

Press Coverage 2015: Carlisle Bay

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BLUE SKY THINKING

Claudia Winkleman needed a break from decision-making, and she found it at the wonderfully choice-free Carlisle Bay in Antigua

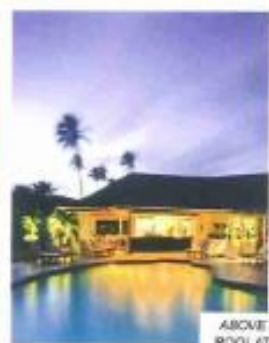
If you're anything like me, you're fed up with making decisions. What are we going to call the baby? What soup are we going to eat? Where should this lamp thing I bought go? Who's coming for supper? Should I give up sugar or gluten? I'm DONE with deciding stuff. It's all I do, all day long – whether it's the big stuff (shall I forgive him for forgetting where the mustard lives?) or the small stuff (Braeburn or Cox?), the bottom line is, I don't want to arrive on holiday any more and have to make decisions.

Before babies and old age set in, I loved landing in Ibiza/Naples/Paris with no sure-fire plans. There was nothing my girlfriends and I loved more than squealing, "WHERE shall we go tonight?" and "WHAT shall we wear?" and, the best one ever, "WHO am I going to flirt with?" Well, now I'm 104 and my world has changed – I like to know what lipbalm I'm going to be using on the flight (it's Clinique) and what socks I'll be carrying with me for the journey home (Broca men's socks in charcoal). No, I know it's not sexy. But remember, I'm 104.

Hotels and resorts don't understand this and offer up a plethora of options the moment you fall out of the airport car and into their lobby: "Would you like a hot or cold towel?"; "Would you like a watermelon punch or a coconut and mango thirst-quencher?"; "Would you like to make dining reservations for this evening? For the Moroccan restaurant by the sea, the Italian bistro next to the spa or, as it's Thursday, would you like to join us for a BBQ and local show on beach number three?"

LEAVE ME ALONE. I CAN'T DECIDE. MY HEAD IS GOING TO FALL OFF I'M A MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER – CHOOSING WHAT CEREAL TO HAVE MIGHT JUST FINISH ME OFF.

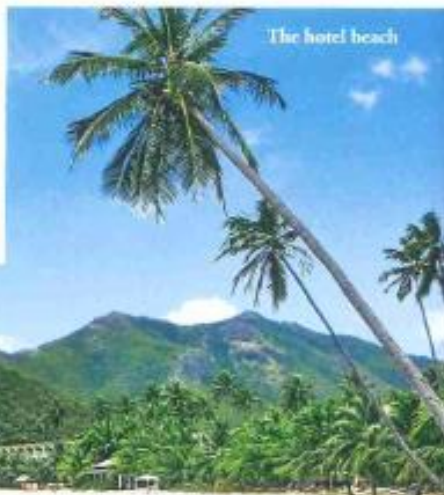
And this is why, ladies and gentlemen, Carlisle Bay is the Greatest Hotel on Earth. They know how busy we are, they know we have to tweak an Ocado shop at least six times before we give the lemon van the full go-ahead, they've worked out that pressing 'add to basket' is only done after 100 ums and ahs. Guess what? There are no decisions to be made at Carlisle Bay. There's no lengthy check-in – somebody just guides you to your room. There's one bar, one restaurant and one



ABOVE LEFT, THE POOL AT CARLISLE BAY. ABOVE RIGHT, THE BLUE SPA. BELOW, ONE OF THE HOTEL ENTRANCES



A pavilion at Carlisle Bay



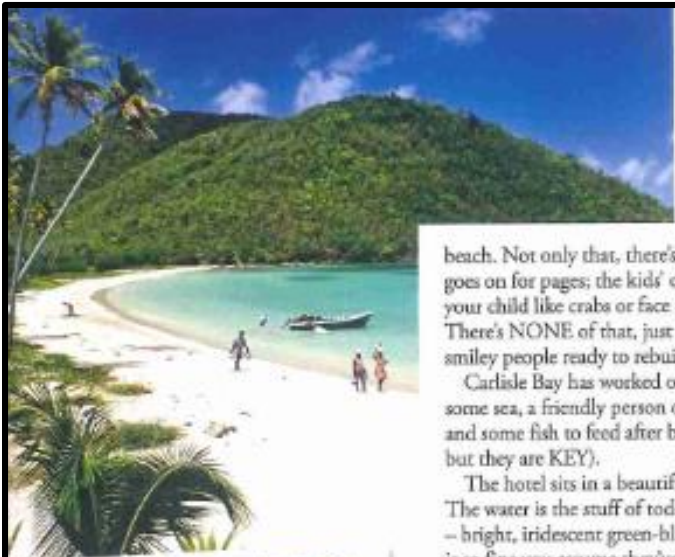
The hotel beach



ABOVE, THE VIEW FROM A BEACH SUITE. BELOW, THE INDIGO ON THE BEACH BAR



Claudia on her balcony



beach. Not only that, there's one menu. There isn't a spa brochure that goes on for pages; the kids' club doesn't have endless choices ('Does your child like crabs or face painting, because we have OPTIONS?'). There's NONE of that, just a lovely room with a paddling pool and smiley people ready to rebuild Lego a hundred times.

Carlisle Bay has worked out that all a family really needs is a beach, some sea, a friendly person occasionally passing round a melon skewer, and some fish to feed after breakfast (I will come back to the fish, but they are KEY).

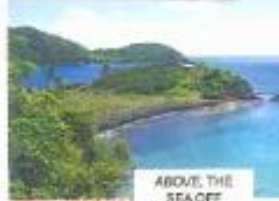
The hotel sits in a beautiful little bay. The water is the stuff of toddler drawings – bright, iridescent green-blue – and the sand is so fine you assume they've stuck the whole thing into a blender overnight. All the rooms look out onto the beach, so there are no duds. They all have the same layout (this, in no-decision world, is ultimately the most relaxing thing ever), so there's never that nagging feeling of 'Bugger, should we have gone for a garden room or the jazzy one with the outdoor bath?', and the room layout is genuinely magnificent. Rarely have I written a travel piece that would be aided by a floor plan, but here I feel I need to mention it. There is a huge, I mean HUGE, sitting room that happens to have a bed in it that overlooks the sea. Next to this is a gargantuan bathroom with a shower that could be used to rinse whole herds of elephants, and then there's ANOTHER huge bedroom that looks out onto the garden. This is shady (good for small people) and they will set up the room however you want. 'Another cot? No problem. Two twins with reading lamps? Sure thing. A sofa bed and a desk for the kid who has exams when he gets home? Give us 10 minutes to sort it.' >



Claudia in full holiday mode



The jetty at sunset



ABOVE THE SEA OFF CARLISLE BAY



ABOVE LEFT, THE MAIN ENTRANCE. RIGHT, THE INDIGO ON THE BEACH BAR. BELOW LEFT, THE CANDLELIT JETTY. BELOW RIGHT, A VIEW OVER ANTIGUA



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY, BETHSAND REEDGROUPEY IMAGES



TRAVEL



The beach at Carlisle Bay

◁ You see? A whole family can inhabit this space and just wander about happily. You also get a beautiful balcony – it's genuinely littered with double daybeds topped with bright white towelling (dreamy) and massive palm trees, and a table that can seat six. Stick the kids in bed, order up two glasses of rosé and the grilled local mahi-mahi with a salad, and open the Scrabble board. This, just so you know, is officially known as 'The Night of Joy'.

Now – we can go no further without a discussion about breakfast: even if you took the bright sea away, the perfect luminous sand, the twinkly stars at night and the amazing spa, I would quite frankly get on a Virgin plane for eight hours just for the breakfast. I should describe the dining room: freakishly high ceilings, whitewashed wood, polished walnut floor and fans – and it's totally open to the elements and sitting bang on the beach. The breakfast is laid out on a central table (amazing news – a buffet for small hungry people is actually the difference between a great holiday and that hideous 'Why are they so whiny? I'm packing the bags' tension).

Let me describe the table: mountains of fresh mango (you should know the mango from Antigua is some of the best in the world and there are mango farms all around the area. Ask to go to one and pick and eat the fruit straight from the tree – mind-blowing), plus there's melon that's so sweet Haribo should invest. And then there are the miniature pastries: tiny apricot swirls that will force you to shout out loud, and mini hazelnut and chocolate croissants that will make you WANT to put on two stone.

They bake fresh bread every day and don't stop bringing over warm baskets full of it. They'll also make waffles, pancakes and the best granola on the planet in minutes. Just when you can't move any more, they'll ask if you'd like to feed your leftovers and crumbs to the fish. 'Got some goldfish?' we asked on the first day before they quietly guided us to a beautiful dappled pool full of inquisitive and happy koi. These fish are strangely sweet and love the apricot swirls as much as any human being. It's weirdly calming and fascinating to sit next to this perfect pond for 30 minutes as a family every morning. Very quickly you get into the amazing pattern of mango, fish feeding, beach lolling, melon skewers, reading books, tennis lessons, supper (mahi-mahi or an amazing local fish curry), and then you just repeat.

No decisions, no hassle, no stress. Carlisle Bay might be the most relaxing holiday we've ever had. The only decision you will have to make is to book it. □

Carrier offers seven nights from £2,950 a person (based on two people sharing), including flights, private transfers, and meals and drinks.



ABOVE, THE RESIDENT KOI CARP. RIGHT, CLAUDIA WITH A JAUNTY FLOWER IN HER HAIR. BELOW, THE BAY



ABOVE, THE BLUE SPA RECEPTION. BELOW, ONE OF THE SUITES



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY / SHUTTERSTOCK