



ST BARTS

This tiny Caribbean island has become the winter hot spot for movie stars and rockers from Europe and the US, who come for the scene in Gustavia, the cool harbour capital and the island's only town

Like exotic birds in a nature documentary, the jet set's private planes migrate en masse toward St Barthélemy as soon as November's cold weather front approaches. But whether you arrive on a yacht or a private plane, your mobility around the island is likely to be rather more paysan.

There are just two petrol stations, 25 miles of narrow, windy roads, and a speed limit of 28mph – so a large, expensive sports car would be pointless. The High Life vehicle of choice is the venerable Mini Moke, a 45-year-old derivative of the Mini, which you can still rent on the island. You get an engine, gearbox, four seats, a bit of canvas for a roof, a wheel at each corner and some flimsy bodywork – and very little else. But you won't mind. The warm Caribbean air replaces the doors and windows, and an old beach towel dries the seats between tropical showers. And 28mph is exactly the speed at which you'll want to travel. You're *en vacance*, after all, and you'll be seduced by the charms of the Moke as much as by those of St Barts.

As a French-speaking island, the Gallic influences run from the topless beaches to the chi-chi boutiques (and of course the proud tradition of food and wine). Yet the year-round temperature of 82°F, and young, tanned bodies sauntering around mean that the surly Parisian attitude is nowhere to be seen. In fact, the laid-back feeling is such that visiting mega-stars don't feel in the least hassled, and happily muck in, dining alfresco at beach bars and street cafés.

There are 20 pristine, blonde beaches that fringe the island. Some, like Colombier Beach, are so discreet you can only reach them by hiking or by small

want more people-watching, Flamands Bay on the northwest coast is where the sun-loungers at Hôtel Saint-Barth Isle de France spread out on the powdery sand.

With just 33 rooms spread throughout their tropical gardens (and facing the beach), Hôtel Saint-Barth Isle de France is the whitewashed bolthole/social club for the elite of Paris, New York and London who return regularly to catch up on transatlantic gossip. On the wooden steps leading down to the hotel's beach, Manolos, Choos and Louboutins vie for space. Claybare and Jean-Marie, two local fishermen, personally catch and deliver the daily lobster and mahi-mahi to the hotel's beachside restaurant, La Case de L'Isle. To dine on the beach, if the sought-after table 56 is busy, a quiet word may get your table moved so that you can eat with sand underfoot.

A typical St Barts evening starts with a glass of rosé at the hotel bar or, if there is space, Baz Bar on the port, where guests nibbling sushi spill out onto the streets to the sound of live jazz. For dinner it's on to Maya's, a simple, concrete-floored restaurant set back from the water, where anyone who can secure a table will experience spicy home-made Creole-Thai fusion dishes. They don't officially take reservations, but certain hotel concierges are rumoured to have some sway.

To round off the night, Le Yacht Club or the quay have live music – often featuring holidaying superstar singers who give impromptu performances before they disappear into the night to party in their private villas or aboard



Diane von Furstenberg kaftan £159

Autumn/Winter 2008 Diane von Furstenberg dress £325

Jimmy Choo shoes £850

Rod Stewart and wife Penny Lancaster, 2005

Hôtel Saint-Barth Isle de France

Yves Saint Laurent Autumn/Winter 2008

Emilio Pucci bangle £249

Cartier 'Noeud' watch £27,050

Shay Todd bikini £159

Sita de Vesci beach bag £209

Etro flip-flops £89.95

The Mini Moke

StriVectin Facial Anti-Oxidant Concentrated Formula £86, exclusive to Harrods

Jean Patou eau de parfum £630, exclusive limited edition

Etro shirt £129

MUST-DO LIST

VISIT Maya's restaurant, a St Barts institution overlooking Gustavia harbour. This celeb hot spot offers Creole-Thai fusion dishes in a laid-back setting

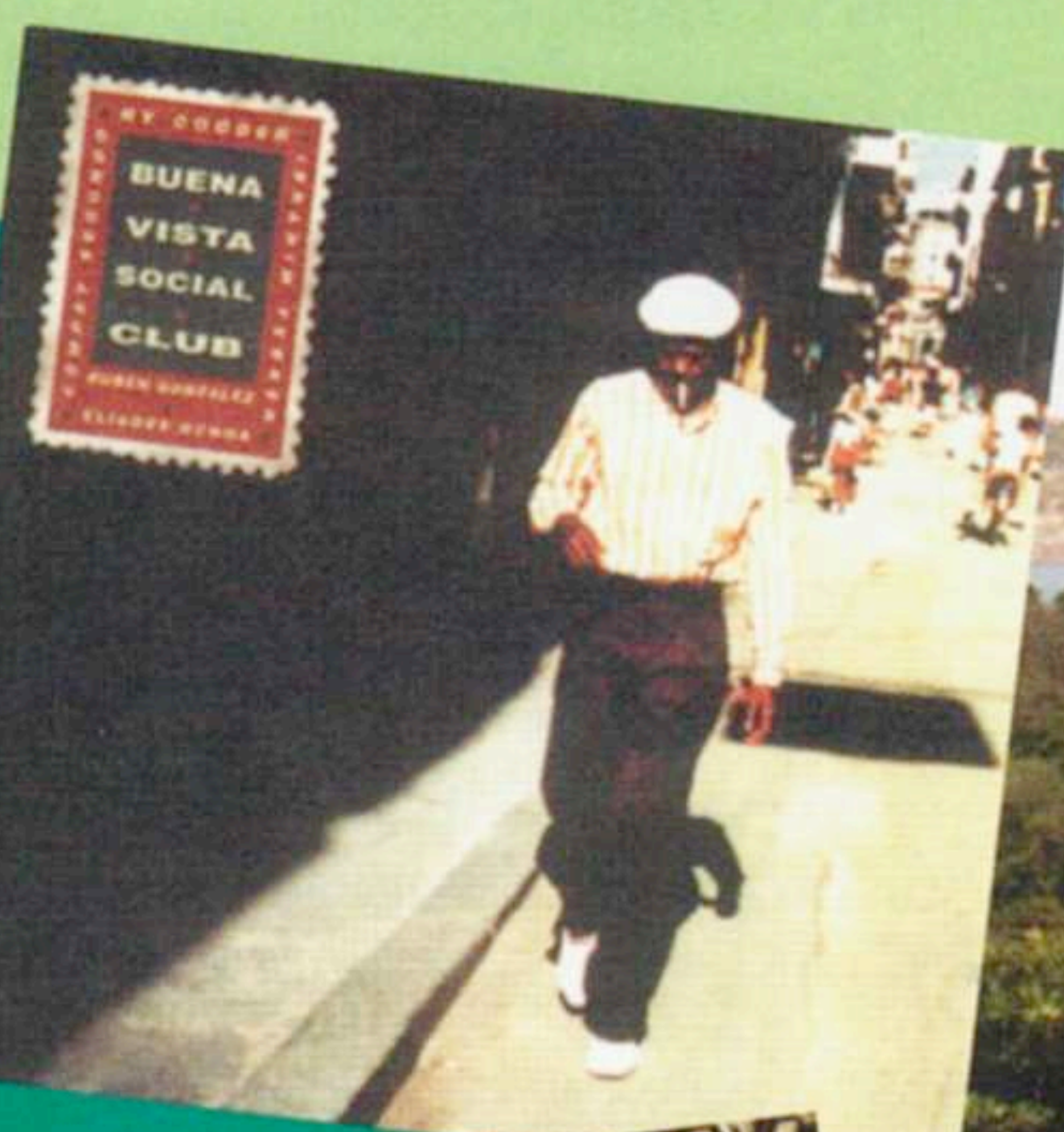
WEAR Diane von Furstenberg's kaftans in sorbet-coloured prints; Pucci tunics; vintage-inspired Shay Todd bikinis

DRIVE Ferrari 612 Scaglietti; Lamborghini Gallardo

LISTEN TO Buena Vista Social Club by Buena Vista Social Club

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