

THE 7 HOTTEST WELLNESS CRUISES

Turns out luxury ships are the new health retreats, with high-tech gyms, wellness programs, medi-spa treatments and even resident gurus. Here's why you'll want to jump aboard travel's latest trend

BY HANNA MARTON



If you equate cruise ships with all-you-can-eat buffets and endless poolside lounging, get ready to have your mind blown. The cruising industry, which is worth more than \$14 billion globally, is embracing wellness with a warm, Ayurvedic hug and now offers patrons far more than nightly cabaret shows, casinos and water slides.

The new breed of tourist wants wellness. In fact, 94 per cent of holiday-makers incorporate self-care into their trip, according to research by global travel network, Virtuoso. And we're not just talking massages. Performance art, sleep programs, mindfulness and the latest fit tech are topping the wish list of experiences for many health-conscious travellers.

But don't just take our word for it. You only need to glance at the list of new cruise offerings to see a hot trend afoot. Just a few recent

examples? Insider Expeditions recently took a luxury 100-cabin vessel to Antarctica for seven days. Co-hosted by Grammy Award-winning artist and producer, Diplo, guests were treated to transformative experiences such as sound baths, DJ sets and a (very) cold plunge into Antarctic waters. Demand was so great that Insider plans to set sail to the South Pole again this December.

Meanwhile, Gwyneth Paltrow collaborated with Celebrity Cruises to curate a 'Goop at Sea' experience, weaving in mental, physical and spiritual workshops, clean-eating options and even cashmere bed linen and pillow menus. Talk about conscious indulgence.

If you've ever dismissed cruising as being just for the newly wed or retired set, this smorgasbord of rejuvenating luxury liners is sure to change your mind... and, if you choose to climb aboard, maybe your body, as well.

1. BOOK THE WORLD'S FIRST MINDFULNESS CRUISE

Your Path to Optimal Health – How Your Body Can Heal Itself, 5 Steps to Happiness and The Healing Power of Sleep are just a few of the seminars that have been created by integrative medicine doyen, Dr Andrew Weil, for Seabourn's Mindful Living Program (seabourn.com). Like, who doesn't want to be healed, happy and well-rested?

The seminars are just one aspect of this (sometimes controversial) visionary's curated, fleet-wide program. It also weaves in yoga classes, guided meditation and crystal sound baths. Because Weil can't be onboard every trip, each ship has a dedicated Mindful Living Coach to lead travellers through their own wellness expedition.

Obligatory massage is on the menu, but with twists. The Earth Grounding Massage promises to make you feel, well, grounded, while the Mindful Living Massage incorporates the vibrational energy of sound. Prepare to emerge from the spa humming Enya.



2. GET YOUR SWEAT ON IN FLOATING FITNESS HEAVEN

Adults-only cruise fleet, Virgin Voyages (virginvoyages.com), helmed by Richard Branson, is so stuffed with fitness features that you'll probably disembark the vessel looking and feeling better than when you jumped aboard. On offer are group fitness classes such as barre, bungee and HIIT, fancy-pants Technogym ARTIS equipment, a bona-fide boxing ring and outdoor fitness playground. A 250-metre running track dubbed 'The Runway' keeps pavement pounders happy while at sea, and hipsters will flock to a modified pickleball court.

If fitness isn't your jam, the spa offers a mud room, salt room and hot and cold plunge pools, and DJs set the vibe at 'evening spa parties'. Though it doesn't fall into the 'health' category, you can even get yourself a holiday memento at the world's first onboard tattoo parlour. Trust Branson to think of that.

3. HIT RESET WITH AERIAL YOGA AND TIBETAN SOUND HEALING

Picture yourself paddleboarding by a secluded cay on the Great Barrier Reef or on a crystalline lagoon in the Solomon Islands. Then, imagine yourself back on a cruise ship like the Scenic Eclipse II (scenic.com.au), dipping into temp-controlled 'vitality pools' or basking in an infrared sauna.

The onshore and onboard experiences offered by Australian-owned Scenic (the founder is from Newcastle, north of Sydney) are equally soul-enriching... and challenging. Yes, there's the requisite state-of-the-art gym and personal training sessions to pry you away from the bar, but the liner's yoga and Pilates studio goes one step further with aerial yoga and TRX.

If mindful meditation is more your speed, sign up for Tibetan sound bowl classes, reflexology, Japanese Shiatsu or Indian Ayurvedic massage. You'll be so chilled after this cruise, your friends won't recognise you without frown lines. Best of all, there's not a waterslide in sight.



4. DISCOVER PEAK WELLNESS WITH THE MASTER OF SELF-HELP

Deepak Chopra is a pioneer in the meditation, self-help and alternative-medicine spheres (Oprah is his number-one fan) and now he's collaborating with Swan Hellenic (swanhellenic.com) to create Explore & Restore wellness programs. Over five to nine days, guests embark on a holistic journey of self-discovery and self-care on the ocean, with the help of Chopra-certified meditation and yoga teachers, Ayurveda-inspired food, breathwork classes and insightful, expert-led workshops.

Chopra himself sails on certain trips, giving guests a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet the globe's most famous spiritual guru. And with routes such as Palermo to Piraeus and Maputo to Cape Town, on smaller, more exclusive ships, these cruises are sure to be transformative.

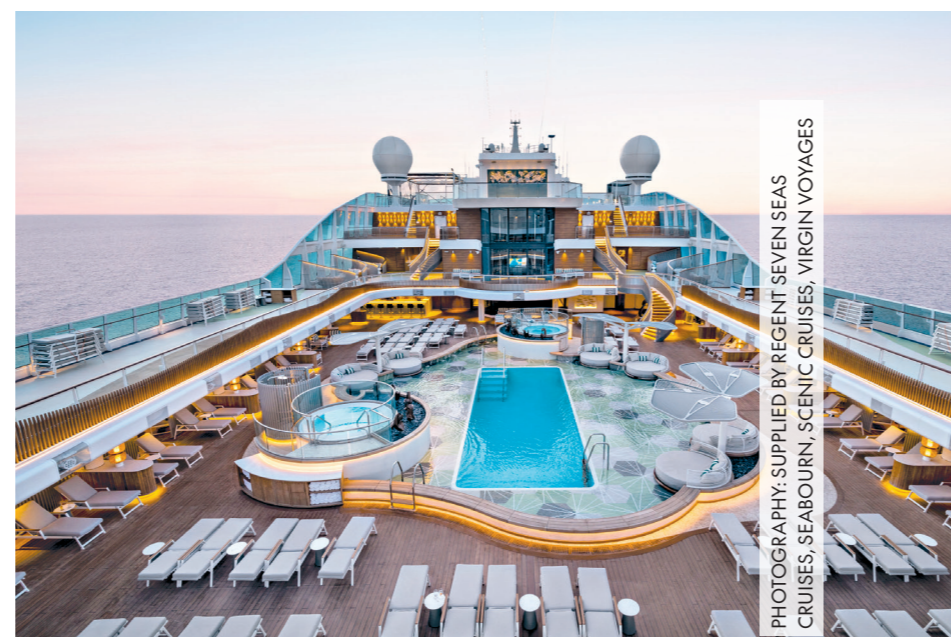


5. FEEL ENRICHED WITH THERMAL BATHS

If you imagine stinky ports and tourist traps when you think of onshore day trips, Regent Seven Seas Cruises (rssc.com) has the antidote. This luxury line's Wellness Tours are tailor-made for travellers wanting excursions that are a little bit nice, different, unusual... and holistic.

Visit the restorative Terme dei Papi (Thermal Baths of the Popes) in the ancient city of Viterbo, northwest of Rome, or practise your warrior pose at a yoga workshop in Taormina, the famed location for the second season of *The White Lotus*.

Back on deck, there are myriad spa treatments plus novel health and fitness services such as body composition analysis and nutritional consultations. Consider it a health retreat with cocktails.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED BY REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES, SEABOURN, SCENIC CRUISES, VIRGIN VOYAGES



7. TREAT YOURSELF ON A SEAFARING SPA

Launched this year, Oceania's newest ship, the Vista (oceania.cruises.com), might just boast the world's most dazzling seafaring day spa. With 11 treatment rooms, a high-tech gym and thermal pools, it promises to enrich, energise and restore. You can unwind in the mineral-rich pool or get pampered on a crystal quartz bed. Sounds comfy... sort of. Clean eaters will rejoice at the onboard cuisine, which features plant-based menus and a cold-pressed juice and smoothie bar.

Still not bougie enough? Try the space-age Amphibia, a waterbed that emits music designed to align with your organs and chakras, while providing an oscillating massage. And the onshore excursions are a wellness wonderland – think meditation sessions with Buddhist elders in Sri Lanka or reflexology on a rice barge in Thailand. We're in.

+ EXPLORE WANT MORE ONBOARD WELLNESS? HEAD TO [BODYANDSOUL.COM.AU/TRAVEL](https://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/travel) FOR A ROUND-UP OF THE WORLD'S BEST CRUISE SPAS

6. FIND ZEN WITH THE FAM IN TOW

Cruising with the kids? No worries. Carnival (carnival.com.au), arguably the world's biggest and brashest cruise line, caters to families but doesn't neglect parents in search of R 'n' R. Its newest Sydney-based ship, Carnival Splendor, has you covered with the Cloud 9 Spa and its thermal suite – flaunting more steam chambers, rain showers and mud pools than a tropical jungle.

Counter the effects of the buffet at the Body Sculpt Boot Camp, but if you're in a hurry, non-surgical treatments are an option. And because it's what's on the inside that counts, Cloud 9 has dedicated therapeutic experts on hand, an onboard acupuncturist and a Chinese medicine consultant to help you change course. If you want to feel rejuvenated with little effort (and frankly, just get away from the kids) the aptly named Serenity Adults-Only Retreat will be your daily go-to.



DEAL of the WEEK

Recharge with a six-night escape at the luxe Aitutaki Lagoon Private Island Resort in the Cook Islands, from \$3890.

The price includes return flights, checked luggage, airport transfers and daily breakfast for two.

You'll also receive \$3000 worth of Bonus Value: a full-day lagoon cruise, mix-and-match spa package, drum show, traditional feast and more.

SCAN TO DISCOVER MORE OR VISIT [MYHOLIDAY.COM.AU](https://www.myholiday.com.au)

REAL-LIFE READ



“THE FOCUS WAS ON CREATIVITY OVER HITTING THE BAR”

Onboard dance parties DJ'd by some of the world's biggest names? You read that right. Here's what happened when Prue Aja cruised to Antarctica with Diplo

“When I heard about this trip with Insider Expeditions, I thought, ‘Amazing DJs, yoga, sound healing and hiking in an incredible landscape? Sign me up!’ But it was even more transformative than I expected. Each night we did Gestalt therapy [a form of psychotherapy centred on self-awareness]. Every other night we danced to DJ sets by Diplo and Flume. Guided by wellness entrepreneur, Devon Lévesque, we plunged into the sub-zero water for two minutes, experiencing a natural high that lasted for hours. The whole journey encouraged us to be fully present, with a focus on creativity over hitting the bar. Guests were writing and making music. A photographer by trade, I took shots of my fellow travellers against a truly spectacular backdrop. Observing sculptural, otherworldly icebergs while enjoying meaningful conversations with creative thinkers profoundly expanded my perspective.”