

GREAT ESCAPES

RIGHT: Dine by candlelight on the Carlisle Bay hotel's jetty bar.
BELOW LEFT: Poolside at Antigua's Blue Waters hotel.
BELOW RIGHT: Colourful houses at Heritage Quay in St John's, Antigua



CARIBBEAN

'We flew out of the UK on a November morning just as snow began to fall and the temperature plummeted to well below zero. Within a few hours we were reclining on a sun lounger, cooling cocktail in hand, as an aqua sea gently lapped the soft white sand. Back home, the weather worsened, with flight delays and snow ploughs struggling to clear the roads. Forgive me for gloating, but this was my first taste of winter sun - and I was determined to squeeze every ounce of enjoyment from it.

Our destination was the island of Antigua. Fanned by the balmy north-east trade winds nearly all year round, its 365 stunning beaches - one for every day of the year, as the locals say - are fringed with swaying palm trees and washed by clear and inviting waves. A friend called to say

he'd been stuck in a motorway traffic jam for five hours: we sympathised, gratefully accepted the ice-cold towel and fruit kebab we'd been offered, rubbed in a little more factor 30 and settled down to watch yachts bobbing on the horizon. Bliss!

Antigua is a true Caribbean paradise, the interior lush and green and dotted with colourful, brightly painted wooden houses and churches, its coastline encircled by a coral reef, which makes it a perfect location for snorkellers and scuba divers.

One essential sight is English Harbour, faithfully restored as the only working Georgian dockyard in the world and home to shops, restaurants and a fascinating museum revealing just what life was like in Nelson's day.

Our stay in Antigua took us to two equally welcoming hotels. Blue Waters in the

north-east corner of the island is a family-owned hotel with 10 room categories to suit almost any taste and budget. Our next stop was Carlisle Bay in the south, a stunning contemporary hotel with 82 spacious beachfront suites, its own screening room, a fabulous kids' club and my own favourite chill-out zone - a cool, comfortable and chic library complete with a great selection of books and Wi-Fi access.' **June Walton**

TAKE ME THERE

ITC Classics (01244 355527; www.itcclassics.co.uk) has one week at Carlisle Bay from £3,259pp or at Blue Waters from £1,649pp, including breakfasts, flights and private transfers. Or you could divide the week between the two.

ALSO CONSIDER

Barbados, Grenada, St Lucia... or anywhere else in the Caribbean

