

Around-the-world cruises and tours are hot. Here's what you need to know about them.



Around-the-world cruises and tours may appeal to vacationers sitting on unused travel budgets. (iStock)

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When Sy Markowsky saw the promotion for Uniworld's [Rivers of the World](#) cruise, a light went on. It was the centerpiece of an around-the-world adventure he'd been dreaming of.

"It looked like quite an experience," says Markowsky, a retired business owner from Leawood, Kan.

It is. The itinerary, which starts in May 2023, runs 46 nights from Cairo to Lisbon. The multi-segment river cruises include onboard dining and beverages, wireless Internet, shore excursions, airport transfers, onboard gratuities and flights between cruise segments. Markowsky is still planning the rest of the journey, which will take him around the globe.

But it isn't cheap. Although Markowsky won't disclose the exact amount he paid for his Rivers of the World vacation, he says he splurged for a cabin upgrade and paid a six-figure sum.

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“I just think people are anxious to travel,” he says. “After what we’ve all gone through — and are still going through — they’ve decided to take the time.”

Markowsky is part of a travel trend that is beginning to unfold. Tired of being locked down for months at a time, Americans are planning months-long vacations around the world. But there are some unique requirements of long-form travel that you need to know about before you schedule an epic trek around the globe.

There are no reliable statistics on round-the-world travel. But to get an idea of the demand, consider what happened when tickets for Regent Seven Seas Cruises’ [2024 World Cruise](#) went on sale this summer. The cruise line, known for its all-inclusive offerings, put its tickets on sale at 8:30 a.m. on July 14. By 11 a.m., it had sold out.

Like Uniworld’s cruises, these tickets were hardly a bargain. Fares started at \$73,499 per guest for a suite, and went as high as \$200,000 per person for a 1,100-square-foot master suite.

Jason Montague, president and chief executive of Regent Seven Seas Cruises, told me that there was a long waitlist for the approximately five-month, 34,500-nautical-mile odyssey. The cruise spans three oceans and four continents, hitting the most desirable ports of call. Stops include Hawaii; French Polynesia; Singapore; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; and Cannes, France.

Why did so many people want to cruise around the world? “I think it was an opportunity to check off a lot of items on your bucket list. It’s not just a vacation — it’s an investment,” Montague says.

There’s also a practical reason for the interest in lengthier vacations, say experts.

“People are sitting on vacation days and unused vacation budgets,” says Annie Scrivanich, a senior vice president of [Cruise Specialists](#) who specializes in around-the-world sailings. “They want to do something big, and an around-the-world trip is the biggest of them all.”

The same can be true of the price tag. Veteran travel agent Mitch Krayton of [Krayton Travel](#) says you’ll need to set a budget, particularly if you want to do a world cruise.

“It’s not a spur-of-the-moment vacation,” he says. “Most world cruisers book an average of two years in advance. That may seem excessive, but world cruises sell out far in advance.”

Travel insurance is another consideration. If you’re on the road for several months, you’ll probably need an annual policy. You can buy insurance through a company such as [Allianz Travel](#) or [Travel Guard](#) or an annual health insurance policy through [GeoBlue](#). But bear in mind that there are important coverage restrictions on these policies that may limit their effectiveness. For example, some policies limit any trip taken during a calendar year to 45 days, meaning you can’t stay on the road for an entire year and expect to be covered.

“Understand what your travel insurance or travel assistance benefits cover or don’t cover,” says Stephen Anderson, senior vice president for client excellence and marketing at [FocusPoint International](#), a company that offers risk management services to travelers. “That way, you can make the best decisions quickly and know who you could call in an emergency.”

Also, for a trip that goes all the way around the world or just halfway around, you’ll want to consult a travel expert. It’s worth it to ensure you have the right paperwork for each segment.

Shopping for around-the-world travel can be a little overwhelming. You have a lot of options, says Stephanie Goldberg-Glazer, owner of [Live Well, Travel Often](#), a boutique travel agency. For example, tour operator Abercrombie & Kent offers charter air trips, allowing guests to see much more than they would if they were on a land-only trip or relying on commercial flights. For one of the segments of your around-the-world adventure, you can book a [14-day trip across parts of Africa](#) to South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zambia.

National Geographic, my former employer, has a 24-day round trip from D.C. to several continents [by private jet](#). Also, not cheap: Be prepared to budget upward of \$90,000. “They’re once-in-a-lifetime trips,” she says. “And there’s a waiting list.”

Goldberg-Glazer says it’s just as important to choose the right tour group. Tours range in activity levels from easy to challenging. But you also want to make sure you find a tour with travelers who share your interests. After all, an around-the-world tour can take weeks, even months. That’s a long time to be around people with whom you may have nothing in common.

But the adventure is worth it, say those who have taken an around-the-world cruise or tour. All the planning and the considerable expense pay rich dividends. You will never see the world the same way. Even researching this story has changed the trajectory of my life. I’m planning a slow journey around the world in 2022. I’ll let you know if it lives up to the hype.

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