



## Family Friendly Mediterranean Ports

By Sandy Bornstein

The peak season for Mediterranean cruises is from May through August. It's a perfect time for families to explore Europe. But be aware that this popular travel time will bring the largest crowds and the highest prices. Last minute bargains will be limited. But there's still time to find a wonderful, family friendly Mediterranean cruise

Itinerary options are plentiful, but the more popular ones fill up fast. The number of choices can be overwhelming. Parents traveling with kids should pay special attention to the time spent in each of the ports, the distance between the port and the main attractions, and whether the ship is docked in a port or tendered.



Sometimes, what you'd like to see at a destination may not be possible because there isn't enough time or the excursion is too far from the port. Trust me, younger kids won't be happy on a lengthy bus ride to an attraction. Kids have short attention spans and need to remain active. Ports that are closer to main attractions may be more desirable. Look for nearby cities that are easy to navigate with foot power.

In some locations, the cruise ship may not be able to dock at a pier. The passengers will be required to take smaller boats to reach the shore. This can be time consuming and limit the time spent on land. Weather conditions can create choppy waters that delay disembarkation and might cause some kids to become queasy.

Here are four Mediterranean ports that families can explore together.

### DUBROVNIK

Cruise ship passengers can take a self-guided walking tour of Dubrovnik and enjoy its picturesque setting. Cobble pathways and steep inclines may cause a bumpy ride for kids in strollers. Energetic families can hike on the winding footpath to Mount Srd (400 meters above the city). Most will reach the summit by cable car or by driving. Families can also explore the city and walk on the fortress' wall. There are several museums, a couple of forts, and nearby beaches.

### SANTORINI

It's hard to forget this tiered location with white and beige painted houses with windmills and blue domed churches. Many consider

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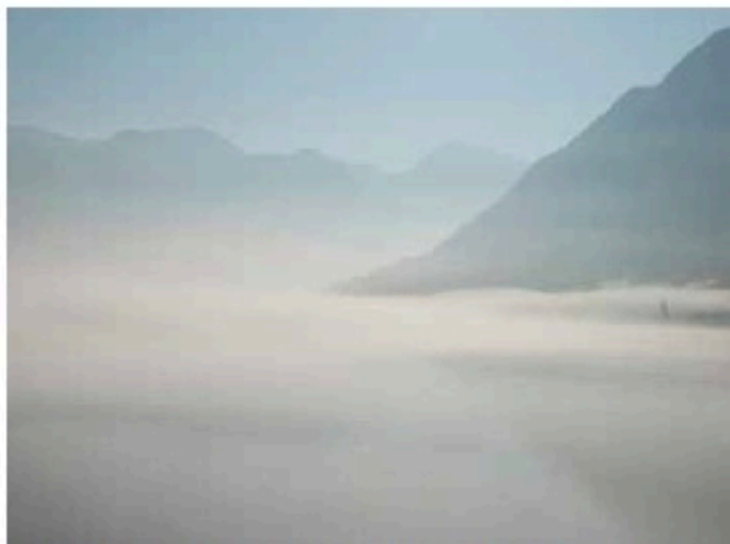


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Santorini to be one of the most beautiful islands in the world. Parents will need to be mindful when walking with their kids through the pedestrian clogged narrow thoroughfares. Hours can be spent exploring the local culture.

**KOTOR**

If you're lucky, the ship will pass through the inlet on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea as the mist touches the morning sky. This view is cited as one of the top 25 fjords in the world. Once in port, families can use a map to locate the North Gate and take the path that leads to the Fortress of St John. You'll need appropriate shoes to tackle the steep and uneven terrain and plenty of water. If time allows, consider a visit to the maritime museum in the middle of the city. It's fun to wander through the narrow streets of the Old Town and explore the local shops and restaurants.

**VENICE**

While exploring the city, kids can keep track of the lion artwork that they see along the way. Gondola rides are pricey, but a memorable experience. Parents will need to judge if the ride will be too boring for their kids. Another option is to take a vaporetto (water bus) to get an overview of Venice's main sites. Creative kids will be intrigued by a visit to a Venetian mask-making workshop. If your itinerary includes multiple days in port, consider a water taxi to Murano to watch glass artists create works of art. Beach goers can head to Lido.



Even with thorough planning, it's best to remain flexible. All cruise ship itineraries are subject to change. Advance planning may fly out the window when weather or other circumstances cause last minute changes to the ship's itinerary.

No matter what happens, Mediterranean cruises offer families a wonderful way to explore Europe without having to pack and unpack or worry about where you're going to eat dinner.

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