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And for UK visitors, there are a number of appealing reasons to make such a trip. Though Guadeloupe sits below Antigua and above Dominica and Martinique, it is part of the EU, and a borderless walk right from the plane to the baggage hall, a pocketful of euros and a phone alert letting me know EU roaming applied all confirmed it. Another plus is that mass tourism and skyscraper hotels are rare here and the trend now is towards eco-tourism and boutique properties. Sure, there are some large resorts, but they're far from ubiquitous. They include Club Med La Caravelle in Sainte-Anne, which has been here for years but is about to start a revamp to include 400 five-star guestrooms.

Finally, with car hire cheap, roads simple and

safety and security not a concern, once you're here the varied islands are yours to explore.

Changing channel

Separated by a narrow channel but joined by a road bridge, the main land mass consists of two quite contrasting islands. There's the incredibly mountainous Basse-Terre island, immortalised as the filming location for BBC drama series *Death In Paradise*. Then there's Grande-Terre, with its long sandy beaches and palm tree-fringed sugar cane fields. It's also home to Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe's largest city, a throbbing port-side hub of colonial architecture, street markets and Creole food.

Des Hotels et Des Iles has properties across

both islands, varying in style from the hillside cabins and historic plantation house of Le Jardin Malanga Ecolodge to the recently refurbished 211-room resort of La Creole Beach Hotel & Spa.

Both are four star. But it is with La Toubana Hotel & Spa that it hopes to attract luxury clientele. Perched on a clifftop in Sainte-Anne, the property is currently a four-star. But with extensive renovations of its pool area, restaurant, 33 bungalows, 12 suites and three villas complete, it hopes to achieve a five-star rating at its next assessment, which would make it Guadeloupe's first. It is also hoped the upgrade will bring in the growing international crowd, including Brits. Service standards are certainly impeccable.

I took my time lounging by the infinity pool after devouring the first two courses of my fresh fish lunch, and as I sipped the last of my chilled chardonnay and polished off a chunk of chocolate and charcoal cake (delicious, trust me), I decided on one sure thing: just like Guadeloupe itself, La Toubana is currently vastly underrated. ■

For more information on the islands, lesilesdeguadeloupe.com, deshotelsetdesiles.com

Pictured

1. Carnival parade, Guadeloupe
2. Plage de Saint-Louis on Marie-Galante
3. La Grande Soufriere
4. La Toubana Hotel & Spa



Philippe Girard

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