

# The Good Life

*Romance and Wellness on St. Maarten*

By Lisa Codianne Fowler

Sometimes, less is less. And I wanted more. Romance, fine dining, nightlife, shopping, a change of pace and culture. My husband, not so much. He craved quiet time, a sunny beach... and a really great massage, but then, so did I. We both needed to at once rejuvenate and relax. Not that our hometown of Sarasota isn't one of our favorite spots on the planet, but we live here, we work here, and we hadn't been allocating enough time for play. It was just time to get away.



Location, location, location. The Sonesta Maho Beach Resort and Casino on St. Maarten certainly had it. Perched on the sparkling shores of Maho Beach and conveniently located in lively Maho Village on the Dutch (versus the French) side of the island, it afforded plenty of daytime and nighttime activities on-property and off, the latter, literally steps away. Of course, lazily lounging at the beach and sipping fruit-embellished tropical elixirs at the swim-up pool bar also held great appeal. So did gazing at the enormous waterfall cascading into the lushly landscaped pool. But the *coups de gras* was the award-winning spa; another key reason we chose this particular paradise.

Aptly named The Good Life, it has for years been voted the best spa on the island, and named among the top three in the Caribbean. An extensive menu of sybaritic treatments includes body scrubs; wraps; masks; facials; waxing, manicures and pedicures, and an array of massages; ours of choice, the couple's massage. We were fortunate to have as our therapists, Spa Director Gabriella, and massage therapist, Gabrielle.



Gabriella melted away my husband's aches and pains as Gabrielle provided me with my own little slice of heaven. We shared our luxurious treatments in the Couples Massage Room, a rose-laden hideaway with lilting music that lulled us into nirvana. We scheduled our massages to occur one hour after our arrival at the resort, facilitating our transition to island time.

We were primed for dinner, glowing, relaxed and hungry. Serendipity came in the form of an exceptional oceanfront dinner venue, The Point. We are foodies... and the meal (fresh lobster, filet mignon and roasted scallops) was not only beautifully presented, but also exquisite in quality. There are more casual dining options, the generous breakfast buffet at the Oceanside Terrace, and lunch or dinner at The Palms Grille, a breezy, beachfront eatery. We savored them all.



We also explored Maho Village, an adjacent esplanade of 40 shops and cafés, as well as the resort's sprawling Casino Royale, just across the street. Cheri's Café, next

door, offers casual, open-air eats, but what drew us in was the entertainment. Beginning at 9 p.m., local entertainers strut their stuff for kids of all ages. If you've never experienced multiple generations bopping to a Caribbean beat, it is heartwarming. From tiny tots to grand- and probably great-grandparents, everyone dances. The crowds converge from everywhere, from the Midwestern United States, to the Northeast, to Western and Eastern Europe and Latin America, with one common language... laughter.

Maho Village boasts restaurants of many ethnic persuasions. We had it on good authority to try Le Moulin Fou, a French restaurant in the heart of the village. Another dreamlike meal, and a wonderful opportunity to dust the cobwebs off my once-fluent French. The food is authentic, and much of it, flown in from France. Next stop, the Casino show... an exhilarating display of glamorous costumes and nubile bodies with limitless energy – an eclectic blend of acrobatics and salsa to heart pounding music. I unsuccessfully tried to convince my husband that we should learn to dance like these performers... for fitness and fun. Oh well, just watching this spectacle had to enhance our cardio health.



While we were content to remain in our self-contained surroundings, we felt we should experience historic Philipsburg, the capitol of Sint Maarten (ranked TripAdvisor.com 's 2008 #1 Caribbean/Latin America and #3 Worldwide Destination.) We took the 30-minute cab ride to the quaint city, replete with markets, boutiques and cafes lining the European-like streets. A shopping diva would find ecstasy in this designer mecca, with everything from Tiffany to Tommy.

Call us homebodies, but we were anxious to return to our resort in the village. It held for us everything we wanted and more. The staff sings with abandon as they go about their chores and everyone here seems genuinely happy. The resort is affordable, comfortable and pretty, with an unpretentious ambiance. And located just a five-minute drive from Princess

Julianna International Airport, it includes, free of charge, the intoxicating rush of giant jets whooshing over the beach. Ever seen the belly of a plane? It's yet another reason visitors flock to these shores.

Among the resort's ongoing efforts to be socially as well as environmentally responsible, it participates in the Make-A-Wish Foundation. A favorite destination of an international group known as "plane spotters," this was the locale of choice for a child with terminal cancer. The staff set up his bed outside under the stars, so that he could lie beneath the swooping planes and make his greatest wish come true.



Sonesta Maho Beach Resort certainly granted ours. Yet, truth be told, of all the things we discovered there, the very best was... us.

*For more information about Sonesta Maho Beach Resort and Casino, visit [www.mahobeach.com](http://www.mahobeach.com).*