

Columbia LIVING

January/February 2018

Colorful FOOD

*Recipes for Eating
Healthy in 2018*

MOST *Romantic* RESTAURANTS

*24 Top Picks for
Dining on
Valentine's Day*

Fun in the Sun
VISIT
NEVIS
ISLAND

Heart
Health

Reading
as Art

A Fresh
Start

travel



NEVIS

Explore the flavors, culture and beauty of the smaller of the two-island nation in the Caribbean of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

By KATIE MCELVEEN

One of the many Montpelier dining options



Just eight miles long and six miles wide, it's a wonderland of lush rainforests and golden beaches that glow against the shimmering turquoise waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Clusters of palm trees, complete with bashful monkeys and the occasional well-placed beach bar, decorate the shoreline. Towering above it all stands Nevis Peak, a 3200-ft. mountain embroidered with trails that lead past plantation ruins to uninterrupted vistas of Saba and St. Kitts.

Getting to Nevis is half the fun, either via one of the tiny planes that land at Nevis's equally diminutive airport or by boat, across the two miles of sapphire sea that separates Nevis from its sister island St. Kitts.

Like most islands, Nevis has its share of beachfront digs -- Paradise Beach Resort combines the privacy of a villa with the service of a hotel -- but to experience authentic Nevis, book a room at one of the island's plantation inns. Nevis was once home to more than 100 sugar plantations. Today, graceful manor houses have been lovingly restored

and acres of sugarcane have given way to lush landscaping, winding paths, swimming pools, spas and neat cottages. Our home base for the next few days would be the historic Montpelier Plantation and Beach, a boutique Relais & Chateaux resort spread across 60 acres of bloom-

ing gardens perched 750 feet above the Caribbean.

Arriving at Montpelier, we headed straight for the pool, where cooling trade winds made it easy to spend the afternoon reading, sunning and sipping rum punch, an island specialty as potent as it



Bicycle tours are a popular activity on Nevis



Nevis Peak





*Enjoy dining on
Montpelier Beach*

is delicious. And mysterious: each family's recipe is treated like a state secret. At Montpelier, head bartender Kaddy is known all over Nevis for his delicious, sunset-hued elixir, which he mixes up early in the day, before prying eyes can take note of the ingredients. When pressed, he'll only admit to following the proportions described in an old-school rhyme: one of strong, two of weak, three of sour, four of sweet. Beyond that, he simply smiles and changes the subject.

With just 19 rooms, Montpelier has the flexibility to curate daily activities specifically for each guest -- choices range from private rum tastings to provi-

sioning trips to the farmer's market with the resort's chef. Led by Nevis native Romel Gaskin, a new outdoor adventure program lets active types create their own guided hiking, strolling or cycling itineraries. We decided to mix exercise with a bit of history with a cycle tour that would take us to Montpelier's private beach club -- where lunch, sun and fresh mango daiquiris awaited -- by way of Charlestown, the island's Colonial-era capital. Stops along the way included Hamilton Estate, a former sugar plantation once owned by Alexander Hamilton's family; the Museum of Nevis History, which is located within Alexander

Hamilton's birthplace; the Jewish Burial Ground, where 19 gravestones dating from 1654 to 1768 are all that's left of the island's once thriving Jewish community and the 1643 St. Thomas Lowland Church, the first Anglican Church in the Caribbean. We also soaked our tired feed in Charlestown's mineral-rich natural springs, shopped at the rainbow-colored cottages that comprise a new artisan center and watched monkeys lope across the greens on the Four Seasons' golf course. Other adventures include hiking hilly trails past plantation ruins and waterfalls, riding horses or cycling to nearby settlements and restaurants; the resort



ed on a breezy bluff and boasts a single hammock as its divine “relaxation area.” If you’re lucky, it will rain during your treatment, as it did during mine, so you can listen to the beat of the drops on the roof of the three-walled structure as you drift in and out of consciousness.

After cocktails in the manor house, dinner is served each night in the resort’s main dining room, where ancient gears that once transformed the plantation’s sugar cane to molasses are hung like artwork from the ceiling. At least once during your visit, dine at Mill Privee, the 300-year-old sugar mill that has been transformed into an intimate dining room lighted entirely by candles. It’s a unique experience -- the circular building holds just a few tables -- and as magical as it gets.

Further afield, Pinney’s Beach is a sunny sweet spot on the island’s west coast where you’ll find Sunshine’s, a beach bar famous for celebrity sightings,

potent rum-laced Killer Bees and surprisingly delicious food. If you happen to visit on a Friday night, continue down the beach to Lime Beach Bar for post-dinner music and dancing. A lunch of lobster sandwiches and mango ice cream in the garden at Golden Rock, another hilltop plantation, is an island tradition; take time to meander through the resort’s parklike grounds, where you’ll find more than 50 varieties of palm trees, clouds of fragrant flowers and hummingbirds galore. You can also pick up a number of hiking trails from the resort.

There’s not much shopping on Nevis; if you’re looking to bring home a memory, drive into the hills in St. Thomas Lowland Parish to Bananas Bistro, where you’ll spend as much time looking at the original artwork on the walls and in the boutique (it’s all for sale) as you will in the pretty dining room. Like all things on Nevis, it’s small, but with a big personality. 🍌

also holds Pilates and yoga classes in a restored barn that opens onto a view of Nevis Peak.

The next day, I took advantage of having a guide at my disposal and decided to attempt the climb to the top of Nevis Peak. Four hours after leaving the resort, I returned--filthy, sore, hungry and smiling with triumph. It’s a tough slog, with slippery roots for footholds and well-used cotton ropes for hauling yourself across boulders and crevasses -- I left my mud-caked shoes and backpack in the trash -- but worth every sweaty step. After a not-so-quick shower, I headed to the resort’s spa, which is locat-



The Montpelier Plantation & Beach resort by night.