

Cruises

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Exploring beyond the ship

Cruise lines are expanding shore excursions that immerse travellers in local history, culture and cuisine

For many cruise passengers, the highlight of their voyage is a shore excursion. It's an opportunity to explore something new and gain a deeper appreciation of a destination through its history, nature, customs or cuisine.

For Doug Wallace, Toronto-based author of *How to Plan a Vacation*, an afternoon spent discovering the Portimão Museum – a former fish cannery turned museum – offered an intriguing glimpse into Portugal's sardine industry.

"It showcases the region's fishing and canning traditions beautifully, with old machinery, artifacts, photos and video," he recalls. "Then we went to a nearby tapas bar, where I sampled mackerel

and sardines on toast alongside bottomless glasses of rosé."

Meanwhile, an excursion taken during a cruise on the Douro River gave Vancouver writer Lucas Aykroyd a closer look at local customs. "In Salamanca, Spain, I had lunch in the Hotel Alameda Palace's seventh-floor ballroom beneath crystal chandeliers," he says. "Two women in ruffled maroon skirts performed elaborate tap dancing to music that evoked both Riverdance and 1980s-style Metallica. I didn't expect to be banging my head while feasting on traditional Spanish seafood paella!"

THE RISE OF ALL-INCLUSIVE EXCURSIONS

The only downside to shore excursions is that they can be expensive. That's why savvy cruisers seek out companies that include them. Regent Seven Seas Cruises is one such line, offering unlimited all-inclusive shore

excursions in every port of call – a rarity in the ultra-luxury cruise space. Recently, the company announced a fresh slate of excursions for passengers aboard the *Seven Seas Prestige*, launching in December 2026.

"Whether guests are passionate about history, food and wine, architecture, or simply discovering hidden gems, the ship's immersive shore excursions are designed to create memorable moments in every port," says Wes D'Silva, president of Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

Among Regent's offerings is a visit to the historic French city of Rouen, on the River Seine, available aboard the *Regal Shores* Cruise departing May 27, 2027, where guests stroll cobbled streets on a guided walking tour that includes a stop at the magnificent Notre-Dame Cathedral. In another excursion, featured on the *Breathtaking* Greek Isles cruise departing July 5, 2027,



Visiting Notre-Dame Cathedral in Rouen, France, is a highlight of Regent Seven Seas Cruises's *Regal Shores* journey. BENOIT ELIOT/ROUEN TOURISM

passengers can uncover the mythology of the island of Delos – the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis – and visit an open-air archeological site in Mykonos, where pilgrims once paid tribute to the Greek gods.

Also in Greece, history buffs can delve deeper with the Medieval Mystras excursion, part of the Antiquities & Ancients sailing departing Aug. 21, 2027. Guests explore the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mystras, the medieval fortress overlooking ancient Sparta, while gaining insight into its architectural treasures and centuries-old frescoes.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT EXCURSION

The sheer number of shore excursions can feel overwhelming. D'Silva suggests thinking about what kind of traveller you are before choosing. "Some guests love cultural and historical tours, others prefer culinary experiences, beach days or more active adventures, but there is definitely something for everyone," he says. He also recommends checking the activity level of each excursion. "It's another important factor to consider when curating your itinerary," he adds.

Popular experiences, especially small-group tours and culinary excursions can fill up quickly. D'Silva advises guests to book shore excursions as early as possible. On *Seven Seas Prestige*,



Above: The Portimão Museum, located in Portimão in Portugal's southern Algarve region, showcases the rich history of the area's fishing and canning industries. Right: For centuries, sardines have been a staple in Portugal's trade and culinary culture. BRIAN DOUGLAS



reservations open well ahead of sailing, with concierge-suite guests and above able to book 210 days before departure.

That said, guests can still reserve excursions onboard, while leaving room for some chill time. As D'Silva

points out: "Many guests like to balance their days between active tours and more relaxed ones. If you have several long touring days in a row, mixing in a shorter or more leisurely excursion day can make the voyage even more enjoyable."

Expert tips to stay healthy

Recent reports about the hantavirus outbreak that affected cruise passengers aboard the *MV Hondius* have raised questions about health risks for cruise passengers. But according to Dr. Darin P. Cherniwchan, medical director of Fraser Valley Fraser Clinic in Abbotsford and Chilliwack, B.C., the circumstances surrounding the outbreak were highly unusual and should not be a cause for concern for most cruisers.

"Hantavirus presents a near-zero threat to typical cruise travellers," he says. "The virus is transmitted primarily through inhaling aerosolized wild rodent excreta, an exposure that is [nearly] impossible within a ship's strictly controlled, sanitized environment."

While cruisers can travel confidently without worrying about hantavirus, he suggests that passengers "maintain rigorous hand hygiene, stay current on vaccinations and practise respiratory etiquette in crowded areas" to help reduce the risk of contracting more common shipboard illnesses such as norovirus or influenza.

Dr. Cherniwchan also recommends taking steps to build immune resilience, including getting seven to eight hours of sleep, staying active, maintaining a well-balanced diet and keeping properly hydrated.

"And limit caffeinated beverages and alcohol," he says. "Both can significantly disrupt hydration and sleep balance, making it much harder for your body to adjust to the effects of jet lag during the first few days of your journey."



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