

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog

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6 Reasons to NOT Take a Cruise Excursion

When traveling by cruise, you may feel like the cruise ship has everything under the sun to keep you entertained and show you the world. While that may be true on the ship, it's when you get on land that they lack the same oomph. Excursions are run by local guides and work on a partnership level with cruise lines. You can trust they have been reviewed and they will get you back to the ship on time, but they don't give you a chance to explore and discover a new port stop as you would if you were to arrive by plane or train.

After taking 8 cruises in different areas of the globe, we have learned a great deal about excursions. Mainly? Don't take them!

Personally, we absolutely hate cruise excursions. For us, there are only two reasons to pay for a cruise excursion: the first being that you have no other options, such as a Visa issue where only travel is allowed with the cruise company. The second is when the port is far from an actual city, which sometimes will happen on large ships that cannot get into smaller ports or ports are commercial ports. In these instances, taxis may be hard to come by, and the excursions are the only way you can explore the city.

But, if you find your family is pulling into a port with lots to see and do, such as a city like Marseille, Pisa or Santorini, here are six reasons you should skip the excursions offered by your cruise.

1. **Excursions are significantly more expensive than if you were to explore on your own.** Cruise excursions are complete rip offs – we spent \$100 to \$200 per person on some of the excursions we took, and we could have seen the same places on our own, for a third to half the price. Take a walk or take an inexpensive taxi to the sights, and pick and choose what you want to invest money on for entry or if you would rather just roam around and take in the new surroundings like a local. We love walking tours often found in large cities, and found many goods one are free, as they are led by locals who earn their fee from tips. (See our article [7 tips to survive a walking tour with a toddler.](#))
2. **Excursions leave early.** In order to get a large group of people off of a cruise ship, onto shuttles and to tours, most excursions leave very early, interfering with your child's sleep, your sleep and your breakfast time. We prefer to travel at our own pace – what if our son isn't quite ready at a 7 a.m. departure time? We don't want to rush and stress about meeting a schedule, and even when you arrive to meet, you end up waiting with the group because it takes so long to get everyone off a ship and onto a bus. It's a complete waste of time. Instead, we wake at our own pace, enjoy a relaxing breakfast, and after everyone has left the ship on their excursions, we can easily disembark

without waiting in line. Try to also get back to the ship before the tour groups return, so you can skip the lines reembararking, as well.

3. **Excursions don't allow for variation.** As you make your way across a new city, you may see something that catches your eye. On an excursion, if it's not on the itinerary, you cannot stop to visit. When you travel on your own, you can make any detours you would like. Also, if your child is acting up and needs a break, you can switch gears and visit a park or eat when and where you'd like.
4. **Excursions take you to stops in which they have partnerships.** Your pre-determined stops on a cruise excursion will be to souvenir shops and locations the tour operator has a partnership. You won't really have a chance to help the local economy and shop in intimate stores that don't receive hundreds of tour visitors weekly.
5. **Excursions have sub-par food.** As part of a large group, most dining experiences on large cruise ships will be buffet style, or one with a pre-set menu that has been cooked in preparation for a large group. (Think conference lunches and weddings.) To truly get a sense of the local food, you will do better to pop into intimate, mom-and-pop restaurants -- check with your walking tour guides for their recommendation.
6. **Excursions don't give you a local sense for the area.** You experience an area like a tourist rather than experience it like a local. You end up in highly commercialized areas. People who take cruises often are afraid to explore on their own, and cruise ships really work on that fear by trying to make it seem taking an excursion on your own is very daunting or that the people you encounter are all trying to steal from you. In Vietnam, the tour guide, a local, told us "If someone tries to talk to you, don't talk to them" as if you are in a warzone and it's unsafe. That fear-building is unnecessary because if a cruise is stopping in a city, it is because it is a safe city; they wouldn't be stopping if it wasn't (and even change ports if safety issues were a concern).

Don't be afraid to explore a new place with your family. Think of your ship just as the means to get you to a different country or city, and just as if you would find adventure stepping off of a train together, do the same when stepping off the gangway. Now that you hold why you don't need to take a cruise excursion, learn how to plan your own in our next article about planning your cruise excursions.