

Amber Cove

A New Spot of Caribbean Blue for Cruisers

By Dana Rebmann



Going somewhere for the first time holds a special allure for many travelers. Discovering a place for the first time is often memorable and can lead to more trips over time. For well-traveled Caribbean cruisers, new has been tougher to come by, until now. Amber Cove is the Caribbean's first new cruise destination in nearly 10 years. The new port marks the return of regularly scheduled cruise ships to the north coast of the Dominican Republic after an almost 30 year absence.

Eight different cruise lines including Carnival, Princess, Holland American and newcomer Fathom™, are expected to deliver an expected 350,000 guests to the Dominican Republic's Puerto Plata area during the first year alone. Ships are expected to empty when they dock at Amber Cove. Curious cruising minds want to know what lies ashore.

The answer is quite a bit; 25 acres to be exact. More than enough to make a day of, actually. Along with the expected shopping, food and beverages, the Aqua Zone offers a large pool and water slides; there's also a playground nearby. There are hilltop and over-the-water cabanas, with an assortment of water toys available to rent. And did I mention there's a zip line? The only thing missing is a beach.

Puerto Plata Shore Excursions Relaxing for a day at Amber Cove will attract some, but for cruisers who prefer getting out and about, there are more than 40 shore excursions to choose from when visiting Puerto Plata, covering a variety of interests. A behind the scenes tour and tasting at local rum maker Brugal offers fans a chance to

purchase drinkable souvenirs at low cost. City tours will cover history, the waterfront and the town center. Sandy beaches and blue water are bound to be a popular option as well. Though colorful Caribbean scenery found at nearly every turn creates the illusion of a picture perfect life in the tropics, the reality is that many North Coast Dominican Republic residents struggle with poverty. The average household income is less than \$6,000 and a reported three million Dominicans don't have access to piped water. Rather than ignore it or try and hide it, opportunities have been created so cruise guests can understand it first hand and, even better, actually do something about it.

An open-air safari-type expedition excursion takes passengers to the rural home of a local farmer in the hills above Puerto Plata. The small four-room house is home to six people. Light (and possibly rain) streams through knot holes and cracks where the uneven boards don't quite fit together. The outside shower requires the use of plastic buckets. It's an eye-opener for many visitors. The tour operator sponsors a number of schools in the community, so cruisers also get the opportunity to peek in working classrooms.

While guests on most cruise ships have just one day to check out Puerto Plata, visitors who come to town with new cruise line Fathom™ will have four days to learn intimate details about the area. Their time in town won't fit the definition of typical cruise vacation days. Fathom™ guests will see a side of the Dominican Republic other visitors don't get to see, because they're willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work. It's



a different kind of cruise for a different kind of traveler who not only wants to see the world, but do their part to make it a better place.

Making chocolate at Chocal On Ground Impact Activities In Puerto Plata, Fathom™ has organized opportunities for its passengers to do community service

work. They've done all of the legwork and made it easy for visitors to work alongside locals, make friends and make an impact. Instead of lying on the beach, vacation days can be spent making water filters, working with local school children or helping a group of entrepreneurial women using artisanal chocolate to create jobs in their community. Chocal chocolate

Fathom™ itineraries leave a comfortable amount of room to breathe and explore. Time is set aside in the journey to enjoy local cuisine, learn about the culture of the Dominican Republic or simply relax. Sailings to Amber Cove begin in April 2016. Cruises to Cuba are scheduled to begin a month later in May.

It appears Fathom has found a way

to make service work easily accessible, safe and enjoyable for travelers of all ages. It might also change the way some people define a good vacation.

Dana Rebmann was part of an international group of media invited to see Amber Cove and Puerto Plata, but as always her thoughts and opinions are her own.

