

MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

Ship out on a holiday cruise

Shopping, storybook sights, themed feasts and no dirty dishes: What better way to celebrate the season?

BY ROSEMARY McCLURE

If you're looking for a holiday getaway that's merry and bright, Cathie Lentz-Fryer of Orange County has a suggestion: Ship out on a holiday season cruise.

Each December for the last five years, Lentz-Fryer has sailed the rivers of Europe on an Ama Waterways cruise with a group of friends and loved it.

"Cities like Vienna and those in the south of France are beautifully decorated during the holiday season," she said. "You taste the local foods at outdoor markets, meet the people, shop for handmade ornaments and other gifts and drink steamy cups of *Glühwein* [mulled wine]."

"When it snows, it's magical."

Of course, not everyone wants to travel to a place where there's a cold season. Whether you're looking for warmer climes, a far-flung hideaway or a storybook village holiday, a cruise ship or river boat probably can take you where you want to go and may reward you with a memorable holiday season that includes shopping and doesn't include cleanup from holidays meals.

For instance, on Dec. 3, you can sail out of the Port of Los Angeles on a weeklong Princess Cruises voyage to the Mexican Riviera that visits Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlán and Puerto Vallarta, starting at



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CELEBRATE the holidays with a cruise of the Seine.

\$549 per person, double occupancy.

Other Princess Cruises ships will sail to the Caribbean, Australia, South America, Asia and Europe in November and December.

Or you can cruise with Viking Ocean Cruises in the Mediterranean (13 days, from \$3,999 per person, double occupancy) or in the Caribbean (11 days, \$3,639 per person, double occupancy) or on a host of European river cruises.

Or follow the sun with high-end Crystal Cruises on cruises from late December through early January: a 14-day voyage in the Caribbean (\$6,810 per person, double occupancy) or a 15-day itinerary that sails from Auckland, New Zealand, to Melbourne, Australia (\$8,020 per person, double occupancy).

If you're afraid that a holiday cruise might leave your family longing for home, relax.

"People worry that leaving home over the holidays might take away from the magic of the season, but on a cruise ship, it's quite the opposite," said Colleen McDaniel of CruiseCritic.com. "They celebrate

the season with on-board decorations, themed meals and special events. If anyone knows how to up the ante on special occasions, it's cruise lines."

Europe's Christmas market river cruises are an increasingly popular way to spend the holiday. These generally begin in mid-November and continue through the end of the year, with sailings on the Main, Rhine, Danube and Seine rivers.

The markets, which date to the late Middle Ages, often take place in town squares where visitors stroll along cobbled streets, sipping spicy mulled wine, eating grilled sausages and baked goods and browsing stands filled with handmade toys, crafts and ornaments.

"We had a wonderful time aboard our Danube Christmas market cruise," said Deanna Martin of Cleveland, who made the voyage last year on CroisiEurope's Vivaldi, sailing out of Vienna. "It was a great way to get into the spirit of the holidays and see the traditions of multiple cities firsthand."

Do you still have time to book a holiday cruise?

"It's not too late," McDaniel said, "but it's worth keeping in mind that it's one of the most popular times of year to cruise. At this time, cruise lines may begin offering last-minute deals, so while it's an expensive time to cruise, you may be able to save there."

"Some lines also offer special deals, so sign up for cruise line emails or find a travel agent who specializes in cruise to help you navigate those waters."

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