



CRUISING EUROPE

INDULGE IN A SMORGASBORD OF OPTIONS ON THE HIGH SEAS.

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WITH DISTINCT TRADITIONS, languages and legacies, Europe contains the highest concentration of historical and cultural sites in the cruising world. The continent is a visual smorgasbord of variegated landscapes and dazzling displays of imperial wealth and power. Its huge size and diversity make it an ideal cruise holiday destination that enthralls and entertains just as much as it enlightens and educates. Here's what to expect when exploring its different parts.

MEDITERRANEAN & GREEK ISLES

The Mediterranean is an ancient arena of empire and mythology, a vast ocean where the ideas and ideals of Western civilisation spread throughout Europe and beyond. These days, this legendary region promises long summery days on the sun-drenched beaches of Spain, the chance to rummage through the ancient ruins of Rome and Athens, and the joy of exploring the charming Old Town in Dubrovnik. A cruise around the Mediterranean is also an education in the greatest masterpieces in art

and architecture – the statue of David in Florence, the Sagrada Família in Barcelona and St. Mark's Basilica in Venice are all here.

It isn't any less grand in the Greek Islands. These ancient islands were featured in Greek mythological tales long before hitting the glossy pages of travel magazines and cruise itineraries.

Cruising is an ideal way to explore the idyllic beaches and white-washed villages, tossed together like jumbles of sugar cubes against the sparkling blue of the Aegean.

Mykonos has been synonymous with decadent, all-night-and-day parties since at least the 60s. Corfu is an intoxicating blend of lush, Tuscany-like landscapes and cosmopolitan flair. Crete is the largest and most-populous of the Greek islands, a diverse terrain of snow-capped mountains, blissful beaches and classical ruins.

And of course there's the romantic Santorini, an island popular with honeymooners and famous for its explosive past – a huge volcanic eruption in 1600BC created the caldera that Santorini sits on.

RUSSIA & ICELAND

Russia's been called a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. But there's nothing puzzling about St Petersburg's enduring appeal. This colourful port city on the Baltic Sea is the cultural heart and soul of Russia – an unapologetic patron of the arts – and is in many ways more European than Russian: its canals and waterways are very Venice-like.

Broad boulevards inside this former imperial capital buzz with cafes, bars and restaurants, which were once the old stomping grounds of some of the greatest Russian writers, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Alexander Pushkin.

The city's fascination with the arts is literally on display inside the palatial State Hermitage Museum, which contains more than three million items. It's the second-largest art museum in the world and rivals the Louvre in Paris. St Petersburg is also renowned for its world-class ballet, opera and classical concerts.

It's a little different up in Iceland. A cruise here is an education in geology. This dramatic landscape of volcanoes, geysers and lava fields was carved by glaciers and moulded by its explosive

Reykjavik reflected in lake Tjornin.



Northern Iceland.

magma; there's no other place in the world quite like it. Yet still, its vibrant capital Reykjavik is home to an eclectic local art and music scene, as well as excellent museums, galleries and restaurants. A visit to the iconic Hallgrímskirkja church and a soak in the famous Blue Lagoon shouldn't be missed.

BRITISH ISLES & RIVERS OF EUROPE

The British Isles are a giddy mix of fairytale castles, cobblestone medieval villages and old-fashioned charm. It's a pocket of the world where quaint towns lay embedded in verdant, rolling hills, and the promise of a good chat at a local pub is literally around every corner. The compact size of this region means it's possible to visit famous landmarks further inland – such as Stonehenge in England and the Blarney Stone in Cork, Ireland – on a cruise, whilst still having time to explore the vibrant capitals of London, Dublin and Edinburgh.

Over on the continent, the rivers of Europe flaunt equally as much interest and beauty. These traditional waterways have been the primary means of

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Arc de Triomphe, Paris.

transportation and communication for centuries, and picturesque towns and villages have sprouted on their banks as well as vibrant metropolises. The Danube, for example, passes through beautiful Budapest, whilst the Seine snakes its way through elegant Paris. Meanwhile, the Rhine flows through six countries (including Switzerland, France and Germany) before joining the North Sea near Amsterdam.

SCANDINAVIA & NORWEGIAN FJORDS

In Scandinavia, it was the Vikings who penned the sagas and left their enduring legacy throughout the Baltic Sea and beyond. These sea-faring warriors were able to cover such vast distances with their longships, aided by advanced sailing and navigational skills.

At the Vasa Museum in Stockholm, it's possible to see an almost fully intact 17th century Swedish warship salvaged from the sea before strolling the city's medieval Old Town and visiting the historic castles in neighbouring Denmark.

Yet, although the Vikings ruled these lands for centuries, it was Mother

Nature who shaped the region's glorious landscape that's so perfectly suited to cruising.

In the Norwegian Fjords, narrow inlets of placid water trace their way through a topography of sheer cliffs that wear their vegetation like scraggly beards. It's an awe-inspiring landscape that has that special ability to make you feel small.

Cruising the UNESCO-listed Geirangerfjord, for example, is particularly spectacular with its rolling canvas of majestic mountains and cascading waterfalls.

Every visitor to Norway simply has to tick this one off their bucket list. ■



Outer Hebrides, Scotland.



Kirkjufell, Iceland.



The Colosseum, Rome.

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