

South African cruise season opens with a bang

By [Natalie Major](#)

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With a staggering 30 million passengers globally set to cruise this year (that's 2 million more than the previous year), it's easy to see why cruising has caught on in South Africa.



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In the past five years, South Africa has seen its cruising market grow significantly. Companies like MSC Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Lines have both reported double-digit growth.



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Ports like Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth are all continually working to boost their cruise terminals to meet the demand.

At least 23 luxury cruise ships operated by a minimum of 17 international cruise lines are scheduled to call at the country's six cruise ports this season.

Among the luxury liners to stop in South Africa and carry passengers to other destinations are Queen Elizabeth, the World Odyssey, the Seven Seas Explorer, the MSC Musica, The Ocean Dream, Queen Victoria, the Silver Cloud, the Pacific Princess and the Viking Sun.

In 2020, Norwegian Cruise Lines will for the first time sail to South Africa, with a cruise from Dubai to Cape Town on its Norwegian Spirit with visits to Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Itineraries are becoming more elaborate. Ships are also creating more onboard experiences and innovating new concepts for all-inclusive holidays.

"With so many elements included in the cruise fare, which would add up at any land-based resort, most passengers return to us within two years," says Nick Wilkinson, Norwegian Cruise Line vice-president and managing director UK, Ireland, Israel, Middle East and Africa.

Based on NCL bookings, first-time passengers generally test the waters with a seven-night sailing and return for longer, more exotic sailings after that.



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While the rand continues its roller-coaster fluctuations, cruising's appeal for South Africans is firmly based on the fact that passengers have a good sense of what they're going to spend on their holiday upfront, plus a cruise brings a great deal of value with all its inclusions.

Most cruise operators will allow you to secure the price on paying a deposit, and you can have the rate of exchange guaranteed, thus not have to worry about currency fluctuations.

Something for everyone

Think multiple destinations, only having to unpack once and having all your meals, accommodation, sightseeing and facilities included. Forget the hassle of having to catch trains, long check out queues and passport control with cruising it's all so easy to plan. Plain sailing, if you'll pardon the pun.

The beauty of cruising is that there is literally something for everyone these days. Families, couples, solo travellers, honeymooners, group travellers, incentive groups, mature travellers, you name it... if there's a person out there wanting to travel, there is a cruise to match!

The Norwegian Encore NCL's newest ship, which launched this month, boasts a range of onboard amusements ideal for South African passengers, including a race track measuring 350 meters long which spans two decks.

Encore has a rather impressive water park with two multi-story water slides, a restaurant-lined boardwalk, large theatre showcasing the 6 times Tony Award-winning production, Kinky Boots.

There's also a virtual-reality complex with interactive games and an open-air laser tag arena themed around the lost city of Atlantis. And 29, yes, 29 food and beverage outlets will see you enjoying food and drink from all four corners of the globe.

For foodies, Oceania Cruises offers the "Finest Cuisine at Sea" which means its commitment to culinary excellence is of the highest standards. Sourcing premium artisanal ingredients from around the world, guests are assured a gastronomic experience that's hard to beat.

For South Africans, there's no easier way to sail the high seas and experience luxurious comfort than boarding Oceania's Cape Town to Cape Town cruise in early January.

Arriving in Cape Town on 5 January, the Nautica will skirt the South African coastline stopping in Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and Mossel Bay throughout January and early February. In April, Oceania's Insignia arrives on South African shores and runs from Cape Town to Richards Bay.

Both Nautica and Insignia offer South Africans an opportunity to enjoy the luxury of a boutique-style cruise without having to fly long-haul. Be smart upfront and book one of Oceania's OLife packages to get free Internet on board, or shore excursions, or a beverage package.

There's no better way to start the year than on the high seas.

With so many options available, choosing the right cruise for you may seem overwhelming.

Luckily there are cruise specialists out there to help match your needs to your perfect cruise. Experts in the field, Cruiseabout, have the right know-how and insider tips to assist you along the way.

- Investigate onboard packages and pre-purchase these so that you can give your wallet a break while on the ship. Plan pre and post accommodation in your embarkation and disembarkation cities and see the sights before and after your sail away.
- It's also a good idea not to leave anything to chance, by giving yourself an extra few days prior to the cruise, just in case your flight is delayed or something unexpected happens.
- Make sure you have all the relevant visas required for your journey and of course, sufficient travel insurance cover. Look out for early bird savings and other offers as these can save you quite a lot in the long run.

The more you cruise, the more you pick up on the insider secrets and, with cruise holidays growing in popularity, you'll be hard-pressed to find a ship with features that don't offer everything you are looking for on your next holiday.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With 22 years in the travel industry under her belt, Natalie has extensive knowledge in all things travel related. From wholesale to retail, to marketing and training, she's been exposed to several facets of the travel industry. Bitten (hard) by the travel bug when she left school, Natalie pursued her passion and studied Travel and Tourism. She has travelled the world, having visited over 27 countries. Marketing and writing are what she loves most, as well as developing catchy, clever campaigns.

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