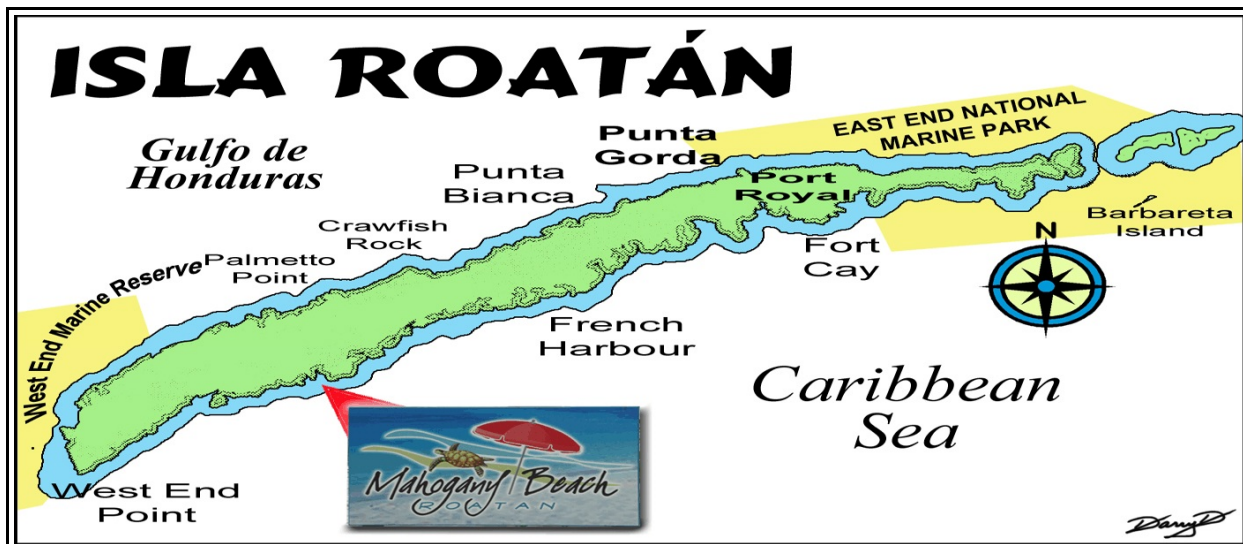




ISLA ROATAN, HONDURAS

Comments are by CruiseCritic.com members & friends
collected by 'DarryDFL' & 'PegEggFL'.

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OVERVIEW

Isla Roatan is a 70 km island off the coast of Honduras. Carnival Lines visits an area that it owns which includes a shopping plaza and Mahogany Beach. It's a completely safe port. The island is next to the Caribbean's largest coral reef (2nd largest in the world). <http://tinyurl.com/yzsmuwy>

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: Imagine a place where lobster is a common lunch fare, traffic lights don't exist & you can hail a taxi on the water. Welcome to Roatan, largest of the Bay Islands, 30 miles north of Honduras. Almost 40 miles long & just 2.5 miles at its widest point, the remote island boasts white sand beaches, pristine bays & spectacular coral reefs.

Roatan is a true melting pot. Its 40,000 people are a mix of Spanish, British, Paya Indian & African, the result of a stormy history that includes conquistadors, pirates & slave traders. In the mid-17th century, the Spanish relocated the Paya Indians in an unsuccessful attempt to rid the island of British pirates. In the late 18th century, the island was repopulated when British troops deported thousands of Black Caribs who had sided with the French during a battle over St. Vincent. Another group of immigrants arrived from the Caymans in the 1830's.

Today, tourism has overtaken commercial fishing as Roatan's top industry. Part of the world's second largest barrier reef system, Roatan's waters are teeming with colorful coral & sponges. Divers & snorkelers swim alongside schools of fish as well as whale sharks, barracuda, mantas, dolphins & turtles. The water feels like your bathtub, averaging 80 to 84 degrees, & snorkeling here is like watching high-definition television, with visibility a fantastic 80 to 120 feet.

Dozens of world-class diving & snorkeling sites are accessible from sandy white beaches around the island & through numerous operators, congregated on West End village, the hub of the island's activity. Marlin, tuna & wahoo lure anglers year-round, & for the annual fall bill fishing tournament. Roatan is also a mecca for water sports. Kayaking, waterskiing, sailing & wake-boarding are popular activities.

The former pirate haven offers travelers unspoiled charm & exceptional marine life. Like many of its Caribbean neighbors, the island is in transition. Expensive new homes & resorts stand in sharp contrast to clapboard tin-roofed houses. In addition to cruise ships, direct flights from Miami & Houston & weekly charters from Milan are bringing large numbers of tourists. Word is

that Hollywood's Leonardo DiCaprio & Francis Ford Coppola have already bought property & Julio Iglesias is developing a golf course. Our advice? Enjoy it now.

BEACHES

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Best Beach for an Active Day: West End offers beaches, coral reefs for snorkeling, eateries, & water sports like sea kayaking, diving & sailing. At the entrance to West End is palm-lined Half Moon Bay beach. Be prepared for large crowds on cruise ship days.

Best Beach for Families: Best West Bay Beach, near the northern tip of the island, features clear, shallow water (about five feet deep) teeming with coral & colorful fish right offshore. With a dozen stations marked by buoys, the Natural Aquarium Snorkel Trail at the Bay Islands Beach Resort at Sandy Bay is a fun way for kids to see everything from eagle rays to sergeant majors (open daily from 9 am until 4:30 p.m.).

Best Secluded Beach: Camp Bay Beach past the village of Diamond Rock is a two-mile idyllic stretch of white sand with swaying coconut palms perfect for snuggling under. Rent a 4-wheel drive for the unpaved road & don't forget a picnic lunch.

BUTTERFLY FARM

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Wing it at the Butterfly Farm, located just before the entrance to West End. A couple of hundred exquisite butterflies representing 15 to 20 species flit around a 3,000-square-ft. enclosure. This is also home to stunning hummingbirds, parrots & toucans (guided tours, open daily except Saturday from 9 AM to 5 PM). Don't forget your binoculars & camera.

CURRENCY

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: The official currency is the Lempira (named for a martyr who fought the Spanish), approximately 18 to the U.S. dollar. The dollar is widely accepted as are credit cards & traveler's checks. In Coxen Hole, Banco Credomatic (open Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Saturday 9 a.m. to noon) provides cash advances on credit cards & features a 24-hour ATM.

DOCK LOCATION

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: You'll be anchored on the south side of Roatan at Coxen Hole, the largest city & capital of the Bay Islands. This busy gateway is named after the pirate, John Coxen.

DOLPHIN SWIM (ANTHONY'S KEY)

► 'ScoonRod', Aug/19/2009: It was fantastic. Took a boat from the pier to Anthony's Key Resort, maybe 5 minutes. After we docked, went into the gift shop to meet our tour person. We must stand still and not reach out to the dolphins or give any hand signals/movement. There were 3 dolphins.

They divided us into two groups. We waded out in the water and stood while the dolphins swam by us. We were allowed to touch them, but only on their back. They performed by waving at us and "talking to us". Then we each got to take a turn to go forward and the dolphin kissed us. You had to crouch with hands behind your back and hold steady. The silly dolphin about knocked me over. After 30 minutes, our dolphin was supposed to stand on its tail and do flips, but would not cooperate so they brought up the other dolphin and then we had both them doing it. They had a photographer taking pictures and you were able to buy the CD for I think \$32. We bought the CD because they allowed Hubby and I to pose together with the dolphin. Afterwards, they told us we could stay and eat at their café or go out snorkeling — of course, not with the dolphins, but on the other side. The water there is just so clear it is amazing. I would do it again *if* we actually got to "swim" with the dolphins.

FINS & FLIPPERS

► 'TerriDHair', Aug/19/2009: My favorite thing has been going to "Fins & Flippers". It's a tiny island you can see from the ship; you ferry over. It's \$20 per person for the day. There is a NICE and clean area with restrooms, gift shop, restaurant/bar, (outdoor) and pool area in the middle of the island, but we walked to the far (ocean) side and there was a dock to snorkel off of, and a beach. We were practically the only ones there. Jeff took some pictures that truly could have been in a magazine or something. It's a very beautiful place.

► 'BlueHorizonLover123', Aug/19/2009: I agree. I have made reservations to go there on the last two cruises, but it was always raining and we did not get off the ship. You can see the private island it is on from the ship while eating breakfast in the morning.

FISHING

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: Anglers can land mackerel, wahoo, & tuna during half-day or full-day sport-fishing excursions available through many resorts, including Bay Islands Beach Resort & Bonefish Lodge. For deep sea fishing, the boat is licensed; bone fishing doesn't require a license if you release your fish.

FOSTER'S WEST BANK RESORT

➤ NeatoKinno, May/29/2010: We're going to Foster's. They will pick us up if we have 8 people. <http://tinyurl.com/27rtzlk>

➤ INeedAShot, Jun/2/2010: Foster's Day includes:

★ Round trip transfers from/to Cruise Dock

★ Full access to Foster's West Bay Resort including beach chairs, palapas, guest bathroom/showers

★ Complimentary beverage

★ Round-trip transportation with day use is available only for groups of 8 or more. Groups with less than 8 people are most certainly welcome and may hire a taxi to Foster's from the cruise dock. This is about a 30 minute ride and will cost approximately \$30.00 per 4 persons each way..(5.00 per person entry) If you wish to form a minimum group with round-trip transportation, one can post messages on the cruisecritic.com and find others to join along!

Adults: \$35, Children 5-13 years: \$30.

GETTING AROUND

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: A paved road runs north from Coxen Hole to West End & east to French Harbour. An unpaved road continues east to Paya Bay & Camp Bay. Taxis, rental cars, motor bike & buses are available in West End, Coxen Hole & French Harbour.

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: Renting a Car: Sandy Bay Rent a Car (504-445-1710) with locations in Sandy Bay & West End, rents 4x4 vehicles for Roatan's unpaved roads. Captain Van's in West End rents vans, mountain bikes, & scooters

(captainvans.com). Caribbean Rent a Car is located along the main road near French Harbour (504-455-6950). Rates start at \$50/day for cars & \$30 for scooters.

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: By Taxi: Some unscrupulous cab drivers have taken advantage of cruise passengers. Before entering a taxi, confirm the fare. If the driver says 20, make sure he's quoting Lempiras, not dollars. A water taxi from West End to West Bay Beach runs about \$1.25. Most cabbies accept both U.S. dollars & Lempiras.
- Magna, Aug/30/2010: By Bus: Mini buses run in either direction from Coxen's Hole. Flag down a bus, & pay the driver's assistant — about one U.S. dollar on most routes.

GUMBALIMBA PARK

- 'SMC0320', Nov/16/2009: We want to go to Gumbalimba Park in Roatan to see the monkeys and go to the beach. It is located in West Bay.

HANGING AROUND

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Besides Internet access, an ATM, a small shopping mall & a handful of restaurants, there's little here for tourists. It's a good place to buy cold drinks & sandwiches before venturing east toward French Harbour & Oak Ridge, & west toward Sandy Bay & the West End.

HORSES

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Kids & beginners can join experienced equestrians in a memorable horseback riding trip along the beach & into the hills at West Bay (Keifetos Resort) or between Calabash Bight & Paya Bay on the island's south side (Roatan Ridge Ranch).

LANGUAGE

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Though Spanish is the official language of Honduras, most people on Roatan speak both Spanish & English.

LUNA BEACH RESORT — <http://LunaBeachResort.com/>

- "Roatan Getaway by Tab Hauser," (<http://bit.ly/bz42gv>): After visiting the island of Roatan what I will say is that it this place will be "the" next destination with in a few years. If you visited Grand Cayman say 40 years ago or Providential on Grand Turk 20 years ago, you know what I mean. Luna Beach is located 20 minutes from the airport on the western end of the island. It is also

a pleasant 10 minute stroll on the beach to the village of West End. The hotel does offer internet, but only using their lap top in the lobby at \$6 per hour. This was the only real flaw I found with them. There are plenty of internet cafes to plug into in the village for \$5 per hour.

LUNCHING

Addresses in Roatan do not exist the way we know them. We've included pertinent location information; locals & cabbies will be able to point the way.

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Casual, In-Town Joints: In the center of Coxen Hole, HB Warren Supermarket's 50's-style cafeteria scrambles up eggs, along with fried beans & tortillas (open Monday to Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.). The Lighthouse, located in West End on the south side of the point, offers some of the best fish tacos, grilled lobster & conch soup on the island (open 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily).

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Gourmet Lunching: Las Rocas, set on a rocky point at West Bay, is known for authentic Bay Island dishes like shrimp with rice, chicken in coconut milk, & beef in coconut milk (open for lunch & dinner, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily). Pura Vida, in the center of West End, cooks up homemade pasta, pizza, & seafood (open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily).

MAHOGANY BEACH

► 'SMC0320', Nov/16/2009: Roatan appears to have a new free beach, courtesy of Carnival: Mahogany Beach. I think we're hitting that one too because it's a \$5 ski lift ride from the pier to the beach. Close enough to go back to the ship to have lunch.

► 'Drogers77', Nov/17/2009: <http://www.mahoganybaycc.com/> is the website. Our [Dec/13/09] cruise is scheduled to arrive at this new port, but I am confused about prices. I found the \$5 Ski Lift ride, but their Website lists Mahogany Beach as a shore excursion to be booked through your cruise line.

► 'DarryDFL', Dec/18/2009: Mahogany Beach is free, but there is a one-time \$5 fee to use the Ski Lift any number of times. We walked along a beautiful, brick path from the plaza to the beach. One can rent kayaks, canoes and paddle boats to explore the adjacent river or to maneuver along the beach. There is a bar on the beach, and the nearby plaza. Why pay for a tour when you can walk to this paradise of a beach?

► MischievousSmile, Jul/13/2010: I hope to get to see Mahogany Beach this time. When we were there in April, the ship was unable to dock there because of the winds expected later in the day. (The week before the ship did and couldn't get out so they missed the next day's port.) So we went to Coxen Hole and tendered in. Friends and I rented a car for the day so tried to go to Mahogany Beach, but were unable to do so as the entire thing is closed with just security there on the days that ships cannot dock there. I've been told this happens often and can't help but wonder if the Dream won't have an issue because it is so big.



Shopping Mall Dec/18/09



Mahogany Beach Dec/18/09

► MasterBaker, Jul/13/2010: Our reason for taking a tour in Roatan is simple. Snorkeling. Mahogany Beach is man made, although it is pretty it doesn't have a reef. I think it's great that Carnival has made that beach though. Many people don't like to venture out far from the pier area and Mahogany offers them a beautiful place to relax and enjoy a nice day ashore.

► SandS0817, Jun/2010: Next stop was Isla Roatan. Boy, oh boy, was it humid on this day! It was hot and the air was still; but, it was sooooo beautiful! We did a little shopping and hit the Magical Chair Ride over to Mahogany beach. We kayaked. It was really fun! On our way to get in the water, we saw a young girl in a great deal of pain with her foot in a bucket with medical staff surrounding her. I am assuming she got stung by a jellyfish I am not certain. This really deterred me from getting in the water, so we went back to the boat.

► MomJen, Jun/2010: We checked out the new Mahogany Bay port area after lunch. My DH thought it looked like a theme park. If you want a full photo

of the ship, go further down the beach. I tried one at the end of the bridge & got almost all of the ship. The kids were tired & hot so I didn't go farther down.

MAYAN PRINCESS RESORT

► 'Haganwood', Sep/9/2010: Hired a cab and toured the island and went to the Mayan Princess Resort to the beach and water.

PIRATES, BIRDS & MONKEYS

► MomJen, Jun/2010: Roatan: As we approached the channel, we looked down & saw a pod of 15 dolphins. Beautiful! Our excursion was Pirates, Birds & Monkeys of the Caribbean, also through Carnival. Our tour guide was Ryan & he spoke perfect English. We crossed a rope bridge to reach the parrots & monkeys. Fortunately, I didn't see one but my son did. "Mommy, that was a big rat!" Also, there were black & green iguanas everywhere. I almost stepped on one on the bridge. The monkeys were well handled. They had a baby one that was born at the park that climbed on the kids. He really liked my son! Tip: Take video & pull the pictures off of that. Worked wonderfully! We had the option to stay & use their beach & pool or head back. We were really hot so we headed back. Their drinks were reasonably priced as well.

SCUBA DIVE

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Always wanted to learn to scuba dive? Sueno del Mar Dive Center (800-298-9009), voted best on Roatan by Scuba Diving magazine, offers introductory diving lessons. Certified juniors, ages 10 to 15 years, must dive with an adult.

SELF TOURS

► 'Haganwood', Nov/17/2009: In February, 2009, we grabbed one of the tour guys right outside the dock and paid 40 bucks and had him all day. Took us on a tour of Roatan and to the Mayan Princess resort (which was \$10 to have full access to the beach/pool/restroom). Very nice beach and beautiful water. It was 40 bucks total for both of us to have the cab and the cabbie take on a tour of the island all day, and he stuck around and waited for us at the Mayan Princess while we played on the beach.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Best for Nature Lovers: The Iguana Farm on the outskirts of French Harbour is an unusual refuge for over 2,500 reptiles. At lunchtime, hundreds of iguanas of all shapes & sizes duke it out for veggies. Roatan's iguanas have been hunted to near extinction for their meat (open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m). Gardeners will enjoy strolling through the lush Carambola Botanical Gardens in Sandy Bay, home to hundreds of exotic tropical plants, including chocolate trees, orchids & heliconias (open daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.).
- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Best Overall Tour: Bottle-nosed dolphins are the scene-stealers at the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences. The Institute uses Anthony's Key Resort in Sandy Bay to care for about a dozen dolphins. The residents put on a show (Monday through Friday) & swim with visitors. The popular marine mammals attract a crowd; best to make reservations at least three to four days in advance. Sharing a building with the Institute, the Roatan Museum features exhibits on the Bay Islands (504-445-1327).
- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Best for Families: For adventurous families with children ages ten & older, the Tabyana Beach & Canopy Tour combines a great beach & snorkeling experience with the adrenalin rush of a zip line canopy tour. The Tarzan-like adventure starts at Creation Rock, where you are outfitted in a harness, pulley & gloves & attached to a cable. With 11 stretches of cable & 13 tree-top stations towering 18 to 30 feet above the ground, this is one E-ride the family isn't likely to forget.

SNORKEL & KAYAKING

- Magna, Aug/30/2010: After paddling down the coastline at either Half Moon Beach or West Bay Beach, leave your kayak onshore to explore the magical coral reefs with your mask & snorkel. Snorkeling equipment is available for rent through tour operators as well as dive shops, some restaurants, & gift shops.
- Magna, Aug/30/2010: Best for Diving & Snorkeling: Roatan's central coast is off the beaten path, with spectacular snorkeling & diving. Valley of the Kings & Parrot Tree are two outstanding snorkeling sites. Nearby, Mary's Place, with its spectacular black coral, is considered the Grand Canyon of wall diving & the island's premier dive site. A dive master leads visitors down one of two sheer-walled vertical faults cut through the reef. Subway

Watersports at Brick Bay Resort offers private snorkeling & diving excursions (www.subwaywatersports.com).

TOURS

- ▶ Lily14, Apr/25/2010: We love to snorkel and for Roatan, we're looking at a 4-hour sail with Roatan Sailing & Catamaran Charters. It's \$89-per-person & includes water, sodas, Beer, juice and open bar; snacks and lunch; snorkel gear; 1–2 snorkel spots; transportation to/from ship. Minimum 4 people, max 12 people. https://sailroatan.com/Cruise_Ship_Guests.php.
- ▶ MasterBaker, April 24, 2010: I have used 2 tour companies:
 - ★ Juan Carlos Ramirez was a wonderful guide in 2005! We had him for the entire day. He took us all around the Island (Fantasy Island, light house, shopping); told us about the history of the island people; and took us to Sandy Bay to snorkel. That water was so clear and the coral was right up to the beach! Wonderful snorkeling! http://islandertours.com/tours_rates.html
 - ★ Victor Bodden. We used him in 2005.
<http://www.boddentours.com/bestofroatan.htm>
- ▶ 'JToniva', Apr/25/2010: I highly recommend Victor Bodden.
- ▶ MischievousSmile, Jul/25/2010: Of our group of 27, there are 3 certified divers — none of whom have been down in quite a while. I've contacted a tour group in Roatan privately & he is offering to take divers & snorkelers out on the same trip to two different locations with a stop back on shore for pee break, etc. in between. The cost is \$60 for snorkeling, \$90 for the dives & he will take us down.
- ▶ TaraParrothead: In Roatan, we are looking into renting the Craig Cats, little 2 people Cats, with a motor @ \$50 an hour, if you go for more than an hour, they include a guide. We are seriously considering it for 2-3 hrs. It looks easy to get into them from the beach but I'm not sure about getting back into one in deeper water. Island Marketing & search Craig Cats. I'm also going to see about arranging a private tour of the island, looks like both companies run about \$40 ea. for all day & you can customize what you want to do. They range from cars to 15 people vans. Victor Boden & Tony's Tours has gotten good reviews over on the destination board.

VICTOR BODDEN

► TaraParrothead, Aug/24/2010: Island Marketing had a lot of tours cheaper than Carnival for Roatan. We opted to book Victor Bodden right from his web site. He gives all day tours for \$40 a person, you can pick what you want to do and pay your own entrance fees. Tripadvisor.com and some other sites gave him excellent reviews. He suggested the name of the stable where we booked our horseback tour. When we had the change of itinerary, he changed our reservation with no problem.

WEATHER

► MasterBaker, Jul/16/2010: Nov–Feb is rainy season. Roatan gets 16 inches of rain over 15 days in November. Think of it as ‘island air conditioning’. The humidity level is practically liquid and the average temps are in the mid-80's in the region. The rain is a relief in that heat and humidity. Pick clothing to wear ashore that is lightweight and dry quickly; you are going to be wet either from sweat or rain.

WEB ACCESS

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Roatan is the only Bay Island with a telephone system, but pay phones are rare. To call home or check e-mail, try Main Street Mall in Coxen Hole. Paradise Computers & Internet Café has two branches: at the JC Commercial Building on Thicket Mouth Road in Coxen Hole & next to Pura Vida in West End.