



St. Maarten / Saint Martin Cruise Port Guide

Two Nations, One Incredible Island



St. Maarten is one of the most unique cruise destinations in the Caribbean—and in the world. Why? Because this beautiful island is shared by **two countries**. The southern half, **Sint Maarten**, is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, while the northern half, **Saint-Martin**, is an overseas collectivity of France.

Despite the international border, travelers can freely explore both sides of the island without passport checkpoints, enjoying two distinct cultures, cuisines, and experiences in a single day.

Whether you're relaxing on world-famous beaches, watching airplanes land just overhead, shopping for duty-free bargains, or enjoying French cafés, St. Maarten offers something for everyone.



Where Do Cruise Ships Dock?



Cruise ships dock at the modern **Port St. Maarten** in Philipsburg.

The cruise terminal features:

- Duty-free shopping
- Souvenir stores
- Restaurants
- Bars
- Free Wi-Fi (limited)
- Excursion meeting areas
- Taxi stand
- Water taxi service
- Restrooms

Downtown Philipsburg is only about a 15–20 minute walk or a short water taxi ride from the cruise terminal.



Explore Philipsburg



Philipsburg is easy to explore on foot.

Popular attractions include:

- Front Street shopping
- Beachfront Boardwalk
- Dutch architecture
- Local boutiques
- Jewelry stores
- Beach bars
- Casinos
- Cafés

The Boardwalk is lined with restaurants where you can enjoy lunch with beautiful views of Great Bay.

Experience World-Famous Maho Beach



No visit to St. Maarten is complete without experiencing **Maho Beach**, one of the world's most famous beaches.

Located directly beside **Princess Juliana International Airport**, visitors gather to watch commercial aircraft fly just overhead as they land.

Important Safety Note:

While watching landings is safe from the beach, **never stand behind departing aircraft near the airport fence**. The powerful jet blast has caused serious injuries. Always remain in designated safe viewing areas and follow posted warnings.

Beautiful Beaches

Great Bay Beach



Located just steps from downtown.

Perfect for:

- Swimming
- Beach chairs
- Restaurants

- Shopping
- Families

Many visitors spend the day here without booking an excursion.

Orient Beach (French Side)



One of the Caribbean's most famous beaches.

Features include:

- White sand
- Beach clubs
- Water sports
- Restaurants
- Crystal-clear water

The southern section is family-friendly, while the northern end has a clothing-optional beach, so choose your location accordingly.

Mullet Bay Beach

A favorite among locals.

Known for:

- Calm water
 - Soft sand
 - Excellent snorkeling
 - Beautiful scenery
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Simpson Bay Beach

A quieter option with plenty of space to relax.

★ Top Shore Excursions

🚤 Island Sightseeing Tour

One of the most popular excursions.

Visit:

- Dutch side
- French side
- Scenic overlooks
- Marigot
- Orient Beach
- Maho Beach

A great way to experience both cultures in one day.

🚤 Catamaran Sail & Snorkeling



Enjoy:

- Sailing
- Snorkeling
- Tropical drinks
- Beach time
- Lunch

One of the island's highest-rated excursions.

🐡 Snorkeling Adventures

Popular snorkeling locations include:

- Creole Rock
- Tintamarre Island

- Little Bay
- Mullet Bay

Expect colorful coral reefs, sea turtles, and tropical fish.

America's Cup Regatta

Race a genuine America's Cup yacht in a friendly competition.

A unique experience only available in a few destinations.

ATV & Off-Road Tours

Explore the island's rugged coastline, scenic overlooks, and hidden beaches.

Pinel Island

Take a short ferry ride to this peaceful island known for:

- Calm water
 - Excellent snorkeling
 - Beach restaurants
 - Relaxing atmosphere
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FR Explore Marigot (French Side)



The capital of the French side offers a completely different atmosphere.

Highlights include:

- French cafés
- Bakeries
- Local markets
- Marina

- Boutique shopping
- Fort Louis

Don't miss a fresh croissant or pastry from one of the local bakeries.



Shopping

St. Maarten is famous for duty-free shopping.

Popular purchases include:

- Jewelry
- Watches
- Perfume
- Electronics
- Caribbean art
- Local rum
- Dutch cheeses
- French wines

Front Street in Philipsburg is one of the Caribbean's premier shopping districts.



What to Eat

The island is often called the "**Culinary Capital of the Caribbean.**"

Must-try foods include:

- Fresh seafood
- French pastries
- Creole dishes
- Caribbean barbecue
- Johnny Cakes
- Lobster
- Conch
- Dutch pancakes
- Local rum

Popular restaurants include:

- The Greenhouse
- Ocean Lounge
- Rainbow Café
- SkipJack's
- Emilio's



Hidden Gems

If you've visited before, consider:

- Fort Amsterdam
- Fort Louis
- Loterie Farm
- Happy Bay Beach
- Cupecoy Beach
- Pic Paradis (the island's highest point)

These locations provide beautiful views and fewer crowds than the most popular attractions.

Weather Throughout the Year

St. Maarten enjoys warm tropical weather year-round.

Winter (December – February)

- Highs: **81–84°F (27–29°C)**
- Lower humidity
- Ideal sightseeing weather

Spring (March – May)

- Highs: **82–86°F (28–30°C)**
- Warm and sunny

Summer (June – August)

- Highs: **87–91°F (31–33°C)**
- Hot and humid
- Brief afternoon showers possible

Fall (September – November)

- Highs: **84–89°F (29–32°C)**
- Warm water
- Fewer crowds

Trade winds help keep temperatures comfortable throughout the year.

Hurricane Season

The official Atlantic hurricane season runs from:

June 1 – November 30

Peak activity generally occurs between **August and October**.

The island has recovered remarkably since Hurricane Irma in 2017, and visitors will find modern facilities, welcoming locals, and a thriving tourism industry.

Travel insurance is recommended whenever traveling during hurricane season.

Getting Around

Transportation options include:

- Taxi
- Water taxi
- Rental car
- Shore excursions
- Local buses (limited routes)

Many attractions are within a 15–30 minute drive from the cruise port.

What to Pack

Bring:

- ✓ Swimsuit
- ✓ Reef-safe sunscreen
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Hat
- ✓ Comfortable sandals
- ✓ Water shoes
- ✓ Passport (optional but recommended if traveling independently around the island)
- ✓ Waterproof phone pouch
- ✓ Reusable water bottle

Premium Travel Group Tip

If this is your **first visit**, spend time experiencing both sides of the island. Shop and stroll through Philipsburg in the morning, then head to Maho Beach or Orient Beach in the afternoon. You'll experience two cultures, two cuisines, and two completely different atmospheres—all without ever leaving the island.

If you've already visited Maho Beach, consider exploring Marigot, Pinel Island, or one of the island's quieter beaches. St. Maarten has far more to offer than airplanes and shopping.

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Why Visit St. Maarten?

Few destinations allow you to experience two countries in a single day. From world-famous beaches and exciting shore excursions to French cuisine, Dutch hospitality, duty-free shopping, and breathtaking coastal scenery, St. Maarten delivers one of the Caribbean's most diverse and memorable cruise experiences. It's no surprise that so many cruisers rank it among their favorite ports of call.