

# St Lucia at Leisure

## Pitons & Parrots

Wednesday 14 March – Thursday 22 March 2018

Leaders: Simon Boyes and local guides

2018 Cost **£4,399** single room supplement **£990**



**O**rntholidays has been visiting the Caribbean for over 35 years now and we have run a very successful suite of tours to Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Jamaica and Grand Cayman. This tour to the small island of St Lucia has a very relaxed feel to it, which will suit those people who want to birdwatch but also to relax – or else couples where one is a birder and the other just wants a warm, sunny, beachside break. Our holiday is based at the lovely hotel of Anse Chastanet, with easy access to the sea and shady places to spend the hot part of the day.

St Lucia is one of the Windward Islands in the eastern Caribbean. It is of volcanic origin and still has some areas that are active: the Pitons, the most notable landmark on the island, are two volcanic plugs. Some fine rainforest still exists on the mountain chain that runs from north to south and this is the home to much of the bird life. The island has a mixed history of settlement and conquerors. The Arawak Indians were overrun by the Caribs, who were later deposed by the British and then the French and then alternating rule by these European powers finally ended with the island's independence in 1979.

The island of St Lucia can boast an impressive list of birds, which includes six endemic species – these are the St Lucia Parrot, St Lucia Oriole, St Lucia Warbler, St Lucia Pewee, St Lucia House Wren and St Lucia Black Finch. It also has 14 Lesser Antillean endemics – so this is a tour that will complement the species lists of those clients who have already visited Trinidad and Tobago or Cuba.

The holiday will be run "At Leisure" with the birding taking place in the mornings, with lunches taken back at the hotel, and then the afternoons free to relax and swim. This holiday will also be an "all-inclusive" while at Anse Chastanet, so all drinks are included. Travel with Simon and see why St Lucia is a great addition to our set of Caribbean tours. It is possible to add on extra days to this holiday – please ask for details.

### ITINERARY

#### Day 1

We leave London in the morning on a direct flight to St Lucia, where we arrive in the late afternoon. We transfer to Anse Chastanet, where we spend the next seven nights. A rum based sundowner this evening will perhaps be the first of many!

#### Days 2 to 7

Each day is designed to be different during our stay with trips to various locations on the island. Our plan is to be active in the morning and return for lunch at the hotel and then relax. The grounds of the hotel itself will provide our first encounters with some of the Lesser Antillean endemic species – in fact at the breakfast table, where the Lesser Antillean Bullfinches and Bananaquits will probably be trying to steal the fruit juice! We can also hope to see Zenaida Dove, Carib Grackle, Grey Trembler, Bare-eyed Thrush, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Lesser Antillean Saltator and Tropical Mockingbird. A short walk on the first morning to the resort's other beach at Anse Mamim should provide views of our first endemic, the beautiful St Lucia Warbler. Along the track we may also find Black-faced Grassquit, Purple-throated Carib, Common Ground-dove, Little Blue Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. At the old sugar plantation, amongst the old ruined buildings, our second endemic, the St Lucia Pewee can also be found.

Close to the hotel there are still some good tracts of forest, and managed orchards, and we can search these, with our local guide Adams Toussaint, for all six endemic species. We shall look at the fruiting trees and hope to get a close view of the St Lucia Parrot (or Jacquot). This species declined severely in the last century due to persecution and the taking of birds to be caged, but due to a superb educational programme and by making it the national bird of St Lucia, the species has made a remarkable recovery (ask any child on the island the name of



St Lucia Parrot

Mangrove Cuckoo



the national bird and they will say “Jacquot” remarkably quickly!). We can hope to see St Lucia Oriole, St Lucia Black Finch, St Lucia Warbler, St Lucia Pewee, St Lucia House Wren, Lesser Antillean Swift, Broad-winged Hawk, Black-whiskered Vireo, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Pearly-eyed and Scaly-breasted Thrashers and Green-throated Carib. Without a doubt St Lucia is one of the best places to see a species that can be elusive elsewhere – the Mangrove Cuckoo, and we would hope to have a few sightings on the trails.

On another day we can make a visit to Anse Chastenet’s organic farm at the Emerald Estates. Here they grow the vegetables used at the hotel and the grounds are home to Grey Kingbird, St Lucia Pewee, Black-faced Grassquit, Grey Trembler and Common Ground-doves. We can also visit the Sulphur Springs while we are in this area – this is an active geothermal area, with gaseous vents and sulphur pools, and we will take a guided tour to learn more about the caldera and when and how it was formed. Later, we visit the Botanical Gardens, which will have many flowering plants, and we can take the short walk to a lovely waterfall and hope to have some good close views of Purple-throated Carib, Caribbean Elaenia, Grey Trembler and St Lucia Warbler.

The eastern side of the island is much drier than the western shore and here we shall look for one of the island’s declining breeding species, the White-breasted Thrasher. Threatened with housing developments and perhaps competition from other species, the numbers have fallen dramatically over the last few decades. We may also find Eared Dove, Caribbean Elaenia, Grey Kingbird, Common Ground-dove, Black-faced Grassquit and American Kestrel. Later, we can visit a tract of rainforest at the Quillesse Forest Reserve where we can walk amongst some fine stands of primary forest. Here we may find Antillean Euphonia, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Pearly-eyed Thrasher and Ruddy Quail-Dove.

At the southern tip of the island, around Vieux Fort, there are some areas of standing fresh water and we may visit one or two that hold Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue, Green and Great Blue Herons, Common Gallinule and perhaps Blue-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Belted Kingfisher and Osprey. On a marshy edge we can look for Wilson’s Snipe and Grassland Yellow-Finches. We drive to a look-out that gives panoramic views over the island, where we can find Red-billed Tropicbirds prospecting their nesting sites and Caribbean Martins hunting for insects. The scrub on the hillside holds both Yellow Warbler and Black-whiskered Vireos.

On one morning our privately chartered boat will pick us up from the hotel’s beach and take us for a two and a half hour cetacean watching trip. At this time of year we have a good chance of encountering a pod of dolphins (either Spinner or Pantropical Spotted) and a much smaller chance of finding Short-finned Pilot Whales, or even Sperm or Humpback Whales. Birds could include Royal and Cabot’s Terns, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Brown and Masked Boobies, as well as many flying fish. The cruise will also give us great seaward views of the Pitons.

We shall make sure we enjoy the beach-side resort where we are staying as there is safe snorkelling, with some nearby small reefs, shady relaxing spots and some good local walks. The beach bar is friendly and serves fine cocktails. One of the highlights for many of our last group was the afternoon snorkelling sessions. The hotel boasts one of the finest small reefs on the island and you literally walk off the sandy beach and swim a mere 20 feet and you are seeing fish. It is likely there are almost 100 species of reef fish in this small area, as well as sea urchins, octopus and reef squid, plus some fine examples of brain, finger and elkhorn corals, yellow tube sponges and lovely sea fans.

**Days 8 & 9**

After some final local birding, or a last swim, we transfer to the airport where we catch the evening flight to London, arriving the next morning.

St Lucia Warbler



**Outline Itinerary**

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly to St Lucia
<b>Days 2-7</b>	St Lucia
<b>Day 8</b>	Depart St Lucia
<b>Day 9</b>	Arrive London

**Party Size**

Maximum of 12 clients.

**Accommodation**

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities.

**Transport**

By minibuses.

**Includes**

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

**Gradings**

-  Good
-  60
-  Warm to Hot
-  Low
-  Special
-  Easy
-  Good
-  Easy
-  Scheduled

Grey Trembler

