



# The destination that has it all

No matter your age, interest or budget, there's a cruise to suit in the Mediterranean

If you had to design the perfect place for a cruise holiday it would look a lot like the Mediterranean. Centuries of history, fascinating cultures, A-list cities, some of the most gorgeous food and wine in the world, blue skies, gorgeous beaches. In short, something for everyone and all ages. No wonder British cruisers flock there in their thousands every summer.

In Italy, France, Spain and Croatia alone you find some of the world's most sought-after cities – Venice, Barcelona, Naples, Seville, Dubrovnik – on the sea, while Rome and Florence are just a 60 and 90-minute transfer respectively from the ports of Civitavecchia and Livorno.







Been there, done that? There are plenty of other wonderful (if less famous) cities to discover – the likes of Pisa, Nice, Marseille, Istanbul and Cadiz – as well as the landscapes of Provence, Andalusia and Tuscany to captivate and the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Elba and Majorca to explore. All can also be visited on a cruise.







## WHAT'S NEW in the Mediterranean

-  Ultra-luxury line Silversea has combined five cruises in to an epic Grand Voyage around the Mediterranean next autumn. Departing September 8 2021, the 59-day cruise, from Venice to Lisbon on the recently-refurbished Silver Shadow, calls into 45 ports in 17 countries including Croatia, Greece, Turkey, Albania, Russia, Malta, Italy, France and Spain. Prices from £26,500 per person including flights, transfers, Wi-Fi, drinks, tips, laundry and \$1,000 per person on-board credit.
-  MSC Cruises' flagship MSC Grandiosa will be taking over the company's signature cruises around the western Med next summer. The seven-night voyage calls into Marseille in France, Genoa, Civitavecchia (for Rome) and Palermo in Italy, Valetta in Malta and Barcelona in Spain.
-  Royal Caribbean International's Odyssey of the Seas is making its debut in the Mediterranean next April. The new Quantum Ultra ship will be sailing seven and nine-night cruises to Greece, Italy and Turkey from Civitavecchia (Rome), as well as 12-night voyages that add calls into Ashdod and Haifa in Israel. Adventure of the Seas, which was planned to cruise the Baltic, will now be sailing new four and five-night Med cruises from Barcelona.
-  Forts, towers and plenty of tapas await as Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' new ship Bolette explores some of Spain's lesser-known ports (Motril anyone?) on a 14-night voyage round-trip from Dover next September. The vessel is one of two ships Fred Olsen acquired from Holland America Line this summer and replaces Boudicca, which has been retired from the Fred fleet.
-  The seventh Holland America Line ship to bear the name Rotterdam will make its debut in the Mediterranean in July 2021 with a seven-day maiden voyage from Trieste in Italy to Civitavecchia (the port for Rome).
-  Virgin Voyages' second ship, Valiant Lady, is due to enter service in May 2021 with a summer season of sailings round-trip from Barcelona, where it will be berthed in a prime location by the World Trade Center. Three one-week itineraries variously visit ports including Monte Carlo, Olbia in Sardinia, Toulon, Palma de Mallorca and Gibraltar, and all include a Friday overnight stay in the party town of Ibiza.



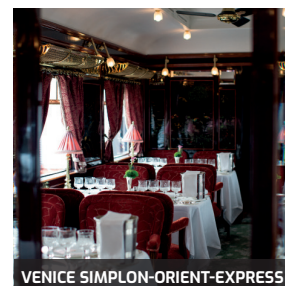
The region is compact, allowing cruisers to tick off four countries in just seven days, all without the hassle of unpacking. Choose the Western Mediterranean and you'll find France, Spain, Italy, Malta and Tunisia on the itinerary. Head east and Greece, Turkey, Croatia and Montenegro await. Or put the two together in one spectacular two or even three-week voyage across the sea.

As a general rule, one-week cruises start with a day at sea so passengers have time to rest before a sightseeing marathon ticking off five great ports. On smaller ships, it might even be one port each day. Clients who want more time to relax should aim for a 12 or 14-night itinerary with more days at sea.

However long clients go for, a couple of hotel nights at the start or end of the cruise is always a good idea, especially for those embarking or disembarking in the must-see triumvirate of Barcelona, Venice and Rome.

All three, and also Athens, are the key embarkation ports for Mediterranean cruises, and served by the likes of British Airways, easyJet and Ryanair. For those who prefer not to fly, a combination of Eurostar and fast national rail services makes the train a viable option to ports such as Marseilles and Barcelona, while an overnight journey from London to Venice on Belmond's Venice Simplon-Orient-Express at the start of a cruise is a lifetime's ambition for many and financially well worth agents selling.

And if neither plane nor train appeal, there are plenty of round-trip cruises from the UK to the Mediterranean with Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, P&O Cruises and others, although clients will need to set aside at least two weeks for the trip because of the extra time needed to get across the Bay of Biscay.



## The world's favourite

With so much going for it – and we haven't even mentioned the reliably hot summers, with temperatures often topping 30 degrees Centigrade – it is no surprise to find that the Mediterranean is the world's favourite cruise destination after the Caribbean, and number one for the Brits, attracting more than 550,000 of us in 2018, according to CLIA UK & Ireland. It's likewise no surprise that throughout the summer there is a vast choice of cruises and itineraries to choose from, ranging from just a few nights to two weeks or more.

There is also a huge range of cruise ships, from the luxury vessels operated by the likes of Seabourn and Silversea that hold a few hundred passengers to the floating resorts of Royal Caribbean International and Norwegian Cruise Line that have room for several thousand and are wonderful for families. If clients fancy a boutique offering, look no further than Variety Cruises; for sailing ships cast your eyes over to Windstar.

As ever, matching clients to the right cruise is imperative. Not just the size of ship, although that's the first place to start, but the type of cruise. Do they want to strike off the modern metropolises, go island-hopping in Greece or uncover ancient Roman cities such as Ephesus in Turkey and Pompeii in Italy? Maybe they have their eye on celebrity hotspots along the French and Italian Rivas.

For those back a second or third time, the lesser-known port such as Valletta in Malta, Palermo in Sicily and Ajaccio in Corsica might be just the ticket. Returnees might also appreciate the increasingly popular 'slow' itineraries that stay late or overnight in popular ports such as Barcelona, Dubrovnik and St Tropez so there is time to see more and party until late.

The Mediterranean season runs from April to October, but a handful of companies – the likes of MSC Cruises, Costa Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line – operate year-round. Winter means most tourists have gone home so sightseeing is easier, but the weather can be unpredictable, with some sunshine but also wind and rain. If the off-season is possible, April, May, September and October are best as the sun is not so toasty.



## Time to tour

All cruise lines offer a multitude of guided excursions that cater for all interests and provide an easy way for passengers to get out and see the top sights, learn about the history and get a taste of local life.

It might be a tour around Pompeii from Naples or Rome from Civitavecchia, a trip to a winery in Tuscany or following in the footsteps of Emperor Napoleon on the islands of Elbe and Corsica.

Foodie tours that encourage participants to cook like a local and health-themed excursions – for instance to a yoga retreat – are increasingly popular, while active sorts will find guided bike rides and walking with Marella Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

'On your own' tours that provide a transfer to Rome or Florence and then leave folk to explore alone are favourites with those feeling more adventurous, and of course everyone is free to wander off and do their own thing anyway once their ship has docked – always making a note of the all-aboard time first so they don't get left behind.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- 📍 The Romans called the Mediterranean the Mare Nostrum, Our Sea, because it was in the middle of their Empire.
- 📍 The Mediterranean is surrounded by 17 countries including France, Spain and Italy to the north, Turkey and Israel to the east and Egypt and Morocco to the south.
- 📍 There are two island nations within the Mediterranean – Malta and Cyprus.
- 📍 The Mediterranean is connected to the Atlantic by the Strait of Gibraltar – a channel between Spain and Morocco that narrows to just eight miles at one point.
- 📍 The Peloponnese was separated from the Greek mainland when the Corinth Canal was dug in the early 1890s.
- 📍 Monaco is smaller than New York's Central Park and home to one of the most expensive streets for real estate in the world.
- 📍 Game of Thrones' fans can join GoT tours around Dubrovnik, where parts of the hit TV series were filmed.
- 📍 Syracuse in Sicily might be Italian now but it was once the largest ancient Greek city in the world.