

# Cruise holidays (written for punyabhumi ltd)

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If your kids or grandchildren have been raving about the adventures of Captain Jack Sparrow at sea, then maybe it's time you discovered the allure of the ocean for yourself! We're not talking about meeting pirates or find gold doubloons on sunken ships, but luxuriating in the sheer bliss of sailing on a cruise liner. Whether you're a stressed-out professional who hardly gets to see their partner on weekdays, a single person looking for romance and adventure, or a parent who's longing for some family time with your children and spouse, there's something about cruises that appeals to everyone!

A cruise vacation is a wonderfully unique opportunity to experience the romance of the sea as well as the appeal of exotic destinations, and is a charming way to spend a few days of quality time with your partner. Most cruises pack so much into a couple of days—luxurious cabins, lazy walks on the deck, gourmet meals, entertainment shows, live bands, swimming pools complete with Jacuzzis, shopping and sight-seeing at exquisite ports—that the cruise is the perfect quick fix to chase your blues away, and have you walking on air for weeks to come!

The two most popular cruise destinations from Chennai are Phuket and Colombo, both managed by the SuperStar Libra operators. The Libra is a state-of-the-art ocean liner, touted as a world-class luxury floating resort where the service is warm and the accommodations elegant. The ship offers you all the facilities you would expect from a five-star resort: mouth-watering menus at every meal, internet access, medical care, shopping and even conference and meeting rooms for those workaholics who want to catch up with business as they relax! The liner has a breathtaking ten decks, with over seven hundred luxury cabins.

It can accommodate over one thousand and four hundred passengers on a single cruise. There are rooms ranging from the aristocratic executive suites (Rs 21, 999/- per night per passenger) to the ocean-view staterooms (ranging from Rs 7, 200 to Rs 11, 000 per night per passenger, depending on the kind of view available from each cabin) with a choice of cabins with portholes, so you can gaze at the dazzlingly-clear night sky as you drift off contentedly into sleep at night! ). The Libra also features several restaurants on board, each offering you a tastefully organized dining experience.

Check out Coconut Willy's, the poolside restaurant where you can lounge in your swimsuit and sample the delightful menu, or the Pool Bar, which is exclusively for drinks and enticing cocktails. For a more formal dining experience, visit the Saffron, which features traditional Indian vegetarian meals, including Jain cuisine; there is also the enchanting Four Seasons restaurant for those who prefer continental meals. If you're taking the kids along, chances are you won't be able to tear them away from the aptly-named Lickety Splits, the ice-cream bar straight out of a child's version of paradise!

And where do we even begin to describe the various entertainment rooms? There's The Bollywood, which is the karaoke lounge; the Galaxy of the Stars, a cocktail lounge with a live band; the discotheque, Boomer's; Video Planet, for those compulsive gamers who periodically feel the need to blast the stuffing out of animated villains, and much, much more! The Libra cruise to Phuket gives you three days and four nights of memorable sailing. This is a typical " high sea" cruise, meaning that it's the closest thing to heaven for

those who want nothing more than to bask in the enchantment that three continuous days of open water can give you!

Phuket also offers you the delight of turquoise waters and exploration in its rustic villages. The Libra Chennai-Colombo cruise is for three days and two nights, which includes one complete day of the high sea experience. Indian Holiday Pvt Ltd organizes cruises for you, and online bookings are available at [www.indianholiday.com](http://www.indianholiday.com). To book a cruise on the Libra, go to [www.indianholiday.com/star-cruise-packages/star-cruise-libra](http://www.indianholiday.com/star-cruise-packages/star-cruise-libra). Indian Holiday organizes cruises from their Mumbai office only. To plan your cruise with a Chennai operator, contact Travel Air Madras, featured below.

If you want a wider choice of destinations, check out the cruises that operate from Mumbai. As Ms Gupta from Travel Air Madras tells us, Mumbai is the most flourishing point of departure for cruises to ever-popular destinations such as Mauritius and Lakshadweep. The four-night Cochin/Goa cruise is an excellent option, which takes you from historical forts to ravishing beaches in the space of three days! This cruise operates between December and February, so plan your trip accordingly. February is the best time, neither harshly cold nor uncomfortably warm, and there is very little chance of stormy weather.

The Lakshadweep/Goa cruise for four nights has two shore stops, Kadmat and Goa. Kadmat is an island paradise, just eight kilometres long and half a kilometre wide! If you're the adventurous type, you can indulge in water sports like scuba-diving, parasailing, snorkeling and kayaking at Kadmat's gorgeous lagoons, or if you'd prefer, just lie back and drink in the vivid blue

of the ocean from one of the memorable glass-bottomed tourist boats! (Swimming skills are mandatory for all water sports, and children under fourteen years cannot participate in diving. The water at Kadmat is crystal clear, and you can gaze at the vibrant marine life up to a depth of an amazing fifty metres. This cruise operates four times a month between October and April every year. Travel Air Madras is a tour operator which plans your cruise right from booking your air tickets to Mumbai and finding you a cruise holiday to suit your tastes and requirements. Rates begin at approximately Rs 5000/- per night per person (excluding taxes). The one- and two-night cruises on the Libra feature Goa as the most popular destination, while three-night cruises take you to Kadmat in Lakshadweep and bring you back.

Rates are inclusive of three meals a day, access to the onboard swimming pool, Jacuzzi and gym, and live entertainment shows in exquisite lounge areas on the ship, which has a professional live band if you want to add to the music of the waves! Air Travel Madras also offers special seasonal discounts; for example, the Valentine's Day discount is for cruises booked up to March 1st, and gives you an attractive 50% off on your partner's fare. To avail of this offer, you need to complete your cruise by April 14th. Call 2852-3095 or 2852-1623, or email Usha at u.[email protected]com for more details. If you want a less touristy cruise, you could also consider a river cruise to the enigmatic Sundarbans. Two luxury river launches, the M. V. Chitrarekha and the M. V. Madhukar, make weekly two-day trips which take you into the heart of the mangrove forests to observe the enchanting wildlife and drift along the delta created by the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. Both

ships include upper observation decks. The gourmet Bengali meals alone are worth the experience! Entertainment includes on-board dancing.

The best time to take this river cruise is between September and March, when you also get the chance to see rare migratory birds. So leave your copy of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* at home on your bookshelf, and witness the charms of the famed diving dolphins for yourself. You can even catch a glimpse of the Bengal tigers sunbathing on the banks! This cruise is operated by the government's tourism department, and departs from Kolkata (just a couple of hours from Chennai by air). A two-day trip costs Rs 2500/- per passenger during the tourist season, and off-season rates are Rs 1175/- per passenger.

You can book your ticket at the Bengal Tourism office located at 2, Brabourne Road, Kolkata. Call 033-2225-4565/8183/4723-25 or email[[email protected](mailto:info@vivada.com)]net. Vivada Cruises has also introduced Sundarbans cruises from January 2007 with the luxury cruiser Paramahansa, featuring three decks and over thirty elegant cabins, as well as restaurants, a gymnasium, and a library with internet connectivity. The package is priced at Rs 20, 000 per passenger for the Luxury class, and Rs 15, 000 per passenger for the Comfort class. For a fascinating voyage through a near-pristine land, book yourself on the Paramahansa!

With its contemporary interiors and tranquil ambience, the cruiser is also the perfect venue for business conferences and wedding receptions. Call 033-2463-1990/1/2/3 or email[[email protected](mailto:info@vivada.com)]com or[[email protected](mailto:info@vivada.com)]com. With Star Cruises, the world's third largest cruise company, now operating in

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India, we now have local access to a special experience from our own ports which equal international standards of quality and luxury. A cruise is a wonderful experience at any time, but you may want to consider one to commemorate a special occasion such as your twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

For those who want to nudge their parents into rediscovering romance during a second honeymoon, a cruise holiday package is also a gift that your parents are sure to cherish forever! So if you've been thinking of stealing your spouse away from the routines of everyday life, or if you want to remember an unforgettable occasion in an exceptional way, consider treating yourself to this holiday experience like no other! Article 2: Fort St George (written for Ritz magazine) History in Our Own Backyard! Date: 20 February, 1640 A. D. Place: A small, nondescript fishing village on the Coromandel coast

A small band of British soldiers land for the first time on the East Coast of India. Realizing quickly that they will need to work fast if they are to claim this territory before the French do, they set to work creating a garrison. They are hard-pressed for land, but a local farmer called Madrasan offers them the use of his banana grove. The Raja of Chandragiri, the last of the great rulers of the Vijayanagar empire, accedes to their request. Two months later, their military base is established and christened Fort St George. And thus, the city of Madras is born.

They say that old buildings are silent, watchful observers of history. From the beginnings of the British Raj, this familiar fort has witnessed the evolution of

one of India's largest cities. Fort St George in Chennai has the somewhat dubious distinction of being the first fort that the British built in India. More importantly, however, the fort made the small settlement of Madraspatnam a flourishing port, and it's not an exaggeration to say that had this fort not been built, Madras would not have developed into a city. Built a mere forty-four years after the East India trading company arrived in India in 1600 A.

D. , Fort St George helped the British establish a stronghold on the east coast, and remains one of the most famous landmarks of the city. The fort was named after St George, the patron saint of England. The British used the fort as their main settlement in India until 1774, when they declared Calcutta as the seat of their administration. The fort not only helped the British establish a settlement in the small South Indian fishing village, but also to create a stronghold from which to defend themselves against the forces of the neighbouring kingdoms.

Arcot and Srirangapatnam were not far away, and the French had taken Pondicherry. Had the British not built the fort, it may have proved difficult for them to establish their power in the south. Consequently, they invested much effort in fortifying the area. The fort is surrounded by walls that are over six metres high, as well as a formidable-looking moat. Although it's tempting to think that vicious crocodiles once swam in the waters of the moat to terrorize the enemy, legend has it that the moat was created not so much to defend the fort as to keep inquisitive " natives" away from it.

The British called the fort area their ' White Town,' as opposed to the ' Black Town' outside its walls, where the " coloured" people lived. Despite its name,



the fort is not “ really” a fort, but more a collection of buildings made by the British in the Neoclassical style, many of which were remodeled in subsequent times. Within a couple of decades after the fort was founded, St Mary’s Church also came to be erected within the fort area. The church, the oldest British one in India, is often described as the Westminster Abbey of the East. According to popular opinion, St Mary’s is also the oldest British church outside Europe.

The church also found itself being used as a military dormitory for three brief years, when the French seized it from the British from 1746 to 1749. Don’t forget to take a peek into the visitor’s book when you visit—it still has comments dating back over a hundred years! Opposite the church are Clive House and Wellesley House, named after the respective governors who lived in them (Wellesley later went on to become the Duke of Wellington, and defeated Napoleon at Waterloo). Robert Clive was married in St Mary’s Church, as was Elihu Yale, the founder of Yale University.

Yale, who was Governor of the city and is said to have made his fortune in India, had a 46-metre teak flagpole erected, from which it is believed that the Union Jack was unfurled for the first time in India. The pole was actually the mast of a ship that was wrecked in the seventeenth century. It still stands today, bearing, of course, a different flag! The original teak, however, was replaced with metal in 1994. This flagpole is the oldest in the country. Although the government has its Secretariat in the offices of Clive House, much of it is also a grand museum. The Fort Museum is open from 10 a. m. to 5 p. . on all days except Fridays, and includes ten galleries with relics from

the British and French empires. The magnificent banqueting hall on the first floor has portraits of the earliest governors, and there are many remnants of the British era, including palanquins, coins, weapons, paintings and manuscripts. You can also see as large, imposing statue of Lord Cornwallis, as well as documents hand-written by Cornwallis and Clive. The statue depicts a sad scene: Tipu Sultan's two young sons being handed over to the British because their father was unable to pay the large sum of money demanded by Cornwallis.

Tipu Sultan's cannons can be seen outside the museum. Both Aurangzeb and Hyder Ali also attacked the fort several times in the eighteenth century, but it was so well-fortified that they could not break its defences. The pentagon-shaped gun ramparts slope down to the moat, and were once connected to five drawbridges that led to the fort. These bridges have since been replaced by roads. From the first landing of the British to the tsunami, the fort has witnessed almost four centuries of Chennai's history. Will it still be there in another four hundred years' time, its walls as impassive and unchanged?

One can only wonder! Article 3: Barry Burn Lodge, South Africa (written for a travel website) Barry Burn Lodge is situated in the gorgeous Lowveld area, a small, serene world of timeless beauty. Enjoy sunsets of unrivalled beauty. Fresh breezes greet each warm tropical day. In this tranquil spot, the altitude and the sun create the perfect tropical climate to vacation in! Some of Africa's most memorable sights will delight you here. The estate is a stone's throw away from the must-see Kruger National Park.

The accommodation includes a stylish open-plan dining room and kitchen, fully operational for your culinary needs, and with the added convenience of a fridge, stove, microwave and dishwasher. Barry Burn Lodge also offers laundry services with a washing machine and tumble dryer. Relax at the well-furnished lounge and bar, equipped with a fireplace which creates a wonderfully cozy ambience on chilly evenings. The lounge opens out on to a beautiful sundeck with braai facilities, which is a magnificent setting in which to absorb the serene beauty of your surroundings, or to unwind after a hard day's vacationing!

Upstairs, discover the joys of a loft room with TV and M-Net (DSTV dish is available, but you need to carry your own decoder. The loft leads on to a charming balcony from which to enjoy a sundowner, with a fantastic panoramic view of the expansive, lush green fairways of the Golf Estate. The accommodation at Barry Burn Lodge includes 4 bedrooms, all with bathrooms en-suite, containing 2 double bedrooms with Queen size beds, as well as 2 bedrooms with 2 single beds in each. Bed linen and bath towels are available for your necessities. Please carry your own swimming towels.

There are several delightful activities to enjoy in and around Barry Burn Lodge. Enjoy the facilities of a championship golf course, with its picturesque fairways, water obstacles, and vibrant bird life. Other sporting activities offered include tennis and squash arranged by the club. Barry Burn Lodge also invites you to revel in splendid and awe-inspiring scenic drives to historic places. Just a few of these historic places which can inspire and

delight you are the Mac-Mac Falls, Graskop, Sodwana Caves, Pilgrim's Rest, God's Window, and Blyde River Canyon.

The estate also shares a border with the remarkable Lake Longmere, where you can unwind as you indulge in fishing, boating, or even mountain biking. Visit Greenway Woods Resort and Conference Centre, eat out at Oliver's Restaurant, or treat yourself to Casterbridge Farm, a homecraft, antique, museum and entertainment centre. Also very enjoyable is the Barnyard Theatre, 3 km towards White River town, where live shows are presented on most weekends - don't miss it! The Riverside Mall/Casino, only a 20-minute drive from the Estate, is also worth a visit.