

The 20 best cruises for 2016

Cruising

From exploring temples in Burma to a wildlife adventure in the Galapagos, Sara Macefield has the pick of the trips

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Elegance on the Irrawaddy

Rangoon's Strand Hotel offers an elegant escape from the hubbub of the Burmese city and now guests can enjoy its colonial splendours on the Irrawaddy River aboard new riverboat Strand Cruise. During three and four-night sailings stopping at villages, temples and monasteries, established Strand traditions of butler service and afternoon tea will be on tap.

Details A seven-night package that includes a four-night voyage from Bagan to Mandalay and two-night stay at The Strand costs from £3,400pp between February and October. Flights are included (020 3603 6518, originaltravel.co.uk)

Norwegian culture

Get under the skin of Norway with specialist line Hurtigruten. Its new cultural sailings include trips to concerts staged in mountain caves, plus tours of botanical gardens and cathedrals. Some excursions focus on the life and works of Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.

Details An 11-night round-trip sailing from Bergen to Kirkenes costs from £1,424pp, departing on April 15 or 19.

Flights and transfers are extra, from £330pp (020 3582 6642, hurtigruten.co.uk)

Transatlantic transformation

Cunard's Queen Mary 2 will emerge for its summer season of Southampton-New York crossings with a new look — inspired by the original Queen Mary — following a multimillion-pound refit in May/June. There will be more single cabins and upgraded dining facilities, including new signature restaurant The Verandah, which is already featured on sister ships Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria.

Details A seven-night transatlantic crossing from Southampton to New York costs from £1,299pp, departing on July 17. The return flight is included (0843 3742224, cunard.co.uk)

Join the Mediterranean jet-set

Live the high life on a new Jet Set Sail package with Celebrity Cruises that whisks passengers on a private jet from Stansted to their ship for a Mediterranean cruise. You will have

free parking and complimentary refreshments in the terminal, plus more leg room on the aircraft and increased

luggage allowance.

Details A Jet Set Sail option, combining private flight both ways, with a one-week cruise from Civitavecchia (Rome) to Barcelona, including calls at Villefranche, Ajaccio and Palma, costs from £1,399pp. It departs on June 25 and includes free inflight meals and drinks, plus priority embarkation on to the ship and late disembarkation (0844 4932041, celebritycruises.co.uk)

Mekong adventure

If you're young at heart and younger in years, a clutch of new river cruises from adventure travel company G Adventures could float your boat. The firm has debut sailings through Burgundy and along the Mekong and Ganges rivers, with the emphasis on exploring local

communities, sometimes on the bikes that its boats carry on selected itineraries.

Details A nine-night package made up of an overnight stay in Ho Chi Minh City pre-cruise, a seven-night sailing to Siem Reap and an overnight stay in the city, costs from £1,199pp, departing on June

29. Flights are extra and cost from £553pp (0344 2722060, gadventures.co.uk)

Water park in the Med

Royal Caribbean International unveils its third 6,000-passenger-plus behemoth, *Harmony of the Seas*, this year. The world's largest cruise ship has the tallest waterslide at sea, a full-size carousel and an onboard park.

Harmony will spend its first summer in the Mediterranean before sailing to Florida for Caribbean cruises.

Details A one-week round-trip Mediterranean voyage from Barcelona

includes calls at Palma, Marseilles and Civitavecchia. It costs from £1,249pp, departing on August 14, including flights (0844 4933033, royalcaribbean.co.uk)

Cuban double act

Interest in Cuba is booming amid warming relations with the US. Italian line MSC Cruises is basing one ship at the island this winter and a second for winter 2016-17, offering sailings from Havana, where you will spend either one or two nights.

Details A one-week round-trip voyage from Havana to Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Mexico costs from £1,019pp, departing on March 15 and including flights (020 3426 3010, mscruises.co.uk)

St Lucia departures

P&O Cruises is introducing St Lucia as a new starting point for Caribbean cruises aboard its newest ship *Britannia* next winter. From November 2016 to March 2017, the line is offering its first seven-night sailings from the island, in addition to 14-night cruises.

Details A seven-night Caribbean ►

