

Understanding the Port

Great Stirrup Cay is where the private-island idea was born: Norwegian leased this Berry Islands cay in 1977 and invented the category. Nearly fifty years later it's mid-glow-up — and still the island that started it all.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

Arrival is mid-makeover: depending on the construction phase, you'll dock at the island's new pier or ride a tender ashore — your daily program will say which. Either way, you land at the Welcome Plaza.

Cash & Currency

Cashless: your ship card pays for everything, lunch is included, and NCL drink packages are currently honored at island bars (a small Bahamian tax applies per drink). Cash for straw-market vendors and tips.

Getting Around

Compact and walkable on paved paths, with a new free tram looping the Welcome Plaza, pool, and beaches. One heads-up: the stretch from the landing to the plaza is on foot.

GOOD

The Free Island Day

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ Beaches plus the new resort-style pool — free, swim-up bars included
- ✓ Lunch included: beach BBQ, made-to-order tacos, a Bahamian food truck
- ✓ Walk away from the arrival area and the sand quiets fast

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Vibe Shore Club or a Snorkel

Best for: Adults after calm; families after fish

- ✓ Vibe: the new adults-only club — padded loungers, own bar and buffet
- ✓ Or snorkel the underwater sculpture garden off the far beach — free with your own gear
- ✓ Vibe sells out — book before you sail

Ask ashore what's open — the island's makeover continues.

BEST

Silver Cove

Best for: Groups, celebrations, a grown-up splurge

- ✓ Private villas on a calm lagoon, away from the crowds
- ✓ Real air conditioning and a private bathroom — rare on any island
- ✓ Split among a group, the math gets friendly

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

Great Life Lagoon

The star of the makeover, and it's free: a sprawling resort-style pool with zero-entry sand edges, two swim-up bars with frozen cocktails on tap, and a kids' splash pad alongside. Pool loungers go first — get ashore early.

BETTER

The Sculpture Garden Snorkel

Just off the far end of the main beach, mermaids and classical statues rest on the sandy bottom, slowly gathering coral and curious fish. Free with your own gear; rentals available ashore. Ask on the island what's open while the makeover continues.

BEST

Silver Cove

Air-conditioned villas on a calm private lagoon, with a dedicated buffet, bar, and spa access. Reviewers call it "the highlight of the week" — just know the private buffet is standard BBQ, not fine dining. Best value split among a group.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

The Quiet Direction

Crowds cluster near the arrival area. Walk the sand toward the Silver Cove end and the beach opens up — same water, a fraction of the neighbors.

Abaco Taco

The sleeper of the free lunch lineup: made-to-order tacos with a full toppings bar, usually shorter-lined than the main BBQ buffet. Lunch wraps by early afternoon — don't wander back late.



Great Stirrup Cay from the anchorage, Berry Islands



Norwegian Dawn at anchor off the island

Key Considerations

Set expectations honestly: this is a \$150 million transformation in progress, scheduled to run into 2027. The island's first-ever pier welcomed a ship in December 2025, then closed again in spring 2026 to double in size — so a classic tender ride may still be part of your day, and you will likely see construction in places. The big prize, the Great Tides Waterpark, opens in early September 2026: sail after that and ask about day passes; sail before it and it's a construction site.

What's finished is genuinely good — the free lagoon pool alone outclasses most private-island freebies. But NCL is nearly doubling visitor numbers this year, so chairs and shade go early, and premium spots (Vibe, cabanas, Silver Cove) sell out before sailing. Book ahead, bring towels from the ship, and don't count on island wifi — there isn't any.



The 1863 lighthouse, still keeping watch



The main swimming beach



The tender ride ashore — still part of many calls

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Port Orientation

FROM THE WELCOME PLAZA

● Welcome Plaza	Pier or tender landing, on foot
A short, flat walk or free tram	
● The Main Beach	Closest sand, busiest
● Great Life Lagoon	Free pool, swim-up bars
● Jumbey Beach Grill	Included BBQ lunch
Farther along	
● Sculpture Garden Snorkel	Far end of the beach
● Vibe Shore Club	Adults-only, book ahead
● Silver Cove	Villas, spa, calm lagoon

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time — and the last tender back — before you leave the ship. Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

Great Stirrup Cay wrote the private-island playbook in 1977 — and it's rewriting itself right now.

Beach and lunch are covered; add snorkeling or the lagoon retreat if your crew wants more.

ETA will help you choose the right experience based on your travel style.

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Did You Know?

Where It All Began. In 1977, Norwegian leased this cay from a Miami oil company and invented the cruise-line private island — widely credited as the industry's first. It liked the experiment so much it bought the island outright in 1986.

Next-Door Rivals. The island next door is Royal Caribbean's Perfect Day at CocoCay, just across a narrow anchorage. Two rival paradises, practically a stone's throw apart — watch for the other line's ship on the horizon.

The 1863 Lighthouse. A genuine British-built lighthouse still keeps watch over the island. Once tended by resident keepers, it now runs on solar power — faithfully flashing for passing ships more than 160 years on.

A Proud First Chapter. The Berry Islands' first permanent settlement was founded right here in 1836, when a group of newly emancipated people made the island home after Britain abolished slavery.

A Space-Age Past. During the Cold War, the US Air Force ran a radio-navigation station here that supported America's rocket launches from Cape Canaveral. GPS retired it in 1991 — but sharp eyes can still spot the old helicopter pad.