

Cruising Through

As much as people may love the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, how would you like to leave the cooking and cleaning to someone else and hop aboard a cruise ship for the holidays?

story Laurie Wallace-Lynch

Christmas



Harvest Caye, Belize. Owned by Norwegian Cruise Lines

It's the perfect way to gather the family together for some fun, sun and it can be stress free! People book their own family and contact their parents or siblings and see if they all want to get together and go on a cruise for Christmas," says Keith Murray, manager of *Able Travel* in Mississauga. "I am definitely seeing a trend of large family groups booking a cruise together for the holidays. The Caribbean is very popular and Disney Cruises are great for families." Keith is a cruise expert who has even designed and organized themed cruises including a cruise featuring entertainment by Gino Vanelli.

Tanja Schneider-Steinbock at *Barrett & Carlyse Travel* in Mississauga says she has seen a significant increase in holiday cruises including river cruises. "We have had a huge interest in Christmas market sailings on river cruises over the last few years, which are excellent to pre-shop for some lovely souvenirs for family at home and to connect with Old World traditions."

Tanja offers a few suggestions including the *Viking River Cruise* from Nuremberg, Germany to Cologne France, the *Uniworld River Europe Rhine Classic Christmas Markets* and the *AMA Waterways Gothic Winter Wonderland* on the Rhine River.

"Generally promotions for Christmas cruises would be in high swing in July and August," states Tanja. "You have to book early—I am seeing dates advertised now for Holidays 2018 into 2020."

Santa arrives on *Royal Caribbean* holiday cruise ships as part of the annual Santa's Arrival Parade on Royal Caribbean's eight-night Eastern Caribbean Holiday Cruise and the seven-night Western Caribbean Holiday Cruise. Guests taking a holiday sailing can enjoy a number of fun events onboard including story time, parties, holiday-themed trivia contests, scavenger hunts and even an Ugly Christmas Sweater Party! The ship is transformed into a winter wonderland complete with decorations, carollers and a grand tree lighting ceremony. Santa's elves keep the young ones busy with story time and craft time as part of the Adventure Ocean Youth Program. Guests can relax poolside and watch holiday classics on screen.

The hottest New Year's Eve At Sea Party includes festive hats, party favours and confetti for all and a balloon drop at midnight. And then of course there are all of the physical activities you can do on board. Swim in the pool, workout in the fitness centre or try the rock climbing wall.

The eight night Bahamas cruise leaves from New Jersey where the *Anthem of the Seas* takes you to Port Canaveral, Florida where you can visit the Kennedy Space Centre or Disney World as excursions, then on to other ports including Nassau, Bahamas where you can visit the famous *Atlantis* resort park. The kids will love the rock climbing, bumper



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Celebrity Cruise Lines



Norwegian Breakaway

cars, skydiving simulator, creating a scrapbook and various optional water sports.

Celebrity Cruise Line guests can leave the stress of the holiday season on dry land and turn the planning over to the cruise team. Holiday sailings are immersive, festive celebrations that feature Celebrity's dynamic destinations all over the world as well as traditional, Michelin-Star quality meals, themed entertainment and celebrations such as New Year's Eve celebrations, holiday plays and carollers, and a visit from Santa. Additionally on 2017/2018 holiday sailings, Celebrity is offering guests two free perks as a gift, which could include free drinks, free Internet and more when they book an Ocean View Stateroom or higher room category.

Other sailings explore the Southern Caribbean, the Western Caribbean or hop aboard the *Celebrity Reflection* for the Ultimate Caribbean Holiday, which departs on December 22 from Fort Lauderdale for 11 nights with visits to Puerto Limon, Costa Rica; Colon, Panama; Cartagena, Columbia; Georgetown, Grand Cayman and Cozumel, Mexico.

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above Norwegian Breakaway, above right Great Stirrup Cay, Bahamas Norwegian Cruise Lines,

beautiful holiday decorations (including a menorah), and the staff go all out, including presenting a carolling show over the Christmas holidays. A Windstar New Year's Eve tradition is for the oldest crew member to ring out the New Year and the youngest to ring in the new. Passengers also are treated to a New Year's Eve party with a champagne toast, live music, and an official countdown by the captain.

Family fun begins on the Adventures in Panama and Costa Rica *Windstar* cruise which is recommended for families with children eight years of age and up. Experience the full majesty of Costa Rica and Panama's natural and man-made wonders on this 10 or 11 day cruise.

Crystal Cruises offer several options during the holidays including river cruises through Europe, yacht excursions to the West Indies or Caribbean holiday cruises. Enjoy a 15-day Caribbean Cruise aboard the *Ocean Crystal Serenity* or an 11-day yacht excursion on the *Crystal Esprit* to the West Indies. *Crystal Cruises* offer two river cruise sailing on December 23rd including a river cruise from Amsterdam to Basel Germany, through the Netherlands and Switzerland on the Rhine River or the 13 day Danube River cruise leaving from Vienna, Australia and travelling through Germany, Hungary and Slovakia on the *Crystal Mozart*. December 26 you can sail from Nuremberg to Budapest on a nine day river cruise.

Norwegian Cruise Lines ships are beautifully decorated with

poinsettias, Christmas trees and twinkling lights. On Christmas Eve the crew members get everyone into the holiday spirit with carols for the kids. And yes, Santa comes for a visit on Christmas Day! Guests enjoy a special dinner menu, holiday-themed cocktails and goodies like holiday cookies, Yule logs, pumpkin pie and more. A must-see is the Gingerbread House and Holiday Village on display in the ship's atrium. New Year's Eve cruisers will ring in the New Year under the stars as the captain counts down to midnight from the bridge. .

Norwegian Breakaway offers 27 dining options for families to experience including Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville. Homeporting in New York City, Norwegian Breakaway features world-class entertainment including the Tony award-winning, *Rock of Ages*, the dance sensation *Burn The Floor* and *Cirque Dreams & Dinner Jungle Fantasy*. With Norwegian's youth programs Splash Academy and Entourage, parents can feel free to have fun and enjoy all the ship has to offer including the casino, bars and Mandara Spa.

On the 11-day Southern Caribbean Cruise from San Juan, families embark on a tropical retreat from San Juan, Puerto Rico to the Southern Caribbean (Aruba, Curacao, Grenada, Barbados and St. Lucia) on Norwegian Dawn. While recovery of Puerto Rico will be ongoing for many months, San Juan port is now back in business and one of the best ways to support the local economy is to return to the incredible island. www.ncl.com ①