

MAXIM

WHY THE EXCLUSIVE CARIBBEAN ISLAND OF ST BARTHS IS A MUST-VISIT DESTINATION

BY JARED PAUL STERN | FEB 27, 2023



Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa.

“An approximation of Elysium, a place that is geographically paradisiacal, filled with stylish and rigorously exacting hotels and restaurants, but where an inclusive and renegade spirit suffuses every corner.” Those who frequent the world’s most luxurious tropical islands and beach enclaves won’t have trouble figuring out that socialite and journalist Vassi Chamberlain is talking about Saint Barthélemy, aka St Barths.

The words come from the introduction to her beautiful new book, *St Barths Freedom*, from top-drawer French luxury publisher Assouline. The latest title in its coveted Travel Series, the voluptuous volume is the next best thing to an actual visit to the idyll in the French West Indies, which lies about 20 miles south of the Caribbean island of St. Martin.

The billionaires who frequent the island might arrive on megayachts, but they usually drive around in Mini Coopers like everyone else. Chamberlain attributes this to the French—St Barths is an overseas territory of France—“who staunchly defend their principles at all costs. So while they happily cater to the whims of those who wish to be defined by their ability to purchase all the luxuries the

island offers, they refuse to be swayed by money, particularly if it doesn't accord with the values of the island."

All in all, "No matter how many superyachts line the harbor, how many new restaurants or beach clubs have popped up, or what parties are happening—none of that matters," she concludes. "What does, the one thing that eclipses everything, is the visceral gut-punch seductiveness of the island. Its hills and dips, its incandescent light and deserted beaches, its breathtaking views, abundant wildlife and charming architecture [are] what make it so special... Nothing trumps the grand and epic beauty" on display everywhere.

So how does this jibe with Chamberlain's declaration that the island's central Gustavia harbor is, "the world's greatest floating catwalk"? Again, it's about how everything is done with style and an emphasis on accomplishment over ostentation.