

Michelle Michael-Pecora shares two of her favourite ways to escape from the winter cold. The unspoilt island destination of Niue and the latest trending cruise holidays close to home will make you want to pack your bags straight away.

Secrets for winter getaways

Photos: The Niue Tourism Office & TravelManagers

Limu Pools on Niue.

As the seasons change, the days become shorter and the mercury drops, many of us can't wait to escape the winter chill and chase the sun. Two holiday ideas that are close to home will help you beat the winter blues — the laid-back island paradise of Niue, and a selection of hand-picked cruise holidays for the whole family.

SECRETS OF NIUE

You've probably heard of all the usual suspects for a South Pacific holiday, but there is a unique and untouched destination to get you away from the madding crowd, escape the constant pull of emails and mobile phones and truly unwind. The island offers fantastic water activities — it's a diver's and snorkeler's paradise — sumptuous seafood, lava caves, whales, dolphins, turtles, coconut crabs and much more awaits you in undiscovered, unspoilt and unbelievable Niue.

While Niue remains largely off the tourist radar, its location in the centre of a triangle of Polynesian islands 2,400 kilometres north-east of New Zealand makes it an easy destination for travellers looking for a short winter break. Air New Zealand has flights via Auckland to the main city of Alofi from \$900* per person ex-Sydney, and in just under seven hours you can be exploring your little piece of tropical heaven.

The ideal time to visit Niue is in the dry season between July and October, when temperatures average between 20°C and 27°C. It is also the humpback whale migration season, so you can grab the opportunity to witness these majestic mammals in the wild. And if you are adventurous you can even swim with them, as Niue is one of only a handful of places in the world where this is allowed. To make the most of the beauty of the island, a seven-day itinerary is the perfect way to explore at your own pace.

Great value for money with packages including airfares, transfers, seven nights' accommodation, breakfasts daily, round island tour with village visits, in-water interaction with humpback whales, lava cave exploration and a snorkelling trip start from \$2300* per person, twin share.

LATEST TRENDING CRUISES CLOSE TO HOME

Cruise holidays have been very popular with Australians for the past few years, and with good reason. There really is a cruise to suit everyone. With a growing selection of cruise ships now visiting our shores, from inexpensive to all-inclusive luxury, you can unpack once and take your pick of some of the many dining, activity and entertainment choices available aboard as you cruise the winter blues away while discovering these emerging destinations.

Tips for a carefree winter escape

- Pack for different destinations and climates, including stopovers.
- Take layover clothes in your carry-on luggage to suit all weather.
- Pashminas/scarves are great for extra warmth and take up less space than a bulky jacket.
- Dress in layers of clothing, especially if you are travelling through a colder destination on your way to a warm one.
- Swimwear — stock up during warmer months as retail outlets don't stock swimwear in winter, or check online sales.
- Sunblock — don't forget to take the high factor sunblock with you, even if travelling to a cold destination.
- Wet weather gear with a hood — make sure it's waterproof and compact.
- Scarf, hat and gloves create warmth but take up little space when packing.
- Space bags or travel cubes to pack for each destination are a great way to get organised with different types of clothing, and also double up for leftover dirty laundry. They're also great for those purchases you won't wear until you get back, such as a long coat which can compact down to next to nothing.

Tips for novice cruisers

- Start with a small local cruise such as the South Pacific options.
- Plan ahead. Pre-book as many activities, spa treatments, alternative dining options and shore excursions as you can before you board. They book out fast and you can always cancel them once aboard.
- Pack appropriately with swim gear, sarongs, evening wear and resort wear. No luggage limits apply.
- Read the daily activity newsletter and plan events that interest you. Make the necessary arrangements (over a cocktail of course).
- Have a go at EVERYTHING! Even Bingo!
- Beverage packages, when on offer, are excellent value. Drinks can be pricey on board.
- Watch out for the spa deals and discounts, which are normally on sea days or towards the end of the cruise.
- Put all valuables in your cabin safe. All you need aboard as currency is your cruise card on a lanyard around your neck. Lanyard fashion rules!
- Don't miss the tender or coach transfer back to the ship. They WILL sail without you!
- Pack a small carry-on to take with you to carry all essentials, including any medication, as your large bags may take time to get to your cabin.



Avaviki Cave on Niue.



Biking Niue.

NORTH QUEENSLAND/BARRIER REEF

This is a great way to visit your own tropical backyard, and winter offers the most favourable climate of the year to see many places and islands.

A sample cruise package ex-Sydney for 10 nights starts from \$1,599* per person in a twin-share outside cabin.

ASIA

There are lots to choose from as so many cruise ships now visit Asia. Some new destinations include river cruising in Burma, China and Vietnam. Popular destinations include Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea and Japan.

A sample cruise for 10 nights from Hong Kong to Singapore, visiting Taiwan, Philippines and Malaysia, starts from \$1,550* per person in a twin-share outside cabin.

HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Who needs a reason to visit Hawaii? See most of the Hawaiian Islands in one hit on a regular seven-night cruise ex-Waikiki every Saturday, year round. A clever idea is to combine a land package for some shopping and sightseeing in Waikiki before and after the cruise.



A Humpback whale and calf visit the waters of Niue.

A sample seven-night cruise round trip from Waikiki starts from \$1,800* per person in a twin-share outside cabin.

Repositioning cruises to or from Hawaii from Sydney offer great value packages, with a one-way airfare and lots of sea days for relaxing.

They are also a great way to see the islands of Tahiti, without all the expense as a bonus. A sample cruise for 18 nights starts from \$4,500*

per person in a twin-share outside cabin ex-Hawaii to Sydney.

These are just a few suggestions to help you escape the winter blues close to home. □

*Conditions apply.

Michelle Michael-Pecora is a personal/cruise manager with over 33 years' travel industry experience, and is a Master Accredited Cruise Specialist.
michellem@travelmanagers.com.au M: 0413 451 720