

FOR THE LOVE OF WATER

From mystical springs and crystalline rivers to the unfathomable depths of the ocean, the realm of water has captured the imagination of writers, artists and explorers for generations. Witness its beauty for yourself with 25 of the best water experiences above and below the waves from around the world.



© Jari Bodin/Mývatn Nature Baths

1 CELESTIAL HOT SPRINGS

Dubbed the crown jewel of North Iceland, Mývatn has a dramatic landscape of lava formations, geysers, fumaroles and geothermal pools set against exceptionally dark skies. In fact, Lake Mývatn is one of the best places in Iceland to view the Northern Lights – and Mývatn Nature Baths is the best place

to do it. Open late into the night and boasting a swim-up bar, natural hot springs and views over Lake Mývatn (even from inside the geothermal sauna!), Mývatn Nature Baths draw water from depths of up to 2,500 metres, and the 40°C heat is guaranteed to keep you toasty for the duration of the celestial light show.

myvatnnaturebaths.is

An underwater photograph showing a diver in the upper middle and a large sea turtle in the lower foreground. Sunlight rays penetrate the water from the top left. The diver is wearing a dark wetsuit and blue fins, swimming horizontally. The sea turtle is swimming towards the right, its head and front flippers visible. The water is a deep blue with some ripples on the surface.

2

MOONLIGHT HATCHLINGS

There's nothing as awe-inspiring as witnessing the cycle of life. Guests of Aman's Amanpulo resort can watch in wonder as turtle hatchlings emerge from their eggs and make their way towards the moonlit tides of Pamalican, a pristine private island in the Philippines. From March to October each year, the island becomes an important nesting site for laying green and hawksbill turtles. aman.com



© True North

3 DIVE INTO WEST PAPUA

Embark on an upscale diving expedition to Raja Ampat in the pristine paradise of West Papua. Guests can explore vibrant coral gardens, swim alongside graceful manta rays, and get up close and personal with rare marine species without the usual crowds in this remote pocket of Indonesia. Cruising aboard the *True North* elevates the experience with plush accommodations, gourmet dining and bespoke service. In between dives, you can relax in elegant surroundings or enjoy guided excursions to far-flung islands. truenorth.com.au



© Richard James Taylor/Les Bateaux Belmond

4 BON VIVANT

Float into French excellence. Idyllic hillsides brimming with haute gastronomy and heritage form the backdrop of Les Bateaux Belmond, Belmond's boutique collection of privately chartered river boats. Drift along tranquil canals before mooring for divine hand-tailored excursions in the delightful Burgundy, Rhône and Provence. From truffle-hunting and vintage tastings to hot air ballooning above vineyard-bordered châteaux, each shore experience is designed to indulge and inspire. Your sumptuous suite will welcome you back in style, with some boats boasting copper bathtubs, embroidered fabrics and on-deck alfresco pools. belmond.com

5 AFRICAN QUEEN

Adventure abounds aboard Rwanda's first floating luxury hotel, the *Mantis Kivu Queen uBuranga*. This all-inclusive houseboat offers a two or three-night sailing on the emerald waters of Lake Kivu. With 10 well-appointed cabins and suites, a pool, dining salon, gourmet restaurant and a viewing deck featuring a hot tub, guests can take in the mountainous landscapes and wildlife without foregoing any creature comforts. Sailing along the Kivu belt, with stops for nature walks and visits to local communities, this expedition is one you will carry with you for a lifetime. mantiscollection.com

6 SUN, SAND AND SHIPWRECKS

Dive into the depths of Egypt's Red Sea and explore the final resting place of the British munitions ship *SS Thistlegorm*, sunk by a German bomber in 1941. The Dive Centre at Four Seasons Resort Sharm El Sheikh now hosts day trips to the dive site. Board a high-speed powerboat to the Strait of Gubal and during two exploratory dives, descend 30 metres below the surface to discover the *Thistlegorm's* holds and sister ship, the *Rosalie Moller*, as well as the wrecks of Abu Nuhas. fourseasons.com

7 SOUND OF SILENCE

Cradled in the peaks of Fiordland National Park lies a mirror-like inlet of stillness. With nothing but the lapping of water against oars to break the quiet, kayaking New Zealand's Doubtful Sound offers a tranquil natural encounter. Home to Fiordland crested penguins, southern fur seals and bottlenose dolphins, this wilderness of glacial valleys, waterfalls and snow-dusted peaks is awe-inspiring. Join Doubtful Sound Kayak for a day tour from Te Anau on the South Island, crossing Lake Manapōuri by boat, and over Wilmot Pass to Deep Cove by car. doubtfulsoundkayak.com

8 SKY HIGH SURFING

Chase the remote and coveted swells of Costa Rica's Pacific Coast with the aid of a private helicopter. Pelorus Travel's multi-day heli-surf adventure begins in the famous surf break of Roca Bruja, backdropped by volcanic rock and verdant national park. Expect captivating azure vistas as you soar down to the charming surf town of Playa Tamarindo, spotting spinner dolphins and breaching whales. On the Nicoya Peninsula, rhythmic barrels, mangroves and snorkelling opportunities await, while Santa Teresa plates up small town charm. pelorustravel.com

© Icebergs Dining Room and Bar



9 ICEBERGS ON THE HARBOUR

Icebergs Dining Room and Bar has teamed up with Australia's newest luxury charter super yacht, *Sirenuse*, and the Yacht Society to create an exceptional dining experience. This innovative partnership marks the first exclusive fine dining experience onboard the opulent *Sirenuse*, setting sail just in time for the summer season. Guests can look forward to enjoying the quintessential Icebergs menu, all designed to be savoured while cruising the stunning waters of Sydney Harbour, creating an unforgettable culinary journey. The new experience is designed for groups and events, and is available upon request. idrb.com



10 SUNKEN TREASURE

With views over the Arabian Gulf, award-winning restaurants and world-class spa facilities, Atlantis, The Palm is one of Dubai's most renowned hotels – and it has some very unique accommodations. The Underwater Suite offers guests views of more than 65,000 marine species from the comfort of their private abode via full-length windows that peer directly into The Lost Chamber Aquarium's Ambassador Lagoon. Complete with a private elevator, 24-hour butler service and in-room check-in, everything is catered for so you can relax while sharks, rays and fish glide right past your bed. For those who dream of finding their Zen, the aquarium hosts yoga classes suitable for all levels. atlantis.com

11 Marine magic

In the heart of the Great Barrier Reef lies a magical underwater wonderland, and there's no better way to explore it than by luxury yacht.

Encircled by turquoise, crystal-clear waters and coral-blessed reefs in a picture-perfect pocket of the Whitsundays, you awake to the gentle sound of waves lapping at the hull. While sipping your morning coffee, a curious pod of whales alters its course to swim right up to your yacht and put on a spectacular show of spouting, breaching and tail lobbing. Next, you jump off the back of the vessel's swimming deck to enter an enchanting underwater world, where so many rainbow-hued fish and vibrant coral gardens await that you feel like you're swimming in an aquarium. From there, your day only gets better...

Exclusive access

Whitsunday Luxury Sailing Holidays offers guests the chance to experience one of the world's most spectacular destinations in the utmost style aboard the yacht *Sydney Sundancer*, which has been likened to a floating five-star hotel. Add to that expert hosting by a couple who have perfected their offering over 30 years, and you've got the ultimate sailing adventure.

Being one of the first yacht charter operators in the area, and recognised by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as a High Standard Tourism Operator, husband-and-wife team Lynne and John Boyce have an intimate knowledge of all the best places to snorkel, swim and dive. With most of their cruises taking an epic seven days and six nights, guests will enjoy rarely visited areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, including the remote outer reef where access is limited to a handful of specialised charter operators. On every snorkelling expedition, Master Reef Guide Lynne is in the water with guests to ensure they discover the finest corals and marine life that these world-famous waters have to offer. Lynne and John operate out of Hamilton Island Marina where the airport is less than a five-minute drive away.

Epicurean pleasures

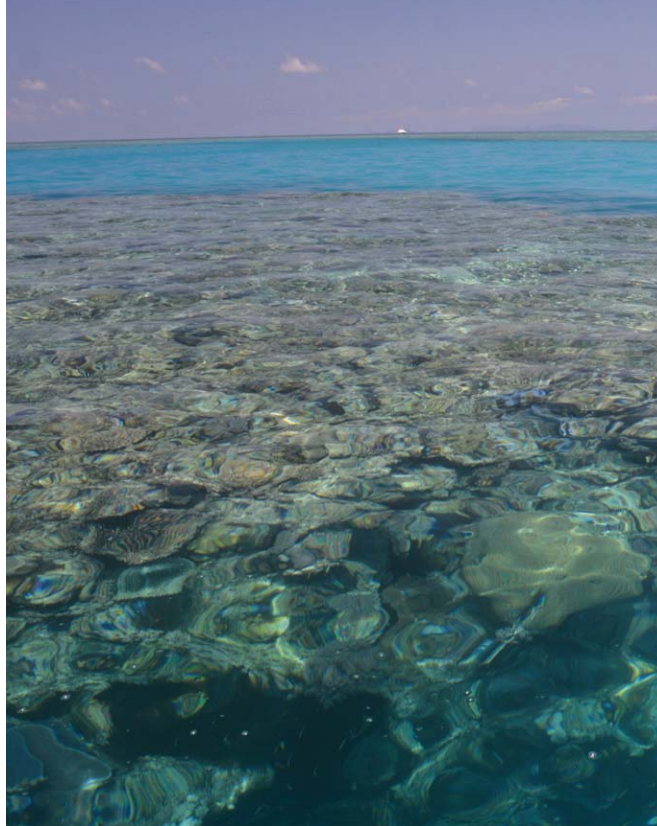
After aquatic adventures, return to your floating hotel to savour gourmet food and award-winning wines (Lynne's culinary skills are so renowned that she's released her own cookbook). Think grilled Atlantic salmon on a bed of warm vegetables, tomato salsa and basil pesto; Asian-inspired glazed duck breast; barbecue king prawns

peri peri; and sticky date and fig pudding with hot fudge sauce. If you feel like commandeering the yacht after lunch, skipper John offers a 'hands-on' experience where you can take the wheel to experience 'big boat' sailing for yourself. Or discover more of the neon-blue waterways with a bevy of onboard 'toys' such as kayaks, snorkelling gear and fishing tackle. There's even a hydrophone (underwater microphone) to listen to the haunting songs of whales as they communicate with each other in the sea's depths, and a stable glass-bottomed dive tender that remains within easy reach of snorkelling guests.

Enchanted evenings

Each night, you'll anchor in a different bay so calm that your long stemmed wine glasses remain safe on the dining table, while you indulge in another sublime meal and swap stories of the day's adventures. A unique aspect of every charter is that one evening Lynne and John will share their immense knowledge in a private presentation entitled 'Is the Great Barrier Reef really dying?' (A lecture they have conducted both locally and abroad.)

Bed down in the Master Stateroom, which runs the full width of the ship, an inviting retreat with a queen-sized bed, separate settee, several portholes, an ensuite and TV/DVD. Or, opt for the Forward Stateroom at the bow; although smaller, it also runs the width of the ship and comes with three portholes and an ensuite bathroom. For a private charter, up to eight guests can be





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accommodated by utilising remaining accommodation.

Charter *Sydney Sundancer* for your own family and friends or book an individual cabin to join two other like-minded travellers on the adventure. Children are welcome on private charters, only. *Sydney Sundancer* is also available for day charters for up to 29 guests for those staying on Hamilton Island who wish to enjoy a private charter with family, friends or for corporate events.

As evening seeps into night, let the gentle lull of the waves rock you to sleep – for more marine magic the next day. www.whitsundayluxursailing.com.au

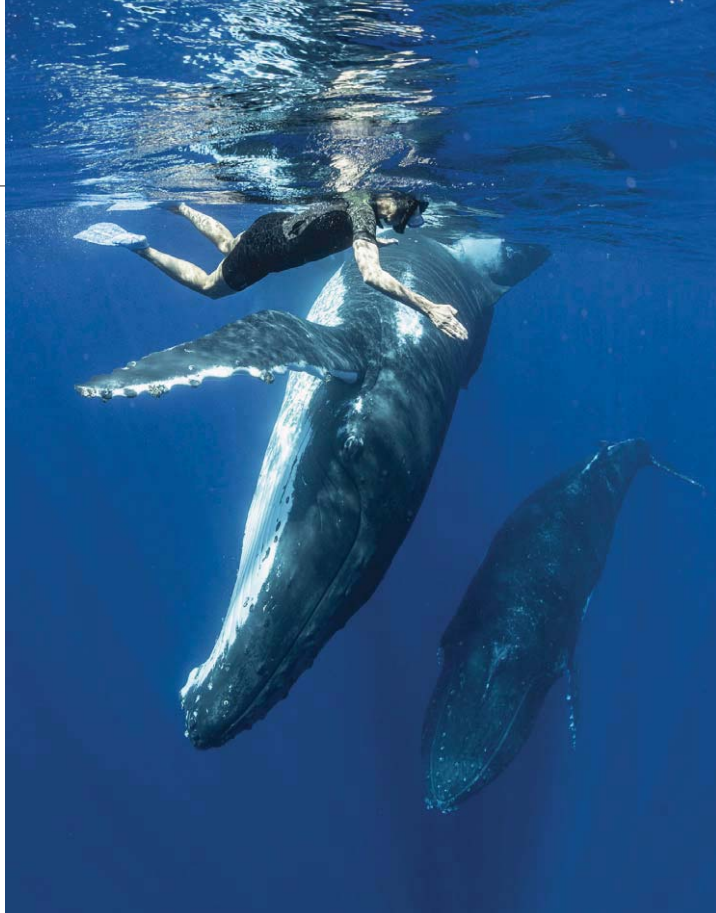
12 WHALE OF A TIME

Tonga is one of the best places in the world to see – and swim with – humpback whales and on a tour with Raw Edge Photography you'll go home with insanely good images of yourself and your mammalian friends. This exceptional experience includes seven nights at Tongan Beach Resort, which has just 12 guest rooms and is located on the beachfront, and four days of swimming with humpback whales in the warm, clear Tongan waters.

rawedgephotography.com.au

13 LIFE AQUATIC

Known as the 'Aquarium of the World' you'll experience a menagerie of marine life while voyaging on the Sea of Cortez. Celebrated for its rich biodiversity, this secluded Mexican paradise offers endless encounters in one of the country's most precious marine havens. Charter your own yacht and dive into the pristine waters, swim with playful sea lions and be wowed by blue-footed boobies along the coastline. Between swims, indulge in gourmet meals prepared by your onboard chef and enjoy the unfolding scenery while reclining on the deck. *puertacortes.com*



© Raw Edge Photography



© Jon from Iceland/Sky Lagoon

14 SEVEN STEPS TO HEAVEN

The Skjól Ritual at Sky Lagoon in Reykjavik offers a rejuvenating wellness experience set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Icelandic ocean. This luxe seven-step journey begins with a dip in the mineral-rich geothermal pools of the lagoon, before a cold plunge to invigorate the senses. The cleansing benefits of a hot sauna come next, followed by a revitalising cold mist shower, energising body scrub and warm steam blast. The ritual concludes with a soothing mist shower and time out for reflection and relaxation, with the whole experience leaving you refreshed and restored for days to come. *skylagoon.com*

15 FJORDS AND FLY FISHING

The Kangia fjord and Erfalik River are the hidden gems of Greenland's West Coast. Known for their exceptionally large runs of Arctic char and salmon, both rivers attract fly-fishing enthusiasts from around the world. Wilderness lovers will be wonderstruck by the spectacular cut-banks, rapids, waterfalls and mountains, and can stay in the remote Kangia River Lodge or Erfalik Lodge, which both facilitate unparalleled fishing adventures. flyfishgreenland.com



© Fly Fish Greenland



© InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland

16 SUBMARINE SLUMBER

Venture to the centre of the Earth at InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland, an innovative hotel built into the rock walls of a flooded quarry. Located 50 kilometres outside of Shanghai, the five-star address defies expectations with two underwater levels, a waterfall and a scalable 88-metre cliff face. Marvel at the nightly water spectacle from one of several underwater suites, each boasting their own aquarium, or savour gourmet seafood at the underwater restaurant while watching sea creatures idly swim past in the custom-built display. ihg.com

17 AMAZON ATTRACTION

You'll journey through one of nature's greatest masterpieces when sailing along the Amazon River. Explore the world's most biodiverse rainforest in the utmost style onboard *Aqua Nera*, which features all the bells and whistles of a five-star hotel including world-class dining, a plunge pool, spa, gym, movie room, and games lounge. By day, explore the Amazonian waterways on guided wildlife excursions, and by night retreat to your elegantly appointed suite to be gently rocked to sleep by the swaying waters and curious animal callings coming from the jungle. aquaexpeditions.com

18 ART AT SEA

Swap the cities of Japan for the islands of Setouchi and discover a world where art reigns supreme. Board your private catamaran and sail the Seto Inland Sea on a bespoke island-hopping itinerary to Naoshima, Inujima, Shodoshima and Teshima. Renowned for their striking outdoor contemporary art installations and beautiful natural scenery, see works by Japanese and international artists, then refuel with a gourmet meal prepared by your private onboard chef. seto-yacht-charter.jp

19 KERALA CALLING

There's no better way to experience Kerala than by meandering along its palm-fringed canals on a private houseboat. Here you can discover the tranquil beauty of India's backwaters while enjoying all the comforts and style of a five-star floating hotel. Indulge in local delicacies whipped up by your onboard chef, before unwinding on the deck to enjoy the ever-moving canvas of tropical lagoons, exotic wildlife and everyday local life along the riverbanks. keralaluxuryhouseboats.in

20 MICHELIN-STARRED SAILING

Be charmed by the beauty of Budapest on a private river cruise along the historic Danube. Float past Buda Castle, the Chain Bridge and Parliament House aboard luxury vessel *Thetis*, while enjoying cuisine from Michelin-starred restaurant Costes or your own personal onboard chef. Whether for a romantic evening or an exclusive gathering, this intimate sailing is available from two to eight hours and offers guests a sophisticated journey through the Hungarian capital city. privatecruisebudapest.com



21 SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

Zodiac tours offer a fresh perspective on the world's hidden gems. From the Amazon's complex network of tributaries and the idyllic coastlines of the South Seas to the mesmerising glacial landscapes of far-flung poles, Hapag-Lloyd Cruises hosts Zodiac tours on select expedition cruises. Taking travellers into locations that are impossible to access via road, rail or ship, these tours are guided by experts, bring you closer to marine life and the awe-inspiring world beneath the waves, where every stop is an incredible adventure. hl-cruises.com

22 TOTAL IMMERSION

There's no better way to experience the majestic expanse of the ocean than onboard a dreamy cruise ship – and the Mediterranean is at the top of everyone's bucket list. Visit destinations such as Italy, Spain and France while gliding across azure waters and taking in panoramic ocean views from the deck. The gentle rhythm of the waves provides a sense of peace as you explore vibrant coastal cities, historic landmarks and charming islands immersed in the Mediterranean's sun-soaked culture and cuisine, making a deep connection with the sea. MSC Cruises is the biggest cruise line in the Mediterranean and the third-largest cruise operator in the world, with 14 ships operating in the Mediterranean alone throughout the year. Offering a unique flexi-porting option that allows guests to choose their port of embarkation, passengers are seamlessly connected to both the ship and the destinations they wish to visit. While onboard, indulge in cutting-edge facilities, world-class entertainment and delicious dining venues. msccruises.com.au



© MSC Cruises



© Journey Beyond

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SOAR, SAIL AND STAY

Soar above the majesty of WA's Horizontal Falls on a 24-hour Seaplane Adventure. Begin with a scenic flight over the falls – where the tide dramatically rushes through narrow gaps of the McLarty Range to create unique horizontal waterfalls – followed by exhilarating powerboat cruises through the turquoise waters of Talbot Bay in the Kimberley region. Unwind aboard the *Jetwave Pearl*, a two-storey houseboat moored near the world-famous falls. Expect gourmet meals, marine life spotting and your every whim taken care of. horizontalfallsadventures.com.au



© Marie-Line Sina

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SENSORY FEAST

Only one yacht was awarded a Michelin star in the 2024 guide, and you'll find it sailing the Seine in Paris. The *Don Juan II* is an Art Deco beauty with a menu crafted by Frédéric Anton, renowned for his Michelin-starred restaurants Pré Catelan and Jules Verne. Board at Port Debilly opposite the Eiffel Tower and settle into the elegant surrounds for a scenic cruise by Paris's most famous monuments, from Notre Dame to the Grand Palais. Expect an elevated menu crafted from seasonal produce presented in fresh and imaginative ways, and a gastronomic experience as beautiful as the City of Light itself. donjuan2.yachtsdeparis.fr

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GREECE IS THE WORD

Dive into some of the world's most beautiful waterways on a swim tour with SwimTrek. In Greece, explore Europe's largest marine protected area, the National Marine Park of Alonissos Northern Sporades. Over seven days, discover the islands of Alonissos, Agios Georgios, Mikros and Skopelos, swimming up to five kilometres a day in azure waters. Other Greek swims include the Ionian Explorer and the Greek Cyclades tour. In 2025, new tours will be introduced in Montenegro, Cyprus, Costa Rica, Galápagos and Cozumel. swimtrek.com

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WHAT LIES BENEATH

Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater galleries are filled with pieces that are not just sculptures but artificial reefs, carefully placed to maximise positive environmental impact. His work can be seen in Australia at the Museum of Underwater Art (MOUA) in the Great Barrier Reef off Townsville. *Ocean Sentinels* features eight sculptures and can be seen by snorkellers and divers. Taylor's newest in Carriacou, Grenada showcases a fleet of 30 boats paddled by school children and brings attention to the threat of climate change. underwatersculpture.com ♦

Journey through the Peruvian Amazon

Is there anything better than taking an intrepid adventure along Peru's wildlife-rich Amazon River?

It doesn't take long before you begin to believe that no one else has ever visited this place before.

Your Amazon journey will start in the city of Iquitos or Nauta, both locales that are fascinating to explore. Then you go deeper, into a boat on the Amazon River, into Pacaya Samiria National Reserve. The forest is dense around you as the light of sunset gives a beautiful rose glow – and surely no one has ever set foot here before.

Though, of course, they have. Because even here, deep in the Amazon in northeastern Peru, there are comforts almost as impressive as the dense jungle and glittering waters that surround you. Multiple luxury vessels operate here, taking visitors on the wild adventure of a lifetime while offering five-star comfort onboard – everything from plush suites with king-sized beds, to onboard chefs serving delicious Amazonian fusion cuisine.

Luxury operators and land excursions

There are two sides to the experiences you will have during land excursions in Pacaya Samiria National Reserve with luxury operators such as Aqua Expeditions, Delfin Amazon Cruises, and Zafiro. The first is the human

interaction, the chance to visit the communities that exist here and discover an incredible, isolated way of life in the Amazon. The second is the wildlife, which is so amazingly abundant in this part of the world.

On walks both during the daylight hours and at night, expert guides lead visitors through the jungle to spot birdlife, caimans, monkeys, snakes, bats, frogs and so much more. There's also the chance to visit and contribute to conservation projects for native Taricaya turtles, as well as rescue centres for various native species.

The river

Of course, there are incredible experiences to be had on the river, too – some even more impressive than the pure joy of just spending time on the luxurious vessels that navigate these waters.

As you cruise the waterways there's a good chance to spot pink river dolphins, a rare freshwater species found only in the rivers around this area. On skiff excursions, meanwhile, you will have the opportunity to explore riverbanks and tributaries, that are off limits to larger boats, to observe wildlife up close.

Many expedition companies here also offer passengers the chance to go

kayaking on the river, try stand-up paddleboarding, or even go on fishing excursions trying to catch the Amazon's most notorious nippers, piranhas.

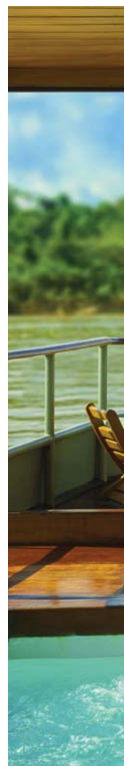
The food

The cuisine of the Amazon is an attraction of its own, a unique set of dishes and techniques that make use of the incredible range of produce that grows and thrives in this verdant area.

These are often fruits, vegetables and fish you will never have heard of before: *camu camu*, *Aguaí*, *cocona*, *tacacho*, *Patarashca*, *inchicapi* and more. You don't need to remember the names. But you will certainly remember the flavours.

These ingredients are used to create five-star dining experiences, with the highest levels of service and presentation. You may feel as if you're in a place that no one else has ever visited before – but the sense of comfort and luxury will soon become familiar.

www.peru.travel/en ♦





01 Amazon river cruises offer the ultimate luxury experience © Jungle Experiences
 02 The region boasts amazing abundant wildlife © Alvaro Garcia Alva/Promperú
 03 Delicious *inchicapi* © Jimena Agois
 04 On excursions, explore riverbanks and wildlife inaccessible to larger ships © Promperú
 05 Soaking up the onboard action © Janine/MMTPhotography



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THE WORLD'S BEST LUXURY CRUISE SHIPS

The highly anticipated *Signature Luxury Travel & Style's* Luxury Cruise Awards is back and better than ever. It's a compendium of the world's finest ocean, river, expedition, family and tall-ship cruising. Our sixth annual awards celebrate the top cruise lines, ships and operators in the industry – all of which are thriving. This year will see some 38 million guests across the world embark upon river and ocean voyages. Locally,

Australia's cruise industry generated a record \$8.43 billion for the economy in the past financial year alone, up almost 50 per cent year on year. Furthermore, a fleet of exceptional vessels entered the scene in 2024, many boasting new sustainable technologies and delivering increasingly impressive gastronomic, cultural and immersive experiences to guests. With that in mind, our annual Luxury Cruise Awards are judged by a panel of 20 leading luxury cruise experts and travel advisors who rate major cruise lines across 14 key categories, including best-in-class on rivers and oceans, top tall ships, family friendly favourites and those striving for sustainability. Each cruise line is awarded points that are tallied to determine the overall winners. From onboard and on-shore services to facilities and experiences, our winners and finalists set the standard for the future of cruising.

Proudly sponsored by



VIRTUOSO

OCEAN SHIPS

MORE THAN 750 PASSENGERS

Winners

1.

Oceania Cruises

Oceania goes above and beyond when it comes to ocean cruising, from impeccable culinary programs covering land and sea to exceptionally curated experiences.

2.

Viking Ocean Cruises

Designed for 'The Thinking Person', Viking's expeditions are immersive and stylish. From onboard enrichment to dining, every moment spotlights your destination.

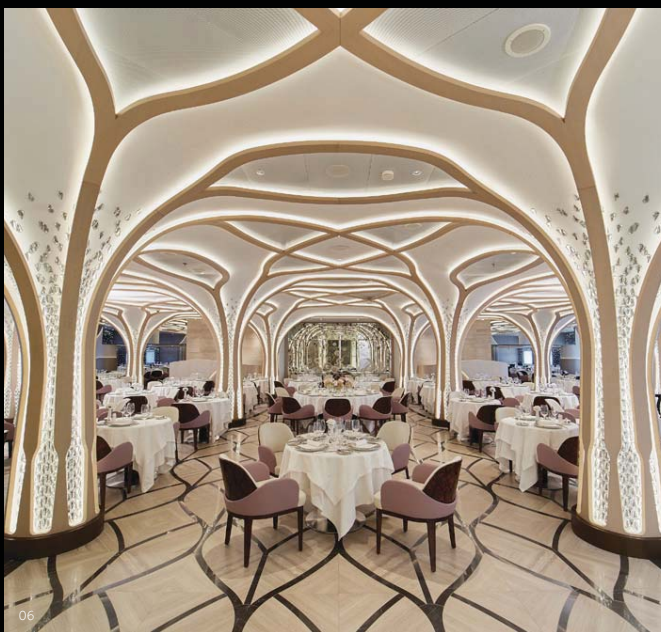
3.

Explora Journeys

From personalised itineraries and exceptional service to immersive experiences, luxe suites, world-class dining and a focus on sustainable travel, Explora is a standout.

Finalists

Celebrity Cruises, Cunard Line,
Virgin Voyages



01 Explora II 02 Uniworld's SS Antoinette 03 Tauck's MS Andorinha 04 Celebrity Apex

OCEAN SHIPS

251 - 749 PASSENGERS

Winners

1.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises

All-suite, all-balcony ships, superior space and service ratios, and fine destination-driven dining make Regent's all-inclusive cruises a leader in the luxury field.

2.

Silversea Cruises

Silversea's ultra-luxury, all-inclusive cruises stand out for their exquisite service, intimate ships, unique itineraries and destination immersion.

3.

Crystal

Renowned as an industry leader in personalised service, Crystal has butler service for every suite. It is also lauded for its Broadway-quality stage shows and onboard dining.

Finalists

Azamara, Hapag-Lloyd Cruises,
Oceania Cruises, Ponant, Seabourn



OCEAN SHIPS

BOUTIQUE 50 - 250 PASSENGERS

Winners

1.

Silversea

Silver Origin sets the bar high when it comes to all-suite accommodations, butler service, destination-focused itineraries and exclusive shore excursions.

2.

Ponant

Le Lyrial excels in sustainable design, impeccable service and its stylish marine-inspired decor. It also boasts a full-service spa, fitness centre and heated pool.

3.

Celebrity Cruises

The all-inclusive *Celebrity Flora* is designed for total immersion into its locale while providing exceptional wellbeing and dining concepts.

Finalists

Aqua Expeditions, Lindblad Expeditions



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05 Oceania Vista 06 Regent Grandeur 07 Ponant's Le Lyrial © Studio Ponant/Francois Lefebvre 08 Silver Origin 09 Celebrity Flora © Michel Verdure

10 Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's *Ilma* 11 *Scenic Explorer* in Antarctica
12 *Silver Endeavour* © Santiago Chaer 13 *Le Ponant* © Studio Ponant/Tamar
Sarkissian 14 NCL *Prima*



OCEAN SHIPS

YACHTS 50 - 300 PASSENGERS

Winners

1. Scenic

Scenic's two Discovery Yachts visit more than 350 extraordinary destinations across 63 countries, taking you further than ever before to explore all seven continents.

2. Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection

Experience the superior style and service of the Ritz-Carlton group at sea on dazzling yachts that take you from Africa to Asia, the Mediterranean to the Caribbean.

3. Silversea

Silversea's intimate yachts travel to some of the most remote corners of the planet - seven continents, in fact. Ultra-luxury expeditions are hosted by true experts.

Finalists

Emerald Cruises, SeaDream Yacht Club

OCEAN SHIPS

TALL SHIPS

Winners

1.

Ponant

Le Ponant is quite possibly the ultimate way to cruise, with just 16 sleek cabins and highly personalised service thanks to a 1:1 guest-to-crew ratio.

2.

Windstar Cruises

Windstar's fleet of tall ships are the epitome of style, designed to feel like private yachts but with the service of a boutique hotel. Look out for two new ships in 2025 and 2026.

3.

Sea Cloud Cruises

For more than 40 years, Sea Cloud has been pursuing the principle of sustainable cruising, travelling with a small number of guests so as to create space for great things.

Finalist

Star Clippers



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OCEAN SHIPS

MULTIGENERATIONAL

Winners

1.

Celebrity Cruises

From tots to teens, parents to grandparents, Celebrity never fails to entertain. Endless activities range from educational programs to family friendly dining options.

2.

Norwegian Cruise Line

A wide range of activities, entertainment, family friendly dining and shore excursions tailored to groups are just some of the reasons why Norwegian is a standout.

3.

Royal Caribbean International

Royal Caribbean delivers family getaways designed to wow across multiple generations – each ship is packed with dining options, entertainment and activities.

Finalists

Disney Cruise Line, MSC Cruises

RIVER CRUISES

EUROPE

Winners

1.

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

Each of Uniworld's 19 river ships are one of a kind, designed as an all-inclusive floating boutique hotel to fully immerse you in your destination.

2.

Tauck

Experiential cruising is Tauck's mantra, from unparalleled entertainment and diversions onboard the fleet of stylish ships to exclusive shore activities.

3.

Scenic

From themed cruises to state-of-the-art 'Space Ships', Scenic dazzles in Europe. Expect all-inclusive travels, innovative shore excursions and personalised service.

Finalists

AmaWaterways, Avalon Waterways,
Les Bateaux Belmond, Emerald
Cruises, Viking Cruises

15 Uniworld SS Antoinette 16 Aqua Nera



15



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RIVER CRUISES

REST OF THE WORLD

Winners

1.

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

Uniworld's all-inclusive boutique river ships sail some of the world's most fascinating waterways in serious style, from Africa to Asia and South America.

2.

Aqua Expeditions

Cruises along the Mekong River in Asia and the Amazon in South America are elevated by Aqua's unrelenting attention to detail, culture, service and sustainability.

3.

Scenic

Travelling with Scenic along the Mekong River is more than river cruising - it's an immersive journey through Southeast Asia to discover unique cultures in ultra-luxury.

Finalists

Delfin Amazon Cruises, Sanctuary Retreats,
The Strand Cruise

EXPEDITION SHIPS

LUXURY

Winners

1.

Silversea Expeditions

Expedition meets luxury when you're cruising with Silversea; the line's fleet travels from pole to pole with cutting-edge itineraries and destination experts.

2.

Seabourn

Seabourn's purpose-built ships offer all-inclusive cruising to remote realms, replete with immersive experiences and a world-class expedition team.

3.

Scenic

From helicopters to submersibles, Scenic's expedition offerings take you on an opulent dive into some of the world's most far-flung and fascinating destinations.

Finalists

Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, Ponant, Quark Expeditions, True North Adventure Cruises, Viking Expeditions



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17 Silver Endeavour © Santiago Chaer 18 Quark's Ultramarine in Antarctica © Michelle Sole

EXPEDITION SHIPS

FOUR-STAR SHIP, FIVE-STAR EXPERIENCE

Winners

1.

Quark Expeditions

Quark's voyages to the Arctic and Antarctic are guided by an unparalleled team of experts, crafting innovative itineraries that include jaw-dropping adventure activities.

2.

Aurora Expeditions

From Antarctica to Alaska, Aurora is dedicated to expeditions that change your perspective of the planet. Small ships and cultural enrichment are highlights.

3.

Lindblad Expeditions

Discovery has been in the Lindblad DNA for 50+ years, and the line's knowledge of the destinations it travels to - from the Galápagos to the Arctic - is astounding.

Finalists

Aranui Cruises, Coral Expeditions, Hurtigruten Expeditions, UnCruise Adventures



INTO *the* WILD

Exploring remote places is at the heart of expedition cruising,
and more travellers than ever are jumping onboard.

Considered the pioneer of modern-day expedition cruising, Lars-Eric Lindblad led 57 adventurers on the first 'citizen voyage' to Antarctica on a chartered Chilean naval vessel in 1966, hoping if people experienced a place firsthand, they would become ambassadors for its protection. Backing up with another 'first' to the Galápagos in 1967, and the launch of the 100-passenger *Lindblad Explorer* in 1969, the idea 'ordinary' people could travel to faraway places started to catch on. And hasn't stopped.

"Expedition is one of the fastest growing areas of cruise tourism," says Joel Katz, managing director Australasia for Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). "Passenger volumes on expedition itineraries have increased 71 per cent from 2019 to 2023."

Expedition ships go where conventional cruise ships can't. Typically carrying between 100 and 300 passengers and built for extreme conditions, they



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01 Discover untouched lands © David Merron/Quark Expeditions 02 Expeditions are a twitcher's paradise © Swan Hellenic 03 Crystalline ice in the Arctic © Acacia Johnson/Quark Expeditions 04 See the Kimberley in a new light © Seabourn 05 Outdoor dining on icy waters © Julien Fabro/Studio Ponant 06 Incredible wildlife encounters © Samantha Crimmin/Quark Expeditions



manoeuvre into far-flung tropical coves, navigate through glacier-filled bays, and cross the roughest stretches of water on the planet, to touch a place and be touched by it. To be pared back, and refilled with humility. With a flexible itinerary, an expedition leader and team of specialised guides work with the captain to make the most of every day through small group excursions. “We call it a safari at sea,” says Cameron McDonnell, key account manager Australia & New Zealand, National Geographic Lindblad Expeditions. “Where expedition cruising truly sits is when the destination is the hero.”

Who is onboard?

This type of travel attracts people looking for an authentic, in-depth experience. From couples and solo voyagers to multigenerational travellers and friendship groups, expedition cruising is a leveller. Companies tailor their niche in line with their philosophy and specific itineraries. Viking is well known for its adult-only clientele;

Silversea, Seabourn, Scenic and Ponant (with the exception of *Le Commandant Charcot*) welcome kids over a minimum age (usually 12 years old), making it clear there aren’t child-specific facilities or activities. National Geographic Lindblad Expeditions has a family focused Global Explorer program and UnCruise Adventures offers curated Family Discoveries itineraries. Perfect for couples or a small group, On Board Expeditions boutique 12-guest, six-crew catamaran, *Odalique III*, ventures into the Tasmanian wilderness.

Solo travellers are well catered for on Quark’s *Ultramarine* and *Ocean Explorer* with studio single cabins; HX (Hurtigruten Expeditions) waives the single supplement on a range of itineraries, and Michael Heath, CEO of Aurora Expeditions, recently announced that 10 dedicated single berths will be available with no single supplement on every sailing in the Arctic and Beyond 2026 season.

“Multigenerational travel has really taken off across the cruise industry,”

Katz says. “Expedition is a popular choice, especially as kids and grandkids reach early adulthood.”

As this trend continues, and the age of 80 becomes the new 60, accessibility is front of mind. HX has elevators and carefully appointed mobility-friendly cabins; Viking, Scenic, Silversea and Quark expedition ships follow suit with facilities for accessible travel.

A ‘once in a lifetime’ expedition cruise often leads to another, and loyalty to a specific company is strong. Atlas Ocean Voyages spokesperson Jason O’Keefe reports: “We’re in our strongest booked capacity to date.” Oliver Critchley, senior PR consultant with True North, agrees, “One in four guests return for another adventure and our most ‘regular’ guest has cruised with us more than 40 times,” Critchley says. For Dan Blanchard, CEO of UnCruise Adventures, seeing guests moved to tears is the best compliment. Adds Katz, “We used to say there’s a cruise for everyone. Now we add there’s an expedition cruise for everyone.”

Paying it forward

“Our aim is for destinations to be better off for a ship visiting,” Katz says. “Understanding what communities and environments need, and how challenges can be overcome, is a focus.”

“We have a deep connection to the conservation and continuing protection of the islands we visit – guests directly support when travelling with us,” says Aaron Russ, commercial director and expedition leader with family owned and operated Heritage Expeditions, the original concessionaires of permits to the Subantarctic Islands.

In a world first for the cruise industry, earlier this year Seabourn named the Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners garrangarru (godparents) of the *Seabourn Pursuit*, an elegant new expedition ship cruising the Kimberley. Guests gain an insight into the Wanjin Wunggurr culture through smoking ceremonies, rock art interpretative tours, dance and storytelling.

True to Lars-Eric Lindblad’s original ethos, the company has flourished under the leadership of his son through a long and strong partnership with National Geographic. “It’s a wonderful joining at the hip of two companies that are dedicated to preserving the destinations we travel to for future generations,” says McDonnell.

Advancements through technology

“We also know many cruise lines continue to prioritise their sustainability initiatives because of the nature of the environments they’re visiting,” Katz affirms.

Innovation in sustainability is the mantra of HX and sister company Hurtigruten, which are aiming to complete Sea Zero – a zero-emission electric ship – by 2030 and working in partnership with Lyngen Seaweed to grow and harvest seaweed, a ‘blue’ superfood and source of natural CO2 capture. B-Corp certified, Aurora Expeditions built the first passenger-carrying ships using game-changing Ulstein X-Bow technology for a smoother ride and fuel reduction, and is

currently in partnership with Eyesea to test and incorporate marine mapping for pollution on their vessels, and Ponant’s *Le Commandant Charcot* with a Polar Class 2 rating, is powered by liquified gas and can venture to places no other expedition vessel can reach.

Luxury at sea

The thought people need to rough it to be on a ‘true’ expedition is passé. Creature comforts like drying rooms, heated floors,

expeditions into three categories: polar, epicurean and cultural. National Geographic Lindblad Expeditions features a glass igloo where guests can have a camping experience without leaving the ship and, for a unique experience, guests on the *Le Commandant Charcot* bathe in snowflakes in the snowroom.

Specialised local dining is also in vogue. Deep in the Amazon, Aqua Expeditions’ ‘rainforest to plate’ menu is served on exclusively designed ceramic tableware. Dining in a lava cave in the Galápagos is the latest innovation for Silversea’s signature S.A.L.T.-inspired (sea and land taste) menu, and Quark Expeditions’ Inuit chefs use 1,000-year-old ice and ancient rock to present a ‘tundra to table’ degustation.

New horizons

Looking ahead, cruise lines are riding the wave of demand for expedition cruising. CLIA research shows five new expedition ships are currently on order from the world’s shipyards with a combined value of US\$500 million.

Where to

Named in honour of Sir Douglas Mawson, Aurora Expeditions’ latest vessel will take 130 passengers to retrace the steps of the Australian legend on an Australasian Antarctic Expedition leaving from Hobart in December 2025. Hurtigruten has launched an innovative tour for the 2025/2026 season where small groups of 20 will follow the Northern Lights on

land and sea; Aqua Expeditions is set to dip into waters teeming with biodiversity in Zanzibar, Tanzania, and the Seychelles with its sixth vessel; and True North is ready to introduce guests to Cenderawasih Bay in West Papua, a hot spot for whale sharks. “Every part of the world has places that appeal to the curiosity of people looking for an experiential voyage,” says Katz. ♦



saunas, hot tubs, gyms, spa treatments and wellness rooms abound. There are libraries, citizen science labs, art spaces, theatres, photography classes, guest speakers for enrichment, and exploration essentials such as Zodiacs, kayaks, snorkelling, diving and snowshoeing equipment, in addition to signature features.

Scenic has the only ships in the industry with both helicopters and submersibles, and Swan Hellenic offers Chopra ‘explore and restore’ wellbeing expeditions pairing ‘inward journeys with outward exploration’. Atlas Ocean Voyages has redefined its luxury

07 Explore the world’s most remote locations © Pia Harboure/Atlas Ocean Voyages 08 Awe-inspiring icescapes in the Arctic © Swan Hellenic

*"This type of travel attracts
people looking for an
authentic, in-depth experience"*







AS THE RIVER RUNS

Ever growing in popularity, river cruising is a blissful way to discover the world. Louise Goldsbury rounds up the new ships and itineraries worthy of our wish lists for 2025.



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River cruising is luxurious by default. Carrying fewer than 200 passengers, the ships are small enough to provide non-stop land and water views from everywhere onboard. The service is attentive and personalised, thanks to high crew-to-guest ratios, and the fares are all-inclusive (or close enough).

More than 400 river vessels are based in Europe, providing the easiest way to travel between neighbouring countries. Cruise lines are always mapping new routes and building new ships, with next year set to be the biggest ever.

In 2025, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises welcomes the SS *Elisabeth* to its fleet. This 110-guest ship features

some of the largest suites on European rivers, as well as a pool, massage room and sundeck bar. Sailing the seven-night 'Castles Along the Rhine' itinerary on repeat until November, it then switches to the 'Rhine Holiday Markets' cruise during the festive season.

Uniworld will also run the first-ever 'Women-Only Cruise', exploring Burgundy and Provence on the SS *Catherine* in August. Burlesque sessions, lavender weaving and truffle hunting are among the fun activities.

The world's largest river cruise company, Viking, is living up to its reputation by launching six ships in Europe in 2025. *Viking Annar*, *Viking Dagur*, *Viking Eldir* and *Viking Honir* will commence cruising

on the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers; *Viking Nerthus* will sail on the Seine; and *Viking Gyda* will ply Portugal's Douro River.

Viking's new itinerary, the 10-night 'Rhine & Main Explorer', is from Basel, Switzerland to Nuremberg, Germany, via Frankfurt, Strasbourg and Bavarian villages. Monthly departures operate from April, with festive sailings to the Christmas markets in November and December.

AmaWaterways' 102-passenger *AmaSintra* will debut on the Douro, with a sundeck pool and most cabins with outside balconies. The daily program focuses on tastings at Portuguese wineries and lunch at local restaurants. More than 70 'Celebration of Wine' cruises are also available on other AmaWaterways'





01 Cruise Europe's rivers with Uniworld
02 Visit iconic sites and landmarks in style © Shutterstock
03 Sip Champagne in *Riverside Ravel's* Palm Court Lounge © Riverside Luxury Cruises 04 See Bordeaux from a new perspective aboard *Artistry II* © Avalon Waterways 05 *Aqua Nera's* sunny pool deck © Stevie Mann/Aqua Expeditions



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ships in the Wachau Valley in Austria, the Moselle River in Germany, and Burgundy, France.

For longer holidays, the line coordinates combination cruises, linking two seven-night sailings to create 14-night itineraries. New for 2025 are the 'Grand Rhine and Dutch Canals', 'Grand Seine and Bordeaux', and 'Grand Seine and Rhône', which include transfers between the rivers.

APT is adding two all-black vessels on the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers. The 154-guest *Solara* and *Ostara* will both have a heated pool and an elegant outdoor lounge and dining deck.

UK-based Riviera Travel also has two new ships, *Riviera Radiance* and *Riviera Rose*, on the way next year. Select sailings are dedicated to solo travellers, including a cruise from Porto to Salamanca, Spain.

Tauck's new itinerary from the Czech Republic to France covers five rivers – the Main, Rhine, Danube and Moselle on one ship, plus a private cruise on the Seine. The 14-night 'Romantic Capitals' includes two-night stays at hotels in Paris and Prague before and after the cruise, a private dinner at Lobkowitz Palace and a trip to the Nürburgring motor racing track.

Another interesting option is Tauck's 10-night 'Rhine Connoisseur' from Montreux to Brussels. Guests will be treated to a Belgian chocolate-making demonstration, tastings at a Swiss wine-making cooperative in Lavaux, beer-tasting in Düsseldorf and Antwerp, dinner at a castle on a private island in the Netherlands, and three nights at Fairmont Le Montreux Palace.

Avalon Waterways' new Bordeaux cruises offer a choice of one, two or three weeks aboard Avalon *Artistry II*. Not only for wine-lovers, the schedule includes e-biking, baking classes and free time in stunning places such as Saint-Émilion, Bourg and Arcachon. French cruise combinations are possible if you want to add the Seine, Saône, Rhône or Rhine to this itinerary on the Garonne and Dordogne rivers. Qantas points (one point per dollar) can also be earned on every purchase of an Avalon cruise.

The newest line on Europe's rivers is Riverside Luxury Cruises, which uses former Crystal River Cruises vessels. Guests can look forward to 24-hour

butler service and room service, rooftop bars and barbecues, and active tours such as kayaking or a hot-air balloon ride over Budapest. For solo travellers, there is no single supplement for select suites on *Riverside Mozart* on the Danube, *Riverside Debussy* on the Rhine, and *Riverside Ravel* on the Rhône and Saône.

For Eastern Europe, Scenic is the top pick. The 22-night 'North Sea to the Black Sea' is a long and leisurely west-to-east crossing from Amsterdam to Bucharest. Among the 20 stops are Giurgiu in Romania, Silistra in Bulgaria, Osijek in Croatia, Mohacs in Hungary, and Belgrade in Serbia. A shorter version is the eight-night 'Eastern Europe & Balkans Unveiled'.

Asia, Africa & South America

Some of the best experiences in river cruising can be found in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia. In these regions, vessels tend to be smaller, with more immersive excursions to discover the cultures of riverside communities.

AmaWaterways

Colombia's Magdalena River is a whole new cruising destination. In partnership with a local tour operator, AmaWaterways will be the first mainstream cruise line on this route. The 60-passenger *AmaMagdalena* is expected to launch in March 2025, soon to be joined in June by *AmaMelodia*. Year-round cruises from Cartagena to Barranquilla explore the local heritage, food, music and dance.

Delfin Amazon Cruises

Delfin III was recently inducted into the Relais & Châteaux group in recognition of its commitment to Peruvian culture and cuisine. Delfin offers short sailings of three or four nights that navigate the jungle waterways through the flooded forest of Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve.

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions has announced a series of Upper Amazon charters aboard this 42-guest vessel. The five-night sailings will be accompanied by naturalists and photography instructors. Passengers can learn about the Indigenous *riberños* way of life, while keeping watch for pink dolphins, piranhas, sloths and toucans.

Lindblad will also host a new nine-day trip, 'Wild Peru Escape', that combines an Amazon cruise and two days at Machu Picchu.

Viking

Viking dominates Egypt with its young fleet of 10 ships, including four new vessels scheduled to launch over the next two years. *Viking Amun* and *Viking Thoth* arrive in 2025 followed by *Viking Ptah* and *Viking Sekhmet* in 2026, operating the 11-night 'Pharaohs & Pyramids' cruise on the Nile River.

In Asia, *Viking Tonle* is scheduled to debut in October 2025. This new 80-guest ship will cruise between Kampong Cham, Cambodia and Mý Tho, Vietnam as part of a 14-night 'Magnificent Mekong' itinerary.

Aqua Expeditions

To do Vietnam and Cambodia in total luxury, the 40-passenger *Aqua Mekong* is hard to beat. Huge, modern suites of polished hardwood, cuisine curated by Michelin-starred chef David Thompson, a luxe spa, movie room and plunge pool are highlights. Aqua Expeditions owns the only private fleet of tender boats on the river, so passengers can head out on twice-daily excursions to temples, hikes or kayak trips.

The line also operates in Peru, where guests can choose three, four or seven nights on the 32-passenger *Aria Amazon* or 40-passenger *Aqua Nera*. Guided adventures delve deep into the rainforest to spot the Amazon's amazing flora and fauna.

Scenic

Scenic's Mekong experience starts onboard. The 68-guest *Scenic Spirit* features tai chi at sunrise, traditional Khmer massages or reflexology in the spa, and a poolside bar to relax in after humid days ashore. Once-in-a-lifetime events include a gala dinner at a 10th-century Angkor temple in Siem Reap, a Hanoi street food tour on the back of a Vespa, and receiving a monk's blessing at a Buddhist pagoda. Land and cruise packages range from nine to 24 nights, with longer trips adding Laos to Vietnam and Cambodia itineraries.



Uniworld

'The Sacred Ganges & the Maharajas Express' brings together a Uniworld cruise and luxury rail travel. *Ganges Voyager II* visits remote villages, Hindu temples and the flower markets of Kolkata, before a train journey from New Delhi to Mumbai via Agra to see the Taj Mahal, the Pink City of Jaipur and the Blue City of Jodhpur. The 16-day November departure has limited availability. A shorter option, the 12-night 'India's Golden Triangle & the Sacred Ganges' begins with five nights pre-cruise at three different Oberoi hotels and offers opportunities to view the Taj Mahal at both sunrise and sunset. ♦

06 Uniworld's SS *Elisabeth* takes to the water in 2025 07 *Viking Osiris* cruises the Nile in Egypt © Viking 08 Take in the views from *Ostara's* sun deck © Studio Piper/APT 09 Discover Austria's hidden gems with Scenic





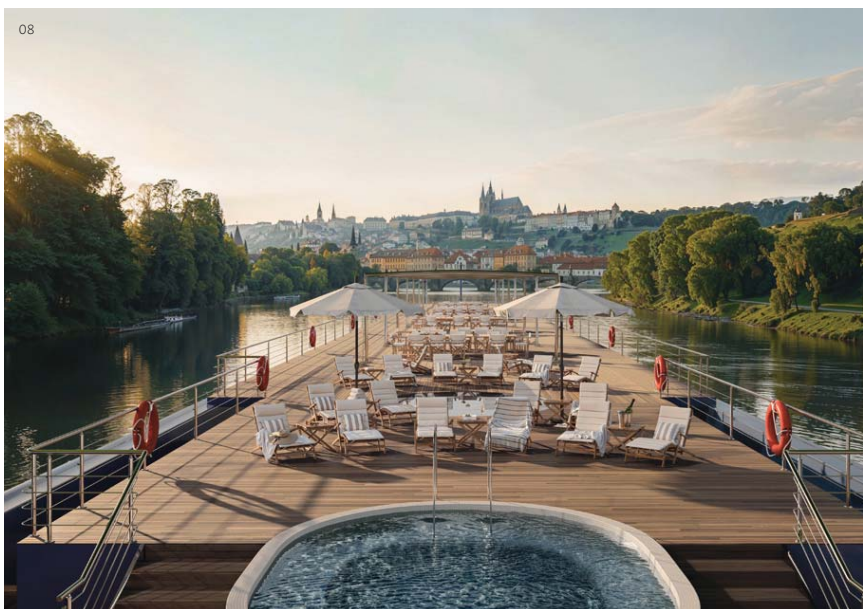
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“Cruise lines are always mapping new routes and building new ships, with next year set to be the biggest ever”