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# Small Cruises Are Big This Summer. Here's What's On The Horizon

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*I'm a consumer advocate. I write about customer service.*

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A Hurtigruten ship in Prince Christian Sound, Greenland. TED GATLIN

When it comes to cruising, small is big this summer.

Expedition cruises, small-ship cruises, and sustainable cruises are attracting more travelers, some of whom haven't taken a vacation since the start of the pandemic.

Smaller is better for passengers like Peter Hoagland, a consultant from Warrenton, Va. He and his wife don't like getting lost on the enormous ocean-going vessels operated by the major cruise lines.

"The smaller ships often have better access to ports than huge ships," he says. "They can be more expensive than large high passenger ships, but we find them a good value nonetheless."

But small doesn't just refer to the size of the ship, but also its carbon footprint and perhaps a smaller itinerary — visiting just one destination instead of multiple ports of call.



Humpback whales feeding in the glacial waters among of the Icefjord, Ilulissat, Greenland GETTY

## Taking passengers to remote places

Take expedition cruises, for example. It's the fastest-growing market segment in the cruise industry, according to a [recent industry report](#). In the past decade, bookings have been up 450 percent.

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Cruise lines like [Hurtigruten](#) have experienced a rise in reservations because they check all the right boxes. Their ships are small, many of them go to hard-to-reach destinations like Antarctica or the Galapagos, and they focus on sustainability. Anders Lindström, a cruise line spokesman, says they'll have three ships operating in Greenland, "taking visitors to some of the most remote places," he says.

The small ships have the cruise industry buzzing, say travel professionals.

"This is the first time in history that some of the specialty cruises – expedition ships, cruises to Arctic and Antarctic regions, river cruising in Asia and Africa – feel like more people are talking about it," says Stephanie Goldberg-Glazer, owner of [Live Well, Travel Often](#), a boutique travel agency.

She says now that COVID is fading, her clients want to do the big bucket list trips now and not wait for some unspecified time in the future.

"For many people, this includes a cruise that is a little out of their comfort zone," she explains.



Anse Sous d'Argent beach in the Seychelles. GETTY

## So what's out there if you want a small cruise experience?

There are plenty of options for passengers who want a more intimate cruise adventure:

- **New small cruise itineraries.** Travel professionals are talking about new offerings from Abercrombie & Kent under the [A&K Luxury Expedition Cruises](#) banner. For this summer, the tour operator has unveiled new expedition cruises to the Seychelles, Greece, French Polynesia, Portugal, and France, among others.
- **The rise of "ultra" luxe cruises.** [Explora Journeys](#), the new luxury lifestyle brand from the MSC Group, is launching its first ship, the Explora I in July. Guests will enjoy spaces that offer relaxed luxury, culinary experiences focused on healthy local food, and curated entertainment, according to the cruise line. Its inaugural cruise will take passengers from

England to Belgium, Norway, and Denmark. Travel advisors predict Explora will be a "hit."

- **Specialty cruises.** Even bigger cruise lines are getting in on the action. [Regent Seven Seas Cruises](#), for example, has collaborated with Fabergé to create [two new "spotlight" sailings](#) that will bring guests into the world of Fabergé with small group master-class programs, exclusive access to unique and intimate shore-side tours, jeweled egg demonstrations and lectures.

By the way, creating a cruise itinerary not easy and many travelers prefer working with a travel expert. Here's my [guide to booking a cruise](#).



View of Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires, from Puente de la Mujer on Frigate ARA Presidente Sarmiento. GETTY

## Advice for booking a small cruise this summer

If you're interested in an expedition cruises, small-ship cruises, or an environmentally-friendly cruise this summer, how do you go

about booking one?

## Look for local guidance and experiences

Brian FitzGerald, CEO of [Overseas Adventure Travel](#), recommends connecting with a cruise line that has a deep understanding of your destination. "Look for someone who has local people and provides the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and traditions come alive," he says. And if you're heading somewhere far away, don't forget to ask if their tour guides speak English and have the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure.

## Ask about the deals

They're still out there. A travel professional can help you find them. [Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic](#) has an offer that could save families thousands of dollars. For bookings completed by June 30, each child 22 and under will travel free with a full-fare paying adult in double occupancy cabins on select Arctic 2023 departures. "Kids cruise free" deals are not unheard of, but most deals set age limits of 18, 14, and sometimes younger than 12.

## Be creative

If you want to cruise somewhere this summer, you may have some trouble finding availability, say experts. Many cruises get booked a year or more in advance. Linda Speer, a [master cruise counselor](#), says aiming for the early or later part of the summer can yield the best results. "Consider cooler destinations for peak summer," she adds. "Prime examples are Alaska, the Baltic and Northern Europe. Europe is warming, and now mid-summer can be brutally hot in bucket list destinations such as Paris and Rome."

## Find a repositioning cruises if you want to save

"Some of the best values for cruising can be found in expedition ship repositioning cruises," says Clark Mitchell, a [luxury cruise and travel specialist](#). For example, he just returned from a repositioning cruise on the Seabourn *Venture*. The ship had been in Antarctica all winter and is transitioning to the Arctic for the summer. "They were offering a seven-night Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro for 40 percent off the regular fare, coupled with all-inclusive ultra-luxury service," he notes. The regular fare was \$4,999 per person, and they had a sale for \$2,699. Mitchell says similar savings are available in Europe and West Coast sailings before and after the Alaska season.



Yacht at the sea in Europe. Many small-ship cruises will take you to Europe and beyond this summer. GETTY

## One more thing before you set sail

Cruise lines are pulling out the stops this summer with new ships, new itineraries and special offers. And with some advice from a professional, you can easily navigate all these choices and find the best small cruise.

But before you go, a note about timing and travel insurance. First, if you're thinking of cruising this summer, you should also think about how to protect your cruise.

Cruise lines have made it more convenient to buy insurance as part of the fare. But experts warn that the travel insurance offered by cruise lines may not cover as much of your trip as you think. Read your policy carefully, advises Angela Borden, a product strategist at [Seven Corners](#). Make sure it covers your flights to and from the port of departure and any hotels you book before boarding.

"Protection purchased from your cruise line may only cover the cost of the cruise itself," she adds.

And second, you should plan as far ahead as possible.

"Specialty cruising is in demand, but you need to plan ahead," says Annie Scrivanich, senior vice president of [Cruise Specialists](#). "Early is the name of the game. Book early, arrive at port early, and if your passport is anywhere near expiring, renew early."

In other words, get ahead of this trend — or you will miss the boat.

This summer's expedition cruises, small-ship cruises, and sustainable cruises could change the cruise industry by adding more choices and shifting consumer expectations.



**Christopher Elliott**

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