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Photo: Passport Archives

Cruise Ship in Venice

# AMAZING CRUISE PORTS AROUND THE WORLD

by Jimmy Im



In 2009, I took my first cruise with Holland America, embarking on a 14-day voyage that sailed from Melbourne, Australia, the departure port, to New Zealand. My friend Margaret and I extended our trip two full days to explore this colorful, progressive, and compelling cosmopolitan city. There were secret alleyways with massive street murals, off-the-beaten-path and quirky underground bars, engaging modern design, and a distinct, self-contained Melbourne “lifestyle.” The dining scene was outstanding, the shops were unique and, despite Sydney’s claim-to-fame, there were wonderful beaches. We shackled up at the Park Hyatt, made Aussie friends who were excited to engage with young Americans, sipped local wines, visited galleries, got lit at bars, and experienced the joy of getting lost in the laneways.

After two days our ship was scheduled to depart, but Margaret and I were reluctant to leave. We grew fond of Melbourne. While the cruise would take us to amazing places like Christchurch, Tasmania, and Napier, we felt our farewell was premature. Melbourne was a mini-NYC on the other side of the world, only everyone had darling accents. It resonated in a way we hadn’t felt before. Melbourne seduces visitors, and that is what makes for an exceptional port of call.

A distinguished port charms, inspires, and fascinates, providing a wealth of amenities, good hotels, excellent attractions, and unforgettable memories pre- and post-cruise. It’s a seaside getaway you never want to leave, despite knowing there’s plenty more stops to experience on your cruise. Ultimately, it’s an alluring place that warrants more than the day excursion generally offered on most cruise ships. And while the cruise industry continues to grow in record numbers (22.1 million passengers in 2014 compared to 21.3 million the prior year), and cruise lines bang out sparkly new ships now more than ever, major port destinations are enhancing their presence with renovated terminal facilities, stronger marketing campaigns, and new businesses. But what makes a cruise port truly special is when it’s a dynamic destination that just happens to have a port.

Passengers seek quality time before embarkation in iconic port cities, like Papeete, Québec City, Seattle, and New York City, but there other

exciting destinations around the world that are emerging with top cruising facilities, one-of-a-kind experiences, and plenty to explore. From Italy to the Galapagos, there are places where cruise lines begin and often end their journeys that are so spectacular, they’re the perfect places to bookend unforgettable cruises. Make the time to spend days, not mere hours, in these stunning destinations that are guaranteed to be as arousing and memorable as the cruise itself.

## AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND

Western Europe is chock-full of major ports of call, many that have been significant for centuries. Now, European cruises are a perennial favorite for modern vacationers who appreciate the beautiful rivers lined with castles, farms, and fields in bucolic countryside. Amsterdam, a unique city built around canals, has begun to leave its mark as a popular port city, with its Passenger Terminal Amsterdam receiving more ships and passengers every year (approximately 100 cruises in 2016). As a newer terminal, the modern design is striking with its wave-like glass structure, and the location is priceless: the terminal is a short ten-minute walk from Central Station and major neighborhoods, and a 15-minute drive from the airport.

Amsterdam is one of the fastest growing cities in Europe, and the luxury travel scene is booming. A slew of five-star hotels have opened in the past five years, including **Conservatorium Hotel**, the most original hotel in the city, housed in an 1897 former music school. The architecture is breathtaking (expect an indoor, lobby atrium, and rafted ceilings) and spacious rooms have alluring views of the lobby or city. The 129-room hotel has an enviable location next to Rijksmuseum, and the destination spa features a generous sized indoor pool, steam, sauna, and a large gym equipped with fitness trainers.

Spend time at the iconic **Rijksmuseum**, which recently unveiled a half-billion dollar renovation. It’s the largest and most visited art museum in Holland with 8,000 objects on display, including works by Rembrandt and Vermeer.

You’ll want to dine at **Jansz**, a stylish restaurant in the Nine Streets district, a trendy neighborhood chockablock with boutiques, cafés, and restaurants. Jansz is helmed by Cassidy Holman, former sous chef at Momofuku in NYC,



Canal Boat in Amsterdam

Bartolome Island in the Galapagos



Photo: Jess Kraft

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who dishes out modern classics with Dutch influence (think Dutch oysters and duck-liver mousse with truffle), with everything in-house made from scratch.

A leading cruise line, award-winning **Uniwold** is known for intimate river cruises aboard its decorative and otherwise highbrow ships (Holland America, originally a Netherlands-America steamship company, offers larger ships for ocean journeys). A popular Uniwold itinerary (especially for botany lovers) is Tulips & Windmills, a ten-day journey (the first three days are conveniently docked in Amsterdam) that hits scenic ports like Rotterdam, Ghent, and Antwerp.

### GALAPAGOS, ECUADOR

One of the most unique places on the planet, the isolated, volcanic islands of the Galapagos off the coast of Ecuador has inspired millions with its rare wildlife species, a fragile ecosystem, and, of course, their influence on the theory of evolution. The human footprint here has been kept to a minimum, and all travelers visit via cruise ship with shore excursions that limit them to a handful of sites. But this all changed when Pikaia Lodge opened in 2014.

**Pikaia Lodge** is the islands' first eco-friendly, luxury resort *ever* (and, don't worry: it's supported by locals). It's the first time visitors to the islands can stay on the islands, and it's very close to Baltra, the island where all cruise ships embark.

A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, Pikaia Lodge has only 14 rooms (with priceless views via floor-to-ceiling windows as well as private outdoor balconies), so you feel like you're literally the only person on the islands—in the middle of nowhere, no less. Completely remote, Pikaia is immersed in the natural ecosystem, like an African safari. On guided

tours, you can see hundreds of bird species, the trademark giant tortoise chilling out on grounds, blue-footed boobies, and more. You can take out a mountain bike, visit the town of Santa Cruz, swim in the ocean, and sunbathe on white-sand beaches—activities are seemingly endless.

An architectural masterpiece that blends in with the environment, Pikaia is an experience, not just a hotel, with amazing views of the sprawling terrain, an outdoor infinity pool, a spa sanctuary, and, as you would expect, a private yacht to explore the Galapagos Islands (each guest receives their own private room on board, so you can shower, even take a nap if you need to). Snorkeling trips will bring you up close to marine life like turtles, stingrays, sea lions, and penguins. With this type of luxury, you really don't need to book one of the crowded cruises the Galapagos is known for and, like a typical cruise, all reservations at Pikaia include daily activities, meals, and transportation.

### HONG KONG

Leave it to Asia to design some of the world's most architecturally stunning cruise terminals. The most buzzing is **Kai Tak Cruise Terminal**, designed by award-winning Foster + Partners. It's so new for the industry that it's still making headlines. The cruise terminal opened in 2013, and since has become both a landmark in Hong Kong and an exciting way to set off on a cruise (and also attend exhibitions and events, due to the terminal's versatility). Since its debut, Kai Tak has become the home embarkation port for 20 cruise lines, and a standard for excellent cruise port design.

Hong Kong, a country that's vibrant and alluring, is one step ahead on trends and unarguably the most international city in Asia. Thriving markets, a growing culinary scene, and some of the world's best shopping abound.

Photo: f11 Photo



Kai Tak Cruise Terminal Hong Kong



PortMiami

The country bustles 24/7, and it's the perfect destination to shack up for several days before your nautical Asia adventure.

Naturally, a visit to Hong Kong isn't proper without indulging in Cantonese food. Find the best bowl of noodles at **Wing Lai Yuen**. The noodles are pulled in-house with broth as fresh as they come. While they have limited one bowl per customer in the past, you can now order as much as you like (spoiler: you'll never eat a bowl of noodles the same way again).

The art scene in Hong Kong is flourishing, especially in the burgeoning neighborhood of **Sheung Wan**, dubbed as "the Meatpacking District of Hong Kong." This artsy district with back lanes and gritty low-rise heritage buildings, is very popular during Art Basel Hong Kong. At the edge of Hollywood Road, new galleries, artists in residence, and trendy restaurants and design shops continue to shape the gentrified neighborhood. One of the more recent openings is **Blindspot Gallery**, known for exhibiting the works of young, local artists and specializing in contemporary photography.

Stay at **Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong**, one of the tallest hotels in the world inside the International Commerce Centre (the tallest building in Hong Kong at 1,538 feet). Perched on top of the hotel is the highest bar on earth, Ozone, flaunting mind-blowing views of the dynamic city.

Plenty of exceptional cruises leave from Hong Kong to explore Asia, though the most booked are through Southeast Asia, like **Azamara Club Cruises**, an award-winning, contemporary boutique river cruise line that specializes in personalized service and excursions. The 13-night journey aboard Azamara Journey stops in Bangkok, Saigon, and Koh Samui.

## MIAMI, FLORIDA

While Fort Lauderdale has long worn the port-city sash and crown in South

Florida, Miami is hot on its heels. In fact, many cruisers now consider it the cruise capital of the world. Miami hasn't been modest in the past 15 years, opening multi-million attractions and facilities like American Airlines Arena, a skyline full of glittery condos and a burgeoning arts district, and it didn't spare budgets with **PortMiami** in Downtown Miami. The port will be world renowned with epic proportions for cruise standards when Royal Caribbean opens its very own cruise terminal to the tune of \$247 million next year, allowing large cruise ships to finally dock here (like the 6,780-passenger *Harmony of the Seas*, the largest vessel in the world).

It's not uncommon for cruise passengers to spend a great deal of time in Miami before embarking. The city is constantly growing, luxury hotels are opening at lightning speed, emerging chefs are debuting hot new restaurants, and the beaches are perfect year-round. Stay at **Faena Hotel**, one of Miami's most posh hotels to date. With its old-world frescos, dapper doormen, and subtle nautical themes, it brings to mind a bygone era when cruising was limited to the wealthy. The rooms are massive, and the artwork is mind blowing, including various sculptures and projects by famed Damien Hirst.

If you can't wait to attend the exciting entertainment provided by talented cruise ship performers, head to **The National** for Cabaret Dinner at Tamara Bistro, hosted by nightlife guru Edison Farrow. Featuring a pianist, servers, and bartender belting show tunes while you nosh on excellent American cuisine, this is the place to be.

All major cruise lines leave from Miami, including Carnival, Celebrity, Norwegian, and Regent, most of which depart to destinations like Mexico, South America, the Caribbean, the Bahamas, and even Europe. *Enchantment of the Seas* is a **Royal Caribbean** cruise that's casual yet packed with fun. The cruises are short, which make them ideal for first-time cruisers, celebrations, and even weekend getaways. A three-night cruise to the Bahamas and back doesn't even require a passport. While *Enchantment of the Seas* is a big ship (2,252 passengers), it never feels crowded in the multiple restaurants, several onboard bars and lounges, clubs, a theater, casino, massive pool deck, and spa and fitness center.

## VALPARAÍSO, CHILE

Gael Garcia Bernal's character in *Motorcycle Diaries* may have gotten around the lower half of South America on a motorbike, but there's no better way to explore the southern tip than on a cruise ship. South America cruises generally navigate the lower countries on the continent, including Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, and the best place to start your journey is in Valparaíso, Chile.

Just an hour drive from Santiago, Valparaíso is a port town that's raw, edgy, beautiful, and commanding. It's easy to get inspired by the 42 hills that roll down to the mouth of an active, industrial port. Wooden homes of various colors nestle in their nooks on cliffs; cobblestone streets form a dizzying labyrinth; and views are breathtaking from any point you stand. Valparaíso, is so unique and historic, the entire colonial city is appointed a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nearby Vina del Mar, unarguably the best beach town in the country, is the perfect setting for a cruise port.

While architecturally engaging, the entire city is washed over with street art, one of the few cities in the world where it is legal and often commissioned by the government. From concrete walls, wooden doors, and coffee shops to hinged gates, almost every structure has been dipped in vibrant colors with moving, statement-making images and portraits that flood the city with optimism. It's a visually engaging show for cruise passengers; the entire city is an open-air museum. While Valparaíso, isn't as big as Santiago, it makes up for it with tons of soul.

Valparaíso, is also smack-dab in wine valley, and visitors can have tastings at a number of top Chilean vineyards like **Emiliana**, a "green" winery that not only produces biodynamic, organic wines, but also makes



Photo: Gurgun Bakhshetyan

their own olive oil and honey.

Valparaíso is so inspiring that famous artist Pablo Neruda built a home at the top of a hill, which is now converted into **La Sebastiana Museum**. Neruda's former house-cum-museum is chock-full of memorabilia, and it's a must when in "Valpo."

Stay at **Casa Higuera**s, a stunning, 20-room boutique property, formerly a 1920's mansion. Perched on a hill, the hotel has breathtaking views of the port, comfortably chic and modern rooms, and an excellent restaurant. **Upscape**, a premiere luxury operator for Valparaíso, specializes in the American market with many gay guides that make exploring the city unforgettable.

For decades, **Celebrity Cruises** has taken guests from Valparaíso to Buenos Aires, Argentina on a 15-night "Chile and Argentina" journey, with stops in the Chilean Fjords, Straights of Magellan, Ushuaia, and Punta Del Este. Guests can enjoy the Canyon Ranch Spa, several restaurants, and a modern rooftop terrace aboard ship.

## VENICE, ITALY

This bite-size city made up of tiny islands is one of the most picturesque, tantalizing, romantic destinations in Italy, and it sure blows Naples (another major embarkation point) out of the water. Venice is already a natural place for cruises considering its canal system, and the cruise tourism infrastructure is solid. While big vessels are forbidden, smaller ships have the privilege of docking at Terminal Venezia Passenger in the Venetian Lagoon for pre- and post-cruise itineraries (approximately 500 ship departures a year), where visitors can spend days exploring the city by foot or gondola.

To truly immerse in Venetian culture, book a room at **The Gritti Palace**. British Writer Somerset Maugham once wrote: "There are few things in life more pleasant than to sit on the terrace of the Gritti." This Luxury Collec-

tions hotel in a historic, 15th-century building is filled with priceless antiques and paintings and is considered the grand dame of the canals, occupying a prime waterfront location across from the basilica **Santa Maria Della Salute**. While one can hop on a traditional gondola to cruise the labyrinth of waterways, splurge on the hotel's new, half-a-million Riva Super yacht that takes guests out privately for an upscale experience.

One of the city's oldest *trattorias*, the family-run **Antiche Carampane** is tucked away on a quiet street in San Polo, removed from crowds of tourists, which makes it a must. Diners can expect an authentic Venetian menu with traditional Italian preparation and cooking, including fresh-caught wild fish and market-fresh produce bought early mornings at nearby Rialto market.

Opened in 1931, Harry's Bar at Cipriani is a legendary watering hole that attracted the likes of **Ernest Hemingway**, **Truman Capote**, and **Charlie Chaplin**. Famous for creating the Bellini, and perfecting the dry martini, **Harry's Bar** is as storied as it is classy.

Among popular museums like Doge's Palace and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, **Museo Fortuny** is a lesser-known gem in San Marco that Art Nouveau designer Mariano Fortuny restored in the early 20th century. Known for its collection of paintings, textiles, and tapestries that mirrors Fortuny's lavish taste, the museum is inside a beautiful 15th-century palazzo.

After you've properly experienced Venice, board your **Viking Cruise** on the Mediterranean Odyssey voyage. The 13-day cruise visits six countries and ten ports (including Corfu, Greece, and Dubrovnik, Croatia). Viking Cruises has become highly regarded as one of the most exceptional small and medium vessels at sea, complete with a stunning atrium, fine-dining restaurants, one of the most sumptuous spas on a ship, and unforgettable excursions. ■

Valparaíso, Chile



Photo: Skretzeleu

## AMSTERDAM

**Conservatorium Hotel**, Van Baerlestraat 27, Tel: 31-20-570-0000. Five-star hotel inside a former music school and bank from 1897. [www.conservatoriumhotel.com](http://www.conservatoriumhotel.com)

**I Amsterdam**. The official tourism website for Amsterdam. [www.iamsterdam.com](http://www.iamsterdam.com)

**Rijksmuseum**, Museumstraat 1, Tel: 31-20-6747-000. The most famous museum in Amsterdam with major artwork. [www.rijksmuseum.nl](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl)

**Jansz**, Reestraat 8, Tel: 31-20-5235-282. Excellent elevated dining restaurant in trendy Nine Streets district. [www.janszamsterdam.com](http://www.janszamsterdam.com)

**Uniwold**. Boutique, luxury cruise line that's a magnet to highbrow, posh travelers. [www.uniworld.com](http://www.uniworld.com)

## GALAPAGOS

**Pikaia Lodge**. The islands first, and only eco-friendly, luxury resort. Enjoy a once-in-a-lifetime experience at this all-inclusive getaway surrounded by incredible natural beauty. Galapagos. Tel: 5934-371-1670. Prices start at \$8,745 for three-night stay (for double occupancy). [www.pikaialodge.com](http://www.pikaialodge.com)

## HONG KONG

**Azamara Club Cruises**. Boutique cruise line focusing on destination immersions. [www.azamarclubcruises.com](http://www.azamarclubcruises.com)

**Blindspot Gallery**, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Tel: 852-2517-6238. Progressive contemporary gallery. [www.blindspotgallery.com](http://www.blindspotgallery.com)

**Ritz-Carlton**, Hong Kong, 1 Austin Road, Tel: 852-2263-2263. The highest hotel in Asia with breathtaking views. [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com)

**Wing Lai Yuen**, 7 Tak On St, no phone. The best noodles in Hong Kong. No website.

## MIAMI

**Miami and The Beaches**. The official tourism website for Miami. [www.miamiandbeaches.com](http://www.miamiandbeaches.com)

**Faena Hotel**, 3201 Collins Ave, Tel: 305-534-8800. Elegant Miami Beach hotel with large rooms and fancy restaurant. [www.faena.com](http://www.faena.com)

**The National**, 1677 Collins Ave, Tel: 305-532-2311. Popular South Beach Hotel with fun, live cabaret dinner hosted by local guru Edison Farrow. [www.thecabaretsouthbeach.com](http://www.thecabaretsouthbeach.com)

**PortMiami**. Miami's cruise terminal's website that helps you plan your cruise. [www.portmiami.com](http://www.portmiami.com)

**Royal Caribbean**. Cruise line known for unique activities and attractions aboard the ships. [www.royalcaribbean.com](http://www.royalcaribbean.com)

## VALPARAÍSO

**Casa Higuera**, Higuera 133, Cerro Alegre de, Tel: 56-32-249-7900. 20-room boutique with sublime views and excellent restaurant. [www.casahiguera.cl](http://www.casahiguera.cl)

**Celebrity Cruises**. Family-friendly and couples-friendly cruise line that focuses on service. [www.celebritycruises.com](http://www.celebritycruises.com)

**Emiliana Organic Vineyards**, Casablanca Region, Tel: 56-22-353-9130. Breathtaking vineyard that focuses on organic wines. [www.emiliana.cl](http://www.emiliana.cl)

**La Sebastiana**, Hector Calvo 692, Tel: 56-32-222-0092. Pablo Neruda's former house and museum. [www.fundacionneruda.org](http://www.fundacionneruda.org)

**Upscape**, Teguvalda 1352, Tel: 802-904-6798. Premiere tour operator in Valparaíso with gay guides. [www.upscaletravel.com](http://www.upscaletravel.com)

## VENICE

**Antiche Carampane**, Rio Tera de la Carampane, 1911, Tel: 39-041-524-0165. Popular restaurant known for seafood and celebrity sightings. [www.antichecarampane.com](http://www.antichecarampane.com)

**The Gritti Palace**, Campo Santa Maria del Giglio, Tel: 39-041-794611. Five-star hotel in a 15th-century palazzo. [www.thegrittipalace.com](http://www.thegrittipalace.com)

**Harry's Bar**, Calle Vallaresso, Tel: 39-041-528-5777. Legendary bar that invented the Bellini. [www.harrysbarvenezia.com](http://www.harrysbarvenezia.com)

**Museo Fortuny**, Campo S. Beneto, 3780, Tel: 39-041-520-0995. Unassuming, off-the-radar museum inside a 15th-century palazzo. [www.fortuny.visitmuve.it](http://www.fortuny.visitmuve.it)

**Viking Cruises**. Upscale cruise line with intimate ships. [www.vikingcruises.com](http://www.vikingcruises.com)