

In this special issue you'll find a detailed report on Expedition cruising, with several of the small luxury and boutique cruise lines investing in ships purpose built and fitted out to explore the world's natural and environmental wonders.

The report has been prepared by Jane Archer, one of the UK's most experienced cruise journalists, whose work appears regularly in the travel pages of the Daily and Weekend Telegraph, as well as in numerous other travel and leisure magazines and travel trade journals.

Don't forget to check our late getaways website www.cruiselates.com for last minute opportunities to cruise on some of the world's finest small luxury and boutique cruise ships.

Welcome to the wonderful world of expedition cruising

The Galapagos, Antarctica, the Arctic, volcanic Kamchatka in Russia. All names guaranteed to excite any thrill seeker, but did you know they can all also be visited on a cruise ship? Not your normal fun-in-the-sun ships but expedition vessels built to cruise in polar waters and other out-of-the-way places where just getting ashore is all part of the adventure.

What is expedition cruising?

In a nutshell, it's adventure holidays at sea. It might be a voyage to the wilds of Antarctica or through the Northwest Passage, the Arctic sea route that connects the Northern Atlantic to the Pacific and was discovered by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen in 1903-1906.

Staying with the chills, there are Arctic cruises in Greenland or, ice conditions permitting, that circumnavigate Spitsbergen, the largest island in the Svalbard archipelago. Now and then there are voyages through the icy Northeast Passage across the top of Russia, linking the Bering Strait in Asia to the White Sea at Murmansk.

If warmer climes appeal, there are island-hopping voyages around the Galapagos, cruises in the Kimberley across the top of Australia where the threat of 'salties' (saltwater crocodiles) add to the sense of adventure. Adventurers can also explore the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

Among the newest places to make it onto the cruise map are Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula,

home to around 29 active volcanoes (and more than 100 others that are dormant), and the Mergui Peninsula in Myanmar.

There's plenty to excite clients who prefer river cruising as well, with voyages on the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin Rivers in Myanmar, the Brahmaputra and Ganges in India, the Upper Mekong between Laos and China and the little-known Red River in Vietnam.



Seabourn Quest, was retro-fitted with an ice-class hull and now sails in Antarctica

What can you see and do?

The most amazing things! You can walk through penguin colonies in Antarctica, spot polar bears in Spitsbergen and the Northwest Passage, and sail up close to giant icebergs in Greenland.

In the Galapagos, you can get close to giant turtles, marine iguanas, booby birds, sea lions and other wildlife that has no fear of humans. In

the Kimberley, there are excursions in inflatable Zodiacs in search of 'salties' and helicopter rides to gushing waterfalls.

On cruises to Kamchatka and around the Russian Far East, there are helicopter rides over volcanoes, trips to hot springs and zodiac expeditions in search of birds and brown bears.

On expedition river cruises, big cities, pagodas, temples, markets and local workshops are among an abundance of amazing attractions. On the Brahmaputra in India, exciting elephant, boat and jeep safaris take you in search of Bengal tigers.

Which cruise lines offer expedition cruises?

There are a lot to choose from, and the numbers are growing as more people discover the excitement of sailing to lesser-known lands.

Norwegian company Hurtigruten has one expedition ship, Fram, which spends its winters in Antarctica and summers in the Arctic, sailing in Spitsbergen and Greenland. However, the first of two new hybrid expedition ships will join Hurtigruten's fleet in Antarctica in 2018. It will run mainly on marine gas oil but for up to 30 minutes at a time can switch to electric power, which is not only silent but will reduce CO2 emissions by 20%.

Silversea is best known for its luxury ships but it also has three expedition ships – Silver Explorer, Silver Discoverer and Silver Galapagos. They



Silversea's Silver Cloud available from November

will be joined this year by Silver Cloud, one of the company's classic fleet, which is being retro-fitted as an expedition ship and starts sailing in Antarctica in November 2017.

Seabourn's Seabourn Quest, built as a classic cruise ship, was retro-fitted with an ice-class hull a few years ago and now sails in Antarctica in winter (the austral summer).



A cabin layout for the new Hapag-Lloyd expedition ships

Other names to look for are Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, which has two expedition ships, Bremen and Hanseatic, and an order for two new vessels to be delivered in April and October 2019, and G Adventures, which has one ship, Expedition, cruising in Antarctica and the Arctic.

Consider also One Ocean Expeditions, a Canadian company that offers voyages in the polar regions on ice-strengthened oceanographic vessels.

Crystal Cruises is building a ice-class expedition ship, Crystal Endeavor, for launch in 2019. Until it arrives, the company is devising more adventurous itineraries for its two luxury ships, Crystal Serenity and Crystal Symphony, including voyages through the Northwest Passage and to the Kamchatka Peninsula.

Australian river cruise line Scenic is launching a new ice-class yacht in August 2018. The company's first ocean-going ship, Scenic Eclipse will accommodate 228 passengers (but only 200 when sailing in the polar regions).

On the rivers, look out for G Adventures and APT/Travelmarvel, which have cruises on the Ganges, Pandaw, which sails the Chindwin, Upper Mekong and Red River, and Saga, which travels the Brahmaputra in India.

Is the experience on board very different?

Even the packing list is different to traditional cruising as you don't need formal gear on an expedition ship. If you are going to the polar regions you will need plenty of warm clothing (hats, gloves, scarves, socks), as well as waterproof trousers and wellington boots for wet landings. Most cruise ships carry boots for hire; some charge.

Unlike traditional cruising, where itineraries and timings are often set two years or more in advance and followed to the letter, on an expedition sailing the actual route taken will depend on local conditions – ice or strong winds in Antarctica, for instance, or prowling polar bears in Spitsbergen.

It means you need to be flexible. You also need to be aware that the only way ashore in many places is in a Zodiac, stepping onto rocks or into the water. On expedition river cruises, the vessels often just pull into the river bank and you walk across a plank to get ashore.

Entertainment on expedition ships is also very different. Rather than singers and dancers, ships have an expedition team to lecture about the places being visited during sailing time and lead trips ashore.

Who does expedition cruising appeal to?

Whether 30 or 80, this is the perfect holiday for anyone seeking excitement and adventure. You might have cruised before, ticking off traditional cruise destinations such as the Mediterranean, Norwegian fjords or Caribbean and be ready for a new challenge.

But these voyages would equally appeal to your non-cruising pals as long as they have an adventurous spirit and are not seeking sun, sand



Crystal Endeavor is due for launch in 2019

and sea in a resort hotel – especially when they realise this is not a traditional cruise and that travelling by ship is the best (and sometimes only) way to see some of the most remote bucket-list destinations in the world.

Be aware that you need a good degree of mobility to get in and out of the Zodiacs and to walk on ice, rocks and uneven paths.

So is it expensive?

These cruises are in remote places where it is expensive to operate and provision ships, which pushes the cost quite a bit. But expedition cruising is addictive and we bet that, expensive or not, once you have done one, you'll be back for another!

Next Stowaway

More luxury and boutique news plus we're also putting finishing touches to the feature on cruise sail ships we promised, together with a look at French rivers offering the twin attractions of scenery and gastronomy, on board some fine river craft.

Don't forget to tell likeminded friends about Stowaway – they can sign up for future issues by emailing me at keith@cruiseworthy.co.uk

Happy sailing

Keith Ellis

Editor

Stowaway

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