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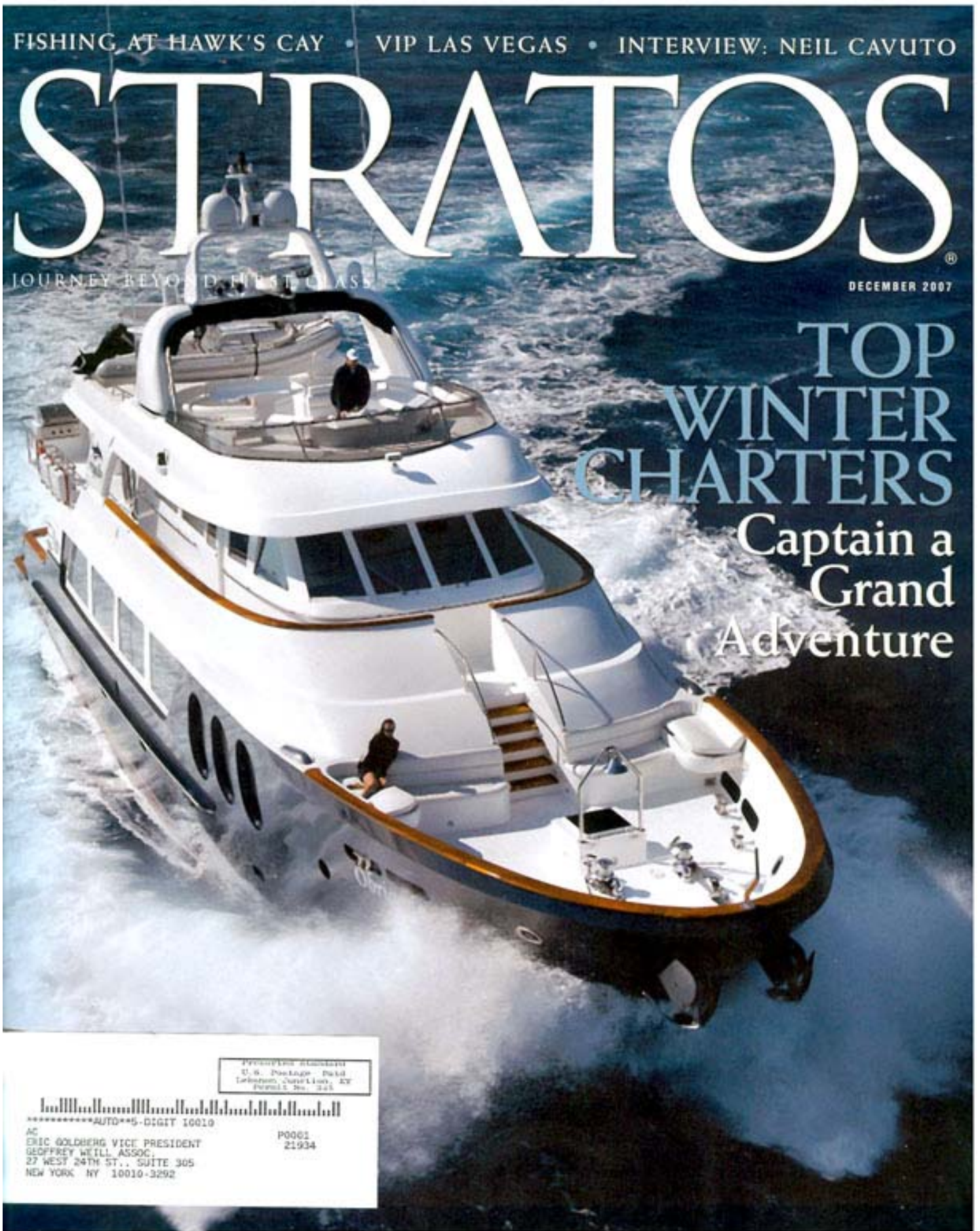
# STRATOS®

JOURNEY BEYOND THE CLASS

DECEMBER 2007

## TOP WINTER CHARTERS

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# Intimate Experiences

*Megaships yield to small and mid-size ones that focus on exotic itineraries and hands-on activities.*

*By Marion Hager*

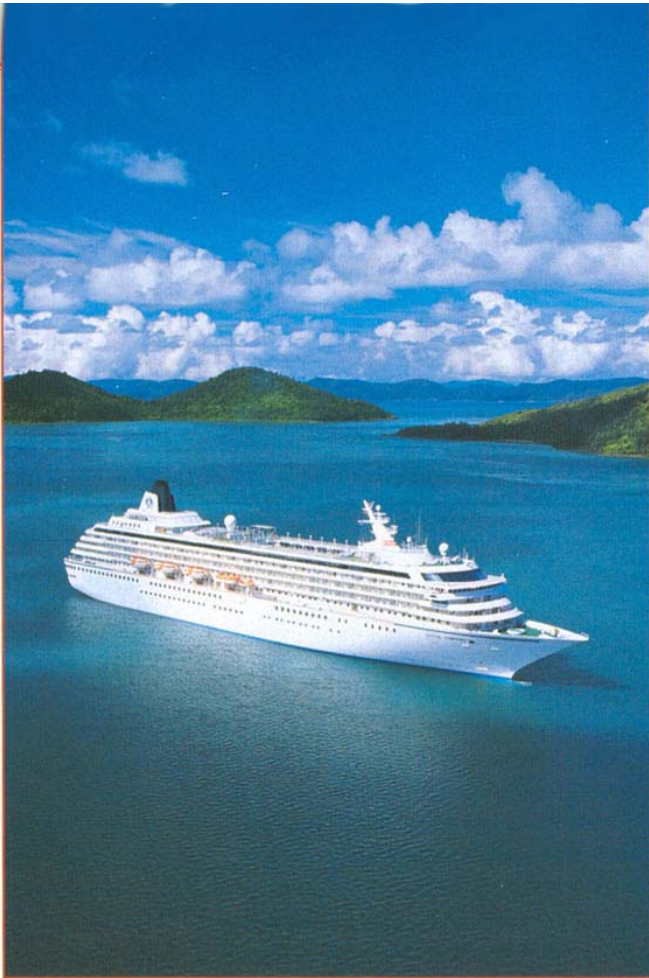


If you wouldn't dream of cruising aboard traditional cruise ships with thousands of people and a big city environment, then read on. *STRATOS* explores two hot segments in cruising for 2008: Experiential expedition cruises and luxury cruise lines operating intimate small to mid-size ships.



*The smallest of the Regent Seven Seas fleet is the 348-passenger Paul Gauguin, which sails year-round in French Polynesia.*





## Top Five Expedition Cruises

There are many expedition ships plying the remote regions of the world — but only a handful of them provide the luxury and comfort expected after a long day of exploration. These top expedition ships are intimate, comfortable and visit some of the most remote and exciting destinations on earth. If you've been there, done that, and are interested in up-close and personal exploration and nature, these may be right up your alley.

Sitting at the top of the expedition list are Orion Expedition Cruises' *Orion*, Abercrombie & Kent's *Explorer II*, Cruceros Australis' twin ships *Via Australis* and *Mare Australis*, Quark Expeditions icebreaker *Yamal* and Aqua Expeditions' *M/V Aqua*.

If you are looking for the ultimate places to "chill out," the *Explorer II* can provide a thrilling experience in Antarctica, the *Yamal* the opportunity to stand on the North Pole, and the *Via Australis* and *Mare Australis* take you through the magnificent landscape of Patagonia and the Chilean Fjords.

If you are a warm weather lover, check out the *Orion's* itineraries in the South Pacific, or explore the upper Amazon River aboard the new luxury river cruiser *M/V Aqua*.

What these ships have in common is that they are the best of the best in expedition cruising. They have a team of top-notch naturalists and lecturers onboard, and all the equipment one

could want for a voyage of exploration and discovery. And, they are as luxurious as can be.

Based in Australia, one of 2008's hot destinations, the 106-passenger *Orion* offers itineraries along Australia and New Zealand's coastlines and beyond to East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The lecturers, naturalists and accommodations are top rate and the food and service excellent.

If Antarctica is on your wish list, *Explorer II* sails to Antarctica through March. Abercrombie & Kent have been outfitting Antarctic adventures for more than a decade, so *Explorer II* offers just the right balance of on board comfort and full-fledged wilderness excitement. Although the ship has 394 lower berths, a maximum of 199 sail in the Antarctic. Cruise prices include everything there is to enjoy on board and ashore: Sightseeing expeditions, meals, all bar drinks and house wines, on-board gratuities and much more.

The next time you plan a fishing trip to Southern Chile or Argentina, add on a cruise aboard one of the twin ships *Via Australis* and *Mare Australis* sailing between Punta Arenas, Chile, and Ushuaia, Argentina. You'll explore the magnificent Tierra del Fuego and its iceberg-choked fjords. These 120-passenger vessels are modern ships with stabilizers, satellite navigation and reinforced hulls. The public rooms are well appointed, the service excellent, and you'll love the fresh Chilean produce and Argentine beef. Cruise prices are inclusive of port charges, gratuities and alcoholic beverages.

New for 2008 is the *M/V Aqua*, the Peruvian Amazon's first luxury boutique expedition vessel. Sailing year round from Iquitos, it explores the more remote and pristine areas of the Pacaya-Samiria Reserve in the upper Amazon River and its tributaries. The *M/V Aqua* has 12 spacious staterooms and suites, nightly culinary feasts and the best South American wines.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to sail to the North Pole on a Russian icebreaker? Check out Quark Expeditions itineraries on the *Yamal*. This nuclear powered vessel has the latest in technology, and is among the world's most powerful and sophisticated ships. You'll be amazed at the onboard comfort. Fifty first-class outside cabins and suites have private facilities, large windows, a desk, television and other amenities. *Yamal's* reconnaissance helicopter takes passengers flight-seeing over the pristine polar landscape and your ship crashing through ice several meters thick. When you reach the North Pole, you'll be able to "circle the world" — memories of a lifetime.

## Five Top Luxury Cruise Lines

Before you decide that cruising is not in your vocabulary, try a short cruise on one of the best of the best: Crystal Cruises, Seabourn Cruise Line, SeaDream Yacht Club, Silversea Cruises, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. Not all luxury cruise lines are



*Explore the upper Amazon River aboard Aqua Expeditions' new luxury river cruiser M/V Aqua.*

created equal, so be sure to know the ins and outs of each before you make your selection.

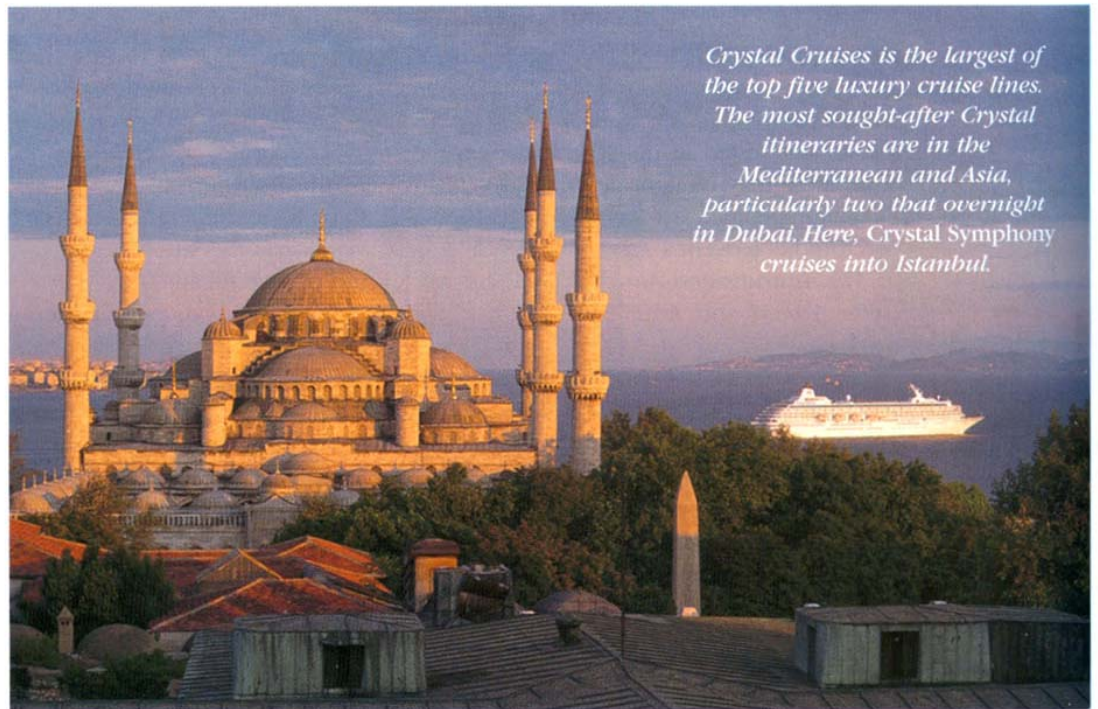
The largest of the top five cruise lines is Crystal Cruises. The *Crystal Symphony* and the *Crystal Serenity* have excellent entertainment, lots of public areas for daytime and evening activities, and carry about 1,000 guests. This might sound like a lot, but you'll be surprised. The service level is so high that staff members remember your name and preferences. If you sail in

a suite on a Penthouse Deck, your butler will unpack and press your clothes, make dinner reservations and arrange your shore excursions. There are two excellent alternative restaurants available by reservation, as well as a casual option and room service if you aren't into the structure of the assigned two-seating dining. The most sought-after Crystal itineraries are in the Mediterranean and Asia, particularly two that overnight in Dubai.

Seabourn Cruise Line has always been known as a "country club at sea," and their three 200-passenger ships definitely

have the ambiance of a private club. Accommodations are all suites, some with French balconies. The décor is elegant, and the food and service top-notch. If you love water toys, you'll love the water-sports platform at the stern and the sea kayaks, windsurfers, water skiing boats and zodiacs. The ships sail throughout the world, and their Vietnam itinerary is one of the best I've seen — 14 days sailing the entire length of the country with one and two-day stops at all the "must see" ports.

The smallest of our luxury vessels are the two 110-passenger ships operated by SeaDream Yacht Club. They are the ultimate boutique ships where hospitality and anticipation are the order of the day. You won't hear the word "no!" If there is anything special you want, you have only to ask. Dress is resort casual, and ports of call are those frequented by private yachts, not cruise liners. The accommodations are "mini-suites" with an outside view measuring 195 square feet — large for a motor



*Crystal Cruises is the largest of the top five luxury cruise lines. The most sought-after Crystal itineraries are in the Mediterranean and Asia, particularly two that overnight in Dubai. Here, Crystal Symphony cruises into Istanbul.*

The 106-passenger Orion offers itineraries along Australia and New Zealand's coastlines and beyond to East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Lecturers and naturalists immerse guests into the experience.



yacht, but smaller than most other luxury ships. These ships are perfect for a family or corporate charter or partial charter. *SeaDream I* and *II* sail summers in the Mediterranean, and according to president Larry Pimentel, their hot itineraries are those in Croatia and the Greek Isles.

If you like the activities and amenities of the larger ships, but don't want to travel with the hordes, consider Silversea Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. Silversea operates four ships, two carrying 296 passengers and two carrying 388 passengers. All provide an excellent cruise experience. Food and service are highly rated, and accommodations are all suites, most with verandas. Silversea sails worldwide, and their hottest itineraries for 2008 are in Asia. Prices are inclusive of gratuities and all beverages and spirits throughout the ship.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises operates four ships, all inclusive of gratuities and beverages and spirits through the ship. The smallest is the 348-passenger *Paul Gauguin* that sails year-round in French Polynesia. The others — 490-passenger *Navigator*, and 708-passenger *Voyager* and *Mariner*, sail worldwide. For great itineraries that combine ports of call in both Croatia and the Greek Isles, check out Regent Seven Seas Cruises. ☺

## STRATOS Details

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