

# Royal Clipper Caribbean cruise blends luxury with Old World flavor

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Sailing on a clipper ship is a delicious way to unshackle oneself from the cares of the world, and to revel in the sensory pleasures of skimming over an open sea.

The Royal Clipper deftly blends an Old World nautical ambiance with luxury-cruise comfort. Those inspired by the new film, *Master and Commander*, can taste a similar open-air adventure without sacrificing the finer amenities.

While we never experienced the heaving seas and lashing gales Russell Crowe endured, we enjoyed an altogether distinctive boating experience. Be it the rhythm of the wind snapping sails or the reverential quiet of passengers watching a Caribbean sunset, our pre-Thanksgiving voyage on the

Royal Clipper was what a get-away is supposed to be.

Launched in 2000, the Royal Clipper is the world's largest five-masted sailing ship, and only the second built since the early 1900s. The 439-foot ship holds 227 passengers and 106 crew. Our journey began in Barbados and took us on a seven-day sail through the Grenadine Islands, stopping in tiny Carriacou, Grenada, uninhabited Tobago Cays, St. Vincent, Bequia, St. Lucia and Martinique.

The vessel is stunning. Its varnished teak, brass accents, riggings and attentive, stripe-shirted crew impressed upon us that this was something different. Even its sounds are different: in the quiet you can hear the ship's wood stretch, and its ropes groan in concert with its shifting sails.





***Captain Klaus Mueller***

departure. While we had smooth seas, there were periods of motion (it is, after all, a sailing ship). Those of us with patches were up late dancing instead of at the railing, yawning into the sea.

### **Destination paradise**

Because the Royal Clipper is small by cruise ship standards, it can access ports larger cruise lines cannot. Our first destination, Carriacou, was a case in point. The tiny island offered our first taste of unspoiled white sand and clear, azure water. Unleashing a thousand-passenger stampede on such a tiny strip of paradise would be unimaginable.

The second day brought us to Grenada, where our hike into a gorgeous rain forest proved a vacation highlight. Though strenuous, arriving at a breathtaking double waterfall ripe for diving and swimming made every humid step worthwhile. Grenada is well known for tourism, spices (particularly nutmeg) and the preservation of its environmental riches. Many remember Grenada as the scene of a 1983 U.S. military invasion. However we saw no lasting effects of the skirmish, save for our tour guide's gratitude that he no longer lived under a Marxist government.



“If there were no sails, I wouldn’t be on this ship,” explained our spirited, bagpipe-playing Captain Klaus Mueller. Clearly he is a skipper with a passion for the sea and its relaxing gifts.

“I tell the passengers to put their cameras away, to just experience the sea and to enjoy being in nature,” he said.

that those sailing solo can have a splendid time.

From one land mammal to another: anyone susceptible to queasiness should acquire a supply of seasickness patches from their doctor before



### ***Tobago Cays***

Scuba diving under St. Lucia's dramatic twin coastal peaks, the Pitons, we found a cornucopia of corals, sponges and undersea life. Encountering a deluge of colorful fish, dancing eels and a cowering lobster, we were mesmerized by the sheer variety and vitality of this undersea preserve.

Our final port of call, Martinique, was a fascinating slice of France, with its blend of French and West Indies culture. It also offers a first-class botanical garden.

At each destination, a variety of activities for different tastes were offered, from mountain biking to air-conditioned bus tours. Passengers were also free to explore port cities on their own.

Still the star of the journey was the Royal Clipper itself. True, there are a few differences between a luxury cruise ship and a Royal Clipper cruise, but to this traveler, the camaraderie aboard and the sensory pleasures of sailing a tropical sea outweighed any minor quibbles.

Tobago Cays offered a full day of pure play on the virtually deserted four islets. Scuba, banana boat rides, snorkeling, wind surfing and water skiing are provided by the Royal Clipper's sports staff at a variety of stops on the cruise.

Our visit to St. Vincent was less interesting, but our same-day hop to neighboring Bequia was a colorful and friendly stop for lovers of whaling culture, books, maps, model boats and scrimshaw.





***Master and Commander: up on the Royal Clipper mast***

*For more information, log on to Star Clippers at [www.starclippers.com](http://www.starclippers.com) or call 800-442-0551. Rates for seven-night cruises on the Star Clippers line are from \$1,445 to \$4,695 per person. Contact your travel agent for specifics.*



***Off St. Lucia***