



Top 10 Caribbean Shore Excursions

By: Linda Garrison

Fascinating shore excursions help make the Caribbean the most popular cruise destination in the world. Other factors contribute to making the Caribbean vacationers' number one cruising choice--the sunny climate, sparkling waters, and beautiful islands--but a memorable shore excursion can imprint each island in your mind forever. If you are ready to do something other than shop, explore the islands on your own, or just sit on a beach, try these shore excursions on your next Caribbean cruise.

1. Stingray City at Grand Cayman Island

A day on Grand Cayman Island is not complete without a visit to Stingray City. This shore excursion is one of the most popular in the Caribbean and its reputation is well deserved. Visitors can dive, snorkel, swim, or just be marveled by these interesting creatures through the viewing windows of a glass bottom boat.

2. America's Cup Yacht Racing on St. Maarten

Racing on a sleek, 12-metre America's Cup yacht is an exciting way to spend a half-day on St. Maarten. Nine participants serve as the crew of each of the two former America's Cup racing yachts, and the speedy boats zip through the water as they race around the harbor at Philipsburg. No previous sailing experience is necessary, but you will come away with a new appreciation of the thrill (and work involved) of sailing a racing yacht.

3. Exploring the Baths on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands

Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands has a remarkable geological rock formation on the western end of the island. Huge boulders are strewn all along the beach. Climbing, snorkeling, and exploring this geological phenomenon is fun for all ages.

4. Tubing on the Layou River in Dominica

Tubing on the Layou River, the longest and largest of the 365 rivers of Dominica, is an exciting and memorable shore excursion. Each person rides in their own tube, and you feel much like a pinball as you drift down the river, hitting rocks and spinning away. It is great fun, and the beautiful Layou River valley, with its tall cliffs and lush vegetation, make the excursion one of the best in the Caribbean.

5. Buck Island Reef Snorkeling on St. Croix in the USVI

Buck Island is a snorkeler's dream. The park covers about 850 acres of land and water surface and lies about 1.5 miles off the northern shore of St. Croix. Buck Island has been a part of the park service since 1948, and the pristine waters offer wonderful snorkeling. There are a couple of snorkeling trails, and several outfitters offer day trips to the island. We sailed on Captain Heinz's Teroro II, and thought the captain and his excursion were great.

6. Hiking the El Junque Rain Forest in Puerto Rico

San Juan is one of the busiest ports and most exciting cities in the Caribbean. If you enjoy hiking and are looking for a shore excursion that is a little more peaceful, consider a day trip to the only tropical rain forest in the United States at El Junque National Forest.

7. Mini-Submarine Ride Beneath the Caribbean

A ride beneath the Caribbean on a mini-submarine is a memorable one-time shore excursion for anyone who loves snorkeling, diving, or exploring. At least a dozen Caribbean islands offer a submarine ride as a shore excursion option. I rode a submarine in Aruba, and although it was small and cramped and definitely not for the claustrophobic, there were plenty of windows to see the undersea world.

8. High Tea at Sunbury Plantation on Barbados

Enjoying an afternoon of English tea at Sunbury Plantation on the island of Barbados in the Caribbean is an excellent way to step back in time and get a taste (and a sip) of life in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sunbury was built over 300 years ago and was once a thriving plantation. Today the house and grounds have been carefully restored and include an excellent collection of antiques, china, silver, furniture, and farm implements.

9. Dominica Champagne Snorkeling

If you love to snorkel and love volcanic activity, you should take this tour. Champagne is an area in the Soufriere/Scottshead Marine Reserve where there are small volcanic fissures in the sea bed. These fissures release tiny, crystal-like bubbles into the water. Champagne is also a haven for many tropical fish, so the 1-1/4 hours of snorkeling (3 hour tour) is interesting and good.

10. Walking Up Dunn's River Falls in Jamaica

If your cruise ship docks in Jamaica, a walk up Dunn's River Falls should be high on your list of shore excursion options if you are relatively fit and sure-footed. Thousands of visitors make this hike up the 600-foot falls each year.