

BOTANIC GARDENS IN THE CARIBBEAN

Posted by Oceania Cruises

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Lush blooms of exotic beauty and diversity welcome you at botanic gardens in destinations across the Caribbean. Established during the British Colonial era as “Horticultural Experimental Stations,” the original mission was to study, collect and disseminate plants that may be of commercial, medical or other advantage.

Today botanic gardens foster public education and support for local efforts at wildlife preservation and ecological sustainability. Visitors get close-up views of gorgeous Caribbean flora and scents of exotic fruits and spices, often while strolling through park-like settings with idyllic streams and fountains, and even the occasional passing monkey or resident peacock.

Grand Cayman

Following the popular Seven Mile Beach, a main attraction in Grand Cayman is the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park of the Cayman Islands. A manicured path meanders past indigenous trees and flowers of tropical curiosity, like Ylang-Ylang, which is an ingredient in the captivating fragrance Chanel No. 5. Ponds out of a fantasy frame primeval lily pads and the occasional Cayman parrot spies from a branch above. Many visitors come here for a sighting of the endemic blue iguanas, affectionately called “Gentle Blue Giants.” Clinging from the brink of extinction a few years ago, they were brought to this reserve for study and preservation where they seem to be flourishing.



St. Lucia

Hands down some of the most exquisite tropical plants come out of the rich volcanic soil of this southern Caribbean island. Ginger lily, heliconia and orchids of every imaginable shade grow in this veritable Garden of Eden, while vanilla, cacao, soursop, calabash and nutmeg trees vie for visitors’ attention. A photo stop at Diamond Waterfalls captures the flashing colors glinting among the mineral-rich cascade. Nearby, the mineral water was captured in special therapeutic baths built in 1784 for the benefit of King Louis XVI’s soldiers. Local guides lead visitors to stations set up along the path where they explain the traditional culinary, spiritual and healing attributes of the island’s fruit, spices and herbs.



St. Vincent

Bragging rights for the oldest botanic garden in the Caribbean belong to St. Vincent Botanic Gardens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Arguably the most historic exhibit at the gardens is the breadfruit tree, billed as a direct descendant of an original sapling brought from Tahiti by Captain William Bligh of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame in the 1790s. Introduced as a food staple for the slave population, breadfruit remains a popular local food today. Another favorite in this garden is the appearance of the island's national bird, affectionately called "Vincy."



The many botanic gardens throughout the Caribbean islands offer fascinating insight into the local flora and make for a delightful diversion for travelers and visitors. They also satisfy the growing public interest in local efforts to protect the wealth of indigenous and endemic living natural resources.

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