

Right Time Right Place

MIDNIGHT SUN

Up all night

If you dream of an endless summer, the midnight sun is a gift from nature you won't want to miss. But where are the best places to enjoy it?

Amelia Glean finds out...

You check your watch. Then you check it again. Yes, it's well past midnight – but here you are, out on deck, basking in sunshine.

That's what you can expect if you venture north of the Arctic Circle in summer, when the sun just kisses the horizon before climbing back into the sky. These 'white nights' take some getting used to, but they're something everyone should see at least once – and a cruise is a wonderful way of doing it, with your cabin close at hand when sleep finally beckons.

How does it work? Well, we were all taught at school that the earth orbits the sun while rotating on its own axis, thus providing all manner of marvellous things such as the four seasons and night and day. But the axis is tilted – which at the earth's northern and southern extremes causes endless nights in winter and incredibly long days in summer. Stark white daylight turns into warm evening hues, but still the sun remains in plain sight.

The light from the midnight sun is different from daylight. It has a magical quality to it, making you feel as if you're on the edge of a perpetual sunset that never quite arrives. For some, that makes the Arctic the place to be during the summer. And why not? Basking in ➤

Good as gold: Svalbard's bright nights are perfect for spotting Polar bears



never-ending sunlight and discovering wondrously unspoiled landscapes can work miracles for the body and the mind, thanks to increased energy levels and a good old-fashioned vitamin D boost. So if you want to experience this amazing natural phenomenon, where should you book your next summer cruise?

NORWEGIAN MAGIC

Home to mountains, glaciers and deep coastal fjords, Norway is well known for outdoor activities such as fishing, hiking, dog-sledding and skiing – all offered on shore excursions – and it's the perfect place to experience the eternal dawn. Much of the country

enjoys all-night daylight for around 76 days between May and July, and it has practically copyrighted the title 'Land of the Midnight Sun'.

The further north you go, the more midnight sunshine you will experience. The island of Svalbard is the usual starting point for Arctic expeditions, and here the sun never sets from late April until late August.

Wildlife-spotting is a great way to spend the extended daylight hours, so look out for Arctic foxes, as well as whales in the surrounding waters. But the sight everyone most wants to see is the polar bear – and in Svalbard your chances are good.

Your ship's crew will always be on the lookout, and a number of lines offer Zodiac tours for the perfect opportunity to photograph these magnificent 'Kings of the Arctic' in their natural home.

Popular ports of call Longyearbyen (Svalbard), Lofoten Islands, Honningsvåg, Tromsø

GLORIOUS GREENLAND

Cross the Norwegian Sea and you'll find yourself in Greenland, the world's largest island and one of its last wildernesses, where 85 per cent of the land is covered in ice. When the summer months bring eternal sunshine, the locals take full advantage. Spending as much time as possible outdoors, they seem to gain energy from the extra daylight. So why not journey to this Danish territory yourself and witness fishing boats filing into the harbour one by one after a full day at sea, or stand on deck to admire mountains cloaked in every shade of gold – all of it well after your usual bed-time?

Cruising provides plenty of chances to meet the Greenlanders, as most of them live along the fjord-lined coast. The northernmost towns visited by cruise ships include Qaanaaq, Upernavik and Uummannaq,



Eternal sunshine: The summer sky never darkens in Helsinki

Red sails, no sunset: The climax of St Petersburg's White Nights festival



TOP TIP

TAKE A QUALITY EYE MASK – CABIN CURTAINS OFTEN LET IN CHINKS OF LIGHT, MAKING IT HARD TO SLEEP



Disko lights: The midnight sun twinkles on the ice in Greenland's famous bay

all of which bathe in the midnight sun from late April through to late August. One of the great experiences in this part of the world is a late-night sailing through waters dotted with sparkling ice. Whether you're weaving between the mammoth 'bergs outside the Ilulissat glacier, or navigating the northeast coast aboard an expedition ship, the sight of the midnight sun playing among the ridged and angled ice is once seen, never forgotten.

Further south, the capital city of Nuuk is something of an adventure centre, offering plentiful opportunities for shore activities such as fly-fishing, sea angling, hiking, climbing and paragliding. But because of its latitude, you'll need a cruise that calls at Nuuk between early June and mid-July to guarantee an experience of the never-setting sun.

Popular ports of call Nuuk, Sisimiut, Narsaq, Uummannaq

TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

There are many reasons to visit this country, and more than 81 million tourists did just that in 2017, drawn by its literary history, art, music and incredible churches. But it's less well known that Russia is also blessed with 'white nights'.

The port city of St Petersburg is a headline attraction on Baltic cruises, and most lines offer at least one overnight mooring, with some ships even staying for two. Comprising more than 45 islands connected by hundreds of bridges, St Petersburg offers a mystical

charm in the summer, when the sun touches its ornate architecture with golden light. And from late May until mid-July the city hosts a White Nights festival of cultural events.

While it doesn't technically see the midnight sun – being too far south – St Petersburg never gets dark in summer. A milky twilight descends between mid-June and early July, and the locals have celebrated this end to the long winter since the 16th century. Today the White Nights festival permeates almost every corner of the city, with the Mariinsky Theatre, New Theatre and Concert Hall hosting opera and ballet performances throughout June. The festival culminates in Scarlet Sails, a spectacular waterborne event including a mock pirate battle in the harbour and an extravagant firework display.

Many cruise lines visit during the festival, with theatre excursions included, though it's not difficult to book independently online, if you prefer.

Another way to experience the midsummer sun is on a river cruise from Saint Petersburg to Moscow, which will also include one or two nights in each city.

Popular ports of call Saint Petersburg

ACROSS THE FINNISH LINE

The whole of Finland enjoys white nights in June and July, and that includes the main cruise port of Helsinki. Late in the day, the sun dips just briefly below the horizon before rising again, blurring

the boundaries between fading night and dawning day. The best time to visit is around the summer solstice (21 June), especially if you'd like to join in a traditional midsummer party. And single ladies – you may be in luck. According to midnight-sun mythology, when a young maiden collects seven flowers under her pillow on midsummer night – the longest day of the year – she'll see her future fiancé in her dreams (here's hoping!).

If your ship overnights in Helsinki on the appropriate date, you can join the locals for a nocturnal picnic – a popular spot is Sibelius Park, named after Finland's great classical composer.

Helsinki being a coastal city, a night-time swim is another option – if you're feeling brave – as the water begins to warm up from June onwards, also allowing for a wide variety of outdoor activities including fly-fishing and canoeing (both available on shore tours). Alternatively, you can simply relax and enjoy the Finnish passion for taking a sauna – at any time of the day or night.

If you happen to be the party type and you fancy going clubbing, be warned – emerging from a dark nightclub at 3am into full daylight can be a disorienting experience. But don't worry, you wouldn't be the first to swap sleep for an after-party on the beach – in full sunlight, of course. Just make sure you get back to your ship in time.

Popular ports of call Helsinki ⚓

'Basking in never-ending sunlight and discovering wondrously unspoiled landscapes can work miracles for the body and the mind'

GET ON BOARD

NORWAY 9-night 'In the Realm of the Polar Bear' expedition cruise, round-trip from Longyearbyen (Svalbard), departing 3 June 2019, from £4,871 (includes internal flights from Oslo), hurtigruten.co.uk

GREENLAND 7-night 'Best of the West' cruise from Kangerlussuaq to Ilulissat via Disko Bay, Qeqertarsuaq and Egi Glacier, departing 10 June 2019, from £1,639, greenlandtours.com

RUSSIA 11-night river cruise from Moscow to Saint Petersburg via Uglich and Yaroslavl, departing 2 July 2019, from £2,458, bestussiancruises.com

FINLAND 14-night 'Viking Homelands' cruise from Stockholm to Bergen via Helsinki, Saint Petersburg, Berlin and Copenhagen, departing 29 August 2019, from £5,190, vikingcruises.co.uk