

Niche Cruises

Niche Cruising:

*Exploring the World from the
bow of a Ship*



Is it really possible that less is more? If you are talking about small ship and niche cruising, the answer is a definitive "Yes"! Whether you want to cruise on a tall-masted ship, sail the Amazon, visit small, secluded islands or see Antarctica up close and personal, niche cruising offers a fantastic alternative to mega-liner cruise ships. Because most niche cruise lines are operated by smaller companies, their itineraries and even their existence is often not known to the traveling public. Yet these cruises offer an exciting, intimate adventure that simply cannot be matched by mass market cruises.



Many of the small ship lines carry fewer than 800 passengers, some as few as 100 or even less. The "niche" part of niche cruising is all about destinations and themes. Itineraries are geared to travelers looking for a more adventurous, off the beaten track type of travel. Some have sails, some steam engines, and some are barges. Some visit exotic South Pacific destinations, some visit the arctic extremes of the planet and still others cruise European waterways, rivers and fjords. Some niche cruises focus on luxury and some on ecology. The choice is yours.



Use this TRO Guide to learn more about the world of niche and small ship cruising. Other TRO Guides go into more detail regarding particular destinations, itineraries and themes. If niche cruising is for you, contact your travel consultant and prepare to set sail!

Niche cruises typically use ships that are smaller than the mass market boats operated by better known cruise lines. This gives the niche cruise lines a tremendous advantage over their larger counterparts. The smaller ships can go where bigger ships cannot, seeking out smaller ports, narrow waterways and more shallow waters. The smaller passenger count means the ships

are more environmentally friendly, and can visit more ecologically sensitive areas. Their itineraries often focus on a destination or a theme. Many niche cruise operators employ experts in zoology, history, anthropology or biology to give informal lectures and to act as guides.

The words most often associated with niche cruises are words like "adventurous", "intimate", "personal" and "rewarding". All types of people travel on niche cruises, but in general the crowds are quieter and less rowdy than on large, mass market cruise experiences. The typical niche cruising enthusiast loves adventure and a sense of discovery. They view their travels as an opportunity to explore and learn. They are travelers, not tourists, and take an active, engaged participation in the voyage. The age range varies widely with the theme and personality of the itinerary.

The traveler considering a niche cruise typically decides first on a destination to visit and then researches the niche cruise lines servicing the chosen destination. Niche cruises are literally world-wide in their scope and schedules. Some have set itineraries, and others deviate not only from trip to trip, but during the course of a single trip. The smaller size of the vessels gives the crew the option to respond quickly to changing conditions, special opportunities and events and to make unscheduled port calls.



The rivers and fjords of the world are some of the most sought after small cruise adventures. Niche-river cruises give participants a close-up view of the villages and cities lining the banks of the world's great rivers. In Europe, cruises on the river waterways of Russia, Germany and France capture the history, the castles, and the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants. The fjords of Norway ease through towering green mountains and the deep Scandinavian waters. Small ships can slip into the wilds of the Amazon and the jungle rivers of South America like the Orinoco. American history comes to life on the Mississippi in authentic steamboats, while on the East Coast of North America, small ships visit ports from the Florida Keys, to the antebellum ports of Charleston, South Carolina to the fishing villages of Nova Scotia and Greenland. On the other side of the world, niche cruise operators and English speaking guides lead travelers down the endangered Yangtze River in China.



Some of the most remote and ecologically fascinating destinations on the planet are open to the niche cruising vessels. Travel to the northern arctic regions of Greenland, Iceland and Alaska are available, typically accompanied by naturalists and trained scholars that provide both formal and informal talks and lectures. The southern boundaries of Argentina and Antarctica are favored destinations for the small cruise industry. Participants go ashore to the stark white and rocky landscapes and colonies of penguins that live in a world that few people ever get to experience. A lucky few each year get to visit the Galapagos Islands off of Ecuador to

see the same exotic wildlife that inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. And in the South Pacific, small tropical islands and the wonders of New Zealand are on many niche cruise itineraries.

One of the best aspects of a niche cruise is that you unpack only once. The destination "comes to you" as you experience the comforts of the ship. The small ship experience offers a wide variety of amenities. Many ships have a full array of services and entertainment options such as casinos and on-board nightclubs. As in all cruising, dining is taken seriously and the cuisine aboard is almost universally applauded by travelers and travel magazines. Most programs are all-inclusive, meaning most of your expenditures like meals, entertainment and planned sightseeing excursions are included in the cost of your trip. Work with your travel consultant to determine exactly what is, or is not, included in the cost of various packages as you research your options.

The atmosphere aboard a niche cruise vessel tends to be relaxed and informal. The more intimate setting lends itself to striking up conversations with other passengers and crew. The vessels tend to have very distinct personalities reflected in the themes chosen for the itineraries, the destinations, the decor and meal selections. As you research your options, be sure to cover your preferences with your travel consultant to ensure that your experience meets your expectations. This is particularly important with your choice of cabin. Some ships have all "outside staterooms" while others have both interior and exterior cabins. On some ships verandas and suites are available. An experienced travel consultant can best explain the type of cabin options available to you and can work with the cruise line to obtain suitable accommodations.



This year, do something special for yourself and seek out a cruise unlike any you might have imagined and try a niche cruise!