

Swim With Turtles, Go Glass-bottom Kayaking, and Enjoy Sunset Picnics at This Beachfront Hotel in St. Barts

The stunning Le Sereno hotel sits on a protected marine reserve perfect for water sports like snorkeling, kitesurfing, kayaking, and more.

BY ALISHA PRAKASH | MARCH 01, 2021



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I've been wading through the calm, cerulean waters of the Grand Cul de Sac — a coveted reef-protected reserve in [St. Barts](#) — for about 15 minutes when I look back at the palm-fringed shore hundreds, maybe thousands, of feet away and realize I'm still only waist deep. The shallow lagoon lends itself to taking in the surroundings — a kitesurfer skimming the crystalline surface to my left, a couple finding their balance on paddleboards to my right, and the susurrus of the sea all around. I attempt to snap a mental photograph, when my husband pops his head up, sputtering and pointing down: "Turtles!"

<http://bit.ly/30iwA61>

A rousing sensation briefly supplants the stillness I felt mere moments before. I dip my face underwater, and the gentle, graceful creatures glide into focus. It's just another day at [Le Sereno](#).



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This sighting wasn't a surprise per se — we had spotted another turtle outside our room, on our private terrace garden, just that morning — but it was no less thrilling each time. And as we would soon learn, this mood — oscillating between a state of delirious joy and trance-like level of relaxation — would color the rest of our stay, even in the [midst of a pandemic](#).

It all happens immediately upon arrival. Walk through the open-air lobby, and you'll promptly get a window into your vacation: an expansive oceanfront sun deck, a breezy restaurant, and arguably the crown jewel of the property, an impossibly photogenic freshwater infinity pool that seamlessly blends in with the sky and sea. This snapshot, enough to make even seasoned travelers giddy, is only briefly paused when a bartender walks over to offer you a welcome drink while your bags are whisked to your room — a sure signal that vacation has commenced.

For us, mornings always began with breakfast – an a la carte spread of eggs, pastries, croissants, Italian jams, yogurt, and fruit – followed by a stroll along the sand. The rest of the day saw some combination of kayaking or stand-up paddleboarding (both on offer for guests), sunbathing on the beach or by the sparkling pool, and eventually our bodies surrendering to the sun and falling asleep to the sound of waves. We'd awaken to cool off in the water, then do it all again.



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Unlike other properties around the island, the pool here is reserved for guests, so day-pass-toting crowds are uncommon – an added appeal, pandemic or not.

To lure you into an even deeper state of quiet tranquility, there's a spa, which houses the island's only beachfront treatment room and uses products from Swiss skincare brand Valmont. For something more action-packed, the concierge can arrange kitesurfing, jet-skiing, sailing, and other water activities, though you, like us, might be content simply ogling the gorgeous view.

And don't worry about missing the view when you head back to your room — practically all of the suites and villas look out onto the water. The accommodations' purposefully pared-down aesthetic, courtesy of French designer Christian Liagre, is meant to conjure the hotel's namesake: serenity. Walls are white and bare, floors are hardwood, the cloud-like beds come with gauzy canopies, and there are sliding screen doors to welcome in the outside — a constant reminder that you're in paradise.

Instead, the pristine views serve as the ultimate décor, whether taken in from a private garden in the Grand Suite Plage or from a [private pool](#) in one of the villas. In addition to a pool and panoramic views, the multi-bedroom villas come with other cossetting amenities like a kitchen and butler service. Villa or suite, all offer complimentary beach bags and customized Havaianas flip-flops.



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And while the design is undoubtedly French, the rest is Italian through and through. The on-site boutique is curated with items from the Milan-based menswear brand Larusmiani, hats from Cambiaghi (founded in Italy in 1880), and other duds and accessories. The property also recently partnered with Larusmiani for a sunset picnic experience, which is just as dreamy as it sounds, with a basket from the Italian fashion house brimming with Champagne, rosé, Mediterranean-inspired bites, and even porcelain dishes — all enjoyed on the beach.

Meanwhile, at Al Mare, chef Raffaele Lenzi (also behind the Michelin-starred eatery at Le Sereno's sister property, Il Sereno, in Lake Como) brings a taste of Italy to the Caribbean, with fresh fish, decadent pastas topped with lobster and mahi-mahi ceviche, and other to-die-for dishes. Al Mare is positioned to offer sea views from every angle, but if you prefer to dig your toes directly in the sand while dining, the Plage beach restaurant, outfitted in funky furniture, serves more casual fare, like burgers and salads. Both are outdoors, alleviating any concerns around indoor dining amid the pandemic, but room service is also available, should you prefer an added layer of caution.



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The staff, too, is from Italy, and each one fits the friendly cultural stereotype — an especially tough feat behind two layers of face masks. Their smiles may not be visible, but here, the waiters, bartenders, and front-desk employees all feel like old friends, who not only remember your name, but also take the time to get to know you and your preferences.

That's the thing about Le Sereno — the waterfront oasis has all the accoutrements typical of a five-star property, but without the overly formal, fussy atmosphere. It's an anomaly, really — a tranquil hideaway on an island that's often considered a magnet for those wanting to be noticed.

On our last afternoon at the hotel, our hurried conversation darted from packing lists and paperwork to get in order. But that didn't last long. Seconds later, a slender, white egret swooped down, drawing our gaze to the water and taking our everyday worries with it. Things slowed down again, as they inevitably do around here, and our shoulders dropped. We ordered one last [Aperol spritz](#).

After all, it was just another day at Le Sereno.

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