



# Western Caribbean Vacation Guide

## Discover Ancient Ruins, Vibrant Reefs & Tropical Adventure

The Western Caribbean is where tropical beauty meets unforgettable adventure. While many travelers picture only beaches, this region offers so much more—from the world's second-largest coral reef system and ancient Mayan cities to lush jungles, waterfalls, wildlife encounters, and some of the Caribbean's best snorkeling and diving.

Whether you're sailing on your first cruise or returning to explore more, the Western Caribbean offers something for every traveler.

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## What is the Western Caribbean?

The Western Caribbean generally includes destinations closest to Mexico and Central America.

Common cruise ports include:

- Cozumel, Mexico
- Costa Maya, Mexico
- Roatán, Honduras
- Belize City, Belize
- Harvest Caye, Belize
- Grand Cayman
- Jamaica
- Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (*often included on western itineraries departing from Florida and New Orleans*)

Most cruises depart from:

- Miami
- Fort Lauderdale
- Port Canaveral
- Tampa
- Galveston
- New Orleans

Cruise lengths typically range from **5 to 8 nights**, making the Western Caribbean one of the most popular cruise regions in the world.

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# Home to the World's Second-Largest Barrier Reef

One of the Western Caribbean's greatest treasures is the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System.

Stretching over **600 miles (965 km)** from Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, it is the **second-largest barrier reef system on Earth**, behind only Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Many travelers have no idea they're cruising alongside one of the world's greatest natural wonders.

## Why It Matters

The reef provides:

- Crystal-clear snorkeling
- Incredible scuba diving
- Sea turtles
- Eagle rays
- Nurse sharks
- Hundreds of tropical fish species
- Healthy coral gardens

If snorkeling or diving is on your bucket list, the Western Caribbean is one of the best places in the world to experience it.

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## Paradise for Snorkelers & Divers

Several Western Caribbean islands consistently rank among the world's best dive destinations.

### Cozumel

Known for:

- Drift diving
  - Exceptional water clarity
  - Vibrant coral reefs
  - Colorful marine life
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## Roatán

One of the Caribbean's hidden gems.

Highlights include:

- Coral reefs just offshore
  - Sea turtles
  - Tropical fish
  - Gentle currents
  - Spectacular wall dives
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## Belize

Belize offers access to the famous **Great Blue Hole**, one of the world's most iconic dive sites. While it's typically visited on dedicated dive trips rather than standard cruise excursions, the surrounding reef system provides exceptional snorkeling and diving opportunities for all experience levels.

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## Grand Cayman

Famous for:

- Stingray City
  - Coral gardens
  - Calm, clear water
  - Family-friendly snorkeling
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## Walk Through Ancient History



Few cruise regions combine tropical beaches with such remarkable history.

The Western Caribbean offers access to the fascinating world of the ancient Maya.

Popular archaeological sites include:

### **Chacchoben (Costa Maya)**

One of the most popular cruise excursions.

Explore towering pyramids surrounded by lush jungle.

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### **Kohunlich**

Known for its Temple of the Masks and fewer crowds.

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### **Altun Ha (Belize)**

One of Belize's most important Mayan cities.

Visitors often spot monkeys and tropical birds along the way.

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### **Chichén Itzá**

One of the New Seven Wonders of the World. While the distance from cruise ports makes this a very long excursion, it is available from some itineraries and is an unforgettable experience for history enthusiasts.

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## **Incredible Wildlife Encounters**



Animal lovers will find plenty to enjoy.

Popular encounters include:

- Sloths in Roatán
- Capuchin monkeys
- Macaws
- Sea turtles
- Stingrays
- Dolphins
- Iguanas
- Exotic birds

Many excursions focus on conservation and education while allowing guests to experience these amazing animals up close.

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## **More Than Just Beaches**

Every island offers something unique.

### **Cozumel**

- Beach clubs
  - Snorkeling
  - Shopping
  - Authentic Mexican cuisine
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### **Costa Maya**

- Relaxed beaches
  - Mayan culture
  - Fishing villages
  - Chacchoben ruins
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### **Roatán**

- Jungle adventures
  - Ziplining
  - Wildlife parks
  - Coral reefs
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## **Belize**

- Cave tubing
  - Jungle rivers
  - Rainforests
  - Reef adventures
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## **Grand Cayman**

- Seven Mile Beach
  - Stingray City
  - Luxury shopping
  - Turtle Centre
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## **Jamaica**

- Dunn's River Falls
  - Blue Mountain coffee
  - River tubing
  - Waterfalls
  - Reggae culture
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## **Puerto Plata**

- Damajagua Waterfalls
  - Cable car
  - Historic downtown
  - Amber Cove & Taino Bay
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# **Adventure Around Every Corner**

The Western Caribbean is perfect for active travelers.

Popular excursions include:

- Ziplining through rainforest canopies
- Cave tubing
- ATV adventures
- Catamaran sailing
- Snorkeling
- Scuba diving

- Parasailing
- River rafting
- Horseback riding
- Paddleboarding

There's rarely a shortage of exciting things to do.

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## A Taste of the Caribbean

Food is another highlight of the region.

You'll find influences from:

- Mexico
- Central America
- Jamaica
- The Cayman Islands
- Honduras
- Dominican Republic

Be sure to try local favorites such as:

- Fresh seafood
  - Conch fritters
  - Jerk chicken
  - Tacos
  - Empanadas
  - Coconut shrimp
  - Tropical fruits
  - Rum cake
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## Weather Throughout the Year

The Western Caribbean enjoys warm tropical weather year-round.

Average daytime temperatures:

- Winter: **80–84°F**
- Spring: **82–87°F**
- Summer: **86–90°F**
- Fall: **84–88°F**

Rain showers are generally brief and often give way to sunshine.

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# Why Cruise the Western Caribbean?

A cruise lets you experience multiple countries and cultures in one vacation.

Instead of choosing just one destination, you can:

- Snorkel in Cozumel
- Visit Mayan ruins in Costa Maya
- Hold a sloth in Roatán
- Explore caves in Belize
- Swim with stingrays in Grand Cayman

...all in a single week.

It's one of the most diverse cruise itineraries available.

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## Premium Travel Group Tip

If your ideal vacation includes adventure, marine life, history, and beautiful beaches, the Western Caribbean is hard to beat.

It's one of our favorite cruise regions because every port offers something completely different. No two days feel the same, and every island has its own culture, cuisine, and unforgettable experiences.

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## Continue Exploring

Ready to learn more? Check out our detailed port guides for:

- Cozumel
- Costa Maya
- Roatán
- Belize
- Grand Cayman
- Puerto Plata
- Harvest Caye