

FLOATING LUXURY



IWEIN MAASSEN

FLOATING

THE MOST LUXURIOUS CRUISE SHIPS

LUXURY

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FOREWORD

Cruising has become increasingly popular as more and more people are choosing to spend their holidays at sea. This is not without reason. The price/quality ratio is always favourable, and cruising is a unique experience, allowing those who live on the mainland to discover new horizons.

Leaving a place in the evening to then wake up the next morning at a new destination is really fascinating. Cruising is a voyage of discovery with the huge advantage that the hotel travels with you. You only have to unpack your suitcase once while you visit several places. During the day, you can explore a city or simply laze around on board, then sail again in the evening and enjoy the ship. And the next day, you pick a new destination — one could think of more boring ways to spend a vacation.

It is a misconception that cruising is for older people. The average age of first-time cruisers is under 40 because nowadays most ships are geared towards catering for children. Today, with such a wide range of cruises offered, it can be difficult to choose the right one.

This cruising book is intended to help you make the best choice. It provides helpful information about the top cruise ships currently available — ‘La crème de la crème’ of today’s cruise industry. These are vessels that excel in the areas of service, food quality, décor, luxury, onboard entertainment, and more.

The ships are classified according to size, because size does matter. A week on a sailing yacht with 60 guests is a very different experience to a holiday on a ship with 3,000 passengers. The latter naturally has a wider range of leisure activities. All cruise ships aim to offer guests an enjoyable holiday, but it is important you choose a vessel that best suits your own personal needs.

This book will give you insight into a wide range of ships, but it is not exhaustive. It is intended to inspire, to be an eye-opener. Those of you who have not yet been on a cruise don’t know what you are missing.

Happy sailing!

Iwein Maassen





Xs

BOUTIQUE SHIPS



LUXURY CABINS



XS

Of all the cruise ships, the boutique ships (with a maximum capacity of 250 guests) are the most intimate. This, of course, is due to their relatively small size. A boutique ship gives the impression of travelling on a private yacht rather than on a cruise ship. The staff not only knows your name; as soon as you appear at the bar, the barman will pour your favourite drink.

As these vessels have a shallow draft, they can travel to places that larger cruise ships cannot get to. Small, intimate harbours, remote bays and coves – it is destinations like these that often make a cruise memorable. Boutique ships have better moorings in large cities. In St. Petersburg, for example, it is easy to sail up the River Neva and moor at the quay close to the Hermitage while larger ships, because of their deep draft, have to dock about an hour away.

However, a very small cruise ship has its disadvantages. The captain of a European boutique ship once told me the story of a cruise that did not go so smoothly. An American company had rented half the cabins to thank its staff for a successful business year. The mood among the company's staff was boisterous and jolly, as is normal during staff outings.

This annoyed the other guests. The inappropriate behaviour of the Americans was seen as offensive. They appeared in T-shirts and shorts for the Captain's Cocktail, a festive champagne party around the swimming pool, with most of them drinking bottles of beer. The other guests (and the crew) had taken the trouble to dress formally...

Tall boutique vessels are the finest of all cruise ships. These are elegant sailing ships, such as the imposing five-master, the Royal Clipper, the largest sailing ship in the world. A cruise on a sailing ship is a different experience from a cruise on a normal ship. There is an atmosphere of togetherness on board and travellers who book this kind of cruise are generally athletic types, often people who own or have owned a sailboat or who are interested in the art of sailing. Passengers have the option to help on board, but it is not mandatory. On some ships, passengers can even take the helm (under supervision, of course) – an experience that men, in particular, do not want to miss. The captain usually gives a detailed explanation of the manoeuvres he makes with his ship, normally in a relaxed manner on the outside deck in the morning sun.

On a sailing ship, you become much more aware of the elements because you rely on the wind in order to sail. However, if the elements are not favourable, the ship can always run on her engine. On a tall ship you are closer to the sea, literally. Anyone who has ever stretched out in the net under the bowsprit while dolphins swim around and jump out of the water will have to agree that this is an unforgettable experience.

And then there is the silence when you are sailing. No droning of an engine, just the sound of the wind and of the bow cutting through the sea.



SEA CLOUD

PASSENGER/SPACE RATIO CREW/PASSENGER RATIO

XS 39.5 1.1

Built as a private yacht at the beginning of the last century, the Sea Cloud is now in service as a luxury cruise ship. This 109-metre-long yacht is still largely in its original state, though it has been adapted to modern-day requirements. The history of this lady of the sea reads like an exciting book.

Built in Germany in 1931 as the largest private yacht at that time, the four-masted barque was purchased by E.F. Hutton, a successful American businessman on Wall Street. The ship, with her black hull, was christened 'Hussar' and Hutton's wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post, concentrated on the interior. This fabulously wealthy heiress of a large American food production group spent more than two years working on this task full-time. She set about the work with zeal; she had the cabins reconstructed in their actual size at a warehouse in Brooklyn to enable her to complete the interior step by step before everything was shipped to the vessel. The antique furniture, paintings and other treasures were selected with the greatest care for the seven cabins. These rooms maintain many of the original details to this day. On account of its commercial function, the ship was extended to include a superstructure and now has a total of 32 cabins. In addition to the 60-man crew, she can also accommodate 64 passengers.

The couple sailed the Hussar frequently, both for business and for pleasure. But unfortunately, the marriage hit the rocks in Augustus 1935. Knowing just how much she was attached to the yacht, Ed Hutton gave it to his former wife the day after their divorce. Marjorie accepted



it gladly and, in order to herald a new era, she renamed the vessel 'Sea Cloud'.

Four months after her divorce, she married her childhood friend, Joseph Davies. He was a lawyer and a diplomat, and when he was appointed Ambassador to the American Embassy in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) at the beginning of 1937, he took his wife and the yacht with him.

The Sea Cloud served as a kind of floating palace where important guests were received. The threat of war meant that the vessel had to make a detour to return to the United States. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, America was at war and, as a result, the American navy requisitioned various yachts in order to deploy them as warships. However, President Roosevelt, who was a good friend of Davies and knew the Sea Cloud well, refused to call up the sailing yacht for military service because he considered her to be too nice for that purpose.

Nevertheless, in 1942 the time finally came. The ship was painted grey, stripped of her masts, equipped with guns and leased by the United States for the symbolic amount of one dollar per year. Under the code name IX-99, she served as a weather station in the Azores and near Greenland. But luck was on the side of the ship because she was one of the few private yachts to come through the war. Not intact though, as the luxury interior had suffered greatly during the presence of the military. A military decoration can still be seen on the bridge comprising five chevrons, one for each half-year that the Sea Cloud served in the American navy.

In 1949, the yacht, now painted white, served again as a reception facility for the Davies couple. Then, when Joe and Marjorie's marriage suffered a crisis in the early fifties, Marjorie decided to sell the vessel. Maintaining the ship (there were 72 crew members alone) had become too much for her.

In 1955, she sold the Sea Cloud to the Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Montinas. The ship was renamed 'Angelieta' and was mainly used for private purposes. When Trujillo's son, Ramfis, went to study in San Francisco, he took the yacht with him to serve as accommodation. In those days, the yacht featured in the tabloid

news almost weekly on account of the infamous parties thrown by the young student. Stars like Zsa Zsa Gabor and Kim Novak were regular guests at these events.

Trujillo was murdered in 1965 and a revolution broke out in the Dominican Republic. The new rulers were not interested in the yacht. To remove the blemish of the dictator, they renamed her 'Patria' and put her up for sale. It took five years before the American John Blue, owner of Operation Sea Cruises, bought the vessel. The 'Patria' was rechristened 'Antarna' and underwent total restoration in Naples. There were problems with the American tax authorities and the yacht was detained in Miami on her return in 1968. And there she remained for eighteen months until Charles and Stephanie Gallagher set eyes on her.

Stephanie wanted to start an 'Oceanic School' where students could, in addition to their normal studies, gain experience of other cultures, languages and scientific research. The students would also form the crew. Stephanie entered into an agreement with John Blue to lease the 'Antarna'. However, ambiguities in the contract led Blue to refuse to let the yacht leave port. Stephanie ignored this order, nevertheless, and she, together with 90 students hijacked the 'Antarna' As a joke, they even hoisted the Jolly Roger to the top of the mast! John Blue was not amused and had the vessel detained – yet again – in Panama, where it remained neglected for eight years. without anyone looking after it.

The sailing yacht, then in very poor condition, was eventually spotted by a German captain, Hartmut Paschburg who convinced a few German businessmen to buy the yacht. Emergency repairs were made to enable the vessel (which has since regained her old name) to cross the ocean. In October 1978 the Sea Cloud moved to Hamburg where it was restored to her former glory and adapted to the requirements of the time.

The Sea Cloud embarked on her first commercial cruise at the end of 1979 and since then, the elegant lady of the sea has once again been admired on the world's oceans. The ship now has room for just 64 guests and 60 crew members.











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