

# High life on the high seas

Ultra-luxurious cruises are all about the experience for the most discerning, well-heeled travellers

By CORINNE KERK



## SEA WORTHY

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**C**RUISING really isn't what it used to be. Not at least, at the very top end of the market. Queue for dinner at the buffet table? You've got to be kidding. Mediocre performances disguised as entertainment? No way.

In today's world of ultra-luxurious cruises, where like-minded travellers are looking for new and exotic places to visit, it's all about the experience for the most discerning, well-heeled travellers with the finest tastes and highest expectations. We're talking about fine dining at a choice of gourmet restaurants on board, as well as 24-hour in-room dining served course by course – no less.

Not only are there world-class performances including spectacular Broadway-style shows on board, there is also room for intellectual experiences, with engaging enrichment programmes such as The Smithsonian Collection by Smithsonian Journeys where specialists from noted art historians to leading authors and former diplomats share their first-hand knowledge and guests are encouraged to

participate in insightful discussions with them.

Instead of cabins, guests stay in plush suites – almost all of which come with a private, furnished balcony – with some bigger than three-bedroom apartments. Under the convenient, all-inclusive fare that luxury cruise operators now charge, pretty much all onboard expenses, from dining to gratuities are included, so there are no concerns about extra charges.

In these exclusive cruises, marbled bathrooms, luxurious European linens and L'Occitane French toiletries come with free unlimited shore excursions, laundry, dry-cleaning, fine wines, champagne, premium spirits and mini bars filled with your choice of beverages – all topped off with attentive butler service.

Yes, all you have to do is literally eat, drink and be a merry traveller.

"Guests occupying the luxury market have the wherewithal to travel the world using a variety of methods, but cruising has a special allure and it's a convenient, hassle-free way to travel," explains Jason Lasecki, senior director, public relations, Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

"You unpack once and relax as the ship takes you from incredible destination to incredible destination. The all-inclusive luxury experience epitomises what cruising is meant to be – elegant cruise ships that feature exceptional personalised guest service which take guests on unforgettable journeys to the world's greatest destinations."

To deliver stellar service, Regent Seven Seas Cruises' staff-to-guest ratio is at 1 to 1.5, with its mid-sized ships having a maximum capacity of 490 or 700 guests. There is also lots of space – with all-suite accommodations ranging from 300 square feet to nearly 4,000 sq ft, inclusive of a spacious sitting area.



PHOTOS: REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES



## STELLAR SERVICE

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Meanwhile, Silversea Cruises offer luxury cruises across the globe, with itineraries to the Mediterranean, Polar regions, Asia and over 800 destinations in between. Because its ships are smaller than most other cruise lines – catering to only 100 aboard *Silver Galapagos* or to 540 guests aboard *Silver Spirit* – they can call at smaller harbours inaccessible to larger ships, dock right in the heart of a city and even go on routes as exotic as the Panama Canal.

Silversea Cruises also offers flexibility via its Silversea Expeditions category, where itineraries are unstructured by design, allowing guests to stay longer at destinations of particular interest, or make slight detours when led by nature or curiosity. To enjoy a far richer experience at each Expedition destination, a team of specialists from relevant fields such as eminent naturalists, geologists, biologists, historians and ornithologists with the education, research experience and personal accomplishments, is assembled so passengers can interact with and learn from them.

"Silversea is very niche, and we cater to affluent travellers who seek to visit more exotic locales while cruising in style," says Karen Christensen, general manager and director of sales/marketing, Australasia. "Our all-suite accommodation offers one of the highest space-per-guest ratios of any luxury cruise."

A staff-to-guest ratio of nearly 1 to 1 is also maintained to ensure every guest receives a high level of personalised attention, including their personal butler. Its all-inclusive fares typically start from US\$2,950 per person for a seven-day voyage (twin share basis).

Owned and operated by one family – the Lefebvres of Rome – Silversea's authentic Italian heritage translates into a European ambience on board the ships, says Ms Christensen. "This means genuine pride in ownership and true Italian passion for embracing

the best of life," she notes, adding that Silversea's linens are by Pratesi, in-suite toiletries by Bulgari and dining options created with Relais & Châteaux. Silversea also boasts the only Relais & Châteaux restaurant at sea.

In the last few years, the addition of cruise ships to the region and the spread of positive aspects of cruising through word of mouth, has led to consistent growth across a range of South-east Asia markets, says Regent Seven Seas Cruises' Mr Lasecki.

Indeed, the novelty of cruising is gaining momentum and growing steadily year on year. "The period from 2000 to 2013 saw 167 new ships added to the cruising industry. In 2012, it was estimated that there were 20.3 million passengers worldwide. This year, they predict that the figures will reach 20.97 million, according to the Cruise Lines International Association," says Ms Christensen, adding that the Asia-Pacific region is the third-largest market for Silversea overall and the second-largest market for its Expedition cruises.

Going forward, cruising can only get more luxe. At Regent Seven Seas Cruises, the *Seven Seas Explorer* – which it claims is the most luxurious ship ever built – will be introduced next year. Setting the tone for the ship's lavish accommodations is the opulent, one-of-a-kind Regent Suite, designed with the finest marble, exotic woods and handcrafted furnishings and featuring a cruise industry first – an in-suite spa retreat, complete with unlimited complimentary spa treatments. The new ship will also introduce what it says is an unrivalled collection of speciality, casual and main dining options for guests to enjoy.

Now that, is how one lives the high life on the high seas. ☐

## A selection of ultra-luxurious cruise suites



ASIA 2016 ALL-INCLUSIVE: SINGAPORE TO HONG KONG ABOARD *SILVER SHADOW*  
12 DAYS, DEPARTING APRIL 6, 2016. (VOYAGE 3608)  
FARES FROM US\$28,150 PER PERSON BASED ON OWNER'S SUITE

The name Owner's Suite says it all. A stylish apartment that is prestigious and classic. For those who seek a superlative level of space, comfort and service on board. Available as a one-bedroom configuration (919 sq ft including veranda) or as two-bedrooms (1,264 sq ft including veranda) by adjoining with a Vista Suite.



ATHENS TO ROME ABOARD *SILVER SPIRIT*  
7 DAYS, DEPARTING OCT 26, 2015. (VOYAGE 5532)  
FARE FROM US\$11,150 PER PERSON BASED ON GRAND SUITE

Expertly designed and exquisitely appointed. Ideal for entertaining friends while you cruise or enjoy a quiet dinner "at home". Available as a one-bedroom configuration (1,425-1,532 sq ft including veranda) or as two-bedrooms (1,772-1,879 sq ft including veranda) by adjoining with a Veranda Suite.



ANTARCTICA ABOARD *SILVER EXPLORER*  
10 DAYS, DEPARTING DEC 12, 2015 (VOYAGE 7527)  
FARE FROM US\$23,190 PER PERSON BASED ON SILVER SUITE  
(VOYAGE FARE INCLUDES AIR CHARTER PACKAGE BETWEEN BUENOS AIRES/USHUAIA. CONDITIONS APPLY)

Stylish and sophisticated with separate dining and living rooms. Larger verandas. Situated midship. Perfectly designed for comfortable living. Silver Suites accommodate three guests. Spacious, with a welcoming sitting area, a marbled bathroom and your own private balcony.

For more details, visit [www.silversea.com](http://www.silversea.com)

PHOTOS: SILVERSEA CRUISES