

word of mouth

Time to Get On Board

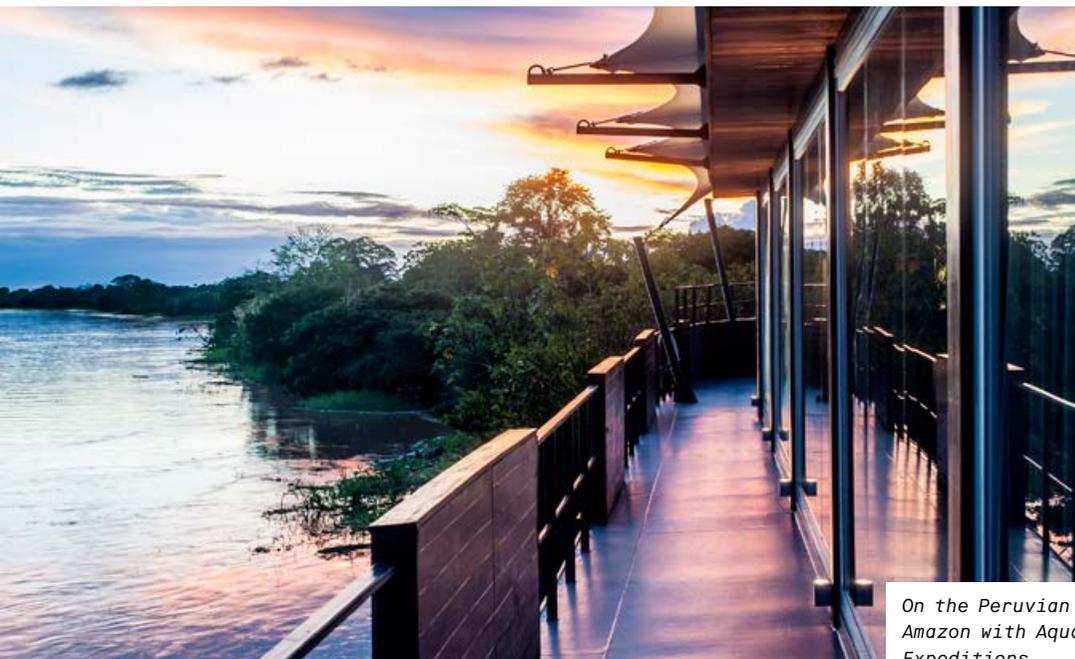
No travel sector has been impacted more publicly by COVID-19 than the cruise industry, which has had to rethink many of its formerly standard practices. As travelers begin returning to the ships they love, here's what awaits

If you hope to cruise in 2021, word in the industry is: Book now. Between the passengers who bumped 2020 sailings because of the pandemic and general interest in getting out to sea again, cabins on ships both small and large, river and ocean, are filling up fast. "Already, availability is limited," says Linda Allen-Speer of Cruises by Linda.

That's a very different picture than the one that was being presented in March, and it reflects the work that the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) immediately began doing with the CDC to establish a revised set of safety standards. Those efforts have led to revamped HVAC systems, an end to the self-service buffet, and an emphasis on

alfresco dining as well as in-suite room service. When sailings resume, cruisers can expect enhanced pre-boarding screenings, temperature checks, more cleanings, and more medical staff. As part of its efforts to ensure travelers' peace of mind, CLIA voluntarily decided in June to delay sailings of large ships until fall—one reason Allen-Speer says 2020 return bookings have been slow even with companies like Aqua Expeditions returning to the Amazon and Windstar Cruises hitting the Caribbean this fall.

But for 2021, cruise bookings industry-wide are up 4 percent, according to travel specialist group Virtuoso—with river cruises up 30 percent from January 2020 to January 2021. And for those deciding whether to cruise next year, specialists like Allen-Speer are asking only for small fully refundable deposits rather than full-trip costs on sailings like Ponant's new hybrid ship *Le Commandant Charcot*, which will cruise through Tahiti in May. "We know the money down needs to be as minimal as possible," she says. —**Corina Quinn**



On the Peruvian Amazon with Aqua Expeditions

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What book inspired you to travel?

The Sheltering Sky, by Paul Bowles. It's the book that first filled me with wanderlust, led to a lifelong obsession with Morocco, and compelled me to always seek out the unknown and unexpected whenever I travel.

Kevin Kwan AUTHOR, *CRAZY RICH ASIANS* AND *THE JUST-RELEASED SEX AND VANITY*