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ACTIVITIES

Posted by: [Jan Ross](#)

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A bridge and secluded home.

If you have never visited New England, as we hadn't, a cruise of the area is the best way to visit and really enjoy your trip. And the Islands of New England cruise on the Grande Caribe from [Blount Small Ship Adventures](#) is the best cruise to take. One of the most wonderful things about cruising is that you can take your cozy, comfortable cabin along with you on your travels! Unpack once, then spend your week relaxing on board as you drift along visiting some of the most well-known

locations in New England.

The Grande Caribe is not an overwhelmingly huge cruise ship; instead, it has space for about eighty passengers in small but comfortable staterooms and is just the right size to be homey. The lounge area on the main deck is furnished with plenty of comfortable upholstered furniture and tables for playing games, reading, or simply enjoying the passing scenery. The adjoining bar area includes soda dispensers, where you are welcome to fill a glass with ice and a drink whenever you want, and space for the liquor and wine bottles that Blount encourages you to bring aboard. Not only do they welcome you to bring aboard your own liquor and wine – they even provide snacks and mixers to accompany them, and there are two very nice cocktail parties during the weeklong cruise that serve scrumptious hot appetizers.

The upper deck includes a shaded area and lots of tables and chairs, along with loungers for relaxing in the sun as the ship cruises along the waterways. The dining room downstairs has tables of varying sizes where you'll get to know your fellow passengers much better than you ever have on any large ship cruise. There's also a soft drink dispenser, along with fresh coffee and other hot drinks and plenty of cookies, pastries, and fresh fruit for snacking in between meals. You will not go hungry on this cruise and you'll enjoy



Sunset on Cuttyhunk Island.

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every bite.



The Grande Caribe.

The cruise embarks from tiny Warren, Rhode Island where Blount Small Ship Adventures is based. It's very nice to find a free parking spot, hand over your luggage, and walk aboard with no fuss. After unpacking and finding a place for everything in our small stateroom (this is made easier by the fact that you can stow all your luggage under the beds) and a delightful lunch of fresh lobster salad, we headed to the top deck to watch our ship begin the short journey to Cuttyhunk, the outermost

of the Elizabeth Islands in Massachusetts where we would drop anchor for the night. The beginning of our voyage set the tone for the rest of the trip with friendly fellow passengers, gorgeous weather, and calm water. Quiet Cuttyhunk was mainly a place to spend a night sleeping blissfully, but a few of us did disembark to stroll the quiet island paths in the dusky evening.

Nantucket was our next stop and Blount provided a bus tour of the area. We were properly awed at the beauty of the gray shingled New England homes – something we would see on every island on our cruise.



Windmill on Nantucket Island.

Quaint cobblestone streets and gray shingled homes, bicycling locals and tourists, lines for the requisite island ferry and a local farmer's market set up for the morning seemed to epitomize this typical New England island. There was an optional walking tour offered by Blount, but we picked up a walking tour map at the tiny visitor center instead and rambled through the neighborhoods on our own, trying to imagine how many millions of dollars some of the surrounding mansions must have cost.

Martha's Vineyard provided another bus tour the next morning, but this time we made a stop at the historic Southeast Lighthouse to appreciate the astonishing view and get some photos. After lunch back on the ship, we decided to brave public transportation as a bus stopped precisely where we were docked. We hopped aboard, paid the extremely reasonable fare, and headed back to Oak Bluffs for a walk along the coastline and, once again, marveled at the breathtaking Victorian mansions in the area. A large and very popular park lies in the middle of town and is surrounded by truly amazing mansions, all of which are single family dwellings and many of which are only used in the summer. Families were relaxing in the park with picnics and kites that caught the strong wind from the ocean.

New Bedford, Massachusetts was once the whaling capital of the world. We headed to their fascinating and historic whaling museum after our



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A sailboat school.

arrival in port and walking tour of the waterfront. Lunch, a nap, and an afternoon of reading on deck made this the perfect day onboard. Soon enough, it was time for another fabulous dinner. Our meals onboard the Grande Mariner were absolutely delicious, each one better than the last. We had lobster in some form every day, including an authentic

lobster bake one evening. The chef and assistants set up a steamer oven on the top deck that consisted of a plywood frame enclosing a stove with seaweed layered under the freshly caught lobsters, potatoes, and fresh corn. When we were served a whole lobster that night, some of us had no clue how to eat this monstrosity but, after a demonstration of how to crack the claws and tail, we dug in and relished every buttery bite.

Heading back in the direction of Rhode Island the next day, we stopped on Block Island, which was a shocking experience. Expecting a quiet island with a few homes, we were pleasantly surprised by the busy town with shops and restaurants full of tourists. Our bus tour soon pulled away from town, though, and we finally saw the island we were expecting with wonderful views, beautiful oceanfront homes, stone fences, lighthouses, and ponds filled with gorgeous, blooming lily pads. We spent some time moseying around town and had lunch on a restaurant patio with a view of the ocean. We couldn't get enough lobster rolls and ordered yet another one for lunch. This ubiquitous New England treat is basically a lobster salad, comprised mainly of cut-up lobster and mayonnaise, served on a buttered and toasted bun – it's delicious! Don't leave the area without sampling one – or possibly two or three.

Blount Small Ship Adventures planned well and included an extra-long stay in Newport, our favorite location on the cruise. Don't leave Newport without touring some of the incredible mansions which were summer homes for some of the most affluent families in America a century ago. The Breakers is especially stunning and allows you access to the Cliff Walk, a sidewalk that wends along the cliffs overlooking the sparkling Atlantic Ocean.



Sunset on Cuttyhunk Island.

We woke early on our last morning as the captain skillfully steered us out of Newport Harbor and back towards Warren where we would sadly disembark. After some last minute packing and breakfast, we waited in the lounge, chatting as our new passenger friends were helped off the ship to catch their flights, and then we finally disembarked, loaded up our suitcases, and headed home. We were sorry to see our cruise come to an end, but excited to know that Blount has lots of other itineraries to choose from. We are already making plans for another adventure, and you should too!

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For twenty years, I worked as a librarian in an elementary school but finally decided to get serious about travel writing and devote all my time to it. Now, I travel the world and write all about it. I can't imagine a more fabulous or fulfilling job. I write a regular travel column for two regional, Central Kentucky magazines and contribute regularly to other magazines and online travel sites, such as The SavvyGal, A Luxury Travel Blog and

The Vacation Gals. I'm an avid reader and stay active with Yoga, Pilates and Zumba classes. My favorite place in the whole world is a beach - any beach. I have been married for 34 years and my husband is my favorite travel companion. I also rely on him for his excellent photography skills. We have two grown children and the best grandson in the world. Slowly but surely, we are visiting all the places we have dreamed about. Hopefully, the next one will be the one you want to read about!

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