

8 of the best... secret ports

Steer clients to quiet spots away from the crowds to discover new destinations, writes **Jane Archer**



CESME, TURKEY

Kusadasi has morphed from a Turkish town on the doorstep of Roman Ephesus into a tourist honeypot, with people, cars and a maze of shops cruisers must negotiate to get back to their ship. Cue Cesme (pronounced with a 'ch'), a port two hours to the north that few have heard of and even fewer ships visit. That makes it manna from heaven for those seeking to escape the crowds. Ashore, there's a grand Ottoman castle, loads of fountains (cesme is the Turkish word for 'fountain', another legacy of the Ottomans), plus beaches, spas and restaurants with views over the pretty harbour.

Go with: SeaDream Yacht Club is visiting Cesme on a seven-day Turkey & the Greek Isles cruise round-trip from Piraeus (Athens), departing September 19, 2026. seadream.com

PICURES: Shutterstock/Kadogan, Zdenek Matyas Photography, Veneris Vas, Enrico Baron Studio



BUTRINT, ALBANIA

Everyone knows Pompeii, the ancient Roman city destroyed when Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD79, but go in summer and you'll see tour groups rather than ruins. Far better to visit Butrint, a Unesco World Heritage Site in Albania, 11 miles south of the town of Sarande. It dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who called it Buthrotum, and features temples, an aqueduct and a mostly intact amphitheatre, as well as basilicas and castles that were added later, offering layer upon layer of history.

Go with: National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions (sold via Fred Holidays in the UK) visits Butrint from Sarande on four eight-day Ancient Mediterranean cruises from Lavrio (Athens) to Split this summer. fredholidays.co.uk



KAVALA, GREECE

Head about two hours east along the coast from Thessaloniki (itself one of the Mediterranean's great unknowns, despite being Greece's second-largest city) and you come to Kavala, a small city with a picturesque harbour and an old town that climbs up the hill from the port to an Ottoman fortress at the top. It's a steep drag to get up there, but worth it for the far-reaching views. Even better, exploring the winding streets on the way back down to sea level brings you out beneath an unexpected and spectacular arched aqueduct that looks as good as when it was built in the early-16th century, again by the Ottomans.

Go with: Explora Journeys is visiting Kavala on a seven-night Journey to Cultural Cauldrons cruise from Piraeus (Athens) to Istanbul, departing August 16. explorajourneys.com



MEDITERRANEAN

FOLEGANDROS, GREECE

Picture, if you can, Santorini before developers coated the cliffs with gleaming white-and-blue villas, the crowds moved in and prices went through the roof – and you have the Greek island of Folegandros. As with Santorini, small ships can call into the harbour, but others need to tender. Once ashore the only way is up, initially to Chora, which has narrow streets and traditional tavernas to explore. A further steep climb brings you to the little Church of Panagia. Set off an hour or so before sunset to grab a good spot to watch the sun dip below the horizon – just like on Santorini but with no one in the way of the photos.

Go with: Variety Cruises (sold through Seafarer Cruises) visits Folegandros on seven-night Jewels of the Cyclades cruises round-trip from Piraeus (Athens). seafarercruises.co.uk

PALAMÓS, SPAIN

In the Spanish province of Girona, Palamós has a deep-water harbour and wants to attract more cruise business, but so far only a handful of lines, including Seabourn, Marella Cruises and Silversea, have been tempted. Most have preferred to stick with Barcelona, some 90 minutes to the west, because that's where cruisers want to be. Of course, if they knew about it, many would enjoy visiting Palamós instead. It has pleasant beaches and medieval streets to explore and is within easy reach of Girona, a city with Roman walls, Jewish history and a spectacular cathedral. In nearby Figueres, you can visit the birthplace – now a museum – of Salvador Dalí.

Go with: Marella Cruises visits Palamós on seven-night Treasures of the Mediterranean voyages round-trip from Palma, Majorca, this summer.
tui.co.uk/cruise



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PERGAMON, TURKEY

If you're thinking of the museum in Berlin, you're in the wrong country. This Pergamon is an ancient Greek citadel in Turkey, about 40 minutes from the port of Dikili. Perched high on a hill, it's accessed by a cable car and houses the remains of the Pergamon Altar, a monumental structure about 12 metres tall that was approached by a grand stairway and decorated with friezes depicting legends of gods and kings (which are now in the aforementioned Pergamon Museum in Berlin). At ground level, wander around the Askleion or ancient 'hospital', where hot and cold baths, mud, herbs and massages were used to treat illnesses and ailments.

Go with: Oceania Cruises visits Pergamon from Dikili on an 11-day Hellenic Havens cruise from Istanbul to Athens, departing October 16.
oceaniacruises.com



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7 AGRIGENTO, ITALY

The archaeological site of Agrigento in Sicily is one of those places you don't know you want to visit until you go – and then you are bowled over. The highlight is the Valley of the Temples – seven temples and an amphitheatre – dating back to the 5th century BC when this was a thriving Greek town. The site gets busy, but because it's a two-hour drive from almost anywhere on Sicily and just 12 minutes from Porto Empedocle, where only small ships can dock, cruisers who visit early in the day will have it pretty much to themselves. Agrigento town itself has a faded elegance and is this year's Italian Capital of Culture.

Go with: Windstar Cruises visits Agrigento from Porto Empedocle on a 10-day Sicilian Splendors round-trip voyage from Civitavecchia (Rome) in September this year. windstarcruises.co.uk

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URBINO, ITALY

This is one for lovers of art, architecture, history and culture: the fascinating city of Urbino, some 60 miles from the port of Ancona, is not only the birthplace of Raphael and the Renaissance but is also guarded by towering walls built to designs by Leonardo da Vinci. Inside these well-preserved walls are narrow cobbled streets, the home – now a museum – of Raphael and the beautiful Ducal Palace, which dates back to the 15th century and houses the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche and a priceless collection of masterpieces by the likes of Titian, Piero della Francesca and Raphael. A guided tour takes in all the must-see pieces.

Go with: Regent Seven Seas Cruises visits Urbino from Ancona on a 10-night cruise from Venice to Civitavecchia (Rome), departing October 15, 2025. rssc.com