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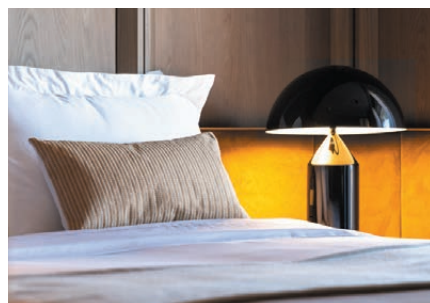
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## Why we deserve to travel



Vanessa Lee in Egypt

DUE TO SOME HEALTH ISSUES, I have been literally grounded since June 2025, other than a brief fall sojourn to sail on a new ship, the Oceania Allura. I won't be travelling again until late March, when I head to Japan for a much-anticipated first-ever visit. And I certainly won't be able to travel as much as I once did in the years to come. But travel, I will – that's a

certainty. And I am in good company, I know.

As a person who has jetted about all her life – starting in France with my parents at the age of 10 – I have always taken for granted that I would be able to go pretty much where I want and when I want. That's primarily because I enjoyed a long career in the travel and cruise business before becoming a magazine writer and publisher. Most years, I am away on a trip or a ship about eight to ten times. And, as many of us do, I took it for granted until quite recently. Then, as the saying goes, life happens while you are planning your life.

Being a baby boomer, in very good company as there are still so many of us, I can hear many of you agreeing with me and saying, "Yes, we want to travel, and we want to go to bucket list destinations". And some are being crossed off the list. Maybe it's a trip for a 60th, 70th, or even an 80th birthday, to visit family and long-standing friends, or to fulfill a desire to see Borneo and the orangutans and pygmy elephants (as in my case and still on my list), or to do a polar cruise in the Arctic or Antarctica. Perhaps it's a wedding anniversary, a retirement, a return to wellness, like me, or a vow renewal – or whatever you want it to be – an escape from winter, a sojourn in Tuscany or a cruise in New Zealand. Travel opens so much for us and also does wonders for one's spirits – especially with time to plan

for a trip of a lifetime, or just a trip of the year. This is one of the reasons I publish travel magazines for a living. I love to see and write about new ships, hotels, and interesting destinations, and to collaborate with our fantastic editor and our amazing freelance writers who find the most fascinating places to write about. It brings me joy, vibrancy, and colourful imagery that is sometimes much needed when one's world suddenly becomes dark and grey. Perhaps you know how I feel?

I really miss getting on a plane, flying off to some fabulous destination or cruise ship as I have done for nearly 50 years. When something we value and see as almost a right is taken away, it's very disconcerting and we miss that aspect of our lives.

But, I am not there yet. I am already planning a few more trips for 2026, some of which will be cruises, and one will be to the UK to see family, with an add-on trip to Scotland for a driving tour of the Highlands. And I'm spending time now researching Japan, Tokyo, and Kyoto in particular.

Wherever you are thinking of going next, or if you are wondering whether you can manage a big trip halfway around the world, settle in with some travel guides, our magazine, or go wandering on the internet, and I am sure you will find somewhere special you want to go. Always book with an experienced travel advisor and use their knowledge to ensure you have the best vacation possible.

Travel continues to boom, new ships are arriving, new cruise lines are launching, and train travel is undergoing a resurgence. There are so many beautiful hotels of every size and kind, and destinations so appealing, whether it's the scenery, the wildlife or the people – how can we not keep travelling? At least for now – and remember, we do deserve it!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vanessa Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Vanessa Lee  
Instagram Vanessa 13577

### IN MEMORIAM

We remember those we have lost recently. Some were good, long-standing friends, and all are sorely missed by their loved ones.

Duncan Bureau, Victor Govan, Mavis Bowman,  
Dennis Marsell, Gary Reid, John Slattery  
and Denis Fennessy

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Editor-in-Chief, Liz Fleming on the silvery sands of Chesterman Beach, Vancouver Island.

WE TRAVEL FOR different reasons – some for entertainment, others for education, some just for fun, and others, as a way to find their roots.

Not long ago, a friend and his sister travelled to Sicily to find the small village where their grandparents were born, raised and married. Though the couple hadn't lived long enough for their grandchildren to know them well, Mario and Teresa had instilled a sense that where they'd come from was beautiful – a place to be remembered and returned to. Their tiny village became a focus for their grandchildren's travels through Sicily and reaching it became the goal of their vacation.

After a week of enjoying sandy beaches, indulging in homemade pastas crowned with savoury sauces and eating more freshly baked bread than any two people should reasonably be able to swallow, they finally arrived at their grandparents' village.

Together, they wandered the ancient streets, looking down narrow alleyways and speculating about where the pair might each have lived before their marriage and then

afterwards. They finally ended their walk through the tiny village at the ancient church at the heart of the community.

They stepped inside, onto the well-worn tile floor where black-garbed nonas knelt to pray. Though not religious themselves, Rick and his sister found something about the atmosphere in the ancient church that drew them into a pew, where they gazed at the soft light filtering through the stained glass.

When the priest appeared, Rick and his sister were able to convince him to allow them to read through the old church records, where, incredibly, they discovered the entry they were looking for – the marriage of their grandparents. There, in spidery black handwriting were their names, Mario and Teresa, and a date in June of 1924. They had found a link to the long-ago bride and groom who would one day become their grandparents.

Maybe one day you'll travel to Spain or Greece or Italy or France or any one of a hundred different countries from which our ancestors came. Perhaps you'll find your family's roots, walk in the footsteps of generations past and discover a part of yourself as yet unknown. Travel and only travel can make that historic introduction. May 2026 be the year that you take a personal journey into the past to come to a better understanding of the present.

Happy Travels,

*Liz Fleming*

Liz Fleming  
Editor-in-Chief

PS. If you'd like to listen to my show, just google Liz Fleming Travels and you'll find an archive of more than 150 shows – and some of them feature our publisher, Vanessa Lee, a favourite guest of mine!

# CRUISE & TRAVEL LIFESTYLES

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 1 WINTER 2026

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www.cruiseandtravellifestyles.com or  
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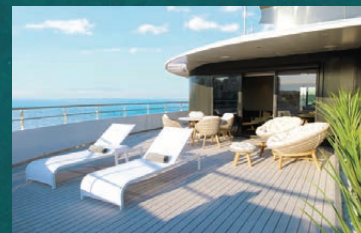
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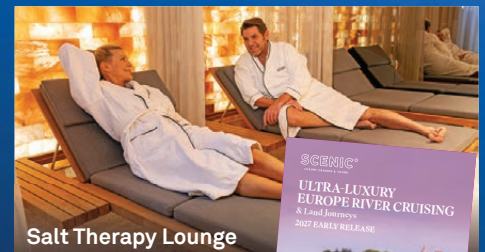
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MS Santa Cruz II



## HX Expeditions heads back to the Galápagos

**HX Expeditions** has officially unveiled its 2027–28 Galápagos season, reinforcing the line's long-term commitment to responsible, science-led exploration in one of the world's most extraordinary wildlife destinations. Bookings for the expanded season opened online on December 22, 2025, and are supported by a standalone Galápagos brochure, launched in January 2026, alongside a series of exclusive films featuring HX ambassador Monty Halls, president of the Galápagos Conservation Trust. The program will once again be anchored by **MS Santa Cruz II**, a 50 stateroom, carbon neutral expedition vessel offering intimate, low impact voyages. HX's 2027–28 lineup includes a variety of routes, from the classic Eastern Route: In Darwin's Footsteps to the Northern & Western Route exploring nine of the archipelago's most captivating islands, as well as combined itineraries that pair Galápagos exploration with Machu Picchu land programs. HX has also extended its partnership with Metropolitan Touring through 2029, underscoring a shared focus on conservation, community engagement and immersive wildlife experiences in this fragile ecosystem.

## Epicurean Expeditions by Atlas

**Atlas Ocean Voyages** is enhancing its 2026 Mediterranean Epicurean Expeditions with a series of immersive journeys that blend exploration, culture and world-class cuisine. Central to the season is Master Foodie Mara Papatheodorou, the brand's celebrated Tastes & Traditions expert, who will host six expeditions, bringing her deep knowledge of regional food heritage and storytelling to guests aboard intimate yacht-style voyages. Across select Mediterranean sailings, travellers will enjoy Atlas's elevated culinary program — from locally sourced, chef-curated menus and Jospier grill experiences to wine tastings, cooking demonstrations and small-group shore excursions that unpack the flavours of each port. Papatheodorou's presentations will enrich onboard events and excursions, connecting food with culture, history and place as explorers savour the best of Mediterranean gastronomy both ashore and at sea. These 2026 expeditions promise unforgettable taste-driven discoveries for lifelong food and travel enthusiasts.

Wine Tasting in the Mediterranean



Solomon Islands

## Explore Asia and the Arctic with Swan Hellenic

**Swan Hellenic** has unveiled an ambitious 2026 expedition season that expands its global footprint with both Asia-Pacific cultural voyages and classic Arctic explorations, offering travellers a blend of remote natural wonders and rich cultural encounters. In the Asia-Pacific region, the boutique **SH Minerva** — fresh from its Antarctic season — will sail a series of seven curated expeditions between April and May, and again in September 2026. Departures from the Solomon Islands will explore the traditions and landscapes of Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan. These itineraries, which never call at the same port twice, can be combined into a 55-day grand voyage for an immersive experience. Meanwhile, **Swan Hellenic's** Arctic program aboard **SH Vega** and **SH Diana** invites guests to discover glaciers, wildlife and dramatic polar scenery from Svalbard and Greenland to Iceland, including a special Solar Eclipse cruise in August. These 2026 offerings reinforce Swan Hellenic's reputation for small-ship expedition cruising that connects culture, nature and discovery.

Oceania Allura



### Oceania Allura

#### Celebrating rich culture and exceptional cuisine

Last November, I enjoyed my first-ever voyage with **Oceania Cruises** aboard the dazzling new **Oceania Allura** as she sailed on her North American inaugural journey from Miami. Stepping onto the ship felt like entering a luxurious, floating boutique hotel – elegant, intimate, and wonderfully attuned to lovers of literature, culture, and fine food. From watching the sun melt into the sea on my stateroom balcony, to savouring meals that could rival some of the best land-based restaurants, every moment felt carefully curated and delightful. This 1,200-guest ship is not only gorgeous but also entertaining, with superb staff and terrific foodie opportunities at alternative restaurants such as Toscana and Jacques, a tribute to longtime Oceania Executive Culinary Advisor Jacques Pépin. There's a new, delicious crêperie serving freshly prepared crêpes, waffles, and sundaes throughout the day, and the best homemade salted caramel ice cream – oh my! There are 800 attentive and charming staff members serving you, including 140 Chefs – just another reason that Oceania deserves acclaim for its superb culinary accomplishments. About half of the staff overall are dedicated to offering guests hospitality at the highest level. The cuisine is à la minute and exquisite. Oceania's dress code is "stylish or effortlessly elegant". Still, no dressing up is required, and the cruise line recently announced that, as of January 7, 2026, it will no longer accept children under 18 for new bookings. It's a new era for a truly adult-oriented cruise line, with its sights firmly set on lovers of fine cuisine and an onboard atmosphere of quiet luxury. When Oceania Cruises launched *Oceania Allura* in the summer of 2025, it did more than expand its fleet. It signalled the start of a new chapter for a brand long celebrated for elevating small-ship luxury and culinary excellence. With Allura now sailing in the Caribbean, and the



Veranda Stateroom

next-generation **Oceania Sonata** preparing for her 2027 debut, Oceania Cruises is entering one of the most ambitious growth periods in its two-decade history. Allura's launch was met with palpable excitement among travellers who value the understated elegance and immersive itineraries that have become synonymous with Oceania. The ship balances the intimacy of small-ship cruising with the spaciousness and amenities of a modern luxury vessel. Her design emphasizes calm, contemporary spaces meant to feel more like high-end residences than traditional cruise venues. Destination-forward itineraries remain central to Oceania's appeal, and Allura's inaugural season showcases exactly that. Her first voyages carried guests through the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean before shifting to the coastal villages of Canada and New England and, eventually, to warmer Caribbean waters. In the spring, the ship will return to Europe for another season of Greek Isles, Aegean and Mediterranean departures. The combination of culinary indulgence, small-ship charm, and destination-rich schedules has long defined Oceania, and Allura brings a refreshed energy to those traditions. And Oceania is looking to the future. The first ship of its next generation, *Oceania Sonata* will represent the beginning of an entirely new class of vessels – the largest and most spacious in Oceania's fleet. With capacity for approximately 1,390 guests and a size of around 86,000 tons, Sonata promises more room, more suites, and an expanded range of dining experiences, all while maintaining the warm, intimate atmosphere the brand is known for. Sonata's accommodations will emphasize more spacious, residential-style living. About one-third of the guestrooms will be suites, and every stateroom onboard will feature a private veranda. Several new suite categories will offer larger living spaces, enhanced amenities, and greater privacy. The line is also introducing new and reimagined dining venues, underscoring Oceania's



Toscana



Jacques



Oceania Allura in Montenegro

identity as a pioneer in sea-going gastronomy. Sonata is only the beginning. Oceania has already confirmed plans to expand the class even further, with additional Sonata-class ships scheduled for 2029, 2032, and 2035. The fleet is expected to grow to 12 ships by the mid-2030s, marking the company's most significant period of expansion to date. Oceania Cruises occupies a distinctive space in the global cruise landscape, known for ships that are small enough to feel personal yet large enough to offer sophisticated amenities. The line focuses on destination immersion and itineraries widely recognized for reaching ports that are both iconic and off the beaten path, from marquee European capitals to hidden coastal villages and remote islands. Onboard, guests enjoy refined living rather than high-octane entertainment or sprawling larger ship features – stylish without being ostentatious, comfortable without sacrificing elegance. Culinary excellence remains at the heart of Oceania's identity. From hands-on cooking schools and specialty restaurants to fresh menus inspired by regional flavours, dining is not an afterthought but a cornerstone of the experience. In addition, attentive service, art studios, wellness programs, and thoughtful enrichment activities make Oceania's ships perfect for those who prefer personalized indulgence over spectacle. As *Oceania Allura* begins her life at sea and anticipation builds for the arrival of *Oceania Sonata* and her sisters, the company is charting a future defined by innovation, growth, and a renewed commitment to its core strengths. This new era blends larger, more versatile ships with the boutique ambiance that has long earned Oceania a loyal following. Inclusions in the fare include all specialty dining, shipboard gratuities, unlimited Wi-Fi, free laundry, specialty coffees, sodas, juices and water, plus a choice of complimentary wine and beer at lunch and dinner, or a shore excursion credit. — VANESSA LEE



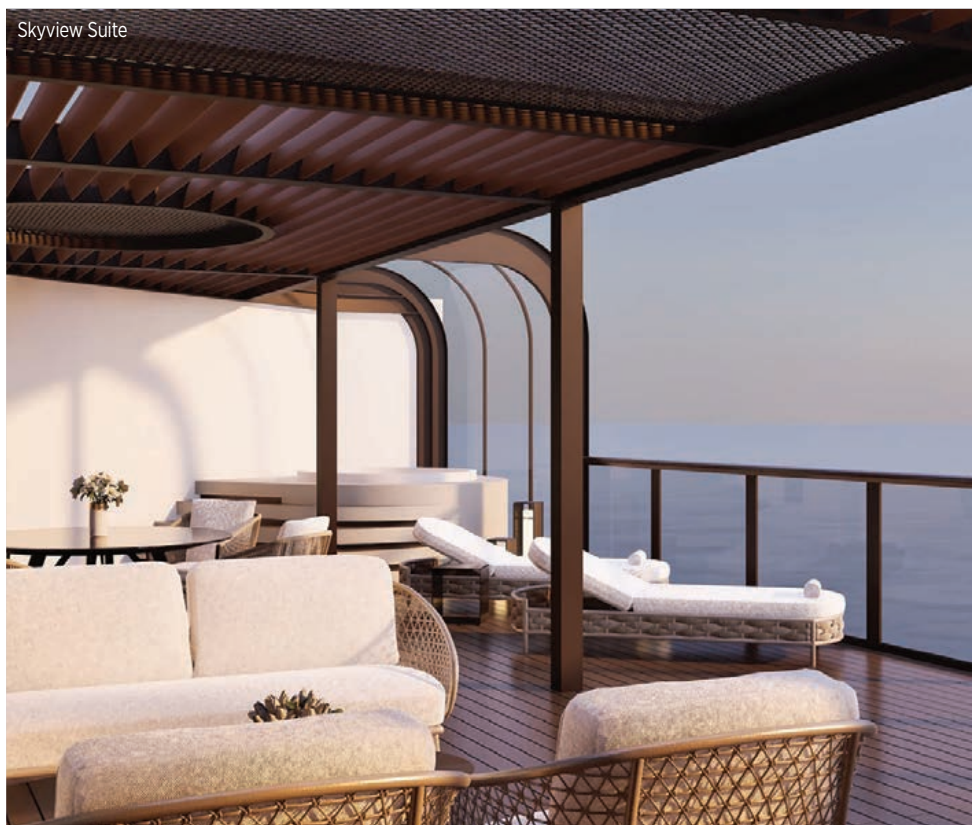
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COURTESY OCEANIA CRUISES

## Regent enhances ultra-luxury inclusions

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Skyview Suite



COURTESY REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES

## Oceania Cruises reveals new culinary experiences

**Oceania Cruises** has revealed two new culinary concepts set to debut aboard **Oceania Sonata**, the first ship in its new Sonata Class, launching in August 2027. Announced at ILTM Cannes, the additions reinforce the brand’s reputation as the world’s leading culinary-focused luxury cruise line. The headline offering is La Table par Maîtres Cuisiniers de France, the most exclusive fine-dining restaurant at sea and the only one launched with the official seal of approval from the prestigious Maîtres Cuisiniers de France. Seating just 18 guests, La Table will present rotating menus created by Oceania Cruises’ Executive Culinary Directors, Chefs Alexis Quaretti and Eric Barale, alongside invited Master Chefs of France. Joining La Table is Nikkei Kitchen, an evening venue celebrating the vibrant fusion of Peruvian flavours and Japanese techniques. Together, the two concepts highlight Oceania Cruises’ continued commitment to innovation and its promise to deliver The Finest Cuisine at Sea.



La Table

COURTESY OCEANIA CRUISES

## Explora Journeys introduces Endless Worlds

**Explora Journeys**, the luxury ocean travel brand of the MSC Group, has unveiled Endless Worlds, its inaugural World Journey aboard **EXPLORA I**. Sailing from January 6 to May 14, 2029, the 128-day east-to-west voyage marks the brand's first continuous global journey, spanning four continents, 29 countries and territories, and 63 destinations. Designed for travellers with time as their greatest luxury, Endless Worlds reflects Explora Journeys' Ocean State of Mind philosophy, offering a purposeful and unhurried approach to discovery. Departing from Dubai and concluding in Barcelona, the journey traces historic routes of trade and cultural exchange across the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Highlights include first-time calls in Australia and New Zealand, immersive exploration of the South Pacific, a transit of the Panama Canal, and Atlantic island destinations before entering the Mediterranean. Divided into seven interconnected Passages, the voyage combines oceanfront living, curated cultural enrichment and seamless service. Reservations open in early 2026.



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## Holland America debuts private island pickleball

**Holland America Line** marked the grand opening of four new pickleball courts at Relax Away, Half Moon Cay, its private island in the Bahamas, expanding recreational offerings at the popular destination. The courts are part of a broader island enhancement program that includes refreshed amenities and new guest experiences across the island. The courts were officially inaugurated December 6 with a friendly pickleball tournament featuring guests sailing aboard **Rotterdam** and **Eurodam**. The celebration coincided with the 28th anniversary of the award-winning island, known for its white-sand beaches and clear turquoise waters. Pickleball has become one of the cruise line's most popular onboard activities, and the new courts allow guests to play while ashore in a scenic setting. Located in the island's sports area, the courts complement existing facilities for basketball, volleyball and soccer. Additional upgrades include refreshed cabanas and daybeds, hundreds of new beach chairs, and new clamshell loungers arriving for the holiday season. Further renovations, including updated villas and a new food pavilion, are planned for the coming year.



COURTESY HOLLAND AMERICA LINE

Pickleball court



Royal Beach Club Santorini

COURTESY ROYAL CARIBBEAN GROUP

## The ultimate Santorini day

**Royal Caribbean Group** has announced plans to open Royal Beach Club Santorini in summer 2026, introducing a new land-based experience on one of Greece's most iconic islands. Welcoming guests from Royal Caribbean and **Celebrity Cruises**, the beach club will blend Santorini's dramatic volcanic beaches with the company's signature service, local culture and Mediterranean beach club vibes. The experience will be part of an "Ultimate Santorini Day," combining time at the beach club with guided exploration of the island's highlights, including Oia's white-washed villages, blue-domed churches, and the shops, cafés and galleries of Fira. To help address congestion on the popular island, Royal Caribbean plans to introduce a new arrival system that distributes guests across three starting points. Royal Beach Club Santorini is the latest addition to the company's expanding portfolio of exclusive destinations, following the upcoming launch of its first Royal Beach Club in The Bahamas and building on the success of Perfect Day at CocoCay.

## Ceremonial launch of Emerald Astra

**Scenic Group** has reached a major milestone with the ceremonial launch of **Emerald Astra**, the newest addition to its **Emerald Cruises** award-winning fleet. Signaling a new chapter in modern luxury river cruising, the ship is set to debut on the Danube River in May 2026. *Emerald Astra* mirrors the sleek elegance of the line's premium superyachts, featuring a modern, grey-tinted glass exterior and the ability to welcome 180 guests. The ship's refreshed design focuses on comfort, sustainability, and style. Highlights include curated art installations created in partnership with leading European galleries, collaborations with luxury brands Missoni and Freifrau, and upgraded suites featuring ESPA toiletries, premium European linens, and an expanded pillow menu. The ship will also introduce complimentary guest laundry facilities – a fleet-first innovation – and keep guests' favourite amenities such as the pool/cinema combination, multiple dining options, and a sun deck dedicated to relaxation and panoramic views.



Emerald Astra Ceremonial Launch

COURTESY EMERALD CRUISES



COURTESY MSC CRUISES

La Romana

## Endless Summer: MSC Cruises' year-round southern Caribbean debut

**MSC Cruises** is charting new territory with the launch of its first-ever year-round southern Caribbean program, sailing from La Romana, Dominican Republic, starting November 2026. To be sailed by the elegant **MSC Opera**, the new itinerary offers weekly departures with the choice of a seven-night voyage or a back-to-back 14-night "butterfly" cruise. A standout moment is the exclusive call to Catalina Island, a pristine nature reserve known for powder-white beaches, crystalline waters and exceptional snorkelling. Designed with Canadian travellers in mind, the program offers seamless access via MSC's Fly & Cruise packages, with departures from major cities across the country. Guests will explore a refined mix of destinations including Martinique, Virgin Gorda and Antigua, blending culture, natural beauty and understated glamour. Beyond the journey itself, MSC's commitment brings meaningful economic benefits to La Romana, reinforcing the cruise line's long-term vision for the region while redefining year-round Caribbean luxury.

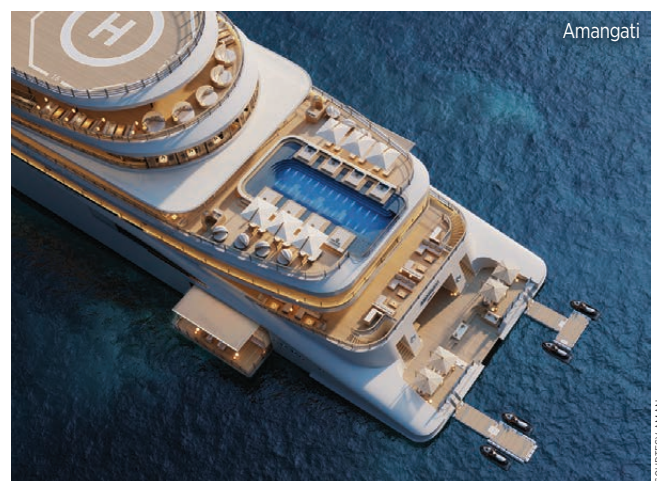
## Azamara unveils its most ambitious transformation yet

**Azamara Cruises** is ushering in a new era of refined small-ship luxury with **Azamara Forward**, the most ambitious fleetwide enhancement program in the brand's history. Celebrated for its Destination Immersion philosophy and unhurried time ashore, Azamara now elevates life onboard with reimagined spaces, enriched dining, and sophisticated new accommodations. Debuting December 18, 2026 aboard **Azamara Quest**, the transformation will introduce an exclusive Penthouse Deck with all-new Panorama and Grandview Suites, designed for expansive ocean views, serene privacy, and elevated living at sea. Across the fleet, guests will discover a dedicated Chef's Table restaurant showcasing destination-inspired menus, a recrafted Atlas Bar serving globally influenced cocktails, a redesigned Cabaret Lounge, refreshed staterooms, and upgraded public spaces. Thoughtful, contemporary, and deeply rooted in place, Azamara Forward honours the line's heritage while setting a new benchmark for intimate, high-end cruising where design, cuisine, and destination connect seamlessly.



COURTESY AZAMARA CRUISES

Panorama Suite



Amangati

COURTESY AMAN

## Amangati: Aman's ultra-luxury sanctuary sets sail

Marking a defining moment in ultra-luxury ocean travel, **Aman** steps beyond the shoreline with **Amangati**, its first ocean-going motor yacht, debuting in Spring 2027. Purpose-built to mirror the brand's reverence for space, privacy and tranquillity, the 600-foot, nine-deck yacht carries just 94 guests in 47 expansive suites, each with a private terrace and uninterrupted sea views. *Amangati's* atmosphere is quietly extraordinary: intimate yet remarkably spacious, with interiors inspired by the refined restraint of a Japanese ryokan. Wellness is central to life on board, anchored by the largest Aman Spa at sea, while days unfold effortlessly between open decks, water-level exploration and restorative rituals. Dining celebrates seasonality across Mediterranean and Japanese venues, complemented by elegant evening salons. Its inaugural Mediterranean voyages will unlock storied coastlines and rare harbours through unhurried itineraries, overnight stays and culturally timed sailings. More than a yacht, Amangati is Aman's philosophy in motion — a sanctuary shaped by the sea.

Scenic guests and butler in Budapest



COURTESY SCENIC LUXURY CRUISES

### Tastes of Discovery Series

**Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours** has announced an expanded collection of wine-focused river journeys for 2026, offering guests immersive access to some of Europe's most celebrated wine regions. Sailing aboard Scenic's 5-star Scenic Space-Ships, which host just 163 guests, the new itineraries blend ultra-luxury cruising with exclusive tastings, private vineyard visits and educational sessions led by regional winemakers. The series spans iconic destinations including Bordeaux, the Rhône Valley, the Danube and the Rhine rivers, with experiences ranging from cycling through the Médoc and sampling Sauternes, to discovering Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners in Austria's Wachau Valley and historic Alsace. Each voyage also features Scenic's all-inclusive offerings, such as Scenic Freechoice excursions, Scenic Enrich events, onboard culinary demonstrations, caviar tastings and private classical concerts in historic settings. Reimagined versions of Scenic's popular Central Europe and France itineraries anchor the collection, with departures primarily in summer and select sailings available in fall, providing added flexibility for wine-loving travellers.

### Uniworld announces largest fleet expansion

**Uniworld Boutique River Cruises** has announced its largest fleet expansion to date, unveiling four new ships and six new itineraries set to launch in 2027. The expansion includes three new Super Ships – **S.S. Audrey**, **S.S. Marlene** and **S.S. São Rafael** – alongside exclusive expedition sailings aboard the **Aqua Blu**, a 15-suite expedition yacht, marking Uniworld's debut in Southeast Asia. It is certain that 2027 will be a landmark year for the brand, highlighting the blend of cultural immersion, luxury and adventure across the new offerings. The **S.S. Audrey** and **S.S. Marlene**, inspired by icons Audrey Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich, will sail European rivers, celebrating the glamour and heritage of the continent, while the **S.S. São Rafael** will expand Uniworld's presence on Portugal's scenic Douro River. Complementing the new ships, six new itineraries ranging from nine to sixteen nights, will span Europe and Asia, ranging from Rhine and Danube journeys to a Bali, Singapore and Indonesia expedition.



S.S. São Rafael on the Douro

COURTESY UNIWORLD

Riverside Mozart on the Danube



COURTESY RIVERSIDE LUXURY CRUISES

### Pearls of the Danube golf cruise

**Riverside Luxury Cruises** has unveiled an exciting addition to its 2026 European river cruise lineup with the "Pearls of the Danube Golf Cruise," a six-night themed voyage tailored for golf enthusiasts. Departing July 23, the cruise sails along the iconic Danube River, combining luxury cruising with sport by visiting five championship golf courses in historic cities, including Hungary's oldest course and several of Europe's top-ranked venues. Guests aboard the 162-guest, all-inclusive, luxurious **Riverside Mozart** will enjoy personalized instruction from an onboard golf professional, enrichment talks, and even swing practice on the ship's Vista Deck, blending leisure and learning against the backdrop of Europe's scenic river landscapes. Whether you are a seasoned golfer or a casual duffer, if driving, putting, and chipping excite you and your favourite colour is green, then this river cruise escape is for you!



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### Ovolo Sydney Woolloomooloo

A historic wharf hotel with designer rooms

With a name that is a mouthful but fun to say, Woolloomooloo is a Sydney suburb home to the historic Finger Wharf. Built in the early 1900s to handle passengers, cargo, and wool (although there's no connection with the area's name), the heritage-listed wharf has been converted into private residences and dining venues, while still retaining its distinction as the world's longest timber-piled structure. Today, it stands as a striking reminder of Sydney's maritime and industrial past, drawing visitors who come to admire its unique character.

At the wharf's entrance is Ovolo Sydney Woolloomooloo, a 100-room boutique hotel nestled beneath the original building framework. The lobby and public spaces are flooded with natural light from the skylights above, showcasing restored features of the building's industrial past, with original loading ramps, cog wheels, exposed steel beams, and wooden rafters. Glass elevators rise to reveal views along the length of the building, while a self-serve candy cart and a neon Woolloomooloo sign add a playful touch.

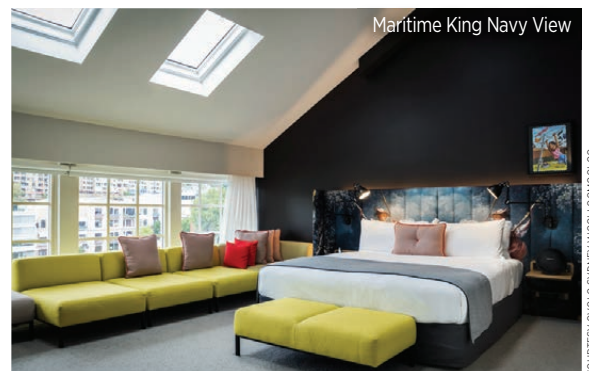
On the second floor and inside a glass pavilion, guests enjoy cocktails and light bites at Bar Woolloomooloo, amongst trees wrapped in twinkling lights, a pool table, and cozy seating. Further back, a restaurant offers buffet breakfast and à la carte lunch and dinner options. Guests can also dine at

the wharf's other restaurants and bars, while the trendy hotspots of Kings Cross and downtown Sydney are a short walk or drive away. Hotel guests share the pool, whirlpool, fitness centre, and an outdoor deck with the private apartments above, whose residents include actor Russell Crowe.

Twin and king rooms offer city or harbour views, and bi-level Urban Loft and Rockstar suites add a hip vibe. Interiors once again reflect the building's warehouse-style character, with black faucets and fixtures, industrial pendant lights, and metal wall sconces. Black feature walls, minimalist-style furnishings, and framed graphics convey a modern luxe aesthetic, softened by soothing monochrome hues with splashes of colour, and upholstered headboards silkscreened with artsy designs. Amenities include robes and slippers, 55" televisions with Chromecast, Alexa Bluetooth speakers, kettles, and "Superspeed" Wi-Fi. Bath products also sport amusing labels – Ain't No Scrub body wash, Right Hair, Right Now shampoo, and Smooth Operator conditioner.

For a distinctive stay that combines historic charm, playful design, and modern comforts, Ovolo Sydney Woolloomooloo makes a unique home base for exploring the city's top attractions.

— MING TAPPIN



COURTESY OVULO SYDNEY WOOLLOOMOOLOO



Lobby



Superior King Suite



The Yarra River

## The Langham Melbourne

Indulge in the epitome of luxury

Since opening its doors in 1865 in London, The Langham Hotels have been crafting sophisticated yet unpretentious stays around the world, and The Langham Melbourne is the jewel in Australia's Victoria State capital. The grand marble lobby showcases one of the largest Waterford chandeliers in the Southern Hemisphere, while the oversized floral centrepiece and The Langham's signature Ginger Flower fragrance provide an air of elegance throughout your stay.

Facing the Yarra River that flows through the city, The Langham Melbourne's location on the Southbank Promenade facilitates easy access to major attractions such as the Royal Botanic Gardens, National Gallery of Victoria, and Koorie Heritage Trust Aboriginal museum, while remaining outside the busy downtown core. A nearby footbridge leads to a variety of waterfront dining options and connects to the iconic Flinders Street station. From there, hop on a free tram to sightsee in the city centre, or board a train to explore further afield.

The 388 rooms and suites feature king or twin beds, a flat-screen TV, a writing desk and lounge chair, a minibar, robes and slippers, coffee and tea, and a marble bath with separate shower and tub. Our top pick: river-facing Club Rooms, which offer private check-in at The Langham Club Lounge on the 24th

floor and a complimentary breakfast buffet at Melba restaurant. Return to the Club Lounge for complimentary afternoon tea, cocktails, and canapés while enjoying sweeping city and river views through floor-to-ceiling windows. For a splurge, book The Residence by Kerrie Hess, a 1,442-square-foot two-bedroom apartment designed and decorated by the Brisbane-based fashion artist. Families are welcome – little ones can indulge in Fantasy Afternoon Tea, with delectable delights specifically created for children. The Langham Melbourne even spoils fur babies – the Pampered Pets Staycation package includes breakfast in bed, Langham-branded pet bedding and bowls, a private pet dining menu, and a supplements and treats pack.

Located on the 9th floor, the hotel's wellness complex is a haven for rest and respite. The 15-metre swimming pool has a glass roof, and the adjacent oversized whirlpool and loungers on the terrace overlook the river and downtown skyline. The Asian-inspired Chuan Spa offers an array of soothing treatments, including the "Sleep Matters by Chuan" program, thoughtfully designed to promote complete rejuvenation. Alternatively, guests can enjoy an invigorating workout with city vistas at the fully equipped fitness studio, open 24/7.

— MING TAPPIN



Afternoon Tea, Aria Bar & Lounge

COURTESY LANGHAM MELBOURNE



Victory II at Chicago's waterfront

# GREAT CRUISE GREAT SHIP GREAT LAKES!

We've cruised the Mediterranean, the Arctic, the Caribbean, the Sea of Cortez, the Galápagos Islands and more, but it wasn't until last summer that we discovered the fun of cruising our own Great Lakes.

## LIZ FLEMING

When we looked closely at the hull of the *Victory II* as we boarded her in the Toronto Harbour, we saw the vague outline of other lettering behind the word "Victory". That faint shadow hinted at the fascinating life this small but much-loved ship has lived. Owned originally by John Waggoner, this ship and her sister, *Victory I* had a previous life, sailing in other waters, before being sold to another cruise line who renamed and sailed them for several years.

"But I missed them," says their first and once-again owner Waggoner. "And so when they came up for sale again, I bought them."

Yes, he says, many people thought he was crazy, but love knows no bounds and Waggoner and his family love these ships. The lobby of the *Victory II* is graced by a photograph of her godmother, Waggoner's young granddaughter, Molly who was just 12 years old at the time.

Every inch of the ship and every staff and crew member aboard seems to share the same passion. Within hours of our arrival, we were being greeted by name and our preferences for everything were almost instantly noted.

"Ah Miss Liz," the servers at breakfast would smile. "You like the vanilla caramel rooibos tea. Here's a pot all ready for you."

Though the ship is far from new, the work done to refurbish and refresh is evident everywhere – you can almost smell the slick of a fresh coat of paint drying in the breeze. The brass has been polished, the carpets renewed, and the upholstery replaced. This intimate little ship preens with pleasure at her fresh new face.

The staterooms are compact but comfortable, with ample storage. A large window offers a wonderful view, and though no rooms have balconies, those on the top deck have small outdoor areas with seating. All guests can easily find spaces for lolling in the shared outdoor areas where tables, comfy chairs and lounges await.

Days are filled with sailing on one of the most famous inland water systems in the world – the Great Lakes – and over the course of our ten-day cruise, we dipped our hull into each of them. After embarking in Toronto, and crossing a surprisingly choppy Lake Ontario, we entered the Welland Canal,



BENJAMIN J. STOK

Maid of the Mist, Niagara Falls



ILINE MACDONALD/ALAMY

Mackinac Island

where we were about a ten-minute drive from our St. Catharines home. We did not jump ship!

The next morning found us in Port Colborne where the big shore excursion attraction was, of course, Niagara Falls. Because it is in our neighbourhood, we tend to take the Falls for granted, I'm afraid, but watching the reaction of our fellow guests was inspiring. For some, seeing Niagara Falls was a life-time ambition and we were reminded by their heartfelt reactions that we should appreciate this natural wonder and our fortunate proximity to it.

Each day brought new adventures. We toured the cafés, souvenir and fudge shops of Mackinac Island and watched the horse-drawn carriages ferrying guests up and down the old main street – no cars allowed there! We reconnected with our musical past as we dove into the fascinating displays of Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, marvelling at just how small Mick Jagger's jeans really were and how many number one songs the Beatles had. At the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit, we were awed to see the bus in which Rosa Parks took her brave position on racial equality and were honoured to sit in her seat.

Even the days we spent at 'sea' were filled with things to view. Often, on an ocean cruise, sea days offer little to look at but endless water; however, in the Great Lakes, you're frequently close enough to shore to be able to



Coastal Dining Room

COURTESY VICTORY CRUISES

see cottages. You can watch children running down docks to jump into the water, and imagine yourself sitting on the porch of a charming spot, gazing at the Victory II sailing by. Somehow, you catch a bit of that summertime magic and feel a part of every little lakeside community.

On board, we found ourselves part of another community that quickly developed. Though the vast majority of the guests were American, and we were, in fact, two of just three Canadians – politics were thankfully not a topic of dinner table conversation. Instead, we talked about books, movies, grandchildren, shore excursions, food, and whatever struck us as amusing that day.

We alternated between enjoying the wonderful cuisine prepared for us by the chefs in the Coastal Dining room and the fabulous steaks, lamb chops, tenderloin and shrimp we grilled for ourselves in The Tuscan Stone Grill, the specialty restaurant on the top deck where you're presented with a blazing hot stone on which to grill your own goodies. Reservations were required for the specialty restaurant, but there was no extra fee, and tables were always available. No matter which spot we chose, there was always someone friendly and interesting with whom to share our meal and have a few

laughs. Sometimes, after dinner or on sailing afternoons, we'd find ourselves a cozy table in the small pub behind the Lounge, where a friendly bartender was always on hand.

Though we've sailed on many ships, never have we found a more versatile entertainment staff. Not only did the ship's band perform live music every night – changing styles and costumes accordingly – but they also provided cocktail jazz. One band member was the cruise director, another, the IT specialist and another gave well-prepared lectures about important points of interest along the way. They hosted bingo games and trivia contests and always had time to chat. We don't know when they slept.

The greatest surprise for us on our Great Lakes cruise was simply how great the lakes are. The waters are vast and while there are certainly bustling ports and cottage communities along the way, many of the shorelines are still green and untouched. Towering trees and craggy rock faces stared silently from the shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron and Lake Superior as the *Victory II* passed by, reminding us of the iconic works of the Group of Seven painters and giving us a sense that there is still incredible natural beauty to be discovered, right in our own backyard. ■



Cat AA bedroom

COURTESY VICTORY CRUISES



KYSEK / SHUTTERSTOCK

Georgian Bay



MICHEL VERDURE

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland

# SAILING THE FABLED NILE

Egypt's remarkable treasures and the allure of the Nile await you onboard AMALilia.

VANESSA LEE



AS WE EMERGED from the Tomb of Ramses III into the bright sunlight on a very hot, 30-degree day in Luxor, I paused to consider what our group had just witnessed – awestruck by the sheer beauty that dated back thousands of years in those remarkable tomb chambers. Looking back on our time in the Valley of the Kings, I decided it was my favourite of the places we'd visited. Walking through the rough-cut tombs, brought the artistry and reverence for the afterlife to life. This is one of the most evocative architectural sites in the world, famed as the burial ground of the New Kingdom Pharaohs. These tombs were hidden underground, and each is unique in design, paying homage to a specific King or Queen. Some contain intricate corridors and

chambers, lavishly painted with scenes of Egyptian mythology, funerary texts and daily life, all meant to guide the deceased safely to the afterlife. We toured several incredible tombs, each with vibrant walls and exquisite ceiling paintings, each remarkably well-preserved and outstanding. The amazing tomb of Seti I of the Nineteenth Dynasty is the longest, deepest, and most decorated in the valley, discovered in 1817, and the beauty of these grand burial chambers, with their well-preserved scenes, is astounding.

There are 65 tombs scattered in the valley, and not all can be visited – several have yet to be discovered, but archaeologists know they are hidden there. With AmaWaterways, we received special tickets that gave

us access to some of the most famous and beautiful sites, including the rather sparse one for King Tutankhamun, discovered in 1922. An interesting note here: King Tut died suddenly and early in his reign, leaving no time to begin building his tomb. So, the one in which he was buried was being constructed for a High Priest, not a King. Though the tomb itself is not special, when you see all the glittering artifacts of Tutankhamun at the GEM, you will be enthralled.

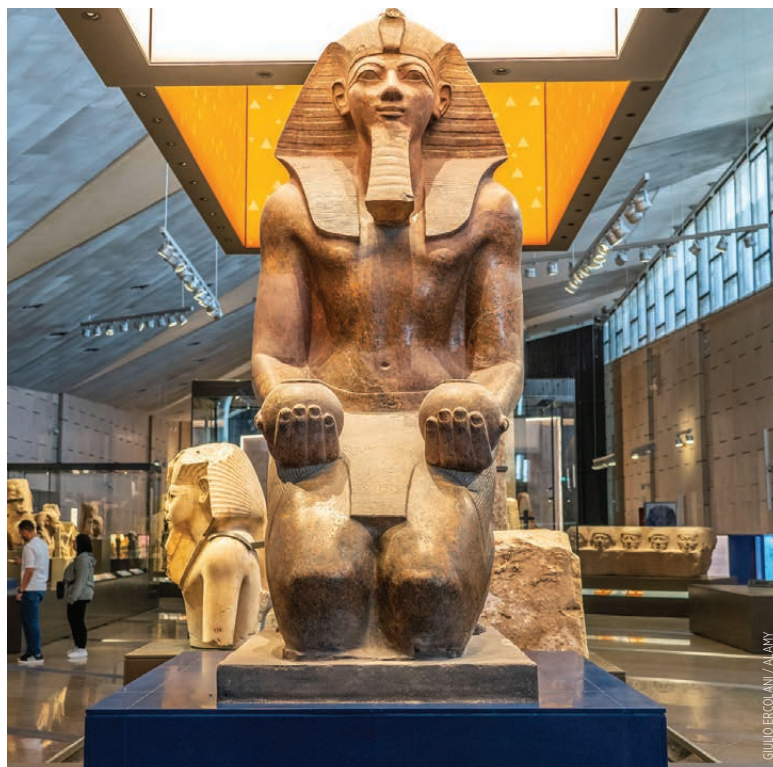
Few journeys capture the romance and wonder of ancient exploration like a cruise along the fabled River Nile. And sailing with AmaWaterways brought this legendary waterway to life in unforgettable ways, blending modern luxury with spellbinding, timeless discoveries.

Above left: AmaLilia  
Above right: Statue  
of Ramesses II in  
Cairo's Grand  
Egyptian Museum.  
Facing page:  
Low relief carving,  
temple of Seti I.





VALENTINRUSSANOV / ISTOCK



GIULIO BROLANI / ALAMY

Above: Camel rides at the Pyramids of Giza.

Above right: Statue of Hatshepsut at the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Facing page:

(Top) The Temple of Hathor, the Goddess of Love.

Interior of the Tomb of Seti I.

The spectacular voyage unfolded through Egypt's dramatic landscapes and centuries-old treasures, where every bend of the remarkable river revealed story upon story written thousands of years ago.

Onboard the new *AmaLilia* launched in 2024, the 81 guests enjoyed AmaWaterways' famed hospitality and the comforts of boutique river cruising, with elegant and spacious staterooms and suites, a stunning upper sun deck, refined dining, and intimate guided excursions accompanied by an AmaWaterways Cruise Manager and an expert Egyptologist — everything curated to deepen our understanding — and our fascination — with Egypt's living history.

Our March adventure began in Cairo, a city steeped in contrasts. It's a large, exceedingly busy place with traffic jams everywhere. Yet, the golden glow of the nearby Pyramids of Giza still meets the urban rhythm of bazaars, museums and timeless mosques. We stayed at the gorgeous St. Regis hotel in the heart of the city, courtesy of AmaWaterways, and we found it an oasis of elegance and calm in the city of 25 million that never seems to sleep.

It was in Cairo that we visited the Egyptian Museum's dazzling collection of artifacts. Then we were fortunate

enough to spend hours at the new GEM — the Grand Egyptian Museum, which was not yet officially opened in March, but was still amazing — perhaps the most impressive museum I have seen. Dedicated to a single civilization, it houses over 100,000 artifacts and treasures, including the whole collection of Tutankhamun, which is spectacular. This very modern, outstanding museum, located a short distance from the Giza Pyramids, juxtaposes beautifully with its ancient monuments, furnishings, and more. I would recommend spending as much time as possible here, especially if you extend your land stay in Cairo at the end of the cruise. It is an unparalleled cultural and historical experience.

Our days in Cairo were busy, with visits to the Pyramids, probably the most iconic image of Egypt, and to the ancient necropolis of Sakkara, with pyramids, tombs, and temples from various dynasties. Considered to be an open-air museum, Sakkara, the magnificent home of the famous Step Pyramid of Djoser, is one of the oldest stone structures in the world. We drove to another of the three pyramids, posed for photographs, and were amazed by its size. Most took the \$15 US per person camel ride, which our cruise manager, Sam, organized for everyone. Then we were off to the nearby Great Sphinx — by this point, we were

barely able to manage all we were seeing — it was sensory overload. During our few, busy days in Cairo, we visited the Citadel of Salah Eldin and the Alabaster Mosque. We also toured a fascinating area of the city — Coptic Cairo — with its churches and synagogues.

From Cairo, we took a short, included flight to Luxor, the second capital of ancient Egypt, where, boarding our charming little ship, purpose-built for the Nile, we marked the exciting start of our seven-day voyage through antiquity. We soon learned that the sheer volume and wealth of information we would receive was phenomenal, and there was so much to absorb. From the start, guests were placed in two groups, each with an Egyptologist. We enjoyed the company of our expert, Mohammed, who was a remarkable fountain of knowledge which he was proud to impart. We wondered how he could remember so much history and keep straight the names of all the Kings and Queens who had ruled for 5,000 years.

Each day brought an early start, and the weather was very warm and humid, so we learned to take an umbrella from our room to provide shade. We dressed appropriately, wore closed-toe shoes, and drank only bottled water. A security guard accompanied us, but we never felt anxious or nervous.



The Egyptians were delighted to see us and were lovely people. We walked a lot, often on uneven ground, and soon learned to stay hydrated, rest and sit as necessary and focused on our Quiet Vox headsets so we could wander a bit as Mohammed told stories of ancient times.

Cruising this lovely river not only led us to the heart of Egypt's ancient splendour and numerous spectacular and astounding temples, but also those from the ancient Greek and Roman periods. All were incredible, and we gawked and admired the Temples of Horus, the Temple of Karnak, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built over the course of 1,300 years, the Colossi of Memnon, the Great Temple of Kom Ombo, the Temple of Hathor – the Goddess of Love – which is the most beautiful and well-preserved, and many more! History surrounded and inspired us, and we seemed to be in a constant state of awe.





The Old Cataract Hotel

Our ship was a haven of comfort and charm, with marvellous, warm service from a delightful crew, wonderful accommodations, and excellent cuisine – a mix of local and western dishes. The head chef was ever-present and happy to make dishes upon request – I enjoyed a specially made, wonderful bowl of pasta one evening. As is typical of AmaWaterways, everything ran smoothly and just about everything was included. One evening, we reserved a table at The Chef's Table, an intimate restaurant, for a special Egyptian menu served to all guests, course by course and described by the Maître d'. And there were fun evenings of entertainment to enjoy onboard, including a Nubian show during the complimentary Sip & Sail pre-dinner drinks hour, a belly dancer and Tanora show, which is an Egyptian folk dance, where males wear colorful layered skirts and spin continuously – rather like a whirling Dervish performance.

A very special evening featured all guests and staff dressed up in local costumes for a Galabeya party, complete with headdresses. There is a shop on board where some items could be pur-

chased, but many of us bought a Galabeya – a long robe or dress – from local merchants. A very fun evening indeed and something memorable.

Another favourite day was in Aswan, where we boarded a felucca, a traditional Egyptian sailboat, for a ride around beautiful Elephantine Island, then on to a colourful Nubian village, where we were greeted with music and dancing and offered tea. From there, we visited the Temple of Philae, an important structure that was famously relocated to avoid flooding from the Aswan High Dam. In the afternoon, we enjoyed a very special outing to the famous Old Cataract Hotel, a British Colonial hotel dating back to 1899 and the locale where Agatha Christie stayed for months as she wrote *Death on the Nile*. Although a little touristy, the hotel is stunning, and we were escorted to an outdoor terrace for afternoon tea, replete with perfectly polished sandwiches and many other treats. It's an optional excursion at an extra cost of \$55 USD per person, but the view of the river, the feluccas sailing by, and the sunset were well worth the price – the experience is memorable and feels surprisingly historic.



Felucca on the Nile, Aswan

ANTON ALEKSENO



Abu Simbel



AmaLilia Lounge



AmaLilia Sun Deck

On another day, very early in the morning, most guests chose to fly to the majesty of Abu Simbel, in southern Egypt. This historic archaeological site comprises two temples built by Pharaoh Ramses II in the 13th Century BCE. The entire complex was moved to higher ground to save it from the rising waters of Lake Nasser – an international engineering feat led by UNESCO. The façade is famous, featuring four colossal statues of Ramses II, each over 65 feet high. The cost for this optional but must-do excursion is \$395 US a person, and everyone said it was worth it.

Egypt and the lovely Nile River made a deep impression on all of us. It is a remarkable place full of beauty and stunning buildings. History leaves its magic touch time and again as you visit one magnificent site after another. The river is beautiful and charming, and we saw farmers working their land, young people in boats trying to sell us their wares, and animals grazing on the banks. There was a timeless beauty and something quite magical permeating our trip to this fabled land, which ensured we would never lose our sense of wonder, and that's just as it should be. ■

AmaWaterways can organize a visa for you, which we highly recommend – you will be met at the airport and provided with it. And I suggest you include AmaWaterways airport transfers as well.

The currency is the Egyptian Pound, and it's wise to carry a lot of small notes with you – for tips and, particularly, for washroom visits, where they are a must to gain entry! US Dollars are also recommended.

And, at the entrance to every major site, there is a market full of wares being hawked by locals – and you must walk through it to gain access. Try not to make eye contact if you aren't interested in buying. And if you are, then haggling is a must.

It can get extremely hot and humid. Wear cool, light clothing, closed-toe shoes for the uneven ground and steps, and have access to bottled water at all times. One fellow guest rather cleverly brought a small battery-powered fan, which he used at many of the sites we visited. You will also be up and on tour early most days – get sleep when you can!

Be aware of local customs and dress appropriately when visiting mosques or churches. Lastly, be amazed – it's a remarkable country.

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# G'DAY AUSTRALIA

From the wonders of the vast red desert and Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock) to lush rainforests and golden coastlines, Australia is a land of dazzling contrasts and untamed beauty. Its diverse wildlife – kangaroos, koalas, wombats and the elusive platypus – thrives in some of the world's most extraordinary natural habitats.

The country's iconic cities each tell their own story; exciting Sydney shines with its harbour and Opera House, Melbourne hums with culture and creativity, and Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide blend laid-back charm with cosmopolitan flair. The wineries are excellent wherever you may be, as is the food and choice, especially the seafood. The country's history, Aboriginal peoples, and unique cultures date back over 60,000 years, making them the world's oldest continuous living culture.

Beyond the urban allure lie endless beaches perfect for surfing, snorkelling, or soaking up the sun. The Great Barrier Reef, a living masterpiece, is filled with wonders beneath turquoise waters alive with colour. Road trips like the Great Ocean Road or the Red Centre Way reveal Australia's raw beauty at every turn. Wherever your journey leads, you'll be greeted by friendly locals whose warmth reflects the spirit of this remarkable island continent. It's breathtakingly beautiful wherever you may go.

## Exploring culture, coastlines, and culinary delights in Australia's southern state

**MING TAPPIN**



Above:  
The Yarra River  
winds through  
Melbourne.  
Facing page:  
The Twelve Apostles  
is one of the  
highlights of the  
Great Ocean Road.

COVERING 227,600 square kilometres on Australia's southeast coast, Victoria may be the smallest mainland state, but it is a powerhouse of Aboriginal culture, gastronomy, and the great outdoors. Here is a guide to three unmissable destinations that reveal Victoria's true splendours.

### **Cultural Capital**

Nestled in Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne – Mel-ben, as it's pronounced by the locals – is the vibrant capital of Victoria, with the Yarra River winding through its heart. The First Peoples named it Narm and the river Birrarung, and today, the city acknowledges and pays deep respect to its traditional custodians by celebrating their history and culture in many meaningful ways. Melbourne's attractions are within walking distance, and the free trams that run through the downtown core make getting around easy and convenient.

Start by wandering through the Queen Victoria Market to feast your

eyes and taste buds. Open since 1878, the beloved "Vic Market" is a historic Melbourne icon spread over two city blocks. It features a farmers market, meat and seafood halls, food trucks, eateries, and shops selling everything from apparel and books to toys and hardware. With over 600 vendors, the National Heritage-listed landmark celebrates a tradition that has endured since colonial times.

Move on to Fed Square, Melbourne's vibrant arts precinct. This lively public square is a natural meeting place for locals and visitors alike. Don't miss the Koorie Heritage Trust (KHT), a First Peoples-owned and managed cultural centre showcasing the art, artefacts, language, and traditions of the Aboriginal peoples of southeastern Australia.

The KHT also offers Aboriginal guided walking tours along the Yarra and workshops that deepen understanding of the region's original settlers. Next door, discover more First

Nations art at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. These museums – and many others throughout Melbourne – offer free admission.

For a breath of fresh air, amble through the living collections of the Royal Botanic Gardens, where over 8,500 plant species thrive in harmony. Extending over 38 hectares, the serene garden showcases flora ranging from the curious to the truly fascinating. From succulents and cacti to flowering shrubs, centuries-old conifers, and towering eucalyptus that pierce the sky, botanical treasures fill every corner. Some of the wonderful activities there include Aboriginal Heritage Walks with a First Peoples guide and punting on the ornamental lake.

More cultural experiences can be found at the Immigration Museum, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Ballet, and annual events such as the Melbourne International Jazz Festival and the prestigious Melbourne Cup.

When it's time to unwind, Melbourne's beaches are just a few kilometres away. From lively St. Kilda to the gentler stretches further along Port Phillip Bay, the sandy beaches, calm waters, and scenic promenades make for an inviting coastal escape, offering a refreshing counterpoint to the city's energetic culture.

Just like its multifaceted attractions, Melbourne's dining scene is equally diverse, with options spanning the downtown core to nearby neighbourhoods. From timeless institutions like Pellegrini's Espresso Bar (which also serves hearty pasta) through to the Vietnamese eateries of Richmond, the Middle Eastern kitchens of Brunswick, and the cluster of restaurants in Chinatown and Koreatown, there is a rich variety of cuisine to explore. Modern menus also make inventive use of native ingredients such as roasted wattleseed, finger lime, barramundi, and kangaroo, creating flavours that are distinctly Australian. The city's renowned coffee culture is also not to be missed.



The splendours of  
**VICTORIA**



## MELBOURNE

STAY: The Langham Melbourne (Page 19)

TASTE: Miss Amelie Gourmet Pies for award-winning meat pies at the Queen Victoria Market.

DRINK: Market Lane Coffee for a flat white with an oversized, buttery croissant (various locations).

CULTURE: NGV International for First Nations art collection; Melbourne Cricket Ground and the Australian Sports Museum for sporting history.

## GEELONG AND THE BELLARINE

STAY: Portarlington Grand Hotel for fully restored Victorian-era charm; Novotel Geelong for bay views.

TASTE: Pier Street Café for steamed Portarlington mussels; Jack Rabbit Vineyard Restaurant for fine dining and wine pairings.

DRINK: Geelong Cellar Door for local wines by the glass.

CULTURE: Geelong Gallery for Australian and international art; National Wool Museum for Geelong's bygone industry.

## THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

STAY: Hotels, motels, and guesthouses along the route.

TASTE: Apollo Bay Bakery for a scallop pie or sausage roll.

DRINK: Sow & Piglets Brew Pub, Port Campbell for German-style craft beer.

CULTURE: Australian National Surfing Museum, Torquay for surfing history and heritage.



## Victoria's Secret

Located 70 kilometres southwest of Melbourne, Geelong (pronounced *Je-long*) and The Bellarine is an uncrowded, undiscovered treasure for lovers of gastronomy and the outdoors. While reachable by car, a more scenic and stress-free option is the Port Phillip Ferries, which depart daily from Melbourne's Docklands. Arrive in Portarlington – Australia's mussel capital – in time to savour a heaping bowl of blue mussels. For a deeper dive into the famous mollusks, book a boat tour to the mussel farm, complete with a cooking demonstration and tastings.

The Bellarine Peninsula is home to more than 40 wineries, many of which also offer casual and fine dining with panoramic views over Port Phillip Bay. Beyond wine, the region features craft breweries, distilleries, and a cider house. Local producers of honey, olive oil, fruit, smoked seafood, and natural goods can be visited as part of the 30 locations featured on The Bellarine Taste Trail.

Outdoor enthusiasts can bike along the 35-kilometre Bellarine Rail Trail or explore one of many scenic coastal walking trails. Golfers have a choice of six courses, including two of Australia's highest-ranking links. Port Phillip Bay caters to every watersport – surfing, snorkelling, diving, fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, and sunbathers and beachcombers.

A visit to the Bellarine should also include Geelong, tucked in the southwest corner of Port Phillip Bay. Stroll the waterfront Bollard Trail, where more than 100 reclaimed pier timbers have been reimagined into charming characters from Geelong's past.

Designated as Australia's only UNESCO City of Design, Geelong is full of opportunities to connect with culture. Use the Geelong Arts and Culture Trails app to locate art studios, galleries, heritage buildings, performance arts venues, and more. Dine on local and international fare on Little Malop Street and take in live entertainment.



### Epic Drive

Twenty kilometres south of Geelong at Torquay is the start of the Great Ocean Road. From here, the two-lane highway meanders over 243 kilometres westward through rugged coastlines, lush rainforests, and quaint seaside communities, earning a reputation as one of the world's most spectacular drives.

Past Anglesea, the Great Ocean Road begins to hug the coast, revealing sweeping views of rock-strewn beaches and winding shoreline. At Aireys Inlet, viewpoints offer the first dramatic vistas over crashing waves and sculpted cliffs. Past Lorne, Teddy's Lookout provides a rare bird's-eye view of the Great Ocean Road – where the highway winds along the edge of the hills and the ocean shimmers below. Arrive at Kennett River to take a nature walk, keeping an eye out for wild koalas in the eucalyptus trees and kangaroos on the hillsides.

The 110-kilometre stretch from Apollo Bay to Peterborough is widely considered the most scenic section of

the Great Ocean Road. After Apollo Bay, the road veers inland through the lush Great Otway National Park.

Enjoy a peaceful walk on an elevated boardwalk at Maits Rest Rainforest Walk, passing ancient tree ferns and towering moss-covered trees. When the road returns to the coast, the awe-inspiring scenery truly unfolds.

At Gibson Steps, descend 86 steps to the sandy beach below and admire the first of the offshore limestone stacks. Just over a kilometre away is the Twelve Apostles – majestic limestone pinnacles that, once part of the mainland, were carved by wind and the Southern Ocean over millions of years. These formations are the most visited and photographed landmarks along the Great Ocean Road. Don't skip Loch Ard Gorge, the Bakers Oven, and Sparks Gully, located a few minutes west. Follow the paths to the cliff edge and witness the sheer power of the ocean at work, relentlessly carving the limestone walls into arches, blow-holes, and caves.

The Great Ocean Road meanders over 243 kms through rugged coastlines, lush rainforests, and quaint seaside communities, earning a reputation as one of the world's most spectacular drives.

The Great Ocean Road continues to captivate between Port Campbell and Peterborough, with more impressive ocean-carved formations at London Bridge, the Grotto, Bay of Martyrs, and the Bay of Islands, before eventually turning inland toward its western terminus at Allansford. Allow at least two or more days to enjoy this drive and take the time to stop and admire the breathtaking scenery. Larger communities such as Apollo Bay and Port Campbell will have more accommodation options. All viewpoints along the route have parking or pull-outs, with some requiring a short walk on well-marked trails. Heed the poisonous snakes warning signs seriously, stay on the paths, and watch for snakes and other wildlife that may cross the trails at any time. ■

Facing page:  
(clockwise from  
top left) Jack Rabbit  
Vineyard Restaurant.  
Geelong Cellar Door.

Portarlington,  
Bellarine Peninsula  
is Australia's mussel  
capital. Book a boat  
tour to the mussel  
farm (top photo),  
and enjoy a heaping  
bowl of blue  
mussels.

Above:  
Twelve Apostles,  
Great Ocean Road.

# BAROSSA WINE WANDER



Reading between the rows of South Australia's iconic vineyards reveals community vitality, pride of passion and intuitive hospitality.

**DOUG WALLACE**



**R**ELUCTANTLY, I'm pushing back from the most exquisite fruit tart I've ever had and savouring every last molecule of my glass of rosé. The combination of flavours is heaven, the total embodiment of early autumn in South Australia's Barossa Wine Valley.

We've stopped for lunch at Staguni, a charming restaurant seemingly in the middle of nowhere, a destination pitstop housed in what was once a one-room schoolhouse. Our one-hour morning drive northeast from the state capital of Adelaide has landed us in bucolic wine country, with rolling vineyards stretching between stands of eucalyptus – or gum trees – that line the roads. The vista is pebbled with wee farms, many with cellar-door signs promising taste sensation. All this creates an instant sense of peace.

Our little restaurant, run by chef-owner Clare Falzon, sets a rustic tone, the kitchen leaning into seasonality with its homespun and creative comfort food. It's a little microcosm of locality – ingredients, people and all – just one of the many success stories to be told here.

Fortified, we then consider our task at hand: tasting the wine. Of course, Barossa has a global reputation, but to actually experience it first-hand is more than marvellous.

"Visiting the Barossa Valley gives you the chance to truly get under the skin of the region," says Dan Coward, commercial director of Alkina Wine Estate. "The wines have a strong imprint of their place, their climate and their traditions." We drove here for the bold Shiraz, which accounts for

about two-thirds of the region's plantings, but we are pleasantly surprised by so much else: the golden Semillon, the structured Cabernet Sauvignon, the heritage Grenache and the thriving Mourvèdre.

The Barossa Zone comprises two main regions. The warmer, lower Barossa Valley is famous for rich, full-bodied and generous reds yielding dark-fruit notes, while the cooler, higher-altitude Eden Valley comes through with floral whites and medium-bodied reds ripe with blue- and red-fruit flavours. Each complements the other nicely. An informally mapped collection of sub regions weaves in and around the villages of Tanunda, Angaston, Nuriootpa, offering more than 80 tasting rooms, all of the wineries boutique, many

Facing page:  
Cycling through  
the scenic vineyards  
of Barossa.  
Above left:  
Grape harvest at  
Alkina Winery.  
Chef-owner  
Clare Falzon of  
Staguni Restaurant.

family-run. And despite the international acclaim, the Barossa Valley has the look and feel of a small community rather than the glitz of a tourist hot-spot. The producers are, of course, passionate about what they do, more focused on sincerity than spectacle, the integrity underscored by enormous character.

"Barossans are incredibly proud of their family histories and wine stories," Dan says. "One thing everyone shares here is history, be that five generations of family grape-growing or just a few years of creating new history like we are at Alkina."

Situated in the Western Barossa Ranges sub-zone, and with its Indigenous name meaning "moon" or "moonlight," Alkina has a relatively new story



Alkina Wine Estate

to tell, having launched in 2015 within the grounds of an old farm. More than 40 hectares are tended according to organic and biodynamic principles, yielding small-scale winemaking at its most creative. We try a classic flight of micro-terroir wines in the 1850s wool shed and get to drink what appeals to us, rather than sift through a pre-set list. The experience is both intimate and unhurried – and fun!

"I urge visitors to go beyond the tasting bar and really get into the vineyards and learn about the sub-regional variations and the varied wine styles," Dan says. "Taste the older wines and the fortified—there's something for all levels of knowledge and interest."



Alkina Wine Estate Tasting Room

ANDY ELLIS / ALKINA WINERY



Le Mas Barossa

TIM STEWART

only four suites, Le Mas is going to feel like our own personal country house, watched over by just an attendant and a chef. Turns out, we are the only guests for the night, which only amplifies the luxury.

Le Mas is owned by a French-Australian family: matriarch Marie-France, her daughter Geraldine who is founder and director, and Geraldine's husband Llewellyn who oversees the vineyard and winemaking. Together, they've blended French aesthetics with Barossa Valley heritage to great effect.

We wander outside the sandstone walls and onto a terrace overlooking the sloped lawn, grenache vines everywhere you look, enveloping the whole property. An immaculate boxwood maze dominates the garden, with a heated mineral pool tucked under the trees beyond. Truthfully, the kookaburras are the only things giving it away that I'm not in France.

The next day, after a delicious breakfast of practically every breakfast item in existence, we take a final stroll to ensure the essence of Barossa is imprinted on our minds. A shy echidna waddles away to avoid saying hello. It's OK, though. We'll see him next time. ■



Touring the scenic vineyards of Barossa



Alkina Wine Estate



Alkina Wine Estate

# WILD AT HEART

With windswept shorelines, ancient geology and rare creatures, life on Kangaroo Island unfolds on nature's terms.

**DOUG WALLACE**

**I**'M COMPLETELY OK with being upstaged by the kangaroos." Tamsin Wendt follows my gaze out toward the grassland surrounding Oceanview Eco Villas on the Red Banks coast of Kangaroo Island, where a mob of about 20 kangaroos are gathering near a water pump. "Keep an eye out for the two nesting pairs of wedge-tailed eagles on the property," she adds. "They love the wind."

We're here off the coast of South Australia to explore what's often billed as the Galápagos of South Australia: a 440,000-hectare natural playground filled with wildlife. Our hosts Tamsin and her husband Tim Wendt operate their two large, luxury villas within a 200-hectare farm, offering visitors bespoke sightseeing tours each day.

"All the things we love most about the Island are also what guests are looking for when they visit," Tim says. "The wildlife in the beautiful night skies, stunning coastline and landscapes – this is what makes the Island so special. It's not uncommon for us to have guests who have been on safari in Africa and toured the real Galápagos, and are coming to Kangaroo Island specifically to see our 'zoo without fences.'"

Colloquially known as KI, Kangaroo Island is an isolated haven of wildlife encounters, like a little time capsule; much of the wildlife has been here for more than 10,000 years. The people population reaches 5,000, with the number of kangaroos hitting 40,000 and the extremely cute wallabies numbering almost 400,000. There are no dingoes, foxes or rabbits – no natural predators – so the flora and fauna mirror what South Australia was like prior to European settlement.

The Wendts have lived on the island for more than 20 years, moving from Adelaide. "We came and never left," Tamsin says. "Our kids grew up here. The island is just one of those places that gets under your skin."



## Wildlife takes centre stage—and we have front-row seats

As the Mercedes SUV glides along the limestone roads toward Seal Bay on the island's south coast, we have our first animal encounter – well, second, after our resident kangaroos. Seal Bay turns out to be not full of seals, but of the endangered Australia sea lion instead. We are visiting the pinnipeds' breeding colony – walking right into their sandy bedroom, so to speak. We find dozens of them, pups and parents, sheltering in the dunes or basking on the beach. The females forage for food at sea for two or three days at a time, before returning to the beach exhausted and stuffed with fish and squid, and calling out to their pups. The bulls take shorter and more frequent trips into the ocean to eat, primarily acting as sanctuary protectors.

We watch a few lone swimmers exit the water and wander the shores to find their kin. It seems rather trial and error, but it could be that the sea lion is just visiting with the various groups – some friendly, others less so. Witnessing this natural behaviour is what makes it all so fascinating.



Kangaroo Island



Seal Bay, Kangaroo Island



Sunset at Oceanview Eco Villas



After fortifying with a picnic lunch in an old sheep-shearing shed by a quiet lake, we chance upon our first koalas, spotted in groves of eucalyptus trees. “Koalas are becoming more rare on mainland Australia, due to loss of habitat, predators and illness,” Tim says. “They sleep for up to 18 hours a day, appearing like fluffy basketballs, nestled in the boughs of the gum trees.” Kangaroo Island is also a bird-lovers paradise, with populations of coastal raptors, sea eagles, kestrels, hawks and kites.

KI is still recovering from a devastating fire in 2019-2020 that destroyed almost half the island. Countless hectares were lost or degraded, the populations of animals decimated. Rejuvenation has been slow but steady. We pass by more than a few burn areas.

A stop at a honey farm brings about a different kind of wildlife: Ligurian bees. Introduced to KI in the late 1800s, originally from the Italian Alps, this species is genetically pure thanks to the island’s disease-free isolation and strict biosecurity laws. KI harbours the last remaining population of them in the world. I easily find a corner of my suitcase for a jar of the earthy, flavourful honey.





Remarkable Rocks

Beyond all this abundant wildlife, KI is also renowned for its staggering vistas, geological oddities and ancient natural history. The u-shaped beach at Vivonne Bay Conservation Park is consistently voted one of Australia's most scenic. Six kms of soft, white sand stretch out to crystal-clear turquoise waters, while wallabies graze in the nearby dunes and eagles soar overhead. A variety of trails take you deeper into this quiet coastal scene. The postcard views continue a half-hour down the road at the 250-square-hectare Flinders Chase National Park. The Remarkable Rocks are indeed remarkable, granite formations shaped by the elements over the past 550 million years. The orange and red lichen glows best at sunrise and sunset.

Weirs Cove Lookout delivers dramatic clifftop views of the Southern Ocean from the ruins of a lighthouse keeper's house on Cape du Couedic. And nearby Admirals Arch was formed by thousands of years of crashing waves, the stalactite-like rock formations hanging over the roaring sea below.

#### **Eco-friendly design in harmony with the environment.**

Back at the villa, I realize how easily I can get used to this kind of sustainable high life. All our meals are prepared fresh, the menus celebrating local products and ingredients, and showcasing island wines and gin. The villa's construction is environmentally-friendly to the hilt, with 90 percent of the materials coming from within South Australia. The glass is viridian smart glass, designed specifically for the Australian

climate. The composite decking is made of wood waste and plastic milk containers. All the furnishings are bespoke. "We worked with South Australian family-based companies to make the chairs, couches, bedheads and pillows," Tamsin says, "and the spotted gum custom cabinetry is sustainable and ethically harvested."

Cross ventilation cools the building down. "People think that with luxury and sustainability you have to compromise somewhere, but absolutely not," Tamsin adds. "Sometimes, people are horrified to hear that we don't have air conditioning, until they realize that we don't need it." As well, little surprises reveal how far the details go: the cup in the bathroom for my toothbrush is made from abandoned fishing netting, and the polished-concrete flooring matches the brown pelts of the kangaroos outside.

Speaking of which, a few kangaroos make a surprise appearance at the front door just before dinner. They've been hanging around the small prep kitchen situated between the two villas, eating sweet potatoes. And as another fabulous meal hits our dining room table, we see one of the bigger kangaroos on the grounds behaving badly, knocking others away from the food bowls the Wendts have set up during dry season. When he's finished drinking from the water trough, he knocks it over. Jerk.

Once again, it's this kind of experience – not just seeing the animals but actually witnessing their behaviour up close – that makes our visit so special. Tamsin is spot on: "There's nowhere else quite like it in the world." ■

# CLASSIC TALL SHIP ROMANCE AT SEA

Romance and adventure aboard  
the intimate Royal Clipper

**VANESSA LEE**



COURTESY ROYAL CLIPPER



COURTESY ROYAL CLIPPER

*“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” —MARK TWAIN*



ROB MCPHERSON

Vanessa Lee on the bowsprit

WITH A WARM, salty breeze in our windswept hair, sand in our shoes, and the sun gently caressing my shoulders, we found our little slice of Caribbean heaven as we boarded our spiffy five-masted sailing ship, the *Royal Clipper*. She is the flagship of the Star Clippers fleet, which also sails the smaller sisters *Star Flyer* and *Star Clipper*.

The impressive *Royal Clipper* can host as many as 227 guests and primarily sails in the Caribbean and the Med. When all of her 42 sails are unfurled, she’s a sight to behold as she seems to fly over the waves.

A fully rigged vessel, like her predecessor, the *Preussen*, after which she was modelled, *Royal Clipper* offers a sense of grandeur and nautical tradition as well as all the modern amenities you’d expect. By night, under a starry, starry inky sky, we set sail to the resounding sounds of Vangelis of 1492: *Conquest of Paradise*. It’s a thrill-

ing cast off, and I suspect most of our fellow guests had the same goosebumps we did, gazing at the towering masts, the fantastic billowing canvas, and the long, sleek hull.

We were on a seven-day Caribbean cruise from Barbados round-trip to several ports in the gorgeous Grenadines, including Bequia and the Tobago Cays, Grenada, St Vincent, Martinique, and St Lucia.

More than 19,000 square feet of expansive teak decks provide generous open space with ample sun loungers in both sun and shade, and three small swimming pools, all sharing the top deck with a bar and the bridge, which is invariably open for visits. We checked out the bowsprit and the tucked-away bow balconies to steal away to. A three-deck atrium channels natural light down into the open-seating dining room, while the Captain Nemo Lounge Spa sits partly

below the waterline with glass portholes on the sea. Burnished brass fittings, mahogany wood, and nautical items create a yacht-like feel on board while a charming library offers quiet space for reading or cards.

The onboard atmosphere is unique, and many repeat guests use the ship as a home away from home. The staterooms are compact, with double or twin beds that can be combined to make a queen. There is a small bathroom with a shower, a closet, a chest of drawers, a tiny sitting area with a TV for video viewing, a hairdryer and two portholes, plus European voltage. I would recommend taking one of the 14 suites, which are more spacious and very comfortable – but they book quickly. You don’t need any fancy clothing or jackets and ties, so packing is simple, and the onboard atmosphere is smart casual – except on pirate night! Ahoy matey!

Facing page:  
Royal Clipper under  
sail in the Caribbean.



Dining room



Watersports marina



Deluxe suite



COURTESY ROYAL CLIPPER

The atmosphere is free and easy, a relaxed cruise where you'll meet fellow, like-minded guests at every turn – in the piano bar, at meals, on shore excursions, or at the covered, outside tropical bar, the heart of the ship and a perfect place for casual evenings under the stars. There are always snacks on hand, as well as a resident duo singing and playing piano melodies or dance tunes. Sometimes entertainment comes onboard – such as a steel drum band – and themed evenings include White Nights, a guest-and-crew talent show, and other fun events. On our cruise, about 30 percent of the guests were repeat sailors, but the Captain told me that on some sailings, that number can be as high as 80 percent!

Guests can watch or help set over 55,000 square feet of sail, and those who'd like a little adventure can climb up to the guests' crow's nest for sweeping Caribbean views. A fold-

down stern marina offers swimming, snorkelling and water sports from the back of the ship and a three-person sports team is ever-ready to assist. On the first full sea day, you can pick up your snorkel, mask, and flippers to use for the week at no charge. We used ours almost every day.

The itinerary is one of my all-time favourites, and it's even better when you're on a sailing yacht. You're seeing the best beaches, fabulous snorkelling spots with terrific marine life, and chilling with a cocktail or beer under the sun. Smaller islands and cays are everywhere in this area of the Caribbean, and it's simply gorgeous, whether under sail, enjoying a beach barbecue ashore, or exploring a local village or market. It feels like the Caribbean did 25 years ago, with fewer crowds and more natural beauty.

Alcohol, specialty coffees and soft drinks are extra, as are gratuities and the shore excursions. The onboard



Spectacular sail by

currency is the Euro, and the recommended gratuity is 8 Euros per guest per day; additional amounts can be offered for your stateroom steward, a favourite bartender or server. All meals are served in the dining room, which can get busy, especially at dinner. Breakfast and lunches are buffet-style with ample choices, and dinner is à la carte.

Shore excursions are varied and might include 4x4 jeeps, catamaran and snorkel sails, heritage tours, Plantation and Garden visits, and more – such as La Soufrière volcano in St Lucia. Prices range from €49 to €85/95. The Captain also organizes a sail by, and guests jump into the tenders/Zodiacs, and in full sail, we can take photos of our gorgeous clipper ship. It's quite a breathtaking sight to realize what everyone else sees as we happily sail from one beautiful island to another, as we explore the yachtman's Caribbean. ■



EL GRECO 973 SHUTTERSTOCK

Martinique

Liz Fleming asked **John Waggoner**, Founder and CEO of Victory Cruise Lines about their intimate two-ship fleet sailing on the Great Lakes and why this kind of cruise is so appealing to many guests for close-to-home cruising.



**Victory Cruise Lines returned to the market with a great deal of attention. What has stood out most to you in the first year based on guest feedback?**

What has been most gratifying is how consistently guests tell us that Victory exceeded their expectations - particularly

those who consider themselves seasoned travellers. The reviews speak to a sense of discovery paired with comfort. Guests love that they're exploring iconic North American destinations in a way that feels fresh, unhurried, and deeply immersive. Many say, "I've been to these cities before -

but never like this." That tells us we're doing something truly special.

**Why do you think the Great Lakes resonate so deeply with Canadian travellers in particular?**

The Great Lakes are part of Canada's cultural and historical DNA. Sailing them offers a powerful sense of connection - to trade routes, early settlements, Indigenous history, and maritime heritage. When guests travel by ship, they see these places as they were meant to be seen: from the water. Ports like Toronto, Thunder Bay, Georgian Bay, Mackinac Island, and Québec City reveal layers of history and beauty that are often missed when travelling by land. For Canadians, it feels both nostalgic and revelatory.

**Many travellers have been to places like Chicago or Toronto before. What changes when you arrive by ship?**

Perspective—instantly. There's something powerful about approaching a great city the way early travelers and merchants did: by water. The skyline reveal is unforgettable, and you understand how the waterfront shaped the city's identity. We think Canadians in particular would love that viewpoint—seeing these Great Lakes cities from the water gives you a new appreciation

for places you may already know. It's familiar, but it feels brand new.

**Your all-inclusive approach is often mentioned in reviews. What does "all-inclusive" mean with Victory in practical terms?**

It means guests can relax into the experience. Shore excursions are included, and they're curated - thoughtful, well-paced, and led by experts who bring the destination to life. Onboard, service is highly personal, dining is elevated and regionally inspired, and the overall experience is designed to feel seamless. For guests who value quality and simplicity, it's the difference between a trip that feels "managed" and one that feels effortless.

**What do you want a discerning traveller to take away from a Great Lakes voyage with Victory?**

That extraordinary travel doesn't always require going far - it requires going deeper. The Great Lakes deliver history, culture, and beauty on a grand scale, and Victory delivers it in a way that's intimate, comfortable, and thoughtfully curated. Guests leave feeling they've truly seen these places, not just checked them off. And the reviews tell us that sense of surprise and delight is exactly what people are looking for right now. ■

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