

# Lessons Learned on a World Cruise

by Bruce and Lorraine Harris

## HOME AT LAST!

by Chase Binder

A world cruise is a major excursion no matter how well-traveled you are. You meet a dizzying array of people and delve into cultures both near and far and exotic and familiar. It is an experience that can forever change your outlook and whet your appetite for more. Luckily for those of us who dream about such a trip – or are even seriously considering it – Bruce and Lorraine Harris have returned from 120 days “around the world” on the Viking Sun and have been sharing the lessons they learned as well as some of their striking photos. This month they are finishing their overall perspective on the journey. In addition, they are offering access to their personal and wonderfully detailed journals as they progressed through dozens of countries and scores of destinations and excursions. Please visit [www.thebowtimes.com/news/travel-talk/travel-journals/](http://www.thebowtimes.com/news/travel-talk/travel-journals/) for more details and photos.

And if you can't resist signing up, visit [www.vikingoceancruises.com](http://www.vikingoceancruises.com) to see current offerings or contact AAA on Fort Eddy Road in Concord ([www.northernnewengland.aaa.com](http://www.northernnewengland.aaa.com), 228-0301) where you'll find the staff who helped the Harris's negotiate the booking process.



Potro, Portugal has opened a dramatic new cruise ship terminal.

## EXCURSIONS

Lecturers rotate on and off the ship and provide excellent background on every country and port. Viking includes one excursion in each port, but also offers more specialized and lengthy excursions—including some that leave the ship for 3-5 (at \$1500-5000 each) days for trips to the Great Wall of China, Taj Mahal, etc. This is about your goals. Is this a one-time trip of a lifetime where spending the extra time and money is no object? Are you a seasoned traveler revisiting countries to observe any changes? Or, are you visiting countries to determine which merit future exploration? We decided on the latter approach and have booked additional trips to explore China, Tibet and Egypt.



The beaches of Phuket Thailand are world renowned.

We also learned to moderate expectations. One country's definition of “magnificent” may be far from reality, especially in smaller countries with less developed tourism. At the same time, we were amazed at value of spending time in local markets, just talking with guides and residents. Across the board, people were very open about their living conditions, economy and politics. We discovered working class folks, students and children are much the same throughout the world. They work hard, are devoted to families, are often very religious, generally speak multiple languages (especially English), and are remarkably politically aware.

There are huge gaps between the political rhetoric in countries and the reality of everyday life. Every child, no matter how impoverished, smiled, wanted their picture taken and to practice their English. Women often were the shopkeepers and are playing a greater role politically in society and frankly, look to democracies for models of what their countries can be.

Attention to sanitation varied greatly. Progressive societies like Singapore had restrictive sanitation laws. Others seem unable to address even the daily garbage produced by populations in the tens of millions. Recycling is unknown in many countries where plastic refuse sits in mountains. Yet, a number of countries are excellent agricultural examples of composting and water/crop management.

Perhaps the most critical component of any excursion program are the guides. We found the best were fluent in English and had a driver to accompany them. Usually our guides were very knowledgeable, had backgrounds and degrees in the social sciences, and could easily handle questions. We found too that the guides were in some cases outspoken about their home political situations. We learned about housing shortages, cultural



The water in the Gulf of Thailand was 80 degrees at Koh Samui Nathon, Thailand.



Dried fish, veggies, spices—anything at the farmer's market at Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

challenges (especially in India), and political issues (increasing refugee influxes which have stressed public services in struggling economies.) Energy needs and especially access to water were often raised.

Many people showed a high interest in and knowledge of the political situation in the US. We still carry great weight in the world, but our internal politics are daily discussion points in much of the world. If nothing else, it renews your understanding about how special the US really is compared to the rest of the world. And, frankly, we all generally trace our ancestry to other countries and should appreciate more what we have here that is too easy to take for granted.

## SECURITY

Viking demonstrates a good grasp of security issues and planned accordingly. There is a fairly large security contingent permanently on staff and these personnel were augmented during our crossing from India to Oman and then into the Red Sea by additional former military personnel appropriately equipped to protect the ship, crew and passengers.

There has not been a pirate attack in the area in 2018, which proved a comfort to everyone, but traversing the Red Sea, the ship deployed concertina wire around the entire second deck and prepositioned water cannons at strategic locations. The ship essentially went “dark” at night with enforced light discipline and a noticeable increase in transit speed. The additional security departed the ship to escort a tanker after we were safely through the danger zone.

## DETAILS: DOLLARS, DUDS AND VISAS

When you undertake a trip like this, the devil is in the details. You’ll need to have access to cash, credit cards, and ATM cards. Best to talk to your cruise company, your bank, your credit card company and make sure that they know where you’re going and when (see Travel Talk for June 2017 and September 2017 for details on credit cards, cash and travel).

Packing for four months is a bit daunting but using the message boards at [cruisecritic.com](http://cruisecritic.com) can help. Pack for 10-12 days, use laundry facilities, and do research on expected temperatures in ports, and (for ladies) remember head scarves and long sleeves for visiting religious sites.

Any extensive itinerary requires visas which are best obtained through a third party via processing company like Generations Visas. Procedures and requirements vary greatly by country and one slip can mean disaster. Talk to your cruise company.



The terraced rice paddies in Bali are iconic.



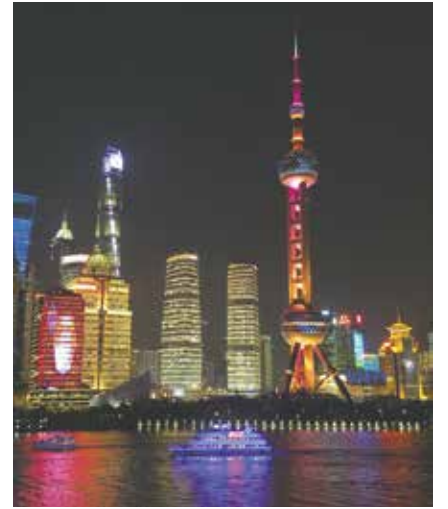
Residents of Kowloon light incense in Memorial Park.



The Marina Bay Sands Hotel and Casino in Singapore cost \$8 billion to build and features the unique SkyPark atop the three towers.



The Sultan Qavoos Grand Mosque in Muscat, Oman is one of the 10 largest mosques in the world. Note that women need to have their heads and arms covered.



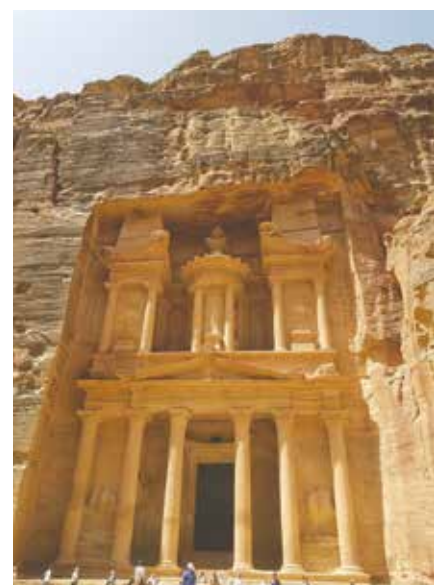
The stunning night skyline of Shanghai is full of electric color.

## SUMMARY

Post 9/11 travel is fraught with security concerns that manifest themselves in longer lines, somewhat intrusive searches of person and personal effects and more. Thus, the idea of a single flight out, unpacking once, repacking and a single fight back is appealing. Many cruises leave from domestic ports on our East and West Coasts which makes for less air travel. Cruise travel is carefree, the ship is professionally managed and your days at sea or ashore will be equally rewarding if you keep an open mind.

We were pleasantly surprised by the relative calmness of the oceans and seas. Modern ships and stabilizer systems make a huge difference, but for this trip we had only three days out of 120 with precipitation.

In four months Lorraine gained nothing and I gained two pounds. A major victory! We exercised hard every sea day, took the stairs rather than elevators, and took almost all intermediate or challenging shore excursions. We ran into difficulty twice; once when snorkeling and once not hydrating enough in the heat. We learned quickly from both experiences. We certainly missed family and friends, but, faced with our typical New England winter, we would not hesitate to take on another cruise to exciting places to meet people, get a sense of their culture, and get to know fellow cruisers.



The Treasury, the most famous of 800 monuments in Petra, Jordan, was used in shooting the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark.