



Travel Trunks

Club Med: Lay in the lap of luxury on Bora Bora and Columbus Isle

A few centuries ago when an internet was something you caught fish in, there reigned civilizations where blue, deep waters meant reeling in a day's meal or at least something to sell at the market. It was a much quieter time back then. No motor boats chugged along the shoreline and the pace of life was not rushed. Then about 1492, Christopher Columbus and many other adventurers of note took the ultimate cruise, setting out to discover new territories. Shuffleboard before dinner was not common, nor were dinner shows (other than the odd plank walking act). Now to those people living on these remote islands in the Caribbean and elsewhere, about the last thing they needed was to be "discovered".

Everyone knew that once the Europeans man arrived, it wouldn't be long before exposure to pestilence, immorality and Don Cherry would be far behind. Flash ahead a few centuries to the 1700's and Captain James Cook, who on another ocean cruise, much bigger than this one, was about to discover Polynesia and the magic charms of its people. The thousands of islands in this deep trench of ocean were also inhabited by magnificent seafaring explorers, who in fragile, open boats, traversed vast stretches of landless sea to themselves, populate these new lush islands.

The romanticism of a tropical paradise is something many of us dream about, and we have two very good

ones to explore!

These days travel can sometimes get complicated, given world events, and the one thing that a couple of haggard faces want to see after stumbling off the plane is a smiling one, complete with a clean towel, fresh piece of fruit or coconut filled with mysterious liquid red stuff. One such company has perfected this type of vacation...in fact, they invented it... and that is Club Med.

First, though a little history...

Club Med has been around for 55 years, since the first village (tent encampment, actually) was plunked down onto the Balearic Islands, south of Spain in the Mediterranean. The resort experience has come a long way since then! In fact with over 100 villages in exotic locations around the world, Club Med is adding “luxury” to its already strong reputation for gourmet food and excellent sports.

Club Med originated “all-inclusive” and as the resort network spread into the swingin’ sixties and beyond, the Austin Powers - “Yeah, baby” attitude of anything goes was also launched. The world finally did catch up, though and as it matured, so too, did Club Med. In fact, Club Med evolved magnificently to meet its guests’ needs. Winter villages and cruise ships became part of the mix and a more laid back attitude took hold. What wasn’t lost was the attention given to guests, through the unique GO staffing style. It also didn’t hurt to employ renowned chefs with European panache to fill even the most resistant of bellies.

The best part about it, too, is that once you toss your loonies on the table, all your accommodations, meals and sippages are part of the deal. For the most part, activities around the beach are all included, however there are scads of options in regard to diving, jet skiing, water skiing, whale riding or whatever other activity there may be at your destination. Sports equipment and instruction are truly professional at the resorts, so take the plunge! (OK, maybe not the whale riding – saddles are perhaps, too big).

If you’ve ever watched the reality TV series “Survivor”, a couple of the episodes (Vanuatu and Marquesas) offered television glimpses into the charisma of the south Pacific. Eye candy or what.



The first of our Club Med spotlight resorts, is located in the Society Islands chain in French Polynesia. Bora Bora is a short hop from Tahiti, itself made famous by the Mutiny on the Bounty, Marlon Brando and stunning landscapes. Bora Bora doesn’t take a back seat to anyone in this department, though. This absolutely spectacular island is an oasis. A volcanic peak in the middle, descending down to a magnificent coastline. The “Pearl of the Pacific” is also protected by a reef which surrounds it like a Mexican sombrero, and a dozens of tiny islands called motu’s, which offer many little charms all to themselves. The Club Med resort here is located on the southeast coast.

An extremely well-kept acreage, Club Med Bora Bora offers a perfect setting for relaxation. The pace of life here is sweetly apathetic, so maybe you go in the water, maybe not. Maybe you play some tennis, maybe not...you get the picture. Spoil yourself and plan on staying two weeks as most one-weekers try to extend, having fallen under the spell of “Bora”.

Nature is king here. From the friendly gecko who greets you on the lobby wall, to the off shore explorations, where you can swim with gigantic-but-gentle manta rays or watch the sharks “have tea”. There are also inland tours one can take where an off-road experience can discover all sorts of treasures and breath grabbing views. This is an island which was a refueling stop for American ships during the Second World War, so remnants are around to remind us of those historic days. The motu’s just off the shore offer up a peaceful day’s excursion with shuttles from the Club Med dock ferrying guests back and forth several times a day. If you prefer, you also have the option to stay, for a few dollars more, in an actual bure (cottage) right on the motu itself.

A highlight for many is the Jet Ski tour, which goes all around the island and includes stops to snorkel as well as another to a coconut show (as in how to scale the tree, hack into the furry orbs and ingest milk from within.) You might also consider a sunset cruise, complete with swanky drinks and a dazzling sunset that may be unmatched anywhere!

One thing you will also find here is the super local cuisine, which includes seafood by the net full. You might even venture out to the venerable Bloody Mary’s for a night of off-resort consumables.

Bora Bora is not cheap, but the Club Med Bora Bora offers an incredible opportunity to experience the south Pacific in an enchanting setting for an affordable price. It is indeed one of those places that should be on your “must see and not soon forgotten” list.



Meanwhile... back in the Caribbean, we find our second high end Club Med resort and that’s Columbus Isle on the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas. This is the crown jewel of the Club Med tiara and features just about everything that an upscale all-inclusive vacation could ever offer. It was created in 1992 on the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus sticking his flag into the ground. Being another remarkable location, many Club Med veterans have taken in its charms and report back that if they had to they would return for three or four weeks each month or so.

This Club Med village is located on the west coast proximal to the airport and also just north of Cockburn Town, the island’s only commercial center. The main attraction of this Club Med property is the resort itself. From the artistic ambiance, with incredible art collections from around the world, to the easy layout of all the facilities, there is everything to love about the place. It’s luxury off the beaten track and when it comes to getting away from it all, Columbus Isle fits like a pair of kid gloves. The island itself is very spartan with salt water flats and lakes in the interior. Also, being only 18 kms long, it is by no means large and like all of the Bahamian Islands, was home to a host of colourful characters, acting as the home base for buccaneers like “Pious” George Watling.

With only 240 units, there is not a bad room in the village. There are a host of ocean view accommodations, with large balconies facing the ocean and its lazy sunsets. The garden view chalets also offer great ocean vistas as well. Each large, tastefully decorated room is equipped with the latest gadgetry, however, your room may be about the last place you spend your time other than to catch zzzs.

The Columbus Isle beach runs 6 kilometres long and with it comes the world famous Club Med sports opportunities. To those with math issues, this expanse of sand also means a lot of beach for not a lot of people!

At any given opportunity one can indulge in, or learn windsurfing or catamaran sailing. One can go scuba diving or snorkeling. (the night dives are especially spectacular with all sorts of creatures combing the ocean floor). There is also wakeboarding and water skiing for those who like to show off and deep sea fishing for those who like to bob the ocean looking for “the big ones”.



On shore there are activities like tennis, archery, cycling or any of the other land lubber pastimes that keep us fit and happy. There is also an awesome fitness program that includes aqua-fitness and massages.

The reason I bring you this roster of activities is that the cuisine at Columbus Isle is like a sorcerer's wand, commanding your taste buds at will. The French-European influence has never been more present than in the kitchen, where chefs prepare meals worthy of royalty itself. Choice reigns supreme with one main restaurant and two more intimate specialty restaurants to choose from. As one might expect, the desserts and pastries are also quite naughty, particularly the ever famous white chocolate bread. It brings thoughts of the Cookie Monster joyfully engulfing a trayful of delights, though... we'd never... actually... do it..... right?

Getting to meet other interesting guests in a relaxed and informal atmosphere is a definite highlight, with visitors journeying here from around the world. Club Med Entertainment is its own quirky self and caters to mostly a European taste, however at least one go-around should never be missed.

The real appeal, though is the gently lapping waters that can caress your toes on a late night stroll, the sounds of the birds at dawn when either you are rising to meet the day, or returning home exhausted from a

night at the disco, the sounds of the ocean from your deck or the spray of salty air that sprinkles your face.

An ocean resort should be something that washes all our cares down the drain and the best ones bring us back time and again. Club Med has been wowing people for 50+ years and they know how to wrestle stress out of a pasty faced newby, just off the boat from downtown.

I'm sure that Columbus and Cook really didn't have in mind the idea of combining commerce and natural beauty all those years ago. Nor did they embrace the idea of sailing 4 months in a dank wooden ship to get there, but they both might be quite amazed that others now get to see and experience the white sandy beaches that first greeted them in their day. My guess is that if they knew there were places out there like Club Med, which pampered them with such gusto, they likely would never have returned. You may not either.

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