



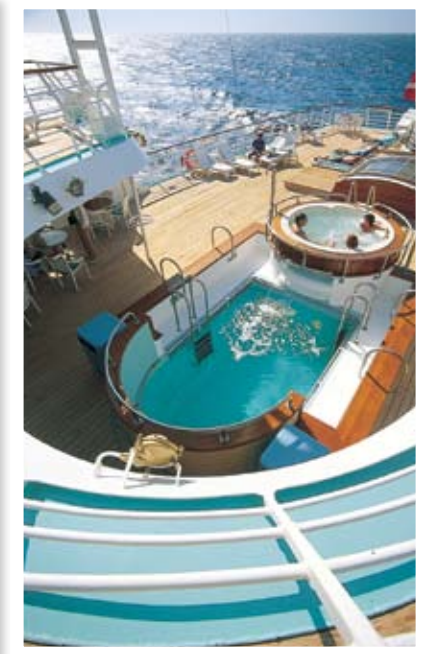
JUST CRUISING

SMALL SHIPS OFFER A CHANGE OF PACE

Many of us are familiar with television commercials touting the big mainstream cruise ships that haul upwards of 3,000 passengers. But did you know there are trips with as few as 100 passengers on board?

If you have cruised on the larger ships and are looking for a change of pace, a more intimate experience, or want more adventure, small-ship cruises are a great alternative. Or if you have never cruised because you don't care for the crowds or glitz of a large cruise ship, a small-ship cruise may be just for you. Smaller ships offer anything from a yacht-like trip to an adventure on the seas to river cruising. Simply put, it's an entirely new experience. ▶

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WINDSTAR CRUISES



Photos from far left, top row:
 >Winding through the Waterways, Wachau Valley, Austria. Courtesy of Amadeus Waterways.
 >Sailing the Mediterranean, Dine in style, and pool deck. Courtesy of Windstar.
 >Casual, and up close to nature. Courtesy of Cruise West.

YACHTING, ANYONE?

A motor sail yacht glides along a breathtaking coastline, its computer-operated sails unfurling at the push of a button within two minutes. She travels off the beaten path on her primarily seven-night itineraries from the Mediterranean, Amalfi Coast, and Greek Islands to the Aegean Sea, the Caribbean, Costa Rica, Tahiti, and beyond. Carrying from 100 to 300 passengers, she sails to rarely visited ports of call that large ships cannot access and without the long lines when embarking and disembarking.

Guests luxuriate in cabins similar to rooms you would find in small boutique-style hotels, complete with DVD/CD players, safe, mini-bar/refrigerator, phone, wireless internet, toiletries, hairdryer, plush robes, and plenty of closet space. Dine in casual elegance on fresh, local cuisine. Jackets, ties, and cocktail dresses may be left at home.

While on board, stroll the wide-open teak decks or visit the spa, exercise room, game

room, or library. Or take part in the complimentary water-skiing, windsurfing, sailing, ski-tubing, or snorkeling. A motor sail yacht vacation appeals to all ages.

SMALL-SHIP ADVENTURE

If you would enjoy watching whales, a small-ship adventure is for you. Your shallow draft ship hugs the shoreline taking in the natural sights and sounds of Alaska, Baja Mexico, Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, and Panama, to name just a handful. You share the waterways with fishermen and explore remote coves and inlets that are either too narrow or too shallow for larger ships to enter.

You are a participant, not a guest, as nature provides your entertainment.

Your exploration leader is always available to point out local vegetation, sea life, and birds of prey. Forget strict timetables—your ship's captain has the flexibility to linger to watch a dolphin play or to stay in port and experience the local culture. Relax and en-

joy the beauty of nature, or feel free to hike, swim, snorkel, and dive. You can also enjoy an adventure of the palate as you dine on local delicacies or sip wine on a California Wine Country itinerary. An adventure cruise appeals to all ages, and you will often find grandparents, parents, and children all traveling together, sharing their experience.

REMARKABLE WATERWAYS

The great rivers of Europe and Russia, Egypt's mysterious Nile River, Asia's mighty Yangtze River, or the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, and Peru are all available to you as you wind through their waterways. Thanks to the completion of the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal in 1992, you're able to sail on one continuous 3,000-mile-long river network, visiting 13 European countries which are otherwise landlocked.

Explore the Old World in grand style on board a new river cruise ship accommodating an average of 150 passengers. Itineraries

are generally a minimum of seven days, starting at one port city along the river and ending in another, and allow you the flexibility to add additional nights in the cities at either end. You have the option of extending your cruise for an additional seven nights or more, traveling further along the river. Cruise from Amsterdam to Prague to Nuremberg to Trier on the Main, Rhine, and Mosel Rivers. Explore Europe without packing, unpacking, without hotel check-in, check-out, and without traffic jams or monotonous freeways. Delight in the fact that you have prepaid your vacation in U.S. dollars and are not subject to the volatile currency exchange rate.

Sail at midnight and arrive at your next destination refreshed and surrounded by scenic vistas, fresh air, charming towns, welcoming residents, and local guides. Or use one of the bicycles provided on board your ship and explore the countryside on your own. Back on board relax in your non-smoking stateroom appointed with plush bedding, down pillows,

down duvet, flat screen TV, internet access, and river-view picture window.

A blend of classic and traditional European cuisine is prepared for you with the finest and freshest ingredients and fine wine, often brought on board from your most recent port of call. Enjoy a new experience every evening on board while you enjoy folklore dancers or local musicians. In the evening, your ship is docked close to the heart of your port city so that you may enjoy the nightlife it has to offer. Wake the next morning as you sail past castles along the river's edge, hear church bells ringing, and smell bakeries just opening as you arrive at your next stop. Catering to Americans, a river cruise offers English-speaking staff and guides on board. Most guests are more mature, well-traveled, and generally in their 50s or older.

With the growing popularity of small-ship cruises, you will need to plan well in advance. Modest deposits are required and often are fully refundable, allowing you to reserve your cruise yet know you have the flexibility to change your plans. Which small-ship experience will you choose? 🍷

Debbie Johnson, owner of Experience Travel, has been in the travel business for 25 years with positions ranging from travel agent to agency manager to group sales operations. She works as a travel consultant providing personalized service and expertise in vacation planning. She may be reached at www.experiencetravel.biz or (603) 224-6519.