

# FRENCH DRESSI

By Bridget Williams February 28, 2023



St. Barths...St. Bart...St. Barts... However you choose to spell it, the tiny volcanic island, encircled by shallow reefs, is endowed with an embarrassment of riches, from its abundant natural beauty to the bounty of billionaire's bodacious yachts docked in and around Gustavia's harbor during the winter months. With no shortage of sprawling villas and upscale resorts catering to the glitterati, luxury is a given. Seeking to differentiate itself, Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa and its sister brand, Le Barth Villa Rentals, sets a high bar for an island idyll that pairs sumptuousness with sustainability. Going green, they say, is the new gold standard. "The hospitality industry is normalizing 'green' so that it's no longer a trend but necessary and logical," remarked Michael Martinez, Le Barthélemy's Director of Food and Beverage, during a sustainable cooking class conducted around the island of the kitchen at Le Barthélemy's oceanfront Villa Aqua.

The dramatic air arrival is part of the St. Barths' experience, highly recommended over the ferry from nearby St. Maarten, a voyage known to make even a seasoned seafarer queasy. Traveling aboard Tradewind Aviation's Pilatus PC-12 aircraft for the 45-minute flight from San Juan to one of the smallest airports in the world includes a steep descent between hills before stopping on a 2,100-foot runway with a 2-degree downslope that terminates in the Caribbean.

As many as 100 private jets a day arrive during peak season. From there, it's a short chauffeured ride to [Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa](#), opened in 2016 and nestled in the arc of St. Barths' Grand Cul-de-Sac beach, a pretty lagoon with white sand beaches and calm, shallow water courtesy of an offshore coral reef that keeps roiling waves at bay. It's a setting that Sebastian Maingourd, Regional General Manager of Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa, says "creates a secluded privacy that encapsulates our ethos of using nature as our muse to cultivate the deepest sense of relaxation. The island's buzz in Gustavia and St. Jean is set apart, yet easily accessible so guests can enjoy the best of both worlds." Apropos for an island full of beautiful people, an army of impeccably attired attendants were waiting as our car arrived, making the check-in process seamless and quick and immediately exemplifying what the property calls their "human-centered, couture hospitality." Not wanting to miss our first sunset, we sent our bags to our rooms and headed for the Amis St. Barth bar, where we had difficulty selecting a celebratory cocktail from an innovative lineup that included ingredients such as bergamot, gingerbread syrup, and lemon foam.



Living room in the Jicapana villa.

Sipping and surveying the alfresco environment of the common areas, I noted that the familiar motifs of island décor are both understated and deliberate and accentuated by whimsical touches, such as birdcage chairs in the reception area. Vibrant pops of color that call to mind the sea, sun, and blue skies contrast with natural textures of rattan, terracotta, wood, and stone.

Forty-four rooms and suites populate two-story buildings whose steeply pitched rooflines mirror the contours of the surrounding landscape. Guests can opt for ocean, garden, or lake views, with many first-floor ocean-view rooms boasting heated private plunge pools. Those needing more elbow room can book a three-



bedroom suite or one of two on-site oceanfront six-bedroom villas, each with a 55-foot swimming pool.

Le Barthélemy's villa rental company has access to 250 of the most luxurious properties on the island combined with 24/7 concierge services, and all the amenities of being a guest at a hotel voted the #1 Resort in St Barths, the #1 Best Resort in the Caribbean and among the Best Resorts in the World by Condé Nast Reader's Choice Awards 2022. Your budget is the only limit on their a la carte menu of experiences.



Primary bedroom in Blanc Bleu.

Le Barthélemy's villa rental company has access to 250 of the most luxurious properties on the island combined with 24/7 concierge services, and all the amenities of being a guest at a hotel voted the #1 Resort in St Barths, the #1 Best Resort in the Caribbean and among the Best Resorts in the World by Condé Nast Reader's Choice Awards 2022. Your budget is the only limit on their a la carte menu of experiences.



Living room in the Ixfalia villa.

"Our portfolio of villas spans every nook and cranny across the island so guests can choose the qualities that matter most to them – whether it's beachfront

access or a panoramic birds-eye view, the layouts and amenities are virtually infinite," said Guillaume Bichot, General Manager of Le Barth Villa Rentals. "Beyond having their own private space, Le Barth Villa Rentals go above and beyond to allow guests the same exclusive access to Le Barthélemy's luxury resort amenities— including a guaranteed lounge chair on the resort's spectacular beach – at no additional cost."

My second-floor Le Barth Ocean room boasted a soaring vaulted ceiling and a large terrace with a retractable screen that invited the sound of the waves in and kept pesky bugs out. As part of the brand's commitment to sustainability, supreme cotton sheets in guest rooms are made of traceable organically grown cotton, and sixty percent of all in-room amenities come from ethical and environmentally friendly labels. Familiarizing myself with the graciously proportioned room and admiring the bulbous blown glass pendant lighting on one side of the bed, I was thrilled to find a box of truffles and a bottle of the house champagne - Leclerc Briant – a pioneer in biodynamic bubbly, on ice in a custom branded box. There's also a "champagne please" button on the in-room phone should you find your well has run dry. Le Barthélemy's owners purchased Leclerc Briant, founded in 1872 on a single plot in Epernay, France, in 2012.



Living room in the Ixfalia villa.

Reflective of UNESCO's 2010 declaration of the "The Gastronomic Meal of the French" as a World Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the hotel's recently revamped Amis St. Barth restaurant is now a dining destination in its own right. Here, executive chef Vincent Gomis' dishes, such as black truffle lobster piemontaise, stuffed squid, and chicken breast with a flavorful olive crust, are infused with the flavors of the South of France and the Mediterranean basin. In addition, Le Barthélemy's affable advanced sommelier, hailing from a two Michelin-starred restaurant in Paris, offers expert pairing advice and is available



to lead guests through an hour-long immersion covering a trio of different wines. Impress your friends by polishing your bartending skills during cocktail master class led Amis St Barths' mixology bartender Thursday through Monday.



Alfresco lunch at Amis St. Barth restaurant.

Chef Gomis, who grew up among a family of chefs in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region of France, followed his passions to the hilltop French culinary town of Carcassonne at the young age of 15. He went on to work at one of Paris' most revered restaurants, Epicure at Le Bristol, alongside triple Michelin-starred

French Chef Eric Fréchon. The kitchen at Amis is a family affair, as Gomis' wife Marie Cécile, whom he met at Le Bristol, is the sous-chef. Gomis is committed to getting the kitchen close to zero waste and sourcing seasonal ingredients, citing sustainably harvested local mahi-mahi and spices from neighboring Guadeloupe as examples.

"As a chef, I want to be able to make every product special," he said during our intimate cooking class, where he shared that overlooked vegetable peels are part of his unique sauces and dressings and that the kitchen composts non-edible food waste.

As if one was remiss in noticing the scores of pretty people partaking of the toes-in-the-sand lunch at Amis St. Barth, the owner of the on-site boutique regularly uses the boardwalk lining the al fresco dining area as a runway for long-legged models to showcase her collection of unique clothing, swimsuits, and accessories.

Innovative and upscale dining isn't limited to the confines of the restaurant. As part of their bespoke guest experiences, we booked a day aboard Le Barthélemy's 35-foot Boston Whaler. Departing directly from the hotel, we explored quiet coves, admired dramatic cliffside villas, and indulged in a picnic

lunch of grilled octopus and Niçoise salad (and bubbly, of course), among other delicacies.

The sky is the limit regarding Amis St. Barths' range of customized dining experiences; we enjoyed a multi-course bohemian beachfront feast illuminated with candlelight and laughter.



Interior of Amis St. Barth restaurant.

One of Le Barthélemy's most unique aspects is the comprehensive offerings at its subterranean Le Spa, whose common area sits beneath a skylight reminiscent of the Louvre's famous pyramid. Notably, Le Spa has the distinction of being the only Caribbean hotel utilizing La Mer products.

A nod to Sweden's control of St. Barths from 1784-1878, the spa's Nordic baths comprise a trio of Red Cedar plunge pools ranging from horribly cold to hot. The self-guided journey is invigorating and endorphin-boosting. Treatment rooms feature ceilings animated with a cosmography of fiber optic lighting that induces a dreamlike state even before the treatment commences.

An indulgent facial incorporating La Mer's Miracle Broth, derived from highly regenerating Giant Sea Kelp, left my skin noticeably glowy for days.

Le Spa's newest offerings— Janzu and Aquatic Tibetan Sound Healing—are unique-to-the-island offerings aimed at holistic well-being. During Janzu, a trained expert utilizes the weightlessness of water and the deep state of relaxation it encourages to guide guests through a series of rhythmic movements inspired by ancient Shamanic regression techniques.

Paired with Janzu or a stand-alone experience, singing bowls are placed on top of the water during Aquatic Tibetan Sound Healing, allowing the sound to transmit deep vibrational frequencies 4x faster than through air, creating a profound vibrational effect on the internal organs and energy system. Guests can experience these treatments in the Nature's Reserve in front of the hotel when the ocean is calm, in private plunge pools, the hotel's oceanfront infinity pool, or villa pools.



An all-encompassing destination, the on-site watersports program means that days are amply occupied by snorkeling or paddling in the lagoon, where you're nearly guaranteed to spot a sea turtle. In addition, the surrounding reefs are undergoing active restoration partly due to the hotel's partnership with Coral Restoration St. Barth.

After dinner, Le Barthélemy's rooftop bar, Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot, cheekily named after the manager's reaction following the 2017 hurricane when he surveyed the space and found it nearly unscathed among the wreckage, is the place for inventive cocktails, live music, and buzzy DJ sets. "We've created a vacation experience that nurtures and reinvigorates the mind, body, and soul," said Maingourd.

For more information, visit [www.lebarthelemyhotel.com](http://www.lebarthelemyhotel.com) or connect with them on social media [@lebarthelemy](#), [@amis\\_stbarth](#), and [@lebarth\\_villas](#).