

Street Hippos and River Cruises

I've always wanted to see hippos walking in the streets. You know the ones, those big round creatures you spot in viral reels, waddling around suburban gardens like they own the place. Everyone talks about how it happens in St Lucia, but I'd never been lucky enough to witness it myself.

So, when we headed to St Lucia for our December holiday, I quietly hoped this would be the trip. We had a few things planned, one of which was the popular river cruise along Lake St Lucia. We had heard that it's beautiful and full of surprises.

That afternoon did not disappoint. We saw a fish eagle perched in a dead tree, lording over the water like royalty. An African finfoot made a surprise appearance, calmly paddling past as if it wasn't one of the trickier birds to spot. A few crocodiles were sunbathing along the banks, and of course, there were plenty of hippos, grunting, yawning, and bobbing like oversized rubber ducks. It was one of those outings where you really felt like you were in the heart of the wild.

We also got chatting to a really nice couple on the boat. During our 3 hour cruise we swapped stories and had some great laughs. It's always fun meeting people who are just as wide-eyed about nature as you are.

That evening was New Year's Eve, and we wanted to celebrate with a proper meal out. But as it turns out, most of St Lucia shuts down for the night. A local pointed us to a restaurant that was still open, first come, first served, so we made our way over, hoping for a table. We were in luck, and dinner was really good, even though my order came out a little different to what I asked for. But by that point, we were just happy to have a seat and a plate of food to mark the end of the year.

Afterwards, instead of heading straight back to Sugarloaf Campsite where we were staying, we decided to take a slow drive around town. The hope? Hippos.

And then it happened.

Up ahead, we saw a few cars pulled over, hazard lights blinking. That could only mean one thing. We rolled to a stop next to them and looked over, and there they were. Two *massive* hippos grazing calmly on someone's lawn. Just like that. No drama. No fuss. In the very same space where people probably enjoyed picnics and sun loungers during the day, now stood two giants of the animal kingdom quietly munching their way through the garden.

It felt surreal. I'd seen hippos before, but not like this. Not strolling through a neighbourhood at night as if they'd just popped out for a takeaway. It was quiet, magical, one of those moments where all you can do is sit and stare, not wanting to break the spell.

That was the last night of 2024, and I couldn't have asked for a better ending. River adventures, birding gems, good food, and the town's most famous night-time residents making a surprise appearance just for us.