**THE SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN**

While it's true to say the Caribbean is a year-round destination (with average temperatures ranging between 84 – 88 degrees depending on the season) – there are definitely better dates for cruising – and better itineraries to consider for those dates (especially if you hope to partake of water sports).

From north to south the Caribbean measures more than 1000 miles. Due to the vast distance between the islands, one can expect to experience considerable variables (aside from temperature alone). For example, rainfall can fluctuate greatly based upon the island's location and the season. And the southern island's ocean temperatures in the winter months (because of their proximity to the equator) can be surprisingly warmer and more pleasant than those islands which make up either eastern or western itineraries.

In other words, if you are a sun seeker from the northeast US, and you hope to both escape the cold and engage in water sports between January and March – your best option is the Southern Caribbean.

Those winter months also have lesser inches of rainfall which could also contribute to a more enjoyable vacation.

The first step in planning any vacation is to get to know your travel agent – and more importantly – let her (or him) get to know you and your family's interests and lifestyle. That's the only way to end up with the best fit. Let's face it: vacations are too important – and too expensive to waste on "guess work" and "advertised specials" which may not be special at all.

I hesitate to make any travel recommendations until I have the opportunity to get to know my clients – but generally speaking – if you are looking to book a first (or even repeat) cruise to the Caribbean – think about scheduling a seven or eight night southern itinerary for December through March and consider Royal Caribbean (their extremely high ratings in the Caribbean were earned as a result of customer satisfaction).

Avoid their huge mega ships (unless you have children who will mostly likely delight in all the extras the huge ships offer). But, understand all those "bells and whistles" will add to the overall cost – and due to the fact that the huge ships may have well over 5000 passengers – it could mean a long wait in line to partake in a water slide or ride bumper cars when there are so many onboard.

It's not too early to plan for 2019. We're already making reservations for next year's winter escapees. Everyone knows the bitter cold will return to the northeast – and knowing you have a warm, sunny vacation to look forward to can brighten the dark days.

And ... what if you can only take a cruise during the summer months??? I'll give some options for that in my next post.