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LE SERENO ST. BARTHS

Perfection in Paradise

Could you ask for a more perfect place than Le Sereno hotel in St. Barths? Only if you were obscenely greedy. Perched on 600 feet of Grand Cul-de-Sac beachfront, Le Sereno's turquoise waters are protected by a reef that creates an ideal venue for windsurfers, kiteboarders and those who prefer to recline with a glass of rosé and just watch the show.

Parisian design star Christian Liaigre has created 37 suites and villas with the kind of understated genius that makes it all seem natural. There are, of course, luxurious amenities like high-thread-count sheets, thick white towels, and thirsty terry robes made by D. Porthault especially for Le Sereno, as well as sexy Ex Voto bath products. But there are lighter touches too, like the white Havaiana flip flops that await in every room, begging you to kick back and relax. The décor is spare but luxurious, with lots of teak touches and gauzy white canopies that float around the dark wood beds. There are, of course, flat-screen televisions on adjustable mounts and bedside stereos with iPod docking stations in every room, but the serene atmosphere will probably make you want to unplug. Glass doors that open the seafront rooms onto the Caribbean have the same effect.

The stunning environment remains the star — whether you're in the deep soaking tub that looks into your lush and private tropical courtyard, enjoying the divan on your seafront villa's patio, or reading on the teak deck beside the pool and looking out across the beach to the azure Caribbean. The effect is almost magical, instantly dropping the blood pressure while still causing a slight acceleration of heart rate.

What puts Le Sereno over the top, though, is that this wonderfully laid-back vibe is accompanied by first-rate service from the moment you cross the threshold. There is a bar and restaurant on site — the open air Le Restaurant des Pêcheurs lets you listen to the faint sound of waves gently lapping the shore, while you relax with your feet in the sand and your palate in the clouds. Seafood is a specialty and it's right off the boat — although in the case of Le Restaurant des Pêcheurs' Bouillabaise à la Ancienne, it is so authentic that the restaurant flies the fish in from the Mediterranean on Thursday for Friday's plat du jour.

There's a spa and gym at Le Sereno, as well as several boutiques, and 24-hour room service. Paradise doesn't come cheap, of course, but it's unlikely you'll spend a penny more than Le Sereno is worth. Rates range from 480 euros per night for a Suite Terrasse in the low season to 15,000 euros per night for a Le Sereno villa during the holiday season. *Le Sereno, +59-(05)-90-29-83-00; lesereno.com*

