

Gastronomic St Lucia

JUDITH BAKER

Great food and fine dining prove there is more to the Caribbean island of St Lucia than beaches and rum.

There are more than 90 types of mango and 30 types of plantain on St Lucia, I am told on my first visit. In the capital Castries, as Welsh chef Craig Jones from Cap Maison hotel takes me on a tour of what National Geographic describes as one of the world's top three markets, it seems I am seeing every single one of these colourful fruits and vegetables displayed on market stalls.

There are trinkets and clothes for sale too, but it is the food that takes one's breath away – not just the mangoes, the plantains, the passion fruit, the yams, and the soursops, but also the lethal-looking bottles of herbs and spices. Tiny booths serve St Lucian breakfasts of black pudding and salt fish bake to early morning shoppers.

St Lucia's fertile landscape means an abundance of fresh produce, and visitors flock here as much for the gastronomic experience as they do for the sand, the sparkling sea, and the sunshine. The market is one of the tours

Craig arranges for guests, who also get the opportunity to visit the organic farms that supply the hotel, and partake in cookery lessons as part of a holiday that brings to life the whole Caribbean "farm to fork" experience.

Back at the hotel, Craig transforms the often odd-looking vegetables into gourmet dishes, which have made his restaurant Cliff at the Cap one of the most talked about on the island.

Food plays a big part in St Lucian culture. The island changed hands between the French and the British 14 times – a tug of war that led one British historian to call it the Helen of the West Indies, after Helen of Troy.

This history means St Lucia has its own distinctive personality. English is the official language but Creole is widely spoken, and the Creole influence is evident in the food, music, architecture, and even mannerisms. There is a lively atmosphere and a friendly welcome found in fish fries in local villages, carnival, Kweyol (Creole) Week, and the Friday night party at nearby Gros Islet.

North-South divide

St Lucia is really two islands in one. The area in the north offers the

comfort of lovely hotels such as Cap Maison amid beautiful bays. In the south, Soufrière is at the heart of old plantations, with hidden beaches and the photogenic Piton Mountains.

From Cap Maison, I walk with the hotel's trainer Julian, who marches me round the island's eastern point at 7:30 a.m. We start at Cas en Bas (meaning house down below) and pass a tiny beach and shack where troubled singer Amy Winehouse spent time towards the end of her life. With nothing but crashing waves, fresh food, and birdsong, it is easy to see why she found it so peaceful. The only other early risers here are minuscule lizards and hermit crabs.

Back at Cap Maison later it is time to sample another famous St Lucian flavour – rum. Sommelier Robbie – who also calls himself a "Rummelier" – is holding a wine and rum tasting evening paired with deli-style dishes in the Cellar at Cap Maison.

Down on the beach is the Naked Fisherman Beach Bar & Grill, named after the minimally attired fishermen who used to find their catches in these waters. Nearby, romantic couples enjoy Rock Maison, a secluded wooden deck built on a rocky outcrop with a zip-wire that delivers champagne – and sometimes engagement rings – straight to the deck!

Pigeon Island

A few minutes from The Cap is the national landmark Pigeon Island, a 40-acre site encompassing hundreds of years of St Lucian history. Admiral Rodney, who used the island as his naval headquarters during the "Battle of the Saints" in 1782, occupied the island in the 18th century, when Britain took the island from the French.

As well as remains of military buildings, the island offers opportunities for hiking and swimming and is the picturesque setting for the famous St Lucia Jazz Festival.

Castries

The buzzing capital of Castries is a hub of island commerce and culture. Being an active cruise-ship port, there are duty-free shopping pavilions along the waterfront and several galleries.

I stopped at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on the main square, which has a lovely interior, and Sir Derek Walcott square, opposite, which was named in honour of St Lucia's Nobel laureate for Literature.



Catch of the day at The Naked Fisherman beach bar



The table set for wine and rum pairing in Cellar Maison

Soufrière

South from Castries is Soufrière, St Lucia's first capital, with the twin peaks of the Pitons, a UNESCO World Heritage site that can be climbed, but only with a guide. The sulphur springs are a seven-acre crater billed as the Caribbean's only drive-in volcano. You can bathe in the warm waters, which are said to have healing properties for a number of ailments.

Flying there: British Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly to St Lucia Hewanorra airport from the UK.

Cap Maison: A garden view room starts from £275 per night on a B&B basis (two sharing). For more information visit: www.capmaison.com; 020 8977 6099

For further information on St Lucia visit: www.saintlucia.org

Judith Baker is a travel writer specialising in the Caribbean. She is a member of The British Guild of Travel Writers.



Welsh chef Craig Jones and his team at Cap Maison



One of the world's top three markets can be found on St Lucia in the capital city of Castries where there is a large variety of goods and produce for sale



Luxurious and spacious villa suites located on the ground floor

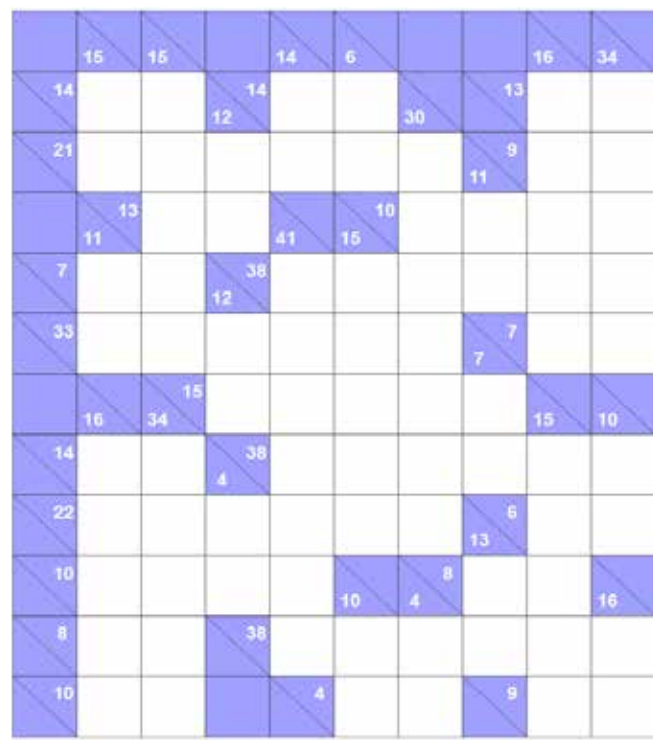


The secluded and private Cap Maison beach

PUZZLES

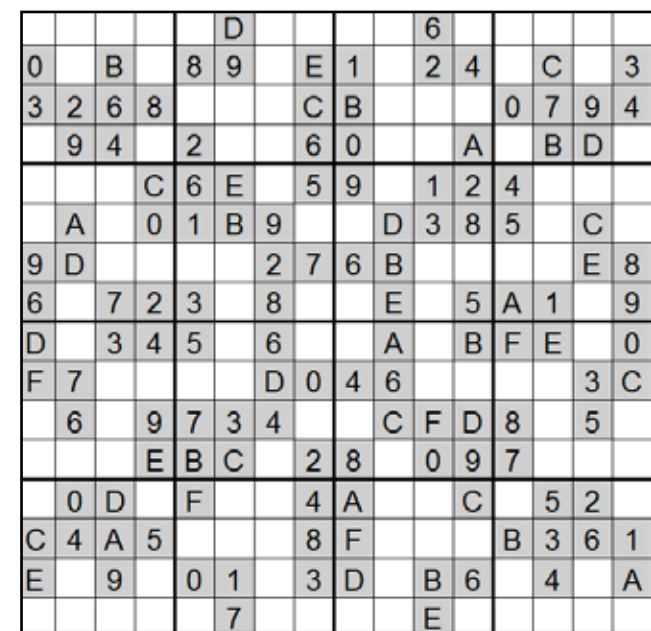
KAKURO

Kakuro puzzles are like crosswords that use numbers instead of words. The goal is to fill the blank squares associated with a clue (called a "run") with the numbers 1-9 so that the numbers add up to the corresponding clues. Like Sudoku, digits in a run cannot repeat. When the grid is filled, the puzzle is complete.



SU DOKU

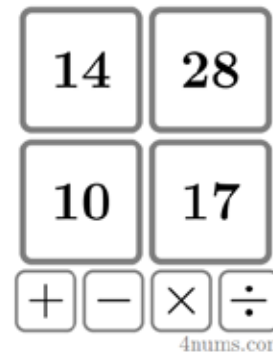
Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.



4NUMBERS

Use the numbers and operands provided to make 24. You must use each number once and only once, though the given operands can be used at will. Details provided at: <http://www.4nums.com/theory/>

2 Solution2

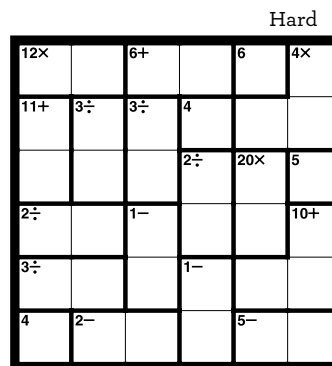
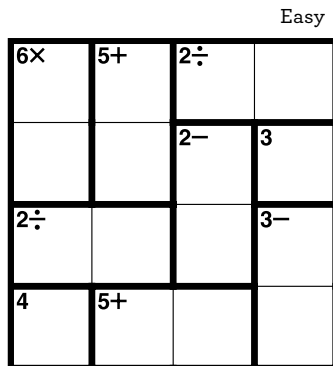


WORKSPACE



KEN KEN

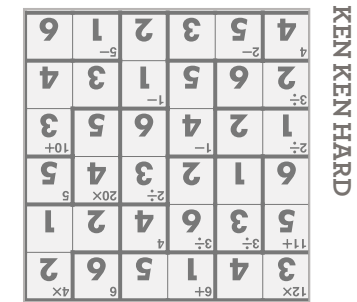
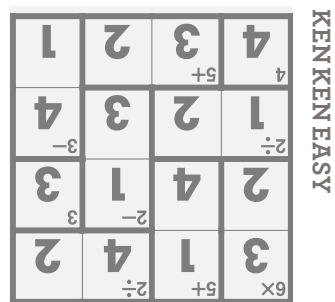
1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 to 6 (hard) or 1 to 4 (easy) without repeating.
2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.
3. Freebies: Fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.



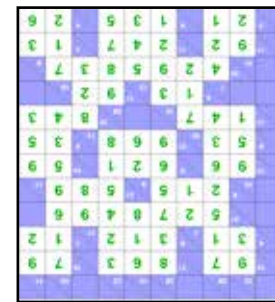
SOLUTIONS

4NUMBERS 2 UNIQUE SOLUTIONS

$$28 \times 17 \div 14 - 10$$



SU DOKU



KAKURO