

Cruising in Style

ON THE WATER



BIRD WATCHING EXCURSION



SUITE ON M/V AQUA

By Stacy H. Small

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, SOMETIMES IT'S BEST TO DITCH THE PRIVATE YACHT IN FAVOR OF A CRUISE SHIP. HAUTE LIVING TRAVEL EDITOR STACY H. SMALL, FOUNDER OF ELITE TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL, TELLS US WHY.

Even if you own a fabulous private yacht, it simply may not be possible to sail it to every corner of the world (for example, the Amazon?). Said yacht also may not be outfitted with a casino, a five-star spa, multiple gourmet dining rooms, or a nightclub just for your teens—nice things to have when traveling with family and friends.

Regardless the reason, there's never been a better time to book a sail aboard an ultra-luxury cruise ship. Both Silversea Cruises and The Yachts of Seabourn have debuted brand new ships in the past year; Seabourn's second new build in as many years takes to the seas this summer (with a third lined up for launch spring 2011). Additionally, Crystal Cruises (which gets our vote as best line for families) gave its already-stunning *Crystal Symphony* a \$25 million makeover last fall.

And, should you desire to sail the Amazon (in luxury, of course), the best way to do so is with Peru-based Aqua Expeditions, which launched its 24-passenger ship two years ago. Its second vessel, the 16-suite *M/V Aria*, is currently under construction and will launch in April 2011.

And by all means, should you prefer the privacy of your very own yacht, these ultra-luxury liners are all available for private charter. Following is a look at the new (and newly improved) luxury ships to consider sailing on this summer and beyond:

Aqua Expeditions

Amazon and luxury are not always words you hear used together, but that changed two years ago when Peru-based Aqua Expeditions launched its 24-passenger, 130-foot *M/V Aqua*, designed to showcase the best of the region in serious style. The ship's instant success has resulted in the construction of a second ship, the 147-foot *M/V Aria*, set to launch next April.

Guests onboard the Aqua Expedition ships—the brainchild of businessman Francesco Galli Zugaro—enjoy daily water-based excursions to experience such wonders as pink dolphins and six-foot-wide water lilies; other activities include floating on black water rivers, fishing for sharp-toothed piranhas, and interacting with the locals in remote villages. Many of the onboard guides grew up in Amazonia and regale guests with tales of life and folklore about little-visited areas such as the remote Pacaya Samiria Reserve. Twice the size of Yellowstone

National Park, the Reserve is located on the headwaters of the Amazon basin and spans more than five million acres.

The voyages depart year-round out of Iquitos, Peru (a 90-minute flight from Lima), and offer three-, four- and seven-day itineraries. The guest suites measure about 250 square feet and feature large panoramic windows and en suite sitting areas. All suites are air-conditioned, with the ability to interconnect up to four (ideal for families). The *Aria* will be slightly larger, with 16 stylishly designed suites accommodating 32 passengers. It will also feature an outdoor Jacuzzi, an exercise room, and a reference library.

Befitting the ambience of a five-star boutique hotel, all meals on board both ships are highlighted by fresh, delicious Peruvian fare—created in partnership with Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, one of Peru's top 10 chefs. Complimentary South American wines are paired with dinners each evening.

ON THE WATER



THE SILVER SPIRIT

Silversea Cruises

The newest addition to the five-ship Silversea fleet—the 270-suite *Silver Spirit*—embarked from its first American port in January. The 36,000-ton vessel, built at the Fincantieri Shipyard in Ancona, Italy, heads to the Mediterranean this summer following a 91-day, 45-port South American inaugural voyage. Perfect for time-pressed travelers, a series of seven-day summer sails dock in hot spots such as Monte Carlo, Portofino, Provence, Venice, Athens, and Istanbul. Been there, done that? Choose one of the more exotic itineraries featuring Montenegro, Croatia and Ukraine. Come November, the *Spirit* will relocate to Bridgetown, Barbados, and offer Caribbean sailings through year's end.

Ocean view suites range in size from 312 square feet to 1,668 square feet, and all but



STARS SUPPER CLUB



VERANDA SUITE

a mere few have private teak balconies. Butler service is standard for all guests and each suite features an Italian marble bathroom with separate shower and tub, two flat-screen satellite TVs, WiFi, and a fridge stocked per guest preferences. Each of the two Owner's Suites can be configured with one or two bedrooms, as can the six Grand Suites. These eight suites feature an additional half-bath, full-size Jacuzzi, huge walk-in closets, espresso machines, two hours each of free in-suite worldwide phone use and Internet, plus complimentary laundry services, dry cleaning, and early embarkation.

The *Silver Spirit's* décor blends an old-world Art Deco feel with classy, modern sophistication throughout the public areas of the ship, which include an 8,300-square-foot

spa, a Cigar & Cognac bar, and six dining venues (including a 24-seat Wine Restaurant by Relais & Châteaux, the 58-guest Stars Supper Club, and a 24-seat Asian/sushi spot called Seishin). Additional onboard features include an outdoor pool, four whirlpools, a fitness center/yoga studio, an Internet café, and a small but stylish casino with blackjack, roulette, poker, and slots.

Silversea's all-inclusive pricing policy covers all meals, an extensive selection of beverages (alcoholic and non-), all gratuities, 24-hour room service, a complimentary shoreside event, and round-trip transportation from the ports to the closest town. We also love Silversea's "open dining" policy, which allows guests to dine at their leisure rather than at set times and assigned tables.

THE
SEABOURN
ODYSSEY

The Yachts of Seabourn

On course to double its fleet size from three to six ships, Seabourn debuted the first of its three brand new babies—the *Seabourn Odyssey*—last June. The second, *Seabourn Sojourn*, sets sail this summer, with the *Seabourn Quest* to launch next spring. Seabourn's three identical new ships, built at T. Mariotti in Genoa, Italy, can accommodate a maximum of 450 guests in 225 suites.

While double the size of Seabourn's original three ships, the new builds remain the smallest vessels constructed by a major cruise line and thus retain their intimate scale with yacht-like atmospheres and the ability to access small, unique destinations.

Each suite (90 percent with balconies) ranges in size from about 300 square feet to 1,182 square feet indoors, plus another 60 feet to 500 feet of outdoor space. This includes five Owner's Suites measuring up

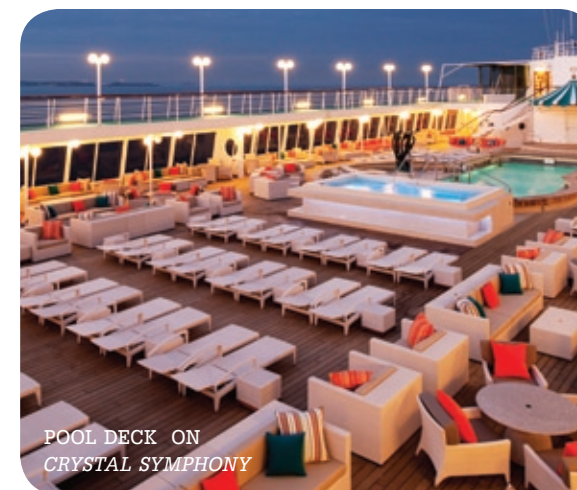
to 1,062 square feet (including the veranda) and four 2-bedroom Grand Suites with up to 1,682 square feet of private living space. These suites—as well as the other larger ones on board—include complimentary in-room WiFi access. Standard Seabourn features include 24-hour room service, an in-suite bar stocked to guests' preferences, flat-screen interactive TV/movies/music, and Molton Brown bath products.

Additional reasons to sail *Seabourn* include menus by celebrity Chef Charlie Palmer and access to the 11,400-square-foot Spa at Seabourn (the largest on any ultra-luxury vessel at sea). Palmer's cuisine is served in four dining venues—ranging from fine dining to casual—and the open-bar policy means no annoying checks to sign throughout the cruise (gratuities are neither required nor expected).

The stunning two-deck spa features nine treatment rooms, including two Spa Villas

spacious enough for treatments a deux. These villas also feature a double daybed for relaxing, a full living/dining room, a private balcony for sunbathing, and an oversized bathtub. The fitness room offers a variety of cardio and strength equipment, a studio for classes, a Kinesis Wall, and even a separate area for Thai massages. More than 10 Eastern cultures are represented on the spa treatment menu, with options such as Chinese reflexology and Tai Chi. Complimentary yoga and Pilates classes are offered.

Following its June 6 maiden voyage and through mid-September, the *Sojourn* offers incredible itineraries throughout Northern Europe, featuring stops in Russia, Norway, Finland, Scotland, England, and Denmark. The *Odyssey* spends the summer and fall in the eastern Mediterranean, with itineraries highlighted by visits to Turkey, the Greek Isles, Venice, and Croatia before relocating to South America for the winter.

POOL DECK ON
CRYSTAL SYMPHONYSUITE ON CRYSTAL
SERENITYLIDO CAFE ON
CRYSTAL SYMPHONY

Crystal Cruises

Families considering a summer vacation at sea can't choose a better option than the stylish *Crystal Symphony*. One of two ultra-luxury ships operated by Crystal Cruises, the 922-guest *Symphony* is fresh from a \$25 million dollar makeover that included the complete redo of its two top Crystal Penthouses. The 1,000-square-foot penthouses now boast a plush residential feel, larger living and bedroom spaces, dual walk-in closets, large private balconies, separate study/living/dining areas, a high-tech audio/visual system, and a master bath with sunken Philippe Starck Jacuzzi bathtub, ocean views, rare marble finishings, heated floors, rainfall showers, and a recessed television to enjoy from the tub.

The renovation also encompassed a redesign of the ship's 61 butler-serviced Penthouse

and Penthouse suites, while the Lido Café has been transformed into an upscale dining spot inspired by the Hamptons seashore. The pool area has also been upgraded with new al fresco dining and seating options and new larger whirlpools.

One of our favorite lines for families for its large accommodations (each stateroom has a sofa that doubles as a third berth) and extensive kid-friendly activities, Crystal has taken it a step further with the introduction of new sophisticated (and free) options for teens. Starting this summer, teens can take sushi-making lessons with a Nobu-trained chef, golf with PGA pro instructors, and learn a foreign language with Berlitz teachers as well as enjoy dance lessons and evening DJ-hosted parties. Both the *Crystal Symphony* and the *Crystal Serenity* have expanded the hours and variety of supervised activities for junior cruisers from three to 17.

"Like their parents, our younger guests are well-traveled and curious about the places

they're visiting," says Bret Bullock, VP of entertainment. "Younger travelers enjoy the camaraderie and friendships they cultivate with their peers from around the world."

Those pressed for time or couples looking for an ultra-easy way to sample the newly renovated *Crystal Symphony* can do so from Los Angeles on one of the four 7-day Mexican Riviera itineraries offered between November 21 and December 12. Fares for these shorter voyages start at less than \$3,000 per person, and "2-for-1" fares are offered in every category, including the Crystal Penthouses. It's a fun way to experience Crystal's award-winning service and food (onboard restaurants include sushi by Nobu and Italian cuisine by Piero Selvaggio of L.A.'s Valentino restaurant). The itinerary includes full-day stops in Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan, and Puerto Vallarta. Come holiday time, Crystal offers an incredible program aboard its 14-day Hawaiian island cruise, with itineraries spanning the globe throughout the rest of the year. ■

Cruise Contacts

It's not always what you know but who you know that ensures your luxury travels will be smooth sailing. For more information on any of the cruise lines mentioned and to plan your next luxury vacation, contact the experts at Los Angeles-based Elite Travel International. Not only will you be taken care of by top experts in the field, but you'll enjoy special VIP perks and privileges such as pre-paid gratuities (on *Crystal*), shipboard credits, complimentary shore excursions, plus the 24/7 services of a concierge-style luxury travel firm. As an added bonus, *Haute Living* readers who book luxury cruises through Elite Travel International in 2010 will enjoy an additional \$150 worth of shipboard credit applied to their account. For more information, call 310.979.9036, email elitetravelgal@gmail.com or visit www.elitetravelinternational.com.