

CRUISING 2017

Sailing to the End of the World

THE FOUR-CABIN-ONLY, 75-FOOT *AUSTRALIS* OFFERS SEVEN PASSENGERS AN INTIMATE, DEEPLY IMMERSIVE SAIL TO ANTARCTICA, COMPLETE WITH FRENCH CHEF, HUMPBACK WHALES, AND PENGUINS APLENTY. JUST BRACE FOR THE DRAKE PASSAGE.

BY **Tim Neville**

The SV *Australis*, a 75-foot, ice-strengthened motor sailer, has been exploring Antarctica's coves and inlets since 2004.

The SV *Australis* spun lazily in a cove off the coast of Antarctica as icebergs the size of islands towered off to stern. It was early March, autumn, and the sky turned restless and gray. Beyond those frozen walls lay the 600-mile-wide Drake Passage, a section of the Southern Ocean where the frigid, polar conditions of the Antarctic Peninsula collide with the cool, humid, subpolar region of South America. This climatic transition forms one of the world's roughest stretches of sea.

Magnus O'Grady, the skipper, stood in the galley, looking at the weather forecasts on his laptop. Maggy, as his friends call him, had a thick red beard, a sailor's squint, and the mien of a captain who, at just 27 years old, had already been through the Drake a hundred times. "Well, guys, we have an issue," he said with

fortably, plus five crew, and came stocked with kayaks and camping gear. She had a forecabin laden with Argentinean lamb, Chilean wines, and French cheeses. From deep within you could feel the soothing rumble of a 180-horsepower engine that muscled us along at a casual nine knots—fast enough to slash travel times without blurring the landscape in between.

On an expedition cruise, you can go where you want to go, linger when you wish to linger, and change course on a whim. As such the *Australis* offered unparalleled intimacy among the planet's most colossal landscapes while providing a cozy home for eight of the most remarkable days of our lives so far. We'd already steamed for hundreds of miles around the peninsula to explore lonely bays bathed in ethereal light. We'd hiked on beaches that bore no five-toe footprints and kayaked through brash ice under cliffs that wept veins of copper and iron. The humpbacks had come so close

blue. The unequivocal remoteness of it all. A whale appeared off to port, and then another and another, as if to wish us good luck.

Most people must cross the Drake twice—once there, once back—but we'd cheated and flown over it on the way south. Antarctic Airways left Punta Arenas in southern Chile and touched down on a gravel strip at a Chilean base on King George Island, about 75 miles north of the Antarctic Peninsula. The flight took less than two hours.

In the summer, about 4,800 people from 29 nations live in Antarctica on bases, and this particular base, which includes one of only two civilian settlements on the entire continent, felt like a Martian colony if Martian colonies had penguins. Scientists slept in what looked like modified shipping containers.

The *Australis* met us on the far side of the

ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS THE DRAKE, A PASSAGE SO VOLATILE ITS STORMS HAVE SHATTERED WINDOWS THREE DECKS UP.

a sigh. Seven of us sat around a table in the stern. He spun the laptop around to reveal a disturbing amount of red—a storm. "If we wait, things will get very unpleasant."

Twists like this are common at these latitudes, and frankly, they were the reason I'd signed up for the 17-day trip with Natural Habitat Adventures. The upscale adventure-travel outfitter, based in Boulder, Colorado, charters the *Australis* and partners with the World Wildlife Fund to offer deeply immersive, nature-focused itineraries. My trip cost \$22,000, close to the price for two nights at the Ritz's Suite Vendôme in Paris.

More than 30,000 people visited Antarctica in 2015, and nearly all of them came on large cruise ships. Vessels like those must stick to choreographed routes to reduce their impact on the fragile polar environment, and even then, only 100 people may disembark at a landing site. That means not everyone can visit every penguin colony or research station detailed in the itinerary.

The *Australis*, built in New Zealand and most recently refurbished in Australia in 2015, offered an entirely different experience. She was small—a 75-foot sloop-rigged yacht with three sails for stability and nine millimeters of steel in an ice-worthy hull. She slept seven guests com-

you could smell their terrible breath.

Now all that was left was the Drake, the passage so volatile its monstrous storms have shattered windows three decks up, flipped pianos, and sent vessels far larger than ours down into the 15,000-foot depths. The passage's namesake himself, Sir Francis Drake, avoided it on his journey around the world in 1578. Crossing it today is a rare experience: In the age of modern travel, grueling ocean voyages have become unnecessary. You do this for you.

The plan had been to spend the night surrounded by the crackling shoulders of looming icebergs in the Melchior Islands on the northwest tip of the peninsula before casting off for Cape Horn in the morning. Instead, we would begin the three-day push right after dinner.

I looked around the table. Some of the passengers had visited all seven continents. Others had hardly left the United States before. All of us had come for the adventure. There were Bob Lawson, a 64-year-old casino builder, and the Leishears, a couple married for 44 years. Next to them sat David Larcombe, 51, an Australian rancher. Andrea "Annie" Van Dinther, 41, and Moira Le Patourel, 26, served as our guides.

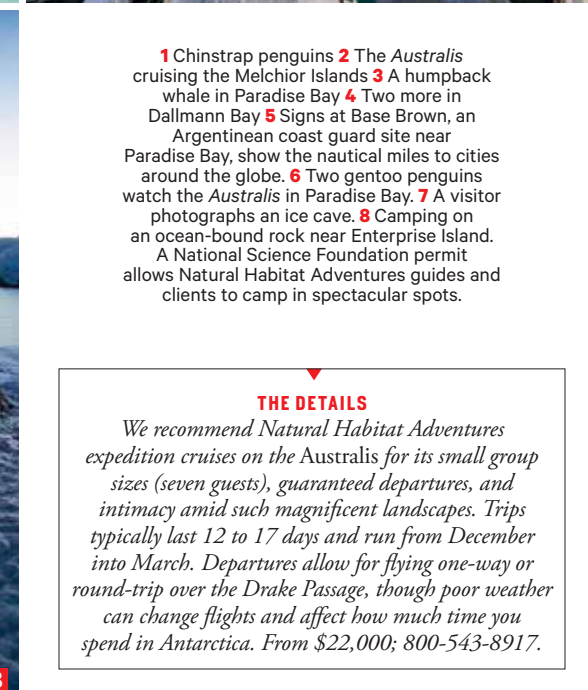
It'd be days before I'd see everyone together again. For the moment, we went on deck to savor the last breath of freedom. The air. The

island in a protected bay. We climbed aboard and rinsed our feet off in a disinfectant bath to reduce the risk of spreading invasive species. Maggy immediately set a course for Deception Island, a caldera about 70 miles southwest. After that the plan became more fluid by design.

While Golden Age explorers ate penguin livers, we had Anaïs Puissant, a 26-year-old French chef, who could conjure up moussaka and tiramisu and endless plates of charcuterie. Maggy's only other hand, Bob Paige, was a 24-year-old Brit who served as the "general dogsbody" of the boat. "If it's cold and wet and smelly, it's my job," Bob said, proudly.

We motored past the wobbly ice turrets of Livingston Island and 5,577-foot Mount Friesland. Chinstrap penguins toddled around on an iceberg with great flutes of blue ice knuckling the waves.

I sat in the stern and flipped through the ship's books, searching for random facts. The ancient Greeks had long hypothesized the existence of an antarctic—literally, the opposite of the arctic—but it wasn't until 1820 that a human laid eyes on it. It'd be another 91 years before Roald Amundsen in 1911 became the first person to reach the South Pole, a place as far south from where we were as the Bronx is from Belize. The maps still speak of



1 Chinstrap penguins 2 The *Australis* cruising the Melchior Islands 3 A humpback whale in Paradise Bay 4 Two more in Dallmann Bay 5 Signs at Base Brown, an Argentinean coast guard site near Paradise Bay 6 Two gentoo penguins watch the *Australis* in Paradise Bay 7 A visitor photographs an ice cave 8 Camping on an ocean-bound rock near Enterprise Island. A National Science Foundation permit allows Natural Habitat Adventures guides and clients to camp in spectacular spots.

THE DETAILS

We recommend Natural Habitat Adventures expedition cruises on the *Australis* for its small group sizes (seven guests), guaranteed departures, and intimacy amid such magnificent landscapes. Trips typically last 12 to 17 days and run from December into March. Departures allow for flying one-way or round-trip over the Drake Passage, though poor weather can change flights and affect how much time you spend in Antarctica. From \$22,000; 800-543-8917.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: MOIRA LE PATOUREL/NATURAL HABITAT ADVENTURES (2, 6); BEN WALLIS/NATURAL HABITAT ADVENTURES (3, 7); MOIRA LE PATOUREL/NATURAL HABITAT ADVENTURES (1, 3, 7); JOHN MITTAN/NATURAL HABITAT ADVENTURES (1, 3, 7); TIM NEVILLE (5, 8)

Traveler Bob Lawson kayaks through Paradise Bay. His boatmates float in the distance.



TIM NEVILLE

the hardships: Delusion Point. Cape Disappointment. Exasperation Inlet.

The day had all but drained out of the sky when we reached Deception Island, a volcanic ring nine miles wide formed by a drowned caldera that opens to the sea through a gusty, narrow breach called Neptune's Bellows. Zodiacs whisked us over to a long, broad beach pressed into an ice-free bay by fog-draped mountains. The husks of wooden boats a century old sat preserved in the sand. Bleached piles of enormous bones clawed their way out of the earth.

I wandered around the remains of the abandoned station itself. "You're walking into a museum," Annie said. Huge cylindrical tanks for storing oil erupted through the sand at odd angles. Deception is still an active volcano, and the British soldiers who built a secret base here during World War II talked of parboiling penguin eggs by burying them. In 1923 the caldera's bay grew so hot during an eruption that the water stripped the paint off boats.

The Bransfield Strait runs for about 200 miles between the South Shetland Islands and the peninsula, and by noon we were in it. Crossing the strait in a long southwest diagonal toward the mainland served as a test run for the Drake.

Maggy ordered us to store our cameras, spare batteries, and anything else that could easily go flying in bags and drawers. "One loose battery rolling around and it'll drive you nuts," he warned. The berths had lee cloths to keep us from flying out of bed. Mine saved me like a backstop.

Maggy eventually dropped anchor near the wreck of a Norwegian transport ship that sank in 1916 in a calm, butterfly-shaped bay. After a day we'd arrived on the western side of Enterprise Island, a dollop of ice and rock about three miles west of the peninsula. It's a popular spot for cruise ships, but luckily no one was around.

Treaties proclaim, in theory, that Antarctica belongs to no one and therefore everyone. In practice every country uses its own names for places and stakes its own claims. To Argentina this is Hope Base. To Chile it is the Land of O'Higgins. The British call it Graham Land, which is fine with Americans, who claim Palmer Land farther to the south.

We spent the morning assembling collapsible kayaks and fitting ourselves into those bright orange survival suits that work as warm, floating Onesies in case of a capsize. We planned to paddle along great hunks of ice that

bobbed around the perimeter of Governøren Bay. Annie warned us to keep our distance.

"You think, Oh, this iceberg won't roll on top of me," she said. "But it will. I can't tell you how dangerous that is."

The wind picked up, so instead we took a Zodiac ashore, where wildlife treats you with a mix of curiosity and disdain. Skuas, the world's crankiest seagulls, dive-bombed us until terns dive-bombed the skuas and all hell broke loose in feathery mayhem and a certain détente evolved. Everyone moved along. I poked around the shallows looking for life.

Tiny fish the color of the rocks and with antifreeze for blood sat motionless on the bottom. There were jellyfish the size of dinner plates and clear ctenophores I mistook for bubbles. I lay down in the sun, listening to the iceberg pop (or melt) and crackle like Rice Krispies in milk.

The thermometer on my watch read 71 degrees against the rocks. Two weeks later scientists would report in *Nature* how global warming is destroying the ice here faster than anyone previously believed.

For lunch Anaïs served flaky cod and rice with baked apples and dulce de leche, and soon afterward Maggy and Annie announced we'd make a run for a Ukrainian base about a day away. Being such a small vessel, we could easily and unobtrusively mingle with the scientists between our own kayaking excursions.

We headed up on deck to watch Bob, the dogsboddy, hoist the anchor, but something was off. The *Australis* shuddered as the enormous chain rattled around the capstan, but then the winch whined and fell silent. Stuck. Bob tried again, but again the ship shuddered and the winches whined. Then it began to snow.

The next day the crew worked tirelessly to free the anchor. We sent a GoPro into the depths. The footage revealed a weird and wonderful world of translucent sea stars, funky worms, and a chain disappearing into a huge hunk of metal. We'd later learn our anchor had discovered another anchor and there was nothing anyone could do.

Losing an anchor is a big deal. In Antarctica it'd be game over without a skilled crew. We had a spare anchor but no spare chain. Still, Maggy knew of a natural harbor so well protected that ropes and a backup anchor would do. Paradise Bay sat 30 miles south, a day's travel away, and we set out immediately the next day, forgoing the Ukrainian base.

We cruised around the southern tip of

Nansen Island, into the Gerlache Strait, and along the 9,050-foot-high Osterrieth Mountains of Anvers Island. During a calm stretch, I climbed into the crow's nest and surveyed the scene. A lone penguin dove off an iceberg. Humpbacks stuck their tails in the air, the water rushing off the flukes in rivers. "It'd be a black-and-white world if it weren't for all that blue," Annie said.

Safely anchored in Paradise, we readied the kayaks and went for a paddle. The ice sluiced around the bow and crackled and crunched. "It's like paddling over potato chips!" said Bob, the builder. We drifted silently, listening to a minke whale puff in the distance.

In a few days we would pitch tents on a lump of ocean-bound rock, stick our backs to the bottom of the earth, and feel the vastness of the continent. But this moment—floating among the sublime bottle-blue ice, each of us desperate to cup the incomprehensible magnificence of a planet stripped down to its birthday suit—shook us both to our cores.

"This," Bob said, gesturing to the mountains, the sea, the ice, "has been going on for a million years. I'm here in one moment. When I leave it won't change. Who am I, really?"

Our time in Paradise, like everywhere in Antarctica, was too short. But we had the Drake to deal with and so we began the push north, stopping to belly-slide with penguins on Danco Island: Pure comedy until skuas swooped in and ate the living eyes right out of one of them.

Maggy set the autopilot for 340 degrees—slightly west of north—and so it began. Crossing the Drake was one of the most intense, yet oddly rewarding, experiences of my life: 75 hours, 65-mile-per-hour winds, 30-foot seas, and one broken rib (not mine). The gray-beards bashed the boat with such ferocity that the concussions felt like artillery fire. The worst of it came 120 miles off the coast of Cape Horn, where Maggy turned the bow into the waves for nine hours just to ride it out. I stayed in bed listening to playlists and audio books, watching the curtains swing like pendulums. What magic to be at sea, safe, untethered, determined, worked.

As we drew close to Tierra del Fuego, I went to the wheelhouse, where Maggy had the helm. "One helluva Drake," he said. The Bobs came up, as did Anaïs and David. Moments later an hourglass dolphin rose off the bow and jumped backward, like a banana with the points facing up. His bright white belly flashed wet and smooth, as if to welcome us home. ♦



Clockwise from left: The atrium entrance on the *Seabourn Encore*; one of three pools on the *Viking Star*; the yacht-like Veranda Suite on the *Encore*



Hotels on the High Seas

SPURRED BY RISING EXPECTATIONS AND NEWLY INTENSE COMPETITION, CRUISE LINES GO ALL IN ON WORLD-CLASS DESIGN.

BY Rima Suqi

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SEABOURN ENCORE; VIKING CRUISES; SEABOURN ENCORE

Last fall, Seabourn Cruise Line unveiled the *Seabourn Encore*, the latest ship in its fleet of ocean liners. And while it might not have been evident from its gleaming exterior, the ship represented a huge departure for the company. Instead of tapping a traditional cruise-ship designer to envision the vessel's interiors, Seabourn chose Adam Tihany, a much-lauded veteran of hospitality design, whose roster of projects ranges from Thomas Keller's Michelin three-star Per Se restaurant in New York to the Four Seasons Hotel Jumeirah Beach in Dubai. It's not Tihany's first time navigating these waters. He's designed restaurants for Celebrity Cruises Solstice class, as well as most of the public spaces on Holland America Line's MS *Koningsdam*, and was named creative director for Costa Cruises. But it was the first time Tihany was tasked with outfitting an entire ship, from stern to bow.

He's not alone. Cruise companies have realized the value of creating environments on sea inspired by the best hotels on land—with comfortable rooms, luxurious spas, restaurants helmed by celebrity chefs—and,

increasingly, are looking to interior designers and architects with impressive land-loving portfolios to help realize them. Celebrity Cruises has reportedly tapped both Patricia Urquiola—the prolific Spanish architect and designer who is the art director of Cassina—for its new Edge-class ships, set to debut in 2018. Urquiola designed the W Hotel in Vieques, Puerto Rico, as well as the Mandarin Oriental in Barcelona. "The evolution of cruise-ship design is quite similar to the evolution in hospitality design," Tihany says. "Things are getting more unique and personal." The *Encore*, for example, has 302 suites with interiors inspired by those of private yachts. This translates into spaces that seamlessly flow into one another, with curves replacing hard edges, as well as fabrics, carpets, and furniture custom-designed for the ship, a generous use of rich woods like mahogany, and carefully curated art.

That's because the cruise business, like many others, is faced with having to achieve a delicate balance between courting a younger generation while not alienating its loyal clientele. And cruise-goers are an incredibly loyal bunch, often returning year after year and spending weeks at a time onboard. That makes these ships, in essence, floating hotels. The problem was they didn't always look as good as their land-based counterparts. "For so long in the industry, everything had been heavily thematic and dated-looking," confirms Greg Walton, a 25-year veteran of cruise-ship design and currently a VP in the Miami office of CallisonRTKL, a firm that has designed hotels such as Miami's Mandarin Oriental. "The guest wants something better, something that they'd stay at if they were going to a great resort." Walton was responsible for several spaces, including the penthouse suites, on the Regent Seven Seas Cruises *Explorer*, which debuted last summer marketed as "the most luxurious ship ever built." The suites he designed have dining tables topped with mother-of-pearl, bathrooms with showers that have massage jets (hard to achieve in a ship's low-water-pressure environment), and smaller, thoughtful touches such as velvet-lined drawers in the nightstands for

jewelry storage. The top-of-the-line Regent Suite on the *Explorer* has mattresses handmade by Savoir and a Dakota Jackson–designed grand piano.

“You start looking at it from the perspective of how you would design a hotel, and then you back into all the things that have to happen for it to be a ship,” says Richard Riveire of the process. Riveire is a principal at Rottet Studio, a firm that has had a relationship with Viking Cruises since 2011, having worked on the design of its glass longships that sail the world’s rivers to its first-ever ocean-faring vessels.

The firm designed the St. Regis in Aspen as well as the Loews Regency in New York, which is one reason Viking CEO Torstein Hagen hired the company. Riveire recalls: “I told him I’d never been on a cruise in my entire life, and he said, ‘I don’t want someone who has done cruise work. I want a hotel designer.’ We had a mandate to create something that looked different.” The *Viking Star* and *Sea*, and the two newest ships, *Sky* and *Sun* (debuting in February and November, respectively), are designed with a nod to the company’s Norwegian roots: blue, cream, and

“HOTELS ARE USUALLY BASED ON WHERE THEY ARE, FOR A SENSE OF AUTHENTICITY AND PLACE,” SAYS DESIGNER RICHARD RIVEIRE. “SHIPS DON’T DO THAT. SO IT’S A DIFFERENT DESIGN PROBLEM.”

rust colors, and the extensive use of natural materials. They’re also the first ships to have a glass-backed infinity pool cantilevered off the stern.

Although the results appear elegant and effortless, a multitude of nonnegotiable restrictions need to be considered for a moving, vibrating hotel to traverse the world for 30 years. “Hotels are usually based on where they are, for a sense of authenticity and place,” Riveire says. “Ships don’t do that. So it’s a different design problem.” Tihany adds that challenges stem from factors such as the impossibility of making

changes once construction begins, weight and movement limitations, and low ceiling heights. Those marble bathrooms you’ll find at every resort? Too heavy. What might look like wood or marble is most likely a very good imitation in laminate or veneer. Rounded edges will win out over sharp corners, and furniture has to have a certain heft so it won’t move or keel if the ship does. “Every millimeter is planned accordingly and has to be useful,” Tihany says. “They’re challenges that make you a better designer.” And they take cruising to a whole new level. ♦

Slow Race to Cuba

Despite the ease in travel restrictions to the country, cruises are still mostly on hold. But there are options.



Ponant’s *Le Ponant* yacht sails to Cuba. Left: A lookout in Cienfuegos

DIVE! DIVE! SAIL!

Personal submarines, scuba diving, and more turn cruising into an active adventure.



A three-person submarine is the highlight of Crystal Cruises’ *Esprit* activities.

Diving the world’s largest coral atoll, Aldabra, in the Seychelles, is just one example of the 20 Scuba Diving Expedition Voyages that **Silversea Cruises** (rooms from \$4,365; 888-978-4070) is offering this year as water sports gain in popularity with cruise-goers. “Our guests want to explore remote destinations both on land and in the water,” says Mark Conroy, Silversea’s managing director for the Americas. (Diver certification is required.)

Beginners can attain Professional Association of Diving Instructors certification from

small-ship operator **Paul Gauguin Cruises** (800-848-6172), which offers lessons and refresher courses in its practice pool on the *Paul Gauguin* (suits and tanks included).

Windstar Cruises (rooms from \$1,499; 877-978-3103) offers Discover Scuba sailings in Tahiti and the Caribbean. The company continues to be ahead of other cruise lines with its water sports offerings. Its ships have always had platforms off the back for jumping into the water with paddleboards, kayaks, and snorkeling equipment. “The small

ports we sail to and hidden coves we anchor in are purpose-built for diving in with your water toy of choice,” says CEO John Delaney.

Crystal Cruises (rooms from \$888-722-0021) followed suit by embracing such toys on its year-old *Esprit*, which features a \$2 million, three-person submarine, plus scuba diving and snorkeling gear, jet skis, kayaks, and paddleboards.

Norwegian Cruise Line’s (rooms from \$866-234-7350) new, \$400 million private island in southern Belize, Harvest Caye, offers everything from paddleboarding to snorkeling.

—Elizabeth Sile

IAN SCHEMPER/CRYSTAL CRUISES

FATHOM; FRANCOIS LEFEBVRE

While JetBlue made the first U.S.-to-Cuba flight in more than 50 years on August 31, with American Airlines and Silver Airways following days later, the Cuban government has been slow to grant approvals for cruise lines to sail there. But that hasn’t stopped several lines from announcing and, in some cases, preselling itineraries to the country without an official go-ahead. Last May, Royal Caribbean International announced it was ready to offer Cuba trips on *Empress of the Seas*—fresh off its \$50 million refurbishment—starting as early as July, only to have to stall sailings until late fall. (At press time, it still didn’t have approval.)

Small luxury ships have, in fact, been docking in Havana and other Cuban ports for years—but only for international travelers. For Americans, right now the only option is to sail with international cruise companies that offer “people-to-people” trip licenses, meaning they provide cultural exchanges and humanitarian relief. And they are few. The line with the most frequent sailings is Carnival’s Cuba-only brand, Fathom, which caters to the budget-conscious. The only luxury lines guaranteed to cruise from the U.S. to Cuba are **Ponant** and **Lindblad Expeditions**. Ponant’s sold-out seven-night circumnavigation (rooms from \$8,190; 888-400-1082) starts March 25 aboard the 64-passenger yacht *Le*

Ponant, while Lindblad will host 11-day land and sea programs (rooms from \$9,500; 800-397-3348) four times in 2017 aboard the 44-passenger *Panorama II*.

Meanwhile, Viking Ocean Cruises, Royal Caribbean, and others are ready and waiting to shuttle Americans to the country. Norwegian Cruise Line, the parent company of Oceania Cruises, started seeking the green light in 2015. For the line’s Cuban-born CEO, Frank Del Rio, who left with his parents and brother when he was six, it’s personal. “To be able to sail our flagship *Regatta* into Havana Harbor with my wife, children, and grandchildren onboard will be the seminal moment of my professional life,” he says. —E.S.

THE BEST AT SEA

Our favorite onboard amenities, classes, and room features

CIGAR LOUNGE

The Churchill Cigar Lounge on Cunard’s *Queen Mary 2* features a list of 20-plus Cuban cigars by Cohiba, Partagas, and Montecristo.

BED

The king-sized Savoir bed in the Regent Suite on the Regent Seven Seas Cruises’ *Explorer*

LINENS

The 240-thread-count Pratesi sheets custom-made for Silversea Cruises’ entire fleet

ROBES

The Frette bathrobes aboard Crystal Cruises’ *Crystal Serenity*

STAFF-TO-GUEST RATIO

Windstar Cruises has a two-to-one crew-to-guest ratio.

COOKING CLASS

Oceania Cruises’ *Marina* and *Riviera* offer a Cuban cooking class. On the menu: *vaca frita* (crispy beef) and daiquiris

GYM

Royal Caribbean’s *Harmony of the Seas* has Flywheel Spin classes, TRX training, boot camps, and more.

IN-ROOM AMENITIES

Bottega Veneta soaps and bath salts in the suites on Regent Seven Seas

LIBRARY

The largest is on the *Queen Mary 2*, which has a full-time librarian to oversee its 10,000 books.

LECTURES

Scientists, politicians, and authors speak at Crystal Cruises’ onboard institute.

EXPERIENCES

Azamara Club Cruises’ night in Jordan: a Bedouin dance show in Wadi Rum



Canyon Ranch SpaClub, on Oceania's Marina

Health and Happiness

No longer an afterthought, the ship's spa is becoming a floating wellness center.

Once uninspired salon-spa-fitness-center combos with a few treatment rooms and maybe a pool, cruise-ship spas are finally getting the attention they deserve. Cruise lines such as **Regent Seven Seas Cruises** (☎ 844-473-4368) are entering into partnerships with established wellness companies like Canyon Ranch, which most recently debuted one of its SpaClub at Sea facilities on the *Explorer*. The brand began working with cruise ships in 2004, first on the *Queen Mary 2* from **Cunard** (☎ 800-728-6273). This represented a major shift for cruise spas at the time, as almost all the major lines contracted out wellness services to Steiner Leisure Limited, which in turn staffed and operated branded spas by Remède, Bliss, and more. **Oceania Cruises** (☎ 855-623-2642) and **Celebrity Cruises** (888-245-4254) followed.

In addition to spa treatments on the new *Explorer*—using Red Flower products for scrubs, mineral soaks, and antiaging facials—the ship debuted an in-room Canyon Ranch SpaClub for guests staying in its penthouse Regent Suite and healthy-cooking classes with menus created in partnership with the spa. In January, **Seabourn** (☎ 866-755-5679) will launch a Spa and Wellness with Dr. Andrew Weil program aboard the *Seabourn Encore*, its newest ship, and by the end of 2017 it will be available

on the entire fleet. Each ship will have a wellness guide who is certified to teach yoga and meditation classes as well as advise guests on topics such as anti-inflammatory foods and Weil's antiaging research. "We will deliver an even greater degree of mind-and-body programs that ensure guests can break away, relax, and rejuvenate while they travel with us," says Seabourn's president, Richard Meadows.

Aboard other lines, elevated spa experiences are also gaining momentum. **Azamara Club Cruises** (☎ 877-999-9553) joins the spa-suite brigade of Holland America, Norwegian, and Seabourn by adding 414-square-foot spa suites aboard its renovated *Journey* and *Quest* ships. The suites feature Frette robes and slippers, a soaking tub with a view out to sea, and a small veranda.

Silversea Cruises (☎ 888-978-4070) is introducing new Wellness Expedition Voyages for 2017, which will include fitness and yoga classes in its Technogym facilities, lectures, cooking demonstrations, and nutritional consulting, all while sailing through Southeast Asia, Australia, and India. **Crystal Cruises** (☎ 888-722-0021) continues its wellness-themed Experiences of Discovery cruises with expert speakers such as Dr. Barbara Udell, previously a director at the Pritikin Longevity Center in Miami. —E.S.

WHAT'S TO COME

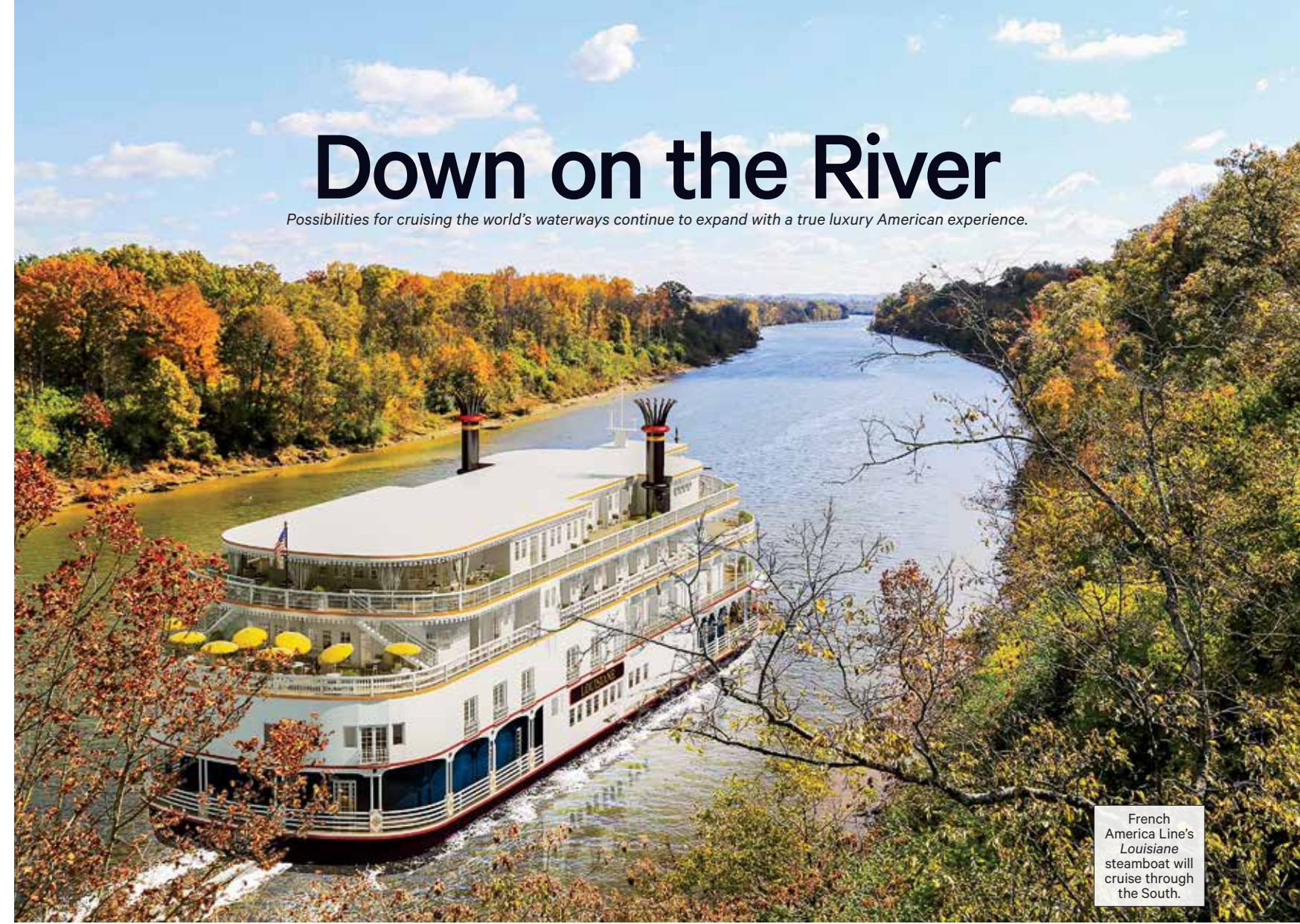
The ocean cruise industry is in the middle of unprecedented investment. Smaller players like Viking, which got \$500 million from TPG Capital, and Crystal Cruises, whose new parent company inked a deal for \$4 billion in new ships, are doubling and tripling the size of their fleets. Others will see more modest expansions. Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Joy*, sailing this summer, will be the first ship designed and styled exclusively for Chinese guests. Ponant's four new ships, launching in 2018 and 2019, will all have International Cleanship designation for their fuel efficiency and wastewater treatment systems. In 2020, Regent Seven Seas Cruises will launch a sister to its \$450 million *Explorer*. For travelers, this means more choices and better boats in the next five years. —E.S.

UP TO 200 GUESTS	201-1,000 GUESTS	1,001-4,000 GUESTS	4,001+ GUESTS
CRYSTAL CRUISES Current fleet: 2 Coming by 2019	VIKING OCEAN CRUISES Current fleet: 2 Coming by 2020	REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES Current fleet: 4 Coming by 2020	
SEABOURN CRUISE LINE Current fleet: 4 Coming by 2018	PONANT CRUISES Current fleet: 5 Coming by 2019	LINDBLAD EXPEDITIONS Current fleet: 6 Coming by 2019	
SILVERSEA CRUISES Current fleet: 10 Coming by April	CELEBRITY CRUISES Current fleet: 12 Coming by 2021	HOLLAND AMERICA LINE Current fleet: 14 Coming by 2018	
NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE Current fleet: 14 Coming by 2019	PRINCESS CRUISES Current fleet: 17 Coming by 2020	ROYAL CARIBBEAN Current fleet: 25 Coming by 2021	
MAKING WAVES Sir Richard Branson is getting into the game with Virgin Voyages . The first of three ships will come in 2020, hold 2,700 people, and debut energy-saving innovations.			

CANYON RANCH

Down on the River

Possibilities for cruising the world's waterways continue to expand with a true luxury American experience.



French America Line's *Louisiane* steamboat will cruise through the South.

It's no secret that river cruising has an ever-growing fan base and an ever-increasing fleet in Europe and Asia, but there has long been a void to fill in the U.S. If you wanted to sail the Mississippi, you were relegated to a handful of low-end lines or the *American Queen*, a 436-guest steamboat decorated in Victorian-era antiques, dark-wood paneling, and brocade wallpaper. The just-launched **French America Line** (888-387-1140) changes all that.

The company purchased the former *Columbia Queen* steamboat, which had previously sailed the Columbia and Snake Rivers in the Pacific Northwest, and gave it a top-to-bottom renovation. The new ship, renamed *Louisiane*, has French-inspired decor (think café chairs, two-poster beds, and touches of mint, cream, and yellow). With only 75 rooms and suites for 150 passengers, it can explore waterways large and small, including the Mississippi,

Cumberland, Ohio, and Tennessee Rivers. "We are filling a niche for intimate cruising, allowing our guests to really connect to the land and community along the river," says chairman Christopher Kyte.

Meanwhile, eight new luxury ships will debut this year in Europe. **Viking River Cruises** (800-706-1483) will introduce two of its 190-guest longships, named *Herja* and *Hild*. **Uniworld** (☎ 866-883-7230) launches the *Joie de Vivre* in March, carrying 128 guests on the Seine. It's decorated with the line's typical opulence, with gilded mirrors, chandeliers, and antiques. Also in March, **AmaWaterways** (☎ 800-626-0126) 158-person *AmaKristina* will begin sailing the Rhine. It features a lounge with art from Sotheby's and Christie's. **Belmond** (800-524-2420) adds two new barges to its Afloat in France program, *Pivoine* and *Lilas*, which will start sailing on canals and rivers in Champagne and Alsace this summer. Both accom-

modate eight guests in four rooms. Also this summer, **Crystal Cruises** (☎ 888-722-0021) will introduce *Crystal Bach* and *Crystal Mahler*, both of which will sail on the Rhine, Main, and Danube Rivers and carry 106 people in 53 suites. All the suites on both ships have panoramic windows and identical configurations. The two-bedroom Crystal Suite offers 759 square feet of space—one of the largest rooms on a riverboat.

Cycling is a big trend, with AmaWaterways expanding its partnership with Backroads and offering a trip on Portugal's Douro River—a waterway not yet overrun by riverboats. Uniworld's partnership with Butterfield & Robinson has itineraries that include pedaling through vineyards in Austria's Wachau Valley. Trek Travel, the eponymous bicycle company's tour arm, will operate two seven-night itineraries aboard **Scenic** (855-517-1200) ships on the Danube and Rhine starting in May. —E.S.

FRENCH AMERICA LINE