

# Seduction at Sea

Only the finest cruises satisfy our loyal readers

By Taura Mizyabi



Above: Break the ice with Seabourn in Alaskan waters.  
Photo: Seabourn  
Right: A heavenly view of SeaDream from the air.  
Photo: SeaDream

Your knife glides through a tender cut of beef tenderloin served with a truffle-infused veal demi glacé, and you sip on a smoky pinot noir while a gentle sea breeze dances across your cheek. The jazz trio strikes mellow riffs as you look into your loved-one's eyes and remember why you first fell in love. It's not dinner at a seaside Malibu restaurant, but rather a mere sample of what to expect while venturing on a luxury cruise.

Today's discerning traveler demands a heightened level of sophistication when embarking on a journey at sea. Most luxury cruise lines have smaller vessels and carry fewer than 500 passengers, allowing for visits to ports inaccessible by the larger mass-market behemoths.

These smaller excursions make for a more private, intimate trip or they can be completely customized to meet your wishes. Menus inspired by celebrity chefs, 300 thread count bed linens and plush, state-of-the-art staterooms with marble-countered bathrooms seem to be staples on the lines that regularly appear in *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List* and *Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards*.

With such greatness packed into these floating utopias, what differentiates one luxury line from another? On all lines, service is king, and so are you.

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## The Yachts of Seabourn

**Seabourn** prides itself on superlative service. With all-suite accommodations for 104 couples and a staff of 165, guests are well tended to. Seabourn is not just service with a smile, but rather with sincerity provided by the professional staff and crew aboard every Seabourn ship.

In lieu of butlers in only certain rooms, each



Seabourn suite is assigned a stewardess to care for your every need. One couple traveling through South America decided to buy knick-knacks for their grandchildren at each port of call on their vacation. They then delicately displayed the gifts next to their grandchildren's photos on the vanity in their stateroom. In Peru the couple disembarked to climb Machu Picchu and rejoined the ship a few days later, surprised to find additional trinkets on their vanity. Even in their absence, the stewardess continued their tradition and purchased gifts for the couple's grandchildren in the ports of call they missed.

Not only will your personal stewardess greet you with canapés and champagne, but she will also ensure that you are totally relaxed. Feeling tired after a long day of exploring the pagodas of Viet Nam? Melt into warm, therapeutic bubbles in your marble tub with an aromatherapy soak from the *Pure Pampering* bath menu drawn for you by your personal stewardess. Seabourn's *Pure Pampering* offers you a variety of soaps from Hermès, Bijan, and L'Occitane with toiletries from Molton Brown.

In addition to exquisite service, Seabourn offers a host of destinations including Asia-India-Arabia and South America. Be sure to partake in an *Exclusively Seabourn* complimentary shore-side excursion such as the private cocktail party amid the ruins of Ephesus in Turkey. March along the same roads that Antony and Cleopatra once traveled on while locals carrying cornucopia overflowing with fruit shower you with greetings. Closed to the public at night, Seabourn guests indulge in a private cocktail party while a chamber group sets the tone with classical music, allowing you to breathe in the thousands of years of history marked by these ancient grounds.

While alcohol and wine are complimentary, if you would like a premium wine selection while enjoying your Charlie Palmer-inspired dinner, consider the *Vintage Seabourn* program and indulge from the yacht's premium wine list. Selections might include a Domaine Laroche Les Blanchots or a Hanzel Alexander Valley Pinot Noir. Other Seabourn signatures include complimentary on-deck massages with *Massage Moments*, *Movies Under the Stars*, *Dancing Under the Stars*, *Seabourn's Personal Shopper*, *Personal Valet Luggage Service*, *Caviar in the Surf*, and *Shopping with the Chef*.

### Silversea Cruises

For an odyssey in opulence, consider **Silversea Cruises**. Silversea is perfectly epitomized by the line's ambassador, Isabella Rossellini, who embodies the grace, style, and elegance that Silversea has adeptly captured in every detail from service to staterooms. Silversea passengers describe their experience as comfortable but not stiff. Flexibility is another Silversea hallmark: Guests may embark and disembark as they wish and make requests of their personal butler.

By partnering with some of the finest purveyors of style, such as Acqua di Parma, Pommery Champagne, Viking, the Humidor by Davidoff, and Relais & Châteaux, Silversea elevates your onboard experience. Silversea's relationship with Relais & Châteaux has led to the creation of two new boutique restaurants, Saletta and Le Champagne. While all other dining and most wine service is complimentary, for a fee, Saletta and Le Champagne offer premium wines expertly chosen by Relais & Châteaux sommeliers and paired with regional cuisine.

Some sailings have even been known to open up their kitchen towards the end of the journey. Passengers line up for a one-of-a-kind dining experience as they peruse food stations in the immaculate kitchen and interact with the various chefs – from pasta to pastry.

Staterooms move beyond luxurious, 80 percent of which have teak verandas. If you really want to spoil yourself, purchase the Grand Suite plus the Rossellini Suite on either the Silver Shadow or Silver Whisper. The two-bedroom suite boasts 1,435 square feet, two teak verandas with floor-to-ceiling glass doors, two marble bathrooms with a Jacuzzi tub in one, plasma televisions, and all of the comforts of home. The line's all-suite ships offer Sealy Posturepedic Plush EuroTop mattresses and in the top suites with Stearns & Foster Plush ultra-luxury beds. Add to that fluffy goose down duvets and 320 thread count, 100 percent Egyptian cotton sheets, and you have a recipe for sumptuous slumber.

Above: Crystal Cruises' Crystal Symphony traveling through Sydney, Australia, one of its many exciting destinations. Photo: Crystal Cruises

Join John Cleese for the John Cleese Film Festival aboard the Silver Shadow's journey May 22-June 7 from New York to Southampton, U.K. Have a laugh with Mr. Cleese while screening comedy classics such as *The Life of Brian*, *A Fish Called Wanda*, and *Fierce Creatures*. Cleese will share his passion for lemurs with guests in his enlightening documentary, "In the Wilde: Lemurs with John Cleese," which details the possibility of extinction for lemurs in Madagascar.

For the regatta enthusiast, hop aboard the Silver Whisper in late June to watch *Alinghi* defend the trophy in the 32nd America's Cup Match in Valencia, Spain. Begin your trip June 22 in Barcelona, and get ready for a front row seat for the world's most thrilling water race.

### SeaDream Yacht Club and Windstar

Staying on the more casual end of the spectrum are **SeaDream Yacht Club** and **Windstar**, which both capitalize on their smaller size by visiting smaller ports of call. How about wine tasting in



Mallorca or exploring the caves and grottos on the island of Minorca? Travel off the beaten path to less crowded ports of call such as Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, Santorini, and Portofino. Both lines tell you to leave the tux and gowns at home. The relaxed atmosphere calls for resort casual attire, and restaurants do not have assigned or set seatings: Dine when and with whom you want.

Launched in 2001 by two former Seabourn executives, **SeaDream** has quickly become one of the top-rated luxury lines and is this year's top-scorer on *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List*. With two identical ultra-luxury mega yachts, SeaDream provides intimate, casual travel experiences to the Mediterranean and the Caribbean as well as Transatlantic voyages. Offering a more unstructured ambiance, SeaDream describes their yachting experience as "no clocks, no crowds, no lines, and no stress."

Although the staterooms do not have balconies or verandas, guests can enjoy unobstructed views on Balinese Sun Beds atop the upper deck. At night they transform into DreamBeds where you and your loved one can marvel at the starry sky. But the extra amenities that come with the room truly make it special: personalized stationery, monogrammed pajamas, a multi-jet massage shower for two, Bvlgari toiletries, Frette linens, 100 percent Turkish cotton robes and slippers, and 24-hour room service with caviar. SeaDream I and II have a capacity of 110 (47-55 couples depending on room configuration).

The active clientele can borrow a mountain bike and explore the Italian island of Ponza, or grab a snorkel from the yacht's water platform and swim with an Eagle Ray through the crystal Caribbean waters of St. John. Some may choose from a variety of excursions, while others entertain themselves by shopping with the chef for that evening's dinner special, or by snorkeling with the captain.

The *Caviar and Champagne Splash* is not to be missed. Basking in the sun on a secluded white sand beach while the crystalline water tickles your toes, the captain zooms in on a zodiac. Before you know it, stewards in full uniform have set up in the water a life preserver or surfboard doubling as a serving tray on which they have arranged sevruga caviar with all of the fixings. Before all is said and done, a barbecue on the beach is grilling up fresh lobster. Another benefit of

Top: All aboard on Cunard – even the pooch! We know you can't leave home without him.  
Left: Cap off the night – or day – at SeaDream's Top of The Yacht Bar, where all dreams come true.

yachting on SeaDream is the flexibility afforded to the captain, who can adjust the schedule when guests just can't seem to put an end to enjoyable day.

Naturally, **Windstar** (capacity – 148 passengers) is the only luxury line with a fleet of motor-sail-yachts – hence the name. Resting on a hammock for two with the ship's sails unfurling overhead, there is no mistaking you are at sea. Windstar breeds an air of “Casual Elegance,” giving equal weight to both terms.

Travelers won't want to miss the Wind Surf's (capacity – 312) May 20 departure from Nice, offering a three-day Monaco Grand Prix package with VIP reserved seating in Tribune K for the world's most thrilling and famous Formula One race. Glitz and glamour prevail at this most prestigious event: cocktail receptions, gala dinners, and a private reception at HSH, Prince Rainier III of Monaco's Auto Museum where you can marvel at the prince's personal collection of classic and vintage cars including the Rolls that carried him away with Grace Kelly after their marriage.

The ships' chefs make an effort to create menus with regional flare and frequently shop at ports of call for local fish and produce. In keeping with the line's “180° from Ordinary” motto, Windstar has teamed with Chef Joachim Splichal of Patina and Pinot to create savory signature menus. Because Windstar has a large number of returning alumni, they are continually reinventing itineraries, menus, and excursions to keep their trips fresh. Regardless of any changes made, a constant on this line's intimate fleet of motor-sail-yachts is the impeccable, friendly staff. One passenger was astounded that after only a few hours of embarking on her journey, every staff member courteously addressed her by name.

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### Regent Seven Seas

**Regent's** motto, “luxury goes exploring” says it all. Cuisine by Le Cordon Bleu, Anichini linens, and Carita Spa of Paris with Shiseido products are only a few of the many indulgences offered by Regent Seven Seas. On the larger side of the small lines, Regent Seven Seas brags a fleet of five vessels that travel to the far corners of the globe.

For warm weather consider Regent's Paul Gauguin (capacity – 330 passengers). Designed specifically for sailing French Polynesia and home-ported in Tahiti year-round, the Paul Gauguin's atmosphere reflects the warm, informal ambiance offered by the islands.

Regent has carried over 100,000 guests through breathtaking seascapes of French Polynesia and now adds Fiji with maiden calls in Savusavu, Lautoka, and Yasawa. On the November 18 voyage from Lautoka to



Above: Experience high tea the British way – the only way – aboard one of Cunard's luxurious cruises, where tea is served with all the dainty fixings. Photo: Cunard

Papeete, Jean-Michel Cousteau, son of Jacques Cousteau, will personally join the 14-night sail through the South Pacific and discuss the natural marine wonders and eco-systems of the region.

If you prefer something on the chilly side, consider an Antarctic adventure aboard the Explorer II (capacity – 198 passengers). This ship, specially designed to travel through ice, delivers you to unspoiled terrain in complete luxury. For those inspired by Shackleton and the allure of that which is so difficult to reach, you will be moved by the colossal mountains of ice, the pureness of the wildlife, the sublime sensation of a baby penguin staring up at you, and watching the hump of a whale rise over the glassy water. Learn about the wildlife and history of the region from naturalists, zoologists, and historians onboard.

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### Crystal Cruises

Like Regent, **Crystal Cruises** has a long list of destinations from which to choose. Crystal may be known for its first-rate service, elegant staterooms, and elaborate entertainment, but equally impressive is the plethora of enrichment programs, theme cruises, and adventures. Crystal is all about choice.

Choose from over 1,400 Crystal Adventures such as flying in a Russian MiG or taking a private tour of the Vatican. You can create

your own escapade with *Crystal Private Adventures*. One family wanted to trace their genealogy on a trip to Europe and the Crystal staff was more than happy to oblige. Another family with a child in a wheelchair was able to charter a private helicopter tour so that their son could explore with his family. Ship capacities are Crystal Symphony, 940, and Crystal Serenity, 1,080.

The choices continue with several dining options including menus inspired by Nobu and by Piero Selvaggio of Valentino. While all the dining is complimentary, wine and alcohol are a la carte. Retire to your room and snuggle up in your plush bed, complete with a featherbed and duvet. Don't like the pillow in your room? Order another one from your Pillow Menu, which includes feather, hypoallergenic, and therapeutic sleep-sensitive pillows. On Crystal, the choice is yours.

### Cunard

Don't be frightened off by the Queen Mary 2's large size. If your interest is transatlantic travel, Cunard is the line for you. The Queen Mary 2 (QM2) and the Queen Elizabeth 2 (QE2) are ocean liners, not cruise ships, specifically designed for transatlantic crossings. The lines' long history and rich history span 167 years, and **Cunard** prides itself for its sense of tradition.

One of the only luxury lines to maintain a class system, choose from the Britannia Grill, or the more exclusive Princess or Queens Grills. For total elegance, the Queens Grill offers two-story, apartment-style suites with butler service, two marble baths, a private fitness area and large balconies. Dinner dress is elegant with several formal nights and assigned seating. One thing the Brits do best is high tea, and Cunard is no exception. Enjoy white glove tea service accompanied by fresh scones, pastries, and finger sandwiches in the Queens Ballroom complete with a string quartet.

One tradition lost today is the practice of traveling by sea with your pet. Cunard is the only luxury line to keep that tradition alive with an onboard kennel. Cunard transatlantic crossings have been known to carry circus elephants, a monkey, canaries, horses and even four-legged celebrities like

Rin-Tin-Tin. In the days when celebrities like Elizabeth Taylor and notables like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor traveled with their animal companions, they expected their pets to receive the same stellar service as guests. Today, only dogs and cats are welcome on QM2's transatlantic sailings, where pets are pampered as much as their masters. Cared for by a full-time Kennel Master, pets can sleep on comfy beds, warm up with fleece blankets, dine on premium pet food, and munch on special gourmet cookies baked fresh daily and served at bedtime. Your furry friend also gets to take home a complimentary gift pack!

On a transatlantic crossing, a large ocean liner affords much in the way of entertainment for those long days at sea. Aside from enrichment programs featuring political figures, authors, and members of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Cunard has the largest library at sea with 8,000 volumes, five million dollars in art, and 30,000 varieties of wine. Unwind in the two-story, 20,000 square-foot Canyon Ranch SpaClub on QM2 complete with Thalassotherapy Pool, an extensive Thermal Suite of saunas and steams, and an array of rejuvenating spa treatments.

When planning a cruise, one expects to travel the sea, but the last place expected to visit is space. With the only planetarium at sea, Cunard

affords the luxury of visiting the outer regions of the universe while visiting the outer regions of the globe. Traveling through time and space in the ship's 150-seat Illuminations Theater is both breathtaking and spine-tingling. With shows produced by the American Museum of Natural History's Hayden Planetarium in conjunction with NASA, the wonders of modern astronomy are presented with real science and cutting-edge technology.

In December 2007 Cunard will launch a third queen, Queen Victoria. Get ready – the British are coming!



Above: Gone with the wind – Windstar, that is. Sail away on the ocean's only fleet of luxury line motor-sail yachts. You'll definitely feel "180 degrees from ordinary."