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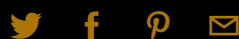
## The Case for Cruising—And Ignoring the Ship

by J U D Y K O U T S K Y

November 27, 2019



Sometimes, it's not just about the journey.



I'm an **avid cruiser**, and as one, I'm also a bit of ship news junkie: which one has just launched and what makes it stand out (maybe it has **on-board go-kart racing** or ziplining, or a restaurant from a **famous chef**. But lots of travelers don't feel the need to be up on the latest developments on board. For them, the ship, and its newest upgrades, aren't the most important part of the trip, it's mostly a means of getting from here to there. Think you might be in that camp? Don't sweat it—sometimes that's the best way to go, even for a vet like me.

While I often travel with my family or **one of my kids**, I recently had the opportunity to take a trip with my sister. We had always wanted to visit the Baltic region, and thought the easiest way to see as much of it as we could, was aboard a **Viking Ocean Cruise**. We were on one of the newest ships, the **Viking Jupiter** for one of their **Homelands tours**, making stops in St. Petersburg, Russia; Tallinn, Estonia; Stockholm, Sweden; **Berlin**,

Germany; and Gdansk, Poland—an alluring itinerary to visit that part of the world.

Alexander Spatari

My sister and I hadn't traveled just the two of us for 12 years—on another cruise, as it happened, that one to the **Galapagos**—and we were excited to leave the kids and husbands behind to explore. When we first boarded the ship, I noticed the clean lights and neutral colors of the Jupiter. It felt soothing—a nice backdrop to the beauty of Stockholm, where we began. But at that moment, it was simply a backdrop. We dropped our luggage in our room and went out to investigate the city.

We wandered for hours down the Old Town's cobblestone streets, where we shopped and had lunch at an outdoor café. Since we had two days in **Stockholm**, we never felt rushed to hurry back to the ship. In **St. Petersburg**, where we also stayed two nights, we reveled in the intricate designs found throughout the Faberge Museum, the world-famous masterpieces at the Hermitage, and the gorgeous dome towers of the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood. In Gdansk we visited St. Mary's, one of the largest brick churches in the world, before walking along the waterfront and popping into the shops on Long Street. We walked through the 16th century High Gates and found a tucked-away little spot to eat Polish sausage and potato pancakes. In Berlin, we walked for five straight hours taking in the historic city, from the **Berlin Wall** to the **Brandenburg Gate**, before finding a local beer hall for dinner.

I've been on enough cruises to know that traveling on a cruise can feel like an endless array of appetizers with no main course. You arrive somewhere new every day, but because of regulations that can delay disembarkation, as well the need to be back on the ship before you sail away that evening, you feel you only see a tiny corner of a place without the time to get the whole picture. But **Viking** prides itself on spending as much time as possible in each port—often overnight—so travelers can really **experience** a place. In addition to our overnights in St. Petersburg and Stockholm, we spent almost a full day in the other ports.

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For my sister and I, the ship was always there if we needed it—if there was bad weather or we were too tired to spend a full day in a city, we could come back to good food, service, and comfort—as well as three pools, a variety of hot tubs, and a **spa**. But even on board, Viking does its best to bring in the experience of a place. We noticed that large windows are a staple—in the restaurants, in the lounges, and in the rooms—to allow us to see what we came for. And the subdued mood meant that we didn't hesitate to go ashore because we were afraid of missing out on something happening on board; there wasn't a casino or Broadway-style performances vying for our attention. Instead, we went to the ballet in St. Petersburg, hiked in Tallinn, and ate and shopped our way through picturesque Gdansk.

We loved our cruise for the opportunity it allowed us to create memories along the Baltic. It's a travel cliché to say it's about the journey and not the destination, but sometimes it really is important where you dock. And there's something to be said for allowing it to be the star. ✦

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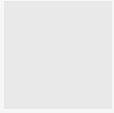
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