

St. Kitts High-Five

St. Kitts' scenery segues from black volcanic rock beaches to deep green ravines. (Bottom) A hiker takes in the view from the top of old Liamuiga.

After a sky-high hike up the volcano, it's all downhill. Here are your best bets.

by Chelle Koster Walton

Hallelujah, I can walk again!" or so I thought as I hobbled from the massage treatment room. Then I came to the steps, my nemesis those past three days after our five-hour upward and downward hike on a 3,792-foot volcano.

Well, at least I wasn't involuntarily and audibly groaning at each step. Only visibly wincing. A decided improvement.

Five tips if you plan to hike/climb Mt. Liamuiga, the highest point on the East Caribbean isle of St. Kitts:

- Hire a good guide, preferably Chuck with Island Safari Tours. (It's easy to get lost along the trail, so don't try it without expert local knowledge. However, if you eschew riding around the island in a safari trolley that screams "tourist," you may want to meet Chuck at the site or ask for alternate transportation.)

- Wear sturdy shoes and loose clothing, preferably those you wouldn't mind throwing in the trash afterward. (Pack these, are you kidding?) Long sleeves and lunch feel good when you reach the summit.

- Take it slowly. Your guide will acquiesce to your pace.

- Bring water and a towel. You'll likely get caught in a shower in the rainfor-

est, especially in early spring.

- Book a spa treatment ahead of time, preferably the Kittitian Massage at St. Kitts Marriott Resort. (Or, if you've become one with the volcano, you could ask for a Cinnamon Black Rock Therapy using volcanic stones from Mt. Liamuiga.) While at the resort, St. Kitts' most full-service, indulge in a Kobe steak at Royal Grille Steakhouse and a beachfront room. You deserve it.

Do not compare this hike to climbing to the top of Diamond Head volcanic crater in Oahu. For one thing, Diamond Head is only 763 feet high. While climbing Diamond Head, furthermore, you never have to use a walking stick, go down on all fours like the green vervet monkeys you see in St. Kitts' jungled rainforest, or wonder what the heck you were trying to prove. You also never get the pristine, cloud-poofed, velvety green sight of a mile-plus wide crater at the top. OK, so it's worth the pain and the indelible mud smears from toe to seat of



pants (don't ask).

St. Kitts provides a number of avenues for adventure—on land, on water, and in the water. Horseback riding excursions take you along the Atlantic shore or into the rainforest. ATV trips visit plantations and other historic sites. Outfitters and cruises cover all the water sports bases from



BOTTOM PHOTO BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON



(Top) Island Safari Tours' not-so-subtle tour bus. (Bottom) A sugarmill ruin along the tracks of the St. Kitts Scenic Railway.

scuba diving and snorkeling to kayaking and sailing into the sunset.

Five other ways to reward yourself after adventuring on St. Kitts:

- Do lobster lunch at Turtle Beach and drink with the monkeys.
 - Eat cheesecake at Sweet Temptations in downtown Basseterre. I'm not sure whether to recommend the cherry or the chocolate marble, so try both. You've never tasted cheesecake like this.
 - Puff a Cuban cigar. Go ahead, it's legal here. Pray for an end to the embargo as you do.
 - Drink the local rum. Belmont Estate and Brinley's Gold are produced on the island. If you're more into suds, St. Kitts also makes its own Carib beer.
 - Have dinner at one of the island's famous 17th century plantation inns. The Royal Palm at Ottley's Plantation Inn, The Golden Lemon Inn, and Rawlins Plantation Inn top the list.
- English-speaking St. Kitts is known



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as the Sugar Island, and not only because its scenery is eye-candy and its natives make you variously chuckle and smile. In plantation days, it brimmed with sugar, and sugarcane fields still flutter like streamers throughout the largely agricultural island. Away from the more famous resort islands of the Caribbean, St. Kitts feels more comfortable with itself. The islanders will tell you how to act right, then tell you a double-entendre joke, where the second “entendre” is often a little naughty. They’ll tell you about their family and proudly about their island.

“We’re always in people’s business, you know,” a pretty young Kittitian mother of five named Lavern explained to me about life on an island the size of Pine Island. “Everybody’s family, that’s why family is so important to us.”

Goats, sheep, cows, and monkeys run freely. The scenery segues from black volcanic rock beaches to deep green ravines, helter-skelter villages, historic churches, the neighboring off-



The view from the St. Kitts Scenic Railway.

shore islands of Statia, Saba, and Nevis, Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and a busy little town-port area. The best way to sightsee is along the route of the old sugar-hauling trains. The St. Kitts Scenic Railway has been resurrected to circle the island’s perimeters. This is an adventure you can take sitting down, above in open air or down below in air-conditioning, with a rum punch in hand, no less. In other words, my kind of post-climbing, screaming-quadriceps adventure.

Five other mild adventures you

should undertake on St. Kitts:

- Do eighteen holes from shore to shore at Royal St. Kitts Golf Course at the Marriott on the Southeast Peninsula. If you don’t golf (I don’t), you still can’t avoid intaking breath at the views.

- Stroll the shops, markets, galleries, restaurants, and sights around Independence Square in downtown Basseterre. Take time to talk to the locals and taste native dishes.

- Tour Brimstone Hill Fortress, where the view possibly could have made the defending soldiers drop dead



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instead of the enemies.

- Visit Romney Manor, home to botanical gardens, historic ruins, and Carabelle Batik.

- Take the 45-minute ferry to Nevis and stroll the sights of downtown Charlestown or hire an island tour to see the tiny thirty-six-square-mile island. 🌴

Chelle Koster Walton is Cuisine & Travel Editor for Times of the Islands and writes also for Miami Herald, Caribbean Travel & Life, St. Petersburg Times, National Geographic, Concierge.com, and other travel outlets.

If You Go

Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, 869-465-2609, www.brimstonehillfortress.org.

Golden Lemon Inn, 869-465-7260, www.goldenlemon.com

Island Safari Tours, 869-663-3416

Rawlins Plantation Inn, 869-465-6221, www.rawlinsplantation.com

Romney Manor/Caribelle Batik, 869-465-6253

The Royal Palm at Ottley's Plantation Inn, 869-465-7234, www.ottleys.com

Royal St. Kitts Golf Club, 869-466-2700, www.royalstkittsgolfclub.com.

St. Kitts Tourism Authority, 800-582-6208, www.stkittstourism.com

St. Kitts Resort & the Royal Beach Casino Marriott, 869-466-1200, www.stkittsmarriott.com

St. Kitts Scenic Railway, 869-465-7263, www.stkittsscenicrailway.com

Sweet Temptations, 869-466-2398

Turtle Beach Bar and Grill, 869-469-9086, www.turtlebeach1.com

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