

World Travel Research Guide

Prepared for Mark Fugel · July 29, 2026

Focus: maximum countries, months-to-a-year duration, solo traveler, budget-minded / no-frills, independent port exploring — the RV-nomad style, applied to the ocean.

1. The Two Flavors of “World Cruise”

Traditional world cruise. One ship does one grand loop, roughly 100–130 nights, departing every January. You book the whole thing (or large segments) 18–24 months ahead. January 2027 sailings are what is bookable now; MSC's 2027 world cruise is already sold out. January 2028 sailings open for booking late 2026 into early 2027 — which makes right now the natural research window for a 2028 departure.

Residential / segment ship. A ship on a continuous multi-year circumnavigation. You buy a segment (35+ days), a year, or a cabin outright, and you can join and leave as life allows. More “RV park at sea” than “formal night.” Villa Vie Odyssey is the affordable one; The World and Storylines are the luxury/vaporware end.

The DIY third option. Stitch together repositioning cruises (transatlantic, transpacific) at \$50–80/day with your own land stays between. Cheapest per day, most planning overhead, no single-booking safety net. Same trade-off as boondocking vs. a campground membership.

2. 2027 World Cruises — Side by Side

Line / Ship	Nights	Departs	Coverage	From (pp, dbl occ)	Style
Fred. Olsen Borealis	98	Jan 2027 Southampton	World loop	~\$18k inside	Older British crowd, very low-key
Cunard Queen Victoria	109	Jan 10 Southampton	5 continents, 25+ ports	~\$23k inside	Formal, traditional
Princess Coral Princess	129	Jan 6 Ft. Lauderdale	61 ports, 3 continents	~\$22–30k (promos incl. drinks/ Wi-Fi/air)	Mainstream, best value
Holland America Volendam	128	Jan 5 Ft. Lauderdale	World loop, port-intensive	mid-\$20ks inside	Mellow, destination- focused
MSC Magnifica	121	Jan 5 Genoa	25 countries, 45 ports	SOLD OUT 2027	European, casual
Viking World Voyage IV	153	Jan 9 Los Angeles	37 countries	~\$68k (incl. biz air, credits)	Premium, adults-only
Seabourn Quest	145	Jan 5 Miami	19 countries, 67 ports	~\$81k	Luxury
Regent Splendor	140	Jan 11 Miami	6 continents, 71 ports	~\$91k (all-incl., 486 excursions)	Ultra-luxury
Oceania Vista	up to 244	Jan 6 Miami	100+ ports	~\$108k full / ~\$53k for 127-day segment	Premium, longest itinerary afloat

Line / Ship	Nights	Departs	Coverage	From (pp, dbl occ)	Style
Villa Vie Odyssey	35+ /segment	Rolling, worldwide	147 countries, 425 ports over 3.5-yr loop	~\$14–26k SINGLE per multi-month segment	Residential, casual, full-time travelers

Prices are advertised “from” fares per person at double occupancy unless noted; solo pricing is usually much higher — see section 4.

3. The Shortlist for Your Style

Best fit on paper: Villa Vie Odyssey (residential). 924-passenger ship on a 3.5-year, 425-port, 147-country loop. Join for a segment, stay months or a year, leave when you want. Casual community of full-time travelers and retirees; no formal nights; real single-cabin pricing. This is the only product that literally sells “a few months to a year.”

- **Caveats to research hard:** young company, one older ship (ex-Fred Olsen Braemar, built 1993); rocky delayed 2024 launch; independent residents report rust, plumbing glitches, skipped ports, and the company has been accused of scrubbing criticism from its Facebook group and cancelling one critical resident's contract. Read the independent sources in section 7 before paying anything.
- **Financial safety:** pay by credit card, never wire; don't prepay beyond the minimum; understand the refund terms if the ship misses ports or the company folds.

Best traditional value: Princess Coral Princess or Holland America Volendam. Both ~128-night January loops in the low-to-mid \$20ks interior before solo supplement. HAL skews quieter and more destination-focused (its world cruise is a 25+ year institution); Princess is livelier and has run aggressive promos including drinks, Wi-Fi, and airfare. Either is the safe, established choice.

Cheapest real world cruise: Fred. Olsen Borealis, 98 nights from Southampton, ~£13,999 (~\$18k). Small, unflashy, older crowd — genuinely un-fancy, which matches your brief, but UK-centric (flights to/from Southampton on you).

Most countries for serious money: Oceania Vista's 244-day Epic Global Adventure (100+ ports). Only worth it if maximum coverage in one shot outranks budget.

4. The Solo-Traveler Math (Read This First)

Advertised fares assume two people per cabin. Traveling alone, most lines charge a **single supplement of 150–200%** of the per-person fare — a “\$22k” world cruise can be \$33–44k solo. This one number changes the ranking of every option, so it's the first question to ask about any sailing.

- Ask every line/agent: “What is the single supplement on this specific sailing, and do you have dedicated solo cabins?” Supplements are sometimes reduced (110–150%) on world cruises because they're hard to fill.
- Villa Vie quotes real single prices (~\$14–26k per multi-month segment) — a big part of why it pencils out well for you.
- Fred. Olsen and Cunard both carry some dedicated solo cabins — limited supply, book early.

5. What It Actually Costs (Beyond the Fare)

Item	Realistic range (4-month trip)	Notes
Base fare (interior, mainstream)	\$18–30k	Before solo supplement
Solo supplement	+\$0–20k	THE variable — ask first
Gratuities/service charges	\$2–3k	Sometimes bundled in promos
Shore excursions	\$0–15k	Your DIY-walking style keeps this near zero
Visas	\$500–1,500	India, Brazil, Australia etc.; line advises
Travel medical + evacuation insurance	\$1,500–4k	Non-negotiable at trip length; age-rated
Flights/hotels bracketing cruise	\$500–3k	Depends on home port
Onboard spending, laundry, Wi-Fi	\$1–3k	Check what promos include

Bottom line: plan \$25–40k all-in solo at the budget end of traditional lines, or a similar ballpark for ~6 months on Villa Vie. That's \$150–250/day — comparable to full-time RV life once fuel, camps, food, and the van's upkeep are counted.

6. Planning Checklist and Timeline

Now – next 6 months (research phase):

- Decide the flavor: one grand loop vs. join-and-leave segments vs. DIY repositioning legs.
- Read the honest sources in section 7; lurk the Cruise Critic world-cruise roll calls — people currently aboard post candid day-by-day reports.
- Get quotes from a world-cruise specialist travel agent (e.g., Cruise Specialists). Same fare as booking direct, but they add shipboard credit, prepaid gratuities, and handle visa choreography. Always ask them the solo-supplement question first.

At booking (12–24 months out):

- Jan 2028 traditional departures open late 2026/early 2027 — deposits are refundable-ish windows; early booking gets cabin choice and the best promos.
- Passport: 2+ years validity and plenty of blank pages. Renew first if close.

- Trip insurance: buy within 14–21 days of deposit to lock in pre-existing-condition waivers.

3–6 months before sailing:

- Visas per the line's country list (some arrange group visas onboard).
- Meds: 6+ months of prescriptions; letter from doctor for controlled meds.
- Money: no-foreign-transaction-fee card + backup card; notify banks of the itinerary.
- Mail/domicile: your SD domicile + Americas Mailbox setup is already exactly what world cruisers scramble to build — you're done here.

Your specific timing: the booking horizon works in your favor — researching now, deciding over the next year, sailing 2028 fits naturally around your responsibilities in NJ without forcing any decision today.

7. Honest Review Sources (The Whole Point)

Forums — where the unvarnished truth lives:

- Cruise Critic message boards — the world-cruise “roll call” threads for each sailing: passengers post live from the ship, including complaints. <https://boards.cruisecritic.com>
- Reddit r/Cruise — search “world cruise”; brutally honest, no advertiser pressure. <https://www.reddit.com/r/Cruise/>
- Cruise Critic member reviews (real passengers, per ship) — e.g. Holland America: <https://www.cruisecritic.com/cruise/holland-america/reviews>

Independent reviewers / bloggers (not sponsored by lines):

- Gary Bembridge, “Tips for Travellers” — veteran, even-handed YouTube reviewer; strong on what long cruises are really like day to day. <https://www.tipsfortravellers.com>
- Emma Cruises — budget-focused, transparency-first YouTuber; publishes exactly what trips cost her. <https://emmacruises.com>
- Cruise Mummy — plain-English cost breakdowns, incl. the real cost of a world cruise: <https://www.cruisemummy.co.uk/how-much-a-world-cruise-costs/>
- Roaming Around the World — how to do a world cruise cheap, incl. the repositioning-stitch strategy: <https://www.roamingaroundtheworld.com/cheap-world-cruise/>

Villa Vie Odyssey specifically — read all three perspectives:

- Joe Bauers' Substack — the CRITICAL one: independent writing on Odyssey's problems (rust, plumbing, skipped ports, criticism being scrubbed). <https://joebauers1.substack.com/p/villa-vie>
- villavieodyssey.com — independent resident's ongoing blog (work-from-ship perspective, not company-run): <https://villavieodyssey.com>
- CNN: “A year at sea” — balanced journalism on resident Sharon Lane after 12 months aboard: <https://www.cnn.com/travel/villa-vie-odyssey-cruise-ship-sharon-lane-one-year-on>
- Cruise Critic editor's review of the ship itself: <https://www.cruisecritic.com/cruise/villa-vie-residences/villa-vie-odyssey>
- Porthole magazine feature (friendly but notes the no-luxury reality): <https://porthole.com/villa-vie-odyssey-living-the-dream/>

Comparison / aggregate references:

- Cruise Critic — Best World Cruises overview (updated yearly): <https://www.cruisecritic.com/articles/best-world-cruises>
- 2027 World Cruise Mega-List — side-by-side prices and perks: <https://weoncruise.com/2027-world-cruise-mega-list/>
- Cruise Specialists — world-cruise specialist agency (get a quote, ask solo pricing): <https://www.cruisespecialists.com>
- Villa Vie official (know their pitch before comparing it to critics): <https://villavieresidences.com>

8. Ten Questions to Ask Before Booking Anything

- What is the single supplement on this exact sailing — and are there solo cabins?
- What's actually included: gratuities, Wi-Fi, drinks, laundry, any excursions?
- What's the deposit/refund schedule? When does the fare become non-refundable?
- Which countries on this route need visas I must arrange myself vs. group visas onboard?
- Can I book a segment instead of the full voyage, and what does per-segment pricing look like?
- What happens (compensation/rerouting) when ports get skipped — and how often did this ship skip ports last year?
- What are the medical facilities onboard, and what does the ship's doctor cost out of pocket?
- How is laundry handled on a 4-month trip (self-serve vs. paid service)?
- What's the internet really like mid-ocean (Starlink or older satellite), and what does it cost?
- For Villa Vie: what protects my money if the company ceases operating mid-segment?

9. Beyond Cruising: Alternative Ways to Travel the World

A cruise shows you 61 ports for a few hours each; land travel shows you 15 countries properly. These alternatives mostly cost LESS per month than a solo world cruise (\$6–10k/mo) and carry no single supplement. The hybrid most experienced solo travelers 60+ land on: slow nomading on an RTW flight backbone, with 2–3 small-group tours dropped in for the hard regions.

9a. Slow Nomading — monthly bases (best overall fit)

Live 4–8 weeks per city in a monthly furnished rental, explore outward, then move on. **\$2–4k/month all-in** in Latin America, SE Asia, Eastern Europe, Portugal. This is RV life with airplanes instead of the van — and your SD domicile/mail setup already solves the hard part.

- **Booking:** Airbnb monthly stays (30–50% discounts) is the workhorse; also Flatio and local furnished-apartment sites once in-country. Book the first month ahead, the rest on the ground.
- **Route logic:** follow weather and visa windows — e.g., Schengen Europe allows only **90 days in any 180** (the single most important rule in long-term travel planning); Mexico gives 180 days; Thailand 60+30; Vietnam 90-day e-visa.

9b. Round-the-World Flight Ticket — the backbone

- **AirTreks** (US specialist, 30+ years): custom multi-stop tickets mixing all alliances — 3–50 stops, typically **\$2,500–6,000 economy**, and for 5–7 stop routes usually CHEAPER than the alliances' own products. Start here. <https://airtreks.com>
- **oneworld Explorer** (priced by continents) and **Star Alliance RTW** (priced by mileage, 26–39k mi): book direct with online planners; one-direction travel, 12-month validity, ~\$3–6k economy. SkyTeam discontinued theirs in 2023. <https://www.oneworld.com> · <https://www.staralliance.com>
- Good comparison reading: [Thrifty Nomads RTW guide](#) and [Upgraded Points 2026 guide](#).

9c. Small-Group Tours for the Hard Regions (50+, solo-friendly)

- **Overseas Adventure Travel (O.A.T.)** — the standout for you: built for Americans 50+, average age mid-60s, groups max 16, and **25,000 designated solo spaces for 2026, 92% with NO single supplement**. Use for Egypt, Morocco, India, East Africa, Vietnam — places that are work to do solo. Typical 2–3 week trip \$3–6k. <https://www.oattravel.com>
- **Road Scholar** — 55+ education-focused nonprofit, lecture-rich itineraries, strong solo contingent. <https://www.roadscholar.org>
- **Intrepid Travel / G Adventures** — younger crowd (30s–50s), cheaper, more basic lodging; both excellent operators with big solo followings. <https://www.intrepidtravel.com> · <https://www.gadventures.com>

9d. House-Sitting — near-free lodging (TrustedHousesitters deep-dive)

TrustedHousesitters (THS) is the dominant platform: ~280,000 members in 140+ countries, deepest inventory in the UK, then US and Australia. Two-sided membership — owners list travel dates, sitters stay free in exchange for pet/home care; **no money changes hands between parties**.

<https://www.trustedhousesitters.com>

- **Cost (2026):** sitter plans \$129–259/yr. Basic/standard tiers now pay a ~\$12 booking fee PER SIT; the \$259 Premium tier waives it and adds owner-cancellation cover (\$150/night, max \$1,500/sit). If joining seriously, Premium is the one to buy. At even 20 sit-nights/year that's \$6–13/night lodging.
- **The real deal:** it's not free lodging — it's a job that pays in lodging. The pet is the point: mostly dogs (schedule-bound), then cats (the sweet spot — freedom to explore). House kept tidy, plants, mail. Only worth it if genuinely comfortable owning responsibility for someone's animal.
- **Competition:** hot cities (Lisbon, London, Paris) draw 20+ applications in hours. But long rural and shoulder-season sits go begging — and flexible retirees are the most in-demand sitters on the platform, because everyone else is chained to school holidays.
- **How to break in:** (1) full profile with ID verification, references, and an honest story — a public web presence like journeyswithjerseymark.com is instant credibility; (2) do 2–4 local NJ/NYC-area sits first — reviews are everything; (3) then target long-duration international sits where calendar flexibility wins; set saved-search alerts (standard tier and up) and apply early; (4) video-call every owner before accepting — “easygoing dog” sometimes isn't.
- **Honest gripes:** the per-sit fee soured the community; customer service is slow when things go wrong; the “insurance” is thinner than the branding implies — read the actual coverage.
- **Smaller alternatives:** Nomador (strong in France), MindMyHouse (\$29/yr), HouseCarers (Australia/NZ lean) — all a fraction of THS's inventory; most serious sitters run THS as primary.
<https://www.nomador.com> · <https://www.mindmyhouse.com>
- **Home exchange (different model):** HomeExchange (~\$220/yr) works even without a permanent home base via its points system. <https://www.homeexchange.com>
- Honest reviews: [Veggies Abroad \(sitter POV\)](#) · [House Sitters Guide 2026 pricing](#) · [My Vegan Travels \(3 years in\)](#)

9e. Overlanding — the direct translation of RV life

- **Overland truck expeditions:** Oasis Overland (UK; active, trips posted through 2028; 13 days to 30 weeks across Africa and Central Asia; ~\$100–150/day camping-style) and Intrepid's Africa overland line. Crowd skews 25–45 — you'd be the elder statesman. Dragoman, the other classic operator, closed.
<https://www.oasisoverland.co.uk> · <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/us/africa/overland>
- **Shipping Codi to Europe:** RORO ~\$3,500–4,500 each way + ~\$1,500 fees (e.g. via [Seabridge](#), the specialist Germans use, or US brokers). The vehicle may stay in the EU up to 6 months duty-free — **but YOU may only stay 90/180 in Schengen**, so the van's window outlasts yours; plan UK/Balkans/Morocco legs to reset. Europe's aire/stellplatz network is superb and cheap.
- **Buy-back campervan markets:** New Zealand and Australia have mature used-camper markets with dealer buy-back — a 3–6 month S. Hemisphere winter escape without shipping anything.

9f. Trains — the regional strategy

- Eurail Global Pass (senior discount ~10%), Japan Rail Pass, India by rail, the Andes routes. Best scenery-per-dollar there is, but regional — combine with 9a/9b. <https://www.eurail.com> · <https://www.jrailpass.com>
- Route-planning bible for every train on earth: [The Man in Seat 61](#) — independent, obsessively accurate, zero ads pressure.

9g. Health Insurance Abroad (applies to ALL options — Medicare stops at the border)

- **GeoBlue Voyager** — available to age 95, up to \$1M medical / \$500k evacuation; the gold standard network abroad. <https://www.geobluetravelinsurance.com>
- **IMG iTravelInsured Choice / GlobeHopper Multi-Trip Senior** — GlobeHopper is designed specifically to sit alongside Medicare for travelers 65+; annual multi-trip versions exist. <https://www.imglobal.com>
- Target at minimum \$100k medical + \$250k evacuation. Compare quotes at Squaremouth or InsureMyTrip before buying.

10. Spotlight: Iceland by Campervan (asked specifically)

Iceland has the most mature campervan-rental market in the world — it's the standard way to do the country, and it's pure Codiwomple: one Ring Road (Route 1, ~830 miles), sleep where the day ends, sunrises for free. **7–10 days minimum for the Ring Road; 14 lets you add the Westfjords or Snaefellsnes.**

The rental companies (all at Keflavik airport with free shuttles):

- **KuKu Campers** — the budget pick: ~€55/day low season to €130–150/day summer, free mileage, free extra driver, CDW included, famously irreverent. <https://www.kukucampers.is>
- **Happy Campers** — best value-to-comfort balance, well-insulated vans with heaters, strong service reputation. <https://happycampers.is>
- **CampEasy** — most 5-star-rated in Iceland; leads on insulated year-round vans (the choice if you'd go shoulder-season). <https://campeasy.com>
- **Go Campers** — the other value contender worth quoting. <https://gocampers.is> · Full 36-company comparison: <https://www.campervanplanet.com/best-campervan-rental-iceland>

Practical notes:

- Budget **\$100–200/day for the van in summer** (June–Aug = high season, book months ahead; May/Sep is the sweet spot: cheaper, fewer people, still drivable weather).
- **Sleeping in vehicles outside campsites is illegal** (since 2015) — use campsites, \$15–25/person/night, no reservations needed outside peak weekends. The Camping Card (~€180, campingcard.is) covers 28 nights at member sites for two.
- 2WD camper is fine for the Ring Road in summer; **4x4 required for Highland F-roads** or any winter/shoulder trip. Wind is the real hazard — hold doors, check road.is and vedur.is daily.
- Costs beyond the van: fuel is expensive (~\$8+/gal — the Ring Road burns ~\$400–500), groceries at Bónus/Krónan supermarkets keep food cheap; restaurants are brutal.
- Getting there: Icelandair flies Newark–Keflavik nonstop, ~5.5 hours — one of the easiest big trips you can stage from your mom's place in NJ. A 2-week shakedown here is the perfect test of whether international vanlife scratches the itch before committing to anything bigger.

11. Hostels + a Rail Pass: Starting with Japan (Kyoto)

The hostel-plus-train-pass pattern is the oldest and cheapest world-travel method there is, and **Japan is the single best country on earth to run it** — the safest large country for a solo traveler, spotless lodging at every price, trains that define the category, and a weak yen that has made it cheaper for Americans than it's been in decades. Kyoto as the anchor makes it a pilgrimage, not just a stop — build the trip around it and give it real time.

11a. Lodging — hostels are not what you think in Japan

- Japanese hostels and guesthouses are immaculate, quiet, and ALL ages — retirees are a normal sight, especially in Kyoto's traditional machiya (townhouse) guesthouses. Kyoto dorm beds run \$20–30; **private rooms in hostels/guesthouses ~\$30–60/night** — the sweet spot: hostel common-room sociability, hotel privacy.
- **Business hotels** (Toyoko Inn, APA, Dormy Inn) are the other budget workhorse: small spotless private rooms with bath, ~\$45–70/night, often with onsen baths (Dormy Inn). Mix these with guesthouses freely.
- **Do once each:** a night in a temple lodging (shukubo) on Mt. Koya — morning prayers with the monks; and one splurge night in a real ryokan with kaiseki dinner (~\$150–300) — in or near Kyoto, this is the one worth paying for.
- Booking: Hostelworld for hostels, Booking.com for guesthouses/business hotels, Japanese Guest Houses for ryokan/shukubo. <https://www.hostelworld.com> · <https://www.japaneseguesthouses.com>

11b. The rail pass math — the JR Pass is no longer automatic

- Since the 2023 price hike the nationwide **JR Pass costs ¥50,000/7 days, ¥80,000/14, ¥100,000/21** (~\$335/\$535/\$670). It only pays off with heavy long-distance travel: a Tokyo–Kyoto round trip ALONE no longer covers the 7-day pass. Another overseas-channel price rise is slated for Oct 2026 — if buying, buy through the official site before then.
- **For a Kyoto-centered trip, skip the national pass.** Buy the Tokyo–Kyoto shinkansen point-to-point (~¥14,000 each way), then use cheap regional passes: the JR Kansai-area passes (¥2,400–4,800) cover Kyoto–Nara–Osaka–Kobe day-tripping; the Kansai-Hiroshima pass adds the Hiroshima/Miyajima run if wanted.
- Get a **Suica/ICOCA card** (in Apple Wallet now) for all local trains, subways, buses, and even convenience stores — tap and forget. Seat61's Japan page is the planning bible: <https://www.seat61.com/japan.htm>

11c. A shape for the trip (3–4 weeks)

- Fly EWR/JFK → Tokyo nonstop (~14 hrs; United, ANA, JAL). US citizens get 90 days visa-free.
- Tokyo 4–5 days to land and absorb → shinkansen to **Kyoto as the long base: 7–10 days minimum**. The bucket-list city deserves slow mornings — Fushimi Inari at dawn before the crowds, the Philosopher's Path, Arashiyama bamboo grove early, an evening in Gion, temples at opening time (8 am beats 11 am by an order of magnitude).
- Day trips from Kyoto on the cheap Kansai passes: Nara (deer + Todai-ji), Uji (tea), Osaka (food, nightlife energy) — all under an hour.

- Then, if extending: Mt. Koya shukubo night → Hiroshima/Miyajima → loop back, or north to Kanazawa/Takayama for old-Japan streetscapes with fewer tourists.
- **Season matters in Kyoto more than anywhere:** late Mar–early Apr (cherry blossom) and Nov (foliage) are sublime AND mobbed — book lodging 3–6 months out. May–June and late Oct are the connoisseur windows. Avoid July–Aug (brutal humidity).

11d. Budget and the bigger pattern

- **Realistic solo budget: \$80–120/day** with private-room guesthouses/business hotels, rail, temple entries, and eating well (7-Eleven and Lawson konbini food is genuinely good; a great bowl of ramen is \$7). Dorm beds pull it under \$70/day. A full month in Japan: **~\$3,000–4,000 all-in including the flight** — a fraction of any cruise month.
- The same pattern then extends country by country: Korea next door (cheap ferries/flights, great rail), Taiwan, then SE Asia where costs halve again — or the Eurail version across Europe (section 9f). Japan first is the gentle on-ramp: hardest language barrier but the easiest everything else.

12. The Trip-Burst Master Plan (the model that fits your life)

The model: keep Codi as home base, park it for 2–4 weeks at a time, fly out of a good hub, do one country or region properly, come home, schedule the next. 4–6 trips a year = 12–20 weeks abroad annually for **\$15–25k/year total** — less than one solo world-cruise season, seeing far more, with your life intact between trips. It also flexes around family responsibilities in a way no 129-night booking ever can.

- **Parking Codi — already solved while NJ-based:** the electric RV spot at Mom's house in Manchester means Codi sits plugged in, batteries maintained, at zero cost during every trip. For later, back on the road: indoor/covered RV storage runs \$50–150/mo, and **Neighbor.com** is the purpose-built peer-to-peer marketplace for cheap driveway/barn RV storage (with payment and protection — use it over informal Nextdoor arrangements). <https://www.neighbor.com>
- **Hub logic:** from NJ, Newark (EWR) is one of the best international gateways in the country — nonstops to Tokyo, Reykjavik, Lisbon, all of Europe. On the road later, route trips through whichever hub Codi is near: MIA (Latin America), DFW/IAH, LAX/SEA (Asia/Pacific).

12a. Which countries, when — the seasonal matrix

Window	Best from the East Coast	Why then
Jan–Feb	Thailand/Vietnam/Cambodia · Patagonia · Costa Rica/Yucatán	SE Asia dry season; austral summer; escape NJ winter
Mar–Apr	Japan (cherry blossom) · Morocco · Portugal/Andalusia	Spring everywhere; blossom crowds need early booking
May–Jun	Kyoto (May window) · Greece/Croatia · Peru · Iceland (from late May)	Pre-crowd Mediterranean; Andes dry season opens
Jul–Aug	Iceland · Scotland/Ireland · Norway/Alps · East Africa safari	The only comfortable window for the far north; migration season
Sep–Oct	Italy/Greece shoulder · Turkey · Nepal · Kyoto (late Oct) · Balkans	Best overall travel month pair on the calendar
Nov–Dec	Egypt + Jordan · Rajasthan (India) · New Zealand · Vietnam	Desert countries finally cool; NZ spring

12b. A suggested two-year sequence

Year 1 — the on-ramp (easiest logistics first):

- **Trip 1: Iceland, 2 weeks (May or Sept)** — campervan shakedown, 5.5-hr flight, no jet lag to speak of, tests the whole model cheaply (§10).
- **Trip 2: Japan/Kyoto, 3 weeks (late Oct–mid Nov foliage, or May)** — the pilgrimage, done right with Kyoto as the long base (§11).
- **Trip 3: Portugal + Andalusia, 2–3 weeks (spring or fall)** — Lisbon nonstop from EWR, gentle, cheap, trains everywhere; the classic first-Europe-solo circuit.
- **Trip 4: SE Asia, 3–4 weeks (Jan–Feb)** — Bangkok in, Hanoi out; Thailand + Vietnam by train/bus/short hops; the cheapest weeks of travel you will ever do (~\$60–80/day).

Year 2 — the bigger swings:

- Peru (May–Sep) · Greece + Turkey (Sep–Oct) · Egypt + Jordan on a Gate 1 or O.A.T. tour (Nov–Feb) · East Africa safari via O.A.T. (Jul–Aug) · New Zealand with a buy-back campervan (their Nov–Mar summer — the one trip worth stretching to 5–6 weeks).
- **How to book each trip:** solo with hostels/guesthouses + rail where it's easy (Japan, Iceland, Portugal, SE Asia); a small-group tour (Gate 1 value tier, O.A.T. solo spaces) where guided genuinely helps (Egypt, safari, India, Morocco); and let flight-deal alerts pick WHICH trip fires next (§12c).

12c. The deal engines — “Travelzoo but better”

The spur-of-the-moment system: keep the passport current, hold an annual travel-medical policy (§9g), maintain a short “go list” of trips you're pre-decided on — then when a deal fires on a go-list destination, book it that day. Cheap spontaneity is a system, not luck.

- **Going.com** (ex-Scott's Cheap Flights) — THE flight-deal engine. Set EWR/JFK/PHL as home airports; Premium (~\$49/yr) adds international economy deals and mistake fares, typically 40–70% off. This single membership powers the whole trip-burst model. <https://www.going.com>
- **Travelzoo Top 20** — the weekly curated list since 1999; strongest on flight+hotel packages and vetted tour deals (free). <https://www.travelzoo.com>
- **Gate 1 Travel** — the closest thing to “cheap but excellent” in escorted tours: 35+ years, value-tier tours constantly on flash sale (frequently the deal behind a Travelzoo listing), crowd skews 50+. Check their Special Offers page weekly. <https://www.gate1travel.com>
- **O.A.T. last-minute deals** — their unsold solo spaces get discounted close-in; the no-single-supplement math (§9c) plus a last-minute discount is the best guided-tour value a solo 60+ traveler can get. <https://www.oattravel.com/deals>
- **Vacations To Go** — the famous 90-day ticker of last-minute cruises at 50–80% off; where a repositioning-cruise leg or a cheap segment of somebody's world cruise shows up. Ties \$2 back in: cruise segments become spur-of-the-moment purchases instead of \$25k commitments. <https://www.vacationstogo.com>
- **Secret Flying / TravelPirates** — free mistake-fare and flash-deal feeds worth a daily skim. <https://www.secretflying.com> · <https://www.travelpirates.com>

13. Master Link Directory — every resource in this guide

Full URLs printed so this works on paper too. All links are clickable in the PDF.

Deal engines (the spur-of-the-moment system)

- Going (ex-Scott's Cheap Flights) — flight-deal alerts, the core membership — <https://www.going.com>
- Travelzoo Top 20 — weekly curated deals since 1999 — <https://www.travelzoo.com/top20>
- Gate 1 Travel — Special Offers / flash sales page — <https://www.gate1travel.com/special-offers.aspx>
- O.A.T. last-minute deals — discounted no-supplement solo spaces — <https://www.oattravel.com/deals>
- Vacations To Go — 90-day ticker, last-minute cruises 50–80% off — <https://www.vacationstogo.com>
- Secret Flying — mistake fares, free — <https://www.secretflying.com>
- TravelPirates — flash package deals, free — <https://www.travelpirates.com>

Small-group tours (solo-friendly, 50+)

- Overseas Adventure Travel (O.A.T.) — main site — <https://www.oattravel.com>
- Road Scholar — 55+ educational tours — <https://www.roadscholar.org>
- Gate 1 Travel — value escorted tours — <https://www.gate1travel.com>
- Intrepid Travel — <https://www.intrepidtravel.com>
- G Adventures — <https://www.gadventures.com>
- EF Go Ahead Tours — last-minute specials — <https://www.goaheadtours.com/travel-deals/last-minute-specials>

World cruises + honest cruise sources

- Cruise Critic — Best World Cruises (updated yearly) — <https://www.cruisecritic.com/articles/best-world-cruises>
- Cruise Critic forums — world-cruise roll calls (live reports from aboard) — <https://boards.cruisecritic.com>
- Reddit r/Cruise — unfiltered opinions — <https://www.reddit.com/r/Cruise/>
- 2027 World Cruise Mega-List — side-by-side comparison — <https://weoncruise.com/2027-world-cruise-mega-list/>
- Cruise Specialists — world-cruise specialist travel agency — <https://www.cruisespecialists.com>
- Cruise Mummy — real cost of a world cruise — <https://www.cruisemummy.co.uk/how-much-a-world-cruise-costs/>
- Roaming Around the World — cheap world cruise / repositioning strategy — <https://www.roamingaroundtheworld.com/cheap-world-cruise/>
- Gary Bembridge, Tips for Travellers — honest YouTube reviews — <https://www.tipsfortravellers.com>

- Emma Cruises — budget-transparency YouTube reviews — <https://emmacruises.com>

Villa Vie Odyssey (read all three sides)

- Villa Vie official — the pitch — <https://villavieresidences.com>
- Joe Bauers Substack — the critical independent view — <https://joebauers1.substack.com/p/villa-vie>
- Independent resident blog — <https://villavieodyssey.com>
- CNN — a year aboard (balanced journalism) — <https://www.cnn.com/travel/villa-vie-odyssey-cruise-ship-sharon-lane-one-year-on>
- Cruise Critic editor's ship review — <https://www.cruisecritic.com/cruise/villa-vie-residences/villa-vie-odyssey>

RTW flights

- AirTreks — custom RTW ticket specialist (start here) — <https://airtreks.com>
- oneworld Explorer RTW — <https://www.oneworld.com/world-travel>
- Star Alliance Round the World — <https://www.staralliance.com/en/round-the-world>
- Thrifty Nomads — RTW ticket guide — <https://thriftnomads.com/round-the-world-tickets-guide/>

House-sitting / home exchange

- TrustedHousesitters — the main platform — <https://www.trustedhousesitters.com>
- Nomador (France-strong) — <https://www.nomador.com>
- MindMyHouse (\$29/yr) — <https://www.mindmyhouse.com>
- HouseCarers (AUS/NZ lean) — <https://www.housecarers.com>
- HomeExchange — points-based home swapping — <https://www.homeexchange.com>
- Veggies Abroad — honest THS sitter review — <https://veggiesabroad.com/trustedhousesitters-review-pros-cons-from-a-pet-sitter/>
- House Sitters Guide — THS 2026 pricing explained — <https://www.housesittersguide.com/trustedhousesitters-pricing-2026/>

Overlanding / vehicle

- Oasis Overland — truck expeditions, Africa + Central Asia — <https://www.oasisoverland.co.uk>
- Intrepid Africa overland — <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/us/africa/overland>
- Seabridge — RV shipping to/from Europe — <https://www.seabridge-tours.de>
- Neighbor — peer-to-peer RV storage (Codi fallback when not at Mom's) — <https://www.neighbor.com>

Trains

- The Man in Seat 61 — the train-travel bible — <https://www.seat61.com>
- Seat 61 Japan page — <https://www.seat61.com/japan.htm>

- Eurail — global pass, senior discount — <https://www.eurail.com>
- Official Japan Rail Pass — <https://japanrailpass.net>

Japan / Kyoto

- Hostelworld — hostels + private rooms — <https://www.hostelworld.com>
- Japanese Guest Houses — ryokan + temple lodging (shukubo) — <https://www.japanesesequesthous.com>
- Japan-Guide — the best free planning site for Japan, period — <https://www.japan-guide.com>

Iceland campervans

- KuKu Campers — budget pick — <https://www.kukucampers.is>
- Happy Campers — value/comfort balance — <https://happycampers.is>
- CampEasy — top-rated, year-round vans — <https://campeasy.com>
- Go Campers — <https://gocampers.is>
- Campervan Planet — 36-company comparison — <https://www.campervanplanet.com/best-campervan-rental-iceland>
- Road conditions (check daily) — <https://www.road.is>
- Weather service — <https://www.vedur.is>
- Camping Card — 28 nights prepaid — <https://www.campingcard.is>

Insurance

- GeoBlue — your known quantity; ask about annual multi-trip (Trekker) — <https://www.geobluetravelinsurance.com>
- IMG — GlobeHopper Multi-Trip Senior (Medicare-adjacent) — <https://www.imglobal.com>
- Squaremouth — compare quotes across insurers — <https://www.squaremouth.com>
- InsureMyTrip — the other comparison engine — <https://www.insuremytrip.com>

Prices verified July 2026 from public sources; always confirm current fares directly. Compiled by Claude for Mark's world-cruise research.