



IN THE WAKE · CRUISINGINTHEWAKE.COM

7-Night Thanksgiving Caribbean — Hosted Solo Group

*Norwegian Escape · 7 Nights from Port Canaveral
November 20 – 27, 2026 · Thanksgiving Cruise · Hosted by Pam
Walters*



Norwegian Escape arriving at Nassau — full broadside in Bahamian waters with the signature marlin/whale hull livery clearly visible. Photo by Syrus257 (CC BY 2.0) via Wikimedia Commons.

A Voyage Pack from **In the Wake**

Hosted by Pam Walters · **Thanksgiving Group Cruise Facebook chat**

Welcome

This pack exists to make one specific cruise easier: **Norwegian Escape**, sailing 7 nights from Port Canaveral, **November 20 – 27, 2026** — Friday to Friday, with **Thanksgiving Day (Thursday November 26) at sea or on the cay**. The itinerary calls at **Puerto Plata (Amber Cove), St. Thomas, Tortola, and Great Stirrup Cay**. It's a **hosted solo cruisers group cruise** organized by **Pam Walters**.

Pam is your on-ship host. Communication for this group runs through the **Thanksgiving Group Cruise Host Pam Facebook chat** — join before sailing for pre-cruise logistics, the sailaway gathering, group dinner timing, and the daily where-are-we-meeting rhythm. Once aboard, Pam is the in-person organizer. For booking questions and what's bundled with your group rate, contact your travel agent.

A note on the Thanksgiving angle. This sailing is built around the holiday. NCL serves a full Thanksgiving feast on Thursday Nov 26 — traditional turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie — typically across all main dining rooms with no extra charge. **Specialty restaurants stay open with their regular menus** if you'd rather have steak or Italian. For solo cruisers, Thanksgiving aboard is often quieter and warmer than Thanksgiving alone at home — that's part of why solo cruisers book this sailing.

A note on Friday-to-Friday. Most cruise weeks run Saturday-to-Saturday. NCL repositions Escape's schedule to Friday-to-Friday this week so that Thanksgiving lands mid-itinerary rather than on debark day. Plan flights and pre-cruise hotels accordingly.

A note on November Caribbean weather. The official Atlantic hurricane season runs through November 30, but the late-November risk is low; the season's peak is September and early October. November typically delivers calmer seas and lower humidity than peak summer cruising. Bring a light rain layer; otherwise, this is typically a calm Caribbean week. See **Section 7** for the seasickness backstop.

It is calm by design. No urgency, no upsell, no countdown timer. The site that produced this pack is independent — no cruise-line affiliations, no shore-excursion commissions, no display ads.

Includes an offline-capable Emergency Contacts section — a fillable family handoff card, cruise-line and consulate numbers tailored to this itinerary, available offline after first load via **In the Wake's** PWA. Designed to share with one trusted person ashore before sailing.

If you're sailing solo for the first time, you are not the only one in this group doing so. The **solo cruising stories on this site** are worth reading whether before, during, or after this trip.

A note on what's first-hand here and what isn't

I haven't sailed this exact itinerary on this ship. **Tina has been on Norwegian Cruise Line ships of this class before** and is the booking source-of-truth for the group rate (cabin tier, what's bundled with Free at Sea, the holiday-specific dining credits). **Pam Walters** is the on-ship host running the daily group rhythm once you're aboard, with all the human connections of the Thanksgiving Group Cruise chat behind her. The pack stitches together NCL's published specifications, the geography of Puerto Plata / St. Thomas / Tortola / Great Stirrup Cay, the November Eastern Caribbean weather pattern, and a careful read of what NCL serves on Thanksgiving Day — so the operational scaffolding is useful even where I wasn't aboard. Where the writing rests on first-hand observation, I've kept it modest; where it rests on published specification or itinerary structure, the **sources note** at the end of the pack lists what was checked. If something here doesn't match what Tina or Pam know first-hand, defer to them.

At a Glance

Ship

Norwegian Escape — lead ship of the **Breakaway Plus class** (sisters: **Norwegian Joy** 2017, **Norwegian Bliss** 2018, **Norwegian Encore** 2019)

Cruise line

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)

Class	Breakaway Plus — the larger evolution of the Breakaway class
Specifications	164,998 GT · 1,069 ft / 326 m · 20 decks (16 passenger-accessible, 12 with cabins) · 2,174 staterooms · ~4,266 double occupancy / ~5,218 max guests · ~1,733 crew
Year built	2015 (Meyer Werft, Papenburg, Germany); Nassau, Bahamas registry
Maiden voyage	October 29, 2015 — transatlantic from Hamburg/Southampton
Christening	November 9, 2015 at PortMiami
Godfather	Pitbull (Armando Christian Pérez) — the first male godfather ever bestowed in cruise-ship christening history. Royal christenings traditionally use “godmother.” NCL broke the convention with Escape.
Departure port	Port Canaveral, Florida (Cruise Terminal 10 — verify in NCL app)
Itinerary	7 nights / 8 days · Eastern Caribbean round-trip
Audience	Solo travelers (hosted group); Thanksgiving cruisers; first-time Caribbean cruisers
Group host	Pam Walters — communication via the Thanksgiving Group Cruise Host Pam Facebook chat
Group rates	Solo Studio \$1,249 · Ocean View \$1,569 · Balcony \$1,839 (per the original group flyer; verify with your booking agent)
Currency aboard	US Dollar

Ports of call

The verified shape for the November 20 – 27, 2026 sailing (typical NCL Eastern Caribbean rotation; verify your day order in the NCL app):

1. **Port Canaveral, Florida** — embark Fri Nov 20 · see </ports/port-canaveral.html>
2. **Cruising at sea** — Sat Nov 21
3. **Puerto Plata (Amber Cove), Dominican Republic** — Sun Nov 22
4. **St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands** — Mon Nov 23
5. **Tortola, British Virgin Islands** — Tue Nov 24
6. **Cruising at sea** — Wed Nov 25
7. **Great Stirrup Cay (NCL private), Bahamas** — Thu Nov 26 (**Thanksgiving Day**)
8. **Port Canaveral, Florida** — disembark Fri Nov 27

Every stop has a port page on this site: Port Canaveral, Amber Cove, St. Thomas, Tortola, and Great Stirrup Cay; this pack carries the sailing-specific reading of each.

The Thanksgiving Day placement depends on the specific sailing — some Friday-to-Friday Thanksgiving rotations put Great Stirrup Cay on Thanksgiving Day; others put it on Wednesday with Thanksgiving at sea so the full feast can run uninterrupted.

Verify your specific day order in the NCL app. Either way, NCL serves the traditional Thanksgiving feast onboard wherever Day 7 falls.

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Section 1 — Your Ship: Norwegian Escape

The lead Breakaway Plus ship — eleven years on

Norwegian Escape was delivered October 22, 2015 by Meyer Werft at Papenburg, Germany — the **lead ship of NCL’s Breakaway Plus class** (the larger evolution of the Breakaway class). Her sisters arrived later: **Norwegian Joy** (2017), **Norwegian Bliss** (2018), and **Norwegian Encore** (2019). By your November 2026 sailing she’s eleven years into service: settled, with crew rhythms long established.

She was christened **November 9, 2015 at PortMiami** by **Pitbull** (Armando Christian Pérez) — the Miami-born rapper who became the **first male godfather ever bestowed in cruise-ship christening history**. The convention had been “godmother” for centuries — NCL broke it with Escape. Quietly distinctive in cruise lore.

If you’ve sailed **Norwegian Bliss** or **Norwegian Encore**, **Escape is a near-identical Breakaway Plus hull and the same general layout** with a few refinements that distinguish her from the later sisters. The Alaska-themed Wyland hull mural on Bliss is replaced on Escape by **Guy Harvey’s marlin-and-billfish hull artwork** — visible the moment the ship is at the pier. If you’re new to Breakaway Plus, the **Ship Size Atlas** shows how she compares against the newer Prima Plus class and other megaships.

What’s distinctive about Escape

- **The Guy Harvey hull artwork** — Escape’s hull mural depicts a leaping marlin, sea turtle, swordfish, and other Caribbean game fish. Visible from any pier shot.

Guy Harvey is a Caribbean marine artist; the partnership is fitting for an Eastern Caribbean ship.

- **The Sky Walk ropes course** — a three-story rope-and-plank course running the width of the upper decks, with two narrow planks that extend eight feet over the side of the ship and five Sky Rail zip tracks that fly over open ocean. At launch in 2015 NCL marketed this as the largest ropes course at sea — Escape's defining outdoor signature.
- **The Aqua Park** — at launch, marketed as the largest at sea: **the Aqua Racer** (twin-tube racing slides), **Free Fall slides** (steep enclosed drops), **The Whip** (a tubular spiral slide), two pools, four hot tubs, and a dedicated kids' area.
- **Spice H2O** (Deck 17 aft) — the adults-only open-air lounge at the stern; the open-air viewing spot on this ship. Escape has no forward Observation Lounge, so the forward-lounge advice from other NCL packs does not apply here.
- **Vibe Beach Club** — adults-only enclave with private pool, two hot tubs, dedicated bar, shaded loungers. ~\$99/day or \$399/week pre-cruise.
- **The Haven by Norwegian** — ship-within-a-ship suite enclave with private restaurant, lounge, pool, and butler service.
- **Pincho Tapas Bar** (Deck 8) — a small Spanish tapas room; specialty dining at small-bites cadence.

What's NOT on Escape

- **No go-kart track / Speedway** — NCL introduced the at-sea Speedway with **Norwegian Joy** in 2017, two years after Escape. The later three Breakaway Plus sisters (Joy, **Bliss**, **Encore**) all got the two-level Speedway; Escape did not.
- **No Indulge Food Hall** — that's a Prima-class signature. Escape predates the Prima Class by seven years.
- **No Penrose Atrium** — also Prima-class.
- **No Aqua Slidecoaster** — Prima Plus only (Aqua, Luna).

Cabin categories — the solo calculus

The group flyer shows three price points: **Solo Studio \$1,249, Ocean View \$1,569, Balcony \$1,839**. Honest reads:

- **Solo Studio at \$1,249** — NCL's signature solo offering. Escape has **82 dedicated Studio cabins** — one of the largest Studio inventories on any cruise ship. Roughly 100 sq ft, windowless, with **no single supplement** and **Studio Lounge access** (free coffee, social space, hosted hours, scheduled meet-and-greets for solo cruisers). The Studio Lounge is the daily social anchor; solos cluster there independent of the group meetups. **At \$1,249, this is the price-leader for solo travel.**
- **Ocean View at \$1,569** — a window cabin, daylight in the morning, the world feels different. The \$320 differential buys real space + a window. **The value pick for most solo cruisers.**
- **Balcony at \$1,839** — a private outdoor space, which on a Caribbean cruise matters more than on Alaska. Sea-day sunrises, port-day return-from-shore decompression, evenings with a book. At a \$270 differential over Ocean View, **the splurge that pencils out** if the math works.

Before you commit, run the stateroom sanity check — give it your ship and cabin number and it tells you whether that cabin sits in a known trouble spot: under the pool deck, over the theater, by the galley or the elevator bank, far forward, behind a lifeboat, or on a connecting door. On most Norwegian ships its cabin list is still partial, and it says so on the result. Studios suit confident sleepers. The check won't tell you whether a windowless room will bother you; it tells you where the cabin sits. Once chosen, the **cabin organization guide** covers small-space pragmatics.

Dining

Escape's dining map:

Included with your fare (no extra charge):

- **Manhattan Room** (Deck 7 aft) — main dining room with a small dance floor and live music most evenings. Most atmospheric of the included rooms.
- **Taste and Savor** (Deck 6) — paired main dining rooms; same menu, different room atmosphere.
- **Garden Café** (Deck 16) — buffet; long hours; upper-deck view earns its keep on sea days.

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- **O'Sheehan's Neighborhood Bar & Grill** (Deck 7) — pub food and classics around the clock; the fallback for any hour. (This is the venue that goes by The Local on Escape's younger sisters.)

Specialty dining (extra charge or via Specialty Dining Package):

- **Cagney's Steakhouse** — NCL's standard steakhouse; reliably good.
- **Le Bistro** — French; the most romantic specialty room on NCL ships.
- **Teppanyaki** — Japanese hibachi; the showy room; group-friendly seating.
- **Q Texas Smokehouse** — Texas BBQ.
- **Los Lobos** — modern Mexican.
- **Ocean Blue** — Geoffrey Zakarian-partnered seafood (verify whether running in 2026).
- **La Cucina** — Italian.
- **Food Republic** — pan-Asian small plates; one of NCL's most distinctive specialty rooms. Worth the visit even if you're not a sushi-and-pho person.
- **Pincho Tapas Bar** — Spanish tapas; small bites and wine.

Drinks. NCL's drink-package math: the Premium Beverage Package is commonly included in the **"Free at Sea"** promotional bundle when booking. If your group fare included Free at Sea, drinks may already be covered — **verify what's bundled with your booking agent**. Otherwise the package runs ~\$109/day per person + 20% gratuity at pre-cruise rates; breaks even at ~5–6 drinks per day. The **drink-calculator** lets you put in your real consumption pattern and see the breakeven. The companion article **Is the drink package worth it?** walks through worked examples.

The honest first-day mistake to avoid: Don't sign up for an unlimited drink package at the front desk on Day 1 unless you've already done the drink-calculator math. Decide before you board, ideally as part of your Free At Sea bundle. Mid-sail upgrades cost more per day and give you fewer days of usage.

Connectivity at sea

NCL's Wi-Fi packages are tier-based and frequently bundled into Free at Sea. The **internet at sea guide** covers cross-line baselines and how to avoid cellular roaming charges in port.

For most solo cruisers in this group:

- Use included basic Wi-Fi if your fare bundles any
 - Don't try to stream video at sea
 - Use port-day cellular when possible (DR uses Claro/Altice; USVI uses US carriers normally; BVI uses Flow/Digicel; expect no usable cellular at Great Stirrup Cay)
 - Keep one trusted person ashore informed via a daily one-line message — see **Section 6**
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Section 2 — Day by Day

The day-by-day below uses the typical NCL Escape Eastern Caribbean rhythm. **Verify your specific times in the NCL app** — the published sequence sometimes shifts between sailings.

***This is not your plan.** What follows is one possible shape of the week, not a schedule to keep. Only a few things on it are actually fixed: the muster drill, sailaway, the ship's arrival and all-aboard times in each port, and anything you have already booked. Everything else is a suggestion you are free to ignore, reorder, or sleep through. A day spent entirely on your balcony is not a day wasted, and nothing here is a commitment you have made to anyone.*

Day 1 — Friday, November 20 — Port Canaveral (embarkation)

Terminal: Port Canaveral, Cruise Terminal 10 (NCL's typical Central Florida berth — verify in the NCL app 14 days before sailing).

Getting to Port Canaveral:

- **Orlando International (MCO) → Port Canaveral:** Uber/Lyft \$60–80, 45–60 min. Shared cruise shuttle ~\$30/person, slower.
- **If driving:** Port Canaveral garage ~\$17–22/day (significantly cheaper than PortMiami's \$35); reservable in advance via the Port Canaveral website.

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- **Embark window:** Typically 11:30 AM – 3:30 PM. **All-aboard 3:30 PM.** Ship departs ~4:00–5:00 PM.

Pre-cruise hotel — strongly recommended. Same-day flights to a 3:30 PM Friday all-aboard are risky given Thanksgiving-week travel volume. Two viable bases:

- **Cocoa Beach** (15 min from port) — beach town, walking distance to the pier and beach. Right call if you want to be near the port.
- **Orlando MCO area** (45 min from port) — more hotel options, longer Friday-morning transfer.

Thursday Nov 19 — fly into MCO. This is the day before your Friday embarkation — and, usefully, a full week ahead of the Thanksgiving travel crush (which peaks on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Nov 25, while you’re already at sea). Still, book flights early and consider arriving Wednesday Nov 18 for extra buffer. Pam will confirm any pre-cruise gathering plans in the Facebook group chat.

The realistic Day 1 timeline:

- **11:00 AM:** Terminal opens. NCL online check-in via the NCL app — complete it before arrival to skip a 20-minute queue.
- **12:00 PM:** Aboard. Cabins typically open by 1:30 PM; until then, lunch at the buffet (**Garden Café**, Deck 16) or **O’Sheehan’s** (Deck 7).
- **1:30 PM:** Cabin open. Meet your stateroom steward.
- **3:00 PM:** Mandatory muster drill — partly app-based (watch the safety video in the NCL app) plus an in-person check-in at your assigned station.
- **4:00 PM: Sailaway.** Pam’s group gathers at a spot she names in the Facebook group chat; on Escape the natural sailaway spots are **Spice H2O** (Deck 17 aft, adults-only, open air) and **The Waterfront** (Deck 8, the outdoor promenade). Both are less crowded than the main pool deck.
- **5:30 – 8:00 PM:** Dinner. Pam’s nightly group dinner is at the **Manhattan Room (or one of the main dining rooms)** at 5:30 PM — verify in the Facebook group chat. Show up to whichever nights work for you.
- **Later evening:** NCL hosts a **Studio meet-and-greet** sometime on Day 1 in the **Studio Lounge** — check the NCL app’s daily program.

What to pack in your carry-on for Day 1: swimsuit (pools open before checked bags arrive), light layer (Florida November evenings can be 65–75°F outdoors but ship interior runs ~72°F), all medications, change of clothes, **passport** (required — DR, USVI, BVI are foreign or special-jurisdiction; passport is the cleanest documentation), phone charger, refillable water bottle. Your checked bags may not arrive until 7–9 PM.

Money/card: Your NCL keycard is your ID, room key, and onboard charge. **Currency aboard: US Dollar.**

Day 2 — Saturday, November 21 — Cruising at sea

The settling-in day. The ship is heading southeast across the Florida Straits and Gulf Stream toward the Dominican Republic.

Morning:

- **The Waterfront** (Deck 8) at sunrise — quiet at 6 AM with coffee.
- **Breakfast at Garden Café** (Deck 16) — upper-deck windows, sea view. Or sit-down at Manhattan Room for a longer breakfast.
- **Studio Lounge** if you booked Studio — hosted Day 2 coffee hour is the NCL solo-cruiser tradition.

Mid-morning to lunch — pick ONE:

- **The Sky Walk ropes course** — first hour after it opens has the shortest queues. Free.
- **Aqua Park** — the Aqua Racer, Free Fall slides, The Whip. All free.
- **Mandara Spa thermal-suite day pass** — sea-day intro rates appear. ~90 minutes is the right dose.
- **Port talk for Puerto Plata** — NCL schedules a Day-2 briefing on tomorrow's port. Worth attending if it's your first time at Amber Cove.

Afternoon:

- **Pool deck or Vibe Beach Club** — if you bought the Vibe pass, this is the day.
- **Trivia, live music, activities** — check the daily program.
- **Specialty dining reservations** — if you didn't book online pre-cruise, walk up to a host stand mid-afternoon for late-day openings. The 7:30 – 8:30 PM slots fill first.

Evening — group dinner.

Pam's standard 5:30 PM group dinner. The Manhattan Room seats groups easily.

Day 3 — Sunday, November 22 — Puerto Plata (Amber Cove), Dominican Republic

Arrival: Approximately 8:00 AM. **Depart:** 5:00 PM. Escape docks at **Amber Cove** — Carnival Corporation's purpose-built cruise port complex on the Dominican Republic's north coast, about 30 minutes from the city of Puerto Plata.

The shape of Puerto Plata / Amber Cove. Amber Cove is the cruise-port complex; Puerto Plata is the actual city. Most cruisers stay at Amber Cove and never see Puerto Plata; some venture inland. Amber Cove has a beach, multiple pools, a zip line, restaurants, shops, and a paid waterpark. The complex was built specifically for cruise visitors and is highly developed. If you want a low-stress "stay near the ship" day, Amber Cove delivers.

Free with your cruise card (at Amber Cove):

- Multiple pool zones (free; first-come for chairs)
- Beach access (small but real)
- Shops and the duty-free zone
- Restaurants for purchase (most affordable in USD)

Paid (decide ahead):

- **Damajagua Waterfalls** — the inland excursion that justifies leaving Amber Cove. A series of 27 cascades you can climb and slide through. Ship excursion ~\$95/person; independent operators ~\$50–60. 4–5 hour day total. Wet shoes required.
- **Puerto Plata City Tour** — visit the colonial fortress (San Felipe), the amber museum, the malecón waterfront. Half-day; ~\$40–60 with transport.
- **Ocean World Adventure Park** — dolphins, sea lions, tigers, sharks. ~\$70 entry; controversial ethics for some travelers (research before booking).
- **Mount Isabel de Torres cable car** — short ride to the top of the mountain with the Christ statue, botanical gardens, panoramic views. ~\$25.
- **Cofresí Beach** — public beach 15 minutes from Amber Cove; quieter than the cruise-port crowd.

For first-time Puerto Plata: if it's your first Caribbean DR call, Damajagua Waterfalls is the experience that justifies leaving the cruise port. If you'd rather stay calm, Amber Cove's pools + beach + lunch is a fine day.

Pack for Puerto Plata: swimsuit, water shoes (Damajagua requires them), sunscreen (SPF 30+), sun hat, light cover-up, \$40–60 USD cash in small bills (USD widely accepted; Dominican peso not necessary), insect repellent for inland excursions.

Worth a look on the way in: the **Amber Cove port page**. Build your day in the **Port Day Planner**; record what actually happened in the **Port Logbook** on the way back.

Day 4 — Monday, November 23 — St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands



Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas — colorful Danish colonial buildings cascading down the hillside above the harbor

Arrival: Approximately 10:00 AM. **Depart:** 6:00 PM. Escape typically docks at **Crown Bay** or **Havensight (WICO)** — both in the harbor at Charlotte Amalie. Crown Bay is ~2 miles west of downtown; Havensight is at the eastern end of downtown.

What St. Thomas is. Charlotte Amalie is one of the busiest cruise ports in the Caribbean; on a busy day several large ships share the harbor. Downtown is well-organized for the cruise crowd: duty-free shopping (jewelry is the marquee category;

St. Thomas was the duty-free engine of US Caribbean commerce for decades), the historic Synagogue, Blackbeard's Castle (overpriced, climb-the-stairs), and ferries to the surrounding islands.

Free, walkable (from Havensight; Crown Bay requires shuttle/taxi):

- **Downtown Charlotte Amalie** — Main Street is the duty-free spine; Government Hill has the historic homes; the Synagogue (1833 — the second-oldest in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere) is worth a quiet half-hour.
- **The waterfront walking path** — quiet, scenic.

Paid (decide ahead):

- **Magens Bay** — the beach on most lists of the Caribbean's best. ~\$12–17 r/t per person via taxi-shuttle; \$5 entry. The standard St. Thomas beach day.
- **Sapphire Beach** — quieter alternative, ~\$15 r/t taxi; better snorkeling at the east end.
- **Mountain Top** — short drive to the highest point on the island; the harbor view that ends up on most postcards. Banana daiquiri tradition. ~\$25 r/t.
- **Ferry to St. John** — Cruz Bay ferries leave Red Hook every 30 min; ~\$8 each way. Trunk Bay beach in St. John's national park is one of the Caribbean's signature beaches.
- **Skyride to Paradise Point** — gondola from Havensight; ~\$24 r/t.
- **Coral World Ocean Park** — sea-life encounters; ~\$25 entry.

For first-time St. Thomas: Magens Bay or the ferry to St. John are the two great calls. Magens is the standard St. Thomas beach day; St. John's Trunk Bay is the "this is the Caribbean of postcards" experience but takes longer (the ferry adds an hour each way).

Pack for St. Thomas: swimsuit, water shoes, reef-safe sunscreen, sun hat, \$60–80 USD cash, snorkel gear if you have your own.

Worth a look: the **St. Thomas port page**, its **gallery**, and the **St. Thomas logbook**.

Day 5 — Tuesday, November 24 — Tortola, British Virgin Islands

Arrival: Approximately 8:00 AM. **Depart:** 5:00 PM. Escape docks at **Tortola Pier Park** in Road Town, the BVI capital — directly adjacent to the cruise terminal complex, no tender required.

What Tortola is. The largest of the British Virgin Islands; population ~24,000; a British Overseas Territory still using the US Dollar despite the British flag. The BVI is *quieter* than St. Thomas — fewer ships, fewer aggressive vendors, a more deliberate pace. The island is mountainous; the postcard destinations are reached by safari taxi over winding roads, not on foot.

Free, walkable from the pier:

- **Road Town** — Main Street walkable; the J.R. O’Neal Botanic Gardens (~10-min walk, ~\$5 entry — quietly excellent); the old courthouse and government complex.
- **Pier Park** — a planned cruise-port shopping/dining complex; restaurants and shops at the gangway.

Paid (decide ahead):

- **Cane Garden Bay** — one of the BVI’s signature beaches; a curve of white sand backed by green hills. ~\$20–30 taxi each way. Calm water, restaurants, bars. **For most cruisers in Tortola, this is the day.**
- **The Baths on Virgin Gorda** — the postcard of the BVI. Massive granite boulders forming sea caves and natural pools you swim through. Requires a ferry from Tortola to Virgin Gorda + taxi. A full half-day; with the 5:00 PM all-aboard there’s more margin here than on shorter Tortola calls. ~\$150–200/person all in.
- **Sage Mountain National Park** — Tortola’s high point and rainforest. Hiking; cool temperatures; less-crowded. Half-day excursion.
- **Sailing or snorkeling day trip** — catamarans to Norman Island or the BVI’s small reef islands. \$130–180/person; standout for water-lovers.

For first-time Tortola: Cane Garden Bay is the right call if it’s a beach day. If you’ve already done a Caribbean-beach excursion this trip, The Baths on Virgin Gorda is the postcard.

Weather note for late November: Tortola in November runs 78–86°F daytime, low rain risk, steady trade winds. Brief afternoon showers possible but the wet stretch (Aug–Nov) is winding down. Comfortable beach day weather. The seasonal panel and live forecast at the **Tortola port page** are the right read 24 hours before docking.

Currency: US Dollar (despite the British flag).

For accessibility: Pier Park is accessible. Most off-port excursions involve open-air safari taxis and unpaved beach approaches.

Worth a look: the **Tortola port page**, its **gallery**, and the **Tortola logbook**.

Day 6 — Wednesday, November 25 — Cruising at sea

Second sea day; the recovery day before Thanksgiving + Great Stirrup Cay tomorrow.

Morning ideas:

- **Sunrise from The Waterfront or Spice H2O** — quiet before the pool deck wakes up.
- **Studio Lounge** if you're in a Studio.
- **Aqua Park slides** — second-sea-day lines are settled.
- **Sky Walk ropes course** — if Day 2 was too crowded; clearer skies and steady trade winds on a Caribbean sea day make this the better day to go up.

Afternoon:

- **The Pool deck** with a book. Vibe Beach Club if you bought the pass.
- **Port talk for Great Stirrup Cay** — NCL covers the new Great Tides Waterpark logistics on a Wednesday briefing typically; worth attending.
- **Specialty lunch** — if Le Bistro is serving lunch that day (check the program), it is quieter than dinner; Cagney's is also worth a walk-up.

Evening — the Thanksgiving prep night.

The night before Thanksgiving usually runs as a normal smart-casual evening. The next 24 hours are the holiday peak — many cruisers use this evening to make any last calls home before the cellular dark zone at Great Stirrup Cay.

Pam's group dinner — Manhattan Room 5:30 PM standard.

Day 7 — Thursday, November 26 — Great Stirrup Cay, Bahamas (THANKSGIVING)

Arrival: Approximately 9:00 AM. **Depart:** 5:00 PM. Escape docks at the cay's **new multi-ship pier** completed in late 2025; no tendering on a normal day. If weather closes the pier, NCL runs tenders instead, and the app will say so that morning.

What Great Stirrup Cay is right now (November 2026). NCL leased Great Stirrup Cay in 1977 — the first cruise line in the industry to take exclusive use of a private island in the Caribbean — and bought it outright in 1986. As of November 2026 the cay is in a substantially-expanded state: the **headline new attraction, Great Tides Waterpark, opened September 4, 2026** — almost three months before your sailing. You'll come ashore at the new **Welcome Plaza**, the arrival area at the pier, and the cay is the most developed it has ever been.

A soft-opening caveat. Great Tides opened eleven weeks before this sailing; large-scale private-island construction often carries small punch-list items past opening day. Treat the beach + BBQ lunch + pool zones as the reliable core of your cay day; treat any specific waterpark attraction as a bonus that may or may not be running the day you visit. Verify status in the NCL app the morning of the cay call before you commit to a paid slot.

Great Tides Waterpark (per NCL's May 2026 marketing booklet):

- **Great Life Lagoon** — a 28,000-square-foot pool with swim-up bars; the new social center of the cay. **No upcharge marker in NCL's own materials, so it should be included;** NCL publishes no pricing outside the app, so confirm there before you budget.
- **Tidal Tower** (paid) — racing slides, sea-themed.
- **Wandering River** (paid) — lazy river with surprise elements.
- **Cliffside Cove** (paid) — platform-jumping into clear pools. Height/swim ability requirements.
- **Splash Cay** (paid) — high-energy splash pad for younger kids. (NCL's island map labels this zone "Splash Harbor" — same area; naming still settling.)
- **Grotto Bar** — cocktail bar inside the family-pad zone, so adults can drink while kids play.
- **19 slides** across the park.

Waterpark access requires a reservation; **book in the NCL for Me app pre-cruise** ideally 60+ days out. Thanksgiving sailings sell out earlier than typical.

Free with your cruise fare:

- **Beach access** — multiple beach zones across the cay.

-
- **BBQ buffet lunch** — at the open-air pavilion; jerk chicken, ribs, salads, hot dogs, burgers. **The Thanksgiving feast also runs onboard tonight after the cay closes** — see Section 12.
 - **Lounge chairs and umbrellas** — first-come; come ashore early for shaded ones.
 - **Great Life Lagoon** (the 28,000-sq-ft pool with swim-up bars) — carries no upcharge marker in NCL's materials, so expect it to be included; confirm in the app.
 - **Snorkel gear rental** — typically deposit-only or nominal.
 - **Tram service** along the spine from Welcome Plaza to the beach zones.

Paid add-ons (reserve in the NCL app):

- **Great Tides Waterpark** — see above; reservation-based.
- **Flighthouse Zipline** — the existing ten-line zipline complex anchored by the "Flighthouse" tower take-off; ~\$20. Worth the price.
- **Underwater Snorkel Garden** — guided reef-snorkel at a curated underwater garden offshore.
- **Vibe Shore Club** — adults-only (18+) private beach, premium loungers, dedicated bar. ~\$79+/person.
- **Cabana rentals** — 2-person and family cabanas. \$300–700+ for the day.
- **Silver Cove** — separate ultra-premium adults-only zone with private cove, lagoon villas, spa, and bar.
- **Kayak tours and waverunners** — small-group; ~\$50–80/person.

For Thanksgiving Day specifically: the cay opens around 9 AM and runs through ~5 PM. Most cruisers come back aboard mid-afternoon to shower and rest before the **5:30 PM – 9:00 PM Thanksgiving dinner service** in the main dining rooms (see Section 12). If you booked a waterpark slot, pick a morning or early-afternoon window so you have time to clean up.

Pack for Great Stirrup Cay: swimsuit, reef-safe sunscreen, sun hat, \$20–40 cash for tipping bartenders (\$1–2/drink), refillable water bottle, water shoes (some shoreline is coral-fragment), waterproof phone pouch.

Worth a look: the **Great Stirrup Cay port page** for the cay's layout and history.

Day 8 — Friday, November 27 — Port Canaveral (debarkation)

The realistic timeline:

- **6:00 – 8:00 AM:** Breakfast at Garden Café or O’Sheehan’s.
- **6:30 AM:** Customs clearance complete. Self-disembarkation begins.
- **7:00 – 9:30 AM:** Walk-off in waves. **All passengers off the ship by 10:00 AM** per NCL standard.

The bag situation. The night before (Thanksgiving evening), NCL asks you to place your checked luggage outside your cabin door by ~11 PM with the color-coded tag.

Carry-on with you on debark morning: change of clothes, all medications, passport, phone charger, valuables.

Getting from Port Canaveral to MCO:

- **Uber/Lyft:** \$60–80, 45–60 minutes. **Friday Nov 27 is Black Friday** — traffic is generally light early morning but spikes by afternoon.
- **Cocoa Beach Shuttle** (\$30/person, advance booking).

Killing 4–6 hours before an evening flight:

- **Cocoa Beach pier** — 15-min Uber. Beach walk + casual lunch.
- **Kennedy Space Center** — 20-min Uber, \$75 entry. Half-day minimum.
- **Black Friday shopping at Cocoa Beach outlets** — if that’s your thing.

Airport-arrival timing for MCO (45+ min away):

Flight	Leave Port Canaveral by
Domestic, after 4 PM	12:30 PM
International, after 6 PM	2:00 PM

MCO TSA on Black Friday afternoon runs heavy — give margin.

Section 3 — Pre-Cruise Countdown

6+ months before — booking and big decisions

- **Confirm the booking with your travel agent.** Cabin category, final price, what's bundled with Free at Sea.
- **Buy travel insurance.** November is post-peak hurricane risk but not zero. Specialist providers (Allianz, Travelex, Travel Guard) are usually better than your home/auto add-on.
- **Plan flights to MCO.** Thanksgiving week is one of the busiest US travel weeks of the year — but the crush peaks on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving (Nov 25) and the Sunday after, both of which fall while you're at sea, so they won't touch your flights. Your outbound (Thursday Nov 19, the day before embarkation) lands a week ahead of that peak. Book Thursday Nov 19 arrival at minimum; Wednesday Nov 18 if you can absorb the extra hotel night.
- **Passport** — required for DR + USVI + BVI. Renew if it expires before May 2027.

4 months before — soft logistics

- **NCL online check-in** in the NCL app.
- **Specialty dining reservations** — NCL opens these ~3–4 months pre-cruise. **Cagney's, Le Bistro, Food Republic fill first.** Plan one specialty night during the sea days (Day 2 or Day 6), since the port-day evenings are tight.
- **Great Tides Waterpark reservation** — book in NCL for Me app. Thanksgiving sailings book ahead.
- **Excursion bookings** — Damajagua Waterfalls in Puerto Plata books out for Thanksgiving Day arrivals.

2 months before — final commitments

- **Pre-pay gratuities** if not in the group rate (\$20/day per person at most cabins; \$25/day Suites/Haven).
- **Drink package upgrades** if Free at Sea didn't include the tier you want.

-
- **Confirm pre-cruise hotel.**
 - **Begin packing list.** Reference **Section 4.**

1 month before — final prep window

- **Photocopy your passport.**
- **Print the emergency handoff card** and share with one trusted person ashore.
- **Confirm Pam's Day 1 sailaway plan in the Facebook group chat.**

14 days before — soft logistics

- **NCL online check-in closes** at 7 days pre-cruise typically — complete earlier.
- **Print boarding documents.**
- **Begin physical packing.**

Day before — Florida arrival

- **Thursday Nov 19 — fly into MCO** (or earlier if Thanksgiving travel volume worries you).
- **Check into hotel** (Cocoa Beach or Orlando).

The Friday-to-Friday PTO + holiday-week travel reality

NCL repositioned Escape to Friday-to-Friday for this week so that Thanksgiving lands mid-itinerary instead of on debark day. That creates two real complications for a working solo cruiser, and the pack would be hiding the ball if it didn't name them:

- **Friday Nov 20 is not a US federal holiday.** Most employers do not give the Friday before Thanksgiving off, and Thursday Nov 26 (the actual holiday) you're already at sea. If you take the full cruise window you're burning four weekdays of PTO (Fri Nov 20, plus Mon Nov 23, Tue Nov 24, Wed Nov 25) since Thanksgiving Day itself is already a paid holiday at most employers, plus Friday Nov 27 (debark day) unless your employer gives the day after Thanksgiving off. That pattern is the minimum.

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- **The Thanksgiving travel peak is the Wednesday before the holiday (Nov 25) and the Sunday after — and both fall while you're at sea, so they can't touch your outbound flight.** What you're managing on Nov 19–20 is ordinary pre-holiday-week volume plus late-November weather at whatever northern hub you connect through. The sane play: take Wednesday Nov 18 off too, fly in Wednesday afternoon, and give yourself a full buffer day. Add one day to PTO, save the entire trip from a single delayed flight cascading.
 - **Working from Cocoa Beach Thursday is the compromise** if your employer is flexible. Drive or fly in Wednesday, work remote from a Cocoa Beach hotel Thursday morning, then walk to the port Friday. Same number of PTO days as a non-cruise Thanksgiving week.
 - **The return is Friday Nov 27 — Black Friday.** Domestic MCO traffic on Black Friday afternoon is the worst of the year in either direction. **Book a morning flight Friday Nov 27 if you can** — anything after 1 PM is exposed to the afternoon spike. International flights have more margin (international concourses don't crush the way domestic does), but the parking-and-rideshare bottleneck still bites.
-

Section 4 — Packing List (calibrated for late-November Caribbean)

This list is tuned for: **late-November Eastern Caribbean** — 78–86°F daytime, 72–80°F evenings, moderate humidity, brief afternoon showers possible but low rain risk. **Late hurricane-season tail** (official end Nov 30) but typically calm by late November. **Three port days** mostly walking and beach. **Two sea days. One private-island day** (Great Stirrup Cay, **Thanksgiving Day**). **NCL's smart-casual evening dress culture** (no formal nights; one optional “Norwegian's Night Out” is slightly dressier but jacket not required).

Documents and money

- **Passport** (required for this itinerary)

-
- Photocopy of passport (separate location)
 - Travel insurance policy and emergency phone number (printed)
 - Credit card + debit card (separate locations)
 - **\$200–300 USD cash** in small bills for tips, taxis, small purchases ashore
 - NCL boarding documents (printed + saved offline)
 - Group itinerary from Pam (or screenshots from the Facebook group chat)

Carry-on (must arrive on the ship with you)

- All medications in original prescription bottles
- Phone + charger + power bank
- Refillable water bottle
- Light layer (Florida November evenings can hit 70°F outside but ship runs 70°F)
- Swimsuit (pools open before checked bags arrive)
- A change of clothes (in case checked bag is delayed)
- Sunglasses, sun hat, reef-safe sunscreen
- Reading material
- Light rain shell (November afternoon showers are brief but real)

Daytime — port and ship

- **4–5 swimsuits** (water 5 of 7 days)
- **2 swim cover-ups**
- **3–4 quick-dry t-shirts or tank tops**
- **2 pairs lightweight shorts**
- **1–2 pairs lightweight pants** (Damajagua Waterfalls; cooler evenings)
- **1 lightweight long-sleeve shirt** (sun protection if you burn easily; mosquito protection inland)
- **1 light cardigan or wrap** (ship AC; evenings on deck)
- **Insect repellent** (DEET 25%+ or picaridin) for inland excursions

Evening — ship dining

- **4–5 smart-casual outfits** — sundresses, lightweight pants + nicer top, dress slacks + button-down. NCL is American smart casual.
- **1 dressier outfit** for “Norwegian’s Night Out” or specialty dining — cocktail dress, dressy jumpsuit, blazer + slacks.
- **One Thanksgiving-nice outfit** — smart casual at minimum; many cruisers dress slightly nicer for the holiday dinner. A scarf or wrap in autumn colors is a low-effort gesture.
- **Comfortable dress shoes** for long carpeted corridors.

Footwear

- **Comfortable walking shoes** — ship corridors and dry port days
- **Water shoes** — Damajagua Waterfalls **REQUIRES** them; St. Thomas + Tortola beaches benefit
- **Flip-flops** (pool deck and cabin)
- **Dress shoes** — one pair for evenings

Toiletries

- All prescription medications (carry-on, original bottles)
- Over-the-counter: Tylenol, Advil, Imodium, Benadryl, Bonine or Dramamine
- Reef-safe sunscreen (SPF 30+; reef-safe enforced)
- After-sun aloe gel
- Insect repellent
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, basic toiletries
- Lip balm with SPF

Accessories and essentials

- Polarized sunglasses
- Sun hat with brim
- Small daypack for port days

-
- Waterproof phone case — Damajagua + snorkel + waterpark
 - Dry bag (small, ~5L) for excursions
 - Power adapter — NCL cabins have US outlets; no adapter needed for the Caribbean ports
 - E-reader or one book

Skip — what NOT to bring

- **Iron or steamer** — prohibited
 - **Candles** — prohibited
 - **Heavy jewelry** — leave home
 - **Beach umbrella or pop-up shade** — provided/rentable
-

Section 5 — Budget Breakdown

The numbers below are calibrated for this specific sailing and were verified against NCL's published rates in June 2026; gratuity and package rates change once or twice a year, so reconfirm them at booking. For a budget tuned to your own cabin choice, drinking habits, excursion appetite, and tipping pattern, the **cruise-budget-calculator** builds a personalized total.

What's included in your fare

- Your cabin (Solo Studio, Ocean View, or Balcony)
- All meals at Manhattan Room, Taste/Savor, Garden Café, O'Sheehan's
- Soft drinks, juice, coffee, tea at most venues
- Onboard entertainment in the Escape Theater, the atrium, comedy + theater shows
- Pools, fitness center, Aqua Park slides
- Cabin steward and dining-room service
- **The full Thanksgiving feast on Day 7 evening** — no extra charge

- **If Free at Sea is in your group rate** — likely Premium Beverage Package, Wi-Fi minutes, specialty dining credits (typically 2–4 meals), shore-excursion credit. **Verify with your booking agent.**

What's NOT included

Category	Typical cost (per person, week)
Drinks package (if not in Free at Sea)	\$900+ pre-cruise ($\$109/\text{day} \times 7 = \763 , plus 20% gratuity)
Wi-Fi package (if not bundled)	\$120–280
Auto-gratuity (if not pre-paid)	\$140 — $\$20/\text{day} \times 7$; \$25/day Suites/Haven
Specialty dining (beyond Free at Sea credits)	\$0–250 — Cagney's ~\$55, Le Bistro ~\$50, Food Republic ~\$45 per meal
Shore excursions — Puerto Plata	\$0–110 — Amber Cove free; Damajagua \$50–95
Shore excursions — St. Thomas	\$0–80 — Magens Bay \$12–17 r/t taxi + \$5 entry; ferry to St. John \$16 r/t
Shore excursions — Tortola	\$0–200 — Cane Garden Bay \$40–60 r/t taxi; The Baths \$150–200 all-in
Great Stirrup Cay add-ons	\$0–250 — Great Tides Waterpark reservation; cabanas \$300–700; Vibe Shore Club \$79
Vibe Beach Club (onboard)	\$99 day / \$399 week
Spa treatments	\$0–500 — massages \$130–200; thermal-suite day pass \$40
Travel insurance	\$80–200 per person

A realistic mid-range solo budget (per person, on top of cruise fare)

Item	Cost
Auto-gratuity ($\$20 \times 7$)	\$140

Item	Cost
Wi-Fi (if not bundled)	\$120
Drinks (if not bundled — moderate drinker)	\$400
Specialty dining (1 meal beyond Free at Sea credits)	\$55
Puerto Plata: Damajagua independent	\$55
St. Thomas: Magens Bay taxi + lunch	\$50
Tortola: Cane Garden Bay taxi + lunch	\$70
Great Stirrup Cay: Waterpark + drinks	\$80
Travel insurance	\$100
Pre-cruise hotel (Cocoa Beach or Orlando)	\$200
Airport transfers MCO ↔ port	\$140
Total above fare	~\$1,410

Frugal version: ~\$520 above fare.

Splurge version (Haven cabin, multiple specialty meals, The Baths excursion, Silver Cove): \$2,500–4,000 above fare.

Section 6 — Emergency Contacts

FAMILY HANDOFF – IN THE WAKE VOYAGE PACK

CRUISER: _____
 CABIN: _____
 SHIP: Norwegian Escape
 LINE: Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)
 SAILING: November 20 – 27, 2026
 (Thanksgiving cruise)
 FROM: Port Canaveral, Florida, USA
 ITINERARY: Port Canaveral → Puerto Plata (DR) →
 St. Thomas (USVI) → Tortola (BVI) →
 Great Stirrup Cay (Bahamas) →
 Port Canaveral
 GROUP HOST: Pam Walters
 Thanksgiving Group Cruise FB chat:
facebook.com/share/1DuHTTgdc

EMERGENCY (24/7):

US Citizens Abroad – State Dept OCS:
 +1 (888) 407-4747 (US/Canada toll-free)
 +1 (202) 501-4444 (from overseas)
 Reach the ship – NCL paid ship-to-shore relay:
 1-888-627-4477 (per-minute charge to caller;
 verify the current number on
 NCL.com before sailing)
 Cruise booking – Tina Maulsby (Maulsby Travel):
 910-528-5077
tina@maulsbytravel.com

NEAREST CONSULAR HELP BY PORT:

Port Canaveral, FL – US domestic; call 911
 Puerto Plata, DR – US Embassy Santo Domingo:
 Verify current number on
do.usembassy.gov before sailing;
 Dominican emergency: 911
 St. Thomas, USVI – US territory; call 911
 Tortola, BVI – US Embassy Bridgetown (Barbados)
 covers the BVI; verify current
 number on bb.usembassy.gov before
 sailing
 BVI emergency: 999
 Great Stirrup Cay – NCL private cay; ship's medical
 and security on-island

CRUISER MEDICAL:

Allergies: _____
 Medications: _____

Conditions: _____
Insurance: _____ policy: _____

MOST RECENT KNOWN POSITION:

Track at: </tools/ship-tracker.html>
or marinetraffic.com (search "Norwegian Escape")

What an at-home contact does

If they don't hear from you for 36+ hours:

1. **Don't panic.** Cruise Wi-Fi is unreliable; silence usually means signal, not emergency. Thanksgiving holiday traffic can also delay messages.
2. **Reach Tina first** at Maulsby Travel (910-528-5077, tina@maulsbytravel.com) — she's the booking agent of record and the fastest path to confirm you boarded and to connect to Pam aboard.
3. **Reach Pam directly** via the Thanksgiving Group Cruise chat (facebook.com/share/1DuHTTgdc) — she's on the ship and can usually confirm an in-person sighting within a few hours.
4. **If Tina and Pam are both unreachable and concern is rising**, call the State Department's Overseas Citizens Services (+1-888-407-4747) — they handle US citizens at sea anywhere in the world and can coordinate with the cruise line, the Coast Guard, and the consulate.
5. **For an emergency message to be relayed to the ship**, NCL operates a paid ship-to-shore relay (1-888-627-4477, per-minute charges to the caller; verify the current number on NCL.com before sailing).
6. **If an incident is confirmed:** US Embassy Santo Domingo handles DR; US Coast Guard handles Florida-and-around waters; US Embassy Bridgetown covers the BVI; ship's medical handles health emergencies aboard.
7. **Track the ship's position** at </tools/ship-tracker.html>.

Section 7 — Seasickness + November Caribbean Weather

Late November Eastern Caribbean is **typically calmer than the summer and early-autumn weeks**. The hurricane season officially ends November 30, but peak risk passed in October. The Gulf Stream and Caribbean transits this week are usually mild.

If you're prone to motion sickness:

- **Bonine (meclizine)** — once-daily, less drowsy than Dramamine.
- **Sea-bands (acupressure wristbands)** — placebo or not, many find them effective.
- **Ginger** (capsules, tea, candies) — mild, and many find it helps.
- **Scopolamine patches** (prescription, behind-the-ear) — strongest option.
- **Stay mid-ship and low** in your cabin choice. Mid-ship Deck 9–12 has the least felt motion.

If you get sick onboard: the ship's medical center stocks IV anti-nausea medication. Bring travel insurance — onboard medical care is billed to you, and most US health plans do not cover care at sea; check yours.

Section 8 — Practical Logistics

Cell service and roaming

- **At sea** — ship Wi-Fi only; turn airplane mode ON.
- **Puerto Plata** — DR carriers Claro, Altice. Some US plans include the DR; verify with your carrier.
- **St. Thomas** — domestic US service; works normally on most plans.
- **Tortola** — BVI carriers Flow, Digicel; most US plans charge a daily roaming pass here; check yours.
- **Great Stirrup Cay** — expect no usable cellular.

Currency

- **Aboard:** USD.
- **Puerto Plata:** USD widely accepted; Dominican peso (DOP) for off-the-tourist-track value.
- **St. Thomas:** USD (US territory).
- **Tortola:** USD (despite British flag).
- **Great Stirrup Cay:** NCL cruise card; no cash needed on the cay.

Tipping ashore

- **Puerto Plata:** 10–15% on restaurant bills, \$2/person on guided tours.
- **St. Thomas / Tortola:** US-standard 18–20% on restaurants; \$5–10 on tour guides; \$1–2/drink at bars.
- **Great Stirrup Cay:** bartender tips appreciated \$1–2/drink (gratuities bundled).

Onboard tipping

NCL's auto-gratuity runs \$20/day per person at most cabins; \$25/day Suites/Haven.

Verify with your booking agent whether your group rate has it pre-paid.

Additional cash tips:

- Stateroom attendant: \$20–40 cash end of cruise
- Specialty dining waiter: ~10–15% if outstanding
- Bartender who remembers your name: \$1–2 per drink

The **cruise-tipping-calculator** covers the total math. For the broader 2026 context, **Cruise Tipping 2026** is the longer read.

Section 9 — The Group Cruise Rhythm

Pam Walters is your on-ship host; the Thanksgiving Group Cruise Host Pam Facebook chat is the communication channel. The typical pattern:

- **Day 1 sailaway** — Pam hosts a gathering at a venue she names in the Facebook group chat (**Spice H2O** on Deck 17 aft or **The Waterfront** on Deck 8 are Escape's natural choices) around 3:30–4:00 PM, just before sailaway. Watch the Facebook group chat for the confirmed spot.
- **Manhattan Room 5:30 PM nightly** — Pam's standard group dinner. Show up when you want. Free with your fare.
- **Studio Lounge** — solo cruisers cluster here. NCL hosts a Studio meet-and-greet on Day 1.
- **Thanksgiving dinner (Day 7)** — Pam typically organizes the group together for the holiday meal. See **Section 12**.
- **Group activities** — Pam may schedule specialty dinners (Cagney's, Le Bistro, Food Republic), hosted trivia, or spa group day. Check the Facebook group chat for plans.
- **Port days** — most hosted groups don't require a port-day group activity.
- **Last-night dinner** — Thursday Nov 26 IS the traditional "last night" feel for this sailing since Friday is debark day. The Thanksgiving dinner doubles as the group's farewell meal.

If you're shy. Group cruises are designed for the shy. You don't have to attend every gathering; you can show up to one dinner, decide you want company, and the group will absorb you naturally.

Section 10 — Solo Cruising Considerations

Norwegian Escape is one of the strongest ships in the fleet for solo cruising — she pioneered the dedicated Studio cabin program at scale (82 Studios is among the largest inventories at sea):

- **Studio cabins with no single supplement** — a cabin product built for solos rather than adapted for them.
- **Studio Lounge** — dedicated social space for Studio cabin guests; free coffee, hosted hours, scheduled meet-and-greets. The daily social anchor.
- **The Waterfront** (Deck 8) — sit alone with coffee without feeling alone; sea on one side, the promenade on the other.
- **Garden Café buffet** — solo dining without “table for one” awkwardness.
- **O’Sheehan’s** — pub atmosphere where solos blend in.

For first-time NCL cruisers:

- The NCL app is the operational hub. Download and log in before sailing.
- Free at Sea is NCL’s promotional bundle; verify what’s in your specific rate.
- “Norwegian’s Night Out” is the optional slightly-dressier evening (not formal night) — once per sailing.

The **solo cruising hub** collects practical, emotional, and social rhythms across multiple sailings.

Section 11 — First Cruise Notes

If this is your first cruise of any kind, the **first-cruise guide** is the deeper read. A few foundational notes:

- **The cabin is small.** Even Balcony cabins are smaller than a budget hotel room.
- **You can’t get lost.** Every elevator lobby has a deck map.

-
- **You don't need to book everything ahead.** Most days have unplanned time by design.
 - **Tipping is built in.** Beyond auto-gratuity, you don't need to tip every interaction.
 - **Don't try to do everything.** A week is enough time to do what matters.

The thing nobody tells first-timers: the best moments are usually unplanned: a toast at the Manhattan Room on Thanksgiving, or half an hour at the stern rail watching the wake. The **Cruising Duck tradition** is the one piece of cruise culture worth knowing in advance — bring or hide a few rubber ducks if you want a friendly, accidental social ritual. The **cruise-tech and photography guide** helps you pack the right gear for Caribbean photo opportunities.

Leave room for that.

Section 12 — Thanksgiving Aboard

The reason this pack has a Section 12 most others don't: **the holiday is the point of this sailing.** Here's the practical Thanksgiving experience aboard Norwegian Escape.

The traditional feast (Thursday November 26 evening)

NCL serves a full Thanksgiving dinner across the main dining rooms — **the Manhattan Room, Taste, and Savor** — on Thanksgiving evening. Typical menu (verify in the daily program once aboard):

- **Roast turkey** with stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy
- **Cranberry sauce** (typically both whole-berry and jellied)
- **Candied sweet potatoes / yams**
- **Green bean casserole or roasted vegetables**
- **Dinner rolls**
- **Pumpkin pie, pecan pie, apple pie** for dessert

No extra charge — this is part of your included main-dining-room experience.

Pam's group typically gathers at the Manhattan Room 5:30 PM seating for the holiday meal. Verify in the Facebook group chat.

If you'd rather NOT do traditional Thanksgiving

Specialty restaurants stay open with their regular menus. Cagney's Steakhouse, Le Bistro, Teppanyaki, and Food Republic all serve their usual menus on Thanksgiving Day. **Reservations for specialty venues on Thanksgiving Day book out earliest** — if you want a non-turkey night, book 60+ days pre-cruise.

The **Garden Café** buffet also runs a Thanksgiving spread for the lunch crowd if you'd rather have your turkey early in the day.

Lunch on Thanksgiving Day (at Great Stirrup Cay)

The cay's **BBQ buffet lunch** runs as usual — jerk chicken, ribs, burgers. NCL typically adds Thanksgiving touches at the buffet too (maybe a small turkey station). Most cruisers eat lunch on the cay and dinner aboard. The shower-and-rest window between 4 PM and 5:30 PM is the unspoken rhythm of Thanksgiving Day on this sailing.

For solo cruisers specifically

Thanksgiving aboard is often quieter and warmer than Thanksgiving alone at home — this is part of why solo cruisers book holiday sailings. Pam's group dinner is the answer to "what do I do on Thanksgiving as a single person." The Studio Lounge crowd typically gathers there too around 4–5 PM for a "before dinner" coffee or drink.

No one will judge if you want to spend Thanksgiving evening at Spice H2O, or on your balcony, with a book and a glass of wine. That's the version some cruisers come for.

The Thanksgiving gratitude tradition (informal)

A small but recurring solo-cruiser tradition: **share what you're grateful for** with the table at the start of the Thanksgiving meal. Pam may invite this at the group dinner. If you'd rather skip, smart-casual table conversation is fine. Both rhythms work.

The 5 PM moment

The hardest minute of the day for many solo Thanksgiving cruisers is around 4:30–5:00 PM ship time. Back home in the Eastern time zone, the family is sitting down. The grandkids are at the table. The chair you usually sit in is occupied by someone else, or it's empty. You can feel that from a ship in the Bahamas.

This is the part nobody briefs you for, and the part this pack will not pretend doesn't happen.

Some options for that hour:

- **Be at Pam's group dinner at 5:30 PM.** The Manhattan Room with the rest of the group, most of them doing the same emotional accounting at the same hour, is the version of Thanksgiving the cruise delivers. The table is full, the conversation is light, and names get learned by dessert.
- **Step away if you need to.** A solo cruiser in tears at the rail at 5 PM on Thanksgiving is not unusual and not weak. Take ten minutes. Call home on the ship's Wi-Fi if you can; send a text if you can't. Then come down to dinner.
- **Skip dinner entirely if that's the answer.** Room service runs around the clock (NCL charges a convenience fee on most orders; check the app); the cabin door locks; the pillow is yours. Some solo cruisers come on Thanksgiving sailings specifically because they don't want to perform celebration. That is also a valid version of this trip.

Pam knows the rhythm of this hour. You don't have to explain anything.

Closing

This pack is the calm read on one specific week — yours. The week is built around Thanksgiving, the ports are warm, and Pam has the group rhythm under control.

Soli Deo Gloria. All work on this project is offered as a gift to God. The site that produced it is independent — no affiliate links, no commissions, no upsells. If it helped you, that's the whole point.

Safe sailing — and Happy Thanksgiving.

Last reviewed | 2026-09-06 (consistency and wording pass; ship facts, prices and contacts as verified June and July 2026, venues checked against NCL's Escape deck plans 2026-09-06) |

How facts here are checked | Ship specifications, christening details, godfather designation, delivery date, and amenity inventory trace to primary sources (Wikipedia primary cites; NCL published specifications; Cruise Industry News + Seatrade Cruise on the Pitbull godfather designation; Great Stirrup Cay history on Wikipedia + NCL Newsroom). Port logistics and excursion pricing reflect public-facing terminal and operator information at time of last review. Where a number is contested between sources or moves quickly (drink package per-day rates, taxi rates, consulate phone numbers), the pack points you at the live primary source rather than freezing a number that may drift. The internal-research record is preserved in the pack's .factcheck.json sidecar. |

Accessibility | This pack is designed to read straight through on a screen reader (headings nested, tables small and labeled, links named not "click here"). The print PDF meets WCAG 2.1 AA contrast. If something here is hard to use for you, that's a bug — tell Tina or post in the Thanksgiving Group Cruise chat and it'll get back to me. |

Sources | Ship: **Norwegian Escape**. Ports: **Port Canaveral, Amber Cove, St. Thomas, Tortola, Great Stirrup Cay**. Host: Pam Walters (Thanksgiving Group Cruise Host Pam Facebook chat: facebook.com/share/1DuHTTgdc). Onboard venues: **Manhattan Room, Garden Café, O'Sheehan's, Spice H2O, Studio Lounge, Cagney's Steakhouse, Le Bistro, Teppanyaki, Q Texas Smokehouse, Los Lobos, Ocean Blue, La Cucina, Food Republic**. Articles: **stateroom-sanity-check, is-drink-package-worth-it, cruise-tipping-2026, caribbean-cruise-trends-2026, cruise-cabin-organization, cruise-tech-photography-guide, cruise-duck-tradition**. Tools: **drink-calculator, cruise-budget-calculator, cruise-tipping-calculator, port-day-planner, port-tracker, ship-tracker, ship-size-atlas**. Reference pages: **solo cruising hub, first-cruise, countdown, packing-lists, internet-at-sea, disability-at-sea**.

Image: Norwegian Escape arriving at Nassau, photographed by Syrus257 (CC BY 2.0) via Wikimedia Commons. Original research: Wikipedia (Norwegian Escape), Wikipedia (Great Stirrup Cay), Cruise Industry News + Seatrade Cruise (Pitbull godfather designation), Emma Cruises + The Points Guy + Cruise Critic (NCL go-kart

speedway program — confirmed Escape does NOT have a go-kart track), NCL Great Stirrup Cay - Great Tides Waterpark Booklet (May 2026). |