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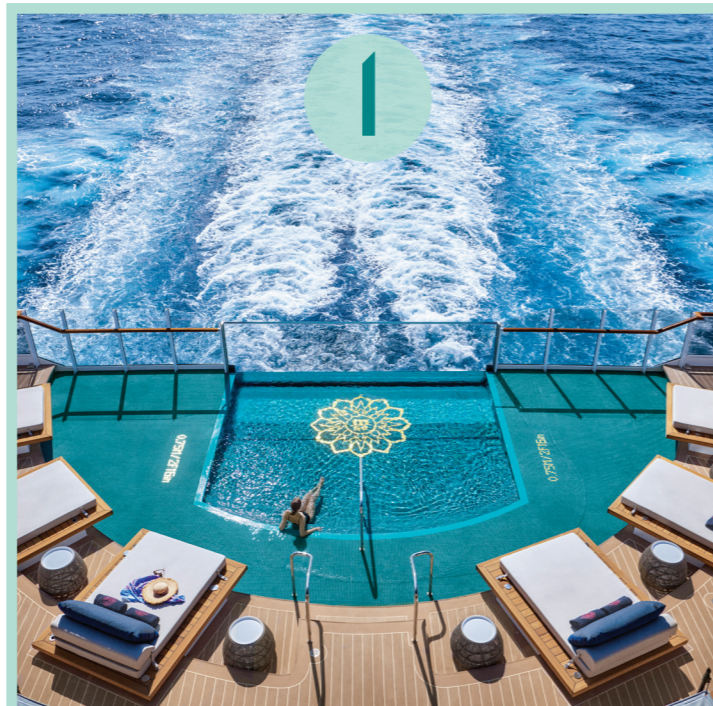
CARIBBEAN CRUISE PORTS

From tranquil beaches to thrilling adventures, a cruise is the best way to island-hop around the Caribbean, writes **Lina Molloholli**

White-sand beaches, rum-infused cocktails and sun-warmed waters – what’s not to like about the Caribbean? This region remains a top seller for winter sun and the third-most-popular

destination with UK and Ireland cruisers, according to Clia, having attracted about 276,000 cruise travellers in 2023.

Tall-ship line Star Clippers reports “strong demand” for the Caribbean, saying it accounts for 48% of 2024 bookings so far. And no wonder – whether indulging in lively fish fries in Barbados or climbing lush jungle peaks in Saint Lucia, strolling past Dutch-influenced architecture in Aruba or hearing swashbuckling stories of pirates in St Vincent, a cruise offers a taste of islands big and small, all on one sun-kissed sailing.



BASK IN THE SUN IN ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

The ‘land of 365 beaches’ boasts the powdery sands and crystal waters holidaymakers associate with the Caribbean, along with rich history at Unesco World Heritage Site Nelson’s Dockyard and panoramic views from the lookout at Shirley Heights. Capital St John’s is among the ports of call for Explora Journeys, and with a scheduled 8pm departure on the itinerary below, there’s even time to hop across to less-bustling Barbuda. Here, the Frigate Bird Sanctuary calls birdwatching enthusiasts, while the fine sands of Princess Diana Beach attract sun worshippers – a perfect port day for those seeking solitude amid a busy itinerary.

Book it: Explora Journeys’ seven-night A Journey of Paradise Coves and Puerto Rican Spirits trip costs from £5,610, based on two sharing an Ocean Suite. The price is on an all-inclusive basis, excluding Anthology, Chef’s Kitchen, spa treatments and premium drinks. explorajourneys.com



GO PETITE IN GUADELOUPE

In this overseas region of France, life moves at a slower pace – and so can cruisers who arrive on a smaller ship that can access the tiny, off-the-beaten-track ports that bigger vessels can’t. *Scenic Eclipse* calls at the Guadeloupean archipelago of Îles des Saintes, where just two of the nine volcanic islands are inhabited – so you’re more likely to spot dolphins, humpback whales, hummingbirds or huge frigatebirds than other humans. For more untouched nature, head to main island Basse-Terre to hike through the Guadeloupe National Park rainforests, swim in the majestic Carbet Falls or take on the climb up La Grande Soufrière volcano for sweeping views across the island.

Book it: Scenic’s new 13-day Island Odyssey: Bahamas to the Grenadines itinerary starts at £6,068, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from major UK airports, meals, butler service and private door-to-door transfers, based on an October 24 departure. scenic.co.uk

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WATCH WHALES IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic is the most-visited destination in the Caribbean, with something for thrill-seekers, history buffs and nature lovers alike. Capital Santo Domingo is home to the first cathedral and fortress built in the Americas, while the Alcázar de Colón was the palace of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus. But it’s not the country’s only cruise port: La Romana will be the base for Marella Cruises’ *Marella Explorer 2*, with the line returning to the Dominican Republic this year for the first time since 2017 for a series of adult-only winter sailings from December 24. They include calls at Samana, a maiden port for Marella and a go-to location to spot thousands of humpback whales migrating every winter. Marella’s managing director, Chris Hackney, says: “Our sailings continue to go from strength to strength, with bookings up 10% across the three ships which operate in the Caribbean this coming winter.”

Book it: A seven-night Colours of the Caribbean round-trip from La Romana on *Marella Explorer 2* starts at £1,599, based on two adults sharing an Inside cabin on an all-inclusive basis, with flights from Manchester on February 11. tui.co.uk/cruise

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Janya_Tarasev, Nancy Parwels, Jay Clark



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STEP BACK IN TIME IN BARBADOS

It’s the birthplace of modern pop sensation Rihanna, but calls at Bajan capital Bridgetown are a gateway to the island’s history. Delve deeper on quirky excursions with Azamara, including a four-hour photography tour to capture the island’s vibrant landmarks on camera, or a visit to the house where George Washington stayed in 1751, on his only trip outside the US. No visit to Barbados is complete without a bit of beach time: Crane Beach is famous for its dramatic cliffs and crystal-clear waters or, for a livelier atmosphere, try the bars and watersports of Accra Beach.

Book it: Azamara recently added a 14-night Eastern Caribbean Voyage on *Azamara Quest*, with prices from £2,005, based on two sharing a Club Interior stateroom. The price is based on a November 8, 2025, departure and includes gratuities, food and drinks, and self-service laundry, but excludes flights. azamara.com



DESTINATIONS

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PICTURE: Shutterstock/ Eli Wilson

DRIFT ON A BAMBOO RAFT IN SAINT LUCIA

Consider Saint Lucia for clients who crave adventure amid breathtaking natural landscapes. From hiking and mountain biking to indulging in mud springs or leisurely bamboo rafting downriver, there's no shortage of outdoor activities. Suggest exploring the Soufrière marine reserve for rewarding snorkelling and diving experiences. For those even more daring, guided ascents of Gros Piton provide an exhilarating challenge. Alternatively, a scenic drive along winding mountain roads will reveal lush rainforests and vibrant fishing villages such as Anse La Raye at a much more leisurely pace.

Book it: P&O Cruises offers a 14-night Caribbean Fly-Cruise on *Arvia* (pictured), which features the first rum distillery at sea. Prices start at £1,699 for a November 29, 2025, sailing. The price is based on two people sharing an Inside cabin and includes full-board dining, airport transfers and flights from London or Manchester.

pocruises.com

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TASTE SPICES IN GRENADA

The mountainous 'spice isle' of Grenada is ideal for a day's exploring, thanks to its manageable size. Popular attractions include the Belmont Estate, renowned for its production of exquisite organic chocolate, and the Nutmeg Processing Station in Gouyave, established in 1952, where tours offer a window into one of the island's most valuable exports. Star Clippers recently expanded its Caribbean programme with the addition of a Grenada homeport. UK general manager Fay McCormack says: "We are delighted that *Star Clipper* will be departing from Grenada in 2026. Tying in with the island's Independence Day celebrations, we recommend guests immerse themselves in this unique and colourful festival that takes over St George's, before embarking the ship for a unique adventure."

Book it: An 11-night West Indies Explorer voyage on *Star Clipper* plus a three-night pre-cruise stay in Grenada costs from £5,629, based on two sharing a Category 6 cabin. The price includes flights from Gatwick, three nights' all-inclusive at Coyaba Beach Resort, most transfers and port charges, departing February 4, 2026.

starclippers.co.uk

Best
OF THE
REST

CARIBBEAN CRUISE
DESTINATIONS

Aruba: Set on the southern fringes of the Caribbean below the hurricane belt, Aruba enjoys warm weather year-round. Stroll past Dutch-influenced architecture in Oranjestad or see aloe vera plants in their raw form on Virgin Voyages' 11-night Colombia & Caribbean Islands cruise, which offers the option of adding a submarine excursion to explore sponge gardens, coral and marine life. virginvoyages.com

British Virgin Islands: Be one of the first to sail on Oceania Cruises' new ship *Allura* when it embarks on a maiden season in the Caribbean in winter 2025. The 12-day round-trip sailing from Miami, departing November 16, features the line's signature foodie focus, including a chef-led tour of Tortola island. oceaniacruises.com

St Kitts: Ships dock in St Kitts' capital, Basseterre. Visitors can ride the Scenic Railway train through lush landscapes, or stay in the city to enjoy the buzz of Independence Square, once called Pall Mall but renamed in 1983 to mark the islands' independence. Silversea has a Fort Lauderdale to Bridgetown cruise on *Silver Moon* departing December 6, 2024, which calls at St Kitts, and includes 'Salt' food and drink experiences that celebrate Caribbean cuisine. silversea.com

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RIDE HORSES IN THE BAHAMAS

The Bahamas has much to offer cruise visitors, from excursions in its biggest port of Nassau to the smattering of tiny cruise line-owned private islands accessible only by ship. Among the latter is Holland America Line's Half Moon Cay, which boasts a crescent-shaped beach. It has activities aplenty too; one of the bestsellers is horse riding through the lapping waves, then along a winding trail to the island's highest vantage point.

Book it: Holland America Line offers a 14-day Eastern Caribbean: Antilles & Private Island trip from £2,569 based on two sharing an Inside cabin, excluding flights. The fare covers dining, drinks, two shore excursions and Wi-Fi, departing December 21, 2025. hollandamerica.com

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SPOT 'PIRATES' IN SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

One of the less-visited regions from the UK, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a chain of 32 volcanic islands, islets and sandbanks steeped in sailing and pirate history – an enchanting backdrop that made it a fitting filming location for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films. In Kingstown, clients can explore historic landmarks such as Fort Charlotte and the Botanical Gardens, or wander through lively markets brimming with crafts and spices. Contrast the experience with smallest island Mayreau, where the powdery sands of Salt Whistle Bay and Saline Bay offer secluded settings in which to relax in the sun.

Book it: SeaDream Yacht Club's new seven-day West Indies Explorer trip starts at £3,519, departing on November 28, 2026. The price is based on two sharing a Yacht Club stateroom on an all-inclusive basis with a daily wine selection and watersports equipment. Flights cost extra. seadream.com





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GO DUTCH IN CURACAO

Nestled between Aruba and Bonaire, Curaçao – the third of the ‘ABC islands’ – is blessed with turquoise-edged coastlines and marine life so colourful they could match its namesake blue curaçao liqueur. Capital Willemstad is equally vibrant, packed with pastel-hued waterfront buildings throughout its historic Punda and Otrobanda districts, connected by the Queen Emma Bridge. For an active day ashore, there’s Christoffel National Park, where hiking trails lead to breathtaking views from the island’s highest peak, Mount Christoffel. Along the way, look out for the island’s diverse flora and fauna, including exotic birds such as troupials and warawaras.

Book it: Seabourn has introduced a 12-day Southern Caribbean Holiday & Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao voyage on *Seabourn Ovation* (pictured). Prices start at £6,499, departing December 22, 2025, based on two sharing a Veranda Suite. seabourn.com



PICTURES: Eric Laignel; Shutterstock/Brian P. Egan

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SKIM PUERTO RICAN WAVES

A captivating blend of old-world charm and modern innovation, Puerto Rico brings together Indigenous, Spanish and African influences, as well as links to the US. Lively San Juan and its historic forts – El Morro and San Cristóbal – are a must for cruisers keen to explore the island’s history. Hikers, meanwhile, can hike through the tropical El Yunque National Forest, full of enticing trails, or soar through the treetops at Toro Verde Adventure Park, which is home to some of the world’s longest and highest ziplines.

Book it: Princess Cruises offers a seven-day Eastern Caribbean with St Thomas itinerary on board new ship *Sun Princess*, with prices on December 14, 2025, starting at £999, excluding flights. The fare is based on two sharing an Interior cabin and includes dining, entertainment and access to fitness facilities. princess.com **TW**