

Small Ship Cruising: Seeing The World Up Close

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Differing Dramatically in Character and Destination, Small Cruise Ships Offer a Uniquely Personal Exploration of the World's Out-of-the-Way Places

At first glance, the American Eagle, the River Queen and the Seabourn Spirit might seem to have little in common. The first carries barely 60 guests on informal journeys through the Chesapeake Bay, the Antebellum South and other destinations on the East Coast. The River Queen travels the legendary Rhine and Moselle rivers of Europe. And, the Seabourn Spirit and its sister ships sail the world, accommodating just over 200 passengers.

But, in fact, these ships, while representing very different varieties of small ship cruising, have important things in common, qualities that distinguish this cruise segment from all other types of travel. And, they are just three of many small ships belonging to member lines of Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

Together, almost 50 small ships belonging to CLIA offer the opportunity to explore the world from a uniquely personal perspective. From Antarctica to the Arctic, the Caribbean to Canada, Mexico to the Mediterranean, they travel the great rivers of Europe and North America, sail along Norwegian fjords and other scenic coasts, cross oceans, explore the globe's most remote destinations, and even embark on world cruises. Their size enables a small group of travelers to go where no other cruise ships go - to the inland capitals of Europe and Asia, tiny islands in the tropics, undiscovered ports in the Middle East, remote coves and bays in Alaska, America's Intra-Coastal Waterway and much more. The combination of out-of-the-way destinations and relatively small amount of passengers means that the lucky few onboard experience the world as though it was theirs alone to discover.

Whether the shipboard experience emphasizes sheer elegance and luxury while visiting some of the world's most glamorous yachting destinations, or a more informal yet equally delightful and comfortable lifestyle for journeying through nature's most extreme environments, all small ships have other qualities in common. They enable guests to socialize easily and share experiences with new-found friends who share their interests and tastes. They provide a true and very satisfying sense of having a home away from home, feeling cared for by staff the guests come to know and enjoy.

And, small ships virtually eliminate the hassles of travel. Getting on and off the vessel is effortless, with docking in the very center of the action of each destination or port, and sightseeing is crowdless, often in places where there are few other visitors.

Here is a sampling of small ship cruise opportunities offered by members of CLIA:

AMERICAN CRUISE LINES' four ships - American Star, American Spirit, American Glory and American Eagle - carry no more than 100 passengers and offer comfortable accommodations, a friendly informal ambiance and such amenities as onboard naturalist and historians, enrichment activities and entertainment, dining that features regional dishes and complimentary cocktails in the evening. Itineraries encompass the length of the East Coast, including the Rivers of Florida, the Antebellum South, the Mid-Atlantic Inland Passage, the Chesapeake Bay, the Hudson River, Maine and New England Islands.

HURTIGRUTEN, formerly Norwegian Coastal Voyage, continues to offer a variety of cruises along the 1,250-mile coast of Norway with its majestic fjords on numerous small ships as well as journeys on the Gota Canal between Stockholm and Gothenburg on three Art Nouveau vintage ships. But among the most popular offerings are voyages to Antarctica, a North to South world cruise, and Greenland Exploration cruises featuring the 310-berth MS Fram, launched in 2007 and built specifically for adventure. As they visit such remote destinations at the southern tip of the world as Marguerite Bay, Whaler's Bay, Cuverville Island and others, passengers discover that the only ones wearing tuxedos are the penguins.

MAJESTIC AMERICA LINE offers voyages from Alaska to the Mississippi River. The intimate, 112-stateroom Empress of the North is small enough to explore the wilderness and waterways of Alaska's Inland Passage. The 142-passenger Queen of the West and the 75-stateroom Columbia Queen were built to cruise the rivers of the Northwest, including the Columbia and the Snake. And, on the mighty Mississippi, the historic, 176-passenger Delta Queen is the last operational steam-powered sternwheeler reminiscent of those piloted by Mark Twain, while the 436-guest American Queen is the world's largest river cruise ship. In addition to capturing a romantic and unique era in American history, both glamorous ships are fully modernized for today's travelers.

PEARL SEAS CRUISES' first ship, as yet unnamed, will begin service in 2009 offering 214 passengers accommodations with private balconies equipped with flat screen TV/DVD systems, a well-stocked library, six lounges, a sports and exercise deck and multiple observation areas. The ship will sail on seven- to 11-night itineraries in the Caribbean during the winter months and a variety of voyages in North America during the spring, summer and fall. These include trips through the Canadian Maritimes, the St. Lawrence Seaway and Thousand Islands, a circumnavigation of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the Great Lakes.

SEABOURN CRUISE LINE also offers the very highest levels of luxury on its three 208-guest yachts, Seabourn Pride, Seabourn Spirit and Seabourn Legend. In 2009, they will be joined by the somewhat larger, all-new Seabourn Odyssey. With staff members almost outnumbering guests, Seabourn guests are treated to gourmet cuisine created by celebrity chef Charlie Palmer, a casino and spa, all-suite accommodations, complimentary wines, spirits and champagne and such signature

experiences as 'Caviar in the Surf.' In addition to the world cruises and transatlantic crossings, Seabourn voyages take in the entire world from Asia to Europe to the Americas and Caribbean.

SEADREAM YACHT CLUB offers a true luxury yachting experience on two 110-passenger ships, SeaDream I and SeaDream II. Facilities and amenities include fine dining with complimentary red and white wine, a casino, library, a piano bar and Top of the Yacht bar, a Main Salon and a water sports marina offering a full range of equipment for enjoyment right off the ship. From May through October, the ships offer seven-night itineraries to classical yachting ports in the French and Italian Riviera, Costa del Sol, the Amalfi Coast, Greek Islands, and the Adriatic and Black Seas. In the winter, SeaDream visits some of the most exclusive islands in the Caribbean, including St. Barts, Virgin Gorda, Jost van Dyke and the Grenadines.

SILVERSEA CRUISES' new Prince Albert II is an adventure ship carrying no more than 132 guests on luxurious expeditions to the Arctic, Antarctica and many points in between. During its inaugural 2008 season it will feature special Sea of Cortez expeditions in September, complete with eight Zodiac boats for up close viewing of birds, dolphins, whales and sea lions. The company's other four larger ships also fit the small ship category, with Silver Shadow and Silver Whisper carrying no more than 382 passengers and Silver Cloud and Silver Wind accommodating only 296. Offering worldwide itineraries, the vessels feature ocean-view suite accommodations, complimentary shoreside experiences, entertainment and onboard enrichment, complimentary beverages and in-suite beverage cabinets and other amenities for an ultra-luxury experience.

UNIWORLD RIVER CRUISES is the leading operator of river cruises in Europe, offering intimacy and personalized service on a variety of ships that typically carry no more than 134 guests. Combining old world elegance with modern amenities, the vessels feature expansive views of passing countryside, libraries, a lounge with full-service bar, boutiques, a beauty salon and 24-hour coffee bar. Operating for more than 30 years, Uniworld offers itineraries on 12 rivers in 20 countries across four continents, including Europe, Russia, Egypt and China. Among the most popular European itineraries are Castles Along the Rhine, Danube Discovery, Enchanting Danube, European Jewels, Eastern Europe Explorer and Tulips & Windmills. One 17-day voyage features the Ukraine, the Black Sea and Istanbul.

WINDSTAR CRUISES operates three sailing yachts - Wind Spirit, Wind Star and Wind Surf - known for offering a pampered luxury lifestyle and the ability to visit the hidden harbors and secluded coves of some of the world's most sought after destinations. Carrying just 148 to 312 guests, the ships visit 50 countries, calling at 100 ports throughout Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas. Windstar appeals to contemporary travelers with a casual onboard ambiance, alternative dining venues, a diversity of shore excursions, deluxe spa facilities and a complimentary water sports program. Popular with honeymooners because of the ships' innate romantic elegance, Windstar also offers voyages through the Greek Islands and in-depth explorations of Costa Rica.

For more information about small ship cruising, visit www.cruising.org.

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