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## Shipmate cruise excursions

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It has been three years since I last addressed this topic, so an update is in order. As an example of typical prices, I checked out some price options for what is probably the most popular excursion in Juneau Alaska, a major summer port: A downtown excursion plus a trip to the local must-see feature, Mendenhall Glacier. The Cruise Line's Price The major cruise lines usually sell this excursion starting at about \$60 per person, or \$120 for a couple. Of course, you can spend more on helicopter trips or so, but this tour is about the least you want to do during a short visit to Juneau. You can book before you leave or board before you arrive. Sometimes, popular coast excursions sell out before the pier, but I suspect that doesn't happen very often, anywhere. Obviously, the cruise line doesn't really work sightseeing; it signs a contract with a local receiving tour operator. Equally clear, the cruise line ticks up the tour operator's price. Book your own tour in advance You can easily book what amounts to the same tour directly with a local tour operator and avoid the intermediate profitability of the cruise line. I know at least four online sites that specialize in booking coast excursions: PortPromotions, PortCompass, ToursPortSide Tours, and Shore Trips. All four offer an excursion equivalent to \$44 per person; \$88 for a couple. The \$32 difference will cover the cost of quite a few souvenirs or other purchases. Negotiate a Tour at the Dock You usually find hungry tour operators scouting for customers on the pier as soon as your ship arrives. Perhaps, at the time cost is a matter of making a good bargain, but it definitely shouldn't be more than the advance price. The risk, of course, is that you won't find anyone to sell you a tour when you arrive. Build your own private tour In many places, you can negotiate with local taxi drivers to reach the main high point. This is usually more expensive than an organized tour for a couple, and usually a lot less expensive for three or four people traveling together. This type of arrangement is especially favorable if you plan to go out at a location during your coast visit. Typical examples will include spending the day on a Caribbean beach, where two quick carbides will almost certainly cost less than an all-day beach tour. Whether at the beach or visiting the glacier, renting a taxi offers more benefits — at least for some of you. With a taxi, you can avoid the almost mandatory stop that most group tours make at a souvenir shop – one that almost certainly gives tour guides or drivers a kickback on what you buy. I've heard of an unusual potential risk here: Apparently, at least a few private tourist attractions in the Caribbean don't admit independent travelers who don't come in an organized group. Another case of your kickback dollars at work. Car hire If some of the main attractions in the port city are a distance from the pier, consider renting a car and driving to places you want to see. I've done it in some areas and paid a lot less than the price of visiting the coast. I rented a car for the glacier and a few other stops the last time my wife and I were in Juneau. Despite the sharp rise in rents this year, you can still rent an economy car there for about \$60 a day, including all fees and taxes, and Juneau is so compact that you can't use as much gas. Use public transport In many ports around the world, you can easily take a bus, tram or subway to the visitor center or main center. Obviously, this technique requires you to know what you are doing and feel comfortable using public transport. I certainly wouldn't hesitate to use public transport anywhere in Europe and in many of Asia's major cities, but I might be a little more cautious elsewhere – and I'd probably try something else in those countries where locals pile on top of buses or trains. In Juneau, a public bus runs between downtown and a stop near the glacier every half hour, and the fare is \$1.50. It's \$6 round trip for a couple - a pretty good deal, through you have to walk a little at the end of the glacier. Going around the port in many ports - especially where cruises are important to the local economy - you can get a pretty good feel for the local landscape by walking around just a few blocks away. You'll definitely find more than enough shopping that way, and some ports sadly offer not much beyond shopping. Many smaller ports, from Ketchikan to Ensenada, are easily accessible by walking, and just about anything what you want to see is near the pier area. Big risk - delays Do anything other than join the official shore tour of the cruise line there is a big risk: If you suddenly delay when you return to the ship, the ship will not wait for you. Usually, unless the situation is very unusual, a cruise line will delay departure, at least a little, if one of its own excursions is late But if you do something alone, to get back on time, you are completely on your own. Homework is necessary If you do anything other than go the service of the cruise line, you really need to do some research in advance. Fortunately, several guide books have zeroed in on port operations, including alternatives to cruise line packages'. Among the best: Frommer's four different publishing cruises and ports of call guide: Complete, and Alaska, Europe for 2010, and Caribbean for 2008. Fodor's published three port call casings: Alaska and caribbean for 2010; Europe in 2008. Some other books focus more closely on individual areas. They are available from major online bookstores and retail travel bookstores. Departing from the pier in Antibes on the French Riviera, founded by Greek merchants in the fifth century BC.C. and is one of France's oldest cities. Walking along Vauban Harbour, one of Europe's largest ports, and through the historic quarter, then stopping at Absinthe Bar. Tucked down to a corner and in a vaulted cave, the watering hole is a homage to wormwood-based ciander as the drink of choice by 19th-century artists. Time posters, coasters, advertisements and other mementos flank the walls, along with hats of all styles, shapes and sizes. As is customed, don a hat and belly up to the absinthe fountain on the bar for a sample la fée verte, which louches (turns white) when water and ice are added. Nosh on tapenade and pissaladière, a provençal specialty that sees flatbread topped with caramelized onions, black olives and anchovies. Allergic to all your can-eat buffets and cruise coast excursions? We have an antidig remedy for you. These 10 sailing experiences offer Michelin-worthy dining and internal access to some of the world's most pristine places. Get on the train. Aranui, Polynesia On board: The Aranui hybrid passenger fleet gives visitors the chance to see one of the world's most spectacular places without breaking the bank and with internal access to other cruise ships not available. While the cargo ships may not have the streamlined sleekness of a luxury cruise ship, they make up for it with their outstanding 14-day itinerary, which sails to Tahiti and the stunning Marquesas Islands. You'll depart from Papeete, Tahiti, and stop for snorkeling and coastal sightseeing at stunning spots like Rangiroa and Bora Bora. Perfect for: Travelers yearn to experience the romance, natural splendor and culture of French Polynesia without being banned. Windjammer Cruise, Maine On board: This is a great option for travelers looking for a small-scale cruise experience that lets you see Maine's coastline in all its glory. The Maine Windjammer Association runs a fleet of eight amazing, painstakingly modeled ships on classic schooners called windjammers, which ply Maine's coastline on three, four and six-day cruises. Expect to encounter wildlife such as whales, dolphins Eagles, and stop at charming coastal villages. Meals on board have Northeast parties such

as grilled lobster, corn chowder and grilled haddock, and after dinner there are often storytelling and stargazing on deck. Choose your own adventure when it comes to the season you sail: The fleet offers cruises from whale watching in June to peak foliage in September. Perfect for: Romantic with a sense of adventure who is looking to experience rowing at its most element. Nour el Nil, Nile Tours On Board: Many cruise ships on the majestic Nile River, but few do it with as much style as a dahabiya, a classic type of 19th-century shallow bottom custom ship designed for the river and used by Turkish pashas. Nour El Nil revived the tradition with a fleet of playful white and red boats carrying just 20 passengers each in the luxurious whitewashed cabin. You start from Esna, just south of Luxor, for the leisurely journey up the big river to Aswan, a strategic ancient port. Perfect for: Lovers of history and romance looking for an authentic Egyptian experience don't ignore luxury. Lindblad Land of the Ice Bears Expedition, Arctic Circle On board: Join your fellow passengers in Oslo, where you'll board this intimate ship (just 148 passengers) as it departs for Svalbard, above the Arctic Circle. The trip is all about polar bear detection— from the comfort of your cabin, deck or on daily kayak and Zodiac excursions. But there is also an opportunity to roam the gravel beaches, witness the icebergs and spotted whales in the hypnotic light of midnight sun. Perfect for: Nature nerds, photographers and wildlife lovers are looking for a swanky adventure. Gulet Cruise around Croatia, Sail Dalmatia On Board: Amidst the idyllic islands, outstanding food and wine, and the perfect postcard village, the Dalmatian coast is everything you've heard and more. And the best way to get it all in is from water. Grab a few friends and explore the green Adriatic on a charter gulet, a wooden sailboat with charming lines that will have spinning heads in each port. It is expected to stop on the dazzling islands of Vis, Hvar and Mljet, along with cities such as Dubrovnik and Split. Perfect for: Europhiles who already know the Amalfi coast and are eager to see more of the continent's jaw-dropping landscape, without the crowds. Seadream Yacht Club, Caribbean On Board: With just 56 couples allowed and a ratio of almost 1:1 crew per passenger, two high-end megayachts offer rarified journeys through crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea (and Europe, too). In Attractions: the most prized restaurant, the shore excursions off the beaten road (captains and crew will often lead passengers to hidden gems such as local seafood tents) and onboard entertainment such as movie screenings under the stars. Both yachts have marina so you can play water sports and Caribbean trips including champagne and caviar picnics on the white sand beach. Perfect for: Gourmands and hedonists who have been considered a luxury cruise but wary of megaships. Queen of the Zambezi River, Botswana On board: Picture a cross between an up-to-end safari camp and a five-star resort and you've got Queen Zambezi. Fourteen suites with floor-to-ceiling windows open to private floors, all better for detecting the area's abundant wildlife (the area is home to 120,000 elephants). Tender boats take guests out to discover big games closer to shore, and also have the opportunity to visit remote villages to learn about local traditions. The best part: The solar-powered ship uses water jets to prevent damage to the riverbed and has removed the generators to ensure the comfort of passing wildlife. Perfect for: Ecologically conscious safari fans want to get out of jeeps and up rivers in one of sub-Saharan Africa's most beautiful and sparsely populated countries. Aqua Expeditions Mekong On board: Sail the fabled Mekong through Vietnam and Cambodia on a river journey that's about as far from the heart of darkness as you can get. With a professional guide for every 10 guests, the menu is prepared by Australian chef David Thompson and peri daisies such as a swimming pool and cabin with floor-to-ceiling windows, this is a more floating design hotel than a cruise ship. Shore excursions using private tenders (the only ones on the Mekong River) take day trips to peaceful Buddhist temples and sedentary villages, or for more heart-thought adventures on bicycles and kayaks. Perfect for: The world has sailed five waters and wants a more unusual underwater adventure, complete with modern amenities. Europa Bark, Tall Ship to Antarctica On board: You may have imagined taking a journey to Antarctica once you retire, but we'll bet you didn't consider making the classic high-speed cruise. The light ship Europa was built in 1911 in Hamburg, Germany, and completely renovated for its incarnation, taking brave passengers from Ushuaia, Argentina (South America's southern extreme), to the White Continent on an exhilarating 25-day adventure. After exploring Antarctica, the ship sails between the icebergs to the South Shetland Islands and through Chile Patagonia, a breathtaking view of snowy peaks, glaciers and impressive fjord. Perfect for: Bucket-listers want to experience Antarctica in a unique and adrenaline-charged way. Belmond Road to Mandalay, Myanmar On board: Myanmar, formerly Burma, is finally open to the world, but road travel can still be a hassle. Enter Belmond's Road to Mandalay, an 82-passenger ship arranged ride on the Ayeeyawady River in high-end style. No skimping when it comes to fancy navigation: We're talking an outdoor gourmet restaurant, pool, cocktail bar, spa and shop, along with entertainment that can include Burmese Marionette classical dance performances or insightful lectures on Myanmar's fascinating culture. Onshore, visitors can visit lost rural villages, meet monks dressed in turmeric robes and of course populate their Instagrams with photos of famous golden pagodas set amid lush jungles. Perfect for: Early acceptees want to see the country's long-hidden sights rich in sight and culture. —Emily Saladino More from Jetsetter: The Hotel Scam You Need to Know 15 Must-have Travel Apps This article was originally published by Jetsetter.com under the title Cruising for People Who Hate Cruises. It's reprinted here with permission. (Photo: Jetsetter) Jets

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