

Cruising. It's just not cool, is it? For a start, it's the type of getaway your gran would go on. You're stuck on a ship and you can't escape. You have nothing to look at but the ocean, plus we've all seen *Titanic* and what happened to Leonardo DiCaprio.... Oh, and two more words: Jane McDonald.

No, when it comes to taking a break, a boat really isn't my bag. My holidays consist of my boyfriend Piers and I stuffing clothes in a bag and lounging on an exotic beach for two weeks. A little exploring, a lot of lying down and very little effort are the order of the day.

But it seems we've been missing out. A week on a Carnival Caribbean cruise leaving from Tampa, Florida, and stopping at Grand Cayman, Cozumel, Belize and Isla de Roatan had us rethinking our usual route to relaxation. Yes, it was surreal at times, but it was loads of fun and we returned feeling uplifted with a spring in our still-slightly-swaying steps. Ship ahoy!

WHY GO?

Because you'll visit more places than on a 'normal' holiday, but without the stress of getting around yourself. You'll wake up somewhere new every day (arriving in an exotic port as the sun comes up is a real buzz), plus you'll get to do activities that you might not do elsewhere. You'll meet lots of people (cruises are sociable affairs if you want them to be), eat fab food, and come home with amusing anecdotes. Carnival is a company big on providing a relaxing trip with the opportunity to have lots of laughs at the same time – and it didn't disappoint...

A GIRL'S GUIDE TO... CRUISING



What happened when land-lover Jo Upcraft left her beloved beach holiday behind and set sail?

WHO'LL BE THERE?

Forget cruises being for the newly wed and nearly dead. Our fellow shipmates ranged from toddlers and teens to young couples, families and single-sex groups. Carnival holds a singles' meet 'n' greet for those looking for love, plus meetings for gay singles and couples. And, yep, there were some pensioners, too.

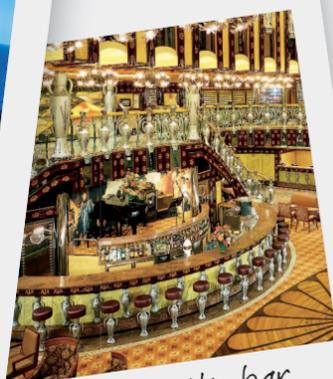
WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Hunt for a new lippie in the shopping mall. Have your hair highlighted. Treat yourself to a facial at the spa. Even do a quick 5k on the treadmill at the gym (rumour has it that the average person puts on 5lb on a week-long cruise!). You could do all these on our ship, Carnival Legend – and that's just for starters. There's constant entertainment, but you're not forced to join in and can simply lie by the pool if you prefer.

Ships vary, but ours had 16 bars (including poolside ones), three restaurants (food is available 24/7), a cinema/stage for nightly shows, a casino and a nightclub. Bored? We didn't have time.



Chill out by the pool



Relax in the bar



CRUISING IS GOOD FOR....
 Social butterflies
 Lazy types
 Food lovers

... BUT BAD FOR...
 Active go-getters
 Searchers of peace and solitude
 Routine rebels



WHAT SHOULD I PACK?

Dressing for dinner is like dressing for your poshest, swishest night out ever. There are two types of dress code, depending on what night it is – cruise casual and cruise elegant. On elegant nights women wear ball gowns while men style it up in tuxedos. You don't have to go that far, but take some fine threads so you don't feel out of place. Heels are a must, as are shoes for your fella.

ANYTHING ELSE?

Most cruises are billed as all-inclusive, but read the small print as some things won't be covered. To make paying easy, you'll receive a swipe card upon check-in (which doubles as your room key) and any extras on-board are charged to that and paid for at the end. Minimise black clothing – black + sea salt = white flecks all over you, resembling dandruff. Also, nice pants are essential – it can get very windy on deck and can be embarrassing...

WILL I BE SEA SICK?

I'm not going to lie. Two hours in, I was being sick. The next day I felt better, but I was aware of a very gentle sway the whole trip. It wasn't until midweek that I spotted everyone had plaster-like patches behind their ears – Scopoderm TTS Patches. Costing £8 on prescription, when stuck on a hairless part of your body the night before travel, they can prevent motion sickness. Why didn't I think of that?!

WHAT HAPPENS ON SHORE?

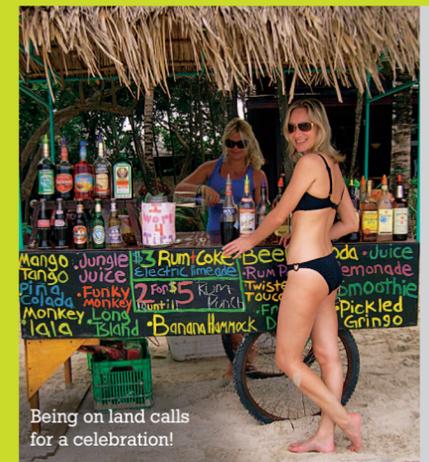
We had two days at sea and four days on land (every night is spent on the ship). Before you board, your cruise line will send you a brochure of on-land excursions, from horse riding to scuba diving to cave tubing (costing from around £21 per person). The ports you dock at will be awash with Duty Free shops and bars, so you can simply shop and sip a beer if you prefer. Each day on shore we had five to six hours to ourselves – we hired a car on two of the islands, which worked out cheaper than the arranged tours.

WILL I HAVE TO BE MEGA-SOCIABLE?

Cruises are definitely more sociable than going to a 'normal' hotel. Meal times are particularly 'party-party' with large tables for those who want to make friends (plus there's an optional nightly Conga...). Don't panic though – you can choose to eat à deux or à dozen when you enter the dining room.

GETTING THERE

A nine-night Caribbean fly/cruise starts from £959* per person. This includes sharing an inside twin cabin, scheduled flights from London, a pre-cruise hotel night in Tampa, transfers and a seven-night Western Caribbean cruise on a full-board basis, visiting Grand Cayman, Cozumel (Mexico), Belize and Isla de Roatan (Honduras). Contact Carnival on 0845 351 0556 or visit Carnivalcruise.co.uk.



Being on land calls for a celebration!

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