



Lap of L U X U R Y

More space, fewer passengers, remote destinations – luxury cruising has never looked more appealing, especially post-Covid. And there's a whole fleet of exciting new ships just waiting to be explored...

Words by **MELISSA MOODY**

WHAT'S
NEW?

Let's get personal

What makes a luxury cruise so special is personalisation, and six-star lines are making sure each guest has exactly what they need. One feature to look for in any luxury line is a high staff-to-guest ratio, which means you'll never wait long for service (on Crystal River Cruises, for example, there is one staff member for every 1.5 guests).

Also designed to cater for guests' every need are the staterooms, which on a high-end ship are usually elegant suites with balconies. And for a final touch of luxury, along with a pillow menu and electronically controlled beds, every guest on Scenic Eclipse gets a personal butler who can secure restaurant reservations, keep the mini-bar stocked with favourites (Scenic checks with you ahead) and even unpack.

This level of personalisation also extends to excursions, where you'll find smaller groups, more exclusive experiences and better transport than on any mainstream cruise. And if you prefer to explore under your own steam, Silversea offers personalised planning to help with independent touring, whether it be organising a private car and driver or tailor-making a whole itinerary.

The adventure starts here

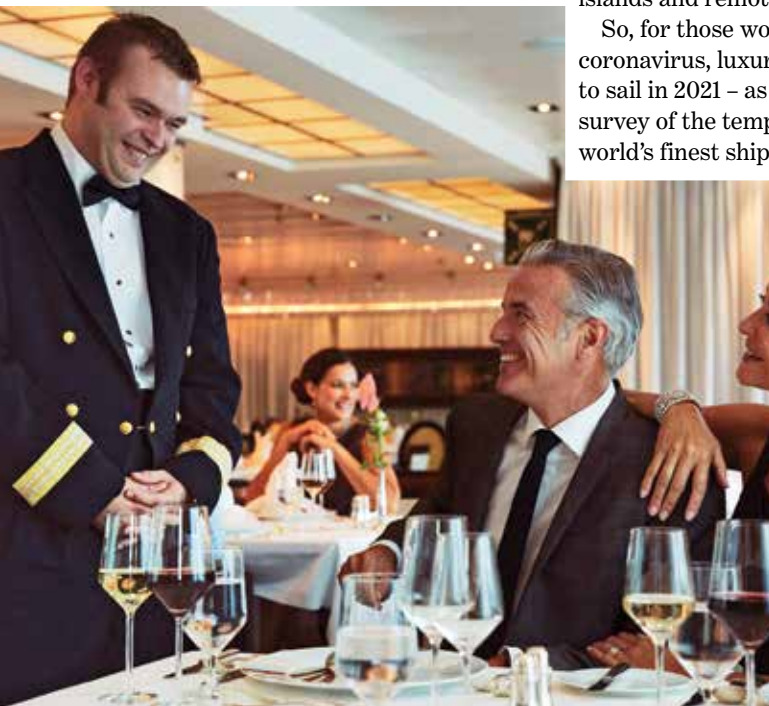
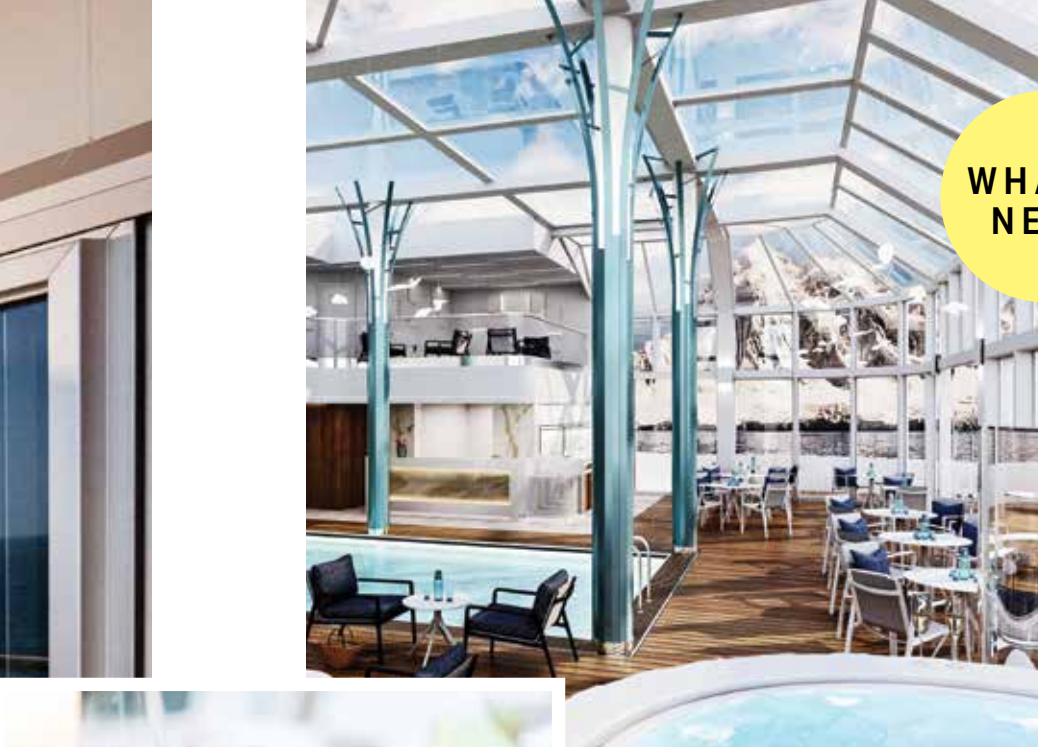
Expedition cruising no longer means slumming it on a freezing ferry. In fact, luxury expedition cruising is one of the biggest emerging trends, attracting the intrepid traveller who wants to explore wild and little-known destinations before returning to the sublime comfort of a small luxury ship.

Clockwise from main picture: Take the luxury route and you can expect your own private balcony – at the very least – together with stunning public areas to relax in, champagne on tap, personal service from the ship's officers and crew and – of course – the very highest standards of onboard cuisine

Once the preserve of the rich and famous, luxury cruising is becoming more popular than ever, with more cruisers eager to embark on a superlative sailing around remote destinations. That's why luxury cruise lines have been going above and beyond to offer guests a truly special onboard experience, with Michelin-quality dining, spacious surroundings and service to rival the Ritz.

Now, in a post-Covid world, these high-end voyages are more appealing than ever, thanks to their large cabins, expansive outdoor spaces and lower passenger numbers. And, priding themselves on their unique itineraries, luxury cruise ships also visit rarely explored, less crowded destinations, such as private Polynesian islands and remote Antarctic outcrops.

So, for those worried about cruising after coronavirus, luxury could be the best way to sail in 2021 – as you'll see from our survey of the tempting offerings by the world's finest ships.



Clockwise from below: The latest high-end spas rival anything you'd find on land; pool decks are always stylish, never crowded; expedition kit comes as standard on Seabourn Venture, which carries two onboard submarines; many luxury cruise lines offer butler service



The total of new expedition ships launched between 2018 and 2022 is projected to reach 28 – which means adventuring to the ends of the earth will be easier than ever. Excitement levels are reaching new heights, too. Seabourn Venture, expected to launch in 2021, will carry two custom built submarines, double sea kayaks, mountain and e-bikes, as well as 24 Zodiac boats, designed to take guests on immersive trips in locations such as the Amazon.

The ships themselves are designed to be as captivating as the destinations. Crystal's new Endeavor will include a two-storey solarium with swimming pool and hot tub, while adventure lovers will appreciate its two helicopters – always at the ready for scenic tours – and a seven-person submersible for underwater expeditions.

...and breathe

Of course, luxury cruising needn't be all about thrill rides in distant destinations. Increasingly, wellness is moving to the top of the agenda, with lavishly equipped gyms and spas backed up by classes and expert guest lecturers.

Sail with SeaDream and you can look forward to Sisley Paris spa treatments, facials and traditional Thai massage – in the open air, if you prefer, with just the sea breeze for company.

Seabourn is another big player in this market, offering dedicated wellness cruises around Arabia and the South



Luxury lines can sail their smaller vessels to remote islands and tiny marinas usually reserved for private yachts

Pacific. Led by integrated medicine pioneer Dr Andrew Weil, these include lectures and classes to help guests enrich their lives for better mental and physical health.

The final frontier

In any form of travel, space is the ultimate luxury. Cruising is no different, and treating yourself to a voyage aboard a high-end ship means you won't find packed restaurants and you'll never be stuck in a queue as you wait to board or disembark for an excursion.

Earlier this year, Regent Seven Seas Cruises launched its latest luxury vessel, Seven Seas Splendor, which

epitomises spacious cruising with a princely 138sq ft of balcony space per suite. The ship's crowning glory, however, is the Regent Suite – 4,000sq ft of splendour that is effectively a penthouse apartment at sea. With in-room dining, a full bar set-up and a sitting area larger than your average flat, you'll find there's no need even to venture outside.

Privacy and exclusivity rank pretty high on the luxury traveller's wish list, too, and cruising doesn't get more private than Belmond. Known for its



Nothing compares to a luxury cruise where seemingly budget-free restaurants serve the finest lobster, steak and champagne

Fine dining

For lovers of fine dining, nothing compares to a luxury cruise, where seemingly budget-free restaurants serve the finest lobster, steak and vintage champagne. That's certainly what you get with Crystal Cruises, thanks to all-inclusive fares on its fleet of ocean ships. Along with top-class Brazilian, French and Italian eateries, the line also has a partnership with Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, the master chef behind the world-famous Nobu restaurants. Aboard Crystal Symphony and Serenity, passengers can dine at Umi Uma, offering Nobu's innovative Japanese-Peruvian fusion cuisine, while new ship Crystal Endeavor will also have a Nobu outlet, as well as serving an 'Ultimate Vintage Connoisseur Wine Dinner' – an exclusive treat for nine guests.

Rival Silversea is tempting foodies with its unique S.A.L.T. (Sea and Land Taste) programme, with ever-changing destination-inspired menus, onshore market excursions, special dinners hosted in the 'S.A.L.T. Lab' and cooking demos with local guest chefs. A must for wannabe chefs, the programme will debut on Silver Moon this year, followed by upcoming ship Silver Dawn. 🍷



Cruises offers an off-the-beaten-track taste of the South Pacific. The cruise line has only one ship, the luxurious and intimate MS Paul Gauguin, which carries just 332 passengers, and it's purpose-built to navigate its way between the tiny islands of the South Pacific, docking in the Marquesas, the Tuamotus and the Society Islands of Bora Bora and Tahiti.

Elsewhere in the world, Silversea's luxury 254-passenger (for polar cruises, she carries 200 passengers) expedition ship Silver Cloud sails to the remote wilds of Antarctica. Highlights include Drake Passage, the Antarctic Peninsula and the ice-covered Elephant Island. On board, there's nearly one crew member for each passenger, and guests are treated to champagne dinners, butler service and grand suites.

luxury hotels and trains, the company also operates a handful of luxury cruise ships and barges. These can be booked by the cabin or chartered in their entirety. Just imagine – you and a few carefully chosen friends, gliding along the serene waterways of France on a luxurious barge with only three or four cabins. Of course, it's still a cruise, so you also get a gourmet chef, stewards and a friendly captain.

Above and beyond

With fewer passengers and smaller vessels, luxury cruise lines are usually able to offer their guests a wider variety of cruise destinations, often including remote islands and tiny marinas usually reserved for private yachts.

For those who feel they've done the Caribbean and the Med, Paul Gauguin

