

# Getting On Travel



A FRESH TAKE ON LUXURY  
FOR TRAVELERS OVER 50

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## AN ASIAN IMMERSION CRUISE ABOARD CELEBRITY MILLENNIUM

SANDY & IRA BORNSTEIN    MAY 13, 2018

CRUISES

0 COMMENTS

In January, my husband and I sailed on Celebrity Cruises' 14-day Asian immersion cruise aboard the Millennium from Hong Kong to Singapore. The ship was docked at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal for two days before setting sail. Our voyage included anchoring in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam for two days, Chan May, Vietnam (Hue/Da Nang), Phu My, Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City), Laem Chabang, Thailand (Bangkok) for two days, and an overnight stay in Singapore.

*This Celebrity itinerary is ideal for people who want to experience a cross-section of Asian ports within a two-week time frame.*

At each destination, we chose different ways to “taste” an unfamiliar-to-us culture. Each experience added to our understanding of the region and its people.

## What's unique about an immersion cruise?

The term “immersion cruise” may not be familiar to all cruisers since most ship itineraries follow a standard format. Cruise ships typically arrive at ports of call in the morning and depart in the afternoon or evening. This scheduling significantly limits the time available to explore a destination but maximizes the number of places that can be visited. In most instances, passengers will only have time for a tiny sampling of the city and its surrounding area. It's like a smorgasbord meal: You scramble from table to table to taste an assortment of foods and then decide if you want to come back later for your favorites. Memorable ports can always be revisited at a later date.

Immersion cruise itineraries deviate slightly. Passengers have two or three days in some of the ports. They can take half-day tours, full day excursions, or have the option of spending a night or two onshore.

*Additional time at the destination usually equals more opportunities to interact with the local population, explore the local cuisine, and simply experience more sites.*

It should be noted that selecting multiple-day excursion packages or independently booking a hotel room significantly increases the total costs of the trip. In fact, each time we have taken a cruise that included an overnight or two in port, I observed that the majority of passengers returned to the ship each night.

## Highlights of Celebrity's Asian immersion itinerary

While the journey began with raindrops, the outdoor temperature was manageable. As the ship headed south from Hong Kong to Vietnam, the temperature and humidity increased. We purposely booked the trip for January before it would become too uncomfortable to explore outdoor attractions. Our Bangkok tour guide told us that there are three seasons —“hot, hotter, and hottest.”

### Hong Kong

We took advantage of our pre-cruise day by enjoying the accouterments of the [Grand Hyatt Hong Kong](#) and its spectacular food and beverage

options in the Club Lounge. Since we adore Asian food, I reserved a spot at the [Hong Kong Foodie Tasting Tour](#) that doubled as a tour of Hong Kong (we arranged this independently prior to the cruise). While my diet prevented me from trying some foods, I did indulge in, among other things, a dim sum feast at Dim Sum Square and nibbled on an egg tart at the Hei Lee Cake Shop. The dim sum entrees were freshly prepared and the egg tart was a welcome sweet treat at the end of a walking tour.



*Good Wish Garden at Wong Tai Sin Temple in Hong Kong*

## Ha Long Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin

The distance between Ha Long Bay and Hanoi is considerable so after looking over a list of Hanoi's top attractions, we chose to take a pass on traveling back and forth to Hanoi. Instead, we booked an overnight Celebrity shore excursion in Ha Long Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is considered a "geographic work of art" with approximately 1,600 islands.





*Woman eating in Ha Long, Vietnam*

To maximize our time in this beautiful place, we spent two days and one night on a small boat operated by [Paradise Cruises](#), joining people from around the world. At a leisurely pace, we visited the Luon Cave, Sung Sot Cave, and Tiv Tov Island, and also participated in a hands-on cooking demonstration, ate several regional meals and had a sunrise lesson in Tai Chi. Only a handful of people from our ship chose this pricey shore excursion.

## Chan May

To minimize our transportation concerns about traveling to the countryside and back within the allotted timeframe, we booked a Celebrity full-day shore excursion that focused on rural traditions. The motor coach took us to a small village identified as Hoa Chau. We exchanged friendly smiles with people who commuted by bicycle and stood outside their rudimentary structures. Our group visited a small open-air marketplace and a local family's private temple (families, in this rural area, worship in their own temples).

We spent several hours and ate lunch in Hoi An, an ancient merchant town with roots in European, Japanese, and Chinese culture. Today, it is a major tourist attraction with small museums, shops, and restaurants

filled with history.

## Phu My

Whenever possible, we include [bicycle rides](#) as part of our shore excursions; we prefer being active and avoiding long motor coach rides. This [Saigon Tourist](#) tour included an informative boat ride on the Saigon River, an invigorating 18-mile bicycle ride through the Vietnamese countryside on a hot and sunny day, and an educational visit to and through the [Cu Chi Tunnels](#). Even though only a few people participated in this engaging Celebrity excursion, it was an outstanding experience. We learned about life along the river and in the countryside, and also gained a new understanding of the Vietnam War.



*Saigon River*

## Bangkok

We received royal treatment at [The Peninsula Bangkok](#). We had high expectations but our suite—and the hotel's food and service—exceeded those expectations. By staying overnight in Bangkok, we were able to see most of the city's key attractions and take a dinner boat ride in the evening. After returning to the ship, we learned from other passengers that the heavy city traffic and the long commute (more than two hours each way) significantly decreased their actual time at scheduled



attractions. We were thrilled that we had maximized our short time in Bangkok by paying extra to book a multi-day shore excursion.



*Wat Arun or Temple of Dawn in Bangkok*



*Bangkok at night viewed from a dinner boat*

## Singapore

Despite the high humidity, we explored many of the must-see places on foot and took a shore excursion to tour the famous National Orchid Garden at the [Singapore Botanic Gardens](#), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. After receiving directions from the tourist office, we trekked through [Chinatown](#) and stopped to look at the Thian Hock Keng Mural, and to read the informative signs along the way. To escape the heat, we spent a couple of hours admiring the impressive collection of exhibits in the [Asian Civilisations Museum](#) and relaxed on a [Singapore River Cruise](#).





*Singapore Skyline*

## **Advantages and drawbacks of an immersion cruise**

With an added day or two at a port, passengers are less rushed. They can spend additional time tasting local foods, shopping, doing activities that require more time, and visiting sites in multiple locations. Passengers have more flexibility since the ship isn't leaving within just a few hours.

Staying overnight at a hotel makes it easier to reach attractions that are far away, while simultaneously lessening the burden of commuting several hours in each direction.

*Breaking up sea time with a hiatus on land may be a welcomed perk for those who prefer sleeping on land or in a deluxe hotel room with a full-sized bathroom.*

Yet, even with added time, occasionally time in port is too limited to accomplish all of your planned activities. In those instances, a land tour is a better choice.

This type of itinerary will not appeal to individuals who just want to spend a few hours exploring the nearby port. They may be anxious to move on to the next destination. Some cruisers may not appreciate the value of spending money for an overnight stay when the cruise fare includes the cost for a stateroom: Passengers who choose to spend a night or two off

of the ship will essentially be paying twice for their room, on the ship and at their hotel.

*Before deciding whether a multi-day excursion is worth the splurge, we review the distance between the port and the city, the traffic levels, the overall safety of the destination, the location and quality of accommodations, proximity to our bucket list of attractions, and the added costs.*

On this 14-day itinerary, we felt the unique small boat experience in Ha Long Bay and the overnight stay at The Peninsula Bangkok was worth the extra money. In previous sailings, we opted to spend a couple of nights in a privately booked Jerusalem boutique hotel and reserved a three-day shore excursion to Beijing with two nights in a centrally located deluxe hotel.

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## What's appealing to the over-50 luxury traveler?

Celebrity Cruises offers stateroom upgrades to enhance the luxury experience including Concierge Class, Aqua Class and Suites (see below):

- Concierge guests receive priority check-in, a special embarkation lunch, use of a pre-departure lounge, priority debarkation, welcome sparkling wine and fresh fruit, a daily afternoon snack delivered to the stateroom, and a special concierge.
- Aqua class guests eat breakfast and dinner in the Blu restaurant, a more personalized experience. With an emphasis on wellness, guests have access to the Persian Garden and a spa concierge.
- Passengers staying in a suite dine in the Luminae restaurant and have access to Michael's Club, a 24-hour lounge that has continental breakfast, teatime with snacks, alcoholic beverages, special programs, and a helpful concierge.

## Take note

- Before booking any multi-day excursion, over-50 travelers should request detailed information about the itinerary, including the proposed

daily schedule. Activities usually start early in the morning and conclude a few hours after dinner; long days can be tiring and may not appeal to everyone. In most instances, it’s possible to take a taxi back to the hotel early.

- Celebrity Cruises will be refurbishing and modernizing its fleet of Solstice and Millennium-class vessels between 2019 and 2023. While the overall quality of service has remained intact, some ships are showing their age.

*Disclosure: Celebrity Cruises discounted some of the author’s shore excursions.*

## IF YOU GO

[Celebrity Cruises](#)

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SHARES

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ASIAN IMMERSION CRUISE

BANGKOK

CELEBRITY CRUISES

CELEBRITY MILLENIUM

CHAN MAY

HA LONG BAY

HONG KONG

IMMERSION CRUISE

PARADISE CRUISES

PENINSULA HOTEL BANGKOK

PHU MY

SINGAPORE

THAILAND

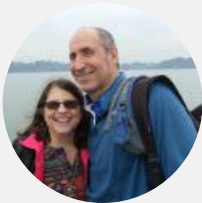
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**SANDY & IRA BORNSTEIN**

Sandy and Ira split their time between skiing and trekking in the Colorado Rockies and traveling. They have visited more than 40 countries. Sandy lived as an international teacher in India and wrote an award-winning book, "May This Be the Best Year of Your Life," as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Their travel stories focus on active midlife and intergenerational adventures, food, historical places, and Jewish cultural sites. Ira assists with photos and edits Sandy's stories before publication.