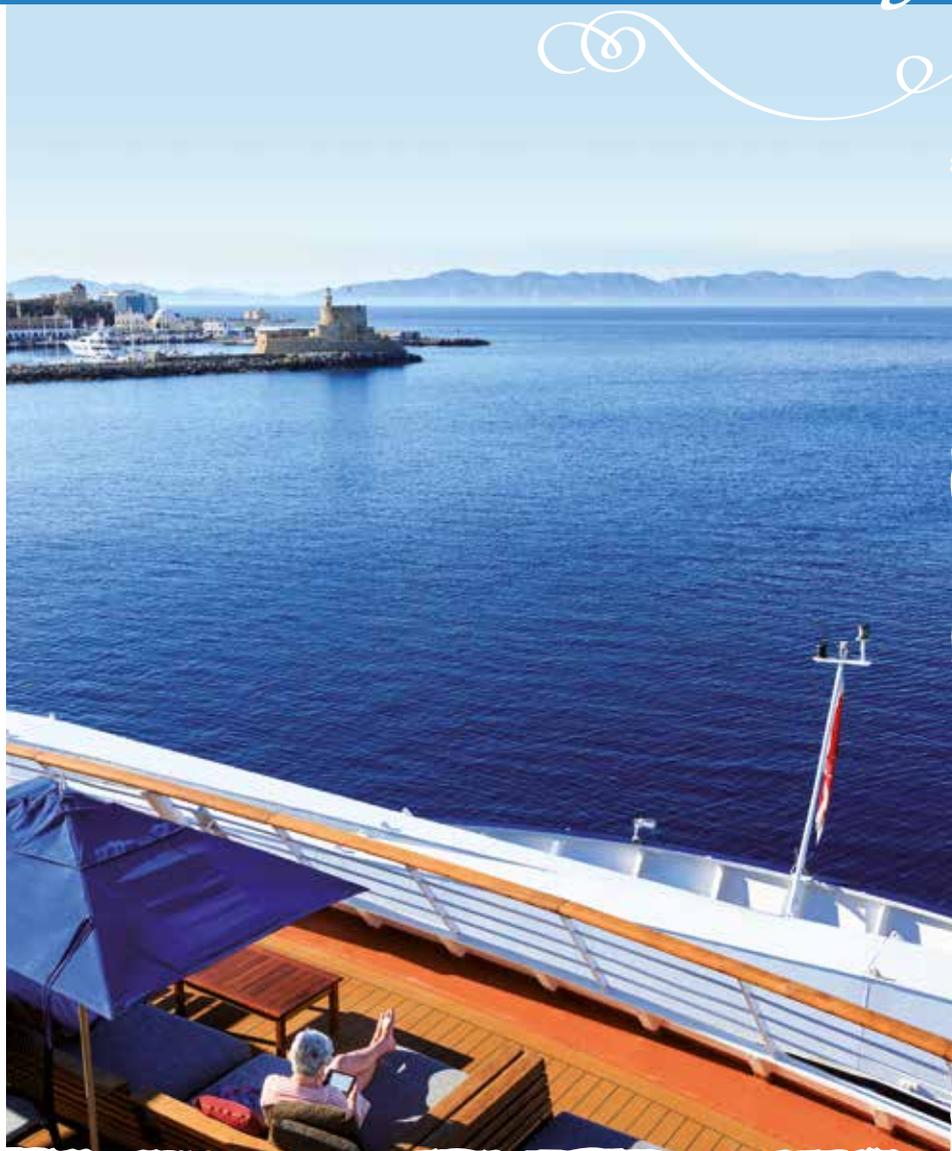


The Saga guide

...to cruising



New to cruising?
Here's everything you need to know

Brought to you by 

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 4 What kind of cruise is for you?
- 8 Help! What do I wear? And other questions
- 11 Travelling alone?
- 12 Life on board
- 14 Exploring dry land
- 16 10 top newbie destinations
- 18 Packing for a cruise

Welcome

by Jane Archer

Congratulations! If you are thinking about going on a cruise you are halfway towards having your best holiday ever. And if you don't believe us, ask the millions of people who go on cruises year after year.

For those who haven't experienced a cruise before, you can imagine the excitement of waking in a new destination each day, the convivial atmosphere on board, being looked after by a friendly, professional crew, and being rocked to sleep in an airy, stylish cabin. And the food! Superlatives all the way.

There are a few things to decide before booking

a cruise. Do you want a big or small ship? There is a trend for huge ships with 4,000 or more people, full of non-stop entertainment for whole families. But many like classic small-ship cruising – 300-700 people: even smaller on a river cruise.

Then there is the ease of access. Some cruises start from UK ports – easy to get to – and many start abroad,

entailing a flight and transfer to port of departure.

However, you're straight into foreign climes from the start.

So which style of cruise would you like and where would you like to go? We've suggested some ideas and picked out several must-see destinations on the following pages. All the way through we've added little boxes to gently point out how Saga does cruising differently – and just that little bit better, we think!

So read on to be inspired, find answers to your queries – and allow yourself to dream!



The Saga difference

On a Saga cruise there are no hidden extras. The price of a Saga cruise includes return chauffeur service to the port; portage to your cabin; selected wines at

lunch and dinner; free buses to towns from the port; a personal cabin steward; and optional insurance. Some excursions are included on selected cruises.



What kind of cruise is for you?

There are many kinds of cruise, so find your style below to pick the perfect experience

It's as much a pleasure to travel as to arrive when you're on board, so think carefully about what kind of style and surroundings you'd like from the ship you pick. Ultra-modern with waterslides, discos and 1,000+ people? Or more traditional, classic cruising with scrubbed decks, brass rails, personal service and a friendly, smaller-ship atmosphere?

Children are wonderful and there are plenty of family cruise lines. But would you prefer an adults-only cruise line with the opportunity to make new friends who are a bit like you? Adults-only cruises tend to have a wider range of fascinating lecturers on board, too.

And what level of luxury are you after? There are plenty of budget cruise lines,

or for just a bit more you can have a rather more indulgent experience: crisp cotton sheets, beautifully decorated, spacious cabins and extras such as personal cabin service from your designated steward, for instance.

It's all down to you and what kind of person you are – so here are some ideas for cruises depending on your interests and levels of energy...



The explorer

A cruise is a great way to reach amazing, off-the-beaten-track places – smaller ships are more able to visit more unusual locations. You can chill out while sailing north to Greenland or the island of Spitsbergen, the closest that cruise ships can get to the North Pole, where polar bears are king.

If getting up close and personal with penguins appeals to you more, go south to Antarctica, where you'll also see massive icebergs.

Prefer warmth? Cruises in Central or South America are a great way to see lots of exotic countries on one holiday; you might even sail around Cape Horn.



The peace-nik

Fancy peace and quiet away from it all? Consider a cruise around the Norwegian fjords: majestic landscapes with snow-capped mountains, deep gorges and tumbling waterfalls, with trips ashore to pastel-coloured villages. (Try playing Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor* in your headphones as you glide past!)

And for a real once-in-a-lifetime experience, try a winter trip to Norway's far north to see the spectacular Northern Lights.

The sun worshipper

The Med in summer is wonderful, with sunny blue skies and temperatures well into the 30s. But a winter cruise in the Caribbean or Canary Islands is just the ticket to escape the British cold weather. The Caribbean has exotic cultures, white-sand beaches and lush rainforests: a contrast to the volcanic Canary Islands with its pine forests, desert dunes and eerie lunar landscapes.



The culture vulture

Cruises can be wonderfully educational experiences. Mediterranean cruises visit the great cultural cities of art, music, literature, grand palaces and beautiful cathedrals and many ships will have experts on board to enhance your appreciation of each place. Pick one that includes Florence and Rome to experience Michelangelo's classics first hand.



The foodie fan

Look out for cruises with celebrity chefs on board, giving live cookery shows. On land, excursions often revolve around local delicacies: from oysters in France and melt-in-the-mouth *jamón* in Spain to *pastéis de nata* (custard-filled tarts) in Portugal, there is no end to the foodie pleasures to enjoy ashore.

In the Baltic, try *borscht* in Tallinn, while the Canary Islands are famous for their *papas arrugadas*, or wrinkly potatoes – delicious with a spicy sauce.



The city slicker

If you love city life, a cruise around the Baltic will take you to the fascinating cities of Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki and Tallinn – the medieval capital of Estonia.

Some itineraries also visit Oslo in Norway, Amsterdam and the seaside town of Warnemünde in Germany, the port for Berlin.

Don't miss Moscow with a visit to the Kremlin, and St Petersburg for its magnificent palaces and grand cathedrals, opera and ballet.

TOP TIP!

Many cruise lines offer 'taster' mini cruises or shorter cruises, especially to the fjords, UK and European destinations. Look out for cruises of 7 nights or less.

The fun lover

Many cruises can take you to world-famous events such as the Edinburgh Tattoo or New Year firework displays, St Patrick's Day in Dublin or the spectacular Tall Ships race in Finland. And for the best event of all, of course there are Christmas cruises, complete with Santa and festive celebrations!

The home bird

A cruise around the British Isles is the easiest way to enjoy some of the best of Britain without the hassle of traffic jams, foreign currency, changing hotels or unpacking every day. Itineraries typically include Liverpool, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

Ships also call at Dublin and Belfast, pretty St Peter Port in Guernsey, colourful Tobermory on the Isle of Mull and Kirkwall in the Orkneys.



The landlubber

Not sure about the ocean waves? A river cruise will keep you close to terra firma and give you a different landscape every day.

Smaller ships (50 to 200 passengers max) travel the Rhine and Danube, the Douro in Portugal, the Seine and Loire in France and many more, calling at historic cities, vineyards, famous gardens and palaces; or stopping off for wildlife walks in the countryside, deep in the heart of each country.

JARGON BUSTER:

Stateroom

Sounds grand, but actually it is just the name cruise lines use when referring to a cabin, whether it be inside (with no window), outside (with a sealed window) or a balcony.

For the most exclusive experience there will be suites, which come with perks such as butler service, free drinks and priority embarkation.



Themed cruises

Have a special interest you'd like to learn more about or a passion you'd like to indulge? Or would you simply like to learn something new? You'll be sure to find a whole cruise devoted to it, visiting places connected to the subject and inviting top experts and celebrities on board to talk and demonstrate their skills.

Traditional themes include archaeology, history, wine and cookery with celebrity chefs, wildlife, photography and dancing. But wackier theme cruises are being developed every year: murder mystery, choral, rock music, chocolate-making and tasting – there's even a nude cruise!

TV-linked cruises with some of the show's stars are growing in popularity, too: *Strictly Come Dancing*, *The Great British Bake Off*, *The Voice* and – wait for it – *Star Trek* for starters.

Help! What do I wear? And other questions

Those new to cruising need to know a great deal. Here are fears quelled and myths busted...

Do I have to sit with people I don't know for dinner?

Not long ago, dinner was served in two sittings and passengers were given a time to eat and a table, sharing with the same people every evening. Some cruise lines still have this system, but most have an open-seating option as well, where you can dine when and with whom you want, and often in the on-board restaurant of your choice – waiter service or buffet.

How do I pay for things on board?

Cruise ships operate a cashless system. When you check in you'll be given a card that acts as a cabin key, your payment card on board and your ID for getting on and off the ship (see page 14).

At the end of the cruise, you'll receive a bill itemising everything you have spent (you can ask for a copy at any time during the cruise). This can be settled by cash or credit card.

How much do I tip?

It is customary to leave a tip



for the crew at the end of the cruise. The recommended amount varies from about £4 to £16 a day.

What happens in bad weather?

Most cruise ships are fitted with stabilisers, which are like fins that protrude from the hull and help balance the vessel when the sea gets rough. They don't stop all movement but they do counter some of the rolling.

What can I do if I become seasick?

If you are prone to seasickness, there are various

tablets you can take and these are available to buy on board. Many people swear by wrist bands or patches behind the ear. The ship's doctor can also administer a seasickness injection. It is effective but costs extra.

When should I book?

If you fancy a cruise with dates that suit, book as soon as possible. There might be some late availability at lower prices if you wait, but chances are you won't get the cabin grade or location you'd prefer. As a general guide, single cabins and cabins with balconies usually sell out first.



Can cruise lines cater for special diets?

Yes, they can, but let them know when you book if you have allergies.

Can I smoke?

Each cruise line has a different smoking policy but most allow smoking in designated places on deck, some smaller than others. Check before you book if it's important to you.

Is there Wi-Fi?

Wi-Fi is available throughout ships on nearly all cruise lines now. Connection is via satellites so the service can be slow though, especially at sea. Many cruise lines charge for the service – but not Saga!

Will my phone work?

If you have roaming on your phone, it will work in most places ashore. However, it will work at sea only if your ship has International Maritime Roaming. Charges for mobile phone use on the ship will be billed to your own phone account, not to

your on-board account. You should check prices with your service provider before travelling.

Can I watch UK TV?

Cabin TVs usually offer a choice of channels including BBC World, Sky and CNN, as well as film and light entertainment channels. Several have DVDs or built-in movies that can be watched free or at an extra charge. Connection is via satellite so the signal can be unreliable.

Will my hairdryer plug in?

Some cruise lines equip cabins with hairdryers so you can leave yours at home. And for those special hair-up occasions, you can always visit the on-board salon. If you take your hairdryer, do bear in mind that on some ships you will need an adaptor for the standard UK three-pin plug.

What happens on days at sea?

These can be busier than going ashore. There can be



The Saga difference

- On Saga ships, access to free Wi-Fi is included.
- Launderettes on each Saga ship are free to use, as is washing powder. That's one less thing to pack!
- They also use UK plug sockets.
- On Saga ships, tips are included as part of your cruise package.
- Parking at the port is included if you're not using Saga's door-to-door chauffeur car service.
- We supply free seasickness tablets in rough weather.

films, talks, demonstrations, key speakers, painting classes – you name it! Or of course you can laze around in the sun catching up with your reading, or take a dip in the pool on board, or relax in the spa. It's all up to you.

Can I exercise?

All ships have gyms equipped with treadmills, exercise bikes and weights; most also offer yoga and Pilates classes.

Can I go ashore alone?

Once the ship is safely docked and the paperwork has been completed, you can go ashore.

Just remember to note the all-aboard time before you go and make sure you are back in time because if you are late the ship might leave without you.

What about laundry?

Ships have an on-board laundry, dry-cleaning and pressing service for an extra charge. Many also have a self-service launderette.

Is there a doctor on board?

All ocean-going ships have a well-staffed medical centre with a doctor and nurse on call 24 hours. Medical centre

facilities vary depending on the ship but all doctors will be able to treat minor ailments, prescribe antibiotics and other drugs and provide emergency care, until the patient can be transferred to a land-based hospital should the need arise.

What are the facilities for disabled people?

There are several cabins adapted for wheelchairs on most cruise ships. Disabled passengers must be accompanied by an able-bodied helper as getting around and getting off and on the ship can be challenging.

You should discuss any disability with the cruise line before booking.

TOP TIP!

Can't decide where you'd like your cabin to be? Check out the ship's layout if you want to be near the restaurants, and a mid-ship one for stability. If you can, get a balcony – it really adds to the experience.



What to wear

This is one topic guaranteed to get every first-timer in a spin but it really shouldn't, as dress codes are all there for fun and a rare (nowadays) opportunity to dress up a bit. By day it's as casual as you like. You'll want shorts, T-shirts and light trousers for sunny days in the Mediterranean, and warm clothing for colder climates.

Smart casual wear is fine most evenings – bring what you would normally wear to a smart restaurant at home. Most ships have a couple of formal nights, requiring either evening dress or a



cocktail dress for women and dinner jacket and tie for men. Semi-formal is simply an opportunity to be a bit more glam if you wish – and men are often required to wear a jacket in the dining room.

As every cruise line has a different dress code, you will be advised on what to bring in your final documents.



The Saga difference

Still fretting about what to wear? See a fun short video at saga.co.uk/whattowear



Travelling alone?

A cruise is the ideal holiday for a single person. The most difficult part is deciding which one to go on – the rest is done for you, from organising any necessary visas to return travel.

With the increase of solo travellers opting for a cruise, many ships are increasing their quota of individually priced single cabins and lowering their single supplements, sometimes waiving them completely on certain itineraries, offering a much fairer deal for people on their own.

It can be a little daunting going on holiday by yourself the first time, but rest assured there will be many others like you, hence it is important to

book well in advance to ensure you get the deal that you want. Choose a cruise with a high quota of single cabins – there will be more people on their own to team up with if you wish. Online forums are a good way to get to know other passengers before you sail.

Once on board, there are several social events organised for singletons and at dinner you can ask to be seated at a table with other solos or opt for a cruise with an open dining policy, so you can sit where you like. On many cruises, dance hosts in the evenings ensure you'll never be short of a partner if you want to hit the floor. If you go for a cruise with

a special interest theme close to your heart (*see page 7*), you will be sure of meeting people who have an interest in common.

However, if you prefer to be on your own and are on holiday for some 'me time', a cruise is the perfect place to unwind and be as sociable or solitary as you choose.

JARGON BUSTER:

Single supplement

Most cabins are priced on two people sharing. If there is just one person, cruise lines make up lost revenue by charging a supplement. This can be twice the per person rate. Look out for twins for sole occupancy offers.

Life on board

What's it really like on a cruise? Find out here...

Eating and drinking

If the joy of waking in a different destination every day is the top reason why most people love to cruise, the amazing cuisine that the chefs create morning, noon and night is a close second. You will never feel hungry on a cruise.

Dining is always an occasion. We're talking beautifully dressed tables, courteous waiter service, convivial conversation and delicious five- or six-course meals every evening. Best of all, dishes served in the main dining room and buffet are included in the cost of your cruise. There are also many other restaurants (Italian, Thai, Indian etc), eateries and snack bars to choose from but you usually pay for these. The bigger the ship the more choices there are. Some lines don't have a traditional main dining room but have several smaller ones instead, included in the fare. Alternatively you can eat in your cabin using Room Service.

Days at sea start with a sumptuous breakfast, full English or continental. Lunch and dinner are equally fabulous spreads, with salads, soups, meat, fish or vegetarian dishes. Afternoon tea (dubbed 'gat'eau-clock') is not to be missed, with freshly made bread, scones and indulgent cakes, and there are light bites in the bar for those still peckish after the evening show.

6 best things about a cruise

- 1 Only unpacking once but waking up in a different destination each day.
- 2 Enjoying a drink or two in the evening without having to drive home.
- 3 Never having to worry about the cost of dinner because it's included in the price.
- 4 Being too busy to attend the keep-fit classes or the circuit walk around the deck. Making new friends.
- 5 Marvellous experiences on shore at exciting destinations.
- 6 Trying new things – hot stones massage in the spa anyone?

Entertainment

This is your chance to do all those things you've been putting off: each cruise line offers a raft of different courses on board on 'sea days' – ie sailing between ports. You might like to brush up on your painting skills, attend a celebrity talk, discuss the merits of Merlot over Malbec at a wine-tasting class, attend lectures on gardening, or finally tick off all those books you've been wanting to read.

Or how about exercising the little grey cells at a quiz or the muscles at a yoga or Pilates class? If that sounds

too much like hard work, a massage or facial in the spa is guaranteed to soothe the soul.

The activities don't stop as night falls, because after dinner you'll need to take your seat for show time. Cruise lines have all sorts of productions and solo singers to classical musicians and comedians. And when the show is over, there'll be more entertainment to enjoy with a nightcap and nibbles in your favourite bar – usually accompanied by late-night music or an act for night owls.



The Saga difference

The space ratios on Saga ships are among the highest in the industry. And a ratio of around two staff to every three passengers on board ensures exceptional service.

JARGON BUSTER:

Space ratio

A mathematical formula created to indicate the amount of room each passenger has on a cruise ship. It's reached by dividing a ship's tonnage by the number of passengers she holds when all lower berths are filled.



The Saga difference

Meals in Saga Sapphire's speciality restaurant East to West are included. Plus, we include wine with lunch and dinner.



Exploring dry land

DIY tours or ready-made excursions?
Here's how to choose



TOP TIP!

Cruise lines provide detailed descriptions of their tours in advance, including how much walking or standing is involved, to help you pick one that suits. Book ahead to be sure of securing a place.

Ships are generally in port for about ten hours, from 8am until 6pm, although they could make a stop for two days, such as at St Petersburg, or sometimes they might make a short morning call or dock at midday and stay late into the evening.

Often, the ship will travel at night so you wake up to find yourself in a completely different country in the morning. Sheer heaven!

You can go ashore and do your own thing or go on one of the ship's pre-booked excursions at extra cost. Choosing a tour is not easy as

there are so many: from historic sights to vineyard wine-tasting, or you can opt for more strenuous activities such as hiking up a mountain, kayaking or a bike tour, or a round of golf.

Depending on where your ship is sailing to, you can go ice fishing and dogsledding in Norway; dolphin and whale-watching from Funchal in Madeira; in Jamaica, climb the gushing Dunn's River Falls; car enthusiasts can even take a tour of the Mercedes-Benz plant from Bremerhaven in Germany.

Why choose a ship's excursion?

1 A reputable local guide will talk about the history and culture of the places you are visiting. Invaluable in cities such as St Petersburg, where there is so much to see and learn about in a short time.

2 You can relax knowing the ship will wait if there are any delays getting back to the port. Especially reassuring if the port is a long way from the city you want to visit, such as Rome or Berlin.

3 If your choice of activity needs equipment, such as for diving or golf, it will be provided.

4 A local guide is essential in destinations where language and customs are an issue.

TOP TIP!

Before getting off the ship, make sure you have your cruise card, as you will need it not only to disembark but also to get back on again. The card is swiped through a machine at the gangway that flashes up your picture, so security staff can keep tabs on everyone getting on the ship.



TOP TIP!

Leave your passport in the cabin safe, don't carry too much cash and keep your purse or wallet secure against your body, out of the reach of pickpockets.

Touring independently

If you prefer to go ashore independently, generally ships dock close to town so that you can walk in; if not, shuttle buses will be provided, (with Saga they're free). A taxi into the centre or the beach a mile or so away may be cheaper than taking the ship's transport.

To save time when you get to the port, decide what you want to do there beforehand



by researching it online if possible and booking what you can. There will be an information desk at the terminal for more advice – and maps – about how to get around. Buses and trams in European countries are efficient, reasonably priced and easy to use. Remember, if you are late back, the boat won't wait.

JARGON BUSTER:

Tender

If water is too shallow or a port is too small for a cruise ship to dock, you'll go ashore by tender. These are usually one of the ship's lifeboats. Some ports provide specially designed tenders, which are easier to get in and out of.



10 top newbie destinations

So you'd love to try a cruise – but where to? Here's a selection of great ports of call for first-timers... and experienced cruisers, too!

Bergen, Norway

A pretty town and the gateway to the fjords. Don't miss the views from Mount Fløyen (take the funicular up and walk down). A trip to majestic Hardangerfjord and a tour of composer Edvard Grieg's home, followed by a piano recital, are among the many excursions.

Canary Islands

Great for island hopping! The largest of the Canary Islands, Tenerife has the idyllic combination of sun, sand and sea. There are hiking trails – and even night-time star gazing – through the lunar landscape of Mount Teide National Park for those in exploration mode. The Jardín Botánico is home to exotic plants and trees from the tropics for keen gardeners.



Ferrol, Spain

Ships call here for tours to Santiago de Compostela:

you'll go by coach but each year thousands of pilgrims walk hundreds of miles along the Camino de Santiago to visit the grave of the apostle St James, inside the city's beautiful cathedral.

Funchal, Madeira

It's hard not to think of fortified wine if visiting Madeira but there is plenty more to see and do before an obligatory tasting. There are trips to the botanical gardens, off-road safaris, walks through the countryside or wacky high-speed toboggan rides down a steep road with two men in straw hats to steer and brake. Pick a cruise over New Year to see the city's famous firework display.

Grenada

This is not called the Spice Island of the Caribbean for nothing. You can almost smell the nutmeg and cinnamon in the air on an island tour. That's the best way to see the sights and learn about the spices that grow here. But exploring the capital, St George's, or spending a day at the sandy beaches, with their warm, clear blue water, are both hard to beat.

Havana, Cuba

Full of life, salsa, fine colonial architecture, grand plazas, oh and those American classic cars. A walking tour of Old Havana is the best way to get a feel for its heart and soul; Ernest Hemingway's favourite watering hole, Floridita, is touristy but perfect for a pick me up along the way. Tours visit rum and cigar factories.

Reykjavik, Iceland

There's nowhere quite like Iceland, with its rumbling volcanoes, shooting geysers and chic modern capital of Reykjavik. Knock remote Faroe Islands off your 'must see' list!



Rome, Italy

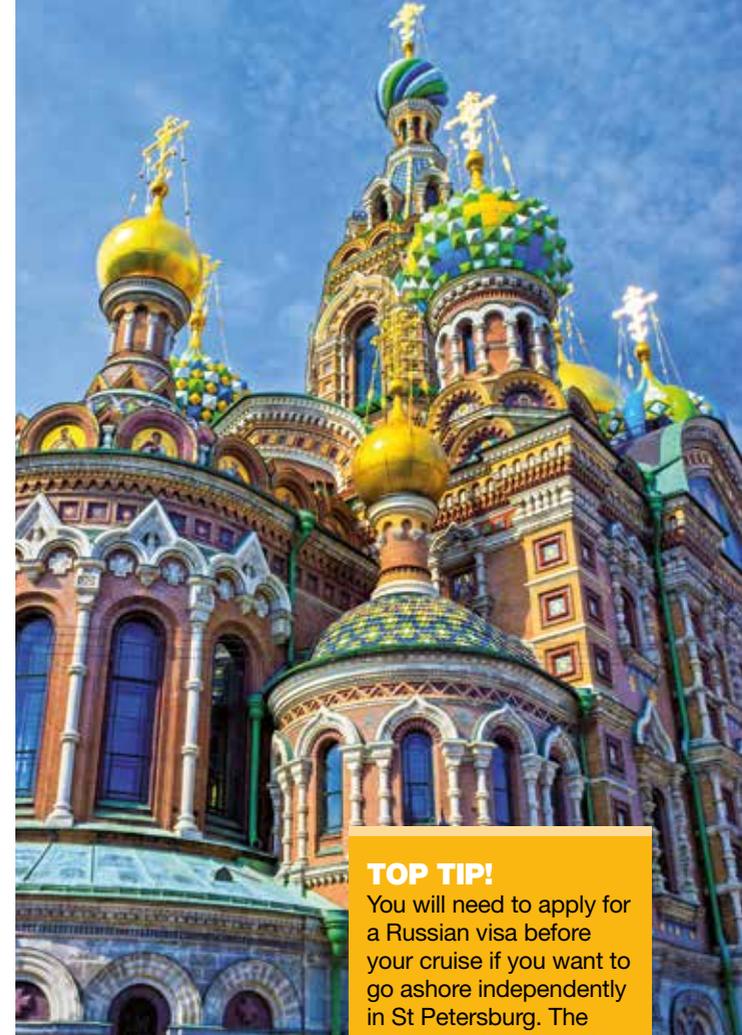
The Colosseum, Pantheon, Piazza Navona and ancient Roman Forum are glorious still. You can see them all on a walking tour, or combine a coach tour of the city with a visit inside the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.

Stockholm, Sweden

Built on 14 islands connected by 57 bridges, the Swedish capital sparkles in the summer sun. The Vasa Museum, housing a 17th-century warship that sank in the harbour on its maiden voyage, is the city's top attraction. Explore the narrow cobbled streets of Galma Stan, the oldest quarter, housing the Royal Palace.

St Petersburg, Russia

Peter the Great's magnificent city of golden spires is the jewel in the crown on a Baltic cruise, with so much to see that ships stay in port for at least two days. Top attractions include the Hermitage Museum, the ornate Catherine Palace, the fountains at Peterhof, Peter and Paul Cathedral and an evening at the ballet or the



TOP TIP!

You will need to apply for a Russian visa before your cruise if you want to go ashore independently in St Petersburg. The alternative is to take the ship's excursions, as you will be covered by the ship's group visa. But you will have to stay with your guide at all times.

opera. If time allows, visit the Fabergé Museum to see the exquisite bejewelled eggs made for the tsars, and lavish Yusupov Palace where Rasputin was murdered.

JARGON BUSTER: Cruise insurance

If it's to be any good, travel insurance must cover the cost of your cruise and any personal items you travel with. A standard policy is often not sufficient, so look out for policies with additional 'cruise' cover. PS! Saga offers cruise insurance with every trip.

Packing for a cruise

This is a little different from any other holiday, so here are a few things to remember...

Cruising from a UK port? You may find you can take as much luggage as you want. But do check with the cruise line before you pack.

Know the dress code on board your ship and have fun packing the suit, tie and posh dress for dinner and dancing.

Remember you can do laundry on board (free on Saga cruises) so no need to pack a zillion undies!

Dress for your destination. Churches in Catholic countries, for example, expect visitors to dress soberly and cover heads and arms.

Make sure you keep some room back in your suitcase

for the inevitable souvenirs found in the shops.

Buy a good money-belt to keep your wallet and documents safe from pickpockets. If you're travelling with a partner, divide credit cards between you so as not to keep all your eggs in one basket.

Good walking shoes are vital for sightseeing – leave the heels on board especially if there are cobblestones.

It seems obvious, but it's surprising how many forget to take enough of their regular medications.

Maps and port information are always useful. Saga ships



The Saga difference

There's a DVD player, TV and hairdryer in every Saga cabin. And a spa on board, too! Both Saga ships have a pair of binoculars in each cabin so you don't miss a thing.

have well-stocked libraries but do take your own guidebooks if you want to read up on your destinations on the way to the next port.

Take trainers and sportswear if you want to use the on-board gyms to work off gat'au-clock!

If you're packing in rainy England, it's easy to forget sunglasses.

Find out more about Saga's wonderful range of ocean cruises and download brochures at www.saga.co.uk/cruises. Or call free on 0800 051 0079. We also offer river cruises – visit www.saga.co.uk/rivercruises, or call free on 0800 046 2481



SAGA.CO.UK/MAGAZINE

© Saga Publishing Ltd, 2016