

Hideaways Life

KNOW MORE. GET MORE. TRAVEL BETTER.™

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Make This Your Year to "Do Europe"

Okay, maybe you've already been there and done Europe—possibly many times. Or maybe you've been meaning to go, but couldn't quite justify the off-kilter dollar-to-euro exchange rate of recent years. Well, we're here to tell you there's no time like the present to enjoy a holiday in Europe, where you'll find more hotel choices than ever, locals bending over backward to make you feel welcome, and, finally, a stronger dollar than we've seen in a long while.

Take our advice: Consider this the ideal summer—or spring or fall, depending on where you're headed—to savor a European vacation. One of the most enjoyable ways to do this, if you're of European descent, is on a customized ancestral tour that explores the land of your heritage. More and more people are being lured to countries like Ireland, Italy, France, Poland, and Greece with the hope of

discovering the towns and stories of their ancestors—and maybe a distant relative or two!

The Travel Specialists at *Hideaways* can put together a personalized itinerary for your heritage search that fits your special desires and budget. And if you're of Italian descent, boy, are you in luck! Our own Italy-born Katia Lillis travels back every year—always on the lookout for exciting new hotels and restaurants—and is an expert at crafting unique stays in Italy. Also, check out the report on Sorrento, page 3, by *Hideaways* ambassador Norma Spadola.

Our Top 5 Places to Hob-Nob in Europe in 2012

Obviously, the number of terrific European destinations we could recommend would create a lengthy list. So we thought it would be fun to explore a handful of cities and/or regions that we deem especially travel-worthy in 2012.

LONDON'S CALLING — This is a big year for the Royal City; not only is London hosting the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, it's also

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celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, marking Queen Elizabeth's 60th year of reign. Needless to say, we highly recommend you *not* visit during the Games, unless you love the excitement of the Olympics and have tickets to some of the venues. (The brand-new Aquatics Centre looks amazing!) Instead, visit in late spring or early fall and take advantage of lower, pre- and post-Olympics prices and a spiffed-up city.

One highlight of your London visit—at least if you're a Harry Potter fan—might be a day trip to Hogwarts via the London Warner Bros. Studio tour of "The Making of Harry Potter," which opens March 31. You can get a behind-the-scenes look at the actual sets, costumes, animatronics, and special effects used at Studios Leavesden, just outside central London, where all eight of the Harry Potter movies were filmed. Tickets are £28 for adults and £21 for children 15 and younger.

While visiting London—especially if you're traveling with children—we recommend living like a local in one of **The Athenaeum's**^{THC} family-friendly apartments in Mayfair. Other favorites include **Claridge's** and the **Connaught**, both in Mayfair, and the completely renovated **Savoy** in central London. For the best of both worlds, combine your city stay with a country rental in one of England's quintessentially charming towns like Chipping Camden or Glastonbury.

LOVING IRELAND — The Emerald Isle is the perfect destination for a self-drive tour along scenic country roads passing through rolling hills and lush green pastures. Just remember, you'll be driving on the left on narrow roads with the occasional crazy roundabout—not for the faint of heart! Some of our favorite towns to explore, each with flower-bedecked shops and pubs, include Sligo, Clifden, Cong, and Kenmare.

Ireland is known for its cozy country inns and elegant castle/estate hotels. We highly recommend **Ballynahinch Castle** in Co. Galway, **Adare Manor** in Co. Limerick, Co. Kerry's **Park Hotel Kenmare**, and **Ashford Castle** in Co. Mayo. Call *Hideaways* Travel Services (800-843-4433) for even more country inn and hotel suggestions.

ITALY, BEYOND ROME — Sure, check out The Eternal City for a few days on your next Italy visit. But don't neglect a side trip to one of the country's up-and-coming hot spots like Bologna or Parma. According to *Hideaways'* Katia Lillis, people returning to Italy are looking for an experience beyond the typical Rome-Florence-Venice stay, and are striking out into less-touristed regions in hopes of a more authentic taste of Italy.

Katia suggests taking the train from Rome (two hours) or hiring a private driver to reach Bologna, a city of medieval architecture and home to the oldest university in the world. Spend at least three days there to soak up all its culture, museums, and, most important, its food. About an hour train ride from Bologna is Parma, famous for its cheese and ham. Katia thinks you'll be pleasantly surprised by its elegant architecture and art. So give her a call when you're ready to try something new in Italy.

BEAUTIFUL BUDAPEST — Always a popular port call for river cruisers, Budapest is an affordable European city with spectacular architecture and a fascinating history. Be sure to visit Matthias Church on Castle Hill, built in 14th-century Gothic style, and pause



BUDAPEST'S FAMOUS Chain Bridge, first opened in 1849, connects the Buda and Pest sections of the city and is a lively place on market days.

PASTORAL SCENES like this one, found around virtually every bend, are just part of Ireland's idyllic charm.



PAT CHAUDOIN

for a moment of contemplation at "Shoes on the Danube," a Holocaust memorial encompassing 40 sets of cast-iron shoes—circa '40s style—positioned on the Pest side of the Danube Promenade in remembrance of those shot riverside by Hungary's anti-Semitic Arrow Cross regime.

Several luxury hotels line Budapest's riverbanks, including the **Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace**, located on the Pest side of Chain Bridge. We also recommend **Boscolo Budapest** and the trendy boutique **Art'otel**. If you prefer a water-based "hotel," **AmaWaterways**^{THC} offers a number of river cruises that begin or end in Budapest.

YES, GO TO GREECE — We've all watched the news and heard about the political unrest in Athens, but the fact remains that the vast majority of Greece, even Athens, is safe to visit. Yes, the economy is weak, but they certainly need and appreciate visitors these days, and those in the tourism industry (hotels especially) are anxious to please. Start your stay in Athens at the classic **Hotel Grande Bretagne**^{THC}, with its fabulous rooftop bar and views of the Acropolis, then finish up your visit with a bit of island hopping—our favorites are Santorini, Mykonos (we recommend **Santa Marina Resort & Villas**^{THC}), and Crete (we recommend **Blue Palace**^{THC}).

Wherever the siren call of Europe pulls you, be sure to contact your personal *Hideaways* Travel Specialist (toll-free at 800-843-4433, or email ts@hideaways.com) to book this year's visit.

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The Magic of Sorrento

BY HIDEAWAYS AMBASSADOR NORMA SPADOLA

Growing up in an Italian-American household and being nursed on traditional Italian foods and culture, it was not surprising that my first trip on an airplane took me to Italy. After almost 40 years of traveling the world, my annual trip to Italy still satisfies that sense of family, belonging, and respect for all I grew up with.

When I hear someone say, “Oh, we’ve seen Italy—we visited Rome, Florence, and Venice,” I want to say, “Seriously?” My analogy: they are but three bunches of grapes in a sprawling vineyard! The “road trip” stories I could share as I’ve discovered authentic Italian towns like Cuneo, Pienza, Vicenza, and Padua are many. But when my plane lands in Naples and I exit the airport to find Luigi, my driver, waiting to whisk me off to Sorrento, a sense of peace and calm comes over me. I’m home! The chaos of traffic and cacophony of blaring horns may unnerve many, but I find it all part of the magic of being in Italy.

My first stop when I arrive *must* be for *un caffè* (espresso) along with a typical Neopolitan pastry called a *sfogliatelle* or a rum-soaked *baba au rhum*. Calories are not to be counted when on vacation, and my justification is walking, walking, and more walking!

My favorite hotel in Sorrento is the iconic **Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria**, not only because GM Nicolino Grigio is a delight and Tony, the head concierge, has been recognized as a top concierge in Italy, but also



CARL SPADOLA

RAVELLO is a favorite stop for a cup of espresso and views like this.

WITH SPECTACULAR VISTAS like this of the Faraglioni—a scattering of iconic rock formations jutting from the sea—it’s no wonder Capri is a tourist magnet by day.



CARL SPADOLA

because the sunsets from the terrace will take your breath away. Private elevator access to the port makes it convenient to catch the hydrofoil to Capri (enjoy a stay at **JK Capri**) or to the more remote Ischia.

Be forewarned: Capri by day is a sea of tourists, and, while the vistas of the Faraglioni are breathtaking, the real Capri comes alive after dark when the tourists disappear. This is the Capri of both über-luxe and charming boutique hotels, designer shops, and high-energy nightclubs.

Touring Along the Amalfi Coast

Just saying “Costiera Amalfitana” sounds romantic! This UNESCO World Heritage site never fails to hypnotize visitors with dramatic cliff-side vistas of the shimmering turquoise waters below. Drive to Ravello, the City of Music, and work your way back via Amalfi to Positano in time for lunch down by the scenic beach at La Cambusa (www.lacambusapositano.com), where you can engage in the Italian art of people-watching.

I admit to being a sun worshipper like the locals, but occasionally it’s nice to take a break and engage in some retail therapy. So back in Sorrento, it’s off to Via San Cesareo, an ancient street lined with shops offering local goods and foods along with plenty of restaurants and bars. My favorite indulgence is the linen fashions found at Vanity. There’s nothing like fine linen to beat the summer

heat! A local tradition is to have sandals made by hand at Corcione or one of the Siniscalchi shops in town. Another fun option is to participate in a hands-on cooking class at the family-run Villa Ida Cooking School hosted by “Zia (Aunt) Angela.”

No evening in Sorrento is complete without the pre-dinner *passaggiata* (evening stroll) along the pedestrian streets or enjoying an *aperitivo* at Fauno Bar (www.fauobar.it). The seats all face to the street for good reason! All this is merely a prelude for a variety of dining experiences. Il Buco (www.ilbucoristorante.it) will never disappoint, and chef/owner Peppe Aversa makes everyone feel like family. Quattro Passi (www.ristorantequattropassi.com) in nearby Nerano is another favorite, as is the exquisite Don Alfonso 1890 (www.donalfonso.com), just 20 minutes outside of town in Sant’Agata sui Due Golfi. This Relais & Chateaux property recently opened a charming boutique hotel and offers a wonderful cooking school. And if you appreciate true *mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo-milk cheese), try Inn Bufalito (www.innbufalito.com) that opened just last year.

At the end of the evening, don’t be surprised to hear the pop of fireworks in the bay. Fireworks are a tradition that marks many a celebration—particularly weddings and birthdays. If I close my eyes, I can see and hear them now. I am home. **H**

Norma Spadola is a long-time friend of Hideaways and Regional Sales Director of Eastern Canada/New England for Silversea Cruises™.

Balmy Wedded Bliss

When it comes to their wedding day, some brides want a pull-out-all-the-stops celebration with hundreds of guests, an elaborate gown, and the linen-and-crystal look at every table. After all (they reason), this is their big day and it only comes around once.

But maybe you're a bride, or the parent of a bride-to-be, who wants a simpler approach in a spectacular island setting instead. You don't need all the bells and whistles, just the company of a few good friends and your closest family members as you take your places on a powder-soft beach and repeat your vows with a view of the Caribbean Sea. Afterward, you might dine on local lobster, dance to the sound of steel drums, and steal away to stroll on the beach with your beloved. And oh, those photo ops!

Hideaways Travel Services can help you put together that perfect, laid-back destination wedding—or vow-renewal ceremony, if that's where you are in life—at any of our recommended Caribbean hideaways. Just remember: Some islands require a short “residency” period (for instance, in Aruba and Jamaica it's two days, and in the Bahamas it's one) before you legally can be married. Others have very relaxed policies regarding residency and legal documents, including Barbados, St. Lucia, and the Cayman Islands.

Here are a few of our favorite island hotels and resorts where the living is easy and the weddings are tropical, breezy, and as relaxed as you like.

Go Ahead, Splurge!

If your needs are few—privacy, turquoise water, and the perfect white-sand beach—then **Guana Island**TM in the BVI takes the wedding cake. You can rent the entire island as your own personal enclave for a total of 36 very fortunate guests and have a celebration not soon forgotten. You and your guests will stay in airy, whitewashed cottages sprinkled among the hillsides, then gather for things like a pre-wedding beach barbecue or a movie night under the stars (maybe a showing of *My Best Friend's Wedding*?).

On your big day, take your vows on the soft sands of White Bay Beach—preferably

barefoot—then let the staff of Guana serve up a superb beach banquet under the stars. Rates start at \$22,150 a night—and when you consider this includes three gourmet meals a day with in-between snacks, wines with lunch and dinner, and unlimited use of goodies like kayaks, small sailboats, snorkeling gear, and tennis courts in a private island paradise, it's worth the splurge.

Simple Elegance

The St. Lucia boutique resort of **Cap Maison**TM is so over-the-top romantic, it was featured in a 2010 episode of “The Bachelor” television show. In fact, to help guys who are hoping for a “Yes” from the girl of their dreams, Cap Maison has a Proposal Concierge who will orchestrate the ideal moment for popping the question—complete with one perfect, long-stemmed red rose.

Then it's on to the wedding! You can choose to be married in a garden gazebo at cliff's edge (what a view!), or right on the water on the wooden deck at Rock Maison, which juts out into the sea. You can even take

your vows on Cap Maison's private 46-foot luxury yacht. Of course, the elegance continues with the wedding banquet, served at The Cliff at Cap Restaurant or in the more intimate setting of Rock Maison, where the sunsets are magnificent.

Make a Wedded Splash

Jamaica is just made for kick-back weddings with a watery twist, and **Jamaica Inn** in Ocho Rios is one of our favorite places to celebrate if you crave privacy in a sequestered garden compound, right at water's edge. You and your guests can celebrate on the beach, have an elegant candlelit wedding dinner on the sand, and then gather around a roaring beach bonfire as the party goes on into the wee hours.

In the Negril area, **Rockhouse Hotel** is a unique boutique property clinging to the cliffs of Pristine Cove. Here again, you can

Strolling White Bay Beach on Guana Island



GUANA ISLAND



JAMAICA INN/FRED MARCUS

ALMOST EVERY BRIDE'S FANTASY is a beautiful beach wedding, balmy breezes rustling the palms, and an evening outdoor reception on the sand under a canopy of lanterns—like this setting at Jamaica Inn.

AT THE FAIRMONT ROYAL PAVILION in Barbados, a bride can walk a petal-strewn pathway to meet her groom and take their vows, all with a sunset view of the sea.

DO's and DON'Ts for Planning the Perfect Island Wedding

Follow our DO's and DON'Ts for a smooth, easy, and jammin' Caribbean wedding.

DO choose a destination wedding—or vow-renewal ceremony—for all the right reasons. If the plan is to keep things simple and share the excitement of getting married or renewing your vows in a tropical location with a few close friends and family members, then a Caribbean island could work for you.

DON'T try to go it alone. It's hard enough trying to plan a wedding in your hometown. By all means, find someone you trust to help plan your destination wedding details, whether that's an on-site wedding coordinator, a wedding planner based in the U.S., or a destination wedding consultant/travel agent who can negotiate all the travel aspects of your wedding—someone like your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist.

DO consider travel logistics and the time of year. Be kind to your guests; don't make the wedding destination too difficult to get to. If most of your guests live on the West Coast, it could take them all day to travel to your chosen Caribbean island. Also, peak season in the Caribbean means prices are at their highest, and the best hotels and villas book up quickly for January through April. Consider shoulder or even off-season if you want to avoid paying through the nose. Above all, avoid hurricane season; a big storm definitely could throw a monkey wrench into your nuptials.

DON'T let the unexpected ruin your day. So the flowers aren't the exact colors you had in mind, or clouds rolled in just as the bride and groom were about to say "I do." Who cares? You're still in paradise, so enjoy the party. And remember, "No worries!

book the entire 34-room inn for a very private wedding getaway. We also recommend **The Caves**, a small, seductive sanctuary in the Island Outpost portfolio with just 12 cliff-side cottages.

For a unique island touch, we've found the perfect ring-bearer for you—and he already lives in Jamaica. He's a charming and intelligent bottlenose dolphin at the Dolphin Cove Negril water park, and he's trained to dive under a flotation device holding your wedding ring and surface with the device balanced on his nose. Unlike your four-year-old nephew, he's guaranteed to get it right.

Barbados Dreamin'

Talk about an exquisite setting for an island wedding! **The Fairmont Royal Pavilion**TM, located on the western shores of Barbados in

THE FAIRMONT ROYAL PAVILION



lovely St. James Parish, has one of the most gorgeous stretches of white-sand beach on the island, backed by turquoise water and lined with rustling palms. Then there are the lush gardens and hidden courtyards that provide other private venues for taking your wedding vows.

As a more traditional resort, Royal Pavilion provides its own on-site wedding coordinator who can oversee all aspects of your big day—from flowers to food—so you can simply show up with your friends and family to enjoy the sun, the sea, and the wedding celebration.

Soup to Nuts

If you can't find the ideal location for saying "I do" somewhere on **Casa de Campo's**TM 7,000 acres, then you might as well stay home. This sprawling Dominican Republic resort offers up more romantic spots than we can list: a cliff side overlooking the sea, the golden sands of Casa de Campo's private Minitas Beach, the cobblestone courtyard of Altos de Chavon—a replica of a 16th-century Mediterranean village—and countless pools and tucked-away garden settings.

You and your guests can choose from a nice selection of rooms and suites for your stay, but our recommendation would be the collection of spacious villas with private pools that easily accommodate a large family or group of friends. Each villa comes with its own four-passenger touring cart, so your wedding party can meet up at all the appropriate rehearsals and celebrations. And

with endless restaurant and entertainment options, your guests will never be bored.

Of course, this handful of suggestions for Caribbean wedding destinations just scratches the surface of what your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist can recommend. So call us at **800-843-4433** (email ts@hideaways.com) when you're ready to tie the knot, island-style. **H**

More Caribbean Wedding Tips

- The beauty of a destination wedding is that you don't *have* to have a Saturday ceremony. Choose a weekday instead and enjoy your guests' company for days before the wedding/honeymoon.
- You may not want to name a specific ceremony time on the invitation, in case it has to slide at the last minute because of weather. Just remember, quick downpours in the Caribbean often give way to afternoon sunshine.
- Choose native local flowers like the frangipani—much cheaper than importing roses, etc.
- Considering you'll likely be hanging your wedding dress in a small space on the airplane, select one that travels well. The fewer wrinkles, the better.
- Music for your ceremony and reception can be supplied by an iPod, with your chosen music recorded on it and played over speakers. To get in the island mood, put together a mix of both Caribbean music and more popular dance tunes.

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Landmark Birthdays

It's hard to believe that **Casa de Campo**™, our favorite Dominican Republic destination with something for everyone, is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its famed Teeth of the Dog golf course, which recently was ranked #47 on *Golf Magazine's* 2011 list of its "Top 100 Courses in the World."

Also having a milestone birthday this year is the 5,000-seat Grecian-style amphitheater at the resort's Altos de Chavon village—its 30th! But that's just part of the news. Casa de Campo also just completed a \$52 million transformation that includes an all-new main lobby area, a new \$12 million kitchen, and upgrades to 185 Elite guest rooms, suites, and villas. And don't forget: Your member perk is a \$200 Cygalle Spa credit during your stay.

Amsterdam's Ship Has Come In

In a city known for its watery appeal, what could be more appropriate than a spiffed-up maritime museum? Amsterdam's newly renovated Het Scheepvaartmuseum, the National Maritime Museum, reopened to the public last fall with 13 new exhibits and a modernized look, including a new glass roof over the inner courtyard that's sprinkled with hundreds of tiny LED lights to give the impression of a starry sky at sea. A full-sized replica of the three-masted *Amsterdam*, a large ship of the Dutch East India Company which sank in the English Channel in 1749, is docked at the museum and open to visitors.

There's no better base from which to explore all the museums of Amsterdam than the **De L'Europe**™, a classic city-center hotel that sits on the scenic River Amstel. Each of its guest rooms and suites has wonderful views of the city, and some have reproductions of original Dutch Masters paintings adorning their walls. Your member perk is a €75 food and beverage credit and complimentary full American breakfast daily. See our review of Amsterdam and other recommended hotels in the November/December 2011 issue of *Hideaways Life*.

Get Buff in Boston

If you're looking for an inspiring view to help you through your daily workout, head to **The Fairmont Copley Plaza**™ in Boston's scenic

downtown. Its brand-new rooftop health club encompasses more than 3,000 square feet of contemporary loft space in the historic hotel, and offers state-of-the-art TechnoGym equipment and floor-to-ceiling windows with those inspiring views of Back Bay. After your workout, head to the expansive outdoor deck for a little rest and relaxation, or treat yourself to a mani-pedi in the rooftop spa area.

But that's not all! The new health club is just part of an ongoing renovation project, totaling more than \$20 million, that includes upgrades to all the hotel's guest rooms, suites, and public areas. So be on the lookout! Your member perk is daily complimentary breakfast.

House of Straw Now Built of Brick

No, we're not talking the "Three Little Pigs" here! We're talking about the famous Straw Market of Nassau that's been the center of souvenir crafts shopping in the Bahamas since the end of World War II. After the death of the sponge industry in the 1940s, Bahamian women started plaiting and decorating dried palm and sisal plant leaves to create lovely dolls, bags, hats, and baskets for tourists to buy, and the Nassau Straw Market was born.

Until recently, the Straw Market was housed in a temporary tarp-covered area with narrow aisles where vendors peddled everything from straw goods to shells and souvenir T-shirts. However, a new permanent market

opened this past December, offering 37,000 square feet of air-conditioned space in a facility built to withstand 200 mph winds. Not as quaint, but certainly more comfortable!

When visiting the Bahamas, we recommend a stay at **Compass Point Beach Resort**, Nassau, or at **Pink Sands**™ on Harbour Island, where each private cottage is within walking distance of a delightful three-mile-long stretch of that perfect pink sand. Your member perk at Pink Sands is a cooking class for two led by Executive Chef James Van Dyke, with lunch and a complimentary Pink Sands apron included (\$190 value). Call *Hideaways Travel Services* (**800-843-4433**) to book your "in-the-pink" stay.

Spicy Fresh

Looking for a way to really "spice up" your honeymoon? Head to Grenada, the "Isle of Spice," and visit the utterly romantic **Spice Island Beach Resort**™. Honeymooners staying at least seven nights at this fully inclusive beachfront enclave can enjoy one complimentary Swedish massage each, a sunset cruise, and a celebratory bottle of champagne—just the thing to set the mood. And of course, the marble baths, lush personal gardens, and private plunge pools in some of the suites are just an added bonus to your honeymoon stay.

More Flights to Paradise

American Eagle has restored its San Juan-to-Barbados service, making it easier than ever to visit **The Fairmont Royal Pavilion**™, *Hideaways'* preferred partner on the island's tranquil western shores. American Eagle's twice-weekly, year-round service will operate on Fridays and Sundays from San Juan to Barbados, and will offer return flights to San Juan on Saturdays and Mondays. During your visit to The Fairmont Royal Pavilion, you'll enjoy your member perk of daily breakfast, afternoon tea, and a welcome gift. Call *Hideaways Travel Services* (**800-843-4433**) to book your stay in paradise.

Sailing Into 2012

SILVERSEA CRUISES

Trips may come and go, but somehow, doesn't the perfect cruise just seem to linger on in your memory a little longer? Maybe it's the romance of living on board a fabulous ship and enjoying all its amenities, or the camaraderie and friendships you strike up with favorite crew members and fellow passengers. Maybe it's that expectation and excitement you feel every time a new port city comes into view in the distance. Or it could be something as simple as sitting on deck at night, cocktail in hand and sea breeze on your face, staring up into a vault of stars that seem so close you could reach out and touch them.

We at *Hideaways* understand completely the allure of cruising, and we want to help you have your best—or maybe first—cruise experience in 2012. For our part, that means we'll help you decide the perfect line and ship for your cruise style, personality, and budget and then plan and book your cruise for you—so all you have to do is show up and have the time of your life!

This Special Report should help get your “cruise juices” flowing with thoughts of sailing the high seas or meandering along a lazy river, all the while visiting exotic destinations in distant lands. When it's time to put those dreams into action, call a *Hideaways* Travel Specialist at **800-843-4433**. Before you know it, you'll be sailing off into an exciting cruise adventure.

Looking Into the Year Ahead

For 2012, the cruise industry is christening a veritable fleet of new ships (see our chart, page 8), adding a boatload of changes and upgrades to their offerings, and charting some unique new itineraries and phenomenal grand voyages. If you planned ahead, you may already be booked on one of those sought-after new itineraries or world cruises. If you didn't, you might find that your first or second choice is already booked.

But don't despair! The cruise calendar has already opened up for bookings into 2013, so you might want to act soon to secure that special suite, brand-new itinerary, or longer grand voyage. In fact, suites on some of the most popular spring 2013 sailings are already on waitlist for premium and luxury lines like **Regent Seven Seas**, **Crystal Cruises**[™], **Silversea**[™], and **Oceania Cruises**[™]. Also note: If you're looking at river cruising in Russia, don't delay—ships often sell out up to a year in advance!

Here are some of the most noteworthy developments for 2012—and beyond—that should enhance your cruise experience with these special *Hideaways*-recommended lines.

- Joining the likes of luxury lines **Silversea** and **Seabourn**, **Crystal Cruises** is going more all-inclusive beginning with its first transatlantic voyage in 2012, departing March 28 aboard the *Crystal Symphony*. Fares now will include fine wines and

New Cruise Ships for 2012

Here's a short wrap-up of the newest vessels to ply the world's waterways in 2012. When you're ready to try out one of these sparkling new ships, call your *Hideaways* Cruise Specialist at **800-843-4433**, or email ts@hideaways.com.

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CRUISE LINE	SHIP NAME(S)	SHIP SIZE	LAUNCH DATE	UNIQUE ASPECTS	NEW FEATURES
AmaWaterways TM	<i>ms Amacerto</i>	Small: 164 passengers	April 2012	River cruising on the Danube, Rhine, Main, and Mosel rivers of Europe; design inspired by classic ocean yachts; featuring AmaWaterways' exclusive "twin balconies" in the majority of staterooms & suites	Glass elevator, intimate Chef's Table restaurant, and heated Sun Deck swimming pool with swim-up bar
American Cruise Lines	<i>Queen of the Mississippi</i>	Small: 140 passengers	August 2012	Reviving the golden era of Mississippi River cruising; 7-night cruise segments between cities like New Orleans & Memphis and Nashville & St. Louis	Brand-new, purpose-built paddlewheeler; 75 staterooms with private balconies; Grand Dining Salon; Internet lounge
Celebrity Cruises	<i>Celebrity Reflection</i>	Large: 2,850 passengers	October 2012	Billed as "Best of Solstice Class," it's also the last of the Solstice Class; sailing Europe this fall before a transatlantic voyage departing November 18 from Barcelona to Miami	A new venue, The Art Studio, offers hands-on instruction from on-board experts in everything from drawing and painting to drink mixology and culinary lessons; three new suite categories: Reflection, Signature, and spa-focused AquaClass [®]
Oceania Cruises TM	<i>Riviera</i>	Large: 1,250 passengers	April 2012	Sister ship to last year's brand-new <i>Marina</i> ; designer touches like crystal Lalique Grand Staircase and Owner's Suites furnished in Ralph Lauren Home; maiden voyages in the Mediterranean	New Bon Appétit Culinary Center, the only hands-on cooking school at sea; Artists Loft, a new enrichment center
Viking River Cruises	<i>Viking Freya, Viking Idun, Viking Njord, Viking Odin, Viking Embla, and Viking Aegir</i>	Small: 190 passengers each	March 2012 through August 2012	Viking's brand-new Longship Class, designed by naval architects Yran & Storbraaten and named for Viking gods; sailing the rivers of Europe using "green" technology, including energy-efficient hybrid engines	Two new Explorer Suites on each ship feature 270° views with a private wraparound veranda; new Aquavit Terrace indoor/outdoor lounge space; organic herb garden and solar panels on each ship

spirits throughout the ship, open bar service in all lounges, non-alcoholic beverages like bottled water and specialty coffees, gratuities for housekeeping and dining staff, dining in the ships' specialty restaurants, golf lessons with PGA pros, fitness classes like Pilates or spinning, and enrichment programs. Whew! One caveat: Crystal's previous "As You Wish" spending credits will go away with the introduction of the more all-inclusive pricing.

- Love your time ashore? Then Silversea Cruises has good news for you. The line is introducing 19 new, immersive land tours for 2012, some of which are multiple-day adventures that really allow you to soak in the local culture and meet the people who live beyond the port cities. For instance, one inland excursion takes you to the Gorah Elephant Camp inside Addo Elephant National Park, near Port Elizabeth in South Africa. It's a three-day package that includes luxury tented accommodations at the Relais & Chateaux camp. Other new land adventures are offered in Egypt, Patagonia, Namibia, China and Tibet, Australia, and into the Amazon wilderness.
- If you hate the idea of being nicked and dimed for your on-board beverages, Oceania Cruises has two new beverage packages for 2012, and one is sure to be just your cup of... well, beer. Guests can opt for a "meals-only" package at \$29.95 per day that includes house wine and beer with lunch and dinner at any open dining venue, as well as with room service

dining for lunch and dinner. The second is an open-bar option at \$49.95 per day that includes premium house wine, beer, and open-bar service throughout the day, plus room service. Both packages include gratuities.

- Whale lovers, take note! **Paul Gauguin CruisesTM** has added a new whale-themed cruise, called "Island of Whales," to its regular lineup of themed voyages for 2012. The cruise departs Papeete on the first of September during the height of the Austral summer, when humpback whales teem in the waters off Rurutu as they gather to bear their young. You're in for a huge treat as you watch these gentle giants cavort in the protected waters and communicate with their eerily pitched songs. Fares for the 11-night cruise start from \$5,297 per person, double.
- Looking to 2013, **Holland America Line** has unveiled four lengthy grand voyage itineraries, two each on the *ms Amsterdam* and the *ms Prinsendam*. If you love the idea of settling in for a truly life-changing adventure, the 115-day Grand World Voyage departs January 5, 2013 (round-trip from Ft. Lauderdale), and will take you to dozens of ports, including some of the world's most popular UNESCO World Heritage sites. If you'd rather explore your favorite corner of the world, you can choose from the Grand Mediterranean Voyage, Grand South America & Antarctica Voyage, or the Grand Pacific & Far East Voyage.

When Smaller Is Way Better

When good friends Amy Felgar and Linda Klippenstein of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, decided to cruise Alaska's Inside Passage together, they both knew what they *didn't* want—another large-ship “herding experience” that involved impersonal service and endless waiting in lines. Enter Silversea Cruises, and its 382-passenger *Silver Shadow*—a match made in heaven!

We asked these two friends for the low-down on their trip last August, and especially the inside scoop on Silversea's legendary on-board experience.

HIDEAWAYS INTERNATIONAL: What was your favorite part of the ship?

AMY FELGAR: For starters, our suite was amazing, complete with sofa, desk, an orchid-adorned coffee table, a walk-in closet (!), and enough floor space to perform daily stretching exercises. We had a lovely big soaking tub and a nice selection of luscious bath products. Once out of our room, we found that just walking the hallways was a treat, admiring the original artwork that was *everywhere*. We also loved afternoon tea in the forward-facing lounge with its panoramic views of icy water, glaciers, and endless green forests. And it seemed as if fresh orchids were blooming on every table top—I wondered if a greenhouse was tucked away somewhere on the ship.

HI: Did you notice advantages to the ship's smaller size?

AF: Definitely. Its more manageable size helped us get acquainted with the deck plan in a short time and start feeling “at home” after just a couple of days. And there were always quiet, pleasant spaces to tuck into for a card game or conversation.

HI: Did you attend any on-board enrichment programs?

LINDA KLIPPENSTEIN: Yes, and they were all very informative. I especially enjoyed the one on the Tlingit people and their culture. Also, the couple doing the Resident Artist program were wonderful and made a great team. Their little “walking talks” on individual paintings and artists represented on board—including Dali, Picasso, and Chagall—were filled with gems of insight, and their amber-carving demonstration was just fascinating.

HI: Was the service level as good as everyone says?

AF: Absolutely! We felt pampered and well tended to the entire time. I'd say the staff training is meticulous and extensive across the board. Dining room servers remembered us by name all week, even though we never sat at the same table. Our butler was a delightful young man who was disappointed that we didn't order room service, as he was looking forward to serving us! While we were settling into our suite, he knocked and asked if we would listen to his presentation on the selection of bath products we could choose from. They were so scrumptious, we opted for all of them!

HI: How was the on-board dining experience?

AF: The food was wonderful, with a great selection at each meal. The breakfast buffet had an endless variety of wonderful fresh fruit—a real treat! Our final lunch was served buffet-style, with selections offered through the kitchen and representing world-wide cuisine. It was an unexpected and delicious experience—and we got an interesting tour of the kitchen while selecting our food.

HI: What was your favorite excursion?

LK: By far our favorite was a 10-man rowboat adventure on Mendenhall Lake near Juneau. Our paddle across the lake gave us “up-front-and-close” exposure to the glacier and its associated icebergs—truly awesome! And our guide, Christina, was a hoot! Winding in and out of those icebergs was both thrilling and a bit scary—especially when Christina said rather quietly to herself, “Oh, I've never seen an iceberg moving quite that fast.” And we were just yards away from it!

AF: Yes, she steered us through the mist and right up to the icebergs, so we could practically reach out and touch them. It was quite eerie and totally awesome to be sitting on that icy water next to those massive icebergs that seemed to be moving.

Sitka also was a favorite stop where we explored a nature preserve. Who knew southeastern Alaska is a temperate rain forest? No surprise, then, when it rained every day of our trip. We didn't mind—we just didn't get any photos that look like postcards!

Read Amy and Linda's complete Alaska report, including highlights of their shopping excursions, at www.Hideaways.com/cruisingalaska.

Tempted to sail Alaska this summer? Contact your Hideaways Travel Specialist today (800-843-4433), and you could earn valuable shipboard credits when booking any 2012 Silversea voyage.



Cruise News You Can Use

Here are some of the latest trends and developments in the cruise industry, plus a few newsy tidbits from our preferred cruise lines in *The Hideaways Collection*®. To find out more about—and book!—any cruise around the world, call *Hideaways Travel Services* at 800-843-4433.

And remember: When you book a cruise with *Hideaways Travel Services* on one of our preferred partner lines—including **AmaWaterways**™, **Crystal Cruises**™, **Oceania Cruises**™, **Paul Gauguin Cruises**™, **Compagne du Ponant**™, and **Silversea**™—you'll receive an in-cabin gift and a membership extension in the *Hideaways Aficionado*® Club (a \$195 value). Also, members receive up to \$500 in ship-board credit on select voyages!

Viking Expands to Blue Water

If there's one thing **Viking River Cruises** knows, it's river cruises. But now it appears the cruise line is branching out into deeper, vaster waters by introducing a new Viking brand, **Viking Ocean Cruises**. Shipbuilder STX France has been commissioned to build two oceangoing cruise ships for Viking, to be delivered in spring 2014 and spring 2015. The luxurious 888-passenger ships will be aimed at attracting Viking's previous river cruise passengers, mostly from the U.S., U.K., and Australia, who want a destination-oriented ocean cruise experience on a smaller ship.

Thankfully, this doesn't mean Viking is abandoning its river cruise business. In fact, it's introducing six new river vessels just this year, all part of the new Viking Longship Class. They'll join Viking's regular fleet and ply the famous rivers of Europe beginning this March.

Take a Peek Behind the Scenes

Ever wondered what *really* goes on behind the scenes on that huge cruise ship? Now you can get the inside scoop with **Celebrity Cruises'** new on-board tours that take passengers where few have trod before. The *Celebrity Inside Access* program includes two sneak-peek tours, the "See How It's Done" tour (\$150 per guest) and the "Bridge Sail Away Experience" (\$75 per guest), both of which reveal the ship's inner workings in areas usually off-limits to passengers.

Depending on the tour, you might

get to visit the bridge and schmooze with the captain, poke around the mooring deck and engine control room, or pop into the main dining room galley for a glimpse of meal prep. Each tour is followed by a wine-paired luncheon hosted by a ship's officer. The *Celebrity Inside Access* program is available on all ships, and tours can be purchased on board.

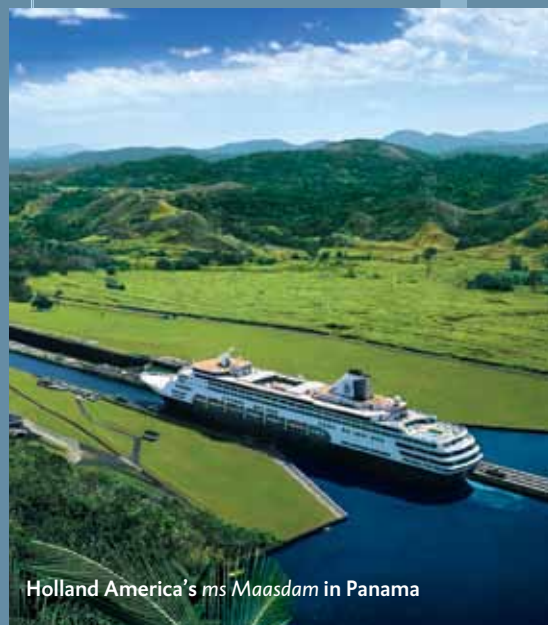
Cruise News Briefs

Here are some of the latest travel trends and cruise news items in a nutshell.

- **Cunard** recently shifted all three of its *Queens'* registries to Bermuda from the U.K., making it possible to offer weddings at sea—something that cannot be done under U.K. registry. Looks like more corks than ever could be popping on board the *QM2*!
- *Hideaways*-recommended **European Waterways** has added a new hotel barge to its fleet for 2012—the stylish 12-passenger *Panache*. She'll be sailing spring Tulip Cruises in Holland, then moving to the scenic Alsace-Lorraine region in eastern France for the rest of the barging season.
- This grande dame of cruising is hardly the beauty on the block, but the classic blue-hulled, 820-passenger *Marco Polo* is back in service as part of the U.K.'s **Cruise & Maritime Voyages** fleet. The 40-year-old ship has traditional teak decks, Art Deco styling, and a pleasantly mature, very comfortable atmosphere. Look for sailings

in Northern Europe, the Med, and Madeira and the Azores.

- In a quiet, almost surreptitious move, **Royal Caribbean** recently changed the minimum drinking age for alcoholic beverages to 18 on cruises departing South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, saying the move will "better accommodate the cultural norms in the regions of the world where Royal Caribbean International sails." The minimum drinking age remains at 21 for cruises originating in North America. Have those I.D.s ready!
- Proving a resurgence in European cruising, **Holland America Line** hopes to dazzle cruisers this summer with five new and unique ports of call: Durrës, Albania; Fowey, England; and Eidfjord, Kirkenes, and Ulvik, Norway.



Holland America's ms Maasdam in Panama

HOLLAND AMERICA LINE

- We couldn't be happier to learn that **Windstar Cruises'** new owner, Xanterra Parks & Resorts, will invest \$18 million to renovate the luxury line's three ships, the *Wind Surf*, *Wind Spirit*, and *Wind Star*. Can't wait to see these luxury sailing yachts back out on the open sea this spring.



Be Spontaneous and Go Glam

First there were flash mobs and “pop-up” clubs. Now there’s a new concept in the realm of temporary and spontaneous entertainment—the “pop-up” hotel. The innovative group of Design Hotels has launched a temporary hotel site in Tulum, Mexico, aimed at fans of “glamping,” or “glamorous camping.”

The **Papaya Playa Project** is a beachfront camp with 99 rustic-style cabanas that cost up to \$675 a night for the deluxe private units; you’ll even find a handful of cots on the beach that go for a mere \$25. During its tenure, the camp will offer a spa that incorporates Mayan shamanism, an on-the-go restaurant serving local organic foods, and concerts by famous musicians performing in the natural amphitheater of the beach. But you snooze, you lose—this “pop-up” will close for good May 5, 2012.

Stay Sober for This Venue

Leave it to Vegas to come up with something as weirdly entertaining as the world’s first “luxury gun range,” located just minutes from the strip. Called Machine Guns Vegas, the facility will offer patrons the chance to shoot a variety of firearms, from modern machine guns and assault rifles to some of the most famous firearms from World War II. Suffice it to say, no alcohol will be served on the premises.

Always wanted to play Rambo? Then choose an appropriate weapon from the facility’s vast selection of machine guns, hand guns, and other firearms—including those used by the U.S. Navy’s Seal Team during its raid of Osama Bin Laden’s compound. You’ll be matched with a shooting host who will guide you through the entire experience. You even can book a bachelor or bachelorette package!

The Ultimate “Royal Suite”

Could it be that the Queen is feeling the pinch of these uncertain economic times? It appears that she’s prepared to break with nearly 500 years of protocol by allowing St. James’s Palace to be rented out during London’s 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Of course, not just any Tom, Dick, or Harry (unless he’s Prince Harry) can plunk down

their £30,000 per day to rent the Palace and its gorgeous Throne Room, Tapestry Room, and/or Queen Anne Room for glamorous parties. Only businesses and official organizations that have existing links with the Royal Household are being considered for the honor. *Hideaways* VP Gail Richard once bumped into Princess Di—literally—on the main drag of Zürs. Does that count?

Hideaways News Briefs

Here are some of the latest travel trends and news items in a nutshell.

- Do you believe in the end-of-times prediction of the Mayan calendar? If so, 2012 is a big year, and Mexican President Felipe Calderon wants to make sure everyone knows more about the country’s Mayan heritage through a program called Maya World 2012. Special dance festivals, concerts, theatrical performances, and gastronomic events will be held at Mayan archaeological sites beginning July 21, 2012—marking the start of the Mayan year—and will run until December 21, 2012, when the Mayan calendar officially ends.
- Southwest Airlines fans, rejoice! In partnership with its new subsidiary, AirTran, Southwest plans to offer four Mexico routes beginning this May and June, including San Antonio to Cancun

and Mexico City, and John Wayne Airport (Orange County, California) to Cabo San Lucas and Mexico City. It also plans twice-daily service between Ft. Lauderdale and San Juan.

- Looking for something unique in wine touring? Consider Saskatchewan for your next trip! The Canadian province is becoming known for its cherry, rhubarb, apple, and currant wines, produced at several emerging wineries in the region. Apparently, cold winters and hot summers provide the perfect climate to grow fruit. Who knew?
- Every beauty needs a facelift every once in awhile, even golf courses, and Kauai’s Prince Course at the **Princeville at Hanalei** has been undergoing a doozy since January 2011. The reopening date, originally set for December 14, 2011, has been delayed to March 2012 due to the scope of the renovation project. Look for new tees, remodeled bunkers, wider fairways, and reshaped greens.
- Everything old is new again, and that will be true of the old Washington, D.C. Post Office Pavilion on Pennsylvania Avenue, which is in the planning stage to be redeveloped into a 245-room Waldorf Astoria hotel. The 112-year-old building is on the National Register of Historic Places and is situated between the U.S. Capitol Building and the White House.
- Talk about over the top! **Emirates Palace** in Abu Dhabi sports a gold vending machine within the hotel, where well-heeled guests can buy gift coins and gold bars weighing up to 10 grams. Prices are updated in real time, and the machine itself is 24-carat gold-plated. The hotel also hosted the world’s most expensive Christmas tree over the holidays. The 46-foot tree was draped with more than \$11 million in diamonds, pearls, and precious gems.
- Now there’s a new way to get between Maui and The Big Island, with once-a-day non-stop flights offered by inter-island carrier Go! Mokulele, a subsidiary of Phoenix-based Mesa Air Group. Go! Mokulele now operates more than 110 daily flights in Hawaii—making it easier than ever to get around paradise.

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L'ANDANATM TUSCANY, ITALY RATING: 4.7

This hotel had the best linens I have ever experienced. Breakfast was great, although the restaurant was expensive and only so-so. Finally, the service was excellent—rates a 5+!

ROBERT E. SUTTON, YAKIMA, WA

NOVECENTO BOUTIQUE HOTEL VENICE, ITALY RATING: 4.5

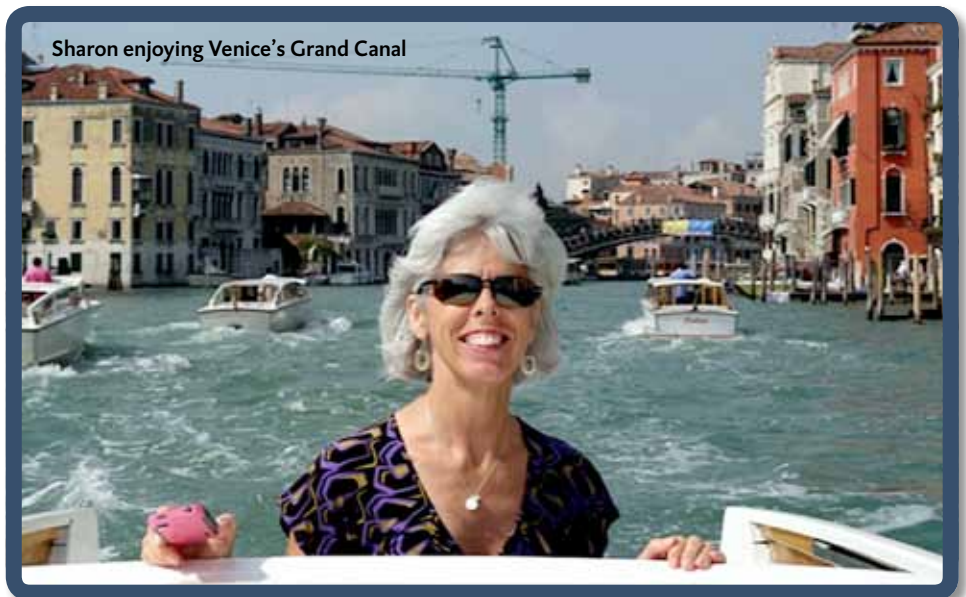
The hotel's location was excellent for getting around Venice, with a water taxi stop just a few hundred yards away. It was nice to have a large common area where I could do my morning yoga and stretching. The morning breakfast was nicely served and offered a great variety of foods from fruit to baked goods.

We used the guides from Walks Inside Venice. Our guide, Sara, was very knowledgeable. On our first afternoon, we had a three-hour Introduction to Venice tour that was a great way to get some basic history and an overview of the city. We also got some good ideas about what to see on our own. Sara took us on a tour of the Grand Canal and to Murano. Also, she booked the water taxi we needed and set us up with a wonderful place for dinner. Finally, she gave us a tour of the Santa Maria del Fiori and provided a very descriptive narrative of the structure and all the monuments inside.

We experienced mass at San Marco on



Gelato shop in San Gimignano



Sharon enjoying Venice's Grand Canal

Sunday—what a treat to see a special procession with a band and banners! Wasn't sure what it was all about, but we were able to worship in a very special church that Sunday morning.

A note on getting to Venice: We used Venice Airporter, and they were excellent. They met us at the airport right outside customs, took us to the car, and drove us onto the Island of Venice, where a water taxi picked us up and took us to the stop 200 yards from the Novecento—all for €95 total! Perfect!

Then it was on to Florence and the **Hotel Brunelleschi**. Again, the location was excellent. Here, we used Walks Inside Florence for our tours. One day, our driver, Pierguseppe, took us to Tuscany. We went to Sienna and met up with Emma, our guide there, who took us around and explained the history of the city. She was excellent, and this was a fun place to see. Lunch was suggested by Pierguseppe, in the magical medieval city of Monteriggioni at **Hotel Il Piccolo Costello's** Ristorante Da Remo. This was a nice place to sit down and enjoy good food and wine in a beautiful setting. Another stop, San Gimignano, was very touristy and crowded—the gelato was good, though! Anna Marie was our tour guide in Florence, and she was amazing, maneuvering around lines and groups to get us into the Accademia Museum. A wealth of knowledge!

SHARON KOSTAROFF, DEARBORN, MI

APARTMENT "NIEL" PARIS, FRANCE RATING: 4.4

The location was great—close to the Metro, dining, nightlife, and a wonderful daily market. The apartment was charming, but it lacked some very basic amenities like trash bags and toilet paper. We had to purchase these. The concierge was very kind, but even with a phone call to the English-speaking agent, there were some things that remained a mystery, like what to do with the trash and how to operate the television.

We also stayed at the **Hotel D'Argouges** in the town of Bayeaux. The hotel was lovely and the daily breakfast delicious. It was close to the historic attractions of Bayeaux and had great parking. We were

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“The tours were wonderfully good with excellent guides, plenty of time to visit the places, and brilliant explanations by said guides.”

[BERT MURRAY RECALLS HIS OCEANIA CRUISE]

on the top floor, which was accessed by a pretty steep stairway. The owners said you must indicate you want a room on a lower floor when you make reservations. This might be important to someone with limited mobility. We were just fine climbing the stairs, and the view of the hotel garden from our room was lovely.

Air France canceled our flight home and moved us a day, so we had to cancel and rebook with the Hyatt at Charles de Gaulle airport. (*Hideaways* Travel Consultant) Katia was very helpful with this unexpected change of plans made for us by Air France.

HIDEAWAYS MEMBER, REDMOND, OR

Ed. Note: As is typical with many European villa and apartment rentals, they often lack some of the basics we take for granted when renting in North America. Be prepared to fill in the gaps with things like toilet paper, facial tissues, etc.

OCEANIA CRUISES[™] ATHENS TO ISTANBUL RATING: 4.9

Thanks to *Hideaways* for the great trip you organized for us. Airline arrangements were very good, with the exception of the early return from Istanbul, but we made it. A later time with a stopover somewhere would have worked better for us. The ship was very nice, and the Vista Suite excellent—although there was one officer who clumped around on the bridge noisily at night and smoked on the wing which drafted down into our cabin. Quite funny on a non-smoking ship! We always knew when he was on watch.

The main dining room (MDR) was incredibly noisy and became a place for us to avoid. The food and service were remarkably good both times we went to the MDR; however, it was so noisy it was impossible to speak to the person next to you without shouting. The place we dined most was in the buffet restaurant at the stern, where they did not try to push you out the door as soon as you downed your last bite. That was a criticism for most of

the other dining venues we experienced first-hand. Both specialty venues were difficult to get reservations for but were very good for dining. We did not try the butler service in the suite because we noted the poor guy was run off his feet by others on the cruise.

The tours were wonderfully good with excellent guides, plenty of time to visit the places, and brilliant explanations given by said guides. Some of the venues were overloaded with people from many other cruise ships—but that, too, is part of the deal, and with an open mind was not too bad. Never did make afternoon tea (we were always on a tour) but others told us it was superb. Thank you for the champagne, it was downed with glee, which led to giggles!

The crew were all great and really did their level best to make you feel welcome. Too funny was the Santorini tour, where we went to a winery at 9 a.m. for a taste. Haven't done that before, but had a good snort and a laugh. We also had thrills galore on the taxi rides in Greece with wild rides along narrow roads at high speed. One driver told me that red lights were only sug-

gestions, and he certainly believed it!

Turkey was also terrific, and taxis were much the same as in Greece. We met friendly people everywhere who treated us well and gained our respect for their charm and willingness to share their ideas. The Hagia Sophia was magnificent, the Grand Bazaar outstanding, and our waterfront Bosphorus cruise truly memorable. Both hotels (*Travel Specialist*) Darcy sent us to (**Grande Bretagne[™]** in Athens and **Ceylan** in Istanbul) were fantastic in service and rooms. We cannot thank her enough for all her work in facilitating this trip for us. We will be back for more of *Hideaways*' help in the near future.

BERT MURRAY, ALBERTA, CANADA

Ed. Note: It's not uncommon for the main dining room to be bustling with activity and the voices of your fellow travelers, regardless of the cruise line. We agree that experiencing the specialty dining venues is well worth it, not only for the slower pace but calmer ambiance. We also recommend taking advantage of in-suite dining whenever possible!

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99 Miles on “The River of No Return”

It all started with a phone call late last winter from Michael, my older son living in Bozeman, Montana, and a proposition: “How would you like to do a camping trip on the Smith River?” The Smith is a wilderness river in central Montana known for its scenic beauty and good trout fishing. My answer was an enthusiastic, “Sure!”

BY HIDEAWAYS FOUNDER/PRESIDENT MIKE THIEL

It sounded like a great adventure, a do-it-yourself trip with some friends of his, fishing and camping in the wilds, cooking over a campfire, and organizing and hauling the rafts, tents, and gear. Ahh! Life would be good.

Several months—and a few prodding inquiries—later, little progress had been made on the plan, and I was resigning myself to it not happening. Just when I'd given up hope, some information came across my desk touting a similar rafting/fishing/camping excursion, not in Montana, but on the famous Middle Fork of Idaho's Salmon River. This, however, was no DIY trip. The outfitter, Far & Away Adventures, promised we'd enjoy all the fun, thrills, scenery, fishing, and camaraderie, and do it in luxurious style, while they took care of every detail and did all the work. Ahh! Life would be even better!

The Middle Fork of the Salmon—a.k.a. “The River of No Return”—is considered the premier western rafting river. It bisects 2.4 million acres of wilderness area of the same name, the second-largest in the Lower 48. The section of river we'd be rafting ran north for about 100 miles, dropping from an elevation of around 6,400 feet to 2,200 feet, its beautiful, clear waters alternating from tranquil flat sections to roaring rapids and falls, and flowing through mountain ranges and forests, deep gorges, and wilderness with no roads and just a few “grandfathered” ranches and camps.

When I first learned of the river's nickname, “The River of No Return,” it gave me a moment's pause. It didn't help that my younger son, Andrew, informed me that in the spring and early summer of 2011, with record snow melt and high waters, there had been 20-some deaths while rafting west-

ern rivers, including this one. But in fact, the river's nickname doesn't come from the number of souls lost on it, but rather from early explorers who found it was so swift, there was no prospect of returning upstream against the current.

A Real Vacation from the “Real” World

So, one bright summer day, Michael and I drove from Bozeman and arrived in Sun Valley, Far & Away's base, for the start of our river safari. Most others in our small group flew into Hailey, the regional airport serving the upscale resort area of Sun Valley/Ketchum, which bills itself as “The Original Mountain Town.” **Sun Valley Resort**, where we stayed, is a most impressive and comprehensive self-contained destination playground (learn more at www.Hideaways.com/traveltoIdaho). Few places I've experienced have so much to offer in

A warm damp towel wipes away morning cobwebs



MIKE THIEL

the way of sports, shopping, theater, and other attractions/distractions, and all in a beautiful, stylish setting.

The next morning, after a scenic two-hour ride into the heart of The River of No Return Wilderness Area, we reached the put-in point. It was a beehive of activity, with several commercial and private groups of rafters organizing gear, people, and rafts. Rafting on the Middle Fork is tightly controlled. Whether private or commercial, you need a permit, and only three commercial operators and three private groups can launch on any given day. Commercial rafters can take no more than 30 people each, including guides. Campsites along the river are assigned with enough separation that all can enjoy a sense of privacy.

While our guides were packing up, Leah, the lone female guide, instructed us guests



MIKE THIEL

SPLASH! Prepare to get wet and wild as you fish your way down the Salmon River. That's Mike's son, Michael, in the front of the raft, enjoying every minute.

on safety measures and paddling techniques. We also were briefed on campsite practices like answering nature's call—visit www.Hideaways.com/traveltoIdaho for a slide show of the most scenic bathrooms in the world.

Taking to the River

Our fleet consisted of two huge sweep boats that traveled downriver each morning ahead of us, with all the equipment to set up camp and have it ready for our arrival. A large oar raft carried more gear and lunch makings plus several guests, and doubled as a fishing platform. A couple of large paddling rafts each carried up to six guests and a guide. Finally, one oar raft was set up with a fishing frame to accommodate a guide/oarsman and two fly fishermen. In all, we were a group of 18 intrepid adventurers—including several children—and seven guides, a ratio that ensured excellent service.

The full river trip runs six days, covering 15–20 miles each day. It can be broken mid-way into shorter segments of two or three nights, with those leaving early or joining late flying in or out by bush plane to one of the private ranch airstrips. Two couples left us early, by plan, after the second night, while another couple with a young child joined us for the last three days. They were “testing the waters,” not sure how their young child would adapt to the experience. As it turned out, all the youngsters were in their element and quickly made friends. In fact, by day two

Idaho Rafting Know-How

FAR & AWAY ADVENTURES has been showing guests the wonders of The River of No Return Wilderness Area in luxe style since 1980. Beyond being lots of fun and educational, their trips are great for team building, whether that team is a couple, a family, or a corporate group. Rates start from \$2,590 for adults and \$2,300 for children. For 2012, they have just 12 scheduled trips, starting on May 28 and running through Sept. 14.

SUN VALLEY RESORT: We stayed here—unfortunately, just for one night—and I have to say we were impressed! This resort offers something for everyone in a beautiful setting, and is well worth a longer visit.

There is simply too much to say about both these operations to cover it all in this brief article. If you're intrigued, go to www.Hideaways.com/traveltoIdaho for further insight, advice, and our slide show. And for help in planning your trip, call us at 800-843-4433, or email ts@hideaways.com.

ONCE PASSENGERS AND CREW pulled in for the evening, the camp became a hub of activity as crew members offloaded gear, set up the tents, and prepared another delicious dinner.



MIKE THIEL

most of the group was getting along famously.

Our days started at 7 a.m. when we were gently roused from bed by a couple of cheerful guides offering warm wet towels to wipe the cobwebs from our eyes and hot coffee to get them open. Our only “chore” for the day was to stuff our sleeping bags and pillows into a dry bag and seal it. By 8 a.m., a delicious hot breakfast—scrambled eggs, pancakes, ham, etc.—was served family-style at long tables.

Michael and I spent the first two mornings in the fishing boat with Knox, one of two fishing guides and also the camp cook supreme. It didn't take long to get into fish, some feisty cutthroats, which are the prevalent fish on the Middle Fork. The trout aren't big, averaging about 12 inches, but they *are* “uneducated” and very willing. That makes it an ideal place for kids and neophytes to experience the thrill of fly-fishing, with Far & Away providing all the gear if you don't choose to bring your own.

Each day's activities were a pleasant mix of rafting, swimming, hiking to a waterfall or an old miner's camp, or trekking to see ancient Indian pictographs scrawled on canyon walls. The guides, all in their 20s and 30s, imparted a wealth of local lore and insight into river life at every turn.

Sundowners in Style

But evenings around camp were where the guides really showed their stuff. By the time we quit rafting for the day, an hour or two before sundown, dinner was being cooked, hot hors d'oeuvres and wine and beer were

being served, and our two-person tents had been set up. This was one of the nicest times of day on the river, a chance to relax, build friendships, or just take some private time to hike, fish the riverbank, or read a book.

Sometime around sundown, dinner would be served by candle and lantern light. And what wonderful meals we enjoyed! Grilled salmon and lamb chops, strip steaks, shrimp on the barbie, and with all the trimmings. The breads and desserts were amazing. I was super impressed with what Knox and his crew could whip up in a Dutch oven over a campfire. The *pièce de résistance* was served our final evening, a dessert of chocolate molts served with homemade—okay, camp-made—vanilla ice cream.

After dinner, it was time to sit around the campfire under a canopy of brilliant stars, sip more wine, and swap stories with fellow rafters and the guides. I have to say that a nicer group of guides would be impossible to find. All were young and enthusiastic, and they worked smoothly as a team to provide great service.

One of the best aspects of this trip, obvious as it may be, is still worth mentioning. For six whole days, we had no communication with the outside world—no cell phones, no computers or email, no electricity, no radio or TV, no newspapers. It was wonderful! And guess what? On our return, the world was still there and functioning, more or less. Maybe there's another meaning to “The River of No Return.” I really didn't feel like returning to the “real world” after six days on this spectacular river. Now *that's* a vacation! **H**

Live Like a Local in the Land of *La Dolce Vita*

Few places in the world evoke such strong emotions as Italy. The food, the wine, the history, the stylish cities, the spectacular countryside! No wonder Italy remains a favorite among *Hideaways* members for repeat visits—you could spend an entire lifetime getting to know the people and their culture.

Without a doubt, the best way to immerse yourself in Italy and *la dolce vita* is by renting a private villa or apartment. You'll shop at the local markets, get the inside scoop on what to see and do from your neighbors, dine in small family restaurants with the locals, and possibly sample a small-batch wine produced by the very estate where you're staying. Plus you'll have plenty of space to spread out if you're traveling with family or friends. And it's a great option if you place a high premium on privacy, flexibility, and value for your dollar—villa vacations are extremely affordable, especially if you're splitting the cost among several couples or family members.

Of course, we also have our Italy expert,

Hideaways Travel Specialist Katia Lillis, who travels back to Italy every year and knows the country inside and out. She'll happily suggest that quiet little apartment tucked away on a side street in Rome, or the perfect whitewashed villa clinging to a cliff side in Positano. She's also an expert at crafting unique itineraries that include out-of-the-way cities and towns where American tourists are few, and where you'll have a more authentic Italian experience.

Here's what a couple of members have said about their villa vacations in Italy, arranged and booked through *Hideaways* Travel Services.

"Villa Amore is a beautiful and romantic property with great views and the quintessential Amalfi Coast location . . . and Katia really knows her Amalfi Coast!" —*John Leibrock, San Antonio, TX*

"We arrived in Rome and were driven to our apartment—I fell in love immediately! The apartment was grand and lovely, filled with antiques and with more space than three of us needed." —*Alexandra Dunlop, Lancaster, PA*

We've partnered with several of the finest villa management companies in Italy to bring you a wide selection of everything from city-center apartments to comfortable villa estates in virtually every region of the country. Visit www.Hideaways.com/villasinitaly for hundreds of villa listings by region, or search by other categories like luxury, lakeside, town-center, or castles and towers. Note: In Rome alone, we have more than 500 apartment choices that are not on our website—be sure to call your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist if this is something you're interested in.

So browse our online catalog to your heart's content, then start planning your Italian getaway as soon as possible for this spring, summer, or fall—before your first choice of villa is booked up solid. Just call your personal *Hideaways* Travel Specialist at **800-843-4433** (+1-603-430-4433 outside the U.S.), or email ts@hideaways.com. We'll have you on the road to Italy in no time!

Overlooking the exquisite Amalfi Coast



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