

Vol. 22 NO 1 WINTER / SPRING 2024

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# CRUISE & TRAVEL LIFESTYLES

50TH  
ISSUE

THE NEW

## *Winter blues*

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## It's Time to Explore More



Vanessa Lee attending the Celebrity Ascent inaugural in November 2023

TRAVEL, PARTICULARLY CRUISING, has made a robust and very welcome comeback – thank goodness! The terrible times of the early 2020s have faded, and everywhere I go, people ask me about travelling and wonder which ships or places I might recommend. Of course, there is a ship for everybody, so I enjoy chatting about various options before I recommend they speak to their local travel professional to make a booking.

Are you ready to return to the travel world and make up for lost time? I don't like the term "revenge travel," but I understand why those who have waited several years to resume their explorations may feel that they are taking a "revenge tour."

Many of us are feeling spurred on to make up for lost time. In January, we flew to Ushuaia in Argentina and boarded the new *Seabourn Pursuit* for a bucket-list exploration of Antarctica. This means we've now accomplished a "Pole to Pole," the Arctic to the Antarctic experience in five months. On the Fall 23 cruise to the Arctic, we met many people who had toured both Poles in one year. Some were heading back to the Seventh Continent as they wanted to see more awe-inspiring, remarkable scenery, epic ice landscapes and impressive wildlife. I was fascinated by how many people – mostly boomers and semi or retired folk – were keen to set forth on such major trips. I realize it's a sign of the times.

Amazingly, such trips are more commonplace, accessible and well-priced as more cruise lines enter the small-ship expedition and exploration category. Sustainability is at the forefront of new ship-building, especially for the brands that focus on the less-explored lands, and this is very important. With seven continents under my belt by the time you read this magazine, know that I am intently working on my bucket list, including a return to Africa and Australia (The Kimberley), more time in Asia with Japan high on the list, and a first visit to New Zealand – hopefully, next year.

I think it's interesting to see what kind of traveller or cruiser people are. Curiosity and authenticity seem to be descriptions that resonate as many of us are curious to learn and keen to leave the beaten path. It seems such people seek unique and authentic experiences and wish to travel with like-minded individuals so harmony and camaraderie can be a core element of their trip. Cruise lines have forged relationships with wildlife partners, indigenous peoples, UNESCO and Smithsonian Journeys to name just a few and sustainability is at the forefront for many brands, especially those sailing at the ends of the earth and in more fragile eco-systems. Travellers these days appreciate this and are attracted to such brands.

Wherever you are reading this and wherever it is you hope to travel, I trust you find the material enjoyable and that it also spurs you to discover more of our remarkable world in whatever fashion suits you. Please follow us at [www.cruiseandtravellifestyles.com](http://www.cruiseandtravellifestyles.com) and on twitter at [vanessaleesails](https://twitter.com/vanessaleesails), on our Facebook page or on Instagram at [Vanessar3577](https://www.instagram.com/Vanessar3577).

Sincerely,

Vanessa Lee

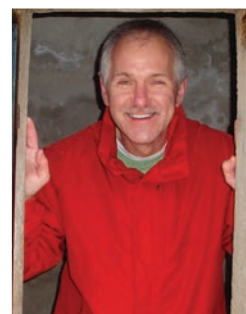
### IN MEMORIAM

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

Derek Hamilton, Barbara Foster, Frank Baka,  
Maleine Fredericks, Michael de Wilde,  
Paul Dupont, Brian Otterbein

Gary Rodeck  
1953 – 2023

Gary was one of the finest people you could ever meet. A truly great guy in every way, cruelly taken from us far too early. He loved his life and was always full of vim and vigour; and that is how we will remember him.





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# Maui moments await

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# Features

## 16 WILD AND SPECTACULAR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Our intrepid writer travels to Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and the Salish Sea and finds a new way to move around on the BC Ferries system. He also hikes, bikes, surfs and kayaks on a fascinating trip full of nature, great sights and majestic vistas.

## 20 VIKING SAILS THE GREAT LAKES

The remarkable and awe-inspiring beauty of Georgian Bay, a World Biosphere Reserve, is part of the attraction of North America's Great Lakes. Viking's new, luxury expedition ship explores big cities, small ports and charming Mackinac Island as she takes her guests on an exploration of the Canadian Shield and more.

## 24 DISCOVERY CRUISING

Our publisher enjoys a luxury, warm-water Discovery cruise on the lovely Scenic Eclipse II. Excellent service, delicious cuisine, and a relaxed onboard atmosphere ensure a delightful experience. A Panama Canal transit and gorgeous, secluded islands on an off-the-beaten-path itinerary make this cruise a wow.

## 32 A RETURN TO MAUI

After the horrifying and tragic fires in Lahaina last summer, we travelled to Maui to see firsthand how the destination is making a remarkable comeback – gratifyingly so.

## 34 CHARMING CHARLESTON

The belle of South Carolina, famous for its Low Country cuisine, Charleston offers a memorable stay. Grand mansions, narrow colonial houses, cobblestone lanes, and myriad church steeples ensure old-world charm is ever present in this exciting, cosmopolitan city.

## 38 SKY PRINCESS IN THE CARIBBEAN

Princess Cruises, with its long-standing and award-winning fleet of ships, sails worldwide, offering loyal and new guests a wonderful experience at sea. Read about our editor's seven-day cruise in the Caribbean and her favourite places on the lovely Sky Princess.

## 42 LIFE UNDER SAIL

Ahoy there! Join us as we set sail on the tall ship, Star Clipper, cruising in the Med. If you enjoy casual and convivial relaxation as you visit fantastic ports of call such as Elba, Bonifacio, and St Tropez, then life at sea under sail is for you on an appealing Star Clippers cruise.

### IN EVERY ISSUE

8 Expedition Cruising  
10 Setting Sail  
12 NewsWorthy  
16 Staying Places  
47 River Cruising  
48 In Conversation

Catching a giant wave in Maui. See story page 32 and learn about Maui's remarkable comeback.





Liz enjoying Sky Princess in the Caribbean.

There's no denying that the world is in tumult and that may have some of us feeling hesitant about travel. Depending on where you live, even traveling in parts of our own continent may feel less than peaceful or enticing, but I would argue that there has never been a more important time to explore the world – not to escape, but rather to learn.

We often fear what we don't understand – what we haven't experienced – and that makes travel vital. Discovering new places, exploring other cultures and meeting people whose lives are different from our own is the key to acceptance and, ultimately, to feeling more comfortable and confident in the world. While we clearly need to avoid areas of conflict and danger, there's never been a better or more important time to push ourselves beyond our comfort zone to

explore destinations we've never visited and to try things that are completely unknown. Savouring a food we've never tasted before, for example, involves a tiny bit of courage but speaking with the chef who created it can be the beginning of a new friendship. Learning a few words in another language as you travel in a country you've never explored can open friendly pathways to a different culture. Listening with the goal of learning about other traditions and cultures can expand both your understanding and your heart. It's all about being willing to try.

At a time when doors seem to be closing between countries, and widening gaps are yawning between different nationalities and political factions, we have the power to keep important portals open through travel. No one comes home from a true journey of exploration unchanged. Everything we learn as we experience a new place makes its mark on our minds and souls as we discover that our way is far from the only way to think, to do or to be. Make this year a time of discovery and excitement as you push the door open just a little farther to let understanding shine in.

Happy travels,

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

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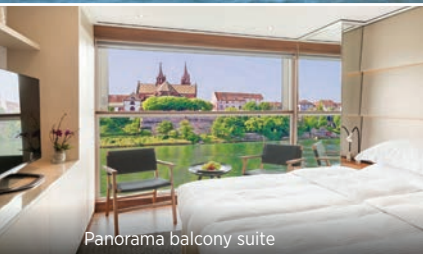
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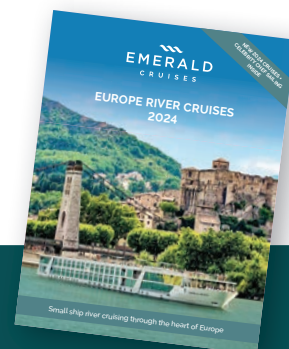
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Le Bellot in Panama



COURTESY PONANT

### PONANT announces tours for 2025 with Smithsonian Journeys

If the idea of exploring the world's most fascinating destinations makes your heart beat a little faster, you'll love the lineup of 2025 voyages just announced by **Ponant**, in partnership with **Smithsonian Journeys**. These all-inclusive sailings are designed to provide a destination immersion with deep dives into the history, cuisine, language, environment, and wildlife of each place. Visiting ports of call on all seven continents, PONANT's destinations for 2025 include: New Zealand's North and South Islands; London to Lisbon – Cruising Europe's Western Shores; Panama and Costa Rica; Cruising the Caribbean's Windward Islands; Antarctica – The White Continent; Mediterranean Island Voyage. Some 2024 itineraries that still have space include: Ancient Civilizations – from Aqaba to Valletta; Mediterranean Island Voyage: Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica & Elba; Cultural and Natural Treasures of Japan; Cruising Alaska's Inside Passage; and Ancient Wonders & Culinary Delights: from Valletta to Livorno. The ships of Ponant are small and luxurious and all-inclusive with some vessels dedicated to expeditions and some to warm-water exploration, all offering fabulous French cuisine.

### Atlas Ocean Voyages offers 48 expeditions aboard three luxury yachts

**Atlas Ocean Voyages'** new Polar Expeditions by Atlas to Antarctica will be setting sail between November 2024 and March 2025 with 48 remarkable adventures to choose from, aboard three luxurious yachts – **World Voyager**, **World Navigator**, and **World Traveller**. Expeditions of between 5-18 nights are available, with most sailing roundtrips from Ushuaia, Argentina, complemented with Fly the Drake expeditions departing or ending in Punta Arenas, Chile. All guests enjoy an included pre-cruise hotel night stay in Buenos Aires or Punta Arenas as well as private roundtrip charter air flights. Expeditions are built around a multitude of exciting landings on remote shores and Zodiac safaris into the pristine wonders of the Antarctic wilderness, guided by Atlas Ocean Voyages' expedition team of field experts, passionate guides, and knowledgeable naturalists. Guests can also choose from a selection of Cultural Expeditions by Atlas in spring 2024 or fall 2025 which include such destinations as: Isla de los Estados, Argentina; São Francisco do Sul, Brazil; the South Orkney Islands and New Island in the Falkland Islands.

### Safari at sea with Seabourn

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## Celebrity Ascent arrives in style

I was pleased to sail on yet another spectacular **Celebrity Cruises** ship recently. This time, it was the brand new, ultra-gorgeous **Celebrity Ascent**. Accolades and admiration for the vessel have been swirling for weeks now, and the unanimous verdict is in. With yet another ship in their fleet and the Edge Class series garnering rave review upon rave review, Celebrity is basking in glory. Justifiably so. The ships are beautifully sophisticated and the attention to detail, décor and design are magnificent. *Celebrity Ascent*, as the fourth ship of five in the groundbreaking Edge Class, offers cruisers an elevated premium experience, warm hospitality, and incredible value. The myriad dining choices are spectacular, and famed Chef Daniel Boulud was onboard to ensure all was exceptional in his signature restaurant, Le Voyage. The restaurant has been newly designed since its **Celebrity Beyond** debut, and the menu has been somewhat expanded. It garners rave reviews and foodie clients will love it, but there is a fee. At \$75 per guest, plus gratuity, it's a must-reserve for its 50 guests. Blu, the restaurant for Aqua Class guests which features clean cuisine, now offers outdoor daytime dining. Enjoy the outstanding Magic Carpet for drinks or dinner and many other spots, including Eden, Le Petit Chef, Raw on Five, and four beautiful main restaurants. I love the Retreat, an exclusive ship-within-a-ship concept that features suites, a fabulous two-storey sundeck, relaxing lounge and bar area and the intimate jewel-box Luminae, one of my favourite restaurants on any ship. The service is excellent, warm and engaging, as it is everywhere. Consistency is important for any hospitality brand and Celebrity excels in this arena, which is another reason they are firmly in the premium category. The *Ascent* and sister *Beyond* are slightly larger than the original **Edge** and **Celebrity Apex** – with an additional length of 20 metres. This allows for a few more staterooms and suites with a total guest capacity of 3,260. There are more solo staterooms, the fabulous multi-level terraced Sunset Bar (the place to be) and an improved locale for the beloved and ever-so-popular Martini Bar in the Grand Plaza. Other enhancements include a gorgeous, expanded Rooftop Garden, a stunning Resort Deck with unique cantilevered resort pools, six terrific new production shows, and live music from bow to stern. You will love *Celebrity Ascent* and can sail her in the Caribbean until April and then in the Med from Barcelona or Rome this summer. — VANESSA LEE







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**EXPLORA I**'s much anticipated sister ship, **EXPLORA II** will set sail in August, exploring the secrets of the Mediterranean and Western Europe, Africa and the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, and India. Discovering new possibilities in lesser-known destinations, visiting ancient empires, and enjoying the nocturnal charms of fascinating ports will give guests aboard these two exciting vessels experiences unlike any others. *Explora II*'s maiden voyage from Barcelona to Athens will explore the cultural heart of Spain, and offer a wealth of Italian indulgences as well as priceless Greek classics. While adventures on shore will abound, life on board these luxurious ships will be equally exciting, particularly in the culinary realm. Both *EXPLORA I* and *EXPLORA II* offer an all-inclusive on-board experience, boast 18 restaurants offering 11 culinary experiences across six vibrant restaurants, in addition to in-suite dining and 12 bars and lounges, all designed to introduce guests to a panoply of flavours from around the world, inspired by the line's signature "Ocean State of Mind".



EXPLORA I in the Mediterranean

COURTESY EXPLORA JOURNEYS

A white river cruise ship with a red and black funnel is sailing on a wide river. The background features a lush green hill with a large, ornate stone building (likely a cathedral or castle) and a modern city skyline under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The water reflects the sky and the surrounding landscape.

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Silver Whisper stop in Polynesia

COURTESY SILVERSEA

## Spend summer 2026 with Silversea in Polynesia

**Silversea** has announced that **Silver Whisper** will sail a first-ever full summer season in French Polynesia, with 17 voyages between April and September 2026, homeporting out of Papeete, Tahiti. Following an extensive scouting mission in the region, two exciting itineraries have been created to be sailed in rotation, offering deep immersion into three of the region's five archipelagos — the Society, Tuamotu, and Marquesas Islands. In addition to her fascinating itineraries, **Silver Whisper** offers a crew-to-guest ratio of 1:1.3 as well as butler service for every suite. Spread over a region similar in size to continental Europe, French Polynesia comprises 118 islands and atolls, combining world-renowned natural beauty with iconic wildlife experiences and unique cultural encounters. During her seven- and 14-day sailings, Silversea's 392-guest ship will spend multiple nights in a variety of exotic small ports, offering leisurely opportunities for guests to explore ashore. Silversea is a luxury all-inclusive cruise line offering a remarkable onboard experience to their guests.

## A taste of the future on the new Queen Anne

The three elegant **Cunard** ships now sailing the globe — **Queen Mary 2**, **Queen Elizabeth** and **Queen Victoria** will welcome a new sister in 2024 — **Queen Anne**. Welcoming 3,000 guests, and with 14 glorious decks, Queen Anne will offer the same elegance as her sisters but will put a special emphasis on dining and entertainment. For example, an exotic new dining experience — Aranya — will offer a stunning Indian menu. In celebration of what lies ahead, a three-course debut meal was recently presented to an elite group of Cunard guests by Surjan Singh, (better known as the highly-acclaimed Chef Jolly) who will create the dining excitement at Aranya. From smoked chilly pork belly with buttered pao to roasted wild turbot with tamarind chili tomato, Malai- Lychee kulfi and more, the meal was a tantalizing taste of Aranya, one of four new dining experiences on *Queen Anne* that include Aji Wa, Sir Samuel's, and Tramonto.



Aranya Restaurant, Queen Anne

COURTESY CUNARD

## MSC Cruises now offering Fly & Cruise packages in the Caribbean and Antilles

Blending excitement with convenience, **MSC Cruises** is now offering a collection of Fly & Cruise packages. Guests can fly from Toronto on Air Canada to Martinique on Saturdays, from Montreal to Martinique on Saturdays and to Guadeloupe on Sundays to enjoy Antilles cruises. Direct flights from Montreal or Toronto to the Port of Miami are available for guests choosing Caribbean itineraries. All guests enjoy seven-night cruises and can choose packages that include beverages, Wi-Fi access and one piece of luggage weighing not more than 23 kg, regardless of stateroom category. These offers also apply to guests choosing to sail as part of the luxurious MSC Yacht Club in suites and with butler service and their own lounge and restaurant. Guests sailing in the Antilles will experience the glamorous **MSC Seaside**, while those sailing in the Caribbean will be aboard the **MSC Seascape**. Note: the Caribbean itinerary also includes a shore excursion.



Martinique

COURTESY MSC CRUISES



## Seven Seas Grandeur makes splashy debut

Three decades of experience at sea has given Regent Seven Seas the upper hand in luxury cruising, and the cruise line welcomed its newest addition – **Seven Seas Grandeur**, christened in Miami in December 2023. The sixth ship in what Regent boasts as “The World’s Most Luxurious Fleet”, **Seven Seas Grandeur** is built for just 746 guests but is served by 548 crew members, promising impeccable service with all-suite, all-balcony accommodations. With plush appointments, included valet laundry service, and a personalized mini-bar, Regent knows how to pamper, from a veranda suite that measures 307 square feet to the \$11,000-a-night Regent Suite that spans 4,443 square feet and comes with its own in-suite spa. Art abounds in her 1,600-piece onboard art collection (complete with a new digital tour available to guests), from classic Picassos to a glass Bonsai cherry tree sculpture and a custom-designed Fabergé egg that pays tribute to Grandeur’s Godmother, Sarah Fabergé. With over 130 new dishes created especially for her discerning guests, dining is an exquisite affair onboard **Seven Seas Grandeur**. The Compass Rose restaurant not only features fresh specialties daily but also allows diners to customize every meal from a wide selection of meats, seafood, pasta, vegetarian and vegan items, sauces, and sides. Four additional specialty restaurants deliver culinary excellence: fine-cut steaks in Prime 7, French flavours in Chartreuse, Pan-Asian in Pacific Rim, and authentic Italian in Sette Mari at Le Veranda.



COURTESY SEVEN SEAS

Grandeur Observation Lounge

## Holland America Line looks ahead for Alaska

Few cruise lines cover Alaska as well as **Holland America**, and in 2025, guests can choose from 17 cruisetours to the Great Land in combination with an Alaska cruise. Ranging from nine to fourteen days, all Denali Cruisetours include a seven-day Glacier Discovery Cruise between Vancouver and Anchorage, featuring Glacier Bay National Park and Inside Passage cruising. Every cruisetour features a stay at Denali National Park at Holland America’s own 68-acre McKinley Chalet Resort, located at the Park’s entrance. Holland America is also the only cruise line to offer Denali and Yukon cruisetours of up to eighteen days, where guests will visit Whitehorse and Dawson City, part of Tr’ondëk-Klondike – the newest UNESCO World Heritage site designated in September 2023. With its “Alaska Up Close” program, Holland America cruisetours promise guests an in-depth immersion into Alaskan history and culture through excursions, culinary events, enrichment lectures, and hands-on workshops onboard and ashore.



MS Volendam

COURTESY HOLLAND AMERICA LINE



Sun Princess Dome

COURTESY PRINCESS

## Sun Princess lights up the seas

Launched in February, the 4,300-guest **Sun Princess** introduces several never-before-seen elements. Crowning the top of the ship forward is The Dome, a sun-filled, glass-enclosed space that is a pool by day and by night, hosts acrobatic shows curated by Montreal’s Cirque Éloize. Another sphere envelops the widened Piazza Atrium in a wall of glass, and a new partnership with Hollywood’s Magic Castle brings Spellbound - a blend of up-close magic and inventive mixology set in an intimate venue. Families will enjoy the new Park19, a three-level, all-ages playground that includes a suspended “Rollglider” ride along an overhead track, a ropes obstacle course, a climbing structure, and additional deck sports and games. Also new onboard are the Reserve and Signature Collection accommodations, featuring upper-end staterooms and suites with access to an exclusive restaurant, lounge, and sundeck. Other enhancements include a larger casino, a three-story Horizons Dining Room, and the Princess Arena with theater-in-the-round seating. A sister ship - **Star Princess** - will debut in 2025.



## Bay Point Landing

Where the great outdoors meets the great indoors

Arriving at Bay Point Landing on Oregon's south coast, I have a dilemma. Do I opt for one of the resort's gleaming Airstream trailers, or one of its sleek modern cabins?

It's a tough choice because both offer queen-size beds with plush linens, well-equipped kitchens (or kitchenettes in the case of the Airstreams), full bathrooms with toilet, sink and shower along with luxury soaps, shampoos and lotions, high-speed Wi-Fi and TV with complimentary cable. Trailers and cabins also boast furnished patios and fire pits for roasting marshmallows. In the end, I choose one of the resort's 26 Scandinavian-inspired cabins because one's available that's close to both the bay and the clubhouse.

Speaking of the clubhouse, it's the resort's architecturally interesting focal point, made of blackened cedar and big picture windows with good views over Coos Bay, the largest bay in Oregon. The Clubhouse is where you'll find a heated

saltwater pool, an activities centre, and a store with locally sourced essentials including beer, wine and packaged s'mores. For large families or groups wanting to eat together indoors, there's the Pavilion, a spacious room with a lounge at one end, an extra-long dining table and glass walls so you can watch magnificent sunsets.

For our group, local Master Chef Eoghain O'Neill prepared a multi-course menu featuring Dungeness crab and halibut with locally grown truffles. (When he's not cooking for private parties, you'll find Chef O'Neill at Restaurant O in the town of Coos Bay.)

Four more things of note: the resort provides RV sites for those with their own trailers; there's a dog washing station; a food truck is available for times when you don't feel like cooking; and the adjacent estuary offers some of the best clamming, kayaking and paddleboarding on the Oregon coast.

— SUZANNE MORPHET



Cabin



Inside the Clubhouse

COURTESY SUZANNE MORPHET



Coos Bay

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRITT EISELE



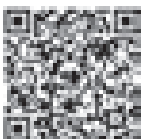


# ALASKA

*The Ponant Way*

Venture into the 49th state for immersive expeditions that offer cultural exchanges, panoramic landscapes, and unforgettable encounters with its enchanting wildlife.

Contact your travel professional for details

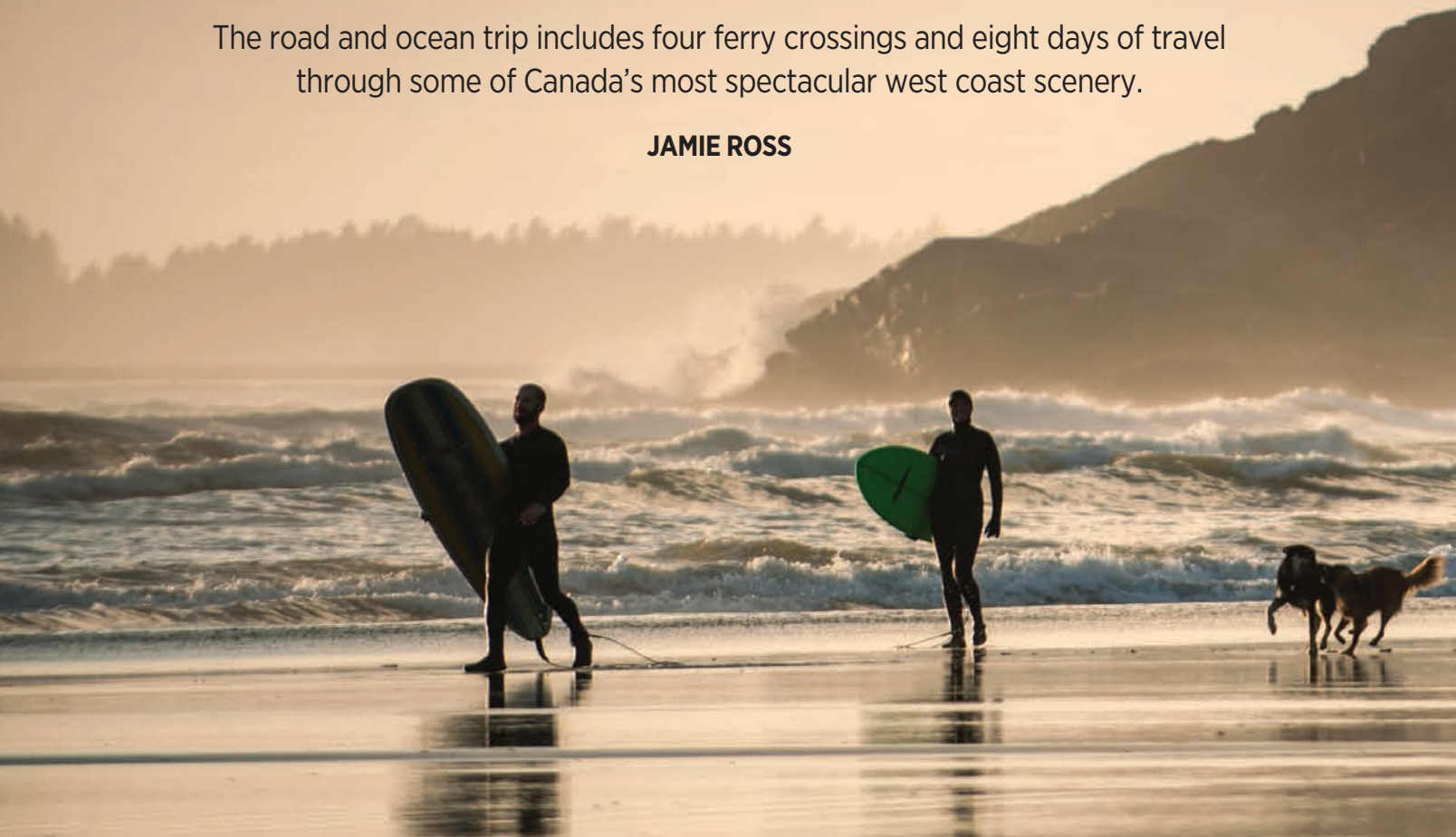




# THE *Ultimate* BC FERRIES COASTAL CIRCLE TRIP

The road and ocean trip includes four ferry crossings and eight days of travel through some of Canada's most spectacular west coast scenery.

JAMIE ROSS



THE OCEAN IS VISIBLY UPSET this morning. Ominous grey clouds gather on the horizon as the wind whips the sea into a froth. Huge waves pound on the rock outcrops that hedge both ends of Cox Bay, shooting spray ten metres into the sky, while big rollers send beachcombers scrambling inland. It is both wild and wonderful. The problem? I have booked a surf lesson, and envision myself out in the turbulent seas, a sophomore surfer getting tossed and broken by the angry waves.

"Sorry mate" says the bearded Surf Club attendant at Long Beach Lodge Resort. "All lessons cancelled!"

I am immediately thankful, while pretending to be upset, saying something inane like, "No chance to go ride some curl then?" I am in Tofino on the wild west coast of Vancouver Island – and when in Tofino you must sling the surfer slang.

Utilizing the marvellous BC Ferries' system, my road and ocean trip itinerary began by flying with my wife to Vancouver, picking up her folks (and more importantly their car), sailing across the Strait of Georgia to Nanaimo, and meandering 208 kilometres westward along an arduous route that twists through sheer cliff faces and jagged shorelines, before coming to the final stop on the Trans-Canada Highway at Tofino.

Tofino is for travellers seeking a wild refuge, an end of the road enclave of lush forests, sweeping silky beaches and a rugged coastal landscape, a tiny town on the continent's westernmost edge that transformed itself from stormy outpost to revered eco-tourism destination. Year-round, surfers slip into wetsuits, grab their boards, and splash into





BRIAN CAISSE / DESTINATION CANADA

the frigid Pacific. While many surfing hotspots tend to be pretentious, Tofino offers a quiet welcome that makes it the perfect place to try surfing for the first time. Just not, apparently, for me. Not today.

There is an extensive trail network in the nearby Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, so in lieu of playing in the surf, we grab some electric bikes to check out the reserve's new cycling trail. Parks Canada, in collaboration with local Indigenous groups, recently unveiled the 25-kilometre pathway whose name translates to "going the right direction on the path." Our plan is to bike from Tofino to Ucluelet and back, so I wonder if we will be going the wrong direction half of the time?

The new trail winds its way through old-growth

forests, over salmon-filled streams, and past breathtaking ocean views. We detour off the trail, peddling down to remote beaches. Slanting pine trees shaped by the relentless wind protect empty stretches of sand strewn with driftwood. You feel you are the first explorer to discover this piece of ragged paradise, standing on the edge of the world.

Tofino is a paradox, a place to both unplug and recharge, a place of relaxation and adventure. The town's growth is limited by its location on a rocky peninsula, but its reputation depends on preserving the wilderness and solitude that has long drawn nature lovers and hippies. While it has grown, Tofino remains a small town at the end of the highway.

Surfers in Tofino's Cox Bay.





JAMES ROOS

## Hiking to huts at heavenly heights

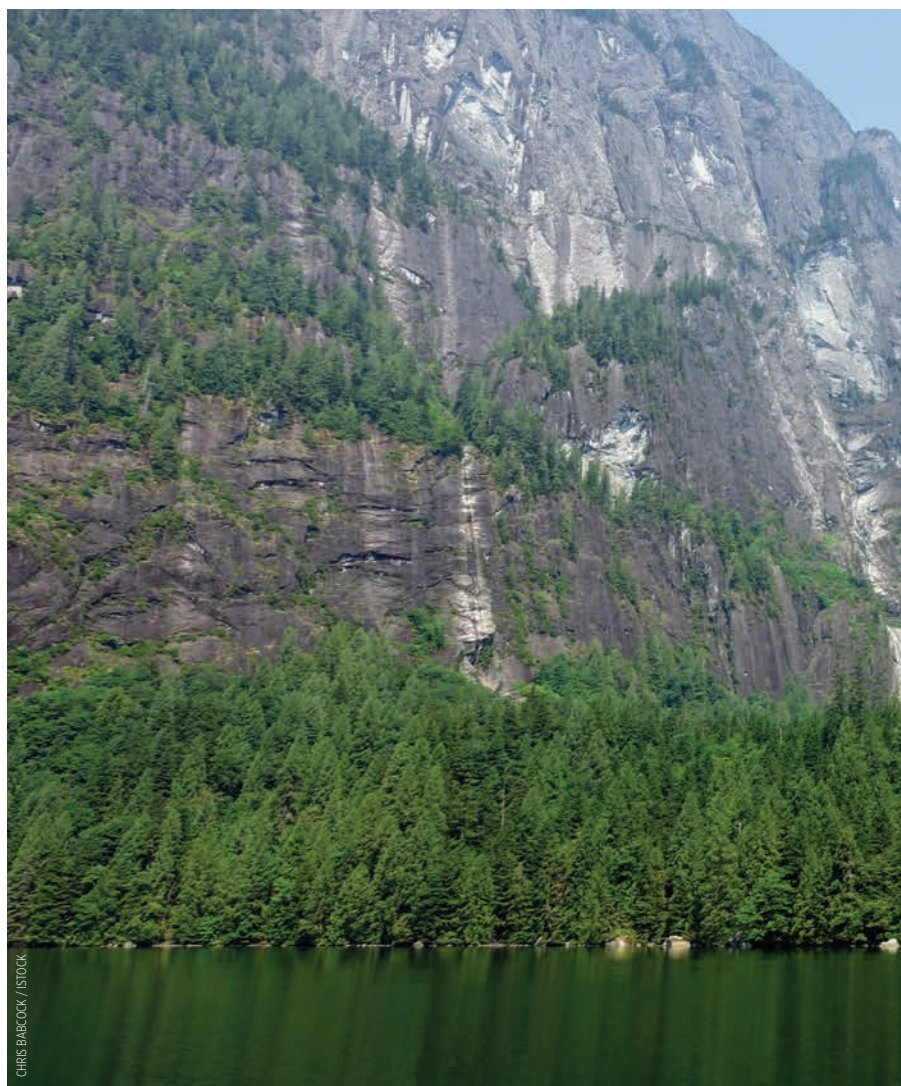
It is time to continue on down the road and across the Salish Sea on a pleasant two-hour ferry voyage from Comox to Powell River. Like Tofino, this end of the highway town, long known for the world's largest pulp and paper mill, has sneakily reinvented itself as the coast's hottest new adventure destination, offering hiking, canoeing, kayaking, boating, rock climbing, fishing, and even scuba diving.

After a night in Lund, my wife and I hike the north-western leg of the Sunshine Coast Trail, climbing gradually skyward to the Manzanita Hut for splendid views out over the Sound. The Sunshine Coast Trail is Canada's longest hut to hut hiking trail, spanning 180 km from Sarah Point in Desolation Sound to Saltery Bay.

## A sailor's sentimental return

My first and only experience along this secluded section of BC's coast came shortly after I was married, when my father-in-law decided to make a sailor of me on an adventure up the inside passage to Desolation Sound. Now, just past his 80th birthday, I have brought him back to reminisce. No, it wasn't just for his car.

Desolation Sound, so named in 1792 by Captain Vancouver, who obviously had no eye for beauty (claiming "there was not a single prospect that was pleasing to the eye"), had literally taken my breath away when I sailed into it 30 years before, with its towering rock bluffs and idyllic islands, all back-dropped by spectacular fjords and snow-capped mountains. It struck me the same way on this trip. We hired a Zodiac from Terracentric Coastal Adventures for an afternoon tour of Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park to explore its



CHRIS BABCOCK / ISTOCK

(Clockwise from top left)

Manzanita Hut on the Sunshine Coast Trail.

View of Princess Louisa inlet and Chatterbox Falls,

Taking in the incredible views from the deck during a trip on BC Ferries.

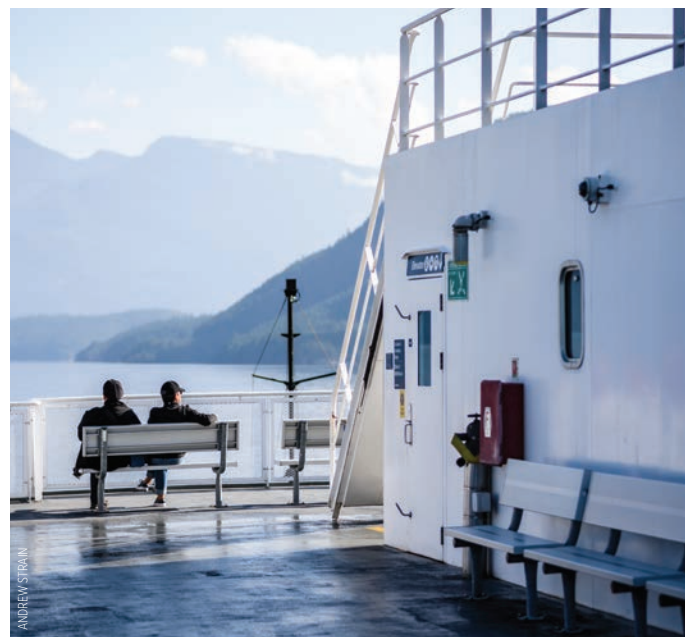
Kayaking in Skookumchuck Narrows, one of the world's biggest tidal rapids.

more than 60 km of shoreline and protected bays, skirting past orca pods, flocks of surf scoters winging over the water, and sea lions basking on the rocks.

The following morning, we caught the ferry from Saltery Bay to Earl's Cove and then continued our marine adventures at the tiny fishing village of Egmont with a day trip up Princess Louisa Inlet. Sailing up the magnificent six km fjord many years before had been a two-day journey. This time, on a high-powered and versatile 32-foot landing craft with Coastland Marine Charters, we took in the inlet at 30 knots. Incredibly steep carved granite walls rise to 2000 metres from the narrow fjord while Chatterbox Falls, at the very end of the inlet, plunges 40 metres into the sea.

Returning to Egmont, we have one more fascinating spectacle to behold. Twice daily, the Sunshine Coast is witness to an incredible display of the ocean's power. As the tide changes in the Skookumchuck Narrows ('strong water' in Chinook), the water rushes through at 30 km/hour, creating one of the world's biggest tidal rapids. We play in the huge waves, boils, and dangerous whirlpools, thankful for our skilled skipper, Kane Rushton, and his twin 250 outboards.





## Hidden harbours, beautiful bays and a bit of beachcombing

The Sunshine Coast is made up of a north and south coast, and while part of British Columbia's mainland, the region maintains an isolated, island-like feel, only accessible by ferry or flight. The drive is a meandering route of 180 km, tracing coastal curves and lakes, and weaving through old-growth forests broken occasionally by laid-back fishing villages, artists' studios, breweries and cideries, and lonely beaches. We skirt around places with their own stories, Smuggler's Bay, Half Moon Harbour, and Molly's Reach, an iconic restaurant that takes me back to when a Canadian television drama introduced us to "Beachcombers" on this delightful stretch of coast.

A scenic, 40-minute cruise takes us from Langdale to Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver, and our enchanting coastal circuit comes to an end. ■



Sailing on BC Ferries is a quintessential part of the coastal experience. As one of the largest and most sophisticated ferry systems in the world, BC Ferries has played a vital role in life on Canada's west coast for over 50 years. BC Ferries Vacations offer over 100 travel packages, including ferry travel and accommodations.

**[www.bcferries.com](http://www.bcferries.com)**

Tourism Tofino – **[www.tourismtofino.com](http://www.tourismtofino.com)**

Sunshine Coast Tourism – **[www.sunshinecoastcanada.com](http://www.sunshinecoastcanada.com)**

We always suggest using a travel advisor for your bookings.







# A Viking invasion on the GREAT LAKES

History, scenery, the stunning Canadian Shield, a World Biosphere Reserve and the great outdoors make for a marvellous cruise

SUZANNE MORPHET



“WHAT’S TO SEE on the Great Lakes?” asked my West coast born-and-raised friend Julie dismissively when I told her I was going on a week-long cruise from Milwaukee to Thunder Bay.

I, too, had been a little skeptical when I heard of Viking’s plan to sail its expedition ships on the Great Lakes. The *Octantis* and *Polaris* were designed and built to withstand polar conditions and to take guests to remote and potentially risky regions of the planet in comfort and luxury. The Great Lakes – in the heart of North America and bordered by towns, cities and summer cottages – hardly qualify as remote or risky.

If you grew up around the lakes, then moved away – as I did – it’s easy to forget their enormous beauty, so, it was with a coming-

home kind of curiosity that I boarded *Octantis* in Milwaukee on a warm evening last June, excited but with no big expectations.

Upon boarding, I realized that the ship was so inviting and luxuriously comfortable that I could happily stay on board all week. Indeed, I met a man who did just that. (I’ll introduce him later.)

Viking offers five itineraries on the Great Lakes ranging from 8 to 15 days including the newest and most comprehensive – the Great Lakes Collection – which sails from Toronto to Duluth, Minnesota (or the reverse) and takes in all five lakes.

I’d signed up for the Great Lakes Explorer, beginning in Milwaukee and ending eight days later in Thunder Bay. Of the 311 guests on board, most were American, but other Canadians were onboard too. Each morning we awoke in a new place and most evenings we sailed into the sunset as we slowly made our way west.

“The horses are always right,” joked John, my guide the first morning on a walking tour of Mackinac (pronounced Mackinaw) Island. “Don’t get in the way of the horses!”

Sitting strategically between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron,

Mackinac Island was for centuries home to the Anishinabek people, then became a British military outpost as well as the centre of the fur trade. It later grew into a quaint, car-free island famous for its fudge. Locals and visitors get around primarily by cycling or by horse and carriage. Even Amazon packages are delivered by the latter!

By happy coincidence, we arrived in early June at the start of Mackinac’s annual Lilac Festival. There were so many lilac trees and bushes in bloom – in more than 250 varieties – that everywhere we went, the sweet scent of lilac perfumed the air. It was a pleasant distraction when I rented a bike after my walking tour and pedalled to the top of West Bluff overlooking Lake Huron. On the way I passed the Grand Hotel, where other Viking guests were enjoying High Tea on what’s said to be the longest porch in the world.

After the manicured charms of Mackinac, the maze of granite islands that make up Georgian Bay’s Thirty Thousand Islands felt wild, almost pristine, even though this is the western edge of Ontario’s busy cottage country. It’s also, I learned, the largest freshwater archipelago in the world.

Left: A horse drawn carriage passes the Grand Hotel on car-free Mackinac Island.

Above: Viking *Octantis*.





(Clockwise from top left)  
Explorer's lounge.  
Viking Octantis.  
Nordic Junior Suite.  
Sunset at Ontario's  
Killbear Provincial  
Park.  
Sleeping Giant  
Provincial Park on  
Lake Superior  
near Thunder Bay,  
Ontario.

Near Parry Sound, some of us hiked the pine-clad granite of Killbear Provincial Park, others toured historic lighthouses on one of Viking's Special Operations Boats (nicknamed SOBst), while still others toured the Georgian Bay Biosphere's administrative headquarters to learn how this UNESCO-designated organization is working to 'nurture a balance between humans and nature' in a region where 50 species are at risk.

The following day, while *Octantis* anchored off Killarney, I joined a kayak group to paddle a sheltered section of the shoreline with its exquisitely clear water.

"This is the start of the Canadian Shield," said Viking's lead kayak guide Elsa Ross. "Just look around. There's very little soil." White pines persevered anyway, some appearing to grow straight out of the red-streaked rock.

Our paddle adventure left us famished and we happily headed to nearby Killarney Mountain Lodge for lunch. The food on *Octantis* was so

good that I was reluctant to miss a ny of it, but a traditional fish fry lunch of local whitefish was not to be skipped either.

This part of northern Ontario was a favourite of the Group of Seven artists and one of the hiking trails near Frazer Bay is named for A.J. Casson, the youngest member of the group.

"He would have taken his easel and paints, his watercolours," said our guide Noemie when we arrived by Zodiac at the foot of Frazer Bay Hill the following day. "He would have hiked all the way up, and painted at the top." Following in his footsteps, we climbed through a light-filled forest before emerging to a stunning view of the long fjord from which Casson created his impression of *Baie Fine Entrance* on a hot July day in 1947.

More history came to life when we sailed through the Soo Locks. Opened in 1855, they link Lake Superior to the lower lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway, allowing ships to bypass the rollicking St. Mary's River. Even

today, the locks are vitally important to both the U.S. and Canadian economies, supporting 123,000 jobs and moving 134 million metric tons of cargo annually.

On our penultimate day, I squeezed in as many excursions as possible after we anchored off Silver Islet: a hike through the old-growth forest at Sleeping Giant Provincial Park; a descent by submarine to the bottom of Lake Superior (Viking has two subs on each of its expedition ships); and a cruise by Zodiac to the tiny island that gave Silver Islet its name.

Tom, our local guide, explained that in the mid-1880s men painstakingly enlarged the islet by constructing wooden breakwaters and dumping crushed rock. Then, fighting wind and waves, they built a wooden shaft reaching 384 metres below Lake Superior. "I know that if I were leading that, I would have walked away and started farming or something on the mainland," Tom chuckled. "But they didn't, they persevered."





ELENA BEED / SHUTTERSTOCK



WIRESTOCK CREATORS / SHUTTERSTOCK

Ultimately, \$3.25 million of silver (equivalent of \$78 million today) was hauled out before the mine flooded in 1884, making it the world's richest silver mine in its day. The water is so clear that when we float around the islet we can see the gaping hole – the shaft – where men once descended to work. Many timbers are still in place.

Looking back at all I did off the ship, you might think I had no time to enjoy being on-board. But come evening (and on the day we had no stops), I relaxed in the spa that offered an indoor pool, hot tub, steam room, sauna, even a 'snow shower', found quiet spots with comfy leather chairs in The Library to catch up on reading, and listened to live classical music while sipping a pre-dinner cocktail in the Explorer's Lounge.

Even though *Octantis* is an 'expedition' ship, which implies getting off and exploring, retired Toronto architect John Vanstone never left the ship. John was sailing with extended family for a floating reunion (his group called themselves the Group of Eight!) but an injured knee kept him on-board.

Still, he enjoyed daily lectures, fabulous food and the ship itself, including his stateroom. "You have the mirrors that give you that panoramic view. If you look carefully at the sink, that whole wall is a work of art. I mean everything, every location on that ship has been considered and is a work of art, in my opinion."

So yes, Julie, there's plenty to see and do on the Great Lakes. And the *Viking Octantis* will take you there in the utmost comfort. ■



A large cruise ship, the Scenic Eclipse II, is sailing on turquoise water. A helicopter is flying overhead, and a small boat is visible in the foreground. The water is a vibrant blue-green, and there are small islands with green vegetation in the background.

# A MEMORABLE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

VANESSA LEE

We embarked on our Caribbean cruise on the all-inclusive, luxurious *Scenic Eclipse II*, a recently launched Discovery yacht, anticipating new places to see, off-the-beaten-path islands most have never heard of, and wildlife such as the elusive three-toed sloth. It was November, and we were thrilled by the prospect of soft sand beaches, warm crystalline waters filled with colourful fish and marine life, fabulous snorkelling spots, and a leisurely sail through the iconic Panama Canal. We were not disappointed.









VANESSA LEE

IMAGINE THAT YOU'VE BEEN looking for an elegantly relaxed yacht full of like-minded people, curious travellers seeking new ports, great photo opportunities, and some remarkable snorkelling over coral gardens and deep abysses. Scenic Luxury Cruises will warmly welcome you as they showcase both Expedition and Exploration (or, as they say, Discovery), cruising to both ends of the world and many places in between. With 200 to 228 guests on each ship, *Scenic Eclipse I* and her new sister, *Eclipse II*, sail the globe from pole to pole in search of remarkable experiences, intriguing wildlife, impressive sights, captivating vistas and endless sunsets. Above all, they're in search of ways to ignite your sense of wonder.

We packed the wonder and some wanderlust, along with a few bathing suits, shorts, tee shirts, and smart yet casual evening clothing, and ensured the camera was ready. We were also prepared for Zodiac landings. You're shown the correct way to get in and out of your inflatable boat since some landings are wet, and you'll learn to keep your sense of humour intact. Be sure to brush up on trivia as you will feel compelled to participate in the fun daily quiz, and you'll enjoy fascinating lectures and talks, as well as culinary demos in the Theatre. Depending on where your yacht is cruising, you may even be able to take flight in one of the two onboard helicopters or go down to the ocean depths in the onboard submersible.

We enjoyed exemplary service from an impressive brigade of staff, whose well-polished yet personal interactions made every meal a wonderful experience. Everywhere on our yacht, we found everyone friendly, knowledgeable and impressive in whatever exchange we had. The crew,



VANESSA LEE



VANESSA LEE

staff, our affable Hotel Manager, Richard, and our wonderfully charming Captain Torry, who hailed from Norway, made our cruise even better. I have to say that over many years and on more than 400 cruises, I have rarely enjoyed better or more charming service across the board.

Choice is always an integral part of luxury cruising, even if it's a casual onboard feel, and we did not lack a variety of excellent restaurants. Among the various dining spots on *Scenic Eclipse II*, we regularly enjoyed the casual Azure Café open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner from 6 am to 9 pm. Think breakfast fixings, pizzas, burgers, sandwiches, pasta and tasty treats.

Another daytime favourite was the Yacht Club, which invariably beckoned us for an al fresco lunch. A glass of French rosé, some delicious food served from a buffet, and that ever-present, harmonious service ensured these meals were enjoyable. Chatting with our fellow travellers (many repeat Scenic guests) and sharing stories of the morning's tour or snorkel excursion was always a pleasure. The camaraderie of small ship cruising can't be underestimated because one of the most enjoyable aspects of the adventure is connecting with other guests and sharing those unforgettable personalized experiences.

This page (clockwise from above):

Paradise! A perfect beach day in the San Blas Islands.

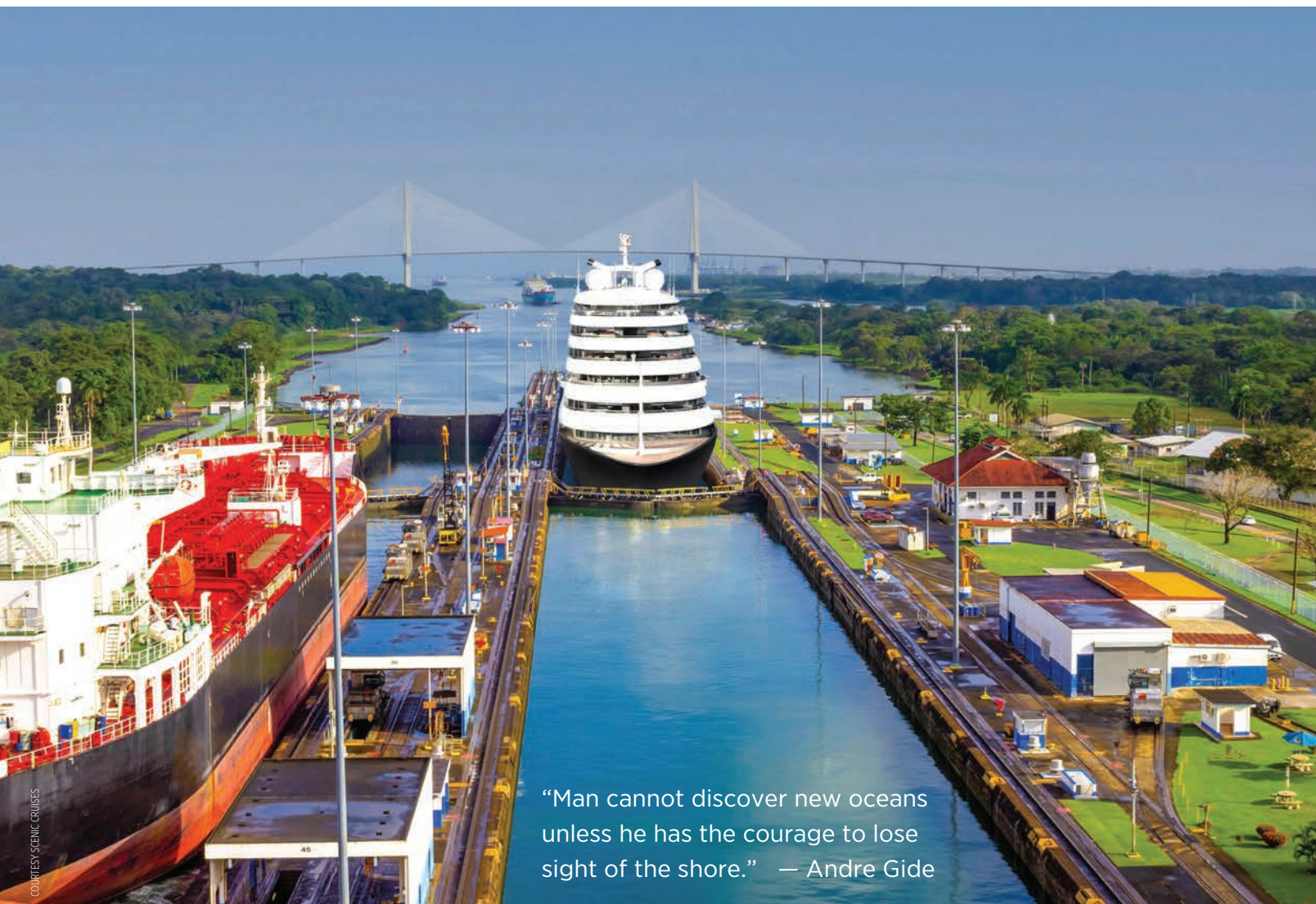
Scenic Lounge.

Koko's features Asian fusion and sushi.

Scenic Eclipse II passing through the Panama Canal.

Elements, the yacht's main dining room.





“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.” — Andre Gide



Other dining choices included my favourite - Lumière, a delightfully intimate venue offering delicious French cuisine and a Champagne bar. A knowledgeable sommelier paired wines, and the restaurant is a must-reserve spot. I loved sitting at the bar counter, enjoying a glass of bubbly and a taste of caviar before our meal. For lovers of Sushi and Asian fusion cuisine, the ship offers Koko's, where you can reserve a seat at the Sushi Bar (very popular) or enjoy a regular menu in this attractive eatery. Several times a week, one can book the special Night Market @Koko's, with a limited number of guests, where the street food of night markets inspires the cuisine – perhaps Greek food, an Indian theme, or Filipino dishes. The main dining room Elements, is perfect for a relaxed dining experience with Italian-inspired dishes, steaks and seafood while an invitation-only private dining room, dubbed Chef's Table @ Elements, offers a curated menu for 10 guests.

On our cruise, we sailed with a celebrity Chef from the Eastern US – Bryan Voltaggio. He comes with quite a pedigree, has been on Top Chef as a finalist three times, and will be a judge on the show next year. He is a very engaging chap and a terrific chef who puts a special focus on seafood. One day in the Theatre, we enjoyed a culinary demo on how to





PARKOL / ISTOCK

make Maryland Blue Crab cakes. On four nights of the voyage, Chef Voltaggio took over *Lumière* for an exclusive tasting menu – fully booked each night. Scenic is a food-focused cruise line, (river and ocean), and often has famous and celebrity chefs on their ocean and river cruises, and their smaller sister line, Emerald Cruises, does the same. A foodie's delight!

Naturally, the itinerary is often the key when booking a cruise and we all have bucket list destinations. Sometimes, it's a getaway moment, and many on our sailing wanted to transit the Panama Canal – which was a lovely and fascinating day. On our itinerary, we happily immersed ourselves in the flora and fauna of islands we had barely heard about. We splashed and snorkelled and swam to our hearts' content, and on one memorable day, we had the best beach party on the most beautiful slice of paradise you could imagine. This was in the San Blas Islands, home to the Guna Indians, who kindly let us come to their island, interact with their people and then frolic in the water with some of the local children. We had so much fun and also enjoyed some fantastic snorkelling. A highlight was doing "aquabics" in the clear, azure water, with Richard wading into the sea in his uniform to bring us Champagne (in plastic glasses), and our delightful Captain Torry joining the shenanigans in the water. These are the days of laughter and memories.

On another beach day in the Pearl Islands – a Panamanian archipelago – most guests helped clean up the flotsam and jetsam that had been washed ashore on the beach in a big storm. It felt good to contribute to this beautiful area of the world, as well as to snorkel, beachcomb, kayak, or try a stand-up paddleboard.



VANESSA LEE



VANESSA LEE

A must-do for many on our yacht was an excursion into the mangroves to look for three-toed sloths, which are notoriously hard to find. It was our lucky day as several were spotted! We also loved the quirky, laid-back vibe of Bocas del Toro in Panama which felt like the Florida Keys of old. Colourful buildings, dive centres, surf shops, funky bars and friendly locals made this terrific stop something different.

The yacht offers an all-inclusive onboard atmosphere – no tipping required as it's included in the fare (although we did give extra to some of our favourite staff). All drinks are included – with a fine choice of wines, cocktails, and more than 100 Whiskeys and Champagne – and no restaurant upcharges. We enjoyed the excellent, caring services of Minty, our butler (every room is a suite, and each suite has the services of a butler, which is lovely), in our expansive and comfortable verandah accommodation. There's a sleeping area and a lounging space, a mini-bar refreshed daily, an Illy coffee maker and a kettle, water bottles, binoculars and a very comfy bed – all you could wish for.

On this warm water Discovery cruise, with our knowledgeable Discovery team leading the charge on our outings, we had a very special times both ashore and on our yacht. It could not have been any better. ■

Lucky guests spotted three-toed sloths in Panama's Bastimentos.

Local Guna children joined the party on a fun beach day in the San Blas Islands.

Panama's quirky, laid-back Bocas del Toro.



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# RESILIENT REMARKABLE MAUI

LIZ FLEMING

**WHEN WE ARRIVED** at Maui's Wailea Beach Resort in October 2023, the prestigious property was everything a lush tropical resort should be with beautifully appointed rooms, charming staff, crystalline pools, a sugary beach, elegant restaurants – even an ultra-indulgent private spa pool with included shoulder massages and gourmet treats delivered to your lounge.

It was luxurious, welcoming – and surprising.

How could a Maui resort be so perfect? Wasn't this the Hawaiian island where an August 7th, 2023 fire destroyed the historic port town of Lahaina? Where all hotels were filled with survivors and first responders? A place tourists should avoid out of respect for those who'd lost their lives? Hadn't the entire island been destroyed?

The reality of Maui couldn't be more different.

The island is 48 miles long and 26 miles wide but the Lahaina fire – which tragically claimed 115 lives – affected less than three and a half square miles. Cruel and capricious, fed by random winds from an off-shore storm, the blaze destroyed just one precious town, leaving the rest of the

island untouched. Two large nearby resorts were initially used to house firefighters, medical personnel and survivors, but all the other Maui hotels and resorts are open, the lush rain-forest lands in the heart of the island are unaffected and the beaches, untouched. The sun still shines with a resilient brilliance and the welcome for visitors is eager and warm. In fact, tourism is the lifeblood of the island's recovery, a vital financial infusion supporting the people of Lahaina as they begin rebuilding their lives.

The story is the same across the island. We asked one tour company owner how local people were feeling about the return of guests, particularly to west Maui, near Lahaina. "Many people lost their homes to the fire," he explained. "We don't want others to lose theirs to foreclosure."

It's important to remember that visitors who choose a Maui holiday this year won't have a lesser experience. The island is fringed with sandy beaches and offers world-class fishing, outstanding surfing, paddle boarding, canoeing, snorkelling, SCUBA – every water sport you'd expect in a tropical paradise. The seafood is fresh and fabulous, the resorts range from relaxed and family-friendly to elegant







COURTESY MAUI VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU (MVCB)

LIZ FLEMING

and upscale, and the service is uniformly gracious. Hospitality is woven into the Hawaiian culture.

We walked the beaches, watched the surfers at Kehei, and toured the fascinating Ocean Center to learn about the whales, sharks and other ocean creatures that swim in Maui's underwater Molokini crater. A helicopter lifted us high above the rainforest for spectacular views of cascading waterfalls and made a stop in an Eden-like valley. There, our friendly pilot introduced us to a wilderness of different ginger varieties, including a bright pink blossom we learned was a natural cleanser that needed just a gentle squeeze to release sweet-scented liquid. One memorable evening, we made the must-do drive up to the rugged Haleakala Crater, 10,000 feet above sea level and nearly 20 degrees cooler than the rest of the island. We shivered a little, despite the blankets we'd brought to chase the chill but the jaw-dropping view of the sun setting

not below or behind, but rather above the clouds was unlike anything we'd ever seen before. One early morning, we rose with the sun, then gathered on the beach in front of our hotel to climb into a traditional Hawaiian war canoe. Led by a nature-loving guide, we paddled to a reef where sea turtles were waiting, seemingly eager to pose for a photo-taking session. Each day on Maui was a memory in the making.

We loved the island so much that we wanted to give something back and it was easy to join local recovery efforts. A day of volunteering at the emergency distribution center near Lahaina, packing food, clothing and other supplies was a simple way to make a contribution. We joined volunteers from across the U.S. and indeed, around the world. Some were part of government-run aid agencies while others were like us, just visitors touched by the stunning scope of Lahaina's loss. We rolled up our sleeves, pitched in and felt privileged to be there.

Whether or not you choose to add voluntourism to your trip lineup, you can help the people of Maui simply by visiting. While you're there, remember that grief is private and don't ask how the people you meet were affected by the fire. The server who's working extra shifts may have lost her home – or worse. The bartender who smiles as he pours your Mai Tai may be struggling to pay his bills and support his displaced family, so keeping the conversation positive and adding an extra-generous tip is best. Stifle your curiosity and offer your kindness, patience and understanding instead.

It's not often that we can use our travel dollars to make a real and immediate difference in the world, but choosing Maui for this year's getaway could help heal an island and her people. By spending your holiday there, you'll be offering your support and truly embodying the Hawaiian word "Melama". It means "healing." ■

This spread (clockwise from top left):  
Beach near Wailea.  
Sunset above the clouds at Haleakala Crater.  
Sea turtle spotting onboard a traditional Hawaiian war canoe.  
Dramatic coastlines on Maui's north coast.  
Sunset at Wailea Beach resort.



# CHARLESTON

## South Carolina's geographic sweet spot

Year after year, Charleston tops *Southern Living* magazine's list as 'the belle of South Carolina'. It seems all the world loves the city's irrepressible southern charm.

**ANNA HOBBS**

**M**Y HUSBAND AND I had been intrigued by Charleston for a long time but somehow a visit never made our to-do list. Until last February. We were ready for a snow break when we heard spring was already happening in Charleston. On the spur of the moment, we said, "Let's go." Here's how we spent a delightful long weekend, getting to know Charleston.

### We took a tour

A two-hour, guided walking tour, with Bulldog Tours, appealed to us as the best way to get an overview of the city before striking out on our own. It was. If clip-clopping through the cobblestone streets in a horse-drawn carriage has more appeal, Old South Carriage Co. offers a relaxing one-hour tour through the historic downtown. You can also flag down a pedicab – the city's open-air answer for getting from point A to point B that reduces the number of cars on the road, creates less pollution and maintains quieter streets.

### We explored on our own

The compact, pedestrian-friendly downtown covers less than five square miles. No car needed. We started at the Pineapple Fountain at Waterfront Park, then headed to East Bay and its famous 13 pastel Georgian row houses to take pictures in the morning light. We spent the morning, wandering picturesque streets, marvelling at grand antebellum mansions and narrow colonial houses. We sauntered down cobblestone lanes. We explored back alleys. We got lost, only to marvel again and again at how old-world charm hums with a cosmopolitan energy throughout the downtown. We discovered a skyline of church steeples (there are over 400 city-wide) that gave credence to the name, "The Holy City."







COURTESY GIBBES MUSEUM OF ART

## We soaked up local art

In 2016, the stately Beaux Arts building, home to Gibbes Museum of Art, underwent a \$13.5 million renovation, bringing the 119-year-old building back to life. The city's only visual arts museum is primarily themed around Charleston and Lowcountry history. The rotunda alone is worth a visit for anyone interested in architecture. The permanent art collection spans four centuries, including a comprehensive collection of 400 miniature portraits. Browse the gift shop or enjoy a coffee break at the café on the main floor. The first floor also has studio space for art lessons and children's activities. The permanent collection and visiting exhibits occupy the second and third floors. Spend an hour visiting the exhibits, then enjoy the tranquil Lenhardt Garden behind the building. 135 Meeting Street.

(Clockwise from top)

Beautiful and historic downtown Charleston.

The Gibbes Museum of Art is themed around Lowcountry history.

A horse-drawn carriage offers a relaxing and informative way to see Charleston's historic district.





ANNA HOBBS

## We dove into Gullah culture

The Gullah people, descendants of enslaved West Africans, are the embodiment of Lowcountry culture. Gullah, the language, refers to the patois they speak today. For ten generations, the Gullah people, have preserved more of their language and cultural heritage than any other African American community. Their contribution is a significant part of the city's history. Alphonso Brown, author of *A Gullah Guide to Charleston* and owner/operator of Gullah Tours, guides a two-hour Black history walking tour with the stories of the rich heritage of his people. Strolling along Meeting Street we stopped to admire a sidewalk table laden with woven sweetgrass baskets and chatted with the weaver, Ann Simons. "I have been weaving for 69 years," she told us. "Since I was five. Weaving is part of my family history and heritage." Like all Gullah artisans, Simons uses a combination of sweetgrass, pine needles, bulrush and palmetto. Considered to be the oldest African craft tradition in the United States, the baskets even have a spot at the Smithsonian Institution.

## We learned about Black history

After 20 years of planning, The International African American Museum (IAAM) opened last year on the site of Gadsden's Wharf, the disembarkation point where up to 40 percent of all American enslaved persons arrived on American soil. The idea of the museum was championed by former Charleston Mayor, Joseph P. Riley Jr. "The International African American Museum has been the most important work of my life," he said, "because I believe so strongly that it is long past time that we tell our true history, our country's history. When we do, we can begin to heal and move forward together." The IAAM is smaller than the Smithsonian African American Museum, but you cannot overlook the power of place. The stunning facility focuses on Charleston's role in the institution of slavery, and provides a snapshot of how important this tiny city was in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.



SAMAR COSTON-HARDY/ESTO/IAAM





(Clockwise from top left)

A Gullah woman weaves sweetgrass baskets.

The Battery.

Waterfront Park  
Pineapple Fountain

Frogmore Stew, a  
Lowcountry classic.

Charleston City  
Market.

The International  
African American  
Museum.

## We found time to shop

Head to King Street, the main shopping area, where you'll find a few brand name biggies, but look for the real attractions here – family-owned boutiques. High-end antique dealers cluster on Lower King from Broad Street to Market Street. Middle King, up to Calhoun Street, is the fashion district. The trendy shops then give way to interior design shops and restaurants. Once we'd walked from one end to the other, and back, we discovered more. Around the corner, the 215-year-old Charleston City Market occupies a series of sheds, spanning four city blocks. Several hundred vendors sell food, crafts, clothing, jewellery and souvenirs including a huge collection of sweetgrass baskets.

## We dug into Low Country cuisine

One of the best ways to get to know Charleston is through its cuisine. We found a vibrant food scene, with distinctively southern flavours, a passion for fresh, locally sourced foods and an influx of young, talented chefs incorporating their own touch into traditional favourites. Come with an appetite. Eateries run the gamut from lunch counter casual to white-tablecloth sophisticate. Seafood, which doesn't get any fresher, takes a starring role, as do Lowcountry comfort classics such as Pimento cheese, okra soup and Frogmore stew, a slow-cooked combo of shrimp, spicy smoked sausage, red potatoes and corn on the cob. Benne wafers, a traditional sesame seed tea cookie – bite-size and crunchy – make a tasty take-home treat.

Three days experiencing Charleston offered a memorable introduction but it wasn't enough. We're still wanting more and are planning a return. ■



# Basking in the warmth of the SKY PRINCESS

LIZ FLEMING





When the days get shorter, the nights get longer and the winds blow colder, there's nothing like a Caribbean getaway to boost your spirits. And if that getaway happens to be aboard the beautiful *Sky Princess*, then you're in for a warm welcome. From delicious culinary treats to fabulous evening entertainment and fascinating ports, this ship is the ultimate antidote for the winter doldrums.



COURTESY PRINCESS CRUISES



JULIA DORIAN / SHUTTERSTOCK



**A**S WE PULLED OUT OF the harbour in Ft. Lauderdale, the breezes were warm and the sun was just beginning to set. We knew we really should have headed to our stateroom to get dressed for dinner but just couldn't pull ourselves away from the railing – we wanted to savour every balmy moment. We weren't alone. The sail-away that evening seemed to have drawn everyone up onto the deck, where the friendly *Sky Princess* entertainment team was singing and dancing, inviting children up to join them and generally setting an upbeat tone that would last for the entire cruise.

We'd been impressed by the ease of the boarding process, made simple by the use of the customized Princess Medallions. Like many cruise lines, Princess has worked hard to create a cashless, keyless system for life on board and has come up with a very powerful computerized disc that guests wear as a necklace, pop into a specialized wristband or brooch-style holder or simply carry in their pockets. Containing all your guest information, the quarter-sized Medallion with imbedded proximity chip is not only used to keep track when you board and leave the ship, but also opens your stateroom door and is accepted in place of cash or credit cards when you make purchases onboard.

As an added bonus, if you shop at participating businesses onshore, a credit is added to your shipboard account. (Note: to simplify the payment of gratuities, 18 percent is added to bar charges and dining room wine accounts and a discretionary gratuity charge is added to guests' shipboard accounts each day. No rushing around with tips at the end of the cruise!)

Technology plays an important role in simplifying life onboard *Sky Princess*. Downloading the Princess app on your phone allows you to make all your dinner reservations, book spa appointments, and even order food to be delivered to you, wherever you might be. It's also a portal into the life of the ship, showing a complete lineup of everything that's happening, from the first early morning fitness classes to the best places to dance in the late hours of the night.

With an impressive collection of dining and entertainment options, *Sky Princess* is a floating resort. Accommodating 3,400 guests, the ship offers a tempting array of restaurants starting with the spacious World Market, an on-going buffet that features a huge range of culinary choices for breakfast, lunch, dinner and any-time grazing. Other casual options include the poolside pizza parlour, Slice and the Salty Dog Grill, the hamburger emporium, perfect for a quick meal when you want to stay in poolside gear. Another great spot for a casual bite is the International Café, which is a fave spot for lovers of soups, parfaits, quiche and more.

Facing page:  
Beach day at  
Princess Cays.  
This page  
(clockwise  
from above):  
Wake pool.  
*Sky Princess* at sea.  
Umbrella street  
in San Juan,  
Puerto Rico.





A popular innovation on this ship is the division of the main dining room into three completely separate venues. Though each – Cielo, Soleil and Estrella – is located in a different area of the ship, all three share the same menu each night. Each restaurant has its own staff and curated atmosphere so you enjoy three different vibes without worrying that you might be missing something delicious at the other locations. We tried all three and were impressed by both the quality of the meals and the warm welcome provided by the wait staff.

In addition to the trio of main dining rooms, all of which are included in the cruise fare, there are also specialty restaurants that can be enjoyed for an extra charge. Several that are well worth a visit include: The Crown Grill, an elegant, old-style steak house where you can indulge your meatiest fantasies; Sabatini's Trattoria – a Princess classic – which offers a menu that will make you think fondly of your Italian Nona and The Catch by Chef Rudi Sodamin, a seafood restaurant. Two favourites of ours were Alfredo's Pizzeria with its artisanal pasta and pizza baked tableside in a giant pizza oven and the Ocean Terrace Sushi Bar. Our best tip? Ask for counter seating so you can watch the sushi chefs at work, creating art from glistening raw fish.

One important note: dining in Cielo, Soleil and Estrella, while free, is still by reservation, unless you're willing to take the latest seating, at 8:40pm. Making reservations is very simple using the Princess app but it's something you'll want to do early as spaces fill quickly.

Another thing you'll want to do early in your cruise booking and planning process is sign up for shore excursions. Our cruise featured four ports – Princess Cays – the cruise line's private island in the Bahamas; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Amber Cove in the Dominican Republic and Grand Turk, as well as two days at sea.

Princess Cays was a glorious beach day and barbecue picnic for all guests, with no organized shore excursions. We were very impressed with the long, sweeping stretches



of beach, peppered with lounge chairs galore – enough for every guest and more. We made a point of walking past the spots where most people had set themselves up on the sand and were able to find our own private little beachy paradise, despite being two of 3,400 guests.

We also enjoyed beach time in Amber Cove and Grand Turk, but thought our best day ashore was in San Juan where we did a foodie tour of the old city. After eating our way through Mallorca buns at a classic diner where the confections are celebrated as the best on the island, trying local beer and fragrant coffee, beef and chicken pasteles (like rolled empanadas) and feasting on mofongo, a delicious mix of green plantain and spices, we felt we'd really tasted the culture of the famous port.

Though our days on shore were sunny and relaxing, our evenings on Sky Princess were filled with fun. The Princess Theatre showcased great entertainment each night, with comedians, singers, dancers and full-on Broadway-calibre shows but our surprise passion was the Voice of the Ocean show, a karaoke competition. Beginning with two qualifying sessions during which an array of surprisingly talented guests auditioned for a spot in the competition,

This page  
(clockwise  
from top left):  
Alfredo's Pizzeria.  
Sabatini's Trattoria.  
Mini-suite.  
Facing page  
(from top):  
Beach day at  
Princess Cays.  
Voice of the Ocean  
judges.






The Voice of the Ocean culminated with a finale held on the last day at sea. In the intervening days, more late-night karaoke shows gave us a chance to see our preferred competitors practice and strut their stuff – along with other non-competing performers whose confidence may sometimes have exceeded their competence but who gave us lots of reason to cheer and shout anyway. What captivated us wasn't really the singing but rather the audience reaction. The eloquent Princess show hosts were careful to emphasize that we were a family, there to support the performers and make sure everyone left the stage feeling good. Each night, the audiences exceeded expectations, leaving the performers feeling like the rock stars they may have been dreaming they were. When the finale was held, in a packed-to-the-rafters Princess Theatre, the applause for the winner and all the competitors was thunderous. It was a true feel-good moment.

At a time when there is so much upheaval in the world, being part of something so happy added a special note of positivity to our cruise. Even now that we've returned to the ice and snow, we've brought with us a bit of that *Sky Princess* warmth to see us through the winter. ■







A large white sailing ship, the Star Clipper, is shown from a high angle, sailing on a deep blue ocean. The ship's numerous white sails are fully deployed, creating a striking contrast against the dark water. The ship is moving towards the bottom right of the frame, leaving a white wake behind it. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and exploration.

# It's the pirate's life for me

"My imagination gets the best of me as I sail away on an eight-day high sea's adventure aboard the classic, four-masted, tall-ship Star Clipper!"

**JAMES ROSS**





This page:  
(Clockwise from  
above)

The author ventures  
up the ratlines,  
50 feet above  
the deck.

Dining room.

Tropical bar.

Facing page:  
(Clockwise from top)

The sheltered  
harbour and fortified  
cliff-top village of  
Bonifacio, Corsica.

The library.

Typical stateroom.

I am feeling a little like Captain Jack Sparrow, standing on the bridge of the rakish *Star Clipper*, in the face of a salty Mediterranean breeze. Filled with a newfound buccaneering spirit, I shout orders to the busy crew. "Ahoy me hearties – prepare to hoist the mainsail. Come on you scurvy seadogs, heave ho!" I realize the ship's real skipper, Captain Yuriy Slastenin, is giving me a look that might soon have me walking the plank, so I jump in to help my mates. Yo Ho Ho!

Travel can stimulate one's imagination, and a voyage aboard a regal and historic tall ship in full sail, has me feeling like a high seas pirate. With the magical Mediterranean as a backdrop, the elegant *Star Clipper*, an authentic re-creation of the classic clipper ships that ruled the waves during the 19th century, is a stunning 115-metre apparition, with four masts, (the tallest of which rises 208 feet above the sea), 16 billowing sails, a dashing bowsprit and a stylish schooner stern.

Whenever the *Star Clipper* heads out to sea, it's all hands-on deck for the pomp and ceremony of sails being raised, accompanied by the inspirational strains of Vangelis' *1492: Conquest of Paradise* booming from the ship's speakers.



Guests are encouraged to pull on some ropes to help raise the sails, tie a few sailor's knots to hold them in place, visit the open bridge (as long as you stay quiet), lay out in the bowsprit net dangling above the briny ocean deep with a chance to see dolphins playing in the surging seas, or climb the mast to the crow's nest for a stunning view. And if that all sounds like work, you can just relax in casual elegance in the upper deck loungers while smartly clad waiters offer you drinks.

The ship is a realm of teak and brass. Her top deck is lined with deck chairs, a pool, and a sea of polished instruments, coiled ropes, a gleaming wood-spoked wheel, and other nautical gear. It's a delight to watch the captain and crew deftly navigate the ship through the narrow channels and cliff-side passages into the sheltered harbours.

The intimate *Star Clipper* is able to visit destinations untouched by larger cruise ships, and her size allows us to slip quietly and seamlessly into each port without overwhelming them like an invading army. Often, we tie up at the wharf, other times we tender in – in either case the fine lines of our vessel draws a crowd.

The convivial indoor-outdoor Tropical Bar, where most of the ship's onboard activities take place, is sheltered under a canvas cover. A cozy library offers a quiet escape inside its beautiful haven of mahogany wood, sailing ship art, and a faux marble fireplace. A piano bar leads down to a lovely dining room, which could be from a golden-age liner, with its brass portholes, beamed ceilings, and tufted velvet booths. It can accommodate all guests at once, which means there is one leisurely open dining time for meals.





In the morning my wife heads to the stern for a complimentary yoga class, while I show off my own dexterity by maneuvering through the swinging doors from the coffee nook to the upper deck without spilling my cup. In the evenings a group of us more unsavoury swashbucklers gather astern to howl at the moon and gawk up at the sky's universal beauty, as a blanket of stars reflect off the calm Mediterranean waters – stars that once guided lonely pirates homeward.

The *Star Clipper* is large enough to offer first-class accommodation and dining, but in a relaxed atmosphere. Superior service is provided by an attentive crew.

On my cruise there are 104 fellow scallywags of 14 different nationalities, looked after by a staff of 70. I am astonished that the crew all know my name on day one, and not due to anything silly

I've done, (well, maybe my Captain Jack impersonations).

Our seven-night voyage takes us from Rome to Cannes on the French Riviera. We invade Porto Cervo where Napoleon was exiled, before drifting stealthfully between the islands of Corsica, France, and Sardinia, Italy. Highlights include the narrow-sheltered harbour and fortified cliff-top village of Bonifacio, the booty garnered at the wineries of Alghero, Sardinia, the town of Calvi, Corsica, with its 13th Century Citadel, and the soft sand beaches of St. Tropez.

In Elba, we stand in a small bird-cage basket gondola which whisks us to the top of Monte Capanne for outstanding views. Outside of Calvi our small group careens around treacherous mountainside curves on a bus tour to the highland villages of Sant'Antonino, with its medieval







Pigna, Corsica

cobbled alleyways, and Pigna, a community saved by art, where more than 50 artisans craft everything from pottery to paintings. I pillage (buy on my wife's decree) an exquisite music box in the beautiful shape of a horse.

The *Star Clipper* hosts a number of theme nights on each voyage. A dance party sees us waltzing around the upper deck in a romantic stupor under a Corsican moon, a talent night has us, fortified by extra rations of grog, cheering on our wonderful waiter Hero, from Indonesia, as he belts out *New York - New York*, and a pirate night has me dressed in a skullcap, eye-patch, earring and hook, trying to impress the fair wenches on board – with absolutely no success. Shiver me timbers!

The opportunity for guests to clamber the web of ropes to the lofty crow's nest is another wonderful adventure. The captain orders me up (perhaps in response to my earlier indiscretions), so I scramble 50 feet up the ratlines high above the deck. Perhaps it's the heights, or possibly just my fanciful mind, but I suddenly imagine myself making the climb in gale-force winds while avoiding the cannon balls and musket fire of angry Corsican pirates. Truthfully, we're



San Tropez sunset



Pirate night

safely moored, sheltered beneath the sheer cliffs of Bonifacio, and the only unfriendly fire was the heckling coming from my wife. Still, I believe the ascent displayed a certain measure of bravery. Okay, I was harnessed in – landlubber that I be.

Traveling under sail offers a sense of intrigue and mystery, and a journey on the Mediterranean aboard a luxurious sailing ship specializing in immersive and intriguing itineraries makes this a special cruise, with the activities, amenities, comradery, and atmosphere of a private charter. ■



## Top chefs sail with Emerald

If great cuisine delights you – and of course it does! – join the special Danube River sailing on June 21. Two top chefs, Canadian Dale MacKay and Chef Tom Goetter of Scenic Group and Top Chef World-All Stars, will cruise for seven nights from Budapest to Regensburg on **Emerald River Cruises**. You can double your “Top Chef” culinary experience as Tom joins his friend and castmate Dale for a special, once-in-a-lifetime culinary sailing. Dale Mackay, from Saskatchewan, has an impressive background, having worked with Gordon Ramsay and Daniel Boulud before winning Top Chef Canada. This tasty cruise features a hosted cocktail reception and an exquisite Danube-inspired dinner as Tom and Dale craft a meal highlighting the flavours of the Danube region. Enjoy live cooking demonstrations as both chefs showcase their culinary expertise, creating unique dishes from identical ingredients! Have fun and learn with an interactive Q & A session that showcases the chefs’ insights from their behind-the-scenes experiences on TV and in renowned restaurants. PLUS, two booked guests will be entered to win a chance to cook with Emerald’s celebrity chefs. These unforgettable culinary collaborations on this special cruise will enhance your experience as you cruise the delightful Danube on one of Emerald’s Star ships, including numerous excursions, port taxes and charges, complimentary wine, beer and soft drinks served with lunch and dinner, and gratuities. A special Cruise & Fly offer expires March 31st – check with your travel advisor now.

Emerald Star Ship, Chefs Dale Mackay and Tom Goetter



COURTESY EMERALD CRUISES



COURTESY RIVIERA RIVER CRUISES

## Riviera River Cruises offers special savings

Until March 31, **Riviera** will provide value savings on their river cruises departing in 2024 and 2025. Guests making new bookings through their travel advisor can save \$400 US per person on 7-night sailings and \$700 US per person on ten nights or longer itineraries. Riviera has also added three new 11-night itineraries for this year and will now sail on the Douro River in Portugal. Solo travellers also qualify for the \$400 savings on the 7-night itineraries, and for special offers on many other sailings. Riviera has also introduced a new drinks package this year, with house wines and draught beer included at lunch, along with soft drinks and juice. From 6 pm to midnight guests can also enjoy cocktails and other beverages and wine at dinner – all at no increased cost.



Ama Lyra in Paris

COURTESY AMAWATERWAYS

## AmaWaterways offers extensive land stays

Enhance your river cruise journey with a pre- or post-land stay in more than 20 marvellous European, African and Asian ports. Why not stay longer in your destination and feed your wanderlust with **AmaWaterways**? These land packages include 4- or 5-star hotels, breakfast, curated guided tours and experiences, the services of a Cruise Manager and transfers between the ship and hotel. Fantastic destinations such as San Sebastian in Spain’s Basque country, Prague, the Loire Valley and Nice, St Malo (to see Mont St Michel), Paris, and gorgeous Lake Como are easily booked with your river cruise. You might want to consider extra time in Bucharest, Istanbul, Munich, Madrid or Siem Reap. When you book with AmaWaterways, you can make all your plans simultaneously, including airfare, hotels, transfers and a fabulous river cruise. Ask about special offers on land stays!



We interviewed **Kristin Karst**, Executive Vice President, and Co-Owner of AmaWaterways. Kristin is a passionate advocate for river cruising and shares more about the company and its ships and future plans.



**How is sailing with AmaWaterways different than other river cruise companies?**

We are proud of our award-winning river cruise fleet and each of our 29 ships has been carefully designed with low draft and spacious staterooms to offer the best cruising experience possible. Most of them boast our signature twin-balcony staterooms, giving our guests the option of enjoying both an indoor and outdoor balcony for taking in the best views no matter the weather. We welcome fewer guests on our ships, which allows us to have less crowded public areas, more spacious staterooms and to offer more amenities like fitness classes and soothing massages. Our onboard activities are diverse, and we welcome travellers of all ages. Everything, from the delicious regional cuisine, excellent wines, activities and entertainment to the ships themselves, has been thoughtfully designed by Rudi Schreiner, myself and our expert teams to ensure AmaWaterways offers the best that river cruising has to offer.

**Which destinations have proven to be the most enticing for Canadian travellers, and what makes these locations particularly appealing to them?**

Canadian river cruisers usually find their perfect match in our longer river cruises, as they like to explore several destinations and delve deep into the heart of each. Our *Rhine & Moselle Fairytales* itinerary takes travellers on a fascinating 11-night journey through France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, with options to extend the cruise with land packages – a pre-cruise in Amsterdam and a post-cruise in Zurich and Lake Lucerne. We expect Canadian river cruisers will love our series of new combination cruises in France debuting in 2025. The new “Grand” series of 14-night itineraries are attractively priced and combine two popular 7-night sailings into one convenient itinerary, offering extra time to explore diverse landscapes, historic cities and charming villages throughout France. Our Mekong cruises also attract many Canadians.

**A lot of river cruisers have already sailed on the Danube and the Rhine. Does AmaWaterways cruise to lesser-known European destinations?**

While the upper Danube tends to attract a lot of attention, the lower Danube, which winds through Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, is less explored. This region offers a unique charm with its lesser-known landscapes, historic sites, and cultural richness, making it an intriguing option for those seeking a more off-the-beaten-path river cruise experience. Our 7-night *Gems of Southeast Europe* itinerary showcases the best of the lower Danube, taking guests through Celtic fortifications, medieval towns and grand cities like Belgrade and Bucharest. Guests have the option to extend their cruise with a land package in the fascinating towns of Brasov and Bucharest or visit Turkey and the mesmerizing city of Istanbul. We also invite curious travellers to join us on board *AmaDolce* to discover the charming region along the Garonne and Dordogne rivers, in the southwest of France. Our *Taste of Bordeaux* itinerary is perfect for epicurean travellers looking to indulge in France’s colourful culture and rich flavours.

**Does AmaWaterways offer river cruises to exotic destinations?**

We are launching two remarkable ships on the beautiful Magdalena River in Colombia. *AmaMagdalena* will launch in November of this year, and her sistership *AmaMelodia* in June 2025. AmaWaterways is the first major river cruise line to offer cruises on the Magdalena River, sailing between Cartagena and Barranquilla on two curated seven-night itineraries. Both itineraries take travellers down the only river in the Caribbean region to experience remarkable historical villages and cultural traditions that have been recognized by UNESCO for their universal value. We also offer cruises on the mesmerizing Mekong River in Vietnam and Cambodia; along the Chobe River in Africa, and we have one, soon to be two ships on the Nile, with the beautiful 82-guest *AmaLilia* joining our fleet in March this year.

**How does AmaWaterways develop its pre and post trip land experiences?**

One of our core beliefs is that travel is about more than just passing through destinations; it should be an opportunity for our guests to fully immerse themselves into the local cultures and authentic experiences. Our land packages are meant for the guests to complement their river cruise: recover from jetlag in Amsterdam, Budapest or Paris or discover yet another city during their vacation like Prague, Lake Como or Zurich. Depending on the land package selected, we offer city tours, museum visits, tastings and even hikes. AmaWaterways’ Cruise Managers accompany our guests throughout their land journeys plus we work with knowledgeable local guides to further enhance the cultural experience. Guests stay at a world-class 4- or 5-star hotel in the heart of the city, enabling them to explore, shop and dine during their own leisure time. In addition, every AmaWaterways land package includes daily breakfast at the hotel and enriching city tours, convenient transfers and luggage service between the hotel and river cruise ship.





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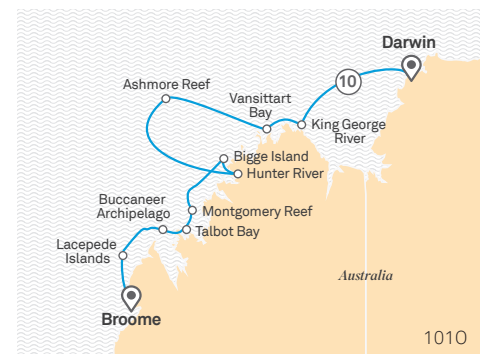
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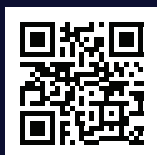
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