

TRAVEL

Cruising for All Tastes

MARCH 11, 2015



Adventure Canada passengers on an excursion to explore the Nachvak Fjord in northern Labrador, one of the cruises that offers mental fodder with sightseeing. Dennis Minty

Update

By ELAINE GLUSAC

✉ Email

f Share

🐦 Tweet

📌 Pin

📁 Save

➦ More

The efforts of cruise lines to meet consumer demand has exploded into an expansive array of vacation options, from intimate yacht-like departures to floating family-friendly theme parks. The 63 cruise company members of the Cruise Line Industry Association estimate passenger volume will grow to 23 million this year, up nearly a million over 2014. Most of the traffic circulates in the Caribbean, but the following trends signal growing wanderlust among cruisers.

History Cruises

River cruises, like [AmaWaterways'](#) Jewish Heritage departure featured in an article in this issue, often weave in historical themes based on their destination focus. But a few ocean-bound vessels also take a long look back, especially in Europe. The Australian-based company [Unlock the Past](#) offers a series of history and genealogy itineraries, including a 14-night Baltic sailing in July with [Celebrity Cruises](#). During its five days at sea, Unlock the Past offers 52 sessions with genealogists from the United States, Australia and Britain.

Closer to home, [Un-Cruise Adventures](#) offers a series of weeklong summer sailings on the Columbia and Snake Rivers via an 88-passenger steamer replica, round trip from Portland, Ore., that highlight pioneer history. Four departures, beginning in May, focus more intensively on the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, accompanied by the historian Todd Weber, a specialist in the subjects.

From Port to Sports

History is just one ship-launching theme. Sail with fellow foodies on [Windstar Cruises'](#) 10-day "Culinary and Wine Delights of Spain and France," which sails in June and again in September, featuring visits to port wine warehouses in Portugal, Asturian cider orchards in Spain and wineries in Bordeaux.

Other themed departures highlight musical guests, such as the band Crosby, Stills and Nash performing three concerts and appearing at Q & A and autograph sessions aboard a [Cunard](#) trans-Atlantic sailing in September. In a similar vein, [Carnival Cruise Lines](#) will offer live concerts from the likes of Rascal Flatts and Smokey Robinson this year. The Cy Young Award-winning pitcher Ferguson Jenkins and Ed Kranepool, a former New York Met, will join [MSC Cruises'](#) April 11 baseball cruise in the Caribbean. And the Seattle Seahawks are the subject of a June fan cruise to Alaska with [Princess Cruises](#), promising meet-and-greets with undisclosed players.

Cruises for Thought

Distancing themselves from the shallow stereotypes of hedonistic cruises, a new category of departures targets those who want some mental fodder with their sightseeing.

[Adventure Canada](#) bills its July 5 Newfoundland and Labrador departure as the first book club at sea, featuring the authors Doug Gibson, Kathleen Winter and Terry Fallis leading discussions of their works. [Oceania Cruises'](#) new Culinary School Immersion Program, taking place on several itineraries, includes two full days of cooking classes that culminate in a "Top Chef"-style team competition.

In a new partnership with the Discovery Channel, [Princess Cruises](#) will offer science-focused wildlife-watching excursions and guided shipboard stargazing on select departures. [Taucek](#) extends its link with BBC Earth to its Galápagos cruises, allowing guests to try the kinds of underwater cameras, microphones and other field equipment used by the nature documentary filmmakers.

Asia Calling

Both river and ocean cruise lines are expanding their operations in Asia. For river operators, ships offer commodious bases for exploring regions with few upscale hotels, including the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar where the 42-passenger Sanctuary Ananda from [Sanctuary Retreats](#) and the 56-passenger AmaPura from [AmaWaterways](#) both began service in November. On the Mekong River in Vietnam and Cambodia the 36-passenger Avalon Siem Reap from [Avalon Waterways](#) launched in January and the 124-guest AmaDara from AmaWaterways will begin sailings later this year. [Uniworld](#) will begin operations on the Ganges River in India next January.

Ocean operators aim to offer experienced cruisers more exotic destinations, while also luring Asian passengers on board. [Princess](#) will station the 2,670-passenger Diamond Princess in Japan beginning in April for four months of sailings between Tokyo and Kobe. [Crystal Cruises](#) will run two cruises from Bali next winter, and the new Quantum of the Seas is bound for its home port in Shanghai this summer. In total, C.L.I.A. members report more than 1,000 Asian cruises this year, with a capacity of nearly 2.2 million passengers.

Meet the Locals

If whiz-bang features like on-board surfing and water parks sell larger ships, smaller ones aim to fortify their strength — easy port access — by increasingly offering insider outings.

[Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection'](#)s new "Do as the Locals Do" programs include such excursions as having coffee with a resident of a Franconian village in Germany or visiting a food market in Budapest. [Azamara Club Cruises](#) organizes "insider access" tours to private homes and farms, including an Andalusian horse ranch in Spain, an artist's workshop in Dubrovnik and a visit with a Middle Eastern scholar in Haifa, Israel. A new seven-day Iceland cruise with [Lindblad Expeditions](#) promises a "hangout with a changing cast of interesting Icelanders," including artists, musicians, politicians, scientists and writers.

Cruise Global, Eat Regional

Even if you don't meet a local, you can eat like one, as the locavore movement sweeps through shipboard galleys large and small. [Princess's](#) new regional program features Alaska seafood on Alaska itineraries, and serves dishes designed by popular local restaurants, including crab cakes from Tracy's King Crab Shack in Juneau. It also serves regional menus in the Mediterranean and Hawaii.

Among smaller ships, [Oceania's](#) cooking schools will offer regional cooking classes based on where its ships are located.

Big Ships, Small Ships

Cruising is growing at both ends of the industry, boutique and behemoth. Among the latter, the new 4,180-passenger Quantum of the Seas from [Royal Caribbean International](#) launched in November, with new attractions including a sky-diving simulator and a glass-enclosed capsule that swings out over the side of the ship for panoramic views from 300 feet above sea level.

Small-ship launches include the 150-passenger Maria Theresa on the Danube River from [Uniworld](#), with Baroque-inspired design that highlights a three-story central lobby with a marble staircase and Venetian glass chandelier. Amenities include a Viennese cafe and a 10-seat screening room.

Straddling both worlds, [Viking River Cruises](#) will introduce Viking Ocean Cruises in April with its first sea-bound vessel, the 930-passenger Viking Star. The ship, scheduled to offer a range of European itineraries, features a glass-walled infinity pool, a Scandinavian-themed spa and an onboard cooking school. Fares include a free shore excursion in each port, beer and wine with most meals and free Wi-Fi.