

SHORE LEAVE

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The cruise stereotype of constant all-day buffets, ice-cream bars, and a pound-a-day weight gain are so out of date. Today's cruiser is younger and more health conscious than ever. Most ships have state-of-the-art gyms, fitness programs, and healthy eating options to help us stay trim — but why stay on the ship to burn off those calories? Why not combine your sightseeing with a good workout, and get some fabulous vistas along the way?

Many ports sit below dominating hills that provide wonderful views down to your ship and the harbor below, plus you may have the reward of exploring a historic fort or nature reserve at the top. Here's our pick of the best climbs in cruising.

1 KOTOR — MONTENEGRO

The sail-in to Kotor is amazing enough, but you can get a different perspective on the stunning Kotor fjord by climbing up to the Venetian Fortress behind town, 755 feet above sea level.

Your legs may be wobbling after the 1,300 strenuous steps up and down (give yourself a good couple of hours for the round trip), but the views are simply spectacular — historic bell-towers, terracotta roof tiles, and your ship docked right next to the medieval Old Town, with that fjord as an awesome backdrop. After this climb, the phrase "no pain, no gain" finally makes sense.

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2 THE PEAK — HONG KONG

Taking the Peak Tram is a Hong Kong rite of passage, but that's way too easy for fitness-loving cruisers. A walk up to the 1,476-foot-high Peak — formally, the summit of Mount Austin — may be extremely challenging, but it gives you a superb perspective on the territory. You get to look down on the forest of skyscrapers that appear to lean into you as you climb, and experience the luxuriant tropical vegetation clinging onto the sides of the Peak to remind you that Hong Kong isn't only a concrete jungle after all.

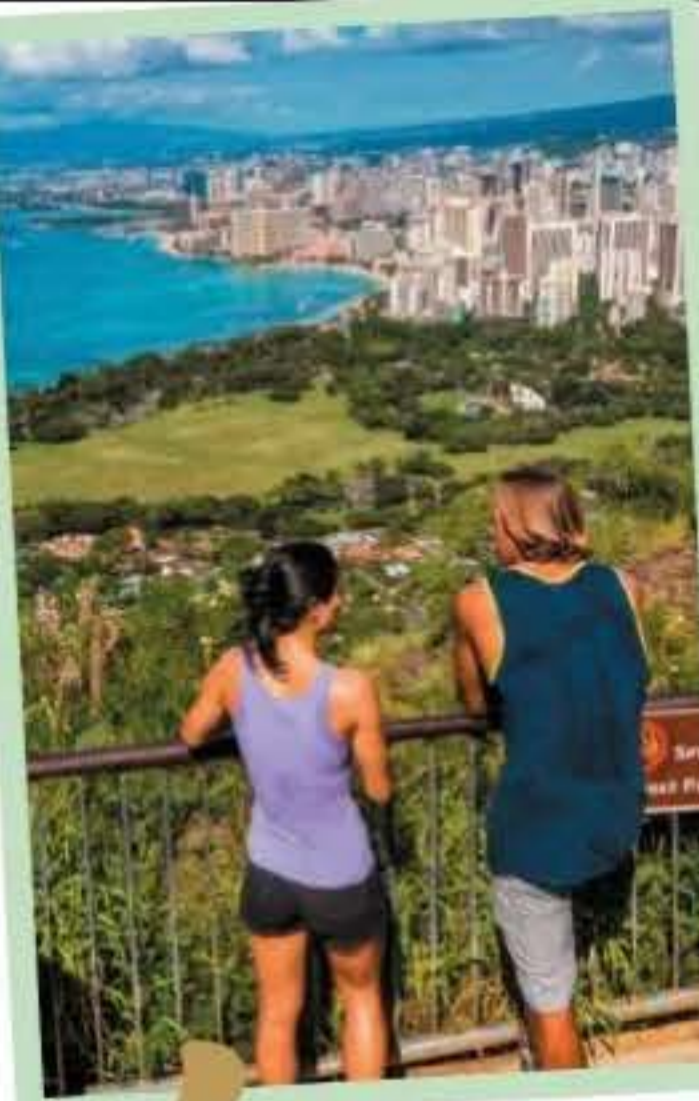
If you want to save a bit of energy for that incredibly steep last section, it makes sense to catch the Mid-Levels Escalator (the longest covered escalator in the world), which will take you about a third of the way up from the Central District.

3 NAFPLION — GREECE

As you catch your tender ride into the beautiful port of Nafplion in the Peloponnese, your target is immediately obvious — a formidable Venetian fortress at the top of a snaking walkway leading up from the historic town.

Making your way up those 800 or so steps of the sloping cobblestone walkway, you'll pass by crenulated fortifications and huge bastions before reaching the impressive (but largely empty) fortress at the top. Of course, the amazing views back over town, with your ship sitting serenely in the gulf behind, make it all worthwhile.

Once you've made it back down to the bottom, cool off at the attractive pebble beach on the other side of the headland.



4 HONOLULU — HAWAII, USA

If you don't mind a few crowds, then climb up to the top of the iconic Diamond Head overlooking the superb Waikiki Beach. Diamond Head is a 200,000-year-old extinct volcano that was used by the U.S. military as a lookout post, so you'll see that there's old military bunkers and installations along the way.

The climb takes about an hour, passing along open paths, narrow stairways, dark tunnels, and steep steps. It can get pretty busy at peak times, but those superb 360-degree panoramic views are definitely worth sharing.

5 SANTORINI — GREECE

Santorini doesn't just have to be about shopping, expensive restaurants, or million dollar views. You can start your day off with a bracing walk up the formidable stairway from the tender station up to the capital, Fira.

Of course, it's easier to catch the cable car up to the top, but the queues can be long, and the other alternative — a donkey ride — looks pretty alarming and will leave you smelling of donkey all day! So, climbing the 600 steps to the top is the best option for the energetic cruiser, as you leap out of the way of any out-of-control donkeys (the screaming of their passengers should give you fair warning). All the while, the views back across that stunning caldera are literally breathtaking.

6 RAIATEA — FRENCH POLYNESIA

The untouristy Pacific island of Raiatea is a place of simple pleasures, and what's more pleasurable than taking the lush, grassy paths climbing up the 984-foot-tall Mount Tapioi?

The mountain sits behind the island's sleepy capital, Uturoa, but the path takes you through some peaceful rural landscapes, getting steadily steeper (and sweatier — it's very humid!) as you approach the summit. After a roughly one-hour climb to the top, you're rewarded with truly spectacular views over the lagoon to Raiatea's twin island, Taha'a, and across the ocean to the jagged outline of Bora Bora in the distance. If you want a walk on the wild side, this is the climb for you.



Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong

LEFT TOP TO BOTTOM: CHAPMAN CHOW/JUNSPASH; HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY (HTA)/TOR JOHNSON; KEN RUSSELL SALVADOR/CC-BY-2.0; HONG KONG TOURISM BOARD; RIGHT: CAMILLA RUTHERFORD



MOUNT MAUNGANUI — TAURANGA, NEW ZEALAND

The distinctive conical shape of the 760-foot-tall Mount Maunganui, just a short walk from the pier, issues an immediate challenge to the energetic cruiser. The mount (more of a hill, really) is the plug of a long-extinct volcano, and it's ringed by steep trails that wind their way through lush, subtropical forest up to the top.

As you puff your way up and down the mount, you're kept going by the fabulous views all around—the Bay of Plenty sparkling in the sun, gorgeous beaches on two sides, and the ship down below you.

Alternatively, if you don't feel like climbing every mountain, there's also a lovely (and less exhausting) trail that takes you around the base of the mountain. ●

