

Royal Caribbean's newest ship,
Freedom of the Seas

To Caribbean or Not?



Why enhanced itineraries, new ships and terrific rates might persuade your group to go back ...

As the cruise industry moves to a global presence, cruise guests are offered more selections than ever before. With that, the thought of taking “just a Caribbean cruise” might seem rather tame by today’s industry standards. But actually there has never been a better time for your group to reconsider taking that Caribbean cruise for a number of reasons.

Why the renewed interest? There are more itinerary variations and departure ports than ever before, with some of the biggest and most technically advanced and designed ships sailing to the Caribbean. Finally, a Caribbean cruise still offers one of the best cruise values around.

According to Brian Major, with Cruise Line International Association (CLIA) the Caribbean still ranks first as far as the top cruise market. Brian mentions, “The statistics CLIA compiles on cruise destination markets and interest are based on the actual capacity of industry presence – in other words, the ship capacity – that is placed in each particular market. Currently the Caribbean ranks first – 40.1% of cruise itineraries include the Caribbean, while Europe/Mediterranean cruise itineraries rank second, and Alaska ranks third.”

By Cindy Bertram

That Was Then – This Is NOW

Back in the 1980s when modern day cruising really began to take hold, Caribbean itineraries really only offered three choices – Eastern, Western and Southern.

The refocus on homeland cruising has made Caribbean cruise itineraries even more accessible and has added to the variety of choices available. To sail to the Caribbean, your group can depart from Tampa, Port Canaveral, Galveston, Fort Lauderdale, Mobile, Norfolk or even New York in addition to the traditional Port of Miami departures. Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL) pioneered Caribbean sailings departing from New York a few years ago. Demand has been so high that *Norwegian Spirit* sails year-round from New York City and offers some diverse, interesting itineraries in 2006. In addition to 8-, 10-, 11- and 12-day cruises to the Eastern and Exotic Southern Caribbean, the *Norwegian Spirit* is sailing on 6- and 7-night cruises to the Bahamas and Florida, and many feature an overnight stay at NCL’s private Bahamian island, Great Stirrup Cay. Also brand new is the *Norwegian Spirit*’s 8-day itinerary that includes Bermuda as one of her ports along with Tortola and St. Thomas.

Southern Caribbean cruises will take on a new more exotic twist with Royal Caribbean. They are home port-

ing their *Legend of the Seas* in the Dominican Republic beginning December 16, 2007 through Spring 2008. *Legend of the Seas* will offer two different 7-night cruise itineraries, which can be combined into a 14-night cruise.

The Ports

The best thing about cruise lines is their ability to help create new destinations. When NCL started the “Out Island” concept back in 1977 with Great Stirrup Cay, other cruise lines followed. Royal Caribbean eventually created an out island experience beyond the traditional Bahamas one with Labadee, located on the north shores of Haiti. Premier Cruise Lines had their own private island experience off Nassau.

Earlier this year when Holland America Line’s newest ship, *Noordam*, sailed into the Caribbean’s newest port facility, the Grand Turk Cruise Center in British West Indies, she made history. It was the official opening of this new state-of-the-art, multi-million-dollar facility, which serves as a gateway to one of



the most beautiful islands in the Caribbean. This new port facility accommodates two large Super Post Panamax vessels, and also features a 13-acre complex, complete with an 800-foot white sand beach, array of shops, cabanas, and swimming pool. It’s also home to the Caribbean’s largest “Margaritaville” themed bar and restaurant, owned by Jimmy Buffet. The new Grand Turk Cruise Center was developed and is operated by the Carnival Corporation.

In addition to cruise lines creating new ports, they keep adding new destinations to their itineraries. Princess Cruises, for instance, offers a Western Caribbean itinerary aboard *Grand Princess* that includes Belize, and Roatan, Honduras, as ports of call. Other ports that are beginning to be featured on more cruise lines’ itineraries include Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, Bonaire, St. Vincent, Trinidad, Costa Maya, an “up-and-coming” port near the ancient Mayan cultural centers, and La Romana in the Dominican Republic. MSC Cruises, for instance, not only includes a call at La Romana, Dominican Republic, but also is featuring Cayo Levantado as their private getaway.

The beauty is that there is no ‘traditional’ Caribbean cruise itinerary anymore.

The Ships Are Even Better!

Yes, the Caribbean has traditionally offered the newest fleet additions, and it’s getting even better. And the bar has been raised again with Royal Caribbean’s *Freedom of the Seas*. This new 3,634-passenger ship, now the world’s largest, was designed to offer a high-quality, choice-filled and active cruise choice for guests, with even more exclusive features.

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Bob Dickinson,
Carnival President and CEO

Activities include the new outdoor H2O Zone water park for kids, but adults are by no means ignored. The Solarium offers an adult-only environment and, like the Voyager class design, there are two pools side by side, with one designated for water sports. In addition to the mainstay features of a rock-climbing wall and ice-skating rink, *Freedom of the Seas* also has a boxing ring. And surfing is a first on this ship with the much anticipated and promoted “FlowRider®.”

For groups that might not want a ship as large as *Freedom of the Seas*, other cruise lines are still aggressively adding tonnage to their fleets. Holland America Line’s newest ship, *Noordam*, takes on a different cruise philosophy. The *Noordam* is the first Holland America Line ship completely constructed with the entire range of their Signature of Excellence features built in.

Caribbean Itineraries Offer Affordable Rates

Caribbean cruises still tend to offer the most affordable rates and, earlier this spring, Carnival came out with some enticing rates for summer sailings. As Bob Dickinson, Carnival President and CEO commented, “We have more and larger ships in the fleet than ever before, and that provides economies of scale and operating efficiencies that enable us to provide 21st-century cruises at 1980s prices.”

Booking early is still the best option for securing space and the best rates. Even with the increasing number of ships sailing throughout the Caribbean starting later in the fall when ships move back from other parts of the world, demand is high. And taking a cruise vacation, especially to the Caribbean, is one of the best group vacation values available. ■