

STOWAWAY

Luxury, Boutique & Expedition Cruises

October 2018 Issue 15



Introducing
Azamara Pursuit

First glimpses of
Crystal's Endeavor

Planning for World cruises

What's NEXT for Oceania

Livorno Port welcomes luxury ships

Need to know

What's in our new look
Stowaway

2 Azamara Pursuit
christened Southampton

3 OceaniaNEXT
refurbishment programme

3 Crystal Endeavor's
inaugural itineraries

4 Livorno Port
welcomes small ships

4 Revolution at Celebrity

5 Silver Spirit cruise review

7 World cruise
programmes announced

7 New Seabourn
expedition video

4 The Luxury Cruise Diary
2019/2020 published

Front cover image - Azamara Pursuit in Oslo

In Pursuit of style

Azamara Club Cruises' new 702 guest Azamara Pursuit, christened in Southampton at the end of August, commences a winter cruise programme that takes in Chile, Peru and Argentina following this coming November's transatlantic crossing, returning to the Mediterranean in Spring 2019 to sail itineraries which take in Spain, France, Italy and Portugal.

The cruise line's focus is on destination immersion – the 2019 Mediterranean programme includes voyages entitled Spain Intensive, Italy Intensive and France Intensive and each cruise features an 'Azamazing' event to take guests closer to the culture and history of the port and its locality.

Fine dining is a feature on Azamara Pursuit, with the Discoveries main restaurant and four other restaurant choices; Windows Café, a substantial buffet with indoor seating and which also leads out to an open rear deck seating area, speciality restaurants Prime C and Aqualina plus Mosaic Café for informal coffee and light bites.

A further informal open dining choice is The Patio which leads onto the main pool deck and serves home made burgers, fried chicken and salads. There are luxury spa, fitness and wellness facilities and three decks of balcony suites and staterooms.



The Aqualina Restaurant (top), and the Ocean club suite (above)

What's NEXT for Oceania

Oceania's four 684 guest Regatta Series ships are to undergo a \$100 million comprehensive refurbishment and upgrade programme, focusing on accommodations, restaurants, lounges and bars and open spaces including the entrance hall and a new Grand Staircase. In parallel, new restaurant menus will be created.

New furniture, furnishings, fabrics and carpets for all suites and staterooms will be coupled with redesigned and refitted bathroom featuring luxury glass walled showers. The aim, Oceania says, is to create a lighter and brighter ambiance throughout using specially commissioned designs for the furnishings and fabrics and incorporating polished woods and stone surfaces.



Crystal Endeavor, due to enter service on August 20th 2020, is the cruise line's first ship designed for expedition cruising although the line emphasises that Crystal Endeavor will adhere to the same ultra luxury standards as their two flagships Crystal Symphony and Crystal Serenity and the more recent Crystal Esprit. The 200 passenger newbuild will feature six restaurants including Nobu Matsushisa's Umi Uma, private butler service to all suites and spacious public rooms. There will also be expedition research and planning rooms, and heated storage for drying parkas after shoreside expeditions.

Preliminary detail of inaugural cruises includes a 17 day Russian and Far East Expedition, with the emphasis on unexplored Russian seas and coastlines, departing 10 August 2020, followed by a second 17 day cruise entitled Japan's Cultural and Coastal Discovery. Full itinerary details from your preferred agent.



Crystal Endeavour suite (top), and De Luxe room (above)

Livorno Port welcomes luxury and boutique smaller ships

Italy's Livorno Port has created dedicated small ship berths adjacent to the Old Fortress and allowing an easy stroll downtown. Livorno is an ideal stopping point for shoreside visits to Florence, Pisa and Lucca although a stimulating alternative is to spend time exploring the shops, the canals through the town, and to visit the sprawling daily market full of locals buying everything from olives, cheeses, local fruit, vegetables and fish landed hours before, to clothes, household goods and kids stuff, then enjoying lunch in a simple restaurant nearby.

Livorno will see calls in 2019 from upscale lines including Seabourn, Silversea, Oceania, Hapag-Lloyd, Sea Cloud, Voyages to Antiquity and Regent Seven Seas, with some overnights,



Livorno Market

offering opportunities for relaxed evenings ashore.

Revolution at Celebrity

Revolution, but in a good way, is underway at Celebrity Cruises, inspired by their new ship Celebrity Edge which features a host of unique new design features and facilities - see Edge feature in Stowaway issue 14 posted on our sister website cruiselates.com.

Celebrity says that Edge features and facilities will be introduced to the entire fleet, including redesigned and furnished accommodations – ‘we aim to rival the world’s best boutique hotels’ they say – and restaurants including all main dining facilities plus the Qsine family restaurant and Oceanview Café, which will introduce a casual marketplace ambiance. The Retreat, an exclusive sanctuary for Suite level guests, featured on Celebrity Edge, will also be fitted to the fleet.



Celebrity Edge pool bar

It doesn't stop there. New bars and lounges including The Gastrobar offering cocktails and craft beers, other public room and even the library will be reinvented. With a budget of \$500 million, expect astonishing things.

New Seabourn video

Most cruise videos are overloaded with superlatives, smiling passengers and not much about the ship or destination but Seabourn's new Ventures by Seabourn video has been photographed by professionals – well worth a look and note the captain's comments on the challenges of Arctic cruising.



SHIP PROFILE

Getting into the Spirit

It's a frightful name for a rather fascinating process writes Maria Harding, but Silversea Cruises' `Musification' of its 36,000-ton, 540-passenger Silver Spirit – which transformed it into a sister to the line's game-changing Silver Muse – has proved a dazzling success since its May 2018 completion.

You might say Silversea would expect no less, having spent more than US\$70 million at Sicily's Fincantieri shipyard, where Silver Spirit had a three-month revamp after the complex `stretching' operation inserted a new 49 foot mid-section, adding 3,519 tons and space for 34 new suites - 26 Veranda, six Silver and two Panorama – which raised passenger capacity to 608.

The operation expanded Spirit's restaurant options from six to (a Muse-matching) eight, and included the retrofitting of Silver Muse signatures like the Arts Café and Zagara Spa.

The ship also gained an elegant `Dolce Vita' piano lounge, and 20 per cent more open-deck seating.

The spectacular process goggled the eyes of thousands on YouTube, but the proof of the pudding is, as they say, in the eating, and however fancy the hardware, it's impossible really to experience the spirit of a ship until you see it in action, catering to regular passengers. And so, indefatigable as ever in the name of research, I climbed aboard the freshly `Musified' ship for a midsummer sailing round the Gulf of Finland.

First impressions were very positive. Silversea has boosted crew numbers to keep pace with Silver Spirit's 10% increase in passenger numbers and 15% growth in restaurant capacity - and it shows. The extra staff, together with the return of Silversea veteran Christian Sauleau (who rejoined the line last year as Executive Vice President, Fleet Operations) have restored service to the impressive level of Silversea's early days – and it's palpable from the moment of embarkation.

As we drew up at the Copenhagen quayside, our bags were whisked from the taxi and taken directly to our suite, while we and our fellow guests were escorted on board, offered Champagne in the ship's elegant reception area, and immediately checked-in.

Sauleau has said getting both the new look and service levels right is crucial, if the Silver Spirit is to pass muster with high-spending, uber-demanding consumers in ultra-luxury cruise sector, who - according to the line's research - expect consistency across the entire fleet, particularly in standards of service.



SHIP PROFILE 2

Getting the food right has been another priority. Silver Spirit now has eight dining venues, having gained two new restaurants - Indochine – which serves excellent Asian fusion dishes like spiced coconut soup, banana leaf-wrapped red snapper and lime crème brûlée - and Atlantide, on Deck

Other dining areas have been expanded and / or revamped, and some given new names. The walnut-lined cabaret-and-supper club, renamed Silver Note, oozes glamour, while an on-deck speciality pizzeria is called Spaccanapoli, after a famous pizzeria-lined street in Naples.

La Terrazza – which offers indoor/outdoor buffets by day and fine Italian food at night – has been expanded and looks very elegant, with sophisticated grey décor and fine marble trims, while The Grill poolside restaurant - which specialises in ‘hot rocks’ dining ever evening, has also been developed (though it would be more stylish, in my view, with tablecloths).

The new Arts Café, though, is a triumph. A firm favourite with Silver Muse passengers, it’s every bit as popular on Silver Spirit; with stylish designer chairs, browsable art books and striking flower displays, it’s a perfect venue for casual breakfasts, spectacular afternoon teas and post-prandial coffees with digestifs (and handmade chocolates on the side).

Best of all, its broad terrace overlooks the stern which, on my sailing, made it a prime platform for viewing the glass-smooth seas and quirky islands of the glorious Swedish Archipelago.

For me though, Atlantide (which – along with Indochine – was created from one wing of the ship’s former main dining room) was Spirit’s most enjoyable restaurant, on account of its pretty bar, abundance of tables for two, friendly but very efficient serving staff and consistently top class menus, which included treats like rare speciality cheeses and grain or grass-fed steaks whose provenance was carefully outlined.

It scored highly even compared to the ship’s extra-charge speciality restaurants Seishin and La Dame, and so consistent was its quality, I’d rate it one of the best ‘main restaurants’ at sea. Add to that Silver Spirit’s elegantly refurbished suites, faster wi-fi and high-tech in-suite entertainment offering new-release movies and music for all tastes, and it’s certainly no stretch to say that Silversea’s top-selling agents – and their high-spending clients – will not be disappointed.



World Cruises – take your pick of the best

'Tis the season for announcing World Cruises and they sell out quickly although sailing dates are usually well over a year, perhaps two years, away. Here's an overview of some of the upcoming ones – note that it's usually possible to take one or more sectors if your diary doesn't allow you all the time away or if there are only particular areas of the globe you want to visit. Clearly it's not possible to list all the ports of call they offer – contact your preferred agent for further details or visit the website of interest.

Oceania's country club style 684 guest Insignia, which will have received the OceaniaNEXT upgrades mentioned in this issue, sails from Miami on January 8th 2020 on a 180 day voyage, transiting the Panama Canal to travel the South American eastern seaboard and round to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, before crossing to Cape Town, Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo and ending in San Francisco. From there it's possible to add a Panama Canal transit to New York too.

Crystal Cruises' Crystal Serenity departs Miami on 5th January 2021 on a 139 day cruise, taking in the Caribbean, Hawaiian Isles, south Pacific and Australia, then onward to Indonesia, South East Asia and the Far East, Myanmar and India, before sailing to the UAE and transiting the Suez Canal for ports in the Mediterranean, finishing in London Tilbury.



Regent Seven Seas "700 guest Seven Seas Mariner by coincidence also leaves Miami on 5th January 2021, for a 118 day voyage via the Caribbean and transiting the Panama Canal to spend extended time in calls along the eastern coast of South America and several days cruising the Pacific and South Pacific, extended time too in Australia, and on to Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, India the UAE, and to a programme of Med ports of call via the Suez Canal, disembarking in Barcelona.

Cruise & Maritime's classically English style 1,400 passenger Columbus sails a 121 day cruise from London Tilbury on January 6th 2020, taking in The Azores, crossing to The Caribbean and transiting the Panama Canal, then on to New Zealand and Australia, Japan, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India. Columbus then through the Suez Canal with Med calls before returning to Tilbury.

The Luxury Cruise Diary 2019/2020

Just published, written by leading cruise journalist Jane Archer and focusing on luxury and boutique small ships, their accommodations, dining, spas and wellbeing, plus many pages of information on lesser visited and unspoilt destinations.

You can download the entire Diary from Stowaway's late cruise getaways website www.cruiselates.com Home page where you can also access The Expedition Cruise Diary, published earlier this year.

We hope you enjoyed this issue of Stowaway - look out for the next issue with an emphasis on fine dining, a topic never far from most cruise lovers' minds.

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