

Understanding the Port

Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve is the comeback story of the Bahamas: an industrial sand-mining site reborn as a low-key beach island inside a protected marine reserve. The twist that changes your whole day: MSC ships stay late into the evening — this island does nights.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

MSC ships dock right at the pier — no tenders, walk on and off all day. Many sailings stay late into the evening for the lighthouse show; check your itinerary's departure time.

Cash & Currency

Cashless: the island runs on your cruise card like an extension of the ship, and MSC drink packages work at every bar ashore. Cash is only for tips.

Getting Around

About a mile of flat island: the first beach is five minutes from the ship, and free trams loop all day — and into the evening. Bring towels from the ship.

GOOD

The Free Island Day

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ Two miles of sand across eight beaches — loungers included
- ✓ Lunch included at two BBQ buffets, plus food trucks
- ✓ The Marine Conservation Center — a free walk-in coral lab

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Into the Reserve

Best for: Snorkelers, explorers, view hunters

- ✓ Shore snorkeling is free with your own gear — North Beach is the spot
- ✓ The boat snorkel into the marine reserve is the real upgrade
- ✓ Climb the lighthouse — the island's cheapest ticket, best view

Umbrellas cost extra and shade goes early — plan for sun.

BEST

Stay for the Night

Best for: Couples, groups, memory collectors

- ✓ A beach-hut massage, or a cabana split among the group
- ✓ Bonfires, live music, and DJs at the Lighthouse Bar
- ✓ The nightly lighthouse light show — free, and genuinely good

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

The Beaches, Sorted

Families: Seekers Cove — shallow, lifeguarded, steps from the food court. Quiet seekers: North or Bimini Beach. Everyone: go ashore in the first hour, because shade is the only thing this island runs short of.

BETTER

Into the Marine Reserve

The waters around the island are 64 square miles of protected reserve. Snorkel free from shore, or take the boat excursion to a reef site inside the reserve — reviewers call it a real step up in fish and clarity.

BEST

The Evening Ashore

On late-stay itineraries the island's best hours start at sunset: bonfires, live music, a drink at the Lighthouse Bar, and the light show playing over the water. Almost no other private island does evenings — don't sleep through yours.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

The Lighthouse Climb

165 steps, about the price of a cocktail, and the best view in the Bimini chain. The island's best-value paid anything — go before the midday heat.

The Marine Conservation Center

Free, walk-in, and genuinely interesting: a working lab where scientists raise heat-tolerant "super corals" for the surrounding reefs. The story that makes this island different — bring the kids.



Ocean Cay from the air — ship, lighthouse, and lagoon



The lighthouse, Ocean Cay

Key Considerations

Ocean Cay is deliberately low-key: no waterpark, no zip line — the island itself is the attraction. What to outsmart: lunch lines peak at noon (eat before 11:45 or after 1:15, and try the Boho House buffet, usually shorter than Seakers), food outlets wind down mid-afternoon, and umbrellas cost extra while free loungers go fast. Towels come from the ship.

Departure times vary here more than most ports — some sailings leave by early evening, others stay past midnight — so check your itinerary before promising anyone the light show. And an expansion is underway through 2027 (a second berth, new dining, an adults-only beach): some construction may be visible, and the island will get busier as it lands.



South Beach and the lagoon



Docked steps from the sand



Palometa in the shallows, Ocean Cay

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Port Orientation

FROM THE PIER

● Welcome Center & Tram Stop	At the gangway
A short, flat walk or free tram	
● Lighthouse Bay	Closest beach, ~5 min
● Seakers Cove & Food Court	Family beach, free lunch
● Marine Conservation Center	Free walk-in coral lab
Farther along	
● South Beach	Lagoon-side, cabanas
● North Beach	Quiet, best shore snorkel
● Sunset Beach	The long ocean side

DON'T FORGET

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

Key Takeaway

Ocean Cay is the quiet one done on purpose: real beaches, a real marine reserve, and — on late-stay sailings — an evening ashore almost no other private island gives you.

Beaches by day, bonfires by night. Set your own pace — the island won't rush you.

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

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Did You Know?

Born Industrial. This island was dredged into existence in the late 1960s as a sand-mining platform — and mined until 2015. MSC hauled away tons of rusting machinery, planted some 75,000 native shrubs and trees, and a paradise grew back.

A Hundred-Year Handshake. MSC doesn't own the island — it signed a 100-year lease with the Bahamian government in 2015. First guests stepped ashore December 5, 2019, and total investment is now said to top half a billion dollars.

The Turtles Voted First. By the summer of 2021 — less than two years after opening — loggerhead sea turtles were already nesting on the reborn beaches. Hundreds of hatchlings have scrambled to the sea since.

Best in Show. Porthole Cruise readers have voted Ocean Cay "Best Private Island" three years running as of 2025 — ending the two-decade reign of Holland America's Half Moon Cay.

Toothpaste Sand. The aragonite once mined here went into cement, glass, and farm lime — and calcium carbonate like it turns up in toothpaste. The same mineral gives these beaches their brilliant white today.