

ONE WOMAN HEADS TO ST LUCIA IN SEARCH OF CLARITY—AFTER SAYING GOODBYE TO NEW YORK FOR GOOD

The second installment of writer and stylist Natalie Decleve's adventures across three countries to find her new hometown.



Natalie Decleve



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*As the saying goes, "if you can make it in New York City, you can make it anywhere." But what happens when you're bored of the city that has it all? After a decade in the Big Apple, **personal stylist** and **journalist**, Natalie Decleve, knew it was time to move on—the question was, to where...?*

Embarking on a soul search to find her next home, Decleve set out on a cross country road trip that forced her to compare her own hectic life with a much simpler one. Here, she traversed the Caribbean for lush pastures before giving the coast of Italy a go. Finally, she'll get a taste of life in California with a tour along the west coast. Check back here each week to follow her journey across three countries in search of her new home.

After a month of living out of a car on a **crosscountry roadtrip**, I was ready to continue my summer of soul searching on a beach—cocktail in hand. Who says you've got to camp in a jungle and spend hours doing yoga and silent meditation to reconnect with the "true-you"? Besides, I already tried that in January and here I was, months later, still seeking peace and clarity. So, days after returning from the road, I paid a quick visit to Manhattan Mini Storage to exchange my vintage Levis and hiking boots for a handful of bikinis, and was off again.



When I relinquished my Manhattan apartment **earlier in the summer**, I promised myself I'd be open to all kinds of potential futures, even the seemingly unlikely ones. While I wasn't going to Saint Lucia to enroll in scuba school and decamp to the island full time, the trip *was* a part of a conscious shift I was making to hit the reset button on my life in New York by exploring the unknown. I'd already spent at least three out of seven months traveling through Costa Rica, India, and Mexico with several frequent trips up and down the West Coast. Hesitant to recommit to another decade or even year in New York City, I let my lease expire, placed all of my belongings in storage and became increasingly comfortable being on the road. Somehow I managed to find ways to create work just about anywhere and Saint Lucia became one of several trips in my increasingly nomadic lifestyle—another excuse to avoid settling back down. I had always identified as an insatiable wanderluster, but as the year continued and my passport filled with stamps, I started to wonder if this jet set life was sustainable. However, these ever-changing environments and experiences had kept me excited and inspired for months; so perhaps a home address was overrated.

St Lucia began with decadence as my friend Angela and I settled down to a welcome Chocolatini at our first hotel, Boucan by **Hotel Chocolat**. The hotel itself is housed on a working cocoa plantation, so pretty much everything you taste is infused with raw, heaven-sent cacao. As the server handed us our drinks, he explained as much, then raising both eyebrows to add that one of cacao's most notorious qualities is...arousal. "It's going to be a long week," Angela and I giggled as we took our first sips. I looked around at the other tables and noticed that at every one sat a couple. Mostly young newlyweds who gazed starry-eyed at each other, hardly noticing the spectacular Piton mountains jutting out from the horizon. It's been awhile since I looked at anyone that way, I thought, and wondered irritatedly where the waiter was with that snack I'd asked for. Angela's voice interrupted my thoughts, suggesting that we pop down for a swim. A quick change of clothes and off we wandered down to rinse off our jetlag in a saltwater pool, which like the rest of the resort, was fed by warm rainwater. I swam a few laps before sprawling out on the deck. As I lay still, I felt appreciative of my current circumstances, yet slightly discontented. Was I becoming spoiled? Or were lingering questions from back home following me to this far flung island? The sun sank slowly toward the horizon and soon it was golden hour, or the awkward hour between daytime and dinnertime when lovers typically "take a nap" and get ready for the evening. Tipsy from our Chocolatini and exhausted from the early flight, Angela and I zigzagged past our canoodling neighbors towards our cabanas. I curled up for an actual nap, while Angela called her boyfriend back home to gush about our first day in paradise.





In the morning, we awoke to the sound of tropical birds, which might seem idyllic until you realize what a parrot actually sounds like. Wiping the sleep out of my eyes, I glanced in the mirror and noticed that the humidity had curled my hair up around my cheekbones in that "tousled but styled" way you can never recreate yourself. My already browning skin glowed despite my jet lag. Fresh-faced and ready to see the island, I joined Angela for our plantation tour and chocolate-making lesson. We met a fast-talking St Lucian, who was quick to tease us about our failures as students. Eager to please this quick-witted broad, I ground my cacao beans with enthusiasm and studiously answered her pop quizzes—glowing with pride when I got one right. Nevermind that nobody was competing for the role of best tourist-chocolatier on the island, but I was pretty sure I was winning.



Angela and I both identify as, what we once heard called, "maximizers": those who like to "maximize" their time by juicing the most out of every opportunity, uncompromising until we've done it all. Traveling together, we excel at sleuthing out "the best" in an effort to avoid wasting a meal on mediocrity or risk missing out on something monumental. For the maximizer, FOMO is as real as cellulite. So when we heard about the Diamond Waterfalls, Sulphur Springs, Tet Paul Hike and mud baths, we planned to do them all—in one day. And we did. The lush landscape reminded me of Hawaii, and trekking through the jungle brought back memories of childhood vacations out west when exotic island sensations were all so new: the humidity of Molokai, intoxicating fragrance of plumeria, home-cooked local meals full of bright, new flavors, and a huge sky full of stars you could actually see. Now, on an island off the opposite coast, I was planning a day of leisure at Sugar Beach, a **Viceroy hotel**, where A-listers like Matt Damon hosted elaborate vow

renewals. Local home cooking was a distant memory, replaced by delicate yellowfin tuna tartare, octopus ceviche and ice cold Perrier while Angela and I lounged under an umbrella, our toes in the white sand. How much things have changed since those Molokai days, I thought as I watched Angela pacing the beach, FaceTiming her boyfriend in New York. What would I say to someone back home if I currently had a someone...or a home? How did I land on one of the most romantic islands in the world without any romance of my own? As I pondered my equal parts bliss and loneliness, a saxophone across the bay began to wail the tune to Etta James' "At Last". From afar I watched a bride float barefoot towards her husband-to-be. Angela was still on the phone, and with nobody to share the moment with, I posted a video to Instagram. #happiness.

The next day, we moved to one of the most jaw dropping hotels I have ever experienced. At **Jade Mountain**, the entire hotel is linked by open, crisscrossing walkways seemingly suspended in space. Upon arrival, a man named Antoine explained that he would be my personal butler, on call to attend to my every need or desire. He escorted me to my Galaxy Suite, **once voted the best hotel room in the world**, and as he swung open the oversized wood door, it was evident that this was no hyperbole. I imagined this was the sort of place a wolf of Wall Street may take his bride after their celebrity-studded nuptials were featured in *Page Six*. The suite has only three walls, leaving the room completely open to the pointed Piton Mountains and endless ocean views. The balmy air flows freely through the space, and each suite is outfitted with its own infinity pool. Not just a three-foot plunge pool mind you, but an infinity pool where I actually swam laps every morning. Swimming nude round and round, I felt like a goldfish, whirling in circles while ogling the wonders of the world just outside my (five-star) bowl. The monotony of the laps in this calm sanctuary gave me plenty of time to contemplate the decisions that lay behind and before me. Where to live? Who to love? What does my vision of the future look like, and how do I get there? Before I could dive too deep, my thoughts were interrupted by a call

from Antoine, reminding me that Angela would be arriving soon followed by a lavish meal, to be delivered en suite as requested. After meticulously fashioning swans out of towels for a centerpiece he asked, *"Is there anything else I can do for you Miss Declève?"* I briefly



The next two days passed with similar pampering. We had the anticipated couple's massage, where the masseuses were surprised to find out that we actually preferred separate rooms. "Lover's quarrel?" one asked with a smile. There was an afternoon of sailing and snorkeling where I discovered the simple pleasure of treading water while eating a coconut out of its shell. On our last night, we dined at **Anse Chastenot**, Jade's adjacent resort, the waves lapping up inches from our feet as the sun set behind the horizon. Drunk with the magic of it all (and maybe a few glasses of Sancerre) Angela and I followed the sound of music up rocky, winding steps and into the hillside, where we found a glowing tiki bar, sandwiched between the two resorts. In the center of the room, a trio of musicians wailed a mix of Bob Marley crowd pleasers with Saint Lucian folk songs about monkeys, jealous husbands and murder, all underscored by a steel-drum beat. Umbrella-topped, blended drinks floated around the room ordered by several shy, sunburnt couples all smiling and clapping self-consciously toward the empty dance floor. Setting my own rum punch down, I kicked off my shoes and jumped up. Channeling Brigitte Bardot in "And God Created Woman", I let the drums dictate my steps as I sashayed around the dance floor in pure, uninhibited joy.

"Who says a honeymoon requires a honey?"

Moments later, Angela joined in and the two of us cackled and twirled in a blur of long, loose hair and brightly-colored silk caftans. The band sang louder, played harder and the rose-cheeked crowd continued to clap politely until the songs finally ended. Back in my suite, I dropped my silks and continued with a dance party-for-one, the warm night air enveloping my bare skin as I blasted Florence and the Machine from my iPhone. Rosey and winded, I eventually collapsed onto a chaise lounge facing the night sky, and noticed how the nearly full moon illuminated my knees and the tips of my toes stretched out before me. *Who says a honeymoon requires a honey?* While I may still have been clueless about love or the future, I decided that my present situation was *lovely*, just the way it was.

<http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/travel-dining/news/a19955/things-to-do-in-st-lucia/>