Headline: Sun shines bright on Saint Lucia

Deckhead: Isle steals show among the Winward Islands

Saint Lucia is a crowning jewel – a gem that shines brightly, rising out of the Caribbean Sea. It’s wedged between Martinique and St. Vincent and is dominated by twin volcano peaks of the Pitons.

Saint Lucia is a star among the Winward Islands. Beauty and nature know no boundaries. Guests are drawn by lush mountain highlands, banana plantations and white- and black-sand beaches.

Horseback riding, mountain biking or hiking the island’s rugged terrain ranks high among its list of adventures. Cruise ships dock at Place Carenage or Porte Seraphine – both are within walking distance to capital city Castries. Visitors have gathered more than a century at the Castries Market and adjacent Craft Market. They come for the fresh fruits, spices and local crafts.

Saint Lucia’s Marigot Bay is stunning. Author James Michener once described it as “the most beautiful bay in the Caribbean.” It’s a star – even on the big screen, serving as a setting for Sea-Star Island in the 1967 version of “Dr. Dolittle”.

Discovered by Columbus in 1499, the island quickly became a precious charm for England and France, changing hands 14 times between the countries before the French ceded it to Great Britain in 1814.

Soufrière served as capital during the French colonial era. Shaded under the long shadow of Petit Piton, it’s best known as the birthplace of Napoleon’s Empress, Josephine.

Diamond Falls is less than a mile east of Soufrière and is considered one of Saint Lucia’s finest natural wonders. Its brilliant palette of colors – a rare mixture of minerals in the water – vibrantly paints the rock face. Guests spend the day walking the lush botanical garden or relaxing in the mineral baths and spa.

Learn about processing coconuts, cocoa and coffee at Morne Coubaril, a working plantation. See an authentic mule-powered, sugar-cane mill. The gardens are comprised of a peaceful oasis of flowers and greenery. Legend has it that visitors grow taller in the rich volcanic soil. The estate’s Hotwire Zipline flies over a canopy of banyan, coconut, and mango trees and across a bamboo-shadowed gorge.

Soufrière is French for sulfur and Saint Lucia is home to the Caribbean’s only “drive-through volcano” at Sulphur Springs. A road leads up to the now dormant caldera, which still bubbles with steam, sulfur, mud and boiling water. Travelers “take the cure” in one of the more than 20 sulfur and mineral baths.

The black-sand beach of Anse Chastanet is north of Soufrière. It rests under the shadow of the Pitons and is one of the island’s premier diving sites. The reef is nearby the beach and shelters an astonishing variety of coral and marine life.

A natural bay connects with an 80-acre, manmade lagoon at Rodney Bay on Saint Lucia’s west coast. Many of the island’s best resorts call it home. Spend the afternoon surfing or relaxing at Reduit Beach – a stunning stretch of white sand that faces the Caribbean.

Saint Lucia glistens from all directions and never loses its luster.

Cutline: WATER COLORS – Diamond Falls sparkles among a lush forest in Saint Lucia. Image: Elena Skalovskaia. Adobe Stock.