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THE CARIBBEAN 101

CRUISING
HANDBOOK

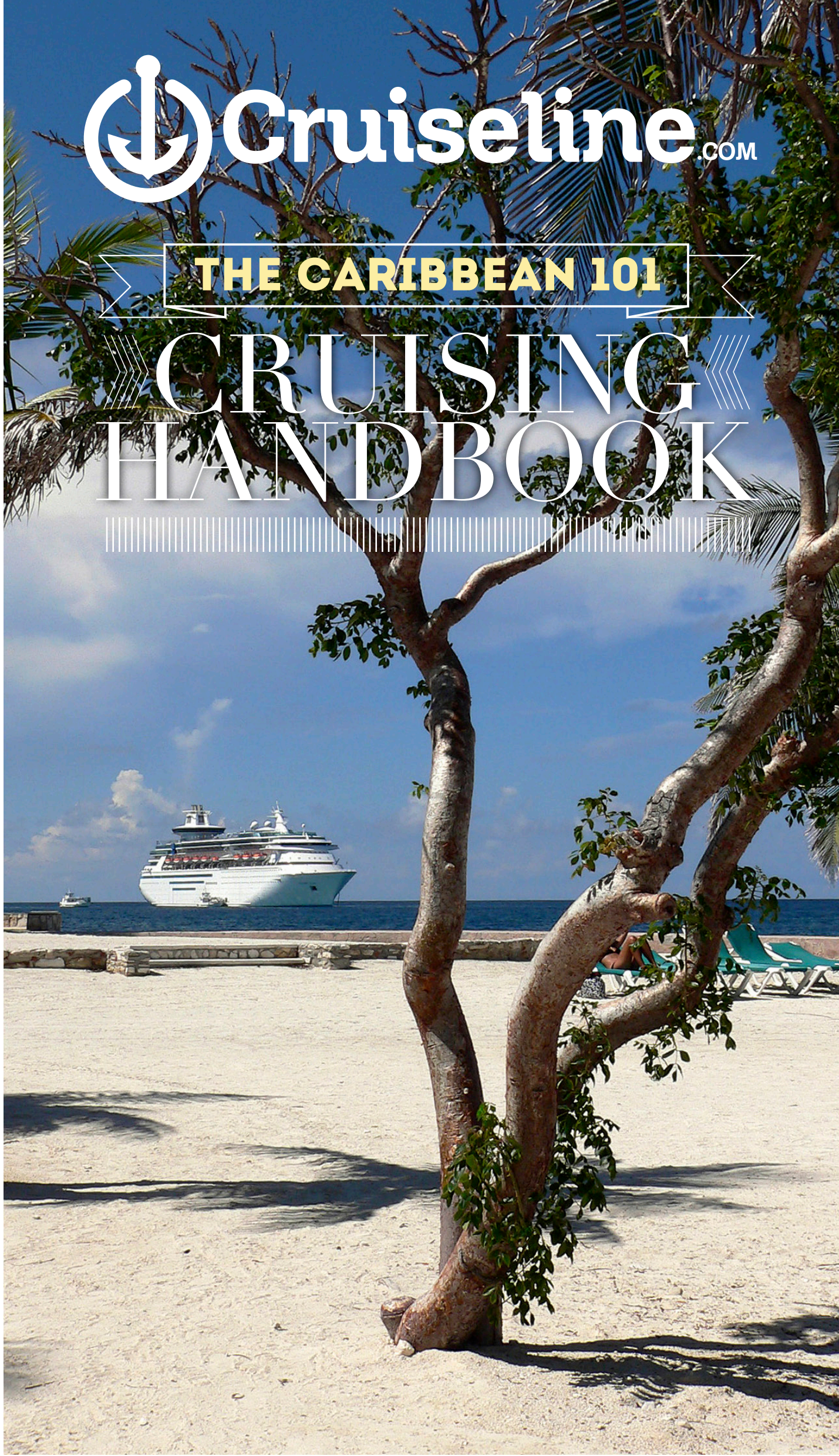


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Cocoa tree in Dutch St Martin



PHOTOS COURTESY iSTOCK



Why go?

By Heidi Sarna



A Spotted trunkfish off the Island of Bonaire

The Caribbean conjures up thoughts of bright turquoise water, white-sand beaches, swaying palm trees, and warm, sunny weather. The best part: It delivers.

Caribbean cruise itineraries are broken up into three routes: eastern, western, and southern. Your vacation length, ideal embarkation port, and interests will determine which is best for you.

For example, the eastern route offers beautiful beaches and lots of water sports. You can zip-line through 200-year-old mango trees in St. Martin, find peace and quiet at Virgin Islands National Park in St. John, or hike among the waterfalls and wildflowers in El Yunque rain forest in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

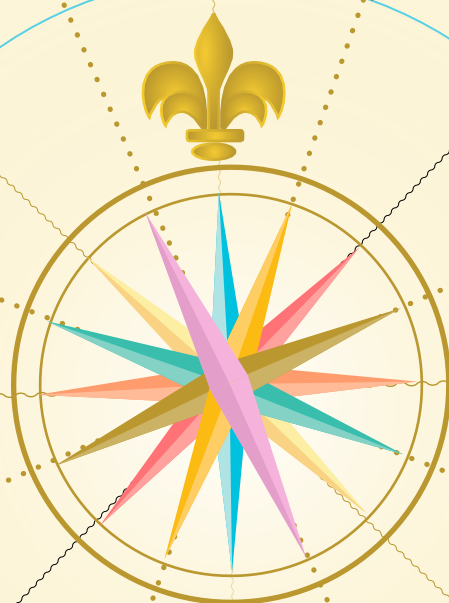
The western route offers a great blend of eco-adventures and cultural attractions, with stops along Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, plus Honduras, Belize, and Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Grand Cayman. Hop in a kayak in Cozumel and pad-

dle around one of the world's largest coral reefs, or take an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) ride through the rain forest in Ocho Rios.

Ports on the southern route are farther apart than those on eastern and western sailings, requiring more travel time—but also providing a more exotic experience. It's the most interesting route, calling on remote isles that make you feel as though you're shipwrecked on "Gilligan's Island." You may want to ride horseback through St. Bart's hillsides and tour St. Lucia's Sulphur Springs, the world's only "drive-in" volcano. While the idea of escaping to a tropical island paradise may have been the initial inspiration for a visit, you'll quickly learn there's a lot more to the Caribbean than just sun, sand, and surf.

HOW TO CHOOSE A CARIBBEAN ITINERARY

By Heidi Sarna



Cruise itineraries in the Caribbean are divided by eastern, southern, and western options. For cruisers who haven't sailed these warm waters, the designations – which are a construct of the cruise industry rather than actual regions – can be confusing. Here's what you need to know to determine which route is best for you:



Cruise ship at Grand Turk

Eastern Caribbean

Embarkation: Embark in Florida or Puerto Rico, or from a variety of ports along the East Coast (Boston; Manhattan; Brooklyn; Bayonne, NJ; Baltimore; Norfolk, VA; Charleston, SC).

Ports: The main stops are the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix), St. Martin (French and Dutch sides), British Virgin Islands (BVI – Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, and Tortola), Puerto Rico, and Grand Turk. Some ships also visit smaller islands like St. Barts, Antigua, Anguilla, Les Saintes, and Dominica.

Highs: The beaches in St. John, the BVIs, St. Barts, Les Saintes, and Anguilla are idyllic.

Lows: Traffic jams up in St. Thomas and St. Martin due to thousands of cruise passengers (more than 10,000 some days) in port at the same time.

Recommendation: Small ships can call on quieter islands like Virgin Gorda and Les Saintes. If you're on a megaship, take a day trip to St. John from St. Thomas by ferry and enjoy the gorgeous beaches of the U.S. National Park land.

Western Caribbean

Embarkation: Most ships depart from Fort Lauderdale, Port Canaveral, Miami, New Orleans, Galveston, or Houston.

Ports: Western Caribbean itineraries include Cozumel and other points on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, plus Honduras, Belize, Grand Cayman, and Jamaica.

Highs: The Mayan ruins at seaside Tulum and farther inland at Chichen Itza are impressive. The reefs of Belize and Grand

Cayman offer the best diving and snorkeling in the region.

Lows: On a single day in Cozumel, you might see more than 10,000 cruisers – and many seem to be drinking at Carlos 'n Charlie's. The throngs of snorkelers at Grand Cayman's Stingray City can be equally overwhelming.

Recommendation: Sign up for active, small-group excursions, such as horseback riding, tubing, bicycling, and diving tours. Also head for shops selling Mexican-made silver jewelry instead of the chain stores.

Southern Caribbean

Embarkation: Most cruises sail from Barbados, St. Martin, or Puerto Rico.

Ports: Cruises exploring the lower part of the Caribbean tend to be longer than a week and hit some combination of the ABC islands – Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao – plus St. Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, and the little gems of the Grenadines, including Bequia and Mayreau.

Highs: The beaches in Aruba, Grenada, and the Grenadines are fantastic, and so are nature walks through St. Lucia's lush, green rain forest.

Lows: You're likely to have a longer flight and multiple connections to start your cruise.

Recommendation: The quiet islands of the Grenadines, with their clear waters, are a seclusion-seeking beach lover's dream. History buffs will love the longer itineraries that include a transit of the Panama Canal, through locks that, by gravity alone, raise ships over Central America and down again on the other side.

The Ultimate Caribbean Cruise Packing List

By Sherri Eisenberg

Not sure what to bring – and, more importantly, what to leave home – on your next Caribbean cruise?

I keep a warm-weather cruise bag mostly packed at all times, which speeds up the process. Here's my Caribbean cruise packing list:

1

A TOILETRY BAG:

I keep this stocked with refillable 3-ounce bottles filled with shampoo, conditioner, body wash, face wash, makeup remover, and astringent, as well as a tiny perfume atomizer. [Japonesque](#) makes a great bag in a clear TSA-friendly pouch, and it comes with cute stickers to label your bottles. I also stash in there a small tube of shaving cream and one of toothpaste, as well as floss and a toothbrush with a lid. (I love this [Violife electric travel toothbrush](#).)

2

TRIAL SIZES OF THINGS I USE EVERY DAY:

In the pockets of my suitcase, I keep a small blow-dryer, comb, brush, and solid deodorant. These stay there at all times so I never have to pack them before my trip.

3

TRAVEL-SPECIFIC ITEMS:

I also keep a pocket stocked with comfy socks, a travel alarm clock, an eye mask, earplugs, a disposable camera, small binoculars, and a notebook and pens. (After all, why find room for this stuff in drawers?)

4

A SUMMER BAG:

In the wintertime, I keep a bag of warm-weather items I can grab quickly and stash in my suitcase, including two bathing suits, a cover-up, sunglasses, goggles, sunscreen, water shoes, and snorkel gear. (I hate to rent something that goes in my mouth – gross.)

5

CLOTHING:

I keep a list of the clothing I need for a one-week cruise or resort trip taped inside my bag and, the night before I head to the airport, I throw the following items in the suitcase:

7 PAIRS OF UNDERWEAR

5 BRAS; 2 SPORTS BRAS

3 PAIRS OF SHORTS

2 PAIRS OF LIGHTWEIGHT PANTS

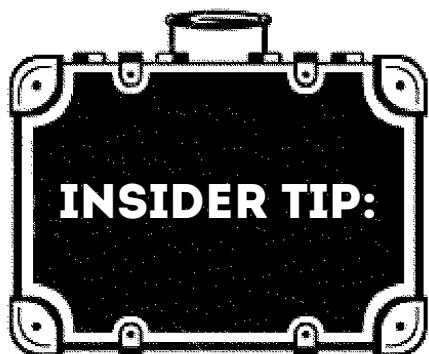
7 TOPS

**3 CASUAL SUNDRESSES
(I PICK ONES I CAN ROLL UP.)**

**1 DRESS FOR FORMAL
NIGHT, IF NECESSARY**

**3 PAIRS OF SHOES: FLIP-FLOPS, CASUAL SANDALS,
AND HEELS**

Of course, if you're a guy, replace the bras, dresses, and heels with a tie, jacket, and dress shoes.



I used to pack sneakers and workout clothes, but after years of traveling, I learned that I'll always choose to do something else on a cruise. So I stopped the aspirational sneaker packing, and now I just have extra room in my bag. The key is knowing yourself: If you're someone who will actually make your gym routine a priority, make sure you bring those things.

One Dress, Two Ways

By Amy Elliott

Day

Night



The key to packing light for your cruise? Clothing that's versatile. Check out how we dress this frock up for formal night, and down for the afternoon. All you need is a blank canvas and chic accessories. Use our picks as inspiration for outfits that effortlessly shift from casual to formal.

Start with a:



1. Maxi Dress

The formal vibe of a floor-length gown meets the ease of a short sundress. Go with a knit jersey style: They're forgiving, comfortable, fold easily – and magically emerge from your suitcase without wrinkles. Where white can feel bridal and black leans toward evening, a jewel tone offers day-to-night versatility. Modern Surplice Maxi Dress, \$98, [garnethill.com](https://www.garnethill.com).

For daytime, add a:



2. Patterned Scarf

Prints tend to telegraph a daytime mood. Choose a scarf with a multicolored motif, and let those hues dictate the rest of your accessories. Lightweight fabrics are best for sunny climates, and keep you warm in an air-conditioned dining room.

Katarina scarf, \$21, [shopsosie.com](https://www.shopsosie.com).



3. Straw Hat

This vacation essential offers protection from the sun and tops off your look with texture, whether it's a floppy, wide-brimmed sun hat or a tomboy-chic fedora. Fringed edge fedora, \$98, hatattack.com.



4. Flat Sandals

Shoes you can walk in comfortably are inherently casual – and the key to nailing your daytime maxi dress look. Skip the flip-flops and go for a flat that feels special, with perforated leather, shell accents, or beads. Kia sandal, \$39, zappos.com.



5. Aviators

The perfect mix of sporty and glam, this classic style suits any activity, from shore excursions to lunch by the pool. These rose-tinted lenses offer 100-percent UVA and UVB protection, which is critical at sea. Kylie sunglasses, \$72, guess.com.



6. Small Pouch

No need to lug around a tote: This zip pouch is perfectly sized for your room key, cash, and travel-sized sunscreen – everything you need for breakfast on deck or a short port visit. Small pouch, \$20, baggu.com.



7. Delicate Jewelry

Keep it simple during the day. Think understated and easily removable for swimming and spa treatments. Golden anchor necklace, \$80, theoneilovenyc.com.

For evening, add a:



8. Necklace

Go bold: An oversized necklace makes a simple dress Captain's Table-ready in a flash.

A pair of sparkly, shoulder-dusting earrings delivers the same effect. Our advice? Choose one or the other. Midnight bouquet bib, \$56,

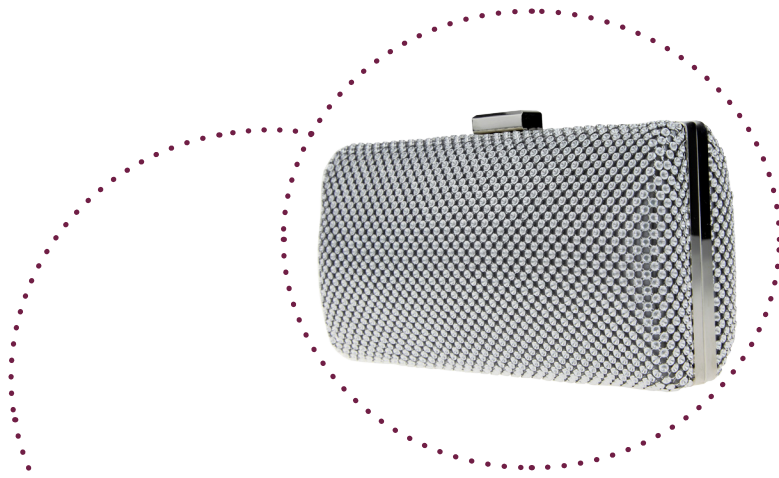
baublebar.com.



9. Shoes With Shine

You already know heels are in order, but how to choose? As versatile as black or nude, metallic styles deliver instant glamour and look gorgeous on a dance floor. Peppa sandal, \$98,

vincecamuto.com.



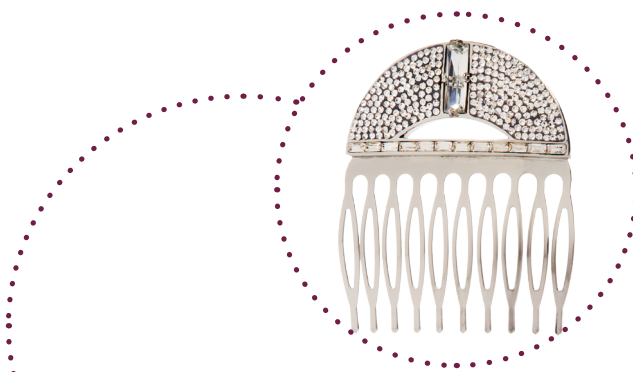
10. Glitzy Clutch

Nothing says evening more than a party-sized gem of a handbag. Kenney minaudiere, \$58, ninashoes.com.



11. Cocktail Ring

It pulls everything together. This piece, for example, picks up the gold metal in the necklace but won't overpower your other jewels. Sparkling Marquis ring, \$38, houseofharlow1960.com.



12. Sparkly Hair Accessory

If you have long enough hair for an updo, now's the time: It's the ultimate special-occasion hairstyle, especially when accented with a crystal comb, clip, or barrette. Wear yours in the back or to one side so you shine from all angles.

Broadway comb, \$68, henribendel.com.

TOP 10

CARIBBEAN SHORE EXCURSIONS

By Joe Yogerst



With so many options – and so many cool things to see and do in every port – deciding on shore excursions for your Caribbean cruise is almost as tricky as winning the limbo contest on the pool deck. But some island activities are definitely don't-miss. Here is our list of the best Caribbean shore excursions, daytrips that you can book through your cruise line or independent operators at each destination.

1

NEW RIVER CRUISE AND LAMANAI RUINS *Belize City, Belize*

The tropical New River meanders inland from the Belize coast to the ruins of Lamanai, an ancient Mayan city once lost in the jungle. Shore excursions combine boating, walking, nature, and Mesoamerican history.

Getting There: The riverboat wharf in Orange Walk village is 50 miles north of the cruise ship tender dock in Belize City.

Must-Do Experiences: Scope for spider monkeys, crocodiles, iguanas, and birdlife along New River; climb the high pyramid for a view over the jungle; check out the Mennonite settlement at riverside Shipyard.

2

MORNE TROIS PITONS NATIONAL PARK *Roseau, Dominica*

This lush rain forest reserve in the rugged Dominica highlands is one of the few places where cruisers can experience what the Caribbean was like before the arrival of mankind. The jungle-shrouded terrain boasts the richest biodiversity in the Lesser Antilles, as well as five volcanoes and three freshwater lakes.

Getting There: The park is 8 miles east of Roseau, the island nation's capital city and cruise port.

Must-Do Experiences: Swim in the secluded Emerald Pool, hike the Valley of Desolation to the volcanic boiling lake, gawk at majestic Trafalgar Falls.



3

UNDERWATER SCULPTURE PARK St. George's, Grenada

Crafted by three different artists, Grenada's submerged sculpture gallery sprawls across the floor of Moliniere Bay on the island's west coast. Among its iconic works are the haunting "Circle of Children," "The Lost Correspondent" pecking on a typewriter, and the whimsical "Man on a Bike."

Getting There: Scuba and snorkel excursions depart from Grand Anse Beach, 3.5 miles south of the St. George's cruise ship terminal.

Must-Do Experiences: Scuba diving is the ideal way to explore the sculpture garden because you can get right down among the figures. But given the bay's shallowness, snorkelers – especially those who can hold their breath for a few minutes – can easily savor the underwater art.

4

STINGRAY CITY George Town, Grand Cayman

One of the Caribbean's oldest and most popular shore excursions is still one of the best: a chance to feed and frolic with stingrays on a shallow sandbank off Rum Point on the north shore of Grand Cayman.

Getting There: Rum Point lies about three hours by road and 15 minutes by ferry from George Town and its twin cruise terminals.

Must-Do Experiences: Cruisers can scuba or snorkel Stingray City. Most tours are via motorboat, but several island outfitters also offer adrenaline-packed personal watercraft excursions that culminate in a stingray swim.

5

AMERICA'S CUP YACHT RACING Philipsburg, St. Martin

Five swift 12-meter yachts from the 1987 America's Cup are now permanently based on the Dutch side of St. Martin, where they race against each other with a mixed crew of visitors and veteran yachtsmen.

Getting There: The America's Cup headquarters is less than 1 mile from the Philipsburg cruise piers; you can easily walk there.

Must-Do Experiences: Grind a winch, trim a sail, or take the wheel of a genuine America's Cup yacht as it outraces an opponent on a course off St. Martin.

OLD SAN JUAN FOOD TOUR *San Juan, Puerto Rico*

6

Puerto Rico's cocina criolla is some of the richest and most varied cuisine in the Caribbean. Old San Juan overflows with top-notch eateries serving dishes inspired by the island's blend of Spanish, African, Taino Indian, and American culinary cultures.

Getting There: The restaurants of Old San Juan are literally footsteps away from the main cruise ship piers on the peninsula's southern shore. You can create your own tour of the culinary scene, or sign up for an organized one through your cruise line.

Must-Do Experiences: Sample mofongos, arroz con pollo, and camarones en cerveza; sip a piña colada in the city where it was invented; take a class that teaches you how to cook the Puerto Rican way.



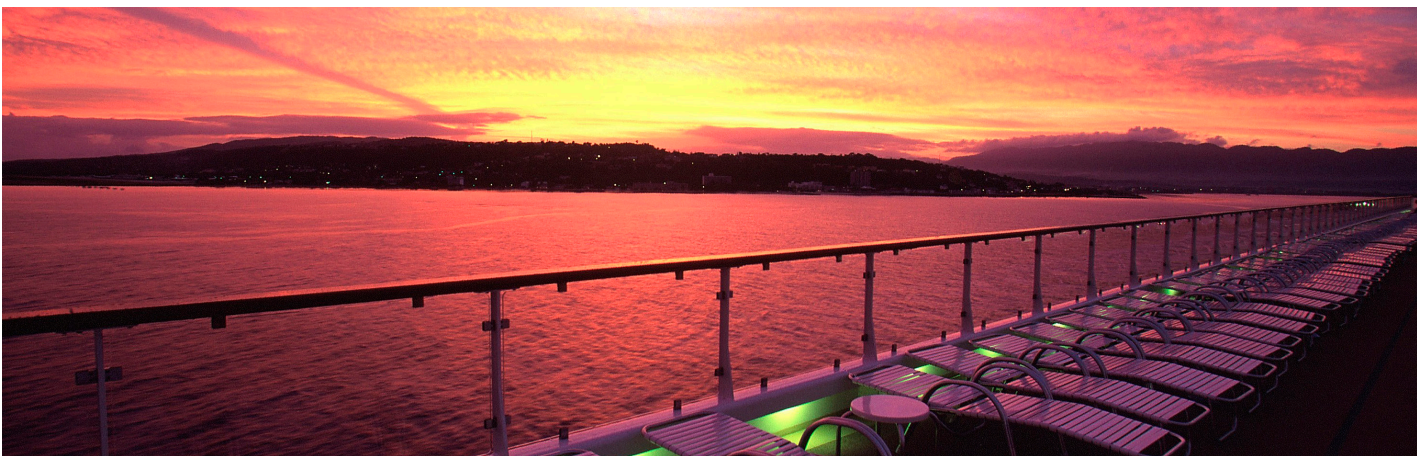
NELSON'S DOCKYARD *English Harbour, Antigua*

7

Named after the esteemed British admiral, Horatio Nelson, the dockyard was once a bastion of the Royal Navy in the Caribbean. Nowadays, the meticulously restored Georgian buildings harbor a museum, shops, pubs, and restaurants, while the docks cater to super yachts rather than naval gunships.

Getting There: The dockyard complex is 11 miles south of the cruise piers in St. John's, the island capital.

Must-Do Experiences: Visit the Dockyard Museum and Dow's Hill visitor center, get a massage at Akparo Salon & Spa, swig grog and munch fish and chips at the Copper and Lumber Store Hotel.



YS FALLS, BLACK RIVER, AND APPLETON ESTATE

8

St. Elizabeth Parish, Jamaica

Three of Jamaica's most outstanding attractions are clustered in St. Elizabeth Parish on the south coast, a three-part shore extension that unveils a whole different side of the island than the north shore cruise ports.

Getting There: St. Elizabeth is about 40 miles from Montego Bay and 80 miles from Ocho Rios.

Must-Do Experiences: Swing on a Tarzan-like vine and lounge in the cool teal-colored pools at YS Falls; spot crocodiles in the Black River swamp; sip the Caribbean's best rum at Appleton.

RMS RHONE Salt Island, British Virgin Islands

9

A Caribbean version of the *Titanic* disaster, the "unsinkable" Royal Mail ship sank during an 1867 hurricane, resulting in the loss of 123 passengers and crew members. The incredibly well-preserved wreck is now a mecca for divers and snorkelers.

Getting There: Scuba and snorkel excursions to the *Rhone* wreck depart from both Road Town on Tortola and Spanish Town on Virgin Gorda.

Must-Do Experiences: Hold your breath, submerge, and touch the barnacle- and coral-encrusted rudder post; look out for creatures like barracuda, moray eels, and octopuses that shelter in the wreck.

HIDDEN WORLDS RAINFOREST ADVENTURES Cozumel, Mexico

10

This eclectic outdoor adventure park centers around a sprawling expanse of Yucatan jungle and a warren of submerged limestone caverns (known as cenotes) that lie beneath the forest floor.

Getting There: The park is 21 miles south of the Cozumel ferry terminal in Playa del Carmen. The ferry from Cozumel to the mainland takes about 45 minutes. It's also 13 miles south of the new Calica cruise terminal.

Must-Do Experiences: Ride the jungle zip line, rappel into a limestone sinkhole, pedal an Aero Cycle through the rain forest canopy, dive or snorkel a cenote.

What to Do on a Cruise Line's Private Island

By Heidi Sarna

Many of the major cruise lines have private islands that they've designed to provide a hassle-free beach day. With one exception (Labadee, in Haiti), they are all located in the Bahamas, where the water is pale and the sand is soft. Without the traffic jams and crowds, these private isles may be devoid of culture, but they deliver plenty of fun in the sun.

1

HALF MOON CAY

Holland America Line

Half Moon Cay's 2-mile arc of white sand, combined with a wide variety of activities—including horseback riding and snorkeling with stingrays—make it a top pick. Kids love the aqua park and playground, while parents dig the air-conditioned cabanas and two-story villas (complete with hot tubs), where you can order drinks and massages. For joggers, there's a 5k course around the isle.

2

CASTAWAY CAY

Disney Cruise Line

This is the only private island that ships can dock at—the rest have to dock offshore and use tenders. Well suited to all ages, this isle offers separate beaches for adults and families, and private cabanas for rent. You can sign up to swim with stingrays, fish, rent bikes, play volleyball in the sun, or try your hand at pingpong or pool in shaded pavilions. Families enjoy the water playground with a slide, the supervised drop-off play area, and the teen-only area.

PHOTOS COURTESY: ISTOCK

3

PRINCESS CAYS

Princess Cruises

Located on the southern tip of Eleuthera, this 2-mile strip of sand has an adult-only area as well as a supervised kids' section with a sandbox and a pirate-themed playground. The new adult-only Sanctuary area is serene, and private air-conditioned cabanas are available for rent and massages. Excursion options include an island tour with a Junkanoo performance. Note: Since much of the seabed is rocky, you'll want to take water shoes.

4

GREAT STIRRUP CAY

Norwegian Cruise Line

Live calypso music serenades you as you play volleyball on three sand courts, snorkel around the faux shipwreck, or try your hand at pingpong. The 40-foot high inflatable water slide is fun for all ages, but access costs \$15 a day. There are also private cabanas for rent.

5

COCOCAY

Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises

This island – located near Norwegian Cruise Line's Great Stirrup Cay – has three beaches, and you'll want to choose the one farthest from the tender pier, since it's the least crowded. You'll find supervised kids' programming, plus an aqua park with a floating trampoline and water slides, as well as battery-operated miniature race cars for small children. Certified divers can sign up for one-tank dives as well.

6

LABADEE

Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises

This peninsula on Haiti's north coast, removed from the poverty-stricken part of the island, is home to five beaches – Columbus Cove at the far end is the most serene. A water park offers floating trampolines, water seesaws, and inflatable slides; there's also a 2,600-foot-long zip line. In addition, Haitian musicians and dancers offer a taste of the island culture.



PHOTOS COURTESY iSTOCK

The **15** Best Caribbean Beaches for Cruisers

By Chanize Thorpe

Chances are, there's one "must-do" on your Caribbean cruise, and that's ... to hit the beach. Good thing there are plenty of gorgeous strands throughout the islands. Here, our favorite picks in the top 15 ports:

SAPPHIRE BEACH **1** [Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas](#)

Plenty of passengers will head to heavily touristed Magens Bay, but the shallow, large reef at Sapphire Beach provides better snorkeling opportunities and smaller crowds. Plus, the views of St. John are a Pinterest® page's dream. The public beach is in front of the Sapphire Beach Club & Resort – you can pay a nominal fee for access to beach chairs and facilities, including showers.

TABYANA BEACH **2** [Roatan, Honduras](#)

While divers go on day trips in the deep, many beach-loving cruisers simply walk a few steps to Mahogany Beach, right near the port. As a result, the strand can get crowded fast, making Tabyana a better choice. Thanks to its proximity to the world's second largest reef system, there's great snorkeling here.

CUPECOY BEACH **3** [Philipsburg, St. Martin](#)

Cupecoy sees a good mix of tourists and locals, many of whom also peddle beach chairs, umbrellas, beer, and soft drinks to visitors. A few things to remember: The north-west side of the beach is clothing-optional, the whole area is gay-friendly, and the waves can be rough on weak swimmers. Also, leave enough time to fight the afternoon traffic back to the ship.

PALM BEACH **4** [Oranjestad, Aruba](#)

Once dominated by high-rise hotels, Palm Beach has now become Aruba's "it" location, thanks to an influx of restaurants, shops, and clubs. You can also sign up for a day pass to a hotel and, best of all, you can forgo the expensive cab ride with an easy trip on the public bus.

COCKLESHELL BAY 5 Basseterre, St. Kitts

Located 10 miles away from the high-rise resort area, this beach features a small number of food and drink vendors, but getting away from the crowds makes up for the lack of luxuries. Our advice: Be sure to negotiate a return ride on the way there.

BLUE BAY 6 Willemstad, Curacao

This is one of Curacao's most popular and largest beaches, but it's equipped to handle crowds. The entrance fee is \$8 but finding your own spot of sand or shade – if you prefer to dodge the intense midday rays – isn't a problem, and the snorkeling is top-notch here.

RUM POINT 7 George Town, Grand Cayman

Skip the overcrowded Seven Mile Beach and hang out on the north shore instead, where you can order a cocktail in one of the Wreck Bar's hammocks. It's best to sign up for a trip to Rum Point through Red Sail Sports, as the beach is about an hour drive from the cruise port.

BRANDONS BEACH 8 Bridgetown, Barbados

This is one of the most popular strands on Barbados's famed "Platinum Coast." It's also where many cruisers head, since it's not far from the port, but it's still your best bet. You can actually walk to Brandons Beach from the port, but if it's too hot, take a five-minute taxi ride.

GALLEY BAY BEACH 9 St. John's, Antigua

Of the island's 365 beaches – that's its claim, and it's sticking to it – this convenient one feels surprisingly quiet. The long, thin strand is pristine, and you can snorkel, swim, or kayak in the clear, warm water. From February through July, sea turtles lay eggs here, and the hatching is a sight to behold.

CANE GARDEN BAY 10 Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Islands

There's over a mile of sand to play in at this popular beach, which is lined with authentic West Indian restaurants. Water sports include windsurfing, and you can join the locals jogging along the curved shoreline. Your ship will offer a tour, but if you want to go solo, hop in a taxi for the 15-minute (roller coaster-style) ride.

GOVERNOR'S BEACH 11 **Grand Turk Island, Turks and Caicos**

This beach is close to the port and has an energetic vibe, which is unusual on this quiet island. There's plenty to do, from Hobie Cat® sailing to snorkeling the small reef. Beach chairs and umbrellas are also available for a fee. It's an easy 10-minute walk from the port to the beach – if you take a taxi, you'll probably regret the expensive, two-minute drive.

TURTLE BEACH 12 **Ocho Rios, Jamaica**

Turtle Beach is bigger than Mallards, closer to the cruise port, and offers a wide range of water activities. Yes, it'll probably be crowded, but it's easy to find a spot to rent a beach chair. Vendors hawk water skiing, scuba diving, and banana boat trips. And, if you want to shop, a mall is right behind you. A short, 10-minute walk from the port, this beach has a \$3 entrance fee.

CABLE BEACH 13 **Nassau, The Bahamas**

While many cruisers flock to the Atlantis Resort, 4-mile Cable Beach is less busy but still offers a great time for day-trippers without breaking the bank. Plenty of hotels offer cruisers day passes, or you can sign up for moderately priced fishing, diving, and scuba packages. It's an easy bus ride to many of the hotels along Cable Beach from the cruise port.

ISLA VERDE BEACH 14 **San Juan, Puerto Rico**

Isla is in front of the high-rise hotel section but is divided into several parts; we're partial to the quiet, family-friendly area near Ocean Park. Just consider yourself warned: Saturdays and Sundays are huge beach days for locals, so you'll run into crowds on the weekends. You'll have no trouble finding a taxi in either direction.

AQUASOL BEACH 15 **Montego Bay, Jamaica**

Just a short walk from MoBay's popular Gloucester Avenue, Aquasol – also known as Walter Fletcher Beach – is more of a water park than just a beach, and families come here to play on banana boats and jump on sea trampolines. Taxis line up at the port to drive the 10-minute ride.

How to Spend a Beach Day on Your Caribbean Cruise

By Polina Myagkov



PHOTOS COURTESY ISTOCK

Caribbean ports are known for gorgeous beaches – but some cruisers sign up for so many excursions to historical sites and boat trips, that they forget the beach is what inspired them to travel in the first place. If you’re dreaming of sunbathing by turquoise waters, consider purchasing a day pass to a resort. Rather than rub shoulders with crowds on public beaches, you can take a dip in a private pool, sip on a cocktail, and order lunch on the sand.

Just don’t expect to show up and crash: Call in advance for information about policies, pricing, and reservations – or snag a deal through ResortForADay.com, which partners with hotels to offer passes to cruisers.

“[Day passes are a] rare and fabulous opportunity to enjoy resort amenities as an overnight guest would, without paying the full overnight rate,” explains Stuart Cohen, founder of ResortForADay.com.

Although not every resort offers day passes, we found six great options in popular ports:

NASSAU, BAHAMAS

Atlantis on Paradise Island is massive, with several hotels and a dazzling combination of water sports, dining, and activities. The property sits on a lovely stretch of sand where you can lie in the sun, order cocktails, and splash in the surf – just as you imagined yourself doing when you booked your Caribbean cruise.

Cost: \$69 per adult, \$40 per child ages 4-11 (children under 4 are complimentary)

What's Included: Access to the beach (with waiter service), towels, lounge chairs, lunch (which includes one soft drink per person), and access to the aquarium and the marine habitats. Those who want to use the water park should ask about packages that include these facilities.

How to Get There: Take a 10-minute cab ride from the cruise terminal to Paradise Island, which costs about \$10 per person round trip.

How to Book: Passes can only be purchased at the resort upon arrival, and since it's first come, first served, there is no guarantee of getting in. Sailing on a large ship? See if your cruise line offers a shore excursion that includes beach access.

OCHO RIOS, JAMAICA

Jamaica Inn is a boutique, family-owned hotel that's known for its gorgeous, secluded beach and impeccable service. The property once hosted Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller on their honeymoon. Go today, and you can read under thatch-roofed palapas and sip cocktails made from freshly squeezed fruit juice.

Cost: \$182 for two people (adults or children). The resort only allows children over 10 May through November, and children over 12 December through April.

What's Included: Access to the beach, lounge chairs, towels, and all non-motorized water sports.

How to Get There: Take a six-minute cab ride from the cruise terminal to the resort, which costs about \$8 per person round trip.

How to Book: Call in advance to reserve.

CASTRIES, ST. LUCIA

Capella Marigot Bay is a small, modern hotel set on 30 acres of lush, tropical gardens. There, you can relax by one of the three pools, one of which has a swim-up bar. The resort itself is on the bay, but you can take a free water taxi to a nearby beach.

Cost: \$85 per adult, \$50 per child ages 4-15

What's Included: Lunch (with one nonalcoholic beverage), access to three pools (with waiter service), the fitness center, towels, and lounge chairs.

How to Get There: Take a 30-minute cab ride from the cruise terminal to the resort, which costs about \$20 per person round trip.

How to Book: Call in advance to reserve.

KING'S WHARF, BERMUDA

Only seven minutes from Bermuda's capital, the tony **Elbow Beach Bermuda** overlooks a private, half-mile-long, pink-sand beach lined with rows of crisp, navy blue umbrellas.

Cost: \$35 per person (children and adults)

What's Included: Access to the beach, lounge chairs, a beach umbrella, and a water bottle. The beach offers waiter service, but all other drinks and food are a la carte.

How to Get There: Take a 30-minute cab ride from the cruise terminal to the resort, which costs about \$20 per person round trip.

How to Book: Call in advance to reserve.

MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA

Housed in an 18th-century sugar plantation, **Hilton Rose Hall** is home to one of the Caribbean's largest water parks. It also sits on a private beach, where you can snorkel, kayak, and windsurf.

Cost: \$80 per adult, \$60 per child ages 6-17

What's Included: Access to the beach, pool, and water park, towels, lounge chairs, all non-motorized water sports, and activities such as dance classes and volleyball.

How to Get There: Take a 10-minute cab ride from the cruise terminal to the resort, which costs about \$12 per person round trip.

How to Book: Call in advance to reserve.



THE 7 COOLEST SUMMER MOMENTS AT SEA

By Sherri Eisenberg

There's no denying it – cruise ships have gotten a lot cooler in recent years. Our favorite innovations: the ones that bring a cruise vacation closer to the best summer vacations on land. Now you can duplicate some of your favorite summer moments, without leaving the cruise ship. Here are seven of the best warm-weather experiences at sea:

1

Sip a drink at a unique swim-up bar.

Resorts on land can keep their swim-up pool bars: SeaDream Yacht Club has taken the concept one step further on its weekly beach picnic, offered in the Caribbean and Costa Rica. Sure, staffers set up tables and chairs in the sand, making for a decadent, less-rustic take on this open-air meal. But the best part is how they hand out the hors d'oeuvres: Waiters in formal attire serve Champagne and caviar from bars they set up on surfboards floating in the sea. (Yes, it is exactly as cool as it sounds.)

2

Play a round of minigolf.

There's not much actual sportsmanship involved, but miniature golf is a summer staple for anyone who grew up going "down the shore." A variety of lines offer small courses – including Norwegian Cruise Line, Royal Caribbean, and Princess – but *Carnival Breeze* has nine holes over two levels and the course is lit up at night.

3

Have a backyard barbecue.

If your favorite part of summer is the backyard cookout, then you'll be thrilled with the Lawn Club Grill on *Celebrity Silhouette* and *Celebrity Reflection*. Located in the grass-covered Lawn Club area, the restaurant has a menu of steaks, chops, seafood, and kebabs – and diners are invited to join the chef out by the grill to take a turn at creating their own perfect hash marks.

4

Watch an outdoor movie.

Some of my favorite grown-up summer memories are of watching movies in Manhattan's Bryant Park, marveling at classic films in the moonlight on warm evenings. Fortunately, this is one treat that many cruise lines offer, including Princess Cruises (which has the largest screen at sea on its new *Royal Princess*), Carnival Cruises, Costa Cruises, Royal Caribbean, and Disney Cruise Line (which shows first-run films).

5

Play bocce at sea.

Not one but two lines have introduced bocce courts on the high seas. On *Royal Princess*, you can play bocce on a small turf court, but on *Celebrity's* Solstice-class ships, you can play bocce on an amazing half-acre lawn, covered in real grass.

6

Eat at a fabulous clam bar.

On Norwegian Cruise Line's new *Breakaway*, the Waterfront area includes one fabulous new dining venue: a boardwalk-style seafood shack, complete with lobster rolls and fried whole-belly clams.

7

Sleep out under the stars.

On SeaDream Yacht Club ships, the crew dresses the Balinese-style day beds – which are made for two – in linens, a duvet, and pillows, and allows guests to spend the night sleeping outside under the stars. Hint: The daybed on the most forward sun deck is the most private, and therefore the most coveted.

5

CELEBRITY CHEF RESTAURANTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

By Sherri Eisenberg

Sure, you can bemoan how touristy the Caribbean islands are, particularly around the cruise ship terminals, where jewelry shops abut duty-free stores and tequila-soaked bars. But for food lovers who are willing to hop in a cab, there are actually great meals to be had at unforgettable restaurants helmed by celebrity chefs. Here, our chef-driven foodie bucket list for the Caribbean in 2014:



Chili crab

FATTY CRAB

St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

New York-based Chef Zakary Pelaccio wows Gotham with his Malaysian dishes, and now he's expanded his hip and playful take on Asian cuisine to the Caribbean.

How to Get There: From St. Thomas, take the short ferry ride to St. John – where the beaches are better anyway – and walk the four blocks to the restaurant.

What to Order: Look for chicken roti with green curry, the signature sliders with chili aioli, and calamansi chili-rubbed brisket with coconut rice. Order a fresh watermelon juice to go on the way out.

PHOTO BY FATTY CRAB



Michael's stylish dining room

MICHAEL'S GENUINE FOOD AND DRINK

George Town, Grand Cayman

New York-based, French-born Eric Ripert's Grand Cayman restaurant, Blue, in the Ritz-Carlton hotel, may not be open at lunchtime, but Michael's is open all day long.

How to Get There: Less than a 10-minute cab ride from the ship terminal, Michael's – the Caribbean branch of Miami-based Chef Michael Swartz's restaurant empire – serves farm-to-table lunch and dinner every day.

What to Order: Start with crostini topped with house-made ricotta and local mango jam for a taste of the islands. Then check out the fish of the day, which is caught locally, then wood-fired and served with escarole and grilled lemon, or served on a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich with homemade brioche.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL'S GENUINE FOOD AND DRINK

DUNE AT ONE & ONLY OCEAN CLUB

Paradise Island, The Bahamas

Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Dune serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, so you can just go when you're hungry. The menu focuses on local seafood and produce, and dishes are light and fresh – perfect for a day at the beach. It's really the only food-loving destination at the resort at lunchtime, when Nobu and Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill are closed.

How to Get There: From the ship terminal in Nassau, you can take your cruise line's transfer to the Atlantis Resort or, if you don't want to use the beach facilities, just hop in a cab. (The restaurant is in the One & Only Ocean Club, so have your driver drop you off there – Atlantis is a huge, spread-out complex, and it will save you a lot of walking.)

What to Order: At lunch, the classic Bahamian conch salad and crab salad are our picks, as well as the watermelon and goat cheese plate.



Roasted tomatoes topped with parmesan

BLT STEAK AT THE RITZ-CARLTON SAN JUAN

San Juan, Puerto Rico

New York's Laurent Tourondel has reimagined the steakhouse as something more luxe – and less stuffy – than the steakhouses of the “Mad Men” era. Still, unless you order the grilled seafood, you can expect a heavy dinner here. Our advice: Eat light during the day so you can indulge without thinking about how you'll look in your swimsuit the next day.

How to Get There: The restaurant is a 15-minute drive from the port.

What to Order: This is a modern take on the iconic steakhouse, so look for classics like properly charred porterhouse for two, grilled double-cut bacon – yes, as an appetizer, not a garnish – and potato skins dressed up with truffle oil.

PHOTO BY BLT STEAK AT THE RITZ-CARLTON SAN JUAN

MI CASA AT DORADO BEACH

San Juan, Puerto Rico

We would follow Washington, D.C.-based Spanish Chef Jose Andres just about anywhere, but it's a real treat to be able to dine on his creative tapas in this common cruise departure port.

How to Get There: The restaurant, a 35-minute drive from the ship terminal, serves breakfast (tortilla, anyone?), but we suggest going for a long, slow dinner the night before your cruise so you can take your time with the dinner menu.

What to Order: We can't resist Andres' Spanish classics – such as Iberico ham, chicken croquettes, gazpacho, savory churros, and squid ink pasta with cuttlefish and shrimp – but he also offers his own take on Puerto Rican dishes, including conch fritters and taro chips.

About Cruiseline.com:

Cruiseline.com launched in December 2012 as an independent, objective guide to cruises and quickly became the second largest social review site on the Internet. Members use the site to simplify the task of choosing a cruise with unbiased opinions from fellow passengers, and to join the growing community.

Unlike other sites, Cruiseline.com guarantees the authenticity of thousands of verified reviews – which means you know you’re reading real reviews, by real people, who went on real cruises.

Best of all, Cruiseline.com uses member opinions to rank each cruise with a “Sail Score,” so you can see how ships and even itineraries stack up to determine the best cruise.

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