




## 5 of the Best Christmas Cruises



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'Tis the season to be cruising. Treat yourself to the ultimate gift this Christmas, a magical festive cruise.

Whether you love all things Christmassy or you dream of sailing away from the shopping, sprout peeling and seasonal stress -- preferably into some sunshine -- December is a great time of year to cruise.

Festive season fans might choose to cruise to the atmospheric European Christmas markets or stock up on presents on a transatlantic cruise to New York. Maybe you fancy a real-life Arctic Adventure, with snow-sledding and northern lights-spotting in Norway, or prefer to swap snow for sun with a cruise in the Caribbean, or island-hopping in the Canaries. Whatever you wish for, there's a cruise to make your festive dreams come true.

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## Christmas Markets Cruise

Europe is famous for its Christmas markets which are held in historic town squares and picturesque settings. On a December river cruise you'll be spoilt for choice, especially if you cruise along the Danube, Rhine or Elbe.

Popular Christmas market stops along the Danube include the Bavarian city of Nuremberg – where you can sample the gingerbread and the gluhwein while shopping for traditional 'plum people' figurines; Vienna – to sip Weinachtspunsch (spiced punch) at the Christkindlmarkt on Rathausplatz; and Hungarian capital Budapest – where even the trams are covered in twinkling fairy lights.

Or choose a Rhine river cruise and go ice-skating in Strasbourg, in front of a 100ft Christmas tree, and shop with the impressive Cologne cathedral or Amsterdam's Royal Palace as a backdrop. Or tick off the markets in Prague and Berlin on a cruise along the Elbe. With little treat-laden wooden chalets strung with fairly lights popping up on pretty much every cobbled square in Europe, you won't struggle to find a festive market on a pre-Christmas river cruise.

Most major river cruise lines offer Christmas market itineraries, including Viking, Uniworld, Avalon, AmaWaterways, CroisiEurope, Tauck and Scenic.

### Book it:

- [Uniworld's](#) seven-night Classic Christmas Markets itinerary departs December 1 and 15 from Frankfurt and calls at Wertheim, Wurzburg, Rothenburg, Bamberg, Nuremberg and Prague.
- [AmaWaterways](#) has a seven-night Christmas on the Danube cruise departing December 4 and visiting Budapest, Vienna, Melk, Passau, Regensburg and Nuremberg.
- [Emerald](#) has a seven-night Christmas Markets sailing departing December 6, visiting Nuremberg, Bamberg, Wurzburg, Miltenberg, Koblenz, Cologne and Amsterdam.
- [Viking Ocean's](#) Western Mediterranean Cruise itinerary includes overnights in Barcelona, Rome and Florence, so you can see the Christmas markets at their most magical when illuminated by thousands of lights, after-dark.

## New York Shopping Trip

You've seen it in the movies, so why not make Christmas in New York a reality with a transatlantic cruise this December? The festive sights and attractions come thick and fast in the Big Apple, starting with the lighting of the huge Rockefeller Center Christmas tree on November 29. You can skate in Central Park with the city's skyscrapers in the background, see the Rockettes at the Radio City Christmas Spectacular show, and maybe even get caught in a snow flurry in Times Square.

There's no better place than New York City for a spot of extra special Christmas shopping, and the elaborate window and in-store displays of Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Barneys, Tiffany & Co and Saks are always a visual treat. And those holidaying with kids will definitely want to visit a traditional toy shop or two. Not only is Mary Arnold Toys the oldest toy shop in town – it's the oldest continuously-run toy store in the whole of the U.S.

Cunard cruises always have a real sense of occasion, and this is ramped up even more over the festive period when a beautiful tree takes pride of place in the Grand Lobby and the chef patissier sets up a cute gingerbread village for passengers to admire.

### Book It:

- A seven-night transatlantic cruise from New York to Southampton departs December 8 on [Queen Mary 2](#), or catch the return trip from Southampton to New York on December 15. You can extend your stay in the city with Cunard's hotel packages, and can also add a New York 'As You Like It' two- to four-night tour package (handy for skipping the queues to some popular attractions).

## Christmas in the Caribbean & Canaries

Those who'd rather see sunshine than snow in wintertime can leave our cold, dark December behind to spend Christmas in the Caribbean.

Revellers who love the festivities but love them even more in a warm climate can combine an adults-only sunshine cruise with a traditional Christmas dinner, festive films showing in the onboard cinema and on the cabin TVs, gifts for all and a gala dinner and dance to see in the New Year.

Alternatively, if you fancy a shot of winter sunshine closer to home there are cruises in the Canaries include a lavish Christmas dinner of roast Norfolk turkey with all the trimmings, a traditional Boxing Day buffet, Christmas parties and a visit from Santa himself.

If you've got children then there are some magical family cruises with visits from Santa, themed activities and plenty of festive fun for all ages.

### Book it:

- P&O Cruises offers a 24-night round-trip from Southampton on adults-only [Arcadia](#), setting sail on December 16 and taking in La Coruna, Antigua, Pointe-a-Pitre, St Vincent, St Lucia, Barbados and Ponta Delgada (Azores).
- Cunard's 12-night Canary Island Celebration on [Queen Victoria](#) sails from Southampton on December 17, calling at Madeira, La Palma, Tenerife, Lanzarote and La Coruna.
- Disney offers Very Merrytime Cruises from November 10 to December 24 on Disney Magic, Wonder, Dream and Fantasy, including a four-night Bahamian Cruise from Miami on Disney Magic departing December 6, calling at Miami, Key West (Florida), Nassau (Bahamas) and Disney's very own Caribbean island, Castaway Cay. The cruises include a giant gingerbread house, 24ft Christmas tree with Mickey's tree lighting ceremony, Santa meet-and-greets and storytime with Mrs Claus. Even Castaway Cay will be transformed into a winter wonderland with snow flurries, a Christmas tree, and Mr and Mrs Snowman -- all with added sunshine, of course!

## See the Northern Lights

If you're dreaming of a white Christmas then a cruise to the snowy wilderness of the Arctic Circle, with its huge ice glaciers and snow-capped mountains, won't disappoint. As northern Norway is considered to be one of the best places to see the [northern lights](#), a cruise along the country's coastline is a memorable Christmas experience.

Alta is one of the best places for spotting the northern lights and on some sailings there's even the offer of a free cruise if you don't get to see them. Some itineraries feature visits to Tromso, where you can visit a traditional Sami camp or go dog-sledding through the snow. You'll also stop off at some of Norway's most beautiful cities including Bergen, Alesund, Stavanger, and Trondheim -- where you'll enjoy the New Year's Eve fireworks display from the ship's deck.

### Book it:

- Fred. Olsen has a 15-night Norwegian Christmas round trip from Southampton on [Black Watch](#), departing on December 21 and including two nights in Alta and New Year in Trondheim.
- [Hurtigruten](#) offers a 'Northern Lights Promise' on its 11-night Classic or Astronomy Voyages (from now until March 2018). If don't see the lights you get another six- or seven-day Classic Voyage for free. The 11-night sailings span the length of the Norwegian coast from Bergen to Kirkenes, crossing the Arctic Circle (where first-timers can take part in a rite of passage ritual out on deck that involves taking a spoonful of cod liver oil). Highlights of this 34 port adventure include sailing into fjords, seeing Norway's second largest glacier, Svartisen and taking part in snow activities in Tromso. Hurtigruten sails every day of the year and offer flights from the U.K. for all departures.

## Christmas and New Year Celebration

For the ultimate hassle-free Christmas, why not spend the day itself at sea? Extend the cruise into the New Year and you can enjoy all the celebrations with no cooking, cleaning, party-hosting or having to book expensive New Year's Eve taxis.

There are sailings to suit all tastes and budgets, including no-fly cruises from the U.K. and short-break sailings that start from just three nights.

### Book it:

- Marella Cruises (formally Thomson) offers the seven-night Canarian Christmas cruise on [Marella Dream](#), departing Tenerife on December 22, followed by the seven-night New Year's Dream sailing. Ports of call include Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Madeira, La Palma, Lanzarote and Porto Santo (Portugal).
- Cruise and Maritime Voyages has a choice of Christmas and New Year cruises departing from London Tilbury, including the 21-night Christmas & New Year Cape Verde, Madeira & Canaries, itinerary departing December 17 on [Magellan](#). There are also shorter celebration cruises including a three-night Festive Getaway cruise to Amsterdam, plus Christmas Market cruises to Amsterdam, Antwerp and France.
- Cunard Christmas and New Year cruises include seeing in the New Year in Amsterdam on the five-night Bruges and Amsterdam Southampton round trip on Queen Victoria, celebrating Christmas Day and the New Year at sea on the 12-night Caribbean Celebration cruise on Queen Mary 2 from New York to Southampton, or spending Christmas Day at sea while cruising from Southampton to Lanzarote before seeing in the New Year in Funchal, Madeira, on the 15-night Canary Island Celebration cruise on [Queen Elizabeth](#).