

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN



BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

Year-round temperatures of around 20-30 degrees Celsius make the Southern Caribbean ideal cruising territory for summer and winter. Peak season is from December to March as this offers an ideal escape from Europe's icy winters. While the Caribbean hurricane season runs from June to November, several destinations in the Southern Caribbean such as Barbados, Grenada and the Dutch ABC Islands are considered to be on the edge or outside the hurricane belt. While this does not mean they are never hit by hurricanes (they have been), it happens less frequently, so sailings here are less likely to be affected than in other areas of the Caribbean.



10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

Colonial flavours – the islands reflect the European nations that colonised them. Discover Dutch gable houses in Curacao, English traditions of cricket and afternoon tea in Barbados, and the Gallic sophistication of St Barts.

Rainforest riches – explore Grenada's Grand Etang National Park, sub-tropical rainforest covering the tiny isles of Dominica and Saba, and the forested slopes of St Lucia and St Vincent.

Unesco treasures – from St Kitts' Brimstone Hill Fortress, to candy-coloured colonial Dutch architecture of Curacao's capital Willemstad, and Dominica's volcanic Morne Trois Pitons National Park.

Island retreats – escape to the pocket-size Dutch isle of Saba; St Kitt's pretty and less-developed sister island Nevis; and the gorgeous Grenadines that include Bequia, Union Island and the Tobago Cays where swimming with turtles is an escapist treat.

Sugar and spice – abandoned sugar mills dotted across the likes of Barbados, Antigua and St Kitts are clues to the "white gold" produced on plantations, while grand estate houses have been turned into fascinating museums. Grenada is also famed for spices and is one of the world's foremost producers of nutmeg.

Natural thrills – St Lucia lays claim to the world's only drive-in volcano, plus sulphur springs and waterfalls; Dominica, known as the Nature Isle, boasts a volcanic Boiling Lake; while Montserrat is dominated by an active volcano.

Go wild – monkeys and mongooses run wild across the islands, while the Caribbean waters are home to various species of turtles and whales. Trinidad & Tobago are famed for birdlife, especially hummingbirds, while parrots are endemic on several islands.

Hitting the shops – from department stores and designer boutiques to atmospheric local shops and colourful markets, there's plenty to pull on the purse-strings.

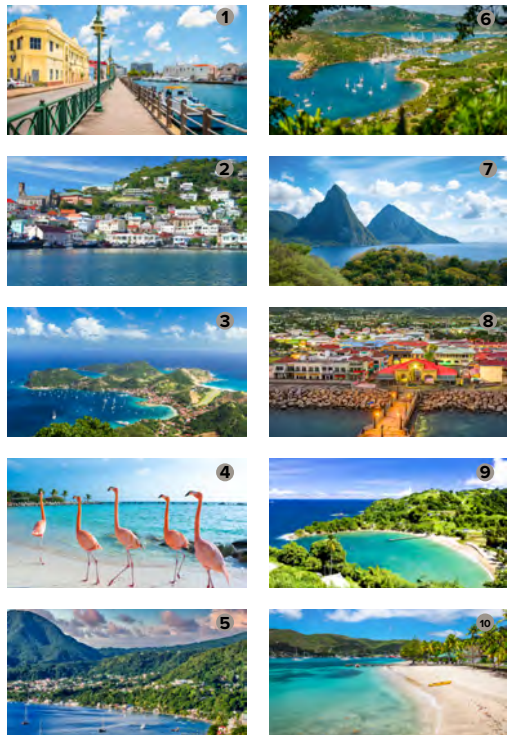
Year-round cruising – the tropical climate means there are good conditions for winter and summer sailings with temperatures remaining blissfully warm.

Get beached – many islands have been blessed with powder sands, from the south and west coasts of Barbados, to the long beaches of Aruba, the chic sands of the French islands and numerous beaches of Antigua which claims to have a different one for each day of the year.

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10 KEY ATTRACTIONS



1. Barbados – one of the more sophisticated islands with Bridgetown its bustling capital. Plantation house tours, botanical gardens and animal attractions are top visitor draws, though the island's top attraction is the impressive underground limestone cavern Harrison's Cave.

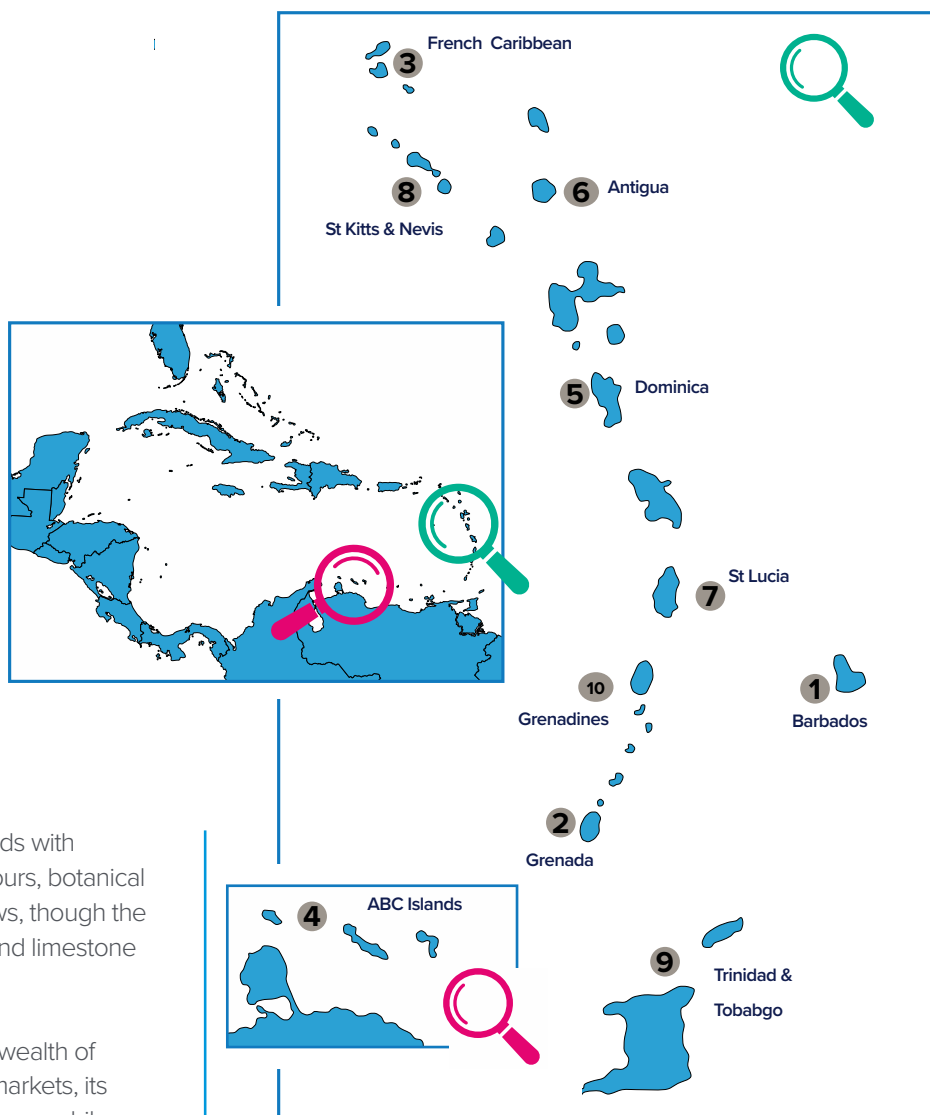
2. Grenada – known as the "Spice Island" for the wealth of spices grown here and sold in pungent-scented markets, its Grand Anse beach is one of the best in the Caribbean while capital St George's is hailed as one of the prettiest towns in the region.

3. French Caribbean – Guadeloupe, Martinique, St Barts and St Martin offer Gallic chic with a tropical twist thanks to stylish hotels, designer boutiques and excellent restaurants.

4. ABC islands – being part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands gives Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao Dutch heritage that mixes in with their modern-day American flavour. The islands are known for their beaches and outstanding diving, particularly Bonaire.

5. Dominica – tiny, rugged and unspoilt, it is nicknamed the Caribbean's "Nature Isle" due to its rainforest and natural wonders best explored on hiking trips.

6. Antigua – the island's rich maritime history includes Nelson's Dockyard, the world's only working Georgian dockyard and the place where a young Horatio Nelson was based in the 1780s. Active adventures include boat trips, swimming with string-rays and zipline adventures through the rainforest.



7. St Lucia – a beautiful island of two halves with the flatter north, close to the cruise dock in the capital Castries, boasting the best beaches. These contrast with the lush, rugged topography of the south and famous twin Piton peaks.

8. St Kitts & Nevis – the sister isles are quite different with St Kitts the busier and more developed cruise stop with its attractive capital Basseterre and known for its rainforest hikes and scenic railway. Nevis is smaller and quieter with a more escapist feel.

9. Trinidad & Tobago – these sister isles are like chalk and cheese with Trinidad a larger commercial hub and Tobago the archetypal hideaway with beautiful beaches and sleepy villages, but both are famous for their fabulous birdlife and rich flora and fauna.

10. Grenadines – this string of islands stretching from St Vincent in the north to Grenada in the south ticks the box as idyllic, castaway Caribbean. Stand-out islands include pretty Bequia, Union Island, Mayreau and the Tobago Cays.

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10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

Get set for adventure – it's not just beaches as the islands are different and the topography varies, so check out which ones offer the best hiking and biking options, 4x4 safaris, zipwire rides and diving/snorkelling.

Plan ahead – with so many islands located fairly close together, itineraries are generally port rich with few sea days, so research excursions and look up the best beaches, as these may be within walking distance or a short taxi ride from the cruise dock.

Different durations – sailings generally range from one week upwards as it takes two days to reach this region from Florida ports. Some cruises from Europe will last around two or three weeks as it can take eight days to reach the islands. Clients may choose to sail one way and fly the other, particularly on repositioning cruises.

Pick your departure – sail down from US ports such as Miami or Fort Lauderdale, though this will take longer than starting a voyage from within the islands with Barbados and Puerto Rico being popular departure points. Longer cruises start at European ports such as Southampton, Barcelona and Marseille.

Hurricane aware – hurricane season runs from June to November, but certain islands are regarded as being outside the hurricane belt, so they are affected less frequently than other islands.

Big ship v small ship – bigger ships will stick to key points such as Barbados, Antigua and St Lucia, while smaller ships will sail through the Grenadines, call at Nevis instead of St Kitts and St Barts or Guadeloupe.

Cruise-and-stays – with such a choice of departure points it's worth adding a few nights to explore Florida and sample the theme parks or, for cruises departing from within the Caribbean, staying on one of the islands.

Stay safe – some islands suffer from higher crime rates and tourists can be targeted, so check the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office advice for up-to-date information and as with all new destinations, stay alert when exploring independently.

Into the party spirit – West Indians know how to party and it's always worth finding out about local celebrations and street parties or even bars that have a good musical vibe.

Dollar delights – while several islands have their own currencies, the US dollar is generally accepted, though change may be given in the local currency. On the French islands, the euro is the official currency.