

Best health

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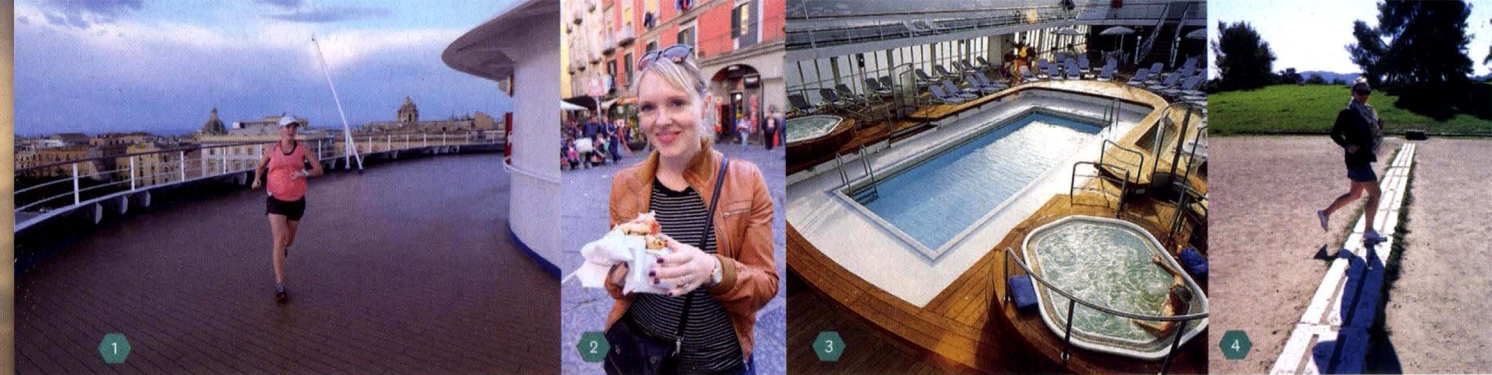


ALL ABOARD

Life on land is nothing compared to vacationing at sea. If you've never been, now is the time to save up for a boutique cruise experience. (Consider it the ultimate holiday gift to yourself!) | by KAREN ROBOCK



BEFORE BOARDING *SILVER SPIRIT*, A POPULAR VESSEL IN THE SILVERSEA FLEET, I thought of cruises as an option strictly for seniors and the Disney set. It never occurred to me that a cruise could be exciting or romantic or a totally luxurious way to travel. Boy, was I wrong! Last fall, my husband and I sailed through the Mediterranean from Athens to Rome, where we saw Greek temples that predate the Pyramids, stood in ancient Olympia at the site of the original Olympic Games and strolled through Sicily's endlessly beautiful coastal cities. Every stop was steeped in history and old-world charm. And those were the sights off the ship; what we experienced on board was just as impressive. Read on to find out why you should consider a cruise, too!



1. DOING LAPS ON THE TRACK ON THE SHIP'S UPPER DECK 2. NIBBLING ON STREET PIZZA IN NAPLES, ITALY 3. THE OPEN-AIR HOT TUBS AND SWIMMING POOL ARE THE PERFECT SPOT TO RELAX 4. CROSSING THE FINISH LINE AT THE SITE OF THE ORIGINAL OLYMPIC GAMES

YOU GET TO BE ADVENTUROUS - WITHOUT THE WORK

You can't beat the thrill of waking up in a new city every morning. The ship did most of its sailing overnight, slogging from place to place while we snoozed. It was so much easier than planning train and bus routes, car rentals or even short flights to hop between cities. I loved getting up, opening the curtains and gazing out at what awaited us.

Silversea offers loads of shore excursions at each port to help you make the most of your trip. We were guided through the beautiful Baroque architecture in Syracuse, ushered around the ornate gardens of Valletta and shuttled to an olive oil farm in Trapani, where we were treated to a tasting. There was always more to see and experience than we had time for. (In my opinion, that's always a hallmark of a fabulous adventure!)

YOU WON'T BELIEVE THE FOOD!

Breakfast on the terrace of my room each morning, overlooking whatever region we'd docked in, was pretty unbeatable. It barely mattered what made it onto my plate for breakfast; the food aboard the ship was outstanding at any time of day. Sure, there were plenty of nutritious options, including made-to-order protein smoothies, fresh fish and salads, but we tended to indulge. (We were on vacation, after all.)

Between the six restaurants and room service menu, there was plenty to choose from at dinnertime, including fine Asian fusion and authentic Italian. The supper we had at Le Champagne (the only Relais & Châteaux restaurant at sea!) was easily one of the best meals I've ever had. The most memorable food moment, though, was a slice of pizza grabbed on the go while strolling the streets of Naples. We stood in a throng of people to order from a little window in the wall, then waited for what felt like forever to be passed our slices of pizza wrapped in waxed paper, but it was worth it. (The sauce! The cheese! The delicate crust!)

THE OPTIONS FOR EXERCISE ARE ENDLESS

I didn't worry too much about working out during my trip, but for those who can't do without their gym routines, the 8,300-square-foot spa and fitness centre on *Silver Spirit* doesn't disappoint. It has all the

equipment you could want, as well as personal training, yoga classes and a pool.

I did make use of the open-air jogging track on the upper deck, though. Lapping the boat while taking in the overhead views of port cities made for a pretty unique running experience.

SEE ART, LIVE MUSIC AND MORE - WITHOUT LEAVING THE SHIP

Art galleries, museums and even live bands are standard on the checklist of things to see in many European cities, but what if you had even more to do and see every night after you got back to your (floating) hotel? Throughout the week, there were top-notch evening performances in the show lounge, guest lecturers on topics relevant to upcoming destinations and an art collection available for perusal that would rival that of many museums. Works by Monet, Matisse and Picasso lined the ship's hallways, but I was enchanted with a photo that hung in the galley just below my suite.

My husband and I instantly fell in love with a print by photographer George Barris, a famed celebrity shooter from the 1950s and '60s who captured Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe in their prime. While walking back to our room after dinner one evening, I decided that I needed to have it. (Some of the art on board the ship is actually for sale.) I may have been a bit drunk on the cruise experience - and, OK, a few glasses of Pinot Grigio - but I suddenly felt like I had to take that print home with me. I went straight to the concierge desk and made an appointment with the ship's art curator for the following day. It's a snap of Marilyn from July 1962 that Barris described as the last photo ever taken of the star. (She died just three weeks later.) Monroe is sitting on the beach in Santa Monica, California, with salt spray tousling her hair, a wool cabin sweater tossed over her bare shoulders and that famous twinkle in her eye. She looks like she has just had one of those truly great days - those days when you feel fulfilled and happy and like it's one you'll probably remember for a long time, which is how I felt that night standing in the ship's hull. Now she hangs in my home, at the top of the staircase, reminding me of that fabulous week I spent at sea. You can't ask for a better souvenir than that. *hr*

MAIN PHOTO AND 3, COURTESY OF SILVERSEA CRUISES; PHOTOS 1, 2 & 4, BARRY FRASER