Special Advertising Feature

ISLAND DESTINATIONS

FINDING YOUR OWN SLICE OF Sand

PHOTO COURTESY OF HYATT INCLUSIVE COLLECTION

The Caribbean beckons, and you can find your own patch of sandy beach to enjoy this winter if you plan your trip carefully.

by Julie Bennett

A reported 20 million cruise passengers have arrived in the countries and islands of the Caribbean so far this year, according to Tourism Analytics. On June 8, 2026, a record-breaking 33,254 visitors from megaships carrying 4,000 to over 7,000 passengers landed at the Nassau Cruise Port in a single day. The restaurants and souvenir shops in some port cities are so mobbed, it's almost impossible to grab a tee shirt depicting that deserted beach most visitors will never see.

Savvy travelers and travel advisors report that you can avoid those crowds and enjoy Caribbean beaches with a bit of research and advance planning. "For starters," advises Ray Snisky, group president of ALG Vacations® in Milwaukee, "stay away from crowded ports." Snisky's travel company, a Hyatt subsidiary and member of the U.S. Tour Operators Association, plans only land-based vacations. "If clients want to vacation on the Caribbean's most popular islands, like Jamaica and the Caymans," he says, "we book them into resorts that are far away from the ports."

The smaller ships of luxury cruise lines like Regent Seven Seas Cruises® and Oceania Cruises can slip into smaller harbors, but do include some larger ports on their itineraries. Thanks to websites like Cruise Mapper, you can choose a cruise when iconic ports are less crowded. The site tracks megacruise ships by destination and can tell how many of them will be in a single port on the same day. On January 19, 2027, for example, six megaships and their thousands of passengers will all be in Philipsburg, St. Maarten.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OCEANIA CRUISES

Book a cruise on a luxury ship like the Oceania Marina *to tuck into secluded harbors and enjoy exclusive shore excursions.*

WHEN AND WHERE TO GO

To escape that crush, schedule your trip at a less popular time, suggests Kathleen Chrystie, owner of Travel by Chrystie in Bluffton, South Carolina, and a member of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA). "Shoulder season generally runs late April through early June and again from November through mid-December. Most restaurants and shops remain open and fully staffed during these windows."

You can also escape by spending your vacation at a high-end resort with its own beach, restaurants and roster of activities. "Just a few years ago," Snisky recalls, "all-inclusive Caribbean resorts were places where you ate at buffets and picked up piña coladas from trays of drinks. Today, they've reached a world-class level of sophistication, with celebrity chefs and luxurious amenities."

"We're a tour operator and we begin by asking clients for their preferences." Snisky explains. "For instance, are they retirees planning a vacation with friends? If they are, we find an adults-only resort without a pool filled with noisy kids and send a limousine to the airport to take them there."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Multigenerational families prefer resorts with heightened amenities and villas with room options, Snisky adds, and foodies enjoy locations like the U.S. Virgin Islands, Aruba, Jamaica or the Grenadines, all known for their cuisine.

Caribbean resorts stock a variety of floating water toys for guests and have concierge desks in the lobby where more adventurous vacationers can book off-site experiences like hikes or fishing excursions. Such resorts are gated and provide security, a feature popular with travelers like Rachel Prentiss of Northbrook, Illinois. "My husband loves to snorkel, and he feels safe leaving me there when he goes off on a snorkel boat for the day."

The only drawback, says Prentiss, who has stayed at resorts on St. Maarten and Turks and Caicos, "is that if you stay at an all-inclusive resort, you tend to eat all your meals there. We took a walk from one and discovered an awesome row of local restaurants just a few steps away."

Most awesome of all may be eating fresh seafood prepared by your own private chef aboard a chartered yacht. Karyn Pavich, co-founder of the Sirena Collective travel agency in New York and an ASTA member, says, "You can rent a yacht for a week in the Caribbean for anywhere from $10,000 to well over $100,000. Most charters are for two to 12 people: couples, small families or a group of friends and family traveling together. Babies are welcome if they weigh at least 18 pounds and fit into a Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Mobility issues can be tough on charters, however, since cabins are usually below deck and getting on and off the boat can be difficult."

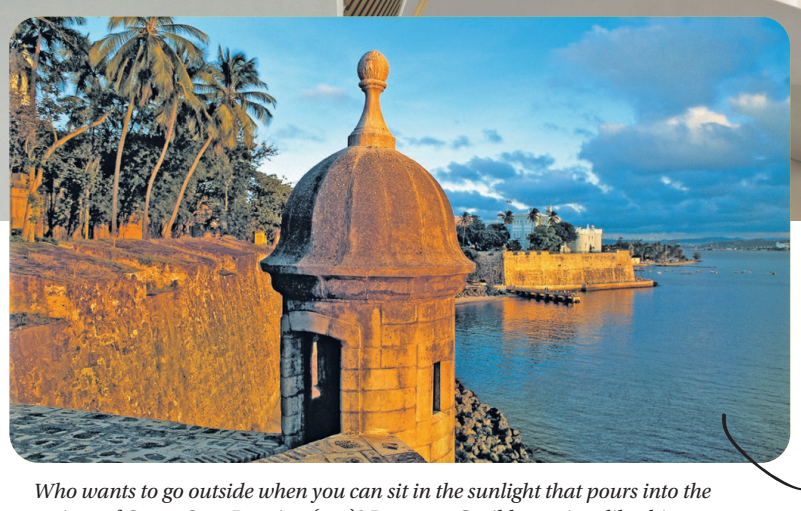
A good skipper will adapt the itinerary to your travel style, she adds. You can stroll through a colorful village for some shopping, plan a guided tour through an island's mountains or just anchor in a quiet cove and have lunch on a secluded beach.

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ISLAND DESTINATIONS





Who wants to go outside when you can sit in the sunlight that pours into the atrium of Seven Seas Prestige *(top)? But some Caribbean sites, like this tower on the waterfront of San Juan, Puerto Rico, are too pretty to miss (above).*

Journeys TO PARADISE BEGIN ONBOARD

by Julie Bennett

Can you imagine taking photos on a tropical beach this winter, then returning to a luxurious cruise ship to admire them? That dream is possible if you book a trip through the Caribbean on *Seven Seas Prestige*.



Coffee Connection, the new café on Seven Seas Prestige, *will be the perfect spot to sip espresso and plan your day in the sun.*



Guests who tire of Caribbean fare like jerk chicken and fruity cocktails will find relief — and delicious Middle Eastern foods — in Regent's newest all-inclusive restaurant, Azure, on Seven Seas Prestige.



Arriving just in time for the December holidays and the 2027 Caribbean cruising season is Seven Seas Prestige, *Regent's most luxurious vessel to date.*



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES

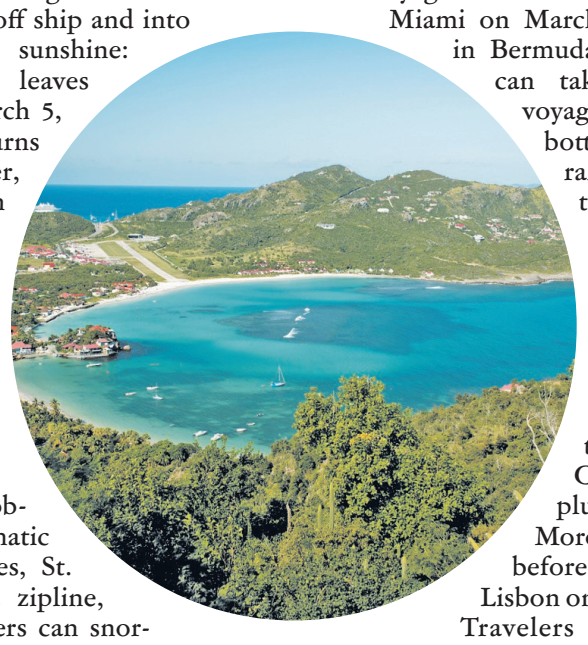
Only one family can stay in the $25,000-a-night Skyview Regent Suite on each sailing of Seven Seas Prestige, *but all guests can enjoy the ship's stunning atrium and its evening light and music show.*

Launching in December, this is the inaugural vessel of Regent Seven Seas Cruises'® first new ship-class in a decade, and it's packed with elegance, from larger all-balcony suites to 11 different all-inclusive restaurants, a Solara Sports Deck with competition-sized padel and pickleball courts, an 18-hole putting green and calm spaces reserved for sunrise and sunset yoga.

All suites are lavish, but the larger ones feature handcrafted mattresses from Italy, and the ship's largest — the Skyview Regent Suite, which costs $25,000 a night and is the size of a small mansion — contains an oversized bespoke mattress with so many comfy elements it took hundreds of hours to create. Guests will be beckoned to dinner by a music and light show centering on the giant crystal chandelier that fills the ship's atrium. Wesley D'Silva, president of Regent, says, "This magnificent installation, which is truly a work of art, offers unforgettable moments of awe and wonder."

DAYTIME TREASURES

Regent also designed several new cruises and exciting shore excursions to lure guests off ship and into the Caribbean sunshine: Prestige Isles leaves Miami on March 5, 2027, and returns 12 nights later, with a stop in St. Kitts and Nevis, where passengers can enjoy spectacular views from an open-air safari vehicle. More adventurous guests can observe the dramatic hills of Castries, St. Lucia, from a zipline, and beach lovers can snorkel, swim or just gaze into the tide pools of The Baths on Virgin Gorda Island, a beautiful beach in the British Virgin Islands.



Most shore excursions are included in Regent fares, like the Champagne and Lobster Catamaran cruise featured aboard the Tropical Passage trip, leaving Miami on March 20, 2027, and ending in San Juan, Puerto Rico. When the ship docks in St. John's, Antigua, guests can sail to a beach for the morning and party on the way back, with calypso music, Champagne and local lobster for lunch.

The 10-night Caribbean Mystique cruise leaves San Juan, Puerto Rico, on March 30, 2027, and returns to Miami. Along the way, the port of St. John's in Antigua offers the best of Caribbean scenery — you can see its rainforests, watershed regions and beaches from a custom-built Jeep. In Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, a catamaran will transport guests to Shipwreck Cove, where a real sunken ship shares snorkeling waters with tropical fish. The attractions in La Romana, Dominican Republic, include ancient cave paintings by the Taino people and a real town that often serves as a movie set for Havana in its heyday.

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Cruises for *Seven Seas Prestige*'s inaugural year are filling so quickly that seasoned travelers are booking Caribbean journeys years in advance. When booking ahead, it is important to ask how early you can sign up for shore excursions, because you'd hate to miss an underwater walk in a diving helmet. That unusual adventure is available in Philipsburg, St. Maarten, when *Seven Seas Prestige* docks in January 2028 on a Miami-to-Miami cruise called Bahamian Breeze.

The 25-night Season of Sails cruise in March 2028 combines visits to islands on two continents with a relaxing sea voyage. *Seven Seas Prestige* sails from Miami on March 26 and stops in Bermuda, where guests can take an evening voyage on a glass-bottom boat over rare marine life that only comes out when the sun sets. After four nights crossing the Atlantic, *Seven Seas Prestige* makes stops in the Azores and Canary Islands, plus ports in Morocco and Spain, before docking in Lisbon on April 20.

Travelers who miss out on booking *Seven Seas Prestige* can still cruise the Caribbean in opulent style aboard three other Regent cruise ships this winter. *Seven Seas Splendor, Seven Seas Grandeur* and *Seven Seas Mariner* begin a total of 30 Caribbean sailings in November with a wide variety of itineraries and shore excursions. And next winter, several cruises will include the new port of Cabo Rojo in the Dominican Republic, known for its red-tinted coastal cliffs and pristine beaches, or San Andres, Columbia, a coral island settled by English Puritans in the early 1600s. Many of these sailings include full or partial trips through the Panama Canal or span festive holidays.



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ISLAND DESTINATIONS



OCEANIA CRUISES

Oceania Cruises is known for its cuisine, but the luxury line also serves some of the best beverages at sea, including custom cocktails (above). Australia may be the land of tropical reefs and exotic animals, but this island continent has also become a mecka for foodies. Seafood restaurants that line Sydney Harbor serve fresh-caught prawns in a variety of tempting ways (right).





SHUTTERSTOCK

Travelers who journey to the islands of French Polynesia on Oceania Cruises will discover people steeped in the culture of their ancestors. Tourists are welcomed with local beverages and treated to performances of traditional dances.

GOING FAR BEYOND the Beach

by Julie Bennett

Like other luxury cruise lines, Oceania Cruises' ships will stop at islands with palm trees and sandy beaches this winter, but their guests will leave with more than a tan. Since electing to cater only to adults, a new level of sophistication is enhancing everything, from the ships' onboard spaces and meals to shore excursions that provide a deeper connection to each destination's history and culture.

"Today's luxury traveler is seeking more meaningful ways to engage with the world around them," says Jason Montague, chief luxury officer of Oceania Cruises. Travelers who book Caribbean adventures on *Oceania Marina, Oceania Vista* and *Oceania Allura* this winter and want to venture beyond the beach will be able to tour organic farms, learn about the economics of the banana industry and visit a replica of a French cathedral.

Oceania Cruises' ships stop in popular destinations, like Oranjestad, Aruba, with its famous upscale shopping mall, but they also dock at less-visited ports like Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe, where you can explore the Mémorial ACTe, a museum dedicated to the Caribbean's indigenous peoples and the slave trade. On sailings that stop in Kralendijk, Bonaire, actors in period costumes talk about the history of this small Dutch island near Venezuela and tell tales of shipwrecks in nearby waters.

'TIS THE SEASON

Travelers who want to put an adult twist on the holidays can join the Caribbean Celebration cruise on *Oceania Marina* that leaves Miami on December 22, 2026, and returns 14 days later. Guests will spend Christmas in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where they can celebrate the holiday relaxing in two famous locations — Margaritaville and Rick's Cafe — ride a river tube through the jungle or climb the gentle cascades of Dunn's River Falls. On December 31, when *Oceania Marina* stops in Fort-de-France, Martinique, several excursions include tours of local distilleries. A bus tour of the city's cultural sites ends with a sampling of local flavored rums.

Islands on Oceania Cruises' list of more than 120 Tropics and Exotics cruises for 2026-2027 extend from Fiji and Tahiti to islands off the coast of Asia all the way to Australia and New Zealand. The Pearls of Melanesia cruise from February 8 to 26 on *Oceania Vista* journeys from Papeete in French Polynesia to less-visited ports in New Caledonia before disembarking in Sydney, Australia. Along the way, guests can learn about the civilizations that lived on these islands thousands of years ago.

Current residents still perform ancient dances and rituals, as guests on the Discovery Down Under cruise aboard *Oceania Vista*, traveling from Lautoka, Fiji, to Sydney from December 9 to December 23, 2027, will learn. Native firewalkers and magicians on Mystery Island, Vanuatu, will demonstrate and explain their ancestral skills. This cruise then pivots to rainforests, exotic animals and the Great Barrier Reef as it stops in ports like Cairns and Brisbane along the east coast of Australia before an overnight stay in Sydney.

The mysteries and wonders of Indonesia will be on display next spring when *Oceania Riviera* travels from Bali to Singapore on a cruise called Southeast Asia Tradewinds. This March 20 to April 5, 2027, voyage takes a deep dive into the heritage of northern Bali with a tour from the port of Celukan Bawang that features visits to Chinese and Hindu temples.

SPEAK UP

Guest enrichment aboard Oceania Cruises vessels will deepen in 2027, with speakers specializing in a region's heritage, culture or history part of every trip. "By expanding our speaker program, we are creating even more ways for guests to personalize their luxury experience and make the most of their time at sea," Montague explains.

Oceania Cruises' ships are being reconfigured as well. *Oceania Marina* will emerge from a complete refurbishment this October with redesigned staterooms and public spaces with enlarged bars and a chef's studio replacing the artist's loft. Seasoned travelers are already booking Caribbean cruises on the all-new *Oceania Sonata*, which boasts larger suites and a new exclusive French dining restaurant, launching August 2027. *Oceania Sonata*'s first tropical cruise, Caribbean Calm, is a 13-day roundtrip from Miami, beginning December 6, 2027, with stops at both popular and less-visited ports. And by the end of 2027, *Oceania Nautica* will be transformed into *Oceania Aurelia*, a mostly suite vessel designed for long journeys.

"At Oceania Cruises, raising the bar is not an initiative — it is our mindset," Montague says. "Our Caribbean voyages showcase the remarkable diversity and depth of the region, and our array of enriching experiences ashore offers even the most well-traveled guest a fresh perspective."

Julie Bennett is a freelance writer specializing in luxury travel, real estate and lifestyle issues.



The most famous sights in Sydney Harbor — the Opera House and Bridge — are best seen from the balconies and decks of Oceania Marina ***as the ship sails by.***





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