

House Hunting in ... St. Barts

Nearly two years after Hurricane Irma, the tiny Caribbean island has regained its footing among the region's most sought-after locales.

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A Pool and a View on the Coast of St. Barts

\$3.2 MILLION (2.8 MILLION EUROS)



This contemporary, three-bedroom villa sits on a verdant hillside above Flamand Beach, near the northwestern tip of the French territory of St. Barts, in the Caribbean Sea.

The 1,722-square-foot house, accented with Caribbean details including a white wood balcony, fretwork and a vaulted, whitewashed ceiling, was built in 1989 and partially renovated in 2018, after Hurricane Irma damaged St. Barts the previous fall. The quarter-acre property includes a wooden deck with a swimming pool and Jacuzzi, a gym housed in a separate bungalow, a garage and two parking spots.

“The property has a refreshing newness about it,” said Tom Smyth, an owner of St. Barth Properties Sotheby’s International Realty, an agency listing the property. “It’s a renovated property in a sweet spot in the pricing right now, where somebody can get in below 3 million” — in euros — “and have a turnkey home with access to one of the best beaches of St. Barts.”

The two-story home, which is being sold furnished, has been offered as a vacation rental with weekly rates ranging from about \$4,300 for two bedrooms in April to \$12,100 for all three bedrooms at Christmas and New Year’s, Mr. Smyth said.

All three bedrooms are on the ground floor, and the common living areas are upstairs, with two sets of stairs — one indoor, one outdoor — connecting them.

The three similarly sized bedrooms have wood floors. Two have en suite bathrooms and glass doors that open to the ipe wood deck, where the pool and Jacuzzi overlook a hillside and the Atlantic Ocean.

Upstairs, the air-conditioned living room has tile floors, built-in shelves and cabinets, and a wall of sliding-glass doors that open to a wide, covered terrace with decorative finishes. Around the corner, the terrace has separate lounging and dining areas near a stairway leading down to the pool. The small bungalow in the rear of the property currently serves as a fitness room, outfitted with a treadmill and stationary bike.



The living room, on the second floor, has a vaulted ceiling, a built-in entertainment center and sliding doors that open to a covered terrace. The open kitchen is on the left. Jean Vallette for The New York Times

The house, known as Villa Ipanema, is one of 12 properties in the private subdivision of Roc Flamands, which overlooks the small community around Flamand Beach. The beach is less than 10 minutes on foot, as are several hotels and restaurants. The regional Gustaf III Airport is about two miles from the house, and the nearest international airport, Princess Juliana International Airport, is on the neighboring island of St. Martin. The ferries at Gustavia Harbor in the capital of Gustavia are three miles south.

St. Barts, about 180 miles east of Puerto Rico, is a semiautonomous collectivity of France, with about 10,000 residents and strong French influence on its culture.

Market Overview

The 10-square-mile island of St. Barts, surrounded by white-sand beaches and shallow reefs, was hit hard by Hurricane Irma in September 2017. Housing prices were not affected, although transactions slowed as the island recovered, Mr. Smyth said.

“There was definitely a lull,” he added, before sales picked up again in 2018. The island’s infrastructure has generally recovered, although two major hotels remain closed as they undergo renovations.

St. Barts properties typically sit “deeper” in investors’ portfolios — not as first or even second homes — so homeowners there tend to be better equipped to withstand economic hits like hurricanes, Mr. Smyth said. And homes sometimes sell before they’re listed, he said, when agents make connections between potential buyers and properties coming to market.

An analysis of the St. Barts real estate market by Benjamin Roche, the founder of Roche Realty, an agency in New York and St. Barts, showed that sales volume has stabilized since Hurricane Irma, while supply fell during 2018. The report counted about 60 homes for sale in the fourth quarter of 2018, most with three bedrooms. Many were less than five years old. They were also smaller in size than homes built in previous years, leading to a reduction in the average listing price for high-end waterfront homes.

Zarek Honneysett, the sales manager and a partner with Sibarth Real Estate, the Christie’s International Real Estate affiliate on St. Barts, said owners there are “very serene” and don’t tend to sell when trouble hits. On the contrary, he said, most houses listed since Irma have been fully renovated, with many incorporating hurricane protection. And while supply declined as homeowners made those repairs, prices have remained steady.

“Historically, Saint Barts has been very stable — not just in real estate, but politically, economically,” Mr. Honneysett said, and the quick recovery from Irma boosted buyers’ confidence. “Within a year, the island was back on its feet compared to different places. It’s added to the confidence of people wanting to buy here.”

Prices start near 1 million euros (about \$1.13 million), which means homeownership is out of reach for many locals, he said. About 2 million or 3 million euros (\$2.3 million to \$3.4 million) can buy a two- or three-bedroom villa with a pool and a view, and prices can top 10 million euros (\$11.3 million) for larger properties that check the boxes on many buyers’ wish lists: newer, beachfront, more land, better view, in “the best locations,” he said.

“The market is quite strong,” Mr. Honneysett said. “We have a lot of demand. We don’t have too much inventory of properties for sale.”

Who Buys in St. Barts

There are “no bad areas” on St. Barts, Mr. Smyth said. The island’s western tip, Colombier, offers sunset views over Colombier Bay and the Atlantic, while Flamand is popular for its white-sand

beach. Pointe Milou, in the northeast, has dramatic cliffs and views, and Saint Jean has more tourist attractions.

Foreign buyers on St. Barts often come from the United States, as well as South and Central America. Mr. Smyth said his agency's buyers have been from a mix of countries over the years, with "no particular pattern."

Over the last few years, Mr. Honneysett said, his agency's buyers have come from the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and other Western European countries. A smaller share have come from elsewhere, including Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and Russia.

Buying Basics

As in France, foreigners are not restricted from buying real estate on St. Barts.

Celine Carsalade, whose law firm has offices in France, Morocco and St. Barts, said the buyer's closing costs include taxes, the notary's fee and the agent's commission, which typically comes to about 12 or 13 percent of the sale price.

Lawyers are not required to handle real estate transactions, she said, but they can be helpful when it comes to dealing with taxation and administrative matters.

Emmanuel Jacques, the managing partner of Emmanuel Jacques Almosnino, a Gustavia law firm, urged buyers to do due diligence, as the island is undergoing "a constant evolution." For example, someone buying a home near the beach might learn "that other purchasers were granted the right to build a property just in front of yours," he said.

Languages and Currency

French; euro (1 euro = \$1.14)

Taxes and Fees

There are no property taxes on St. Barts. The community fees in the Roc Flamand development are around 1,600 euros (\$1,810) a year, Mr. Smyth said.

Websites

- St. Barts tourism: saint-barths.com
- St. Barts government: comstbarth.fr
- Port of Gustavia: portdegustavia.fr