

Destination Review: Perfect Day at Coco Cay

I'll continue on with the Royal Caribbean theme for this newsletter and fill you in on the changes they've made to their private island, Coco Cay. We've visited there three times in the



past month, twice as part of the inaugural cruise on Odyssey of the Seas and most recently as part of the itinerary for our cruise aboard Anthem of the Seas. Coco Cay is packed full of fun and relaxation, and there is truly something for all generations and ages. For us, Coco Cay is all about a relaxing day at the beach and from our first stop there on a cruise with the kids way back in 1998 Coco Cay is the one repeat port call we look forward to. When we first stopped at Coco



Cay it was nothing more than a nice beach with some lounge chairs and a few drink and snack vendors brought over from the ship. In fact everything had to be brought over from the ship, and back then there was no pier so they had to use tenders. As the stop became a more regular and popular part of Royal Caribbean's itineraries the company invested in more permanent infrastructure. Even though they call it their "private island" Royal Caribbean uses the island under a long term lease arrangement the government of The Bahamas. They still own it and Royal Caribbean and all cruise ship passengers that visit are subject to Bahamian laws. That became very important a few months ago when the Bahamian government began requiring that any cruise ship passenger visiting any of the islands eligible to be vaccinated against COVID-19, was vaccinated.

Royal Caribbean invested in a huge infrastructure update to Coco Cay several years ago and cruises are just now getting to take advantage of that investment. They now have a permanent staff presence to support the daily visits of one and, increasingly, two cruise ships. They went so far as to trademark the entire experience, calling it "Perfect Day at Coco Cay" which is a pretty accurate description.

One of the first improvements Royal Caribbean invested in was a dedicated pier of sufficient size and structure to handle all ship classes in the fleet, from the Oasis at the top end all the way down to the diminutive Empress of the Seas which is now no longer in the Royal Caribbean fleet. The facilities and attractions on Coco Cay are all within about a 15-minute walk from the pier, but there is a network of trams that will take you anywhere on the island in the matter of

a few short minutes. You pick up the trams at designated stops which have seating and shaded waiting areas, though there's usually not more than a few minutes between trams.

Let's talk about money. Yes, much of what you *can* do on Coco Cay costs extra. I've seen no shortage of complaints about Royal Caribbean dipping their hands into your pocket more and more, and the cost of the Coco Cay experience is one that some cruisers complain about. It is true that just about anything you do on the island, other than lay out in the sun or swim in the ocean, costs extra. Partly it is so Royal Caribbean can recover the money they put into the place, and have money for the upkeep and future enhancements. But there is another, more practical reason Royal Caribbean charges fees for many of the activities on Coco Cay. With two cruise ships stopping daily, when ships resume sailing at full capacity, Coco Cay could be hosting up to 10,000 cruisers at a time. Most of the extra attractions and activities on Coco Cay are capacity limited, so charging a small fee also tends to control demand and ensures that those wanting the experience enough to be willing to pay for it can do so. Even now with cruise ships still sailing at 50-60% capacity most of the attractions on Coco Cay sell out, so be sure to book as soon as you can.

Beaches

There are four beaches on Coco Cay that are open to all guests, and one that is access controlled and costs extra.

Chill Island – The facilities at Chill Island Beach are mostly complimentary. From the beach front lounge chairs to the casual Chill Grill eatery offering Caribbean style food and snacks, you can spend your entire day at Coco Cay in this area and not spend a penny. There are cabanas available for a fee, and if you want one you should book it early as they sell out.



Harbor Beach – The beach here is situated along a lagoon which makes for calm waters.

South Beach – This is the furthest beach from the pier, which means it tends to be the least populated. It is the place to go when you see two large ships visiting the island on the same day. In addition to the complimentary beach chairs, you can float in the ocean or enjoy sports activities like beach volleyball. When you work up a hunger you can hit the snack shack for a burger...one of three complimentary snack shacks on Coco Cay.

Breezy Bay at Chill Island – Located on the opposite shore of Coco Cay from the pier, Breezy Bay offers ocean front relaxation in lounge chairs or on a comfortable day bed.

Coco Beach Club – this area is more than just a beach...it is an exclusive access beach club. You have to book it in advance like a shore excursion, and it is capacity limited. The cost of your admission includes unlimited use of the beach, floating mats, upgraded lounge chairs with included towels and beach umbrella, access to the beachfront infinity pool, and you get to dine in the Coco Beach Club Restaurant which offers an elevated two course meal that is quite tasty. There are over the water bungalows available for rent...at about \$1000 for the day they aren't cheap. On the upside, that price lets up to eight guests have access to the beach club from a semi-private floating bungalow along with other amenities.

Pool

Coco Cay offers guests the complimentary Oasis Lagoon, what Royal Caribbean describes as the largest freshwater pool in the Caribbean. It is a huge meandering free-form pool with multiple swim up bars, artificial islands, and more. A walking path bridge allows access through the pool without getting wet, and serves as an artificial divide, separating the pool into a quiet side and a more active party side.

Thrill Waterpark

There are two distinct areas inside the Thrill Waterpark, Splash Summit and the Daredevil's Tower. Splash Summit offers three waterslides, each with a unique aspect to the ride. You can try the SlingShot which allows four riders to soar on a raft into a zero-G moment before plummeting down to the pool below. On Twister, two riders slide down a winding tube on a tandem raft. And for the competitive, try Splash Speedway where four riders race each other on mats down individual 40-foot-tall



racer slides. True adrenaline junkies will want to try

the Daredevil's Tower Waterslides. There are five exhilarating slide experiences to choose from. The most thrill-inducing slide being Daredevil's Peak. At 135 feet tall it is the tallest waterslide in North America. Or if you prefer something that gets you to the bottom quicker, try the Dueling Demons. These are twin drop slides that launch riders 75 feet from a vertical position. If speed is your thing, you'll want to try the Screeching Serpent, a 50-foot tall fully vertical speed slide. Or there's the Green Mamba, a 50-foot-tall slide with plenty of twists and turns. To finish off the attractions you can try Manta Racers, where you race down twin open flume slides.



If waterslides aren't your thing, Thrill Waterpark also offers the largest wave pool in the Caribbean where the surf is always up, and the Adventure pool where you can bounce, climb, swing, and splash your way through obstacles.

There are height limits to the waterslides, and guests under 14 must be accompanied by a ticketed guest 14 or older. Your admission price gets you all day access to Thrill Waterpark, and if inclement weather causes the park to be closed refunds are offered on a pro-rated basis.

For the Little Ones

Royal Caribbean offers two areas for the youngest cruisers, Captain Jill's Galleon and Splash Away Bay. Adult supervision is required for both areas. Captain Jill's Galleon is a splash-worthy pirate ship attraction loaded with slides, water cannons, and more. The smallest cruisers will enjoy Splash Away Bay, an aqua park with kiddie pools, massive drench buckets, and enough water attractions to keep the kids entertained all day.

Dining

There are two complimentary BBQ grills open to any guest from visiting ships, Chill Grill located near Chill Island, and Skipper's Grill near Harbor Beach. In addition, there are three complimentary snack shacks located on South Beach, inside the Thrill Island Waterpark, and next to the Oasis Lagoon pool.

Activities and Rentals

Floating mats are available for rental at 3 locations on Chill Island. Shore excursions that can be booked onboard your ship will meet at and depart from the designated Shore Excursion center on Coco Cay. Excursions include snorkeling, guided Kayak tours, jet-ski rentals, and scuba diving. Sports courts are scattered about Coco Cay where you can get involved in pickup games of beach volleyball, basketball, or life-sized soccer-billiards. The latter is an activity similar to life-sized chess, only in this case the person serves as the pool cue. You kick a soccer ball as you would hit a cue ball on a billiard table and try to knock colored soccer balls into pockets positioned around the court. Coco Cay also offers a daring zipline that speeds you along 1600 adrenaline producing feet over the middle of the harbor. Only for the brave!



One of the more interesting and novel attractions on Coco Cay is the Up Up and Away Balloon ride. This is a tethered helium balloon that offers a ride where you'll gently be lifted above the action and the din on the island to a height of 450 feet. You'll have ample time to capture the view with your cellphone or camera before the tether is winched in and your feet once again touch solid land. As with most things on Coco Cay, there is a fee for the balloon rides.

Odds and Ends

Two cruise ships can dock simultaneously at Coco Cay, one on either side of the pier. The Perfect Day at Coco Cay experience has become so popular, and particularly with COVID-forced port call restrictions throughout the Caribbean, there will almost always be two cruise ships visiting each day. When you order a drink or gain access to a pre-paid excursion or activity be sure to let the staff know which ship you come from. Each ship has a different departure time, and one may offer special deal the other does not. The staff will know all of that, as long as you let them know which ship you are from.

Food at the two BBQ grills and the three snack shacks is complimentary, and each has beverage stations where you can get complimentary water, tea, and. Sodas and alcoholic beverages are available for cost, and your ship beverage packages are honored at all bars on Coco Cay. The ship's WIFI extends to Coco Cay so you can make full use of your selected VOOM package, though signal strength and bandwidth can vary.

Coco Cay is mostly accessible with either paved or hard packed sand paths leading to all of the major areas and attractions on the island. With the extensive tram service, it is a short distance from any tram stop to the beach and a limited number of beach access wheelchairs are available on a first-come basis at three locations around the island.

It's a Wrap

Coco Cay has long been our favorite Royal Caribbean port call, and the Perfect Day at Coco Cay experience gives us more reasons to look forward to our next cruise. I've tried to capture the high points here, but there is so much happening it's hard to convey it all in a short newsletter article. When you book your next Royal Caribbean cruise with us, we'll make sure you get all the details you need to make the most of your Perfect Day at Coco Cay!