

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

WESTERN CARIBBEAN



BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

The Western Caribbean's tropical climate is fine for year-round cruising with temperatures hovering around 20-30 degrees Celsius, though winter tends to be the peak as the region offers a balmy escape from cold conditions in Europe. 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 are also good times to visit as these are considered shoulder season and there are less crowds.



10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

Year-round appeal – this collection of tropical islands and countries enjoys ideal conditions and a warm climate that lends itself to cruising throughout the seasons.

Ancient civilisations – Mexico has an enviable array of Mayan treasures that include the well-preserved ancient port city of Tulum and impressive pre-Columbian ruins of Chichen Itza on the Yucatan Peninsula. Other Mayan remains can be found in Belize and Guatemala.

Contrasting cultures – from Key West's laidback quirky charm and Central America's vibrant Latin spirit to Cuba's unique mix of tropical Communism and Jamaica's jammin' reggae beat.

Beautiful beaches – sun-worshippers are spoilt for choice with the white sands of Roatan island off the coast of Honduras; Grand Cayman's famous Seven Mile Beach; and the sweeping sands of Mexico's Costa Maya.

Private retreats – larger cruise lines have their own islands and private resorts scattered across the Bahamas, Haiti and Belize which feature in selected itineraries.

Panama passage – some cruises include the Panama Canal, either a full transit or a partial one where ships sail through the locks at the Caribbean entrance into Gatun Lake, before turning around and sailing back out.

Diverse departure points – guests can choose from a line-up of Florida ports such as Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Port Canaveral plus New Orleans, the Texan port of Galveston, Mobile, Alabama, and New York.

Watersports galore – the warm clear waters of the Caribbean Sea are a proverbial aquatic playground of dolphin encounters, sea kayaking, snorkelling, yachting trips and even swimming with string-rays.

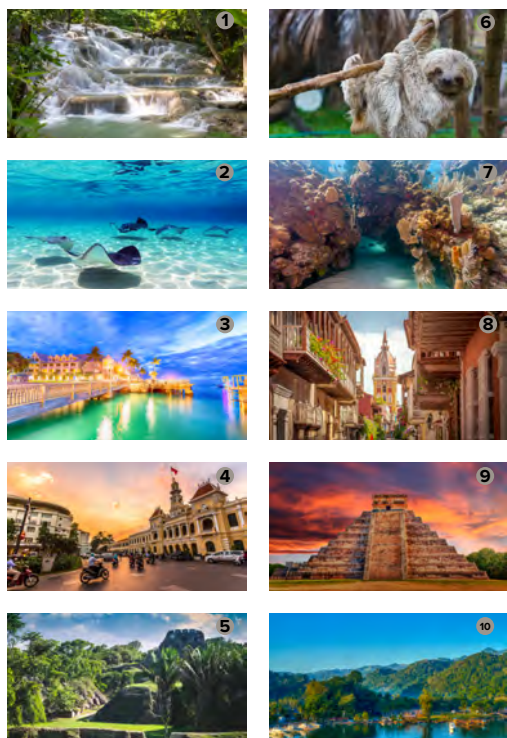
Exotic adventures – tropical jungle hikes, thrilling zipwire rides and Jeep safaris contrast with waterfall climbs, white-water rafting and wildlife-spotting treks.

World-class diving – off the coast of Belize sits the world's second-largest barrier reef with diving and snorkelling trips offered from Belize City and Roatan. Grand Cayman offers some of the world's best diving with pristine coral reefs and amazing marine life.

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

WESTERN CARIBBEAN

10 KEY ATTRACTIONS



1. Jamaica – a treasure chest of natural attractions awaits on this ruggedly beautiful island, where visitors can clamber up unforgettable Dunn's River Falls, take scenic river rides on bamboo rafts or explore its fascinating plantation history and reggae heritage.

2. Grand Cayman – famed for powder sand beaches and gin clear waters, this is perfect for exploring underwater reefs and feeding tame rays at a shallow sandbar named Stingray City. As this is a tender port, wind and sea conditions may prevent ships from docking.

3. Key West – situated at the end of the Florida Keys, this tiny isle is the USA's southernmost point, and has a kooky Caribbean feel with pastel clapboard houses underpinned by the spirit of former resident hell-raising author Ernest Hemingway.

4. Cuba – the vibrant hub of rum and revolution gives a tropical twist to Communism, but it is off-limits to US cruise companies for political reasons. Famously the home of cigars and salsa, it makes a fascinating stop for non-American lines that call here.

5. Belize – an adventurers' paradise with a jungle-filled interior of exotic fauna; an underground cave network best explored on cave-tubing trips; Mayan ruins; and coastal waters with an outstanding coral reef and bountiful marine-life.

6. Puerto Limon – gateway to the unspoilt and unforgettable eco-tourism paradise of Costa Rica where rainforest hikes, white-water rafting and boat rides uncover troops of scampering monkeys, sleepy sloths and, if you're lucky, brightly-billed toucans.

7. Roatan – the largest and most developed of the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras, it is heaven for divers and snorkellers with gorgeous beaches and coral reefs teeming with tropical fish.

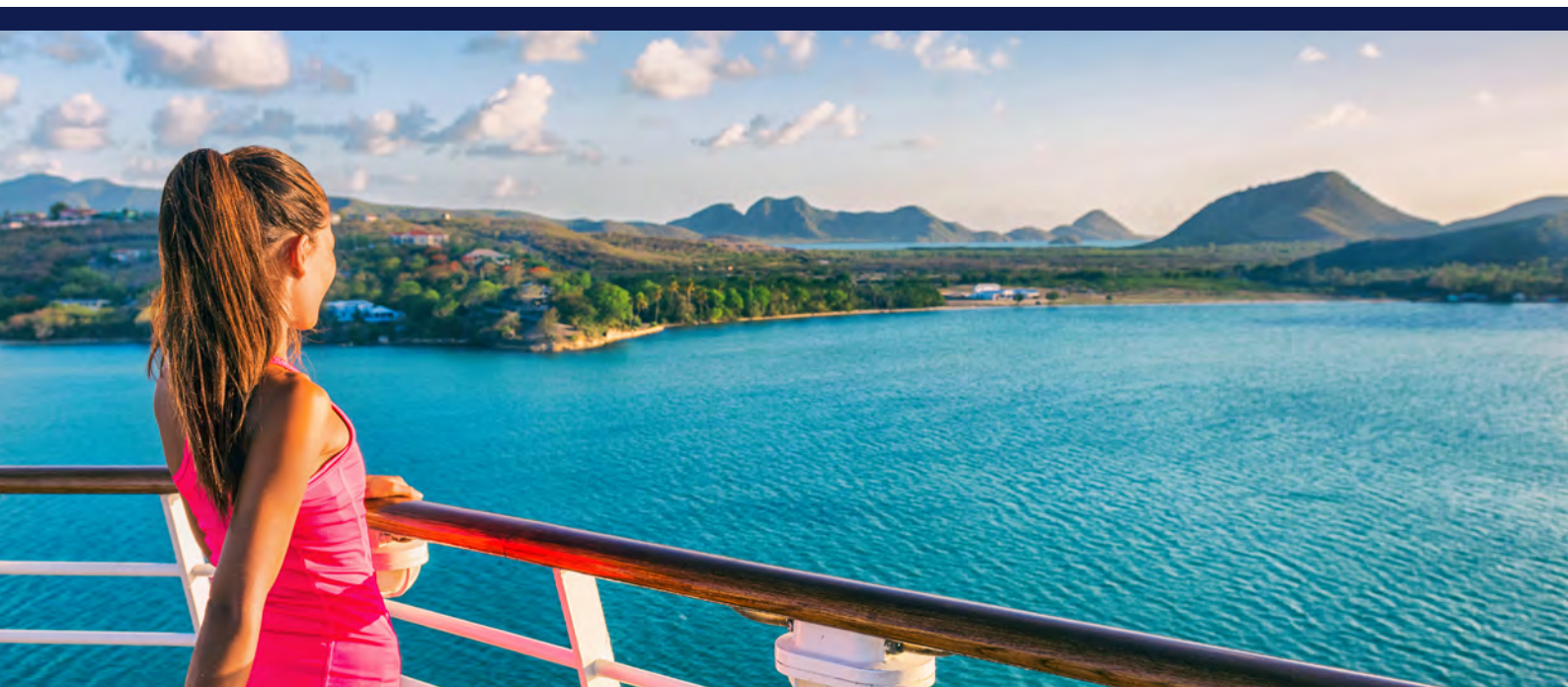
8. Cartagena – this evocative city is Colombia's historic gem with cobbled streets, atmospheric plazas and balconied houses oozing colonial charm, and surrounded by fortified walls constructed in 1586 after it was raided by Sir Francis Drake.

9. Mexican waves – the Yucatan Peninsula, home to some of the country's most renowned Mayan ruins, is reached from cruise ports at Progreso, Costa Maya and the tiny isle of Cozumel just off-shore.

10. Santo Tomas – this Guatemalan port city is the springboard from which to visit Antigua, the atmospheric former capital, full of stately colonial buildings, and the wonderful scenery of the Quirigua National Park with its collection of 8th century Mayan ruins.

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

WESTERN CARIBBEAN



10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

Two-centre temptations – the variety of US departure points lends itself to cruise-and stays combining voyages with the bright lights of New York, Florida's theme parks or the musical city of New Orleans.

Differing durations – itineraries vary from four or five nights, generally containing two port stops, to one-week and ten-night voyages that combine Caribbean islands and Central American destinations. Longer voyages of two or three weeks may also traverse the Panama Canal.

Beware hurricanes – hurricane season runs from June to November, but storms generally occur from August onwards. Ships monitor weather patterns and change course to avoid stormy conditions, but this could mean itinerary changes and missing planned port stops.

Do your homework – with such a variety of ports, plan ahead to see which attractions are best visited on organised excursions, bearing in mind that some locations may be difficult to reach independently.

Taste of Central America – some tours offer a more local flavour with visits to indigenous communities, sampling local cuisine or exploring Mayan culture, while cookery classes give guests a chance to rustle up homespun specialties.

Stay safe – some Latin American countries and Caribbean islands have higher crime rates and tourists travelling independently can be obvious targets, so check latest information and alerts on the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office website.

Book early – some excursions, and particularly those involving bucket-list experiences, will sell out first, so recommend that clients book those before setting sail.

Taking the plunge – to capitalise on the excellent underwater corals and marine life, it's worth recommending to interested clients that they take a dive qualification before arriving.

Panama Canal experience – point out that passengers on partial transits are generally not allowed to disembark at Gatun Lake unless they are on an official cruise ship excursion.

Currency considerations – the US dollar is king throughout this region as it is legal tender in some destinations and unofficially accepted in others.

