

Sailing Europe's Grand Tour

by Elana Andersen

Recall the old phrase “If it’s Tuesday, it must be Belgium?” Many long time travelers are likely to respond with a worn-out smile and memories of their first trip to Europe. For the younger readers, it typically went something like this: nine capitals in 14 days, spending a lot of time changing currency, shopping at designated gift shop stops, fast coaching through city and country highlights; and, by day three, you couldn’t tell one cathedral from another. Thankfully, travel styles have been refined and travelers are offered many itinerary options for sightseeing and destination experiences that are more suited to their interests and pace.

Group travel planners often talk about being challenged in selecting European itineraries that will be of interest to a mixed assortment of members. Some will be visiting a destination for the first time and others are returning with a desire for new experiences. Another part of the challenge is that today’s traveler isn’t fond of packing and unpacking, which can limit how far afield an itinerary can travel.

Enter Cruising

With the introduction of Regent Seven Seas’ new 14-day Western European itinerary, planners can once again offer travelers a Grand-European-style itinerary satisfying both the first-timer and return traveler. With cruising you only unpack once and Regent’s port



Public Art Display in Hamburg

selection offers a mix of destinations with historic and civic significance as well as interesting sights and activities. The sailing schedule also allows for ample port time for travelers to experience each destination’s culture and personality.

This past June, I had the opportunity to sail Regent’s Western European route between Monte Carlo and Copenhagen, visiting ten ports along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, plus two days in London, a day transiting along the Kiel Canal which connects the North Atlantic and the Baltic seas, and three days at sea. Like many passengers, I selected this itinerary for the diverse ports being visited and the mix of experiences that each port offered. In almost every port, the ship was docked at town’s center and, where not, transportation was provided. Our in-port time was no less than seven hours though typically was 10-12 hours, which provided plenty of time for tours, enjoying the cities on

our own and, if so inclined, to easily return to the ship for a rest followed with another shore visit.

Regent was thoughtful in selecting organized tour options. There was always a city/region highlights tour that offered an overview of the area plus a collection of special interest itineraries. For exploring on your own, the ship’s library offers an excellent collection of guide books. Its daily newspaper and internet connections were great resources for local festivals, entertainment, museum showings, and other events scheduled for days in port.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises operates four small to mid-size luxury cruise ships and luxury guest suites, most with balconies and its signature six-star service. Its fleet includes the 700-passenger Seven Seas Voyager and Seven Seas Mariner, the 490-passenger Seven Seas Navigator and the 320-passenger Paul Gauguin. For group travel information, call 877-505-5370. Visit www.rssc.com. ■