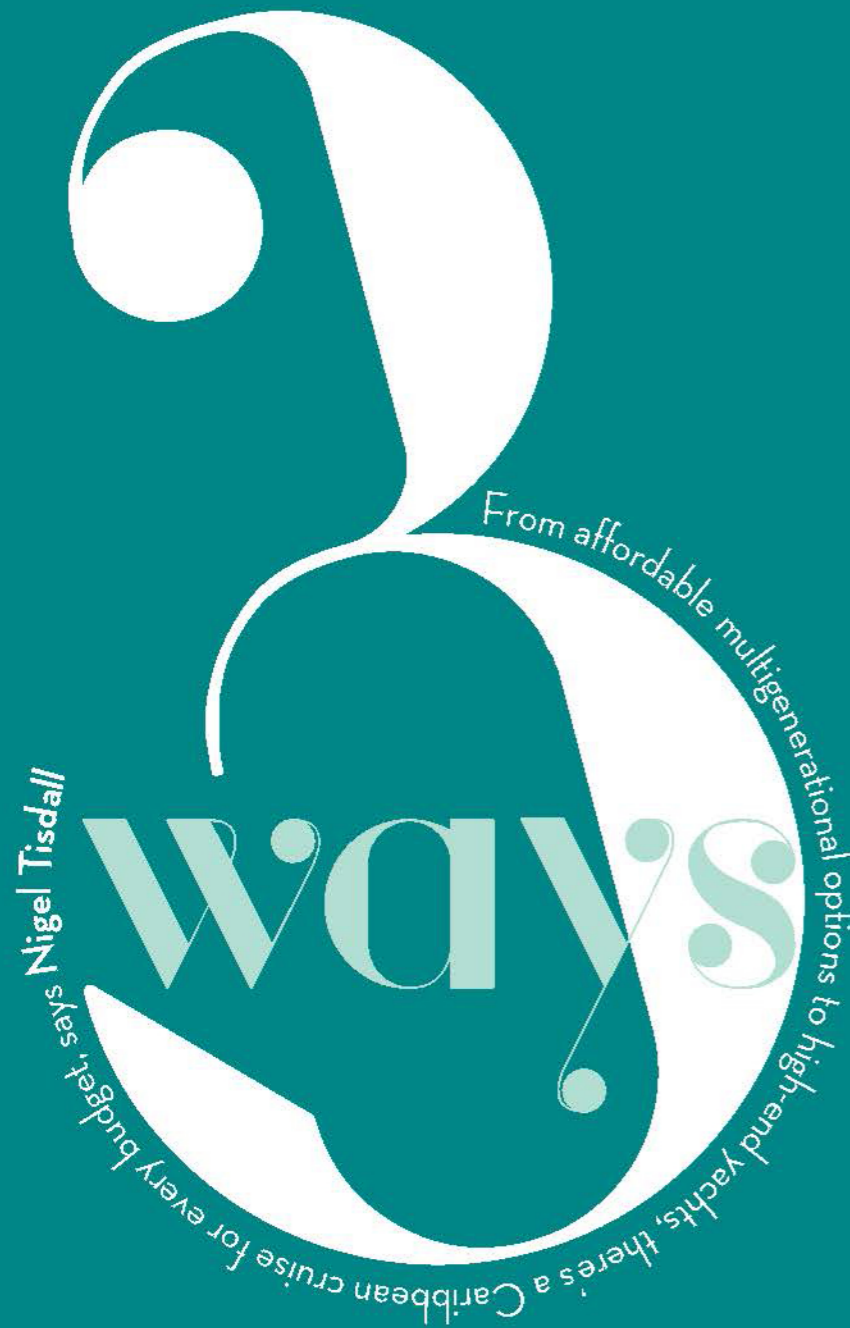


CARIBBEAN CRUISES



Everyone loves the idea of a Caribbean holiday and an island-hopping cruise is an ideal way to get a taste of this vibrant and diverse region, renowned for its palm-lined beaches, potent rum cocktails, lilted tunes and charismatic people.

With the first full winter season for two years under way, the mood is buoyant as new ships arrive and operators compete to offer the most lavish comforts, show-stopping entertainment or value packages. The choice is wide, including transatlantic sailings and embarkations in attractive homeports such as Miami, Bridgetown and San Juan. Whether it's a quick let's-party voyage, a highbrow tour of contrasting islands or a luxury cruise with plush staterooms and a butler to polish your sunglasses, there is almost certainly a ship, itinerary and price point that can excite a client's interest.

Save



MSC Seashore, Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve, Bahamas

FAMILY ADVENTURES MSC CRUISES

With free children's clubs, up to 11 types of cabin and competitive prices, MSC Cruises' year-round sailings work well for a family or multigenerational holiday. Embarkation points include Port Canaveral (ideal for pairing with Orlando theme parks), Miami and Bridgetown, with sailings from four to 14 nights. A strong selling point is that new ships such as *MSC Seashore*, which launched in December, are purpose-built for warm-weather cruising, offering spacious pools, including an infinity pool with submerged loungers, alfresco restaurants and an ocean-facing spa. Passengers are an international mix, with many in their early 40s.

Book it: A 14-night Caribbean Antilles cruise aboard *MSC Seaside*, departing Bridgetown on November 28, costs from £839 per person, based on two sharing. Flights, drinks, Wi-Fi and gratuities are extra. msccruises.co.uk

CRUISE AND STAY MARELLA CRUISES

With its top-class restaurants, love of cricket and historic links with the UK, Barbados is an excellent choice for clients looking to add some time on land pre or post-cruise. Tui has a wide choice of hotels here and most guests extend their trip by three to seven nights. This winter, the operator's cruise line expanded its sailings from Bridgetown with two ships, *Marella Discovery* and adult-only *Marella Explorer 2*, offering weekly island-hopping cruises until April 13, including flights from airports across the UK. Itineraries are commendably varied with calls into French, Dutch and US islands including gems such as old-school Bequia and Bonaire.

Book it: A seven-night Paradise Islands cruise aboard *Marella Explorer 2*, departing Bridgetown on March 12, costs from £1,309 per person, based on two sharing. Includes flights from Birmingham, transfers and gratuities. tui.co.uk/cruise

YEAR-ROUND FUN VIRGIN VOYAGES

Many operators cruise the Caribbean only in winter, so it's a boon that Virgin Voyages offers year-round departures on two ships sailing from Miami on itineraries spanning four to eight nights. These are high-spirited, adult-only cruises (app and wristband essential). And they are as much about having a fun time on board and at a purpose-built Beach Club on Bimini in the Bahamas as discovering the delights of eastern Caribbean ports in the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Average passenger age is 40 to 60 and prices include meals from 20-plus eateries, soft drinks, Wi-Fi, fitness classes, live entertainment and gratuities.

Book it: An eight-night Eastern Caribbean Antilles cruise aboard *Valiant Lady*, departing Miami on March 11, costs from £1,315 per person, based on two sharing. Flights are extra. virginvoyages.com

FIVE TOP TIPS FOR SELLING CARIBBEAN CRUISES



By Neil Duncan, general manager – product, planning and marketing, Marella Cruises

- 1 Look carefully at itineraries: analyse your clients' interests and identify ports of call that can meet their requirements.
- 2 Emphasise value: so much is included in a Caribbean cruise, from generous meals and daily entertainment to stops at five or more islands, that you find many customers now prefer this to a conventional beach holiday.
- 3 Stress that the Caribbean is a long way to go for seven nights: a 14-night cruise or some added time on the gateway islands invariably makes sense.
- 4 Flag up included gratuities: while North Americans are well-versed with tipping, British travellers dislike this and other 'hidden' costs. No tips required brings peace of mind and ensures a happy relationship with crew members.
- 5 Every ship has its own atmosphere: regular cruisers have favourite vessels they follow round the world, so explain why a suggested ship is so appealing. Caribbean cruising attracts strong repeat business and we see 35%-50% of passengers returning at a later stage.

Spend



"2023 is already shaping up to be our best year ever and a record number of bookings came in after Christmas. We're investing in a new \$350 million mega-cruise terminal in PortMiami and next winter our Caribbean fleet increases to six ships. One unique selling point is that all Florida departures spend a day at Ocean Cay, our reclaimed private island with eight beaches and a marine reserve in the Bahamas, while Barbados sailings tie in with BA charter flights from Gatwick. A wide choice of excursions includes sustainable and accessible options, and agents should note that pre-booked Explorer packages and other ancillaries are commissionable."

Steve Williams, director of sales UK & Ireland, MSC Cruises



El Morro fortress, San Juan, Puerto Rico

WORLD-CLASS SIGHTS

VIKING CRUISES

There's much more to the Caribbean than sun, sea and rum punches by the pool. This balmy region boasts 21 World Heritage Sites and a fascinating blend of British, French, Dutch, Spanish, African and Carib influences. A good pick for travellers, rather than cruisers, adult-only line Viking puts destinations to the fore with an excursion at every port. These include a visit to the 16th-century El Morro fortress in Puerto Rico, or guests can pay a little extra to take a ride on the St Kitts Scenic Railway. There are also lectures and onboard historians.

Book it: Viking Sea's 10-night West Indies Explorer itinerary takes in nine countries and costs from £3,590 per person, based on two sharing, including flights, meals and gratuities, departing from San Juan on December 20. viking.com

THE SPORTY OPTION

WINDSTAR CRUISES

For active clients who are into beaches, snorkelling and watersports, suggest a cruise that visits playground islands such as Saint Martin, Anguilla, St Barts and Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands. New for next winter, Windstar Cruises' seven-day Beach Fun & Sun voyages hop between such party places on board *Wind Surf*, the world's largest sailing ship. This eye-catching, all-suite yacht carries 342 guests and comes with a watersports platform, while bookable shore activities include golf, piloting a two-person Zodiac and beach days. This is also a good choice for families with older teens.

Book it: A seven-day sailing on *Wind Surf*, departing Saint Martin on December 16, costs from £1,827 per person, based on two sharing. Flights, gratuities and alcoholic drinks are extra. windstarcruises.com

ATLANTIC CROSSINGS

P&O CRUISES

For clients disinclined to fly or who can devote time to a longer cruise, consider P&O Cruises' round voyages to the Caribbean, departing Southampton for 24 or 35 nights, available from October 22, with a stop in Madeira on the way out. The operator's commitment to cruising this region will be evident when its newest ship *Arvia* is named at a grand beachside ceremony in Barbados on March 16. The vessel's 16 guest decks include an innovative onboard rum distillery, while restaurants feature dishes such as jerk chicken supreme created by Trinidad-raised TV chef Shivi Ramoutar.

Book it: A 24-night sailing on adult-only *Aurora*, departing Southampton on October 22, costs from £2,499 per person, based on two sharing. Most drinks cost extra. shinerewardsclub.com





“While round voyages from Miami are our bread and butter, UK travellers like flying straight to the region to embark in Barbados or Aruba, and we’re noticing a trend to take longer holidays of two to three weeks, including land stays. Oceania prefers a ‘Your World. Your Way’ model to all-inclusive, which brings lower rates and flexibility, while superb cuisine has been a trademark for the last 20 years.”

Bernard Carter, vice-president and managing director EMEA, Oceania Cruises



PUSH THE BOAT OUT
REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES

For clients with something to celebrate or who enjoy five-star treats, Regent Seven Seas Cruises provides ‘every luxury included’ voyages of seven to 14 nights from Miami or Barbados. Flights, transfers, Wi-Fi, all drinks, speciality restaurants, excursions, gratuities and even laundry are rolled into the price, creating a liberated mood. A standout itinerary is its Cupid to Carnival cruise from Bridgetown visiting super-scenic islands such as Dominica, Grenada and Saint Lucia, while Miami sailings next winter include St Barts and the British Virgin Islands. **Book it:** Ten nights’ all-inclusive aboard *Seven Seas Navigator*, departing Bridgetown on February 13, costs from £5,999 per person based on two sharing. rssc.com

COOK AND CRUISE
OCEANIA CRUISES

Oceania Vista, the operator’s first new ship in a decade, will offer cruises from Miami from November 19. Selling points include the most spacious standard staterooms on the high seas (all with a veranda plus a dedicated concierge for solo travellers), a staff ratio of two crew to every three guests and a Culinary Center offering hands-on cooking classes. For first-time Caribbean

visitors seeking an in-depth taste of the region suggest a 12-day voyage that calls into contrasting islands such as Barbados, Dominica, St Barts and Puerto Rico.

Book it: Ten days on *Oceania Vista* departing Miami on December 1 costs from £5,409 per person, based on two sharing. Flights, gratuities and alcoholic drinks extra. oceaniacruises.com

SMALL AND LUXURIOUS
EMERALD CRUISES

The glamorous side of the Caribbean has inspired Emerald Cruises to base two luxury yachts, *Emerald Azzurra* and *Emerald Sakara*, here from November 17. Carrying no more than 100 guests, served by 72 crew, the ships can visit quieter ports of call such as Sainte-Pierre in Martinique and the snorkelling paradise of Tobago Cays in the Grenadines, with shore excursions included. The average age of guests is around mid-50s but the yachts’ stylish design plus an arsenal of ‘toys’ spanning water scooters, an over-ocean trampoline and e-bikes makes this a good sell to younger couples too.

Book it: A seven-night Eastern Caribbean with St Barths cruise on *Emerald Azzurra*, departing Bridgetown on December 1, costs from £5,010 per person, based on two sharing. All-inclusive, with flights. Premium drinks extra. emeraldcruiises.co.uk **TW**

Splurge



St Barts

PICTURES: MSC Rights; Viking Cruises; Simon Harvey Photography; Shutterstock/Gary Ives