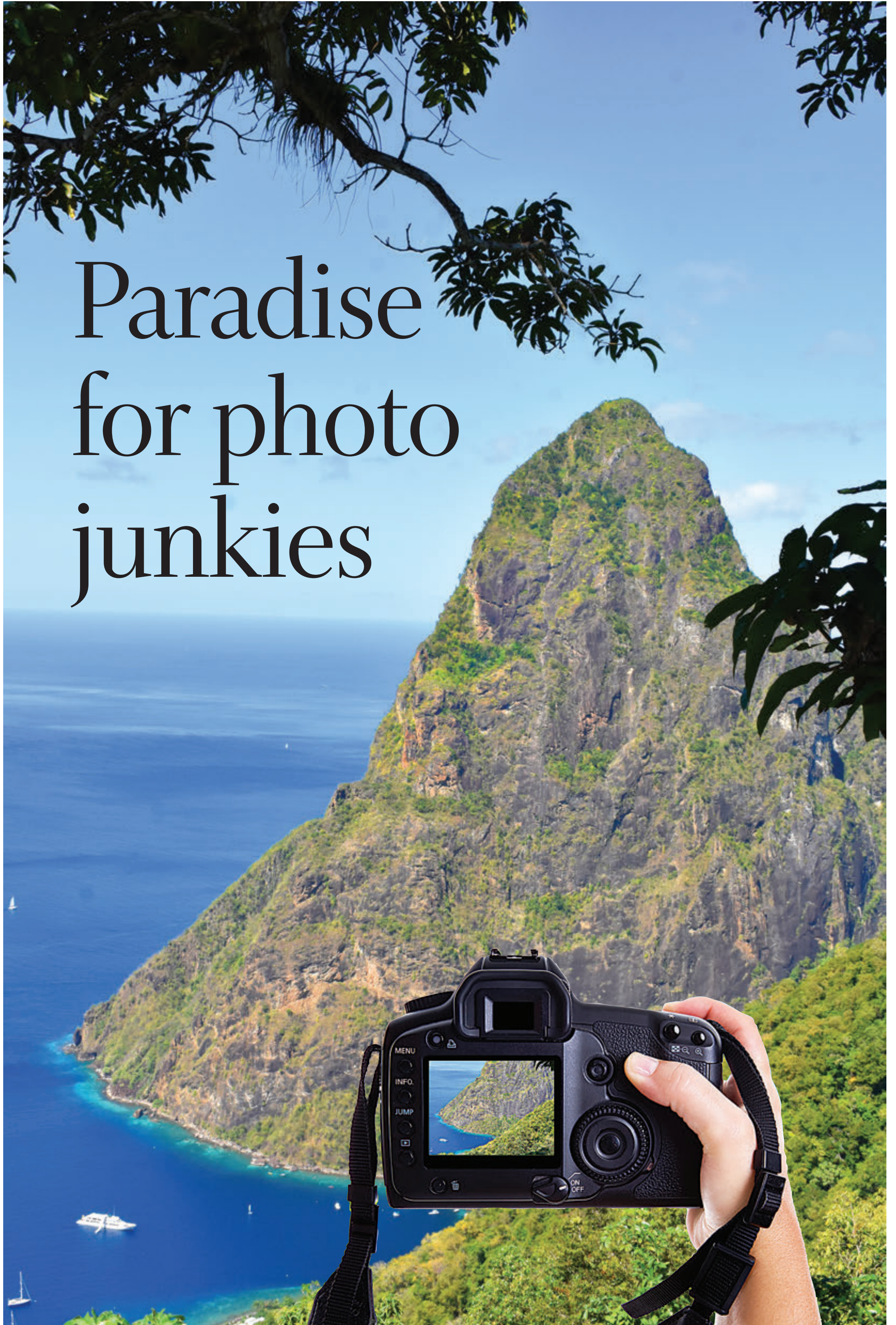
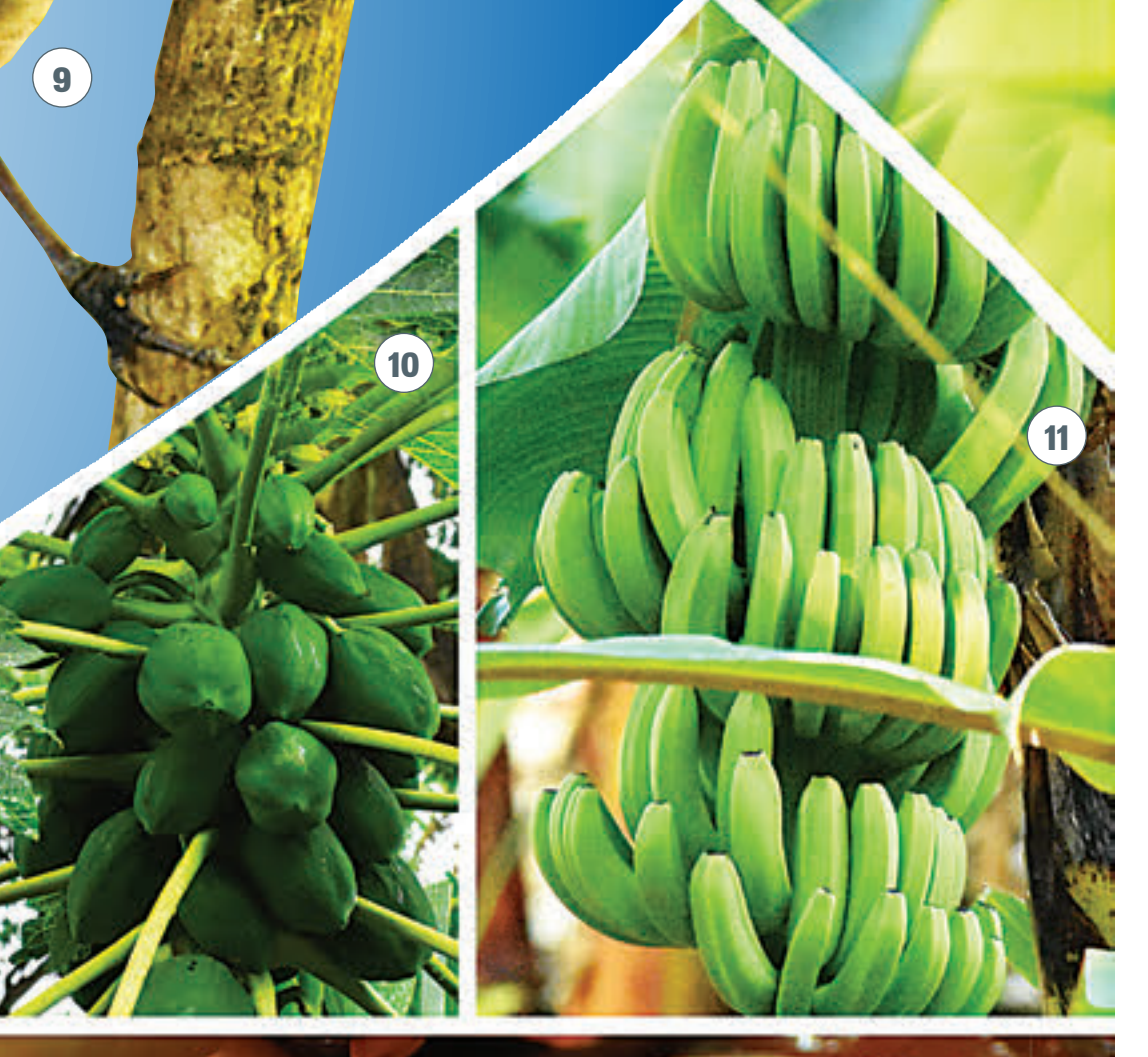
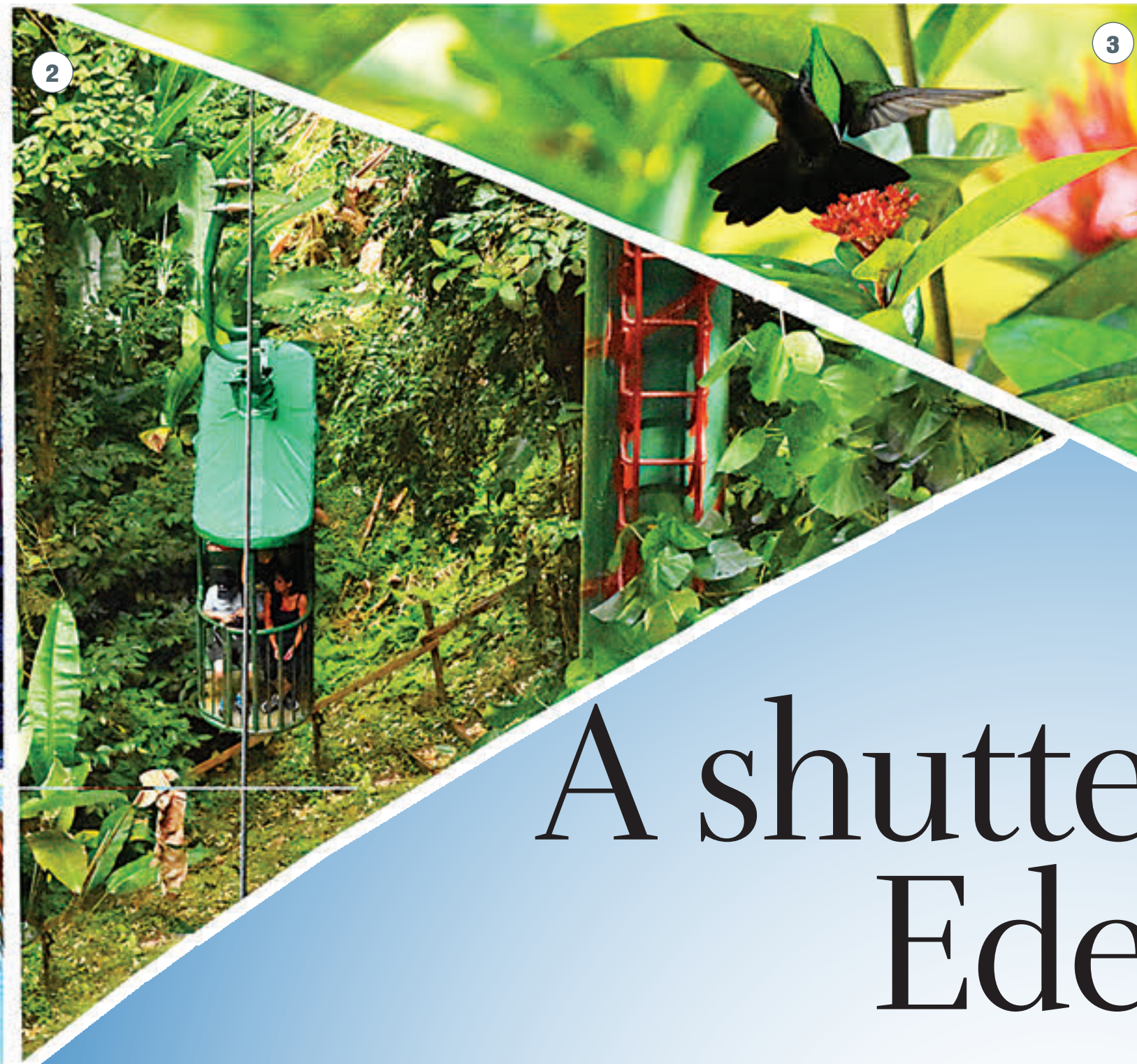
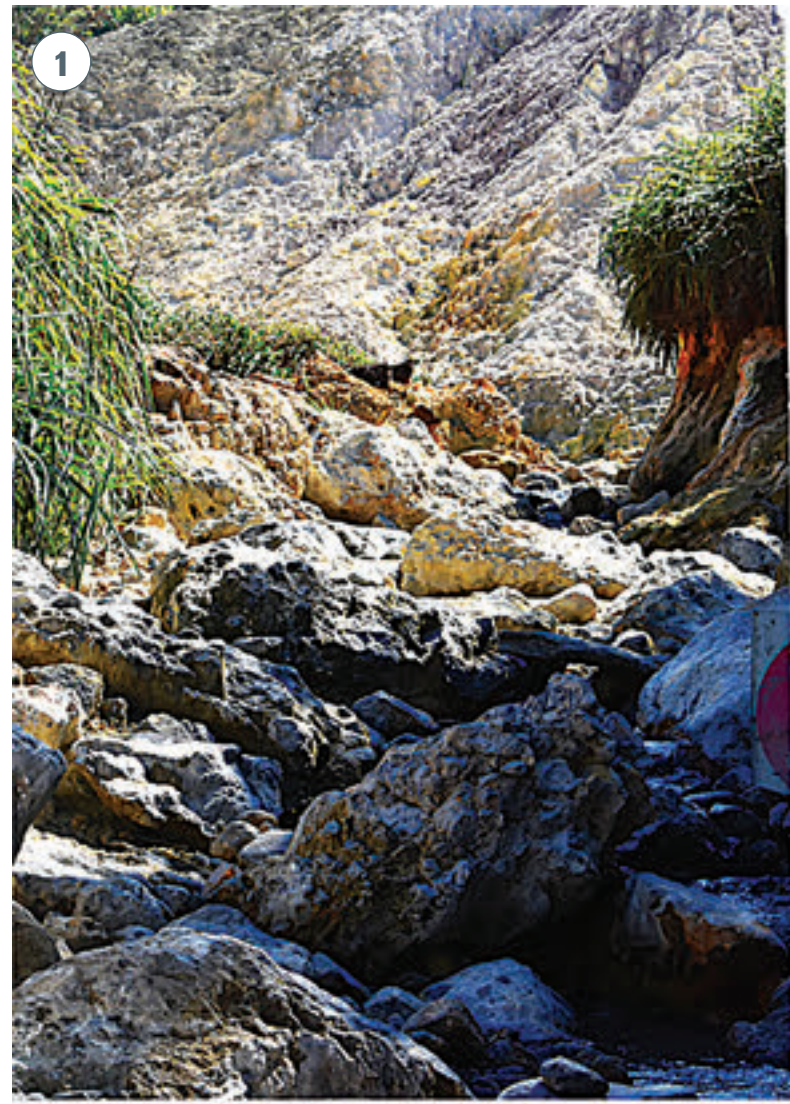


salon

Paradise for photo junkies



salon focus



A shutterbug's Eden

Photo junkies looking for great shots can find paradise in St. Lucia. by Tiffany Thornton / Telegraph-Journal

St. Lucia is a nature enthusiast's paradise. It is also a shutterbug's Eden, an oasis for photographers looking to capture memorable images.

For this photo junkie, St. Lucia offered countless sights. And this island paradise is easily accessible from New Brunswick. Air Canada flies daily from Moncton to Toronto, where a connecting flight will take you to St. Lucia with same day arrival options.

This once volcanic Caribbean island with a diverse landscape is teeming with birds. St. Lucia even boasts its own national parrot. Dense rainforests, turquoise waters and towering mountain tops known as the Pitons point towards the clear blue sky.

The island has a long history, having been "seven times British, seven times French" as the locals will tell you. Traces of past influences can be found everywhere. Cars drive on the left side of the road and the locals speak

English as well as a French-Creole patois. The country is a vibrant mix of culture infused with warm island hospitality. It is the kind of place that will leave you wishing your travel adventures would never end.

Waking up to nature

East Winds Resort is truly a hidden oasis by the sea. Thirty cottages sit tucked away in a tropical garden, boasting an incredible array of bird life. Staying at East Winds is like stumbling on a private island that few know about, yet those who do keep coming back for decades.

All guests will find a beautifully illustrated East Winds Nature guidebook in their cottage to help you identify the varied flora, fauna and wildlife. You can even join one of the free garden tours offered with the head gardener, Sylvanus Lewis, who can tell you all about the medicinal properties that various plants offer.

Birds galore

East Winds is home to the three types of hummingbird: the purple-throated carib, green-throated carib and the antillean crested. That is only a few of the beautiful birds you will spot, so have your camera handy.

Every morning expect to be greeted by the bullfinches and their daily antics as they try to swoop in for a taste of your sweet fruit breakfast, while the aptly named bright yellow bananaquits watch from the trees above.

Outdoor activities

Everything is inclusive at East Winds, and all activities are complimentary. From weekly yoga and Pilates classes (held in an open concept wood pavilion) to the outdoor spa, there is something for everyone. You can learn to sail the open seas on a Hobie Cat with an instructor, or snorkel your way just off the clear blue shore out to a coral reef where tropical fish like sergeant majors and glassy sweepers abound (all snorkel gear is included).

East Winds is all about sustainable cuisine — they grow their own bananas, mangoes, vegetables and more. The friendly staff will eagerly fill you in on what is locally utilized.

At the ocean front restaurant you will find the chef preparing everything from fresh mahi mahi to stewed chicken. Enjoy BBQ night when the huge open grill is all heated up and spiny lobster, steak, and more sizzles while the sound of traditional music from a local band fills the air.

Day trip adventures

The two Pitons known as Gros Piton and Petite Piton are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These verdant mountain peaks are remnants of a volcanic eruption from thousands of years ago.

Spice Travel and Tours offers a fabulous day trip option to view the Pitons. They will pick you up at the resort and take you to Tet Paul Nature Trail, a moderate hike that leads to the most stellar views of the Pitons with the ocean below.

Sweet treat

Cocoa has grown all over the island for centuries, yet it was only in the last decade that St. Lucia started producing its own chocolate.

Cocoa Sainte Lucie is a family owned chocolate company that whips up delicious handcrafted dark chocolate with 65% Island Spice added to the mix. You can learn how to melt, stir and mould your own. Add tasty cashews (they grow on the island), almonds and more, package up your bar and take it with you.

The rainforest awaits

How often can you say you ascended through the rainforest on an aerial tram? St. Lucia encompasses 19,000 acres of rainforest, and Spice Tours can take you into a part of it. Rainforest Adventure boasts 16, open-air gondolas that take you up into the rainforest with a guide.

Birds flit and frolic as you pass huge ferns and other plant life until you reach the top. Nothing prepares you for the spectacular view of St. Lucia's raw beauty that lies before you. You can even see the French Island of Martinique on a clear day.

In the town of Soufriere (derived from the word sulphur) you will find the world's "only drive in volcano." It's there that you can cover yourself in volcanic ash, and dip in the warm grey waters. The clay is said to knock ten years off, and when you feel how soft your skin is after you wash it off you may believe it's true.

There's no shortage of stunning visuals to take one's breath away in St. Lucia. And with flights reasonably priced out of N.B., this island getaway is easily accessible.

Other island destinations via N.B.

Sunwing flies direct from Saint John, N.B. to Varadero, Cuba. Air Transat flies direct from

Moncton to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Air Transat flies direct from Moncton to Cancun, Mexico.

Tips to capture your vacation memories

Good Lighting: The best time of day for optimal lighting is the golden hours at dusk and dawn. It is light enough out to capture the subject's colours, terrain, etc., without the glare.

Keep it Simple: Don't try to take in too much of a scope in one shot. Focus your camera on the subject with a soft, natural background to start, such as a bird on a flower.

Be Patient: If you are photographing the ocean, for example, study the contrasting colours when the light hits the waves. Wait and watch how the waves and sky change for the perfect shot.

Study Your Subject: If it's birds you are looking to photograph, spend time familiarizing yourself with where they hang out (tree tops, gardens, forest, etc.) and watch their patterns. Many species of bird will generally return to the same spot.

Have Fun: Don't lose sight of being in the moment. Your camera is a window into the beauty of the world. Play around with colour and contrast. Experimenting often leads to unexpected surprises.

Cover: The picturesque Pitons tower above the volcanic Caribbean island. **1.** The town of Soufriere, derived from the word sulphur, features a drive-in volcano where people can get covered in volcanic ash and take a dip in rejuvenating waters. **2.** St. Lucia encompasses 19,000 acres of rainforest, some of which can be toured by tourists looking to click some memorable photos. **3.** The Antillean crested hummingbird is a species of hummingbird found in St. Lucia, as well as in many of the island nations in the Caribbean. **4.** East Winds is home to many types of birds, including tremblers, aptly named as they tremble when they sing. **5.** It is not uncommon for the bright yellow bananaquits to watch you eat breakfast from the trees above. **6.** Grass canopied huts and beautiful blue waters give St. Lucia that island paradise feel. **7.** St. Lucia is well-known for the various species of hummingbirds that call the Caribbean island home. **8.** Sylvanus Lewis, head gardener for the resort, has encyclopedia type knowledge of the island plant life and the medicinal properties they offer. **9.** The bull finch isn't shy about sharing its singing voice in St. Lucia. **10.** Mangoes are in abundance on St. Lucia. **11.** Bananas are among the food crops grown on the island that become a staple on the menu in St. Lucia. **12.** A view of one of the East Winds cottages nestled among the foliage of St. Lucia. **13.** Looking for scenic water photos in St. Lucia? They're everywhere to be found. **14.** Cocoa has grown on St. Lucia for centuries. Cocoa Sainte Lucie is a family-owned chocolate company operating on the island that features island spice and nuts. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TIFFANY THORNTON / PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: SONJA SCHRICK / BRUNSWICK NEWS