

# Bowled over by the choice of contests

Whether you're watching or taking part, Barbados is ahead on points for sports fans, says **John Wilmott**

The crack that echoes around the magnificent Kensington Oval as a Windies batsman hits a smart ball to the boundary. The snap of a yacht's vast sail filling with a gust. The excited roar as a veteran footballer scores with a free kick. And the breath-held silence as a putted golf ball rolls across a clipped green.

Barbados loves its sport. Cricket, of course – signified by the Caribbean's finest cricket ground in Bridgetown – but there's far more to it than bat and ball. Horse-racing, fishing, rallying, surfing, polo and running all attract international competitors.

First, though, we must deal with the gentleman's sport. This year, Barbados will host several West Indies matches, including two one-day internationals against Pakistan in April and May and a Test against India at the end of June.

There's also the exciting CLOBI Cup featuring household names of cricket – see overleaf for full details.

The cricket legend Sir Garry Sobers is the island's hero and now an ambassador for tourism, yet he still gives a great deal back to sport, hosting and promoting both a schools cricket competition and a golf tournament.

The International Schools Cricket Tournament will celebrate its 25th anniversary in July. It promotes good relations between young cricketers from around the globe, including the UK, with the final taking place at the Kensington Oval providing a real treat for sporting schoolchildren.

The Sir Garfield Sobers Festival of Golf in April is an amateur tournament for teams – including ladies – played across three courses in April, attracting players from around the world.

Business may be interested in the Royal Westmoreland Corporate Cup in March. It's a team golf event aimed at fostering international trade; one of the teams consists of sporting legends. The Barbados Open is held in the autumn on one of the island's beautiful courses.

A key event in the calendar is the Sandy Lane Gold Cup, the Caribbean's most prestigious horse race, attracting top horses from overseas and sponsored by Barbados' leading hotel. It takes place at the historic Garrison Savannah course close to Bridgetown, which has been hosting racing for more than 160 years, back to the days when officers of the British Regiment raced their horses on what was the parade ground. They were soon joined by plantation owners and merchants.

The premier race has now been running for well over 20 years, yet it's far from the only race meeting; regular events are held through the year.

Visitors can watch from the grandstand or from the shady lawns with a picnic.

Polo has an equally venerable history on the island. It was first played here by British cavalry officers in the 19th century and the Barbados Polo Club was established in 1884.

The well-supported Barbados Polo Open in March is the prime fixture and a see-and-be-seen special occasion, but look out for local and international games at other times at one of the four beautifully-situated fields. Teams from the UK, the USA and Canada are all regular visitors and even if you've never before considered going to a match, it makes a special day out on the island.

Football may not spring to mind as a top Caribbean sport, yet the Barbados International Masters Football Festival continues to grow – more on that over the page.

Even if you don't take part, it's worth going down to the quay at Bridgetown when the boats return from the Barbados Game Fishing Association International Tournament. In March, international teams compete to see who can land

the biggest marlin (the blue variety can grow up to 500lb), wahoo, tuna and other species from the island's rich waters. This fixture draws anglers from Europe and the Americas as well as the Caribbean.

If you're in Barbados next week (January 21), wherever you are on the coast you may see a succession of yachts passing by offshore at speed. They will be taking part in the Mount Gay Rum Round Barbados Race, which started in 1936 (this year is the 75th anniversary). Now, as then, a full-rigged schooner – Elena, built in 1911 – will be competing. The record for a course that's about 70 miles long is just over four hours 40 minutes, claimed by a 30ft catamaran.

The other big sailing event is the Mount Gay Regatta (the rum maker has a long association with sailing). It's held in May for various classes of racing yacht and the starts and finishes especially are quite a sight if you get yourself down to Carlisle Bay; even better if you can grab a seat on a spectator boat.

Still on the water, the Soup Bowl at Bathsheba on the island's unspoilt east coast is regarded as one of the planet's top surfing spots. A three-day contest, usually held in November, attracts talent from many countries who love the reliable surf. Spectators will be impressed not only by the action on the sea but by the giant boulders and wild palms strewn along this rugged coast.

A fun windsurfing and kitesurfing contest is usually held in February at Silver Rock in the island's south-east.

Tennis fans should keep their eye out



## Rallying round the island

Barbados' hilly, rural landscape has proved itself to be ideal for another sport that would not normally be associated with a Caribbean island – rallying.

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the Sol Rally Barbados, a meeting that attracts about 90 cars and is now the Caribbean's biggest motorsport event.

This year it takes place in early June and should see English driver Rob Swann and Welsh co-driver Darren Garrod return to defend their class win in 2010, along with other pairings from the UK and

other countries. Ten-times winner Roger Skeete will still be the man to beat in his Subaru. There's also a King of the Hill warm-up the weekend before the main event.

For serious petrolheads, there is the option of a hospitality package that allows privileged access, but for casual spectators there are plenty of great viewpoints from which to watch the action safely. Join the locals and take a cool box for the bottles of Banks beer.

www.rallybarbados.bb



**Certain winners: from cricket at the Kensington Oval to golf, rallying and international polo, Barbados offers a thrill a minute for sports enthusiasts**

for invitational events that are held each year, either in Bridgetown or at the Sugar Hill resort further north. Expect to find world-ranked players competing – Serena Williams and Caroline Wozniacki are two of the stars who have appeared in the past.

In fact there can be few sports that do not feature at some point during the Barbados year. The Banks International Hockey Festival in August draws teams from across the globe, with trophies for men, women and veterans, while the Sizzlin' Sand beach volleyball contest in November is great fun to watch.

Finally, you would not expect the tropical warmth of Barbados to be suitable for a marathon, but Run Barbados has become a hugely successful annual event in December.

Various lengths of race take place over three days, including a Midnight Mile in which anyone is encouraged to participate, through children's events to the full marathon on a Sunday. If you're just a watcher, you'll never be far from a stall serving rum and snacks – but then, that applies to just about any sporting event in Barbados!

### Sports websites

- Cricket:** [www.windiescricket.com](http://www.windiescricket.com)
- Horse racing:** [www.barbadosurfclub.org](http://www.barbadosurfclub.org)
- Fishing:** [barbadosgamefishing.com](http://barbadosgamefishing.com)
- Sailing:** [www.sailbarbados.com](http://www.sailbarbados.com)

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