

CRUISE NEWS! 90 TOP SHIPS, NEVER-BEFORE BARGAINS

Condé Nast Traveler

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

FEBRUARY 2009

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GOOD LIFE, BIG FUN

SPECIAL REPORT

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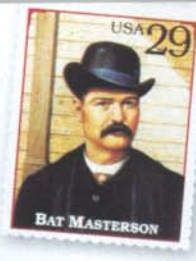
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February

Come Sail Away

Condé Nast Traveler's annual survey of the world's best ships leads one reader to an illuminating experience on a European waterway

AFTER DECADES OF INDEPENDENT travel, we were hesitant to join any sort of tour group. But based on the results of last year's cruise poll [February 2008], we decided to book a Uniworld river cruise on the Danube. It was superb. Throughout the trip, we gained an exceptional understanding of the history, culture, and economics of the region. It was as if we were enrolled in a fascinating history course and each day added another layer of information. Our previous cruise experiences had been mediocre—entirely lacking the coordinated, thoughtful, and painstakingly detailed intelligence that we received on this journey. As for the ship, we can't say enough about the excellent accommodations, fine food, personable service, and comfortable facilities. Thank you for publishing your surveys. We would never have considered Uniworld if we hadn't seen its high marks in your magazine.

JOAN WALTERS
via e-mail

Check out the results of this year's cruise poll on page 66. —Ed.

Where Are You? Dec. 2008



Go to cntraveler.com/whereareyou for a podcast by writer John Oseid decoding each of this puzzle's clues.

THE DECEMBER ANSWER IS . . . Seljalandsfoss, Iceland. **AND THE NOVEMBER WINNER IS . . .** Irene Dean, of Garden Grove, California, whose entry was drawn at random from 3,837 correct responses (out of a total of 4,701—an accuracy rate of 82 percent).

To play this month's contest, turn to page 39.

B&B in the City

AS ONE OF THE OWNERS OF THE Flemish House, in Chicago, I'd like to thank you for recommending urban B&Bs as an alternative to traditional hotels [Stop Press, November 2008]. However, your article overemphasized the drawbacks (waiting for hot water, climbing stairs, lack of luxury toiletries) at the expense of the positive features. The strengths and weaknesses of any property can be determined in advance by an e-mail or a phone call. Urban B&Bs are an incredible asset to the visitor who is seeking intimacy in the anonymity of a big city. The success of that experience will depend on the guest's expectations and flexibility. The checklist mind-set has its place, but hopefully our guests come away with an experience of feeling at home in a strange place.

TOM WARNKE
Chicago, Illinois

LINDA K. NATHAN'S "BIG-CITY B&Bs" was a great surprise. Overseas guests often ask me to suggest homey, neighborhood places where they might stay in New York. Now I can confidently give them several excellent options, along with the pluses and the caveats. I'm eager to try one myself and have passed the article on to a friend in Chicago.

CAROL M. SHORT
New York, New York

Innocents Abroad

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING series on etiquette [November 2007–December 2008]. Beyond viewing the sights, the best part of travel is experiencing different cultures. Sure, I'm always amazed at seeing the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall, but what I enjoy most is interacting with the locals. Wherever I go, I spend a great deal of time in parks, plazas, and squares, just mingling, talking, and observing. I love the intensity of the Chinese and their lack of concern for personal space; the festive atmosphere of India, how frenetic the people are and how extremely quiet at the same time; the preciseness of

the Germans (don't even *consider* crossing the street against the light); the dry humor of the Israelis; the warmth of the Egyptians; the fun-loving and food-obsessed Italians. As you stated, other cultures know a lot about us (or think they do) through popular entertainment. We, on the other hand, haven't really embraced them. Instead, Americans tend to judge everyone by our mores. But in doing so, we neglect the unique aspects of other people and miss a gold mine of gratifying experiences. Thank you for helping to open our eyes.

MARILYN MARSHALL
via e-mail

HAVING JUST RETURNED FROM ARGENTINA, I disagree with the recommendations in the pullout booklet "Etiquette 101: The Tipping Guide" [December 2008]. Travelers should always tip in U.S. dollars rather than in pesos. Argentinians use greenbacks to pay for nearly everything. In fact, if you pay your hotel bill in pesos, you'll be charged an additional 17 percent. Needless to say, tipping in pesos is not the way to go.

ROBERT DEMUTH
via e-mail

Corrections

In "Best of Spirits" (November 2008), the bar Nacional 27 is described as being in Washington, D.C.; it is in Chicago. In the "Readers' Choice Awards" (November 2008), India's Jet Airways is listed among the top five airlines flying foreign-only routes, but the carrier now flies into Newark and thus should be categorized as international.

Missed It the First Time?

The articles to which these letters refer are available online at cntraveler.com.

Contact Us

News and views are welcome at letters@cntraveler.com. You can also write or fax Condé Nast Traveler (4 Times Square, New York, New York 10036; 212-286-2190). All submissions become the property of Condé Nast Traveler and will not be returned. Letters may be edited and may be published or otherwise used in any medium. Questions are welcome too. Ask yours online at perrinpost.com.

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SMALL SHIPS

Ship	Cruise Line	Passengers	Overall Score	Itineraries/ Schedule	Shore Excursions	Crew/Service	Cabins	Food/Dining	Activities/ Facilities	Design/Layout
1 Bizet	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	120	93.1	98.1	92.3	98.1	86.5	96.2	86.3	94.2
2 Sea Cloud	Sea Cloud Cruises	64	92.9	96.2	92.3	96.2	92.3	100	88.5	84.6
3 Oberoi Philae	Oberoi	116	91.6	96.6	96.6	100	89.7	86.2	82.8	89.7
4 River Baroness	Uniworld	128	90.9	96.2	94.3	98.1	84.6	90.4	86.5	86.0
5 River Duchess	Uniworld	134	90.6	95.5	88.6	95.5	88.6	90.9	79.5	95.3
5 Seabourn Legend	Yachts of Seabourn	208	90.6	95.5	83.9	96.8	92.3	96.8	81.2	87.5
7 Paul Gauguin	Regent Seven Seas Cruises	330	89.9	94.3	86.9	93.7	87.4	92.1	86.8	88.2
8 River Anuket	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	138	89.6	98.5	93.9	83.3	83.3	83.3	83.3	86.2
9 SeaDream I	SeaDream Yacht Club	110	89.3	91.9	85.1	95.9	82.4	94.6	85.1	90.4
9 Viking Neptune	Viking River Cruises	150	89.3	95.1	91.4	96.2	88.6	88.6	80.3	84.5
11 River Royale	Uniworld	132	89.2	90.6	90.4	94.3	88.7	88.7	81.1	90.6
12 Queen of the West	Majestic America Line	142	89.0	100	93.1	100	89.7	86.2	82.1	71.4
12 Seabourn Spirit	Yachts of Seabourn	208	89.0	92.3	88.3	95.2	90.4	92.3	79.6	84.3
14 River Concerto	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	140	88.9	95.1	90.2	95.1	85.4	87.8	87.8	80.5
15 River Countess	Uniworld	134	88.7	96.3	93.8	95.1	84.0	87.7	77.5	86.4
16 Seven Seas Navigator	Regent Seven Seas Cruises	490	88.1	91.1	77.9	92.5	92.9	91.8	80.8	89.3
17 Silver Whisper	Silversea	382	87.8	94.6	78.9	90.9	92.7	87.7	78.0	91.4
18 River Harmony	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	140	87.7	93.0	91.5	94.4	80.3	90.1	81.7	82.9
19 Ravel	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	120	87.6	95.7	87.0	95.7	87.0	91.3	82.6	73.9
20 River Melody	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	140	87.2	92.3	88.5	96.2	80.8	88.5	84.0	79.2
21 Seabourn Pride	Yachts of Seabourn	208	87.0	92.8	79.1	94.9	89.2	92.8	76.1	84.1
22 Silver Cloud	Silversea	296	86.7	94.6	80.5	91.4	90.8	87.1	77.2	85.1
22 Silver Shadow	Silversea	382	86.7	93.2	80.7	89.8	93.2	87.4	75.7	86.8
24 River Aria	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	164	86.2	96.6	93.1	89.5	80.4	82.8	76.4	83.9
25 Amadagio	AMAWaterways	148	85.7	94.1	88.2	87.9	88.2	82.4	76.5	82.4
25 SeaDream II	SeaDream Yacht Club	110	85.7	83.3	76.1	93.1	84.7	93.1	83.3	86.1
27 River Adagio	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	164	85.6	88.7	90.1	91.5	81.7	81.7	81.2	84.3
27 Viking Century Sun	Viking River Cruises	306	85.6	95.2	91.3	97.1	87.5	70.9	73.8	83.3
29 Viking Century Sky	Viking River Cruises	306	85.1	94.0	91.0	94.6	81.4	80.4	73.8	80.2
30 Katharina	Peter Deilmann	79	84.7	95.0	85.0	100	75.0	94.7	65.0	78.9
31 Sea Voyager	Lindblad Expeditions	60	84.6	92.3	95.8	95.8	69.6	70.8	87.5	79.2
32 River Queen	Uniworld	132	84.2	88.1	84.5	93.2	86.4	84.7	74.6	78.0
33 River Symphony	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	140	84.0	93.3	88.3	91.7	72.9	91.7	75.0	75.0
34 Debussy	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	120	83.9	91.7	88.9	88.9	66.7	88.9	82.9	78.8
34 Wind Surf	Windstar	312	83.9	92.3	76.0	92.9	82.2	86.3	73.6	83.6
36 Avalon Artistry	Avalon Waterways	176	83.3	85.4	90.2	92.7	80.5	78.0	75.6	80.5
36 River Rhapsody	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	140	83.3	93.1	86.2	89.7	69.0	86.2	79.3	79.3
38 Viking Pride	Viking River Cruises	150	83.2	94.3	88.9	93.0	80.0	77.2	69.3	79.0
39 Viking Sun	Viking River Cruises	198	83.1	95.5	86.8	92.2	75.0	81.8	67.8	82.0
40 River Empress	Uniworld	134	82.9	90.7	86.5	91.9	79.7	79.7	73.2	78.1
41 Clipper Odyssey	Abercrombie & Kent	116	82.1	94.3	88.5	96.1	67.3	75.0	80.8	73.1
41 River barges	Abercrombie & Kent	6-50	82.1	94.1	94.1	97.0	70.6	79.4	72.7	65.6
43 Sun Boat III	Abercrombie & Kent	36	81.9	96.3	85.2	88.9	81.5	74.1	69.2	77.8
44 River Ambassador	Uniworld	128	81.7	97.2	86.1	91.7	69.4	80.6	63.9	83.3
44 Silver Wind	Silversea	296	81.7	88.7	71.6	90.6	83.7	87.2	67.9	82.0
44 Wind Spirit	Windstar	148	81.7	90.8	77.4	91.4	75.7	84.0	70.5	81.9
44 Wind Star	Windstar	148	81.7	91.2	80.8	90.4	74.9	85.1	70.0	79.2
48 Nat'l. Geo. Endeavour	Lindblad Expeditions	110	81.5	95.2	95.2	93.5	54.8	71.0	87.1	73.8
49 Sun Boat IV	Abercrombie & Kent	80	81.3	89.7	97.4	92.3	71.8	71.8	71.8	74.4
50 Tikhi Don	Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises	216	81.0	87.9	90.9	87.9	69.7	78.8	78.8	72.7

Boldfaced scores represent the highest rating for that criterion.



Au Current

With the number of passengers increasing on average 7.4 percent per year since 1990, cruising is the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry. In the past 10 years alone, staterooms have hosted 91.5 million North American guests. But that isn't news to Condé Nast Traveler readers, for whom cruising has become a favorite way to see the world. Here's a look at shipboard trends of the past year:

- **VIP AREAS** Newer ships like the Norwegian Jewel and the MSC Fantasia offer exclusive luxury experiences for pleasure seekers—Swarovski-crystal stairs and private pools included.
- **KID-FRIENDLY ZONES** Following in Disney's footsteps, most of the vessels in the Large Ships category now have dedicated kid spaces and staff.
- **UPSCALE ADVENTURE SHIPS** Gone are the days of sacrificing frills for far-flung adventure. Now you can have both. Guests aboard the National Geographic Explorer and the MV Orion can enjoy a leisurely lamb chop while sailing to the remotest shores on earth.

Watch Out

Although its name is a mouthful, this limited edition Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Rhône-Fusterie Chronograph is elegantly simple. Water-resistant to 100 meters, it's ideal for all your land and sea pursuits (888-214-6858).



Still life by Jens Mortensen. Illustration by Bo Lundberg