# Jane Archer lines up 10 reasons to book a cruise in the Caribbean

ust weeks after the Caribbean was hit by two of the strongest hurricanes to sweep across the region for a decade, ports were reopening and cruise ships and visitors being welcomed back.

The swift clean-up operation after last September's storms was vital for the islands left devastated because they desperately needed money to help rebuild homes and services. Tourism chiefs also had to get the message across that, terrible though the damage was,

more than 70% of the region was unscathed.

The number of British cruisers visiting the Caribbean in 2017 rose slightly compared with the previous year (275,000 from 266,000 in 2016), according to Clia UK & Ireland. However, as the hurricanes hit in September, the real marker will be when 2018 numbers are collated.

Clia UK director Andy Harmer is optimistic. He says: "The Caribbean remains a firm favourite with British cruisers. The region is very much open for business to welcome cruise guests and tourists from across the world."

Ben Bouldin, Royal Caribbean International's associate vice-president and UK managing director, says: "Last year our region became the strongest-performing source market for the Caribbean, with passenger volume growing by 6.2%."

Still stuck for ideas? Here are 10 reasons why clients should book a Caribbean cruise.

# **DACTION MAN**

Adrenaline junkies can get their fix on ATV jungle adventures in Costa Maya, scooting around Saint Lucia on Segways and horse riding in the sea in Jamaica. Those visiting St Maarten with Norwegian Cruise Line can take a chairlift up Sentry Hill and speed down at up 56mph on the world's steepest zipline. Add on a schooner ride and they'll head back up the mountain and surf down on an inner tube. Price





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**CRUISE CARIBBEAN DESTINATIONS** 



from £105 per person for five hours. Book it: NCL's Norwegian Jade is visiting St Maarten on a 10-day Southern Caribbean voyage from Miami in November. From £749 per person cruise-only.

#### **PEUN IN THE SUN**

Non-stop carnivals and festivals mean Caribbean life is never dull. Cruisers in Antigua on a Sunday can drop in on the Shirley Heights barbecue, Barbados has a colourful Crop Over carnival from June to August, while Saint Lucia's Arts and Heritage Festival in October means music, street parties and art exhibitions. Come February in the Dominican Republic, it's carnival time, with feathers, floats and dancing in the street. Book it: Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess will be in Antigua and Saint Lucia in October during a 10-day eastern Caribbean cruise from Fort Lauderdale. From £599 per person

# DELVE INTO THE PAST

The Caribbean doesn't have Roman ruins or medieval castles, but there is in the past, including pirates, buccaneers and plantation houses. Brimstone Hill Fortress in St Kitts and Fort Rodney on Pigeon Island in Saint Lucia are a testament to the constant wars between the French and British. In Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, clients can visit magnificent cathedrals built by the Spanish

Book it: Marella Cruises' Marella Discovery is spending two days in Havana on a seven-night Cuban Fusion voyage from Montego Bay in Jamaica in January 2019 From £1,301 per person including flights.

# **DEACHES, BABY**

choice when it comes to topping up their tan on white-sand beaches. Clear favourites include Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman, Varadero in Cuba, Grand Anse in Grenada and St Jean in St Barths. Aruba and Barbados

plenty to excite those interested

Cruise passengers are spoilt for

Antigua with Cruises

LEFT:

RIGHT: Brimstone Hill Fortress,



There is plenty to excite those interested in the past, including pirates and plantation houses

have miles and miles of beautiful white sand, Antigua claims to have a beach for every day of the year, while the sand at Anse des Pitons in Saint Lucia takes top prize in the picturesque stakes. Book it: Oceania Cruises' 12-night Allure of the Islands voyage next February is a beach lover's dream, with Aruba, Barbados, St Barths and Grenada among calls. From £3,489 per person including flights.

# GO LARGE (OR SMALL)

Ships big and small, luxurious and lively sail the Caribbean some or

all of the year, offering cruises to suit everyone. Families can take their pick from the world's largest cruise ships, aka Royal Caribbean International's Oasis-class vessels, which offer everything from ziplines to water slides and laser tag, or meet Mickey and pals on Disney Cruise Line sailings. For a taste of luxury, Seabourn has yacht-like ships with posh suites, butlers and upmarket spas.

Book it: Royal Caribbean's Symphony of the Seas, its newest Oasis-class ship, is sailing the Caribbean year-round starting in October. From £1,069 per person cruise-only for a seven-night round-trip from Miami in February 2019

# **SAIL IN TO THE SUNSET**

Who says romance is dead? Loved-up couples can have sun, sand, sea and cuddles under the canvas on the Star Clippers and Windstar Cruises sailing ships that call the Caribbean home in winter. These ships are the ultimate in yachting casual, with onboard lectures and fitness classes, relaxing days ashore, water sports from the ship and low-key entertainment to



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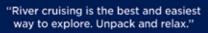
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# **DESTINATIONS CARIBBEAN CRUISE**

while away evenings under the stars. Book it: Star Clippers' Royal Clipper is offering seven-night Windward Islands cruises round-trip from Barbados this winter. From £1,535 per person cruiseonly departing January 26, 2019.

### ISLAND-HOPPING MADE FASY

Clients staying in hotels can visit different islands on one holiday, flying or taking the ferry between them, but it's much easier to hop on a cruise and sail from one country to another, unpacking once and waking each day in a new destination. Most seven-night itineraries visit four countries, some squeeze in six, but for an islandhopping fest, suggest a 14-night sailing with P&O Cruises, Marella Cruises or Celebrity Cruises.

Book it: P&O Cruises' Azura is visiting eight islands in 14 nights on voyages from Barbados this winter. From £1,299 per person departing December 1, including flights.

## THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Cruises are great value, with all meals in the dining rooms and self-service buffet included in the price. There's nothing to pay for kids' clubs or entertainment - not just lavish shows but live bands, karaoke and dance parties - and most don't charge for activities. All will likely cost extra in a hotel unless clients book an allinclusive property. If drinks-inclusive prices appeal, point them to luxury





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lines Silversea and Crystal Cruises. **Book it:** Carnival Cruise Line offers an eight-day eastern Caribbean cruise round-trip from Miami on Carnival Vista from £576 per person cruise-only departing September 8, 2018.



Star Clippers' Royal Clipper

LEFT: Carnival Cruise Line's Carnival Vista

# DOFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Changing aircraft to get to your holiday is a hassle, which is why most Britons stay on islands with direct flights from the UK and miss seeing little gems such as Nevis, Norman Island, Port Elizabeth and Tobago Cays. No such problems for those sailing with SeaDream Yacht Club, Windstar Cruises or Seabourn - their ships seek out secluded islands in the BVIs, French West Indies and the Grenadines where the local bar might be a beach shack and excursions mean a few hours on a deserted beach. Book it: SeaDream has a seven-night cruise from Bridgetown to Marigot that calls at Mayreau, Bequia, Ile des Saintes. St Barths and Nevis. From £2,636 per person cruise-only departing January 26, 2019.

## HITCHED WITHOUT A HITCH

Couples who dream of saying 'I do' on a Caribbean island are spoilt for choice, with cruise operators such as Holland America Line, Princess, Disney and NCL. All have wedding organisers to take the stress out of planning the big day (couples are responsible for arranging the marriage licence), which might be by a beach or in a gazebo. Holland America even has a little chapel on Half Moon Cay, its private island. **Book it:** Holland America is visiting Half Moon Cay on a 10-night southern Caribbean cruise round-trip from Fort Lauderdale in November. From £799 per person cruise-only. Its beach or chapel weddings cost from \$2,450. TW