

European countries best visited by ship

Sparkling ports, history and sights put them at top of list

Romance has few peers when sailing into a beautiful port while toasting wine glasses or sipping cappuccinos from your private balcony on a cruise ship – particularly when you're sailing through Europe.

Visiting the Old Country by sea vessel transforms travel into a stress-free experience. Joy overwhelms your body and soothes your soul. Sailing eliminates the hassle of arranging transportation, meals and itineraries.

Simply awaken from your bed and prepare to explore a new destination, one that will spark your curiosities. Cruising provides a trip that is equal parts engaging and restorative.

Your biggest concern might be deciding which countries to visit. Here are some of the most popular and fulfilling:

Croatia – Boasting 1,100 miles of coastline, it's the ideal place to visit by ship. Absorb the stunning views of its picturesque ports. Walk the walls above Dubrovnik's Old Town, which has been featured in "Game of Thrones." Ride a cable car to the top of Dubrovnik's Srd Hill and sip a spritzzy beverage immersed in panoramas of the historic city's red-clay roofs and Adriatic Sea.

Montenegro – Sharing its southern border with Croatia, Montenegro's Kotor is one of the best-preserved



BAY WATCH – Kotor Bay is considered one of the most scenic ports on the Adriatic Sea. *Image: SCStock. Adobe Stock.*

medieval towns in the Adriatic and considered one of the prettiest ports. Limestone cliffs surround the bay. Visit natural wonders in Lovcen National Park and travel Kotor's serpentine streets and centuries-old churches.

Iceland – Uncover the contrasting

waterfalls and lava fields of Akureyri. In Isafjordur, visit the small town that served as a trading post centuries ago. Or explore the Westfjords peninsula by kayak or ATV. Capital city Reykjavik boasts wonderful architecture and geothermal pools.

Greece – The white facades and blue domes of Greek islands like Santorini quickly grab your attention. Sailing the Greek islands is as magical as wandering through winding streets and ancient ruins.

Turkey – Awaken to the morning call to prayer in Istanbul. Overnight stays in this captivating and multifaceted city give guests the luxury of time to explore a city that straddles cultures and continents. Marvel at the sixth-century Hagia Sophia or the tiles of the Blue Mosque. Explore the 3,000-year-old preserved ruins at Ephesus.

Italy – Your senses will be taken on a ride through the bells that toll in the cathedrals of Rome to the scent of the sea in Portofino on the Italian Riviera. Italy's wondrous personality can be found in a gondola on the canals of Venice or in a plate of fresh pasta. The ports of La Spezia and Livorno are driving distance from the cultural capital of Florence. Tour the Accademia Gallery to see Michelangelo's *David*. Take photos at the Duomo cathedral – a star of the city's majestic skyline. And don't forget to savor a glass of local wine.

Cruising Europe is extraordinary. A floating resort sails through the high seas and allows us to step through doorways to other worlds. It's as magnificent as it is memorable.

Archeology, architecture define Mesa Verde

Cliff dwellings, dating more than 1,000 years, leave guests in awe

Few national parks are as unique as Mesa Verde. It's more than a playground for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers. It's an acknowledgement to archeology and a tribute to architecture.

Mesa Verde National Park protects thousands of archaeological sites in southwest Colorado, including some of the most striking and well-preserved structures by the Ancestral Pueblo people. The park offers a mixture of geological and manmade splendor. Multistory native buildings blend with natural sandstone shelters.

Three sites have more than 100 rooms and a variety of smaller and older ruins, some dating 1,500 years. The park also offers magnificent views of the Four Corners of the Southwest and the San Juan Mountains. There's no doubt Mesa Verde is a work of art, but masterpiece might be a better description.

Cliff dwellings define the national park. The Mesa Verde Dwellings are considered the most notable and best-preserved archeological sites in North America. Dating to the late 1190s, after primarily living on the mesa top for 600 years, Ancestral Puebloans began living in pueblos they built beneath overhanging cliffs. The structures ranged in size from one-room storage units to villages of more than 150 rooms.

The Puebloans farmed the mesa tops and continued to reside in the alcoves, repairing and constructing new rooms



THE KINGDOM – Cliff Palace is the most famous cliff dwelling at Mesa Verde National Park. *Image: Patrick Jennings. Adobe Stock.*

for nearly a century. By the 1270s, the population began migrating south to present-day New Mexico and Arizona; and by 1300, the Ancestral Puebloan occupation ended in Mesa Verde.

It's a lesson in history that can be better understood in person. An up-close experience with the structures will leave visitors in awe. Detailed architecture that shouldn't have been possible during such primitive times

is on display.

Mesa Verde boasts more than 600 cliff dwellings. They're a testament to the Puebloans and are waiting to be explored.

Balcony House is one of the more popular sites to visit. A "medium-sized" cliff dwelling, it has 40 rooms. It illustrates how room and passageway construction evolved. A tunnel, passageways and 32-foot ladder make Balcony

House the most adventurous cliff dwelling in the park.

Mesa Verde Cliff Palace, meanwhile, is the park's most famous cliff dwelling. It has more than 150 rooms and more than 20 kivas – rooms for religious rituals. Crafted of sandstone and wooden beams and mortar, it has been remarkably well preserved for the past 700 years.

Constructed between 1211 and 1278, Spruce Tree House is the third largest cliff dwelling. It contains 130 rooms and eight kivas built into a natural alcove measuring 216 feet wide and 89 feet deep. It's thought to have been home to nearly 80 people, making it a town unto itself.

Step House shows proof of two separate occupations in the same site. The modified-basket-maker site, dating to 626, is situated between the old stone steps on the south and large boulders on the north. The remaining alcove contains a masonry pueblo dating to Classic Pueblo times 1226.

Cliff dwellings are synonymous with Mesa Verde, but there is more to the park. There is a plethora of hiking trails that will take guests through some of the destination's most majestic terrain, and plenty of camping sites that allow visitors to spend their trips nearby to absorb the ambiance and get the most from their experiences.

Mesa Verde National Park doesn't rely strictly on natural beauty. It built its reputation from the ground up.