



Put on the map – by Amy’s 5-star shenanigans

By Hunter Davies

Is St Lucia the new Barbados? That is what the travel industry is trying to suggest, especially those travel traders hoping to send more trade to St Lucia.

In many ways they are rather similar – same sort of size (Barbados is 21 by 14 miles, St Lucia 27 by 14), roughly similar populations (280,000 and 170,000), both former British colonies where English is spoken and both look vaguely pear-shaped.

Traditionally, though, Barbados has always been wealthier, more developed, with better roads, the people better educated and, as far as the travel trade goes, a more glitzy destination with all those five-star hotels down the so-called Platinum West Coast and all those starry, glamorous folk – plus Michael Winner – who flock there every winter.

I have been many times to Barbados – it is easy to get to for a start, with lots of direct flights from Blyth, and when you get there, things work. But I’ve only been to St Lucia twice. On my visits so far, it did seem more

West Indian than Barbados, more exotic with the French-style place names and locals speaking a French-based patois.

Best of all, it has a stunning landscape, with massive hills and a stupendous rainforest, making Barbados seem rather flat and tame by comparison.

The downside to the landscape has been the roads, hellishly bendy and full of potholes, which meant getting from north to south took for ever.

The reason for all the recent excitement and

extensive publicity for the ‘new’ St Lucia is that suddenly it has a lot more smart hotels, expensive luxury villas and, wait for it, a smattering of British celebrities. That

might, of course, put you off but it has at least brought coverage for St Lucia.

I booked into what is considered the most exciting, exclusive and best-designed of the new hotels, Cap Maison, just after Kelly Brook and her boyfriend Danny Cipriani had checked out.

Next door, Amy

Winehouse was still causing chaos, having been eased out of Le Sport, but now resident in a nearby villa, loving St Lucia so much she appeared not to want to return home.

I was a bit alarmed by my first sight of Cap Maison, up in the north-east, just past Rodney Bay. I had chosen it because it bills itself as a boutique hotel, with only 50 rooms, which is the maximum size I like, but it

looked huge. Its eight or so main buildings loomed vast and inside my ground-floor suite, it seemed even bigger. I needed a taxi to get me from my bedroom to the kitchen.

I was disappointed to find that it was 62 steps down to the beach, as the hotel is perched dramatically on a cliff. I do have a dodgy knee. But I was thrilled to find I had my own pool. Usually, when a hotel boasts that its suites have a pool it is about the size of a sink. This one was excellent.

The reason for the size, and all the amenities, is that to finance and build the hotel they created their own variation on a time share, except that each owner gets to own their bit, living there for up to nine weeks a year. Some 20 out of the 21 suites, with up to three beds, were sold before they

opened at the end of 2008, at prices up to \$1.6 million.

Most of the year, they revert to ordinary hotel rooms, with the bigger suites being divided up (hence the 50 rooms.)

The creators of Cap Maison are the Gobat family, Theo and Helen, and their three handsome sons, Rufus, Adam and Oliver, one of whom Amy was most taken with, throwing herself at him, allegedly.

The Gobats got into hotels by chance when Theo, trained as an accountant, was moved to St Lucia in 1974 as finance director of a hotel and travel company which then went bankrupt. The liquidators suggested that he and another director should take over the company’s hotels in St Lucia.

They made it work, Theo later bought out his partner then

GETTING THERE

Elegant Resorts (01244 897515, www.elegantresorts.co.uk) offers seven nights at Cap Maison from £2,615pp sharing a one-bedroom Ocean View Suite plus Jacuzzi on a room-only basis and economy flights from Gatwick with BA including private car transfers.

sold out in 1999, aged 60, intending to retire. But he began to fantasise about creating the sort of hotel he would like to stay in – a small, upmarket, boutique hotel. Then he thought, when it’s finished, I’ll hand it over to my sons, let them get on with it. Which is what has happened.

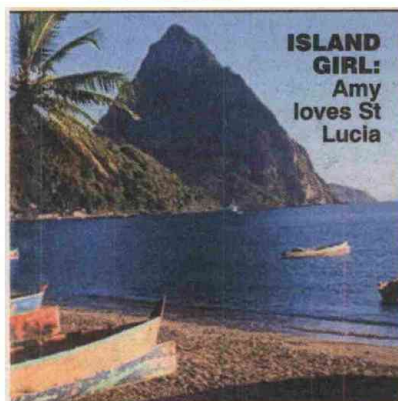
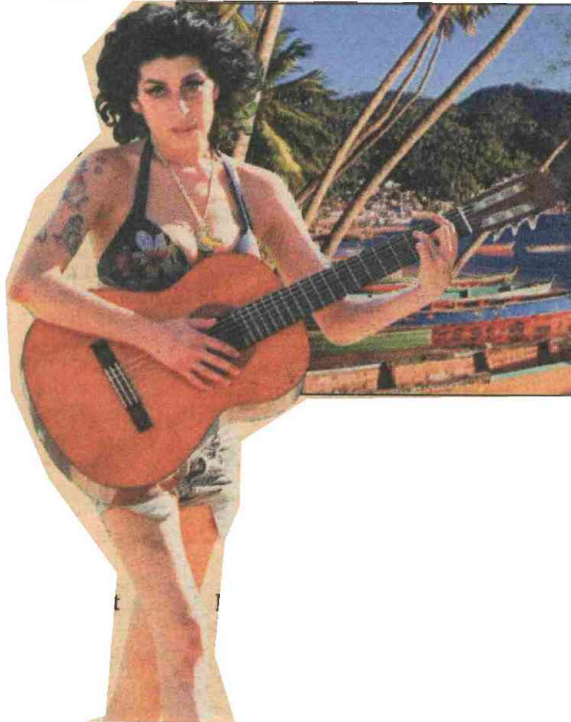
The other new developments in St Lucia, of an upmarket nature, include The Landings, not far away at Pigeon Point, with a marina, and the Jade Mountain, further south at Anse Chastenet.

Le Sport, next door to Cap Maison, is all-inclusive, much bigger with 154 rooms. I had lunch there, and heard lurid stories of Amy’s capers.

St Lucia, like Barbados, has its own individual delights



which are improving and becoming easier to enjoy and more accessible. BA has introduced three non-stop flights a week from Gatwick and, phew, the potholes are disappearing.



**ISLAND
GIRL:**
Amy
loves St
Lucia