

Choose to Cruise

It's the hottest way to travel these days.

If you've ever stood in line at a Starbucks and pondered the seemingly endless choices, you have some idea of what it's like to choose a cruise lately. Mind-boggling! And as cruising becomes more and more popular—given all its advantages in a weak-dollar economy—the choices have multiplied. Should you opt for a river cruiser or an ocean-going vessel? Small, mid-size, or mega ship? White-glove, six-star service; intimate, eclectic, and casual; or big and jam-packed with activities? Then there are the itineraries to consider, with options in virtually every corner of the globe.



SEADREAM YACHT CLUB

So, how do you choose? After all, this isn't just a cup of coffee. Interestingly, while about 50 percent of overall travel is booked online, only 7 percent of cruises are, according to PhoCusWright, a company that tracks online travel activity. Cruisers, especially first-timers, rely much more heavily on the services of a professional travel agent to help them navigate the complexities of cruise bookings, to say nothing of sorting through the reams of destinations, cruise lines, and individual ships. First-hand advice from the cruise specialists at *Hideaways* will prove invaluable when it comes to booking your cruise—and here's why. A recent study by a cruise-booking company showed that the number-one reason for customer dissatisfaction was that people were on the wrong cruise. Your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist (877-843-4433) can help you avoid exactly that pitfall.

You should know from the get-go that not all cruise lines are created equal. And, while your best friends may have returned home and raved about their cruise, that doesn't necessarily mean that line is the best fit for you. Some are designed specifically to attract the budget traveler or the first-time cruiser. Some are geared toward families, or toward those enjoying the ample fruits of their retirement years. And still others are meant to appeal to adventurers with an independent streak.

By the way, the Cruise Lines International Association recently reported that 2007 showed a 4.6 percent increase in cruising over 2006—and that interest is expected to hold, despite the weaken-

ing economy, with as many as 12.8 million passengers predicted to sail in 2008. So, if you haven't already tried it, jump aboard the cruising wave—and read on for a short synopsis of some of our favorite cruise lines, and what sort of travel style they might appeal to most.

CELEBRITY CRUISES^{THC}

If you like sophisticated cruising without the stuffy attitude, try Celebrity. Each ship has a loose theme associated with it for an added degree of fun. Of course, the biggest thing to hit the water lately is the line's brand-new, 2,850-passenger *Celebrity Solstice*, touted for having a half-acre of real growing-grass lawn—think picnics and Bocce ball—on its top deck. Celebrity Cruises is especially appropriate for multi-generation family travel; it offers the X-Club youth program for toddlers all the way through teens. If you don't mind larger ships—mostly in the 1,850- to

CRUISING TIPS

- If you like the idea of visiting unique, hard-to-reach ports of call—like the narrow fjords of Alaska's Inside Passage or the upper reaches of the Amazon River—be sure to choose a small-sized ship. They'll be able to maneuver into fascinating ports that the large-ship lines can only dream of visiting.
- Spend the extra money to book an ocean-view cabin at a minimum. For even more space and amenities, we recommend a suite or a stateroom with a private veranda.
- If you want the least rocky ride, choose a cabin near the middle of the ship and as low as possible. And if you don't care about foot traffic outside your cabin, choose one near the elevator or stairs for ease in getting around.
- Keep in mind, frequent cruisers often earn discounts for repeat travel with the same cruise line. Discounts also are offered for back-to-back cruises.

DID YOU KNOW?

The longer the cruise, the fewer children you'll find on board—and usually the more exotic the itinerary. One extremely popular trend we're seeing in cruising lately is the longer "grand voyage" of two, three, even four months at sea. Look for "grand voyage" itineraries and world cruises on **Crystal Cruises^{THC}**, **Silversea Cruises^{THC}**, **Cunard**, **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**, and **Holland America Line**.

1,950-passenger range—then Celebrity also represents a good value for a nice level of luxury. *Hideaways Aficionado[®] Club* member-only perk: A coupon booklet worth \$150.

OCEANIA CRUISES^{THC}

We continually hear rave reviews about Oceania Cruises for its excellent crew and its elegant-yet-unpretentious, country-club-casual atmosphere. You can relax and just be yourself on any one of its three 684-passenger ships—the *Regatta*, *Insignia*, and *Nautica*. When *Hideaways Travel Specialist Shannon O'Neill* sailed recently with Oceania, she was smitten with the international crew and its friendliness. "They all spoke perfect English, no matter where they were from—Russia, Romania, Peru, Ireland. And when I'd stop and ask someone a question, they'd



Oceania Cruises' *Regatta*

SHANNON O'NEILL

smile, look me in the eye, and act genuinely concerned about how they could help me. I also loved the relaxed, comfortable dress code on board; I always felt comfortable going to dinner in a nice pants suit." *Hideaways Aficionado Club* member-only perk: A \$100–\$200 shipboard credit on select sailings.

A FLOATING STAFFED VILLA VACATION

So much more than a cruise line, **The World^{THC} of ResidenSea** is a private residential community-at-sea, a form of apartment living that just happens to be on board a luxurious ship that continuously circumnavigates the globe. These floating homes are amazingly spacious—two to six bedrooms, each with en suite bath—and beautifully furnished by professional designers in five chosen themes, including maritime, English country, and classic contemporary. Each has a state-of-the-art kitchen (imagine making dinner on board, from ingredients you bought earlier in the day at a floating market), living and dining room areas, and a private veranda. Smaller studios, some with kitchenettes, have their own private verandas, interior sitting areas, entertainment centers, and marble bathrooms.

Now here's where it gets interesting. *The World* has an exclusive on-board golf club with its own golf director, an exotic Banyan Tree spa (the only one at sea), and four exquisite, international dining venues serving everything from Asian to Mediterranean cuisine. There's even a deli market so you can pick up cheeses, meats, fresh fruit, and wine for an evening cocktail hour on your veranda. And the crew-to-guest ratio is about 1:1, so you'll never want for anything on this villa vacation. Plus, the comfortable house-party atmosphere on board guarantees you'll share lively conversation and social engagements with the well-traveled, full-time residents who call this ship home. For rental information, call your *Hideaways Travel Specialist* at 877-843-4433. Be sure to ask about *The World's* intriguing itineraries for 2009.

SILVERSEA CRUISES^{THC}

This is the epitome of luxurious and romantic six-star cruising, Italian style. If you're looking for a special way to celebrate an anniversary, take your honeymoon, or just reconnect with your significant other, this is it. You'll be lavished with flawless service, exquisite dining, excellent wines, and over-the-top amenities like marbled baths, teak verandas, extra-fine linens, and European bath products. Silversea remains one of the only lines that sails with "Gentleman Hosts," so single affluent ladies can socialize comfortably without feeling like a third wheel. We think you'll find a Silversea cruise to be worth every penny, especially when you consider the 100-percent-inclusive food-and-beverage policy that spills over to a selection of excursions as well. *Hideaways Aficionado Club* member-only perk: A \$200 shipboard credit per suite and a bottle of champagne.

AZAMARA CRUISES^{THC}

Azamara is the upscale little-sister to Celebrity, a new cruise line that offers small-ship advantages with luxury touches like butler service, European bedding, gourmet specialty dining, even on-board art auctions. The *Azamara Quest* and *Azamara Journey* carry about 700 guests each to some of the more secluded and little-visited ports of the world, making them a good choice for those looking for unique destinations. In fact, Azamara considers what it calls its "shore immersions" to be the hallmark of its cruise experience. This type of cruise should appeal mostly to

SILVERSEA UNVEILS EXPEDITION SHIP

If the name “Silversea” seems totally incongruous with the idea of an expedition-class ship, we agree. After all, Silversea Cruises™ is known for its silky-smooth service and five-star Italian flair. But when you combine that wonderful style and superb service with the excitement of true sea-based exploration, you come up with something quite new and exhilarating—Silversea’s *Prince Albert II*, a full-scale, ice-rated expedition vessel with a luxurious twist.

Following a multi-million-dollar renovation—adding Silversea upgrades and special touches like a cigar lounge, a full-service spa, bow-to-stern wireless Internet access, and flat-screen TVs—the *Prince Albert II* will be ready to set sail from London on June 12, 2008, for a series of polar adventures lasting from 10 to 21 days. The ship will begin by visiting the Arctic Circle, Svalbard, Iceland, and Greenland for the summer, then will reposition to South America and Antarctica for autumn and winter sailings. Guests will rub shoulders with experts in the fields of natural science, history, world cultures, and ecology as they sail to some of the most remote parts of the earth. And they’ll sail in luxurious comfort and space—just 132 passengers in 66 oceanview suites, many with private verandas.

If you’d like a taste of the new *Prince Albert II* without heading to one of the poles, you can sail on its special repositioning route and experience the Sea of Cortez (with an extension to Copper Canyon), the Galapagos, the Falklands, and South Georgia Island. Pricing starts at \$3,867 per person, double, and includes shore excursions as well as Silversea’s signature all-inclusive amenities. Call *Hideaways Travel Services* at 877-843-4433 (+1-603-430-4433 outside the U.S.) to book your expedition voyage aboard the *Prince Albert II*.

couples seeking an out-of-the-ordinary voyage to less-touristed ports in places like Asia and South America. *Hideaways Aficionado Club* member-only perk: A \$50–\$100 shipboard credit per stateroom, depending on sailing, and a bottle of wine.



Artist's rendering of Silversea Cruises' *Prince Albert II*

CRYSTAL CRUISES^{THC}

Call it the best of both worlds. We find that Crystal appeals to those seeking a smaller-ship luxury cruise experience with more big-ship amenities and entertainment options. Its ships are to the larger end of the luxury-line spectrum—with the 940-passenger *Crystal Symphony* and the 1,080-guest *Crystal Serenity*—but with their size comes one of the highest space-per-guest ratios at sea, allowing for nice extras like a sushi bar, a 3,000-square-foot shopping arcade, the Computer University@Sea, an expansive



Crystal Serenity

award-winning spa, and a dedicated children's playroom called Fantasia. Because of its size, Crystal adheres to the tradition of offering two set dinner seatings in the main dining room—something that may or may not appeal to today's cruisers. By the way, Crystal has one of the most loyal repeat-client bases in the business; when *Hideaways V.P.* Gail Richard cruised with Crystal a few years ago, she met two ladies celebrating their 66th sailing! *Hideaways Aficionado Club* member-only perk: A \$100 shipboard credit per suite and a bottle of champagne.

ALTERNATIVE CRUISES

These cruise lines offer a slightly different take on the typical cruise experience. Most will appeal to the adventurous and/or repeat cruiser.

WINDSTAR CRUISES

The sports-minded and young-at-heart will feel equally comfortable on a Windstar cruise, especially if they're Type-A personalities who appreciate unpretentious luxury and having plenty to keep them busy. Windstar's three motor-sail yachts are small—*Wind Star* and *Wind Spirit* carry 148 passengers each, and *Wind Surf* 312 guests—so there's a sense of camaraderie on board, as well as an open-bridge policy that allows you to schmooze with the captain and his officers. The aft water-sports platform, with loads of complimentary equipment, attracts an active crowd that enjoys waterskiing, kayaking, windsurfing, and sailing.



To book, call *Hideaways Travel Services*: 877-843-4433; +1-603-430-4433 outside the U.S.

Star Clipper



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CRUISING

appeal to those who want a relaxed, casual cruising atmosphere and don't require a lot of "extras" like a casino, nightly entertainment, or a spa. And the vessels make port calls almost every day, so they're perfect for those who like to be on the go. Because river cruising involves visits to ancient towns and villages along these waterways, it appeals to history buffs as well. And there's nothing more exhilarating than catching your first glimpse of one of Europe's famous cities—Budapest, Vienna, Amsterdam—from the deck of a river cruiser.

This sampling of cruise options just scratches the surface of what *Hideaways* has to offer—which includes other favorites like **Regent Seven Seas Cruises** and **Holland America Line**. Regardless of how you choose to cruise, take the advice of those in the know and contact one of the cruise experts at *Hideaways* Travel Services (877-843-4433) before dipping your toe in uncharted waters. It could make all the difference in the world! **HL**

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SEADREAM YACHT CLUB

SeaDream takes the "Yacht" part of its name seriously; if you want a very personalized cruise experience with a captain and crew who go out of their way to accommodate special requests, this is the way to go. The captain might arrange to linger a while so guests can enjoy a pod of whales or photograph an erupting volcano. In fact, *Hideaways* Ambassador Bill Giles recalls the first words spoken to him by the captain of *SeaDream I* as he came aboard: "Welcome aboard your yacht. I am your captain; how may I be of service?" Yes, both *SeaDream I* and *SeaDream II*—which carry just 110 guests each—are a little slice of yachting heaven.

STAR CLIPPERS

If you're a romantic at heart, a voyage with Star Clippers is sure to stir your soul. It's hard to imagine a more glorious sight than being aboard one of its three reproduction clipper ships, with white canvas sails billowing overhead against an azure blue sky. Part of the appeal also is that both your crew and fellow passengers will be a very international bunch. These ships are small—170 passengers on the *Star Flyer* and *Star Clipper*, and 227 on the larger *Royal Clipper*—so you can easily interact with the captain, make friends with your fellow passengers, and even lend a hand in the nightly ritual of raising the sails to catch the evening breeze.

VIKING RIVER CRUISES

If you've considered a European river cruise but weren't sure which line to go with, we can highly recommend Viking River Cruises; it's designed specifically for Americans, and offers English-speaking guides on all shore excursions. River voyages generally

YACHT CHARTERS=PERSONALIZED FUN

Imagine this. You wake up to a freshly made breakfast and hot coffee—no buffet line here—and relax alone on deck with just six or seven of your best friends. About mid-morning, your group spots a cove that looks perfect for snorkeling. Can you stop here? Of course, says your smiling captain. And so you stop for a quick snorkel, followed by a delicious lunch and a siesta. Later that evening, your yacht drops you off at the beachside town you read about that has fun shops and a great seafood restaurant. Then it's a nightcap back on board, followed by a deep sleep with the sound of water lapping at the sides of the boat. Ahhhh, the joys of a yacht charter!

This type of highly personalized, travel-at-your-own-pace cruising is growing rapidly in popularity. And it's easy to see why. You choose the itinerary (with plenty of allowance for flexibility), you decide when and where you want to eat, and you and your friends or family are the masters of your destiny—at least for the week or so that you're on board your yacht. These charters can be aboard motor yachts, small sailing ships, and European canal barges—or you can opt to bareboat and do the sailing and cooking yourselves.

It used to be that cruise charters were limited in location, with most available in the Mediterranean, Mexico, the Caribbean, and off the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. But now they're available most anywhere you might imagine, from Alaska and California to Africa, Thailand, and exotic islands like The Seychelles. And while you could spend a small fortune on this kind of custom-made voyage—as much as \$5,000 an hour!—it's easy enough to find a yacht charter for \$2,000–\$3,000 per person—for a week! That includes a full crew and all your food and beverages.

Hideaways works with several top-notch yacht charter companies, and can get you started on your bareboat or fully crewed adventure today. Call *Hideaways* Travel Services at 877-843-4433 (+1-603-430-4433 outside the U.S.) for more information.