

Understanding the Port

Eight square miles of France with a Swedish past and superyacht prices. There is no cruise pier — ships anchor off and tender into the middle of Gustavia, which is small enough to walk end to end. Come for the harbor, the beaches and the view. Do not come to bargain.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

There is no cruise dock. Ships anchor outside and tender to the quay in the middle of town. The anchorage is open, so swell can and does cancel calls.

Cash & Currency

The euro is the currency. Dollars are taken almost everywhere but at the shop's own rate; an ATM does better. Visa and Mastercard fine, Amex often not. No sales tax at all.

Getting Around

Taxi fares are set by decree, not metered — agree the fare first. There are only about fifty drivers island-wide and no buses or ride-hailing.

GOOD

Gustavia on Foot

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ The harbor, the boutiques and the yachts
- ✓ Fort Gustav's view, ten minutes uphill
- ✓ Shell Beach, a flat ten-minute walk

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

A Beach by Taxi

Best for: Couples, beach lovers, sun seekers

- ✓ St. Jean, with the airport at one end
- ✓ Gouverneur or Saline for quiet and space
- ✓ Ten to fifteen minutes from town

Arrange your return ride before you settle in.

BEST

The Island in an Afternoon

Best for: First timers, photographers, explorers

- ✓ The whole perimeter in about an hour
- ✓ Planes dropping over the Col de la Tourmente
- ✓ Villages, viewpoints and empty coves

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

Gustavia

A stroll of an hour or two: cut-stone Swedish buildings still carrying their original street names, the old belfry, boutiques you may only window-shop, and a harbor packed with yachts. Fort Gustav above it is free and has the best view on the island.

BETTER

The Beaches

St. Jean is the busy one, with beach clubs and the runway at the end of the sand. Gouverneur and Saline are the beautiful empty ones — and they have no facilities whatsoever: no bar, no loungers, no shade. Bring water and fix your pickup time.

BEST

The Island by Car

Under ten square miles, and you can drive the whole perimeter in an hour. A taxi tour takes in the villages, the viewpoints and Colombier — which has no road at all and is reached only on foot or by boat.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

Shell Beach

The only real beach you can walk to — ten minutes from the tender landing and flat the whole way. Coarse shell rather than powder, one beach restaurant, and lovely water.

The Airport Approach

Aircraft drop steeply over the hill at the Col de la Tourmente onto a strip that ends at the sand. People pull over on the hill road to watch. Free, genuinely thrilling, and it explains the whole island.



A Swedish-era cannon above the harbor at Fort Gustav



A cut-stone Swedish-era building in the heart of Gustavia

Key Considerations

Everything starts with the tender. There is no cruise pier here — ships anchor outside the harbor and run their own boats in, and an open anchorage means a heavy swell can cancel the call outright. Build the queue into your plan at both ends of the day, and treat the last tender, not all aboard, as your real deadline.

This is the most expensive island in the Caribbean, and it does not pretend otherwise. There is no sales tax, which makes perfume, spirits and watches genuinely competitive, but a casual lunch and a short taxi ride each cost roughly double what they would elsewhere in the region. Knowing that in advance turns a shock into a choice.

Two practical notes. Taxis are regulated by decree rather than metered, and with only about fifty drivers for the whole island and no buses or ride-hailing, you should agree the fare and fix your pickup before you set off. And unlike Martinique or Guadeloupe, St. Barts sits outside the EU customs area, so European phone plans do not roam here at home rates — keep data off and use the ship's wifi.



Superyachts stern-to on the Gustavia quay



Gustaf III airport, where the runway ends at the sand



Shell Beach, the one beach you can walk to

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Port Orientation

FROM THE TENDER DOCK (GUSTAVIA)

● Gustavia harbor & shops	At the landing
~ 10 min on foot	
● Shell Beach	Flat the whole way
● Fort Gustav & the lighthouse	Uphill; the best free view
~ 10–15 min by taxi	
● St. Jean & the airport	Beach clubs and plane spotting
● Anse du Gouverneur	Beautiful; no facilities at all
● Anse de Grande Saline	Dune walk in; no facilities
On foot or by boat only	
● Anse de Colombier	No road reaches it

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time — and the last tender back — before you leave the ship. Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

St. Barts is small, French, expensive and quietly spectacular — an island that never built a cruise pier because it never needed one.

Walk Gustavia, take a taxi to a beach, and watch a plane come over the hill. That is the day, and it is a very good one.

ETA will help you choose the right experience based on your travel style.

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Did You Know?

Sweden's Caribbean Colony. In 1784 France traded this island to Sweden in return for trading rights in Gothenburg, and the harbor town was renamed Gustavia for King Gustav III. Sweden held it for ninety-four years.

The 350-to-1 Vote. In 1877 the island's men were asked whether to return to France. Of 351 ballots cast, 350 said yes. The Swedish flag came down over Gustavia in March 1878.

Briefly a Swedish City. At the height of the Napoleonic Wars this was one of the busiest ports in the Swedish realm. The island's museum puts Gustavia near 5,000 people — sixth-largest town in Sweden — with 1,793 ships through the harbor in 1811 alone.

A Runway That Ends at the Beach. The airport has one of the shortest commercial runways in the world at 2,119 feet, pilots need a specific certification to fly in, and with no runway lights it closes about fifteen minutes after sunset.

A Free Port Since 1785. Gustavia was declared a free port by Swedish royal decree in 1785 and still charges no sales tax. The duty-free shopping is a 240-year-old piece of Swedish commercial policy that outlived the Swedes.