

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog

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How to Do a Cruise Excursion on Your Own

Just because you are a passenger on a cruise ship does not mean you have to follow the hordes of passengers who disembark to embark on a cruise excursion. Families have the freedom to do exactly what they want in every port – including staying on the ship, should you so choose. Personally, after taking numerous cruises, we learned quickly we would rather do our own thing in port. (In fact, we even have an article on the [6 Reasons to NOT Take a Cruise Excursion](#).) To us, visiting a place and trying local foods, meeting local people and seeing local neighborhoods enriches a trip and makes any planning worth it. We have a few simple tips to keep in mind when setting off on your own – trust us, we learned the hard way!

BEFORE YOU CRUISE

Plan your adventure. Before you set foot on a ship, have a sense of your itinerary for port stops. Use sites such as TripAdvisor and CruiseCritic, TripAdvisor's cruise site, to find what others feel are the top 10 things to do in a city – as well as [The 2 Idiots' Destination Guides](#). Then, determine which ones interest you, check hours and prices, and view maps to see where attractions are in relation to a port and how many places you can see during your stop. (You can also book your own private tours with local tour guides that will be cheaper than cruise excursions.)

Get necessary visas. Some countries will not allow you off the ship without a visa or with a cruise tour. The visas may take weeks to get approved, so if there are any places you want to visit without the tour, apply for your visas before your trip.

Purchase a good international data plan. Beside cruise ships notoriously not offering the best Wi-Fi on board, you'll want a good data plan so you can utilize your apps and Smartphone in ports. Speak with your cellular provider before you travel to ensure you'll have the access you need. (Here is [our recommendation](#)).

PLOT YOUR TRANSPORTATION

Put a pin on your map. Before you disembark for your own personal excursion, be sure to put a pin on a Google Map app so you know where your port is when you're ready to return. Some ports are so large that you could get lost looking for your ship – we nearly missed our boat because we couldn't remember where our ship was in our port!

Figure out your transportation. Depending on your situation, you will have three methods of transportation options:

1. If you are right by a city, such as the case for Marseille or Kotor, you can easily walk into the heart of town where most attractions await. Even if you need to take a taxi a short distance, as we had to do in Marseille, they will often be cheaper and faster than a cruise shuttle.
2. If your ship pulls into a port that is farther away from *a single* main destination, such as Pisa or Olympia, you'll need to arrange a ride. Often, taxis are waiting for passengers who want to do it on their own, and some will offer a set price to take you somewhere and wait to take you back, or will return at a mutually agreed upon time.
3. If you need to visit multiple sites because destinations are dispersed, it may be too difficult to negotiate and plan. During our trip to Santorini, we arranged private transportation for the day, turning to TripAdvisor for the best local transportation companies and asking for several quotes before booking. To find the best transportation companies in a location on TripAdvisor, go to All Things To Do and click on Transportation under Types of Things to Do (this link is in sometimes hard to find so you can just search for "Transportation" to get to it). This will take you to a page listing the top Transportation companies in the destination (for example, here is the link to [Top Transportation Companies in Santorini](#)). We typically click on the top 10-15 companies and send them an e-mail asking whether they would be available the cruise day and what the rates were for what we wanted; just copy and paste the same e-mail over and over again to save time.

Negotiate rates. The price taxis and drivers offer you can always be haggled down as much as 20 to 25 percent. If you are in a place where there are more taxis than people, definitely ask multiple drivers for a price. We found we could get someone to take us for a third to half of the original price.

DURING YOUR CRUISE DAY

Carry cash and an ATM card. When visiting a port, have at least \$300 in cash, if possible, so you are ready for minor expenditures and for places that do not accept credit cards. Most countries will accept U.S. dollars. Also be aware of the exchange rates so you can be sure you aren't getting ripped off when you exchange money or buy something locally with your dollars. If you don't have any cash, visit an ATM and pull from local currency at the exact rate of the day.

Plan to be back an hour early. Always plan to be back at your ship at least an hour before the ship's final time, just in case you get stuck in traffic. Having wiggle room will help eliminate stress.

Be prepared for the unexpected. The best reason for taking an excursion on your own rather than using the tour provided by the cruise is that you have more flexibility. Doing it on your own means leaving and returning at your pace, detouring when something you were not originally aware of looks interesting, taking breaks, and ditching an attraction because you're

just not that into it. Stay flexible in your plans rather than following a strict itinerary of your own.

You *can* do it on your own. And, if you learn more ways to make planning your own excursion easier, comment below and share them with other family travelers!