

A Taste of the Tropics at Sea

Windstar's James Beard Caribbean Cruise is a feast for the senses

By Melody Wren



As I stood on the sun-drenched deck of a luxurious yacht, a warm breeze swept across my skin and the turquoise sea lapped gently at the hull below. The air was alive with the scent of saltwater and tropical blooms, while the soft rhythm of steel drums floated in the wind, inviting me to slip into the laidback rhythm of the islands. Aboard the Windstar Star Pride, the Caribbean stretched endlessly ahead, promising indulgence, exploration and a feast for the senses.

Guided by the James Beard Foundation, I was setting off on a culinary voyage into the soul of the islands where culture, colour and flavour would converge in every unforgettable bite.

As the official cruise line of the Foundation, Windstar Cruises offers a rare culinary experience

curated by some of the world's most acclaimed chefs. With five exclusive sailings each year, these cruises are in high demand and often sell out far in advance. This partnership elevates Windstar's commitment to local cuisine, giving guests immersive access to the authentic flavours and food traditions of each destination.

On this particular journey, guest chef Jamilka Borges, a James Beard Award semi-finalist, led onboard culinary events and demonstrations. Originally from Puerto Rico and now overseeing Lilith restaurant in Pittsburgh, Borges brings her signature style and deep passion for food to sea. Recognized in 2015 as a rising star by the Foundation, her presence added excitement and drew many guests specifically for this voyage.





The Star Pride, with its cozy 298-passenger capacity, fosters a warm, intimate atmosphere that makes connecting with fellow travellers and the crew effortless. Upon boarding, I was greeted by a welcoming staff whose attentiveness made me feel instantly at home. After a brief tour of the ship, I enjoyed an alfresco lunch with choices of daily made specials and then booked a spa treatment for the upcoming sea day knowing those slots disappear quickly.

As we sailed away, we were treated to the crew's signature sail-away celebration, a stirring rendition of "Conquest of Paradise" while the flag was being raised. The ritual became a favourite memory, repeated each time we departed a port. That first evening, I dined beneath the stars at Candles, where Foundation dishes were featured including thinly sliced duck carpaccio, tuna steaks and gluten free carrot cake. The food was exceptional and the conversation just as rich—passengers readily swapping travel stories over dinner.

The next day brought a solo traveller meetup, a thoughtful offering Windstar includes on most of its sailings. It was the perfect opportunity to connect with others travelling alone. According to Janet Bava, Windstar's Chief Commercial Officer, the cruise line has seen an 81 per cent rise in solo travellers since 2019, with 2024 on track to have welcomed more solo guests than ever before in its 40-year history. That upward trend shows no signs of slowing down in 2025.

As we cruised through the Caribbean, our first port of call was Willemstad, Curaçao. I chose a walking tour to explore the unique and photo-worthy architecture of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is divided by a deep channel and connected by the famous Queen Emma Bridge, a pedestrian-only floating bridge, and awash with colourful buildings, vibrant murals and sculptures. After the tour, I unwound poolside with a frozen piña colada from the Star Bar basking in the island sun. That evening, the pool deck came alive with Windstar's festive barbecue buffet, featuring dishes inspired by the James Beard Foundation and accompanied by live music. As I have many dietary restrictions, one of the waitstaff walked me through the buffet suggesting dishes that would work. There were massive pans filled with local shrimp and vegetables, watermelon carved into flowers and a long table of pastries including the world's largest apple pie. I savoured a tender steak and deliciously moist jerk chicken and salads, all delicately flavoured and designed by chef Jamilka. The energy was contagious as passengers ate, mingled, danced and enjoyed the Caribbean night.

The next day's highlight was a sail on the Samur, an authentic Siamese junk, to the uninhabited island of Klein Bonaire. Snorkelling in the pristine aquamarine waters, I swam among brilliant parrotfish, curious jellyfish and sleek white fish—an unforgettable underwater world. As we sailed

back, the crew served rum punch and platters of tropical fruit while Caribbean music floated through the air.

The rest of the cruise continued to delight. On our day at sea, I joined a morning Q&A with captain Krasimir Ivanov and the chief engineer, attended a cooking demo with chef Jamilka in which we tasted herb infused watermelon and shrimp salad, and enjoyed a wine seminar hosted by Luxe Wines. Later, a behind-the-scenes galley tour with executive chef Marcelo and chef Jamilka revealed the care, precision and creativity behind each meal served on board.

One of my favourite days was the beach barbecue party on the tiny island of Mayreau in St. Vincent & the Grenadines. We travelled by tender to Saline Bay, a beautiful anchorage where the Caribbean meets the Atlantic. Windstar's signature beach day unfolded with steel drums, snorkelling, kayaking, paddleboarding and a giant trampoline in the sea. The scent of smoky barbecue drifted across the beach as guests dined under shady trees, sipping tropical cocktails and soaking up the island vibes. Enormous whole fish, melt in your mouth smoked chicken, moist tropical cakes and colourful cocktails all combined to create the epitome of island-style celebration.

As the voyage came to a close, I found myself reflecting on the unforgettable experiences: the exquisite meals, the islands like jewels in the sea, the friendly crew and the warm connections made along the way. This Windstar cruise was more than a trip—it was a vibrant celebration of Caribbean culture, cuisine and community. With its intimate setting, welcoming spirit and immersive experiences, this was a journey I would recommend to anyone seeking something truly special.