

10 best Christmas cruises for 2023

(Courtesy of Zachary Laks, The Points Guy)

It's the most wonderful time of the year ... to go on a cruise.

Trade the glow of a Christmas tree in your living room with the warmth of the sand and the sun on a holiday cruise. Skip the mulled wine on your stovetop for some of the world's best at a European Christmas market.

Christmas cruises can take your holiday celebrations to the next level — and are an ideal opportunity to escape the conventional holiday celebrations in place of an adventure.

On a [holiday cruise](#), you can leave the cooking, cleaning and decorating to the pros and simply enjoy time with your family. Christmas and New Year's cruises can also be good options for people trying to avoid the crush of relatives or who don't have family but still want to spend the holiday surrounded by other people and festive cheer.

Winter cruises feature holiday-themed activities for all ages, special feasts that capture the magic of the holiday season and port calls at destinations that let you enjoy the holiday spirit without shivering from frigid temperatures.

It's never too early to plan your holiday getaway, especially as these cruises are among the quickest to sell out. Here are the 10 best Christmas and New Year's cruises you can take in 2023.

Holiday cruise tips

Before you book, keep in mind a few key facts about Christmas cruises.

Rates will be high

Expect cruise fares to be among the highest of the year during the holiday weeks as demand increases.

The best prices will be for early bookings; you likely won't find any last-minute discounts. If you do, they'll either be on [windowless inside cabins](#) or [guarantee cabins](#), where the cruise line picks your room location.

Sailings will sell out

Holiday sailings sell out earlier than other itineraries, as people plan their holiday vacations months in advance. Suites and special cabins (family, spa, solo rooms, etc.) book up the fastest.

Consider booking your holiday cruise as early as possible, as the December sailings often [fill up a year in advance](#).

Consider your own decorations

The crew will decorate public areas on board, but passengers often go all-out decorating their doors and cabins for the holidays, as well.

Magnetic doors on cabins are blank canvases for the imagination. You'll find stateroom doors on Christmas cruises covered in wrapping paper, adorned with garlands or dotted with holiday-themed images.

It's best to double-check with your cruise line before attaching anything to your door or in your stateroom, as rules and regulations differ per line. If you're not creative, check if your cruise line offers cabin decoration packages for preorder prior to your sailing.

Specialty dining is not advised on the actual holiday

Most of the [specialty dining restaurants](#) on major cruise lines have set menus that do not change for the holidays.

Your best bet for traditional holiday dinner options (think roast turkey, smoked ham, mashed potatoes and gravy) will come from the main, included dining options on board. It can't hurt to ask if any of the extra-fee restaurants are doing a Christmas or New Year's menu if you're looking for a more intimate holiday meal.

Expect holiday hours in port

Most cruise ships will plan for Christmas to be a sea day, but if you're in port on Dec. 25 (or on Boxing Day, as many islands celebrate the day after), expect shops, restaurants and attractions to have modified hours or be closed.

Onboard services won't stop, so if all your top lunch spots in port are closed, you're always guaranteed a hot meal on the ship.

Consider a holiday bonus for the crew

Cruise ship crew members go beyond the standard service on all lines for the holidays, whether it's a kind note wishing you well, a Champagne toast for New Year's or a fanciful towel creation.

They can't be at home celebrating with their families because they're working hard to make your holiday special. While [gratuities are often included in your fare](#) or added automatically to your final bill, consider tipping a bit extra on a Christmas cruise. The hardworking staff will appreciate your extra generosity during the holiday season.

Best Christmas cruises for 2023

If you're on the hunt for the ideal holiday getaway, consider these Christmas cruises for your 2023 holiday vacation. (Note: These sailings had availability at the time of writing, but prices may change, or ships sell out at any time.)

7-night Western Caribbean and Perfect Day cruise on Royal Caribbean

Sail dates: Dec. 23-30.

Ship: Wonder of the Seas.

This year, [Royal Caribbean](#)'s newest ship (and the world's largest), [Wonder of the Seas](#), is sailing a special cruise for the holiday week.

Sail through the Caribbean round-trip from Port Canaveral, Florida, with a special Christmas Eve stop at Perfect Day at CocoCay, the line's private island in the Bahamas, before heading to Cozumel and Costa Maya, Mexico, and Roatan, Honduras. The sailing ends the day before New Year's Eve, with plenty of time to make your way to any of Orlando's parties.

Holiday highlights on board include Christmas Eve caroling, an ugly Christmas sweater crafting competition, Christmas ornament and gingerbread cookie decorating classes, and holiday games and trivia.

Many of the ship's specialty restaurants have holiday-inspired specials, while the main dining options bring a few fresh takes on classics, like an almond-crusting fried brie and chestnut truffle risotto.

Rates for inside cabins start at \$1,458 per person, not including \$151.85 in taxes, fees and port expenses.

10-day Southern Caribbean Seafarer cruise on Holland America

Sail dates: Dec. 17-27.

Ship: Nieuw Statendam.

The 10-day Southern Caribbean Seafarer on [Holland America's](#) Nieuw Statendam is a great way to retreat from the cold this December. The extended itinerary leaves from Fort Lauderdale and sails to Turks and Caicos, the Dominican Republic, Bonaire, Curacao and Aruba, as well as Half Moon Cay, HAL's private island in the Bahamas.

Don't forget your holiday best, as each ship hosts a Christmas Eve formal ball with dinner and dancing, as well as midnight mass, holiday-themed high tea service, holiday choir performances and Santa meet-and-greets.

Rates for inside cabins start from \$1,299 per person, not including an estimated \$220 per person in taxes, fees and port expenses.

18-day Reefs and Rainforests in Panama and Costa Rica cruise on Windstar Cruises

Sailing date: Dec. 19, 2023-Jan. 6, 2024.

Ship: Wind Star.

Give yourself a bucket list gift this Christmas and book a Panama Canal cruise for your winter vacation.

[Windstar Cruises'](#) Wind Star — a cruise ship that's part yacht, part four-masted sailing ship — is sailing this holiday season through the Panama Canal and then up Central America's Pacific coast to Costa Rica.

The ship sets sail from Barbados and first stops in Bequia, Mayreau and St. George's in the Grenadines. Then it's on to ports in Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Colombia and Panama before sailing through the Panama Canal on New Year's Eve. The itinerary continues in the Pacific waters with stops at Balboa and Isla Parida, Panama, and Golfo Dulce, Quepos and Puerto Caldera, Costa Rica.

To sweeten the holiday, Windstar gifts each cabin with a basket of Christmas cookies, candy canes, mandarin oranges, roasted nuts and chocolate candies.

Christmas Day events include complimentary eggnog and fresh gingerbread loaf, Windstar's Christmas high tea, and a decadent Christmas banquet that includes roast turkey and lobster tail.

Rates for the 18-day Central American getaway start from \$4,899 per person, not including port fees and taxes.

4-night Very Merrytime Bahamian cruise on Disney Cruise Line

Sail dates: Dec. 22-26.

Ship: Disney Wish.

Hop on the new [Disney Wish](#) this Christmas for a four-night sailing from Port Canaveral to Nassau, Bahamas, and Castaway Cay, Disney's private island. This sailing is one of Disney Cruise Line's Very Merrytime Cruises, so expect plenty of holiday-themed surprises and special moments.

Disney's December sailings imbue the line's signature magic into the joy of the holidays with snow flurries in the ship's atrium, pop-up meet-and-greets with Disney characters dressed in special festive wear, and a Christmas wonderland on the beach at Castaway Cay.

Rates start at \$4,699 for two adults sharing an inside cabin, including all taxes and fees.

12-night Antarctic Explorer cruise on Viking

Sail dates: Dec. 18-30.

Ship: Viking Octantis.

While instinct might say to stop by the North Pole to check in on Santa's operations, it's just too cold, dark and icy for cruising. Instead, head toward the South Pole and Antarctica for a Christmas expedition.

Spend 13 days exploring the farthest reaches of the earth on the Antarctic Explorer itinerary aboard [Viking's](#) Octantis. The route sails round-trip from Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a stop in Ushuaia before traversing the Drake Passage and cruising Antarctica for seven days.

You'll explore the icebergs and cliffs of Antarctica on Christmas, presumably followed by a hot cocoa or a warm cocktail on deck. Afterward, treat yourself to Nordic-inspired dishes like smoked salmon and caviar, along with holiday treats like krumkake (a Nordic take on the cannoli) and sandkaker (Norwegian sugar cookies).

As with all Antarctica itineraries, ports and destinations on the continent change by the day, depending on weather and climate conditions. Rates for the cruise start from \$12,995, including airfare, port taxes and fees.

4-day Bahamas cruise on Carnival Cruise Line

Carnival Conquest. DANNY LEHMAN/CARNIVAL

Sail dates: Dec. 22-26.

Ship: Carnival Conquest.

[Carnival's](#) four-day Bahamas sailing is the best way to experience all the joys of the holiday without breaking the bank or being gone for too long. Carnival Conquest sails round-trip from Miami with stops in Princess Cays and Nassau, Bahamas, for some much-needed beach time and warm weather.

The line understands its family-forward “fun” ships are built for cheery escapes, and its Christmas proceedings fit perfectly into that world. Holiday events during the season include Christmas caroling, an ugly sweater competition and a live holiday show with appearances by Santa and the Grinch.

Rates for inside cabins start at \$496 per person, not including an additional \$145.20 per person in fees.

7-night Christmas Markets on the Danube cruise on AmaWaterways

Sail dates: Dec. 11-18.

Ship: AmaBella.

A [river cruise through Europe](#) is the most convenient way to visit a wide array of the Continent's famous Christmas markets.

Your ship will dock in the heart of each city, usually just a few steps from the markets. Sailing with [AmaWaterways](#) during the holiday season, guests return from a day exploring the markets to events on board that include tree-trimming, caroling and a fun European tradition called “Shoes for St. Nick,” where passengers who leave their slippers outside their stateroom awake to find them filled with sweets.

Unlike most Christmas-related retail stores in the U.S. that stay open through the holiday season, many of Europe's Christmas markets close up shop by Dec. 22, so you'll need to take your vacation before Christmas itself. AmaWaterways' seven-night Christmas Markets on the Danube cruise takes place aboard AmaBella. You'll be immersed in the holiday spirit with port stops in Passau, Germany; Linz, Vienna and Weissenkirchen, Austria; and Esztergom and Budapest, Hungary.

Rates for the weeklong cruise start at \$3,499 per person.

13-night New Zealand holiday cruise on Celebrity Cruises

Sail dates: Dec. 21, 2023-Jan. 3, 2024.

Ship: Celebrity Edge.

The most appealing holiday itinerary on [Celebrity Cruises](#) this year travels for nearly the entire two weeks of the holidays, round-trip from Sydney, for a holiday season Down Under.

You'll cruise during the region's summer season with an itinerary that traverses the picturesque Milford Sound, Doubtful Sound and Dusky Sound before making port stops in Dunedin, Napier, Auckland, Tauranga with a New Year's Eve visit at the Bay of Islands, New Zealand.

If you're feeling the holiday spirit, sign up to join a group of crew and passengers to go caroling around the ship. Cookie decorating, visits with Santa and Christmas games are part of the fun of the holiday. On New Year's Eve, gather for a special party that includes a complimentary midnight Champagne toast, party favors and live music.

The lowest cabin fares start at \$2,331 per person, plus \$320.10 in taxes, fees and port expenses.

14-night South Africa Intensive Holiday voyage on Azamara

Sail dates: Dec. 21, 2023-Jan. 5, 2024.

Ship: Azamara Pursuit.

[Azamara](#) is known for its travels to less-frequented ports, often with longer stays providing more time for immersion. The best of Azamara's Christmas and New Year's celebrations will be on the 14-night South Africa Intensive Holiday that sails round-trip from Cape Town with stops along the east coast of South Africa, including Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and Richards Bay, and then up to Maputo, Mozambique.

Holiday events include caroling concerts, pop-ups with Christmas cookies and hot chocolate, and a special tree-trimming party on Dec. 24. Azamara Journey will time its popular White Night pool deck party to coincide with New Year's Eve. The line has a cute tradition of seeking out the oldest person on board to ring the ship's bell two minutes prior to midnight to literally "ring out the old." Then the youngest passenger on board will "ring in the new" as the clock strikes 12.

Rates start from \$2,358 per person, not including \$204 in taxes, fees and port expenses.

15-day Athens to Petra cruise on Silversea

Sail dates: Dec. 22, 2023-Jan. 6, 2024.

Ship: Silver Moon.

The best [Silversea](#) itinerary this winter spans all the holidays while escaping to the most exotic locations. On the 15-day Athens-to-Petra sailing, Silver Moon will alight at unique ports such as Heraklion and Rhodes, Greece; Safaga (for Luxor), Alexandria and Sharm El Keik, Egypt; Jeddah and Yanbu, Ras Al Abyadh, Saudia Arabia, before finishing the journey in Aqaba (for Petra), Jordan. The ship will overnight in Safaga and Jeddah, and spend a day transiting the Suez Canal.

Dress to impress for the ship's New Year's Eve gala, celebrated on this itinerary while cruising the Red Sea. Other special holiday events include a holiday music show by the ship's performers, caroling around the ship and Christmas-themed movie screenings.

Rates for this sailing start from \$6,950 per person, including port fees and taxes.