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Barbados Quest

For this writer, a search for sand and sun leads from a New York City snowstorm to island bliss **BY SLOANE CROSLY**

DURING A BLIZZARD LAST WINTER, MY FRIEND Jesse asked me if I wanted to come to Barbados with her for the weekend. While I had been riding out the storm watching CNN and panic-eating s'mores, she had been spending it in a more diet-friendly fashion: Googling islands. I looked down at my pale arms and instantly agreed. I hadn't taken an actual vacation in more than a year. I wanted to relax, to stand somewhere remote and gaze out into turquoise folds of water, ruminating on everything that's ever happened ever. I told Jesse I knew but three things about Barbados: 1) It stuck farther out into the Atlantic than most people gave it credit for, 2) I happened to have enough frequent-flyer miles to get there, and 3) Rihanna is from Barbados.

"Think we can track down Rihanna's mom, break coconut water together, maybe ask her what happened there?"

"I don't care," Jesse said, as the sleet pelted our respective Manhattan windows, "so long as she lives by the water."

As it turns out, Rihanna's mom does live by the water. Because the island is 14 miles wide, everyone lives by the water in Barbados. But according to our cab driver, Rihanna's mom lives on the west side of the country, along with the five-star version of everything. Jesse and I would be staying on the east side, at a moderately priced hotel that bragged of immediate ocean access on its Web site.

"Beach is beach," she had reasoned back in New York, land of the hissing radiator pipes.

While the Web site didn't outright lie, the "beach access" it promised turned out to be limited to about 20 feet of sandy front yard. We surveyed what little land we could. Then I asked, as almost no one has asked before me: "What would Rihanna's mom do?"

I should note that I didn't actually want to spend my Caribbean vacation searching for the mother of a pop star. I wanted to spend it lying on hot sand. But the joke had set, and it's not as though we had anything—a list of sights, say—to unseat it.

We hopped in a rental car and decided our best plan was to drive until we hit real sand. Unfortunately, thanks to the island's netting of winding roads that stretches from shore to shore, it's easy to get lost on Barbados without a GPS. We found ourselves in the middle of a sugarcane field, in the midst of turning our map right side up, when a tractor cut through the grass, blowing dirt behind it. Its giant wheels came to a halt, and the dust cleared to reveal a smiling, toothless gentleman wearing a trucker hat. We explained our situation, and he revealed an even wider swath of gums. The answer, he said, was obvious: We needed to go to Bathsheba.

Bathsheba is a stunning trail of pristine beach with prehistoric-looking rocks jutting out of the water. They are mammoth and gravity-defying, as if they have been dropped from the sky and landed on their narrow points. As far as we could see, with the exception of the occasional squid fisherman, it was abandoned.

As Jesse and I walked beneath the shadow of the rocks, we came upon one with a set of stone steps carved into it, like a surrealist painting, a staircase leading to nowhere. We took turns climbing up and taking in the view. Afterward, we lay side by side on the beach, lost in thought and listening to the waves. By the time the sun began to set, spackling the landscape with an orange glow, I'd forgotten all about my faux hunt for Rihanna's mom. Now this—this is why we left New York.

Sloane Crosley is the author of I Was Told There'd Be Cake and How Did You Get This Number. She lives in Manhattan.