



Sailing the Mediterranean with Viking Cruises

Empires of the Mediterranean with Viking Cruises

Venetian prelude and Adriatic to Aegean Voyage.

I've just returned from Viking Cruises' *Empires of the Mediterranean* itinerary aboard *Viking Star*, and it was exactly the kind of journey I love being able to experience firsthand before recommending it to clients. Beginning with a pre-cruise stay in Venice and ending with extra time in Athens, this trip offered a beautiful mix of culture, history, scenery, and an onboard atmosphere that felt calm, polished, and very easy to settle into. As a Travel Advisor, I'm always paying attention to the details that shape a client's experience, and this sailing stood out for how smoothly the land and cruise portions worked together.

Pre-Cruise in Venice

My first two days in Venice were a wonderful way to begin the trip, and I couldn't have asked for a better pre-cruise city experience to evaluate firsthand. Staying at the **Baglioni Luna**, a Virtuoso hotel meant we were beautifully positioned for both iconic sightseeing and those quieter, more atmospheric moments that so often define Venice. Not to mention, when you book the best of the best Virtuoso hotels, you enjoy the added amenities* of room upgrade, early check-in, late check-out, €90 dinner credit. The hotel felt elegant and distinctly Venetian, with attentive service and a location that made everything feel easy. After check-in, we crossed the city by canal ferry, enjoyed a private gondola ride that felt every bit as special as clients hope it will, and then wandered back on foot through the lanes and over the bridges before ending the evening with Italian pizza and a good night's sleep.

Venice Sightseeing Highlights

The next day was packed with classic Venice moments. We began with a guided visit to **St. Mark's Square and Basilica**, followed by **Doge's Palace**—an experience rich in history, artistry, and grandeur. One of the day's most memorable moments was stepping onto the terrace for that spectacular elevated view over Venice. Later, we joined a boat tour to **Murano and Burano**, which added an entirely different dimension to the city experience. In Murano, the glassblowing demonstration was a reminder of the island's extraordinary craftsmanship, while Burano charmed with its brilliantly coloured houses and lace-making tradition. Add in a stop for Italian gelato, and it became one of those days that will stay vivid in memory long after the trip ends.

From Venice, our transfers were beautifully arranged, taking us from the airport to the hotel and then onward to the cruise port via car and water taxi—an appropriately memorable way to begin a voyage through this part of the world.

Embarking and First Impressions of Viking Star

Embarkation on *Viking Star* was remarkably smooth, which is always something I notice closely as a Travel Advisor because it sets the tone for the entire voyage. We arrived early, before the busiest rush, and since our suite was not yet ready, we took the opportunity to explore the ship and begin settling into the Viking rhythm. Almost immediately, the atmosphere felt calm, polished, and unhurried. After flights and two full sightseeing days in Venice, a deep-tissue massage in the spa was exactly the right reset, and by sail away that evening, the transition from city stay to cruise life felt seamless.

From there, the itinerary unfolded as a compelling sequence of coastal cities, island landscapes, and historic ports stretching from the Adriatic into the Aegean.

Itinerary Recap: From the Adriatic to Greece

Slovenia: Koper

Slovenia made for a fascinating first call. In Koper, a guided walk through the old and newer parts of town revealed layers of history stretching from Roman times to the present, all set within a compact and very walkable setting.

One of the most memorable moments in Koper came after the tour, when we wandered into a local jewellery shop run by the last generation of a family of handcrafting jewellers. Hearing her speak emotionally about the tradition beginning with her grandfather, continuing through her father, and now ending with her was deeply moving. We left with rings that felt far more meaningful than souvenirs—they became one-of-a-kind keepsakes from the port.

Croatia: Zadar

Zadar was another standout, with its Romanesque architecture, layered history, and distinctive waterfront attractions. The Old Town feels storied and atmospheric, while the Sea Organ and Monument to the Sun add a modern, creative contrast. Although we departed before sunset and missed the evening light display, the city still left a strong impression.

Croatia: Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik was every bit the Adriatic jewel it is said to be. Arriving by sea only heightened the drama of the experience, and once ashore, the medieval streets, limestone lanes, and beautifully preserved architecture made the city feel almost cinematic. A cable car ride added sweeping views from above before we returned to the ship after another exceptional port day.

That evening, as we departed port, the bridge glowing blue made for a beautiful visual finale. Dinner at Manfredi's was a perfect way to close out the day—one of several reminders that life on board was just as enjoyable as the destinations themselves.

Montenegro: Kotor

Kotor offered one of the most dramatic sail-ins of the trip, framed by steep mountains and a striking bay often compared to a fjord. Its medieval Old Town, Venetian walls, and maze of narrow

streets made it a captivating place to explore, and the overall warmth of the port added to its charm. Even watching another ship tender farther out reinforced how comfortably sized *Viking Star* is for itineraries like this.

Greece: Corfu

Corfu brought a different kind of beauty, blending layered history with sweeping coastal scenery. Its Old Town and fortress, shaped by Venetian influence and recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, gave the stop both elegance and substance.

Greece: Katakolon, Olympia

Katakolon offered the charm of a seaside harbour, but the real draw was nearby Olympia. Walking among the ruins, temples, and ancient athletic grounds made history feel immediate and tangible—one of the most significant historical experiences of the itinerary.

Greece: Santorini

Santorini delivered the iconic Aegean views so many travellers dream about: whitewashed villages, dramatic volcanic cliffs, blue water, and sunlit terraces high above the caldera. From Thira's winding streets and cafés to the famed beauty of Oia, the island felt every bit as striking in person as it does in photographs.

Greece: Athens

Athens marked the final cruise port and the beginning of the last land-based portion of the trip. From a Travel Advisor perspective, I found this extension especially valuable because it allowed me to experience how well the itinerary works for travellers who want more than just a ship-to-airport departure. With one last night aboard *Viking Star* and then two more nights in Athens before flying home, it created a much more complete and rewarding finish to the journey.

Athens Day 1: Our first day in Athens blended ancient history with living culture. We explored the National Archaeological Museum, where the scale and significance of the collection made Greece's long history feel immediate and deeply impressive. Even the drive through the city added context, with narration that helped connect modern Athens to the landmarks and neighbourhoods around us. That evening, we ended the day with a Greek heritage dinner and folk show filled with music, dancing, and generous hospitality—a lively, memorable introduction to the city.

Athens Day 2: Day two began with disembarkation in Piraeus and the move from ship to city stay. We checked in at the King George, A Luxury Collection Hotel, where the welcome was warm even though we had arrived too early for our room to be ready. That gave us time for a light meal next door at the Winter Garden in the Hotel Grande Bretagne before setting out to get our bearings. A hop-on hop-off bus turned out to be an easy and enjoyable way to get an initial feel for Athens, and later we stopped for a drink on the rooftop at Public, which offered a lovely perspective back toward our hotel and the city around it.

Once our room was ready, we settled in and prepared for dinner at Tudor Hall. The meal itself was excellent, but the true star was the setting: an extraordinary view of the Acropolis as dusk gave way to evening and the city lights began to glow. Later, we continued the night with a rooftop

nightcap at the Grande Bretagne, where the illuminated Acropolis provided one more unforgettable Athens moment.

Athens Day 3: Our final full day in Athens began early with a visit to the Acropolis, including the memorable sight of the guard entering to raise the flag. Standing on the site itself was extraordinary—layer upon layer of history, architecture, and meaning all concentrated in one of the world’s most iconic settings. Afterwards, we visited the Acropolis Museum, where the exhibits provide valuable context for what remains on the hill above. Seeing both original artifacts and carefully presented reconstructions made the experience feel even more complete. Later, we left the city behind for a scenic coastal drive along the Athens Riviera toward Cape Sounion. The contrast with central Athens was immediate: less bustle, more open sea views, and a relaxed rhythm shaped by the coastline. Stops along the way, including Vouliagmeni, added to the appeal before we reached the Temple of Poseidon, standing stark and striking above the Aegean in the afternoon light. It was a fitting final excursion before continuing on to the Sofitel Athens Airport for our journey home.

For our Athens touring, we booked with a local provider recommended by a Greek travel-industry friend, which worked out especially well. Having the same driver for both the morning city arrangements and the later coastal excursion made the day feel smooth, personal, and well paced from start to finish.

The Viking Star Experience:

Having now experienced *Viking Star* firsthand, I understand very clearly why this style of cruising appeals to so many well-travelled clients. The ship feels much closer to a boutique luxury hotel than a conventional cruise experience. Its all-veranda design and smaller guest count create an atmosphere that is comfortable, uncrowded, and intentionally destination-focused rather than built around high-energy resort-style activity.

The atmosphere on board was quiet, refined, and distinctly adult. With no children under 18, no casino, and relatively low-key entertainment, the ship caters especially well to travellers who prefer calm surroundings, meaningful port time, and comfortable shared spaces. Viking’s Scandinavian design language is evident throughout, from the light-filled public rooms to the serene, understated décor.

Itinerary and Focus

One of the strongest takeaways for me as a Travel Advisor is just how destination-focused the *Empires of the Mediterranean* itinerary really is. This is the kind of sailing I would confidently suggest to clients who want to maximize time ashore and who care more about cultural immersion than sea-day entertainment. With Venice at the front end, Athens at the back end, and a series of compelling Adriatic and Greek ports in between, the route feels exceptionally well balanced.

Included excursions at most ports provided straightforward introductions to each destination, usually through guided walking tours, leaving plenty of room to explore further independently.

That combination worked especially well on this route, where every stop offered a different mix of history, scenery, and local character.

Included shore excursions at most stops – simple tours, usually walking city introductions. For travellers who care more about cultural immersion than pool games or nightlife, this style of cruising is a very appealing fit.

Cabins and Comfort

From a comfort standpoint, the stateroom experience was a real strength. I always pay attention to whether accommodations feel merely attractive or genuinely livable, and on this sailing the suite delivered both. The private veranda added a great deal to the experience, especially on a spring itinerary, and details like the heated bathroom floors, comfortable bed, and spacious layout made it easy to see why repeat Viking guests are so loyal.

The Scandinavian design aesthetic carries into the accommodations and public spaces alike: clean lines, natural light, restrained elegance, and plenty of comfortable seating areas throughout the ship. Those quiet sitting spaces became part of the appeal, and the overall environment consistently felt peaceful rather than crowded.

Dining

Dining is another area I look at carefully when I travel, because it has such a direct impact on how clients remember a cruise. On *Viking Star*, the variety worked very well over the course of the voyage. Having options like Manfredi's, The Chef's Table, and The Restaurant meant meals never felt repetitive, and the overall quality supported the ship's quietly upscale feel.

My personal favourite was Manfredi's, where we managed to dine twice during the cruise. The buffet was consistently popular and full of choice, while The Restaurant provided an easy classic sit-down option. Afternoon tea at 4 p.m. became another enjoyable ritual, complete with café lattes, scones, finger sandwiches, and sweets. I also appreciated the ship's zero-proof offerings, including non-alcoholic wines, beer, and cocktails, even if service occasionally became mixed up at busier moments.

Amenities & Onboard Life

The onboard amenities felt thoughtfully chosen rather than excessive, and that is very much in line with the type of client I would match to Viking. Instead of trying to entertain everyone with endless options, the ship offers spaces and services that genuinely enhance the overall travel experience, especially for guests who appreciate comfort, wellness, and a more relaxed pace. The spa stood out immediately for me, especially since I booked treatments on embarkation day and again on the final afternoon. Viking's Nordic Spa is one of the ship's signature features, with its sauna, steam room, snow grotto, and hydrotherapy elements, even though I mostly admired rather than fully used some of those spaces. The Explorer's Lounge was another favourite kind of space—comfortable, scenic, and ideal for quietly taking in the surroundings. Lectures and enrichment programming were available as well, and I appreciated being able to watch some of them from the cabin.

Entertainment on Viking Star is intentionally understated. Rather than Broadway-style productions or a nightlife-driven atmosphere, evenings tend to revolve around lectures, live music, small performances, conversation, and quiet time in the lounges. For some travellers that will feel wonderfully calm; for others, it may feel too subdued. On this itinerary, however, the lower-key approach suited the overall tone of the trip.

Service and Crowd

Service was consistently strong throughout the sailing, and that is always one of the biggest factors I assess when I travel professionally. Our cabin steward was accommodating, room service was reliable, and breakfast in the suite quickly became one of our favourite routines. Small touches also stood out, including the staff's attentiveness to preferences such as keeping the fridge stocked with zero beer for my companion. For clients, those details matter because they are often what elevate a good trip into a very comfortable one.

Pros and Cons

What I appreciated most, both personally and professionally, was the ship's elegant and uncrowded feel, its consistently strong service, and the way the onboard experience supported the destinations instead of competing with them.

Travellers looking for nightlife, energetic entertainment, or a highly social resort-style atmosphere may find Viking too quiet. Some opinions also varied from guest to guest on excursions and food, but that felt no different from the usual range of views you hear on most ships.

Bottom Line

Now that I've completed *Empires of the Mediterranean on Viking Star* myself, I can say with confidence that it is an excellent fit for travellers looking for a destination-rich, adult-oriented, and quietly luxurious cruise experience. Paired with pre-cruise Venice and extra time in Athens, it becomes far more than a standard itinerary—it becomes the kind of well-rounded journey I would be very comfortable recommending to clients who value culture, comfort, and a more refined pace of travel.

If this cruise experience is what you are looking for, I'd love to help you explore whether Viking Cruises is the right fit for your travel style, interests and help you find the ideal cruise itinerary. I'd be happy to narrow the options and design the right experience for you. Contact me today, to start planning.