

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

EASTERN CARIBBEAN



BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

With temperatures hovering around 20-30 degrees Celsius year-round, the Eastern Caribbean's tropical climate makes it a natural winner for year-round cruising. The peak season tends to be from December to March when the region offers a balmy escape from Europe's chilly winters. Humidity is also lower at this time than in the hurricane season, which runs from June to November, though storms are more likely from August onwards. April and May tend to be good times to visit as these are considered shoulder season, with less crowds.



10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

Island hideaways – areas such as the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos and tiny outposts like Nevis, Saba and Anguilla offer a delightful contrast to larger, busier destinations.

Festivals and fish-fries – West Indians love their music and know how to party, so it's always worth seeking out live music, celebrations and fish-fry events where locals cook-up the day's catch.

European flavours – the Caribbean's turbulent history of being conquered and fought over by Old World powers has left a legacy of European cultures with English, French, Dutch and Spanish influences that have shaped the islands and countries.

All-year appeal – with a blissfully warm climate 365 days a year and islands scattered like jewels across the tropical waters, it's easy to see why the Caribbean is the world's most popular cruise destination.

Active adventures – stride out on rainforest hikes in Puerto Rico or across the slopes of a dormant volcano in St Kitts; splash down on exhilarating river tubing rides in the Dominican Republic; and dive with sharks in the Bahamas.

Exclusive retreats – most mainstream cruise lines have private islands or resorts, mainly in the Bahamas, which feature in itineraries offering a day of beach-based activities.

A taste of home – in the English-speaking islands it could be love of cricket, driving on the left, familiar place names, stone churches that are dead-ringers for those found in English villages and even old-fashioned red phone-boxes.

Brilliant beach life – the islands of the West Indies are famous for their idyllic beaches, which are often only a short taxi ride from the cruise dock or even within walking distance.

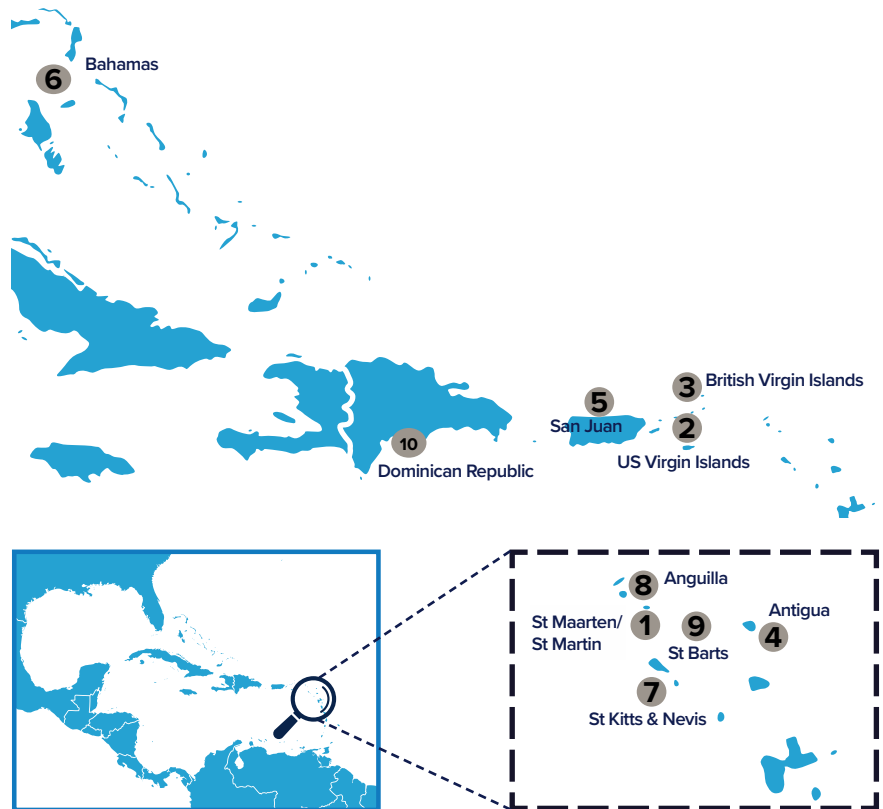
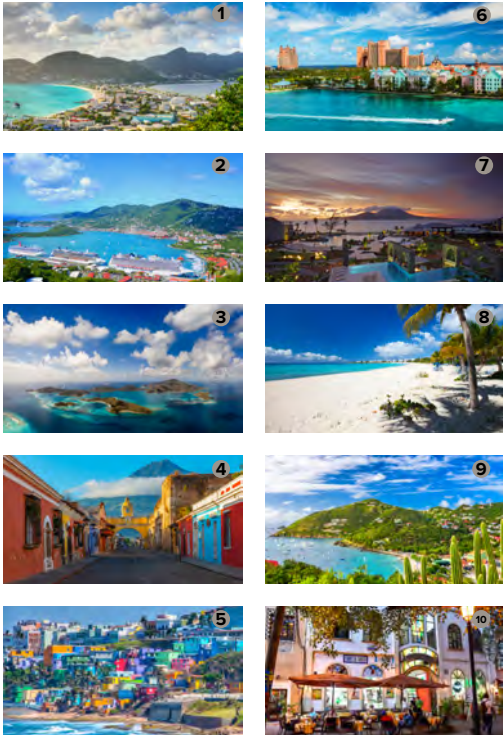
Tropical tastes – tuck into mouth-watering fruits that grow in abundance, from coconuts and mango to guava and papaya; freshly-caught fish like grouper and snapper; and washed down with local beers such as Kalik in the Bahamas and irresistible rum punch cocktails.

Shopping treats – from designer stores to imaginative local brands, the year-round warm climate means there's a good choice of swimwear and casual clothes. Local markets are rich hunting grounds for wood carvings and handicrafts along with local rums and spicy cooking sauces.

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10 KEY ATTRACTIONS



1. St Maarten/St Martin – this island is part Dutch and part French, which gives it an engaging split personality and contrasting ambience to match. Larger ships call at Philipsburg on Dutch St Maarten, which is more developed, while smaller vessels stop at Marigot in French St Martin.

2. US Virgin Islands – the former pirate hangout of St Thomas is the most commercialised of the USVIs and is famous for its duty-free shopping, while sleepy St John, a short ferry ride away, is the smallest of the trio, boasting beautifully unspoilt scenery.

3. British Virgin Islands – this archipelago is one of the most stunning spots of the Caribbean, with the main isle of Tortola attracting most cruise calls, though some smaller ships stop at Virgin Gorda and lesser-known Anegada, Jost Van Dyke and Norman Island which have a castaway feel.

4. Antigua – considered more as a Southern Caribbean destination, but also occasionally appears in Eastern Caribbean sailings and is a popular stop with its 365 beaches and delightful capital St John's, where ships dock..

5. San Juan – the Spanish spirit runs through the narrow stone streets of the Old Town of Puerto Rico's capital with 16th century balconied houses and sheltered plazas, guarded by fortresses and old city walls.

6. Bahamas – the capital Nassau pops into several cruise itineraries, with its pastel pink colonial buildings, busy Straw Market and dazzling sand beaches of nearby Paradise Island with its collection of hotels, cafes and water sports.

7. St Kitts & Nevis - sister islands with pretty landscapes dotted with old sugar mills that reflect their evocative plantation history. While St Kitts is a popular stop for larger ships, sleepier Nevis plays host to smaller vessels.

8. Anguilla – miles of deserted beaches of blindingly-white sands, sumptuous hotels and top-flight restaurants help to give this British territory an air of exclusivity.

9. St Barts – French chic at its finest. This may be the smallest of the French Caribbean isles, but it is the most glamorous with a steady stream of celebrity visitors who revel in the unashamedly upscale surroundings.

10. Dominican Republic – famous for its beaches, but this Spanish Caribbean nation is bursting with history, intoxicating Latin culture and a rugged hinterland that makes it an adventurer's paradise.

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10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

Cruise-and-stays – with sailings from various Florida ports and the islands themselves, including departures from Barbados, San Juan and Havana, it is easy to tag a land-stay on to a sailing.

Hurricane season – runs from June to November. Cruise ships change course to avoid stormy weather, but this could involve last-minute itinerary changes and missing planned port stops.

Different durations – sailings vary from one week to two or three weeks, especially if sailing from Europe where it can take at least eight days to reach the islands.

Plan ahead – Eastern Caribbean itineraries tend to call at several islands, so research excursions and look up the best beaches – and check whether to book an excursion.

Catch some culture – soak up the Dominican Republic's merengue rhythms; explore the maritime heritage of Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua; and absorb tales of piracy and treasure in the Bahamas.

Stock up on US dollars – these are official tender on some islands and unofficial tender on others where they are accepted, but your change might be in the local currency.

Consider a car – the islands are easy to get around and having your own wheels brings more freedom to seek out less touristy areas. On English Caribbean islands, locals drive on the left.

Big ship or small ship – larger ships will visit more developed ports such as St Maarten, St Kitts and St Thomas while smaller vessels will call at quieter islands including Nevis, St Barts and also St John in the USVIs.

Stay streetwise – some Caribbean destinations have higher crime rates and tourists can be targeted, so check the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office website for latest information and as with all new destinations, stay alert when exploring on your own.

Choice of departures – these range from US ports such as Florida favourites Miami, Fort Lauderdale and Port Canaveral to New York or other US East coast ports including Charleston. Some sailings start from within the islands, while others sail from European ports including Southampton and Hamburg.

