ships and now litter the crystal-clear bay's bottom.

Not enough excitement hunting discarded history? Then try a "three-in-one-wreck dive" also found in Carlisle Bay. A trio of distinctly different wrecks diveable with just a short swim from one to the next. A solitary golden frog fish may greet you on the wreck of the *Ce-Trek*, a derelict boat sunk in 45 feet. The nearby *Wolfe*, a wooden schooner sunk during hurricane Janet in 1955 now attracts schools of tropicals. Still haven't had enough; then head south to the wreck of the *Berwind*, a 70-foot-long French tug sunk in 1919. This shallow wreck (25 feet) is totally encrusted in corals, sponges and hydroids, offering many photo opportunities and is known as an inspiring night dive or simply as a first check-out dive.

Jump up and crop over are local Bajan slang for seasonal festivals which emulate a celebration of life. Happiness permeates this island. Rum shacks stipple the road-sides, offering a temporary

interlude to work or a rendezvous for locals in need to pass along a story of import. Visitors won't have to look very far for a rum shop, as there are well over 1,000 on this 166 square-mile island.

Rum and sugarcane are deep seated components of Barbados. Sugarcane was first propagated back in 1637 by a Brazilian emigrant. Soon the demand for sugar spawned hundreds of plantations and sugar mills. During the 1700s, the production of sugar on Barbados was so profitable that planters were reluctant to waste land for the purpose of growing food. Much of this was due to the foreign demand for rum, with Barbados being the first to export this golden spirit. In fact, Barbados is considered the birthplace of rum, also known as *rum-bullion* back in the 1600s. This inevitably led to the coining of the name *rum*. Two popular tours retrace the historical presence of rum on Barbados' Mount Gay visitors' center in Bridgetown and Cockspar luncheon tour each Wednesday. You may, however, wish to take a taxi to these tours due to each distiller's reputation of letting the rum spigot run freely.

If you're driving a rental car on this island, be on the lookout for corner landmarks of varietal early cannons, each pointed downward never to roar again. "We were supposed to turn at that can-

Children cavort among local fishing boats in the shallows south of Bridgetown.

Above: The foggy shoreline of Bathsheba may have been the first vista of early explorers as they approached from the Atlantic. Inset: Early hand-blown bottles and stoneware, typical of those found in Carlisle Bay.

