

# Navigate

CRUISE INSPIRATION | AUTUMN 2024



## IN THIS ISSUE

**MULTI BUCKET-LIST DESTINATIONS**  
**CRUISING SOLO**  
**SPECTACULAR RIVER CRUISES**



Future Travel  
Group



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines



## JOIN FRED. OLSEN THIS FESTIVE SEASON

Step aboard one of Fred. Olsen's smaller ships this festive season and embark on a journey to spectacular destinations. From sunshine escapes to adventures seeking out the elusive Northern Lights, there is a festive sailing to entice.

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Celebrity **X** Cruises®

\*The Retreat Sundeck is currently not available on Celebrity Solstice, Eclipse, Reflection, Constellation, Infinity.



# WELCOME TO Navigate

Whether you're looking for a short break close to home or an extensive adventure to lands far and away, the range of cruises available is what makes them so popular for so many, and it's one of the only ways to travel where the journey is just as exciting as the destination itself. Plus, our service and expertise mean that we can scour the vast options to find something that ticks all your boxes, whilst providing you with the best prices, value for money and peace of mind.

In this issue of Navigate, we delve deep into river cruises, uncovering the jewels that await you along the Danube and the Rhine on page 29, whilst on page 14 we explain why cruising is the most efficient way to visit multiple destinations across several countries in one big fat holiday. Discover the wonders of Antarctica on an expedition cruise over on page 34 and learn how effortless and exciting it can be travelling solo on page 4.

New to the world of cruise? Take our fun quiz on page 18 to find out what style of cruising suits you most, as well as which cruise lines are your perfect match. Whether you're more of a cultural enthusiast, lavish



**P32**

*Riveting River Cruises Along  
the Danube and the Rhine*

roamer, a YOLO superstar or anything in-between, we've got the ideal cruise in store for you.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Navigate and we look forward to using our cruise knowledge and experience to help you plan and enjoy your sublime cruise!

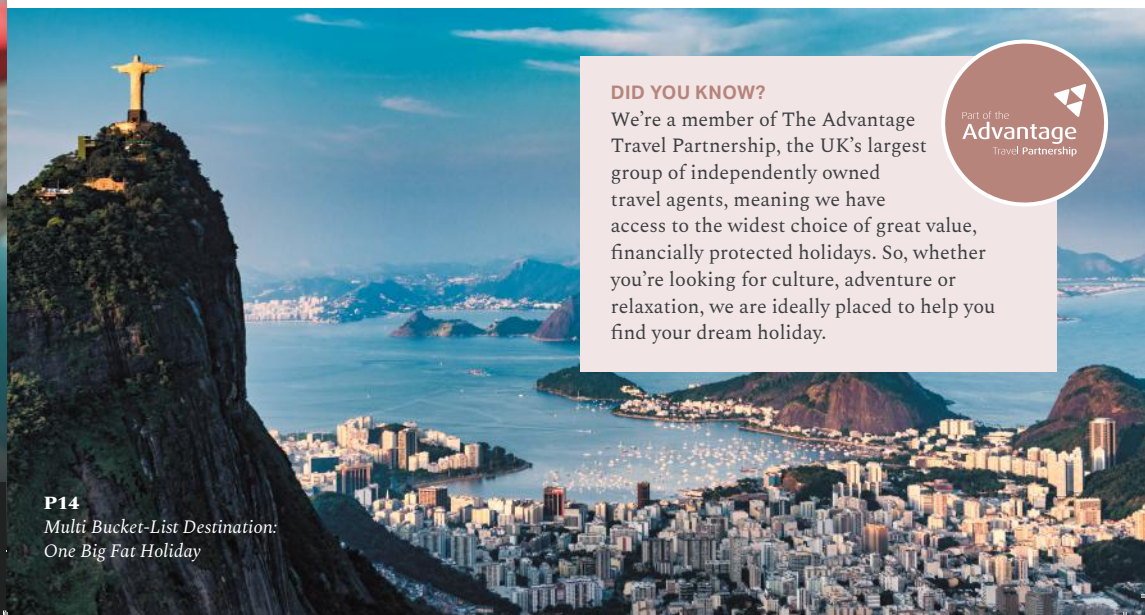
## Get in touch

☎ 01179 254 444

✉ [Cruise@futuretravelgroup.co.uk](mailto:Cruise@futuretravelgroup.co.uk)

Find more holiday inspiration at [futuretravelgroup.co.uk](http://futuretravelgroup.co.uk)

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**P14**

*Multi Bucket-List Destination:  
One Big Fat Holiday*

### DID YOU KNOW?

We're a member of The Advantage Travel Partnership, the UK's largest group of independently owned travel agents, meaning we have access to the widest choice of great value, financially protected holidays. So, whether you're looking for culture, adventure or relaxation, we are ideally placed to help you find your dream holiday.



# Cruising Solo Is in for the Win for 2025



Fencing on board Queen Victoria, Cunard

By Sam Ballard

Solo cruisers have traditionally had a rough time of it, having to fork out almost twice the fare for the privilege of sailing alone. However, those days are, in many cases, coming to an end. Cruise lines are recognising the value of the solo pound and either adding single cabins to new ships, or their existing tonnage, or putting aside a number of double rooms for those sailing on their own. Some river cruise lines even put on entire cruises just for solos. The world is definitely becoming more friendly to those who choose to holiday alone.

Pricing has also changed, with the best cruise lines for solos offering either individual single prices or low/no supplements. It's all long overdue given cruising is a great holiday for lone travellers: they have a ready-made family on board, other people to go ashore with if they are nervous of exploring alone

and, best of all, can do what they like – have a lie-in, skip the show, take whatever tour they fancy. After all, when you're on your own there is no one else to please.

*“One fascinating bit of trivia for Cunard’s transatlantic crossings is that they change the clocks by an hour each day to ease guests into the time difference. It’s just past midday on the way to New York and just after midnight on the way back to the UK.”*

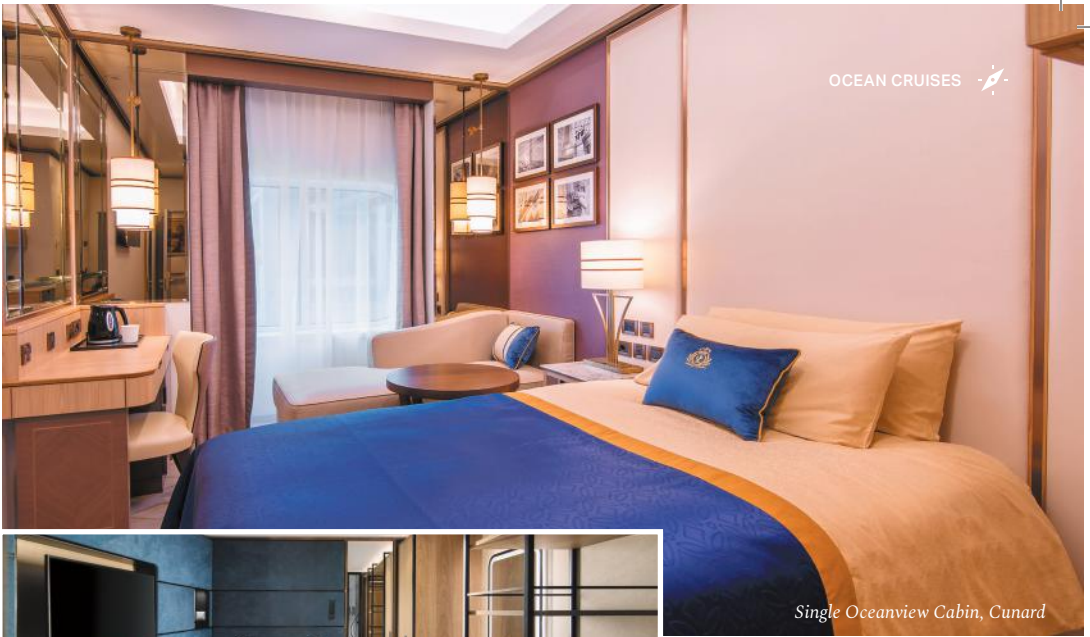
## BUT WHAT ARE THE BEST SHIPS, AND CRUISES, FOR SOLO TRAVELLERS?

When Cunard added 15 ocean-view single cabins to the 2,705-guest *Queen Mary 2* during an extensive refit in 2016, it opened up the iconic ship to a huge market that was previously paying extra to sail its transatlantic voyages. The route – arguably the most famous cruise itinerary in the world – sees guests sail from Southampton to New York (or vice versa) on the world’s only ocean liner. On board, guests are given the flexibility to eat at a table with other solo travellers or on their own. There is also a wealth of activities and experiences on board, too, from fencing lessons



Painting classes with Cunard





*Single Oceanview Cabin, Cunard*



*Prima Single Oceanview Cabin, Norwegian Cruise Line*

in The Queens Room to Cunard's famous traditional afternoon tea, or just sitting by the pool with a good book.

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is another great contender in the solo cruising arena. Renowned for operating out of UK ports, they now have three ocean ships: the *Bolette*, *Borealis* and *Balmoral*. Each of its ships is designed with solo clients in mind – the *Bolette* and *Borealis* being particularly accommodating to solo guests, with more than 100 solo cabins across the two vessels. For Fred. Olsen, it's about the more subtle touches that make solo cruisers feel welcome. It might be an invitation to a solo only social event, or the option to dine with fellow solo passengers, or, and this proves to be one of the most popular additions, year-after-year, it might be their dance hosts, who

are always on hand should a solo cruiser want a partner for a jive.

Whilst it would be disingenuous to say that the days of solo travellers paying more than their coupled counterparts are over, it's undoubtedly true that there is a world of options available to them now that simply weren't there 10 years ago. So, whether that's specially built solo cabins, curated social events or fairer pricing (even on certain

sailings), there has never been a better time to sail the world, solo.

Another cruise line to look out for is Norwegian Cruise Line, which has its own dedicated lounge for solo travellers, with free tea and coffee as well as a wine vending machine and a whiteboard to post notes to fellow travellers. In terms of accommodation, there are Studios, specially created solo cabins that are all in the same part of the ship.

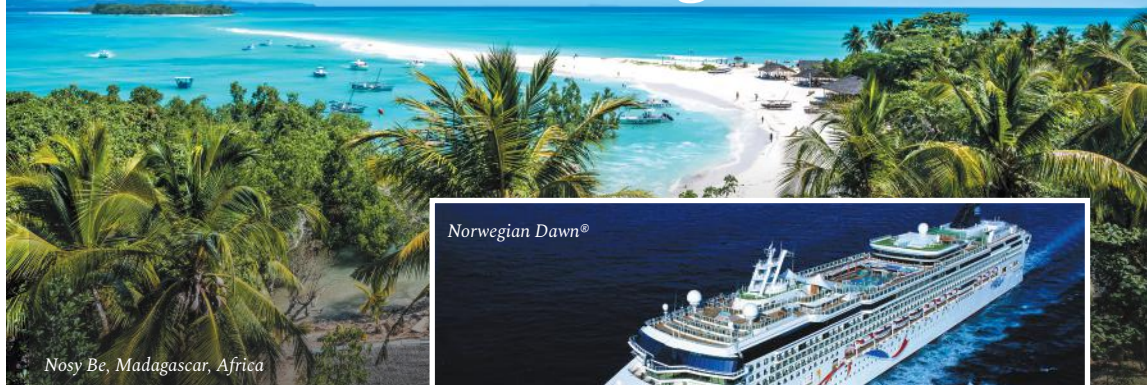
#### READY TO CRUISE SOLO?

If you're looking to cruise solo, get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today and find out the many options available to you.



*Breakaway Studio Lounge, Norwegian Cruise Line*

# Spectacular South Africa and Madagascar



Nosy Be, Madagascar, Africa



Norwegian Dawn®

Providing superior guest service from land to sea, Norwegian Cruise Line® (NCL) has the perfect cruise holiday for just about everyone. With a wide variety of award-winning entertainment and dining options as well as an extensive range of accommodation, including solo-traveller staterooms, Club Balcony Suites and exclusive luxury in The Haven by Norwegian®, we're positive NCL will tick all your boxes.

We walk you through 12 days and 8 ports from NCL's spectacular South Africa & Madagascar itinerary, embarking from Cape Town, and show how you can make your 2025 go from nice to extraordinary.

## CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Admire the panoramic city and harbour views from the summit of the majestic Table Mountain.

*"With a fleet of 20 contemporary ships cruising to over 400 of the world's most desirable destinations, NCL has been breaking the boundaries of traditional cruising for 57 years."*

Take a ferry trip to the iconic Robben Island to learn about the former prison's fascinating history, as well as Nelson Mandela – its most famous prisoner. Afterwards, wander the spectacular Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, acclaimed as one of the great botanic gardens of the world.

## MOSSEL BAY, SOUTH AFRICA

At Mossel Bay, take in the breathtaking scenery from the top of Cape St. Blaize Lighthouse, which has adorned the horizon since 1864. Follow up with a visit to the Point of Human Origins, a world-renowned archaeological site

which houses the earliest artifacts of modern humans – or embrace more recent cultural heritage at

the Bartolomeu Dias Museum, built to commemorate Dias' voyage around the southern tip of Africa.

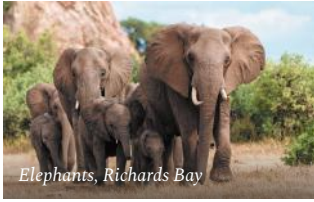
## PORT ELIZABETH (GQEBERHA), SOUTH AFRICA

Once you dock at Port Elizabeth, stroll down the mile-long golden sands of King's Beach in the 'Friendly City'. Wildlife lovers should look out for vast herds of African game in the lush coastal forest and grasslands of Kragga Kamma Game Park, whilst history buffs will stand in awe of the four-sided stone pyramid in the Donkin Reserve, constructed by Rufane Donkin in memory of his late wife, Elizabeth, who the city was named after.

## RICHARDS BAY, SOUTH AFRICA (OVERNIGHT)

Take advantage of an overnight stay in Richards Bay, which allows even more time to see why it's so popular with nature and culture seekers. Situated in the





*Elephants, Richards Bay*

deepest natural harbour in the southern hemisphere, the region offers fantastic opportunities to encounter abundant sea life or elephants, lions, hippos and other species on an unforgettable safari. You can even learn about Zulu language and traditions with a visit to the DumaZulu traditional village.

#### **NOSY BE, MADAGASCAR**

This 'Big Island' off the north-west coast is famous for its natural splendour and ylang-ylang trees that make up a major part of the local economy. Spend the day at Lokobe Reserve and hang out with lemurs and chameleons. Indulge in local cuisine like the diverse and delectable variations of Laoka, a tasty side dish served with rice. Or hike Mont Lokobe, the highest peak on the island. The views of the island from the top are like no other!

#### **ANTSIRANANA, MADAGASCAR**

Known as Diego Suarez until 1975, it's the perfect mix of a lively city and relaxed beaches, located in the far north of the country. You'll come across several ruins of French-style colonial architecture that have been destroyed by cyclones over the years. Outside the city, explore rainforests, waterfalls and spot some of Madagascar's incredible native animals in one of the most biodiverse places in Africa.

#### **POINTE DES GALETS, RÉUNION**

Discover the wonders of Pointe des Galets, a gateway to Réunion Island's incredible attractions. Hike the awe-inspiring Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world's most active volcanoes. Explore the lush Bélouve Forest, a haven for nature enthusiasts with its rich biodiversity. Stroll through the historic Jardin de l'État, where exotic flora and serene pathways await. The jewel of the Indian Ocean provides a perfect blend of adventure, the great outdoors and complete relaxation.

#### **PORT LOUIS, MAURITIUS**

Explore Mauritius' capital, Port Louis, where discovery and culture await. Visit the historic Cape of Good Hope for stunning ocean views and to dive into the area's rich maritime history. Wander through Champs de Mars, the oldest racecourse in the southern hemisphere, or delve into the island's heritage at the Blue Penny Museum, home to rare stamps and fascinating artefacts, offering a captivating blend of history, excitement and natural beauty.

#### **READY TO MAKE 2025 EXTRAORDINARY?**

NCL itineraries are all combined with a personable service on board, flexible dining and a wide range of entertainment options, making sure your 2025 holiday is nothing short of extraordinary. For more information about NCL and its broad range of itineraries available next year, contact us, your local travel agent, today.

*NCL at Boulders Beach, Cape Town*



*Kirstenbosch botanical garden in Cape Town*

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# EXPLORE THE CARIBBEAN

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FARES PP FROM:

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## 9-DAY SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN SEAFARER

*Rotterdam: 29 Nov 2024*

**VISITS:** Fort Lauderdale, Half Moon Cay, Grand Turk, Kralendijk (Bonaire), Willemstad (Curaçao), Fort Lauderdale



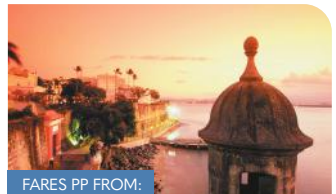
FARES PP FROM:

INSIDE **£1,599** VERANDAH **£2,499**

## 12-DAY PANAMA CANAL SUNFARER

*Rotterdam: 17 Nov 2024*

**VISITS:** Fort Lauderdale, Half Moon Cay, Willemstad, Cartagena, Enter Panama Canal, Gatun Lake, Exit Panama Canal, Colón, Puerto Limon, Georgetown, Fort Lauderdale



FARES PP FROM:

INSIDE **£1,499** VERANDAH **£2,069**

## 14-DAY TROPICAL / EASTERN CARIBBEAN

*Nieuw Statendam: 7 Dec 2024*

**VISITS:** Fort Lauderdale, Half Moon Cay, Grand Turk, Amber Cove, Nassau, Grand Turk, San Juan, St. Thomas, Half Moon Cay, Fort Lauderdale

Contact your Travel Agent today!



Holland America

\*Availability and pricing per person correct at time of print. Caribbean Air Credit: is available on select flights booked through Holland America Line's Flight Ease programme on select Caribbean 2024/2025 sailings and is available to guests 1 & 2 sharing a stateroom. Inclusive transfers include ground transportation from Miami (MIA) or Fort Lauderdale (FLL) airport to ship and ship to MIA or FLL airport. Pre-cruise hotel accommodation is available at select MIA or FLL hotels and may be assigned after booking. Inclusive air is subject to availability and day fare of the airline and may become unavailable or subject to surcharge depending on time of booking. Luggage is not included unless verified otherwise and offered by the individual airline. Offer ends 31st October 2024. Please read full terms and conditions at HollandAmerica.com before booking. All the flights and flight-inclusive holidays featured are financially protected by the ATOL scheme. When you pay you will be supplied with an ATOL Certificate. Please ask for it and check to ensure



that everything you booked (flights, hotels and other services) is listed on it. Please see our booking conditions for further information or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to: [www.caa.co.uk](http://www.caa.co.uk)



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OCEAN CRUISES 

# Kid-free Cruising Around Turkey and Greece

**Summer 2025 might feel like an ocean away, but it's never too soon to plan your next epic holiday with Virgin Voyages.**

*Resilient Lady*, Virgin Voyages' third Lady Ship, returns to Athens for an 11-night, bucket-list trip of a lifetime. Our top pick for 2025 is the Istanbul, Santorini & More voyage, which has multiple sail dates from May through to September. Read on to find out more!

## ISTANBUL AND KUSADASI

On the Istanbul, Santorini & More itinerary, you'll spend a day at sea on the way to iconic Istanbul for two days of endless exploration. Here, you can take in architectural wonders like the Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace and the Blue Mosque. Or perhaps peruse the variety of shops from countless vendors at the Grand Bazaar, the Feriköy Flea Market or the Spice Bazaar before spending another day at sea on the way to Kusadasi, perfectly placed for the ancient ruins of Ephesus.

## MYKONOS AND RHODES

Next on the list, you'll visit marvellous Mykonos, where you can stroll down the quaint and

picturesque streets of 'Little Venice' in the Old Town and take in island life, before treating yourself at the Kalua Mykonos beach club. Wake up the next day to stunning Rhodes and explore the fortified, medieval old town, visit Lindos beach and Acropolis, or relax at Kallithea Springs.

## SANTORINI AND CRETE

Arriving onto the sultry sands of Santorini, you can spend the day at one of the volcanic beaches, take a walking tour through infamous Oia and snap the obligatory selfie, visit some wineries, or go on a kayaking adventure. Once you reach Chania, Crete, try a Greek cooking class and take a scenic walk through yet another charming old town before returning to the ship for a final day at sea to relax and unwind as you head back to Athens.

*"With elevated experiences curated with adults in mind, Virgin Voyages creates a place where your inner child can roam free."*

*Resilient Lady, Virgin Voyages*



**ALWAYS INCLUDED LUXURY**

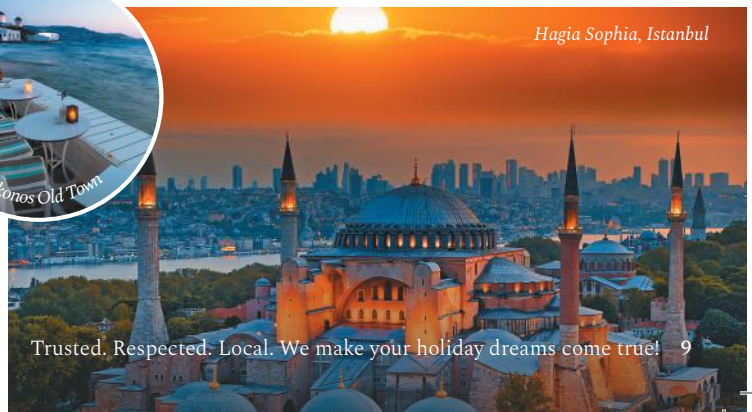
Enjoy over \$1,000 worth of Always Included Luxury. Every Virgin Voyages sailing includes access to all the premium dining at their 20+ eateries with menus curated by Michelin-star chefs, essential drinks, group fitness classes, wifi, gratuities and award-winning entertainment.

## WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Virgin Voyages has won several awards for its unparalleled luxury and service across the entire fleet. Book your next voyage with us, your local travel agent, to experience award-winning service first-hand.



*Hagia Sophia, Istanbul*



Trusted. Respected. Local. We make your holiday dreams come true! 9

Santorini

# Nothing Beats a Norwegian Fjords Cruise with P&O



by Lyndsay Haddock

In April my partner and I were lucky enough to embark on a Norwegian Fjords cruise aboard the beautiful P&O *Iona*. Being such an iconic itinerary, we were so excited for this trip and, let me tell you, P&O did not disappoint. The *Iona* played host to an unforgettable journey, visiting stunning locations, dining on delicious cuisine and immersing us in incredible entertainment.

Embarking from Southampton terminal, the seamless boarding process took a matter of minutes: our car was whisked away for parking, bags taken for delivery to the cabin, and we were straight through security. Once on board, *Iona* was ready and waiting for us, with bars and dining options available. It was time to explore the ship and grab a drink for sail-away views down the Solent.

After navigating the vastness of *Iona*, our days at sea were spent soaking up spectacular views from the hot tub or people-watching in the atrium. There are plenty of little nooks to grab a drink and lose yourself in a book, but occasionally we found ourselves venturing into a pub quiz or having a flutter in the casino.



## THE JOURNEY

Our chosen itinerary took in some of Norway's most beautiful locations, including the Norwegian heritage site of Old Town Stavanger, where cobbled streets are lined with traditional white wooden houses, scattered with art galleries and local independent craft shops. We also visited Ålesund, its colourful art-nouveau architecture and cosy atmosphere felt like something from a fairytale. And Haugesund, the home of the Vikings, offered charming markets and historical coastal walks accompanied by wild sheep.

## OUR HIGHLIGHT DAY

We woke up at a fresh 6am as *Iona* started her sail through the beautiful Nordfjord; a couple of hours were spent on our aft (the rear end of the ship) balcony with

Stavanger





a cup of coffee, a spot of breakfast and some of the most magnificent views of the Fjords against the sunrise. After taking port in the tiny town of Olden, we jumped on a coach towards Briksdal Glacier; the drive alone was incredible through the valley, passing lakes and waterfalls. Seeing the glacier up close was spectacular, and the hike to get there was worth every step. That evening we had the honour of dining in the elegant Epicurean restaurant on board, where famous Norwegian chef Kjartan Skjelde created a delicious six-course tasting menu using locally sourced ingredients. Dinner was served against breathtaking views as we sailed away from the port and weaved between the fjords. For a special dessert, Kjartan himself stopped by to ensure everything was just perfect.

#### LIFE ON BOARD

During the evenings we were spoilt for choice, taking in a show at the Headliners Theatre, a quick dance at the silent disco or checking out the comedy act in the lounge. A standout performance for us was an evening in the Limelight Club: an exceptional three-course meal, accompanied by magnificent entertainment from West End singer Alice Fearne (*Wicked*, *Come from Away*). The club is

home to some of P&O's most elite performances and the intimate, cabaret-style event is one that I would say shouldn't be missed.

The dining experiences on board were second to none. The main restaurants had beautiful settings and well-varied menus although we couldn't help but treat ourselves to a premium restaurant or two. Our favourites were Sindhu for authentic Indian dishes (and generous portions) and Keel & Cow for one of the tastiest cuts of steak at sea! Afterwards, you could probably catch us at Ripples grabbing a cheeky snowflake gelato before bed.

From the second we stepped on board, through to the spectacular views from *Iona's* Crow's Nest

#### TOP TIPS

Be sure to book the Limelight Club in advance; performances are intimate, so spaces are limited.

For itineraries like the Norwegian Fjords, an aft Balcony cabin offers exceptional panoramic views without leaving the comfort of your room.

Check out the App when you first board. It is full of useful information, copies of the daily Horizon newsletter and a fantastic virtual queuing system for all of the restaurants.

bar for our final sail-away, P&O offered an unforgettable blend of local charm, vibrant entertainment and exquisite dining, all neatly wrapped in British luxury.

#### TAKE ME THERE

If Lyndsay's experience has you eager to book your next Norwegian Fjords voyage with P&O Cruises, get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today to start planning or to find out more.



ENJOY YOURSELF

ON BRITAIN'S  
NO-FLY CRUISE LINE



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PORTS



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SMALL-TO-  
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SHIPS



9 OUT OF 10  
CUSTOMERS  
SAIL AGAIN

Contact your local travel agent to book. Offers & prices subject to availability and may be withdrawn without notice. Ambassador Cruise Line T&C's apply



CUNARD

## SCANDINAVIA/NORWEGIAN FJORDS

Sail to Northern Europe's highlights on Queen Anne with this charming 14-night voyage. Relax and watch the world go by on deck, explore historic streets, or enjoy Queen Anne's elegant spaces.

Queen Anne ♦ 14 nights ♦ 27 Apr 2025 ♦ H510A

From only £1,499pp with our Cunard Fare,  
with US\$210pp on board credit.  
Flights can be added upon enquiry.

To find out more or to book,  
speak with your local travel agent.





# American Comfort with European Elegance on MSC World America

Are you dreaming of an unforgettable cruise that blends the best of American comfort with European elegance? Look no further than MSC Cruises' latest masterpiece, *MSC World America*. Setting sail from Miami, Florida, in April 2025, this stunning new vessel is already available to book, promising an extraordinary journey like no other.

*MSC World America* is designed to cater to every desire, whether you seek a peaceful retreat or a thrilling adventure. This magnificent ship boasts seven distinct districts, each offering unique and tailored experiences for guests of all ages and tastes.

## WHERE LUXURY KNOWS NO BOUNDS

Upgrade your cruise experience and immerse yourself in the ultimate luxury of the MSC Yacht Club, an exclusive part of the ship where luxury knows no bounds.



Enjoy premium services, a private pool and sun deck, and a serene ambience that sets the perfect tone for relaxation.

Families will find paradise in the Aventura Area, offering a wide range of engaging activities and adventures fit for all ages. For those craving tranquility, head to the Zen Area on deck 18 for a serene retreat, where you can relax and recharge whilst listening to the soothing sounds of the ocean waves.

*"The lively terrace boasts nine restaurants and bars, a comedy club, duelling piano bars and even late-night karaoke."*

## NEVER A DULL MOMENT

For water enthusiasts, the Aqua Deck is a dream come true, with a variety of aquatic activities to enjoy from sunrise to sunset. For the foodies and shopaholics, the Galleria Zone is a must-visit, featuring a wide array of exquisite dining options, chic bars and stylish boutiques. Don't miss the high-tech entertainment at MSC Luna Park Arena, hosting themed parties and game shows. As the sun sets, the ship comes alive with a vibrant nightlife. The half-covered outdoor promenade is the perfect place to end your day, offering a dynamic space for both

Brought to you by  
**MSC**  
CRUISES



day and night activities. From a morning coffee at the authentic Emporium coffee bar to lively evening entertainment, delightful drinks and sumptuous dinners, the Promenade has something special for everyone.

And for the ultimate thrill, don't miss the Cliffhanger - the exhilarating over-water swing. With breathtaking views that will leave you in awe, it's an experience you won't want to miss. You might find it a tad difficult to leave the ship, which just means you'll have to book another cruise to experience it all over again!

## READY TO SET SAIL?

*MSC World America* is set to transform the future of cruising as it island-hops around the Caribbean next year. To book your dream holiday on this extraordinary ship, contact us, your local travel agent, today. Your cruise experience awaits!

## MULTI BUCKET-LIST DESTINATIONS:

# One Big Fat Holiday

**Just think about it: you first walk on board your ship. Ahead of you are two weeks of sailing for hundreds of miles and seeing the very best of what a region has to offer. It could be island-hopping around the Caribbean or exploring the far reaches of Alaska. Regardless of where your destination is, to replicate a cruise on land would be a logistical nightmare: repacking, unpacking, checking-in and checking-out. With a cruise, on day one the relaxation starts, and it does not stop.**



Ha Long Bay, Vietnam

An example of an itinerary with multiple destinations across a lengthy cruise would be something like Oceania Cruises' 33-day Enchanting East Asia voyage. Starting in Singapore on 12 January 2025, on board *Riviera*, the ship also calls at ports in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. It offers an incredible

opportunity for those who are looking to sample what East Asia has to offer, either with the intention of going back one day, or to tick it off their bucket list altogether. To do a similar journey on land would be possible, albeit extremely costly, and the prospect of organising a ferry crossing between remote towns in Asia might seem a little ambitious for the average traveller.

Azamara is another operator that offers complex itineraries which marry together different destinations very well. In February 2025, the company will offer a Carnival

Rio & Amazon Voyage that begins in beautiful Buenos Aires, before heading to Montevideo in Uruguay, Rio de Janeiro for the world-famous Carnival, and Salvador De Bahia, Brazil. From there the ship heads down the Amazon River and into one of the world's most famous ecosystems. How many holidays could so successfully blend the sophistication of Buenos Aires with the hedonism of Rio Carnival before moving on to some time spent in the world's largest rainforest? It's a staggering blend of different experiences, which is what cruise lines achieve so well.

Or, how about taking a deep dive into the paradise islands of the Pacific? Holland

America Line is offering its guests the chance to sail between Fort Lauderdale and Singapore on a particularly unusual itinerary in January 2025. The cruise includes calls at the Caribbean, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Easter Island, the Islands of French Polynesia and the Cook Islands, Tonga, Australia,

Indonesia and Singapore. It's an incredible itinerary that will tick off so many places for those lucky enough to venture on board. And again, it just cements what good value a cruise is. How else can you go to Easter Island, sunbathe in French Polynesia, swim in the Great Barrier

*“If you’ve cruised before then this will seem like the most obvious thing in the world, but one of the greatest pleasures of a cruise holiday is having to only unpack once.”*

Reef and see a Komodo dragon, all on one holiday?



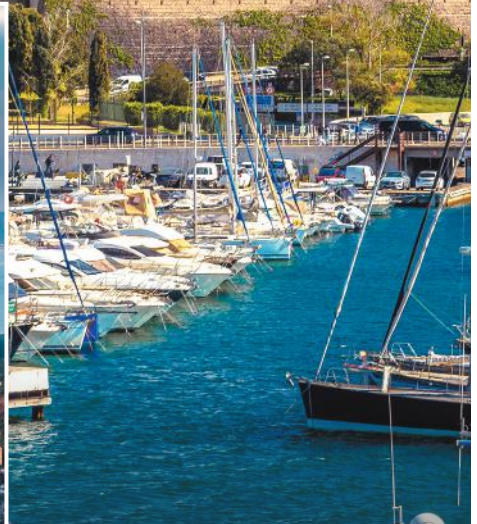


*Marseille harbour, France*

For those who want to avoid flights altogether but still want to enjoy the gems of Europe, you'll be surprised at just how much variety you can get into even relatively short itineraries. For the summer season, P&O Cruises, as well as many other cruise lines sailing out of Southampton, offers variations on a two-week Mediterranean sailing that includes calls at ports in Spain, Portugal, France and Italy, so, whether you'll be calling at glamorous Lisbon, exploring the French Riviera or eating the best pizza in the world in Naples, you can do it all without ever having to set foot on a plane.

#### READY TO SET SAIL?

So, why not board a cruise and start ticking those destinations off. You'd be hard pushed to find an easier, more stress-free way to see the world. Get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today to find your perfect multi-destination cruise and start ticking off your bucket list.

*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

# Family Fun On Board *Sky Princess*



By Joanne Robson

As complete cruise novices we arrived at Southampton's QEII dock on a rather overcast day in July for a Princess Cruises family open day to see what cruising with kids would be like. The arrival experience was easy, certainly compared to an airport, as we were able to park on-site and make the short walk to where *Sky Princess* was docked. A Royal-class vessel,

the length of three American football pitches (so I'm told!), she was certainly an impressive sight despite the early hour.

Pretty quickly we were on board and shown to the beautiful Princess Theatre for welcome refreshments with our fellow open day visitors, most of whom had brought their families along too. On spying the many cakes and

pastries on offer, my delighted seven-year-old son set about sampling as many of them as possible; my husband and I were no less guilty! With caffeine fixes satisfied, we were treated to a sample family show – a Jim Henson's Muppets inspired production, 'Inspired Silliness', which all the kids loved.



*Sky Princess Pool*



## KIDS' CLUB

When the show was over, we headed for Camp Discovery – Princess Cruises' range of clubs for kids and teens – to test out the many activities and games on offer. My son declared The Tree House club, for 3–7-year-olds, 'too babyish', although it was perfect for little ones, with a beautiful themed soft-play area. So, we spent a good hour, or was it two (I lost track!) in The Lodge, aimed at 8–12-year-olds, trying everything from air hockey and table football to Mario Karts and jewellery making! At some point there was a big commotion and the kids started going crazy (crazier) as a large teddy bear ambled in clutching an equally large sack in his paws.



Stanley the Bear

Quickly children appeared around us hugging their own version of the bear, who I soon found out was called Stanley and is something of a Princess Cruises' icon. Never one to pass up the opportunity to add yet another teddy to his vast collection, my son bolted from his game and got in line to receive his Stanley bear too, even obliging with a picture.

By this point, numbers in Camp Discovery were dwindling as, one by one, parents managed to lure



their reluctant offspring away. It was around this point I began to fear we may be stuck in the kids' club all day (I'd heard how good the buffet was and was keen to get moving) and so, on the premise of showing Stanley around the ship, and perhaps even finding the basketball court, we finally managed to extract boy and bear from The Lodge.

## DINING

The ship was beginning to fill up now as more passengers, bound for a two-week Baltic cruise, came aboard, and so we headed to the buffet – which thankfully was not too busy. It was hard to know where to start, with pretty much every taste catered for, but we did our best to sample as much as possible and can confirm it was all excellent, particularly the carving section.

## AMENITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

After far too much food, we set out to explore some more of *Sky Princess*. Being new to cruise ships, we quickly got lost, but happily discovered plenty along the way, including Movies Under the Stars (a huge cinema screen on top deck), a plethora of pools and hot tubs, an all-day pizza station (which we vowed to come back to before the end of the day), a putting green and – finally – Centre Court, offering basketball and pickleball/tennis to those looking to work off that lunch.

All too soon it was time to depart – we did manage to squeeze in a few slices of the incredible poolside pizza before saying goodbye to our lovely Princess hosts for the day. As for cruising with kids – I can certainly see the appeal as I don't think they could ever get bored. We'll certainly be booking our first official cruise with Princess in the near future!



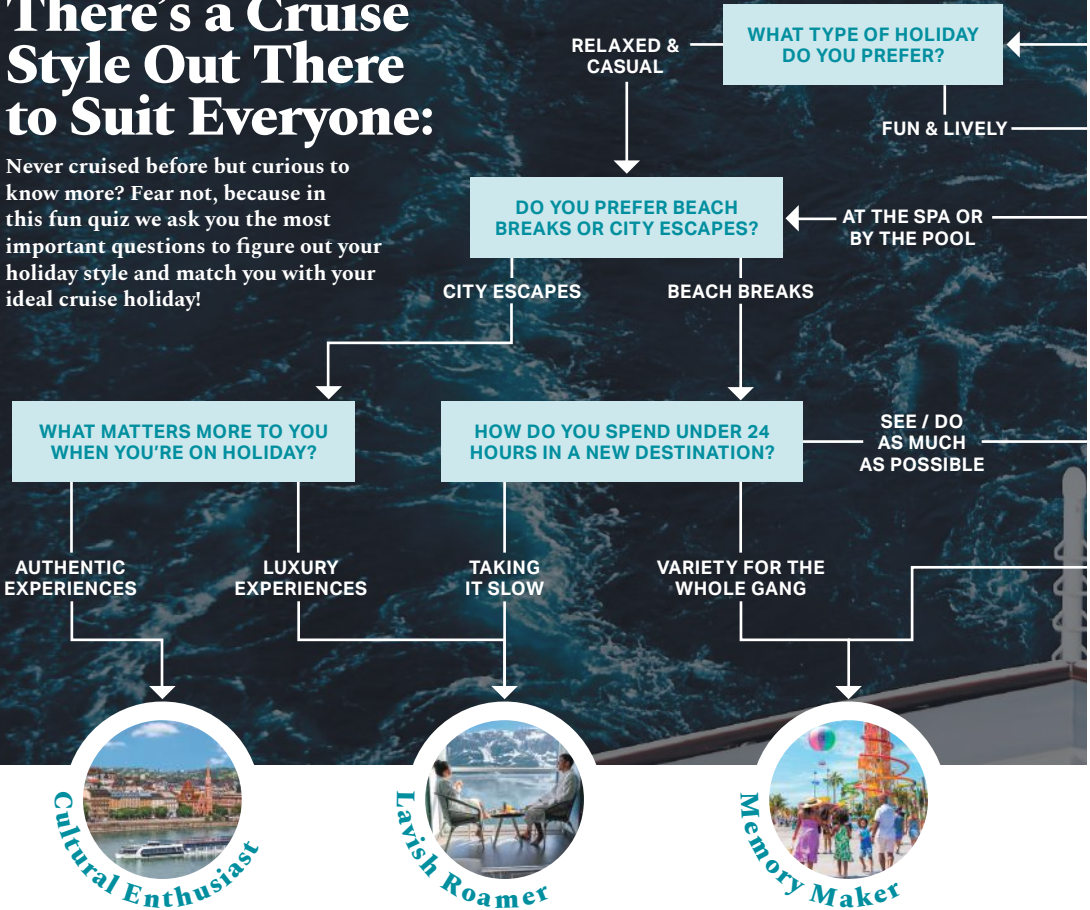
Kids' Club

## READY TO EMBARK ON YOUR OWN FAMILY CRUISE ADVENTURE?

If you've been tempted by Joanne's experience to take your family on a holiday on board a Princess Cruise, contact us today to find out more or to book!

# There's a Cruise Style Out There to Suit Everyone:

Never cruised before but curious to know more? Fear not, because in this fun quiz we ask you the most important questions to figure out your holiday style and match you with your ideal cruise holiday!




You're a relaxed explorer, but relaxed doesn't have to mean boring! You like city escapes over beach breaks because they offer more enriching, cultural experiences – and that's exactly what you want when you're on holiday. Well, river cruises with Uniworld, APT, Scenic or AmaWaterways (see pages 28 - 33 for more) offer all of this and more. You'll be at the heart of the action every time you dock. And guess what? Excursions are included as standard too, so you really can see it all.

You prioritise comfort and indulgence, favouring a leisurely pace and luxurious experiences over jam-packed itineraries. The cruise lines that you are best suited to are Explorer Journeys, Celebrity Cruises and Oceania Cruises (see pages 21 - 27 for more), where you can enjoy the finer things in life along with meticulously planned itineraries without feeling overwhelmed. We're talking the best cuisine at sea, chic design and extraordinary service.

When it comes to holidays, you prioritise a fun and lively atmosphere, seeking vibrant and active experiences, making lifelong memories. Cruise lines such as Royal Caribbean, Princess Cruises and MSC Cruises would be ideal choices to cater to all of your needs (see pages 13, 16 - 17 and 20 for more). These cruise lines are renowned for their extensive range of on-board entertainment and activities, diverse dining options, kids' clubs, activities for cruisers of all ages and exciting shore excursions.



## START HERE

FIND YOUR IDEAL CRUISE 

AS A COUPLE

HOW ARE YOU TRAVELLING?

WITH FRIENDS / SOLO

FAMILY WITH KIDS

YOU'RE HAVING A BLAST AT SEA FOR THE ENTIRE DAY:  
HOW ARE YOU SPENDING YOUR TIME ON BOARD?

DAYTIME FUN

NIGHT LIFE OR DAYTIME FUN?

I WANT TO BE ENTERTAINED OR TRY AN ACTIVITY

NIGHT LIFE

WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER: AN EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT, ACTIVITIES FULL OF ADRENALINE, OR SOMETHING CHILL?

ADRENALINE

EDUCATIONAL

CHILL

  
**Curious Adventurer**

  
**YOLO Superstar**

You live life to the fullest, making the most of your time away, and are always trying to cram as much as you can into your itinerary. Most importantly, you want to fully immerse yourself in the moment and try something new. Expedition cruises with Hurtigruten, Seabourn and Quark (see page 34 for more) offer expert on-board lectures and the opportunity to explore rugged, remote destinations. Or how about cruises designed to catch natural phenomena like the northern lights with Fred. Olsen Cruise Line? Whatever kind of adventure you are seeking, these cruise lines can absolutely deliver!

You're the type of person who loves to dance the night away and live in the moment. During the day, you still want to have fun, but would opt for something more chill and casual over strenuous and demanding. From theatre shows and dance classes to pool parties and comedy acts – there is never a dull day! With kid-free cruises available from Virgin Voyages and P&O, and solo cabins on Norwegian Cruise Line (see pages 4 - 11 for more), all offering an exceptional experience on board, you'll never look back.

### DOES IT SOUND LIKE A MATCH?

We hope this handy quiz has helped you narrow down the options and realise that there is so much more to the world of cruising than you may have realised! If the cruise line you've ended up with sounds like a match made in heaven, get in touch to find out more or to book and, if not, there are plenty more cruise lines out there for you to consider! We're positive we can find the one to cater to all your needs, so get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today and discover the world of cruising and all it has to offer.



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**To book, contact your local travel agent.**



# Luxury Unveiled:

A JOURNEY ABOARD SILVER DAWN



View of Geiranger from Classic Veranda Suite balcony



Classic Veranda Suite



By Mark Pullen

Having sailed with Silversea previously, we are always on the lookout for another great itinerary and, in June of 2023, my partner and I found the perfect cruise for us from Southampton, finishing in Copenhagen 14 nights later. With a majority of ports of call in Norway and some in Sweden and Denmark, our minds were set.

## SERVICE ON BOARD

Embarkation in Southampton was smooth, and our suite was ready for us on arrival. The Classic

Veranda Suite was a very good size and even incorporated a full-size tub, a separate large shower cubicle in the bathroom, and a wardrobe area which was in fact a small dressing room behind a separate door and was perfectly sized. The suite itself had the most wonderfully comfortable bed with plush pillows and good-sized bedside tables, whilst the living area had a rather nice sofa, chair and a lovely marble table that could be used for in-suite dining and a mini-bar stocked to your preference.

At this point, the butler made herself known to us and helped make our two weeks very memorable. From champagne and caviar as a surprise on the balcony, to shoeshines for formal nights and lovely little touches such as cookies

and juice on the table when we returned from an early and long excursion, we were made to feel incredibly well looked after.

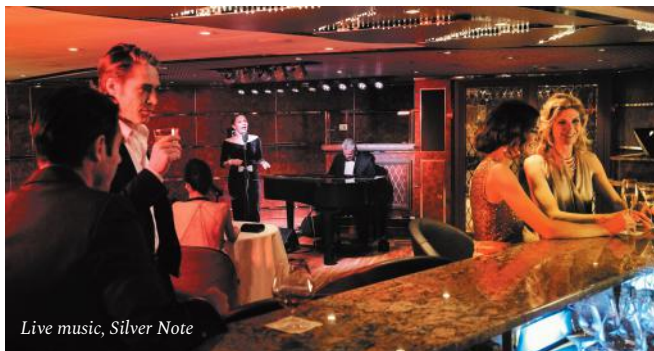
## AMENITIES

The ship itself was immaculate, with beautiful public areas such as the Dolce Vita lounge and bar. The outside spaces were also beautifully thought out, with sumptuous loungers and large fluffy towels ready for hot tub or swimming pool use. The on-deck crew were always around for drink orders and the ice cream parlour on one of the higher decks was fabulous, with many flavours and toppings. The same area also had an outside pizza restaurant which was great for a quick bite when we came back from one of the excursions in the mid-afternoon.

### DRINKS AND DINING

With pretty much everything included in the Silversea fare, it takes away the need to consider what you are spending on drinks, excursions, wifi and much more. There are a couple of up-sell restaurants for dinner such as La Dame and Kaiseki (Japanese); however, we visited Kaiseki a few times during lunch as it's complimentary during this time.

Dining on board is fantastic, with access to two main restaurants - S.A.L.T Kitchen and Atlantide - an Italian-inspired eatery (La Terrazza) and a brilliant outside area where the use of hot rocks gives you the ability to cook your own steak or king prawns in the balmy evenings that we experienced on this trip. With the Norwegian Fjords surrounding you as you sail away, it's a memorable experience to say the least.



### ENTERTAINMENT AND EXCURSIONS

We chose many of the included excursions and found them to be perfectly timed and paced with a great variety of inclusions, which made sure we were able to see what we wanted when we wanted.

The on-board entertainment provided by Silversea is of exceptional quality, featuring talented singers and guest artists throughout the cruise. The port lectures were informative and well structured, providing ample information for those who wished to explore the ports independently. There is also a wonderful jazz club experience called Silver Note,

which we very much enjoyed on two separate occasions.

For us, what makes Silversea Cruises is the crew on board – they are absolutely wonderful, learning your names very early on and making the cruise experience one that is unforgettable. Would we sail again on Silversea? You bet! In a heartbeat!

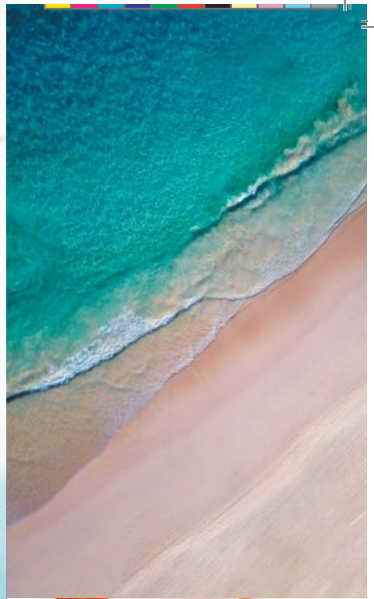
### READY FOR A LUXURY SAILING EXPERIENCE?

If Mark's experience has you eager to find out more about Silversea or to book, get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today!





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# Discover the Ocean State of Mind... Its Influence Is at the Heart of Explora Journeys

**The ocean connects us with ourselves, other people and the places around us. It inspires discovery, broadening horizons and triggering new connections. Explora Journeys call this powerful, transformative and rewarding emotional response the Ocean State of Mind.**

Inspired by their name, as well as the mandala-inspired pattern icon of their logo, Explora Journeys connects the passion for exploration and inner and outer discovery. Rooted in spirituality, Ocean Wellness has been curated to assist you in reaching the Ocean State of Mind: a state that is uniquely rewarding - physically, intellectually and spiritually.

### A LUXURIOUS SPA EXPERIENCE

Over 1,000 sqm of space is dedicated to a luxurious spa, offering a hydrotherapy pool, Finnish sauna, salt cave, experience showers, heated marble loungers, ice fall and steam room, alongside indoor and outdoor wellness areas.

The selection of partner brands, including Dr. LEVY Switzerland®, Aromatherapy Associates and The Tides Wellness, have been meticulously chosen to give guests the gifts of Ocean Wellness, sourced by experts who understand the Ocean State of Mind and how it is achieved. Explora Journeys' approach to skincare is curated and personalised, restoring your own natural youth with visibly transformative results. Only sustainable products containing first-class active ingredients with high concentrations of botanical, marine and biological extracts are used in the Spa.

From sleep to nutrition, the selection of wellbeing initiatives has been carefully curated to ensure that guests are able to enrich their sense of wellbeing.

### SEIZE THE BENEFITS OF SLEEP WITH THE SLEEP RETREAT

The Sleep Retreat provides guests with a series of sleep-enhancing practices. Including an introductory one-to-one workshop, a sleep-enhancing smoothie, a yoga nidra class and in-suite bedtime



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JOURNEYS

EXPLORA I Deck

meditation - Explora Journeys will ensure that guests benefit from a well-rested stay.

### EXPERT-LED WORKSHOPS, ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

Protect and prepare your body and mind with the Immune Boosting Retreat: including expert-led workshops that help you learn about the core principles of immunity, and how to boost it, and a one-to-one yoga flow session with a focus on pranayama techniques and thymus tapping. The programme is complemented with a specially curated immune-fortifying lunch and the Aromatherapy Associates Immune Support Treatment.



Explora I Astern Pool

Ocean Wellness treatment  
Astern Pool





EXPLORA I Whirlpool



EXPLORA I Fitness Centre

*“Ocean Wellness encompasses your physical, spiritual and emotional health, ensuring your time on board is enriching and fulfilling. Sleep, relaxation, mindfulness, energy and immunity-boosting are addressed holistically, producing a deep sense of physical and spiritual renewal enhanced by the revitalising influence of the sea.”*

#### BEAUTY TREATMENTS AND PHILOSOPHY

We believe inner wellness should radiate in outer beauty and confidence. Our beauty spaces are dedicated to this philosophy, allowing you to feel at one with the natural beauty of your surroundings. The Beauty Studio is a flowing space, to ensure all your beauty needs are catered for in one place, ranging from hair rituals and barber treatments to rejuvenating hand and foot treatments.

#### HIGH-PERFORMANCE FITNESS FACILITIES

Contemporary fitness facilities, complete with the latest high-performance equipment by Technogym and Pilates Reformers, is where mind and body will benefit from Explora Journeys’ modern approach to fitness – whether it’s indoor, outdoor at the open-air fitness or sports

courts or running track, or in-suite – offering you a varied and personalised workout experience.

#### SPECTACULAR SHIP SPACES

Generous outdoor decks, offering more than 6,200 sqm of spectacular sea views, combined with numerous indoor and outdoor pools and whirlpools on the ship’s promenade deck, provide an experience inspired by the ocean. Three heated outdoor pools, including one for adults only, plus one heated, weather-protected indoor pool with a retractable glass roof, measuring at a large 1,200 sqm, allowing for poolside relaxing, whatever the weather. Relax in one of the 64 private cabanas, at no additional fee, in one of the five indoor and outdoor whirlpools, or at one of the several poolside and outdoor bars and lounges.

#### YOUR OWN PRIVATE YACHT

Designed to feel like your own private yacht, Explora Journeys’ EXPLORA I’s, and newly sailing EXPLORA II’s, 461 oceanfront suites – some of the largest in the category – ensure every guest will enjoy sweeping sea views

and a private terrace. Be spoilt for choice with sophisticated, varied experiences across 18 food and beverage venues, including six restaurants, five bars and lounges, plus in-suite dining, redefined entertainment, high-speed wifi and authentic, intuitive service from a team of hospitality experts, with an industry-leading guest to host ratio of 1.25 to 1.

#### REMARKABLE ITINERARIES

Remarkable itineraries will blend renowned destinations with lesser-travelled ports for a journey that celebrates discovery. Experience EXPLORA I or EXPLORA II on a collection of journeys across the Caribbean and Mediterranean, starting from 7 nights with the flexibility to combine multiple journeys to extend your sailing to 14 or 21-night explorations with Extended Journey and Grand Journey savings.

#### READY TO DISCOVER THE OCEAN STATE OF MIND?

For more information, or to book your sailing with Explora Journeys, contact us, your local travel agent.

# Outrageously Luxurious Ocean Resorts at Sea

Ocean Terrace Suite



By Zoe Adams

**In September 2023 I had the privilege of cruising on the recently launched *Explora I* ship with Explora Journeys. We embarked on a voyage through the Scottish Highlands and Icelandic Geysers. The ship accommodates fewer than 1,000 passengers and offers various areas to explore and a wide range of dining options.**

The interior and décor were stunning and very modern, and the staff were extremely friendly and welcoming from the moment I stepped on board, setting a precedent for the rest of the trip.

I stayed in an Ocean Terrace Suite which is classed as their 'standard cabin'; the suites are lovely, very comfortable and quite spacious. Every suite comes with all the trimmings, including a Dyson hairdryer, heated bathroom floor, motion sensor lighting under the bedside table, a welcome bottle of Veuve Clicquot, daily replenished mini-bar with beers, soft drinks

and mixers, and a choice of two bottles of either spirits or wine or a mixture to enjoy in the suite. There is also a day bed, comfortable seating and a good-sized table on the terrace to enjoy when the weather is good. The bed was exceptionally comfortable, with the opportunity to request different types of pillows to ensure a great night's sleep. Nothing was too much trouble for the staff on board. Needless to say, *Explora I* has everything you would expect (and more) of a high-end, luxury hotel at sea.

## ON-BOARD ENTERTAINMENT

Everyone receives a daily programme so you know what entertainment and activities are taking place each day. Even though the ship doesn't have a traditional theatre, the show lounge still showcases some incredible performances that you won't want to miss. Daytime activities consist of fitness classes, lectures and more light-hearted quizzes – or, for a fee, there is the option to do a range of cookery classes with the on-board chef.





The Spa was amazing, and I was able to make use of the facilities without having to book a treatment, although I couldn't quite help myself and ended up treating myself to a facial, which was superb, and I felt so relaxed afterwards.

### DINING OPTIONS

The ship is All-inclusive and the food is probably the best I have ever had on a cruise – the quality is to a very high standard, and they really did cater for every need. There were lots of options with à la carte restaurants with no extra charge too.

The Emporium is a buffet-style restaurant, but the food is served to you at different food stations and includes foods such as hand-made pasta, a deli counter, pizza, sweet treats and sushi. This is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner without the need to book.

The French-themed Fil Rouge is open for breakfast and dinner, whilst the Med Yacht Club serves Mediterranean cuisine for lunch and dinner. I had some fantastic dishes in the Yacht Club and would



Grilled Octopus, Med Yacht Club



Med Yacht Club

highly recommend trying the grilled octopus that is sustainably sourced – it was one of my favourites! All dishes are prepared with authentic Mediterranean ingredients and flavours, with Med-influenced music to enhance the ambience and provide guests with a true culinary experience.

Sakura is a pan-Asian restaurant which needs to be reserved, and the food here was nothing short of incredible – definitely another easy favourite. Think of the delicious flavours of Wagyu beef tatakai and Makrut lime pavlova, all whilst being spoilt with fantastic views from the generously sized windows, paired with gorgeous artificial Sakura trees, a cherry blossom ceiling with hanging lanterns and oriental paintings to set the scene.

Marble & Co., the steak restaurant, which also requires a reservation, had lots of choice – the steaks here are mouth-watering – and there are some interesting side dishes and appetisers too. I opted for the grilled prime rib topped with a Hollandaise sauce and let's just say I was far too indulged to envy anyone else's choices! To elevate this already sensational dining experience, the restaurant's cellar

housed an exquisite collection of fine wines, catering to every palate.

Overall, I had an outrageously luxurious experience on board the *Explora 1* and I can't rate the food and service highly enough.



Sakura Restaurant

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AmaSonata on the Danube



# Luxury River Cruising for Mature Travellers



by Gary Freshwater

**My wife Gill and I recently returned from our first river cruise with AmaWaterways as seasoned cruisers. We have travelled with many different ocean cruise lines but have always wanted to try a river cruise, so we made sure this was the year to do it – and let's just say it won't be our last river cruise with AmaWaterways, that's for sure.**

We chose an itinerary on the Danube as it gave us the opportunity to visit five countries in seven days: Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria,

Slovakia and Hungary. As an active couple in our 70s, we liked the idea of beautiful scenery and visiting some great cities and were not disappointed.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND SERVICE

AmaWaterways met us at the airport where we were seamlessly and efficiently whisked away to our beautiful ship, the *AmaSonata*. Our luggage was all taken care of and check-in was very quick with no queuing.

Our accommodation was an extremely comfortable Twin Balcony Stateroom, which meant we were able to step out and enjoy the lovely weather and beautiful views.

Our first impression was how excellent the service was on board. From the welcome at the reception and the excellent cruise manager through to the charismatic captain and the attention to detail from the bar and restaurant, the staff blew us away. They remembered everything that we liked, and nothing was too much trouble.

To kick things off on our first evening, AmaWaterways organised an exclusive Oktoberfest experience complete with German beer and Oompah band. We could tell we were in for a real treat for the rest of the journey.

## FOOD AND DRINKS

We made sure to take advantage of cocktail hour (fondly named Sip and Sail) before dinner every evening as it was a chance to meet new people – and all drinks are included, so you can sip as much as you want!

The food was exceptional and changed depending on the local destination, which we both thought was a really nice touch. My highlight was the Hungarian Goulash in Budapest, which was so delicious I had two portions!



AmaSonata Chef's Table

Gary (right) and Gill (left) in Český Krumlov, Czech Republic



My wife loved the choice at breakfast, especially the freshly made omelettes accompanied by a cheeky glass of Buck's fizz. One of the dining highlights was the exclusive Chef's Table evening. The chef prepared a seven-course tasting menu with wine. We could see the chef preparing our meal which made for a unique and special experience.

**PORT OF CALL POINTS AND EXCURSIONS**

There were still lots of daily classes and facilities on board to keep you busy, such as a plunge pool, gym and a Wellness Host, and AmaWaterways even have their own bikes at hand too so that you can borrow for the day once docked and do your own thing.

You can pre-book your excursions on the Ama app before you go,

*“Our ship felt luxurious but relaxed. The dress code is very flexible too, so no need to worry about evening dress although we did dress up for the Captain’s Cocktail Party.”*



Weissenkirchen, Wachau Valley, Austria

but we waited to see what was available once on board and it was easy to book them. There were a variety of walking tour options, such as hikes for the very active and gentle, leisurely walking for people who liked to go a bit slower. There was also a lift on board too should you need it.

What I most enjoyed about river cruising was how easy it was to see places due to the fact that the ship docks in the centre of town. One

of my favourite days was cruising through the breathtaking Wachau Valley with its stunning mountain and castle views.

During the evenings our Cruise Manager gave us an update on the following day’s activities, and on all of our included trips, we had local guides that spoke excellent English and were incredibly knowledgeable. We spent time meeting

our fellow travellers, enjoyed a disco night, went wine tasting after dinner in Weissenkirchen, saw local entertainment in the form of Hungarian dancing and a lovely classical concert on board, which was all included in the price of the

holiday so really good value for money. Some of our fellow traveller friends also attended the opera in Vienna at a modest extra cost.

**WHAT’S AROUND THE RIVERBEND?**

If river cruising has piqued your interest, get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today to find out more about AmaWaterways and the wonderful itineraries available.



Benedictine Abbey, Melk, Wachau Valley



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

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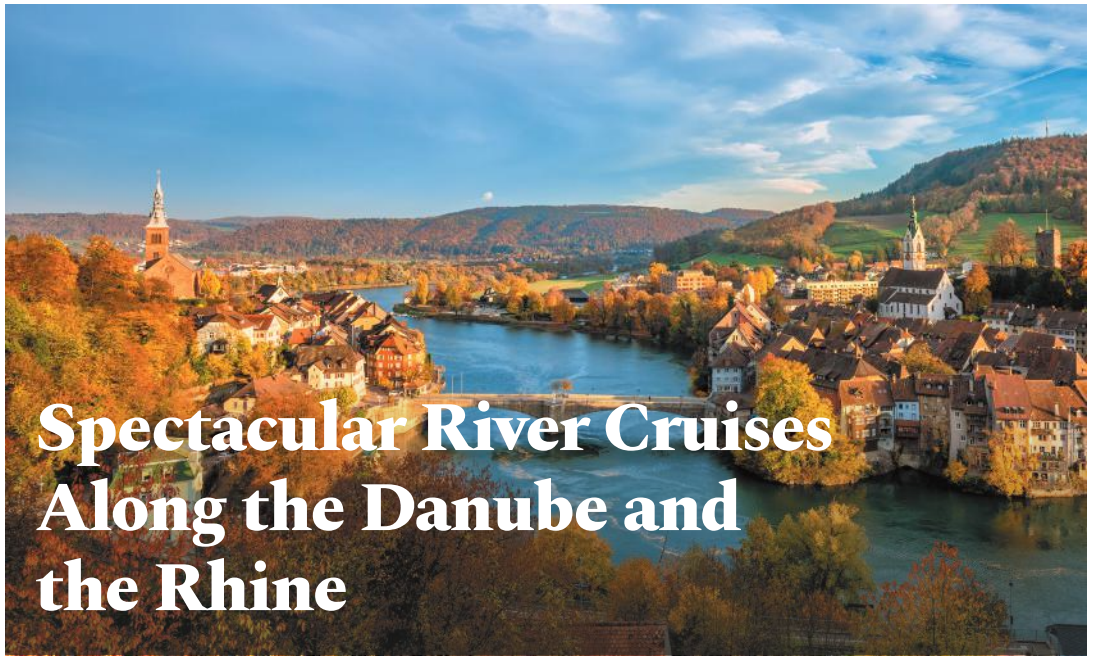
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# Spectacular River Cruises Along the Danube and the Rhine

By Sam Ballard

**The growth of river cruise is an amazing thing to see, from the beautiful rivers of Asia to the storied waterways of the United States. However, when it comes to enduring popularity, nothing seems to come close to the major rivers of Europe, particularly the Danube and the Rhine. When you look at what each river has to offer, it's no surprise. Both flow through most cities and past beautiful countryside, and tell their own fascinating stories.**

Let's start with the Danube. With three capitals within just 150 miles of each other, the Danube's headline acts will always be Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest – but there's beauty at every turn. Hidden away in the narrow Wachau Valley is

the beautiful, sleepy town of Dürnstein. Surrounded by lush green vineyards, the product of the region's southerly microclimate, and overlooked by hilly forests and a medieval castle, it is as pretty a village as you can imagine: home to a striking church, a few pubs and a spattering of houses.

Depending on your direction of travel, it is the first stop before or after the river's trio of capitals mentioned previously and couldn't offer a more pronounced contrast. Compared to the imperial grandeur of the Austrian capital – where 1.7 million live – it has a distinctly Mediterranean feel: hot, slow-paced and bucolic.

It's one of any number of fascinating smaller stops along the Danube, a river often pitched as being all about its capitals. Of course, a three-day sailing through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary is one of a cruise line's highlights

– but the Danube is a river that, above all else, is remarkable for its diversity. The itinerary is available with a number of operators, including AmaWaterways which, despite being one of the most established luxury river cruise lines in the world, are still family owned. They include all excursions, gourmet dining and hand-selected wines and local beers during lunch and dinner.



Strasbourg, France





*Laufenburg Old town on Rhine river, Switzerland*

Take Passau, for example: a remarkably beautiful German city, which sits on the confluence of three rivers – the Danube, the Inn and the Ilz. Home to a considerable student population and incredible Gothic and Baroque architecture, it's as fascinating as it is attractive.

From here, passengers can usually opt to take one of two remarkable shore excursions. One is to Český Krumlov, in Bohemia, over the border to the Czech Republic, a fantastically pretty town.

The second option is Salzburg, home of *The Sound of Music* and the birthplace of Mozart. It also boasts a wonderful preserved Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, containing some of the world's finest baroque architecture.

Just up the river from Passau is Melk, famed for its remarkable Benedictine abbey, still a working

monastery and school to some 900 pupils. Melk is also important for its geographical location. It's found on the edge of the Wachau Valley – one of Europe's most beautiful areas. River cruise passengers are treated to a daytime sailing through the region, past vineyards, green hills and crumbling castles, some on overcrops dangling over the Danube.

But of course, let's not forget the Rhine, an equally popular river. From the frothing Dutch capital to Belgium's pastoral countryside, a cruise on the Rhine shows you all the different sides to life.

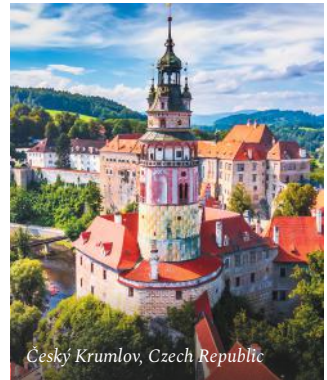
Start in Amsterdam, that most famous and easily accessible capital city, with either a flight from the UK or a Eurostar. The flying time is normally no more than 90 minutes, making it easier to access than Southampton for guests who don't live in the south of England. Amsterdam has a reputation as one of the liveliest capital cities in the world. The truth is that there are a thousand different sides to the city, and not all of them revolve around its renowned Red Light District.

For starters, there is the Rijksmuseum, one of the world's great art galleries, which houses some true masterpieces. It's most famous for Rembrandt's *Night Watch* and Vermeer's *Milkmaid*; however, given that there are more than 6,000 pieces hanging on its famous walls – it is certainly worth a visit.

From the Netherlands, travellers typically stop at Cologne, with its imposing Gothic cathedral, and then head on for a deeper exploration of Germany and France. Chocolate-box towns like Heidelberg and Strasbourg help create evocative itineraries as do

journeys through the Black Forest. As with many parts of the river, it all feels like you're part of a Brothers Grimm fairytale.

During the colder months, Christmas market cruises are popular on both the Danube and Rhine, with cities like Nuremberg, which hosts the largest Christmas market in Germany, and Bamberg, which boasts four Christmas markets and a nativity scene trail, proving incredibly popular. If you love mulled wine and festive treats, then these itineraries are well worth enquiring about.



*Český Krumlov, Czech Republic*

From lively Amsterdam, through the beautiful German countryside, many Rhine river cruises' final destination (or first) is Basel, Switzerland. The city, which is renowned for its art and cultural scene, also has a beautiful medieval old town, perfectly marrying the old and the new.

### READY TO SET SAIL?

If you're interested in finding out more about these river cruises, get in touch with us, your local travel agent, today to find out whether the Rhine or the Danube is better suited to you, or if you fancy taking a look at other river cruises, we've got plenty more to show you!

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“Without a doubt, the most eagerly anticipated element of the trip was when we would make landfall on the Peninsula, included in the full-day excursion programme along with a stand-alone cruise. Operated by a member of the Expedition Team, the 90-minute cruises were all beautifully planned to give us a wider view of the area. Not just wildlife, but shipwrecks, icebergs and glaciers. Each Zodiac accommodated ten of us together, along with an Expedition Team member as driver and guide. My lasting memory of the entire trip is zooming across the open water, watching the other Zodiacs criss-cross the bay with towering icebergs and glaciers on either side. It's times like these I appreciate how lucky I was to be there.”

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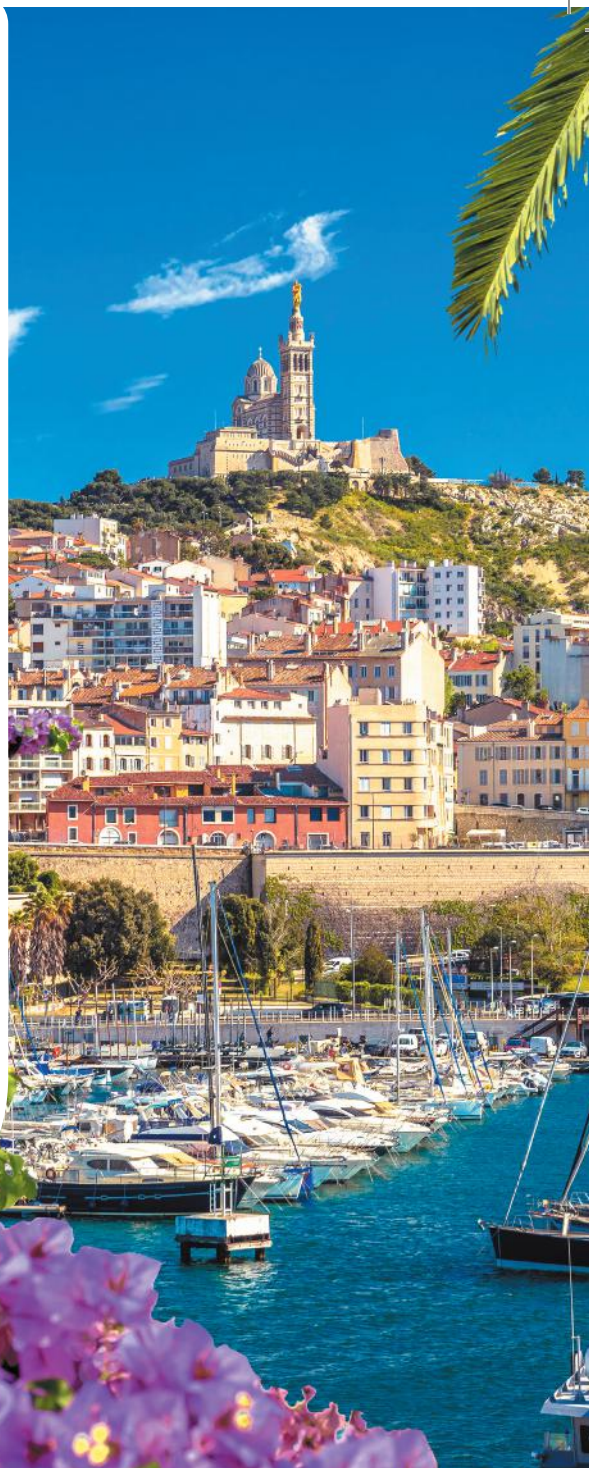
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