



THE RISE OF THE SOLO SAILOR

Is this the single supplement's swan song? As cruise lines drop surcharges and add sole occupancy cabins, solo cruisers are finally getting the space – and the savings – they deserve, writes Fiona Harper.

Don't you get lonely being on a cruise by yourself?" a friend asks when I share my excitement about an upcoming cruise to Antarctica. "You're very brave," she offers. "Not at all," I laugh. "I love cruising on my own."

Cruising solo offers the best of both worlds, I'd argue. For example, on a cruise ship I have a ready-made social outlet when I want to meet people, share a meal, chat over a pre-dinner drink or team up with a newfound buddy to explore ports ashore. When I want 'me time' I have the luxury of a cabin all to myself, a private home away from home – and no-one to crowd my space.

But my favourite pastime afloat is to find a comfy armchair with a view, with a book at hand, not too far from a cocktail bar or tea station, and simply soak up the ever-changing scene all the way to the horizon.

It's a common misconception that travelling solo is lonely. That somehow solo travellers, minus the accoutrement of a travel partner, are missing out.

In fact, the opposite is true.

The State of the Cruise Industry Report 2025 from Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) notes that 12 per cent of the 34.6 million cruise travellers in 2024 travelled solo. That's double the number of solo cruisers in 2023.

Cruisers are getting younger, too. CLIA's stats suggest 46.5 years is the average age of a cruise traveller, with approximately 67 per cent of cruise travellers being Gen X or younger.

"Solo travel has been increasing in many areas of tourism, and cruising has been no exception," says Joel Katz, Managing Director of CLIA.

"It's now more common for single travellers to holiday and cruise on their own, including both young and older age groups. As a result, we're seeing more cruise line initiatives like single-supplement waivers and cabins designed specifically for solo guests."

Cruising is particularly well suited to solo travellers. As cruise lines adapt their onboard programs and cabin configurations to reflect passenger demand, solo cruisers are enjoying privacy and solitude, along with

opportunities for social engagement on their terms.

But that's the thing about cruising solo. You can be as social or as solitary as you like. Want to make new friends? Dine with different people every night? Dance 'til dawn or take a shore excursion with your new besties? Cruising has you covered.

Or perhaps you're more the introverted type. Someone who balks at communal dining (*helloooo room service*) and would rather curl up on a sofa with a longed-to-read book your only companion. Cruising has your book, sorry, your back, here too.

Oh, don't get me wrong. It's not that solo cruisers are anti-social creatures. It's more that cruising offers such diversity that everyone is encouraged to live their best life onboard, in whatever style that looks like.

Cruise lines offer communal spaces along with inclusive activity programs. Some even have meet-ups to connect unaccompanied travellers with others rolling solo. Though in truth, I find one of the joys of cruising on my own is that there is no expectation to mingle at all. It's easy to flit in and out of social settings as I feel like it. Or alternatively, take the opportunity to read, to write, or learn a new skill (like joining language, craft or cooking lessons).

But what I love most is savouring the joy of being on the ocean. Watching waves is a form of meditation that soothes my soul. Balcony cabins are particularly enjoyable, especially on longer voyages where sea days form part of the ocean-going rhythm.

I know that sea days don't float everyone's boat. But this is when solo cruisers have the edge. Sea days feel like a luxury where there is no expectation to go anywhere or do anything. When sun loungers are claimed early, when poolside bartenders are on speed dial and the spa is booked out from dawn to well after dark. Sea days are little snatches of luxury to do whatever the heck you want. Or not.

"For anyone who enjoys solitude at sea there are always quiet spaces among the cafes, libraries or private balconies, and opportunities to indulge in things like spa treatments," Katz suggests.



01 Going solo with Explora is a joy
02 Ponant values solo cruisers @ Julien Fabro
03 Dining on Azamara Aquilina © Tim Faircloth
04 Oceania's Solo Veranda Stateroom
05 Uniworld offers solo rates

So, with solo travel predicted to grow by around 16 per cent year-on-year, why are solo travellers still penalised with single supplements? Some cruise companies are more solo-friendly than others, dropping single supplements or equipping cabins for sole occupancy. Others offer special sailings eliminating surcharges or will 'pair up' solo travellers to help reduce the cost.

Small ship expedition-style cruising with its relaxed, convivial vibe, is particularly suited for solo travellers. Heritage Expeditions offers dedicated solo staterooms, as well the option to share a twin or triple cabin with others. Hurtigruten has a year-round offering on selected voyages where solo travellers occupy a twin cabin at the same price as double occupancy. Coral Expeditions has a single traveller program with

supplements waived on many scheduled voyages year-round.

Azamara waives surcharges for selected sailings, as does Aurora Expeditions for 2026 voyages, while Uniworld Cruises provides solo rates for its intimate river cruise experiences.

Solo travellers journeying with Ponant have the choice of single cabins, shared cabins or a double stateroom at no extra cost, thanks to the 'No Single Supplement' offer applied on many itineraries.

"Solo travellers have become a vibrant community of explorers who value their independence as much as their connection with others," says Deb Corbett, Ponant's CEO Asia-Pacific. "This aligns perfectly with our ethos and the friendly, communal spirit of our small ships and human-scale vision. We see a natural fit and we want to nurture it."

Corbett says Ponant "will always offer a large selection of sailings across all destinations with a free solo supplement, and that makes a big difference for the solo traveller community who often felt discriminated against in the past."

Explora Journeys also offers zero supplement for solo occupancy on select journeys, and the line's 'Perfect Hosts' (as dedicated butlers are known) are always on hand should solo travellers require a dinner companion, dance partner or opponent in a game of Scrabble.

Of the larger operators, Norwegian Cruise Line has increased its solo cabin numbers across its fleet and Oceania, Virgin Voyages, Cunard and Holland America have all enthusiastically joined the solo cruiser party.

Today, when it comes to cruising, nothing's stopping you going it alone. ♦