

Understanding the Port

Half Moon Cay is the private island other cruise lines get measured against — built by Holland America, now officially billed as "RelaxAway, Half Moon Cay" after its 2026 expansion. No waterpark, no upsell maze: about two miles of powder-white crescent, with nature holding the rest of the island.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

Two arrivals, one island: Carnival ships dock at the first-ever pier, new in mid-2026, on the north side. Holland America ships still tender (~20 min) to the classic south side. Venues differ by side.

Cash & Currency

Cashless: your ship card pays for everything, and the beach BBQ lunch is included on both sides. Drink packages are NOT honored ashore. The straw market is cash only — bring small US bills.

Getting Around

North side: a free six-stop tram links the pier and five new zones; the first beach is ~15 minutes on foot. South side: compact and walkable, with trams to the pavilion.

GOOD

The Beach, Simply

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ Two miles of crescent — calm, shallow, startlingly clear
- ✓ Chairs, umbrellas, and the island BBQ lunch: included
- ✓ Walk ten minutes down the sand and it's nearly private

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

A Day on the Water

Best for: Families, snorkelers, active travelers

- ✓ Snorkel, kayak, or paddle the clear shallows
- ✓ The stingray encounter — wade in and hand-feed the rays
- ✓ The clamshell shade rental: the island's best-value buy

Shade is the scarce commodity — book the clamshell before you sail.

BEST

Horseback in the Surf

Best for: Bucket lists, couples, photographers

- ✓ Trail ride along the ridge, then into the sea
- ✓ One of the few places in cruising you can swim a horse
- ✓ Minimum age 10 — and it sells out fast

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

The Crescent Beach

Voted best private island by Porthole readers for twenty straight years, and the beach is why: soft white sand, calm shallow water, lunch already paid for. Claim a chair, then do nothing spectacularly well.

BETTER

Stingrays & Water Toys

Wade into a shallow enclosure and hand-feed stingrays with a guide, or grab a kayak or snorkel set and work the clear water. Easy add-ons that turn a beach day into a story.

BEST

Horseback Riding

Saddle up at the island's own stables and finish with the horses chest-deep in turquoise water. The ocean leg depends on surf conditions — but it's the island's signature splurge, and the first excursion to sell out.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

The Far End of the Beach

The crescent is two miles long and most guests settle in the first quarter of it. Walk ten minutes past the pirate-ship bar and the last stretch feels like a private island of your own.

The BBQ Lunch

Included with your day — burgers, jerk chicken, ribs, and the fixings. Go right at opening or in the last twenty minutes to dodge the line.



The crescent beach, Half Moon Cay



Clamshells and palapas along the shore

Key Considerations

The island now runs as two experiences, and which one you get depends on your cruise line. Carnival guests walk ashore at the island's first-ever pier, opened June 2026, onto a newly built north side with its own grills, bars, and tram. Holland America guests still ride tenders to the classic south side — pirate-ship bar, Lobster Shack, aqua park — which keeps the old weather rule: rough seas can shorten or cancel tender calls.

Sun is the honest hazard. Natural shade is scarce, free umbrellas near the arrival areas go early, and the clamshell rental is the consensus best-value fix. Two more surprises worth knowing: drink packages are not honored ashore (a recent change — every drink bills to your ship card), and bars close about 90 minutes before the ship's departure.



Eurodam at anchor, tenders alongside



The land-and-sea horseback ride



Beach cabanas, Half Moon Cay

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Port Orientation

FROM YOUR ARRIVAL POINT

● The Crescent Beach	The main event, both sides
North side — Carnival, via the new pier	
● Five Tram-Linked Zones	Mango through Avocado
● Orchid & Hibiscus Grills	Free BBQ lunch
South side — Holland America, by tender	
● Pirate-Ship Bar & Pavilion	Island icon, free lunch
● Half Moon Lagoon Aqua Park	Free kids' splash
● Lobster Shack	A la carte lunch upgrade
By excursion	
● Stingray Encounter	Wade-in, staff-guided
● Pegasus Ranch	Horseback by land & sea
● Bonefish Lagoon	Eco kayak & birdlife

DON'T FORGET

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

Key Takeaway

Half Moon Cay is the anti-theme-park: one perfect beach, lunch included, and nature running the rest of the island.

Do nothing on the sand or do the surf ride of a lifetime — both count as a day well spent.

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

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Did You Know?

The Ship, Not the Shape. Holland America named the island for Henry Hudson's ship, the Halve Maen — "Half Moon" — from the line's old logo. That the beach happens to curve like one? A lucky bonus.

Three Names, One Island. Born Little San Salvador, rechristened Half Moon Cay in 1997, and officially billed as "RelaxAway, Half Moon Cay" since its 2026 makeover.

A \$6 Million Handshake. Holland America acquired the uninhabited island in 1996 — a reported \$6 million deal split among more than 150 heirs of the original landowner — and opened it in December 1997 with the Bahamian Prime Minister cutting the ribbon.

Mostly for the Birds. Of 2,400 acres, only a small fraction has ever been developed. The rest is preserved under the agreement with the Bahamian government — wrapped around a 700-acre lagoon where birders have logged more than 45 species.

Presidential Waters. Long before cruise ships, the island reportedly drew presidential anglers — FDR fished and swam here from his yacht in the mid-1930s, and Eisenhower trolled these same waters in 1957.