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Travel advice: code-share flights, duty-free rules and luxury Caribbean cruises

Gill Charlton solves your travel conundrums. This week: advice on code-share flights, luxury Caribbean cruises, duty-free rules and exceptions, finding South African b & bs, and insurance for one-way trips.



It's possible to cruise the Caribbean and avoid the hordes Photo: Alamy

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By **Gill Charlton**
9:28AM GMT 25 Nov 2011

4 Comments

Caribbean cruise in style

I want to take my wife on a luxurious cruise in the Caribbean next year. We can spend up to £5,000 each. Can you suggest an interesting itinerary and the best time of year to visit?

John Norman, Manchester

Gill Charlton replies

As this is not my specialist area, I asked Scott Anderson, who manages the **Luxury Cruise Company** in Hove (0845 643 1878; theluxurycruisecompany.com), for advice.

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He recommends the Seabourn Quest, which is a six-star liner large enough to offer a choice of dining options and bars but small enough to visit yachting harbours rather than sticking to the main ports.

Scott recommends taking the 14-night cruise out of Fort Lauderdale in Florida, which takes in San Juan in Puerto Rico, St Kitts, St Vincent and Mayreau in the Grenadines, Barbados, Martinique, St Barts, St John and Isla Catalina off the Dominican Republic. This route will give you a real sense of visiting different island states, and enable you to avoid the tourist-trap markets and the many thousands pouring off mega-ships each day.

A Veranda Suite with its own balcony costs around £4,500 per person including flights, transfers, all meals, drinks and gratuities. The best months to travel are November to April.

In Puerto Rico and Barbados, which can be busy with cruise ships, Scott recommends spending some of your budget on private shore excursions to get away from the tourist hordes.

Code-share flights

Earlier this year we booked flights from London to Chicago through a branch of Thomas Cook. We specifically asked to travel with British Airways. The agent assured us we were flying with BA.

As the outbound flight was at 7.45am, I also booked a room at the Sofitel at Heathrow Terminal 5. In March I received an invoice that showed BA flight numbers but indicated a T3 departure. I queried this with the travel agent and was told it was an error. We were definitely flying out of T5. However, when we collected the e-tickets from the agent some time later, it became clear that we were travelling on a code-share flight operated by American Airlines from T3.

Not only did we have to take a taxi from the Sofitel to T3, but we were not able to check in online because it was a code-share flight. It took more than an hour to check in at the airport.

I have been offered a cheque for £18 in settlement of the cab fare, and a voucher for £50 off another Thomas Cook holiday.

Please use my experience to warn other travellers to be sharp-eyed about possible code-share flights and the challenges they can present.

Andy Catto, London

Gill Charlton replies

Since British Airways went into partnership with American Airlines, it has given customers much greater choice of departure times from Heathrow to the US using the code-share arrangement. But, as you have discovered, the fact that you cannot check in online unless you have booked with the operating carrier is an annoying downside.

BA says that at present this is not technically possible (traditionally, airlines did not like passengers using their website to check in for another company's flight). It is working with AA to remedy that, but cannot say when they will have an answer.

This sort of nonsense from a travel agent gives the trade a bad name. All agents should know how to find the operating carrier. You can do it yourself by visiting ba.com and entering your travel dates. On the Flight Selection page, the "flight operating airline" will be listed in the right-hand column.



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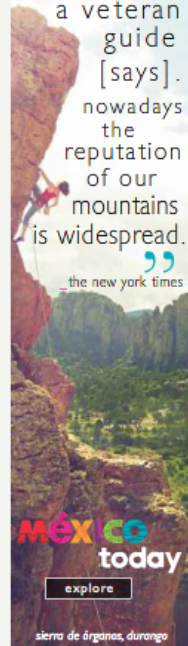
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