

# TRAVEL

## PROFESSIONAL

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**CARNIVAL  
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INTRODUCING A  
NEW GENERATION  
OF FUN SHIPS

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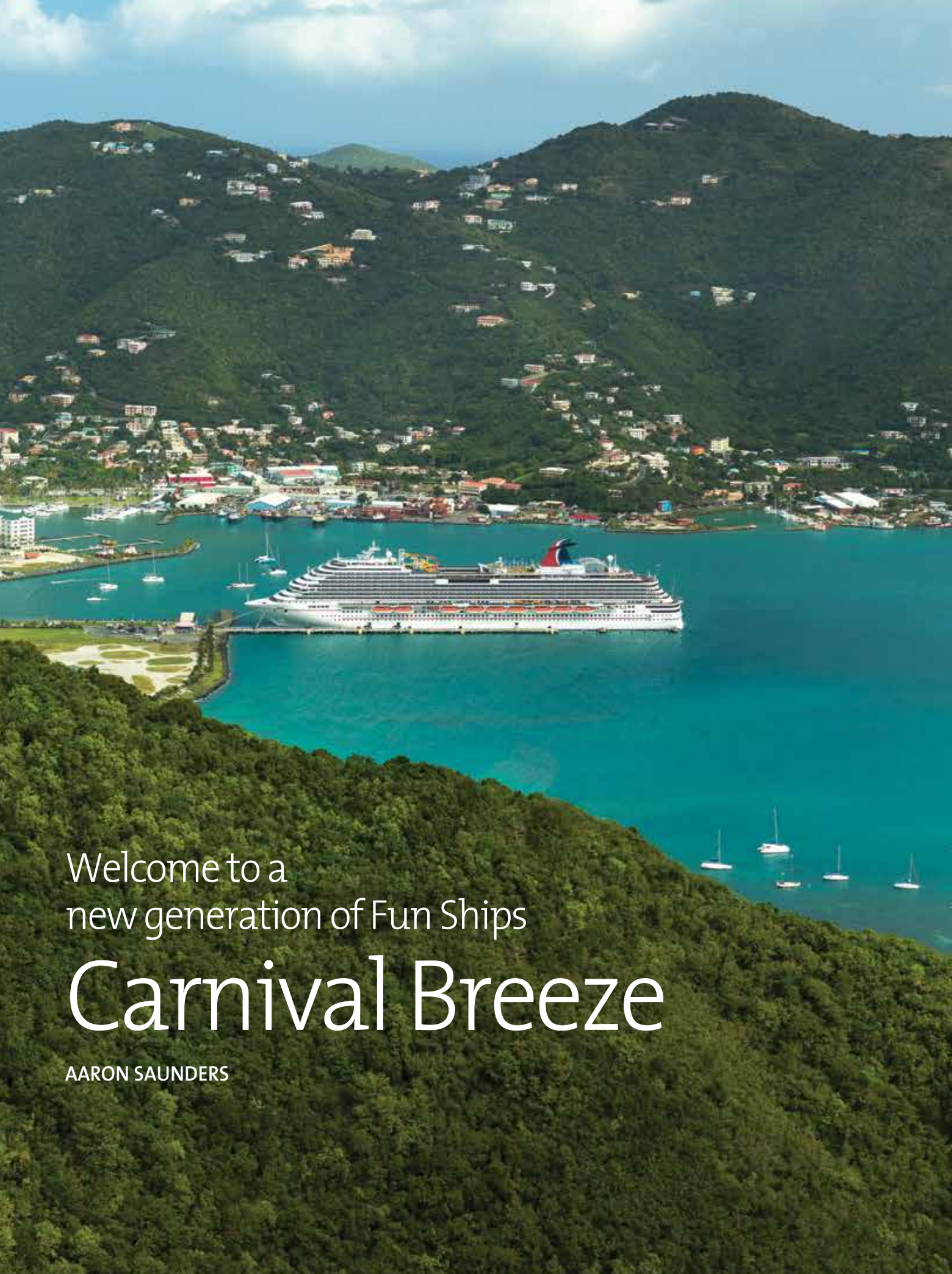
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GRAND STYLE ON THE RIVERS OF FRANCE

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Welcome to a  
new generation of Fun Ships

# Carnival Breeze

AARON SAUNDERS



Blue Iguana Cantina



RedFrog Pub

PHOTOS COURTESY CARNIVAL CRUISE LINES

Aboard *Carnival Breeze*, we set sail aboard one of Carnival Cruise Lines' newest Fun Ships – one that is geared towards an entirely new generation of cruisers.

CARNIVAL CRUISE LINES has long offered voyages to the Caribbean from Miami, but few ships are as trend setting as the new *Carnival Breeze*. For many, the 3,690-guest ship is their ticket to a week of carefree fun. A closer look, however, shows that *Carnival Breeze* isn't like those that came before her; she's leading the way for a new generation of Fun Ship cruisers.

At 1,004 feet in length, the 2012-built *Carnival Breeze* is nearly identical on the outside to her two sisters, *Carnival Dream* and *Carnival Magic*. The similarities, however, end there.

Inside, *Carnival Breeze* is the face of the 'new' Carnival. Gone are the too-bright colours and busy textures that characterised the Fun Ship fleet of the past, replaced instead with a new design that puts more emphasis on cool, soothing

décor and clean lines. Not that the line is changing gears entirely. The new look is still unmistakably Carnival; but it's a more subdued, refined Carnival. Fun, yet not overbearing; bright, but not gaudy. Even the guest corridors are attractively decorated with soft blue tones, faux slatted wood, and full-sized photographs of Caribbean islands.

Given the fact that *Carnival Breeze* was setting out into the sunset from Miami, bound for the Eastern Caribbean, this new décor seemed all the more appropriate. Our first port of call, Grand Turk, was actually built by Carnival in 2006, not far from Cockburn Town on the Turks & Caicos Islands. NASA used to use the island as one of their "splash-down" sites during the Apollo rocket phase of space exploration, but today people largely

come here for the cool ocean breeze and impossibly clear waters. Carnival offers 27 different shore excursions in Grand Turk that range from snorkelling adventures to ATV and dune buggy tours, to deluxe Cabana poolside rentals for those looking to kick back and relax in style.

We also called on Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas and Philipsburg, St. Maarten, two de-facto ports for the Eastern Caribbean. Both are pretty, fun, and loaded with things to do. Our call on San Juan, Puerto Rico, though, proved to be the most enriching destination. Founded in 1521, Old San Juan has a more decidedly European flair to it than most other Caribbean ports of call. The Old Town and El Morro fortress are both recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites for their cultural and historic significance.



She may have a new look and feel, but *Carnival Breeze* is still a truly Fun Ship.



My itinerary was also tempered with three fantastic days at sea that could be used to fully enjoy the *Carnival Breeze*. She was the first in the fleet to feature all of Carnival's FunShip 2.0 enhancements straight out of the shipyard. A \$500-million investment, these incorporated new entertainment and dining features and added new amenities not seen on Carnival ships before.

I was pleasantly surprised by the strength of the acts at the new Punchliner Comedy Club, headed up by noted comedian George Lopez. Carnival does offer a "clean" comedy show that's suitable for families, but it is their late-night, no-holds-barred performances that had people lining up around the corner of the Limelight Lounge. By rotating the comedians mid-cruise, Carnival did a great job of keeping the acts here fresh and relevant.

*Carnival Breeze* also features an impressive number of dining venues that are sure to satisfy even the pickiest eater. I don't normally go out of my way to eat hamburgers, but the ones served up – free of charge, no less – at Guy's Burger Joint were mouth-wateringly good. Carnival created Guy's in partnership with celebrity

chef Guy Fieri and the venture seems to have been a welcomed addition, judging by the lines that formed prior to its noon opening each day.

Directly across the pool deck, the Blue Iguana Cantina creates made-to-order burritos and tacos that were also surprisingly tasty, all of which could be served up with any number of authentic Mexican drinks. Quality is good enough that the cruise line could be charging money for this – but they're not.

The diversity of the culinary options offered was impressive. One neat feature appearing on the dinner menus in the Sapphire and Blush Main Dining Rooms was the "Didja" category – as in "Did You Ever – food you always wanted to try, but did not dare." This was my favourite menu selection, with dishes like sushi, escargot and even an alligator dish one night.

On the social scene, The RedFrog Rum Bar was an enormous hit, particularly during adult pub trivia – where the only rule is that everyone has to have a drink to participate. A tasty pint of Carnival's very own ThirstyFrog Red suited well. As you can imagine, towards the end the answers get a little interesting. ■

If you're looking for something a little more refined, you can hide away in the cozy, wood-paneled Library Bar. It features self-service wine dispensers, a dedicated bar, and a book selection that's very comprehensive.

Fun, of course, is plentiful on Carnival. The Fun Times daily programme listed over 80 different activities from dawn to dusk on a single sea day. What's more, they managed to offer activities that I'd never seen before aboard a mainstream ship, like "Towel Animal Theatre". I was expecting an amateur-style puppet show; instead, Carnival whipped up a full-blown Muppets-esque spectacular for the little ones, complete with songs, colourful lighting and a boppy soundtrack.

In the end, my week aboard *Carnival Breeze* was all about surprises. Surprise, at the quality of the food, the entertainment, and service onboard. And surprise that, on a 3,690-guest ship, you could still find a quiet spot to yourself. The sheer depth and variety of the offerings onboard was remarkable. She may have a new look and feel, but *Carnival Breeze* is still a truly Fun Ship. ■

