

SAILING TWO WAYS

Luxurious Superyacht Leisurologist or High Seas Pirate? **James Ross** takes to the water to find out



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SGALE FORCE WINDS pounded the ship, ripped at the sails, and sent the sea into an angry froth, on the captain's orders I scrambled 23 metres up the ratlines to the crow's nest high above the deck, all the while avoiding the cannon balls and musket fire from the attacking Corsican pirates. At least that is how my mind fancifully played it out.

Truthfully, we were moored in a sheltered port, the winds were calm, and the only unfriendly fire came from the heckling of my fellow shipmates. Still, the opportunity to climb the web of ropes to the lofty viewing perch was a wonderful adventure, and a measure of bravery was needed to clamour so precariously skyward. Okay, I was harnessed in.

◀ High Seas Adventure on the Star Clipper

Travel can caress one's imagination, and a voyage aboard a regal and historic tall ship, an authentic re-creation of the classic clipper ships that ruled the waves during the 19th century, has me feeling like a high seas pirate. With the magical Mediterranean as a backdrop, this rakish square-rigger is an elegant 115-metre apparition, with four masts, (the tallest rises 64 metres above the sea), 16 sails, a dashing bowsprit, and a stylish schooner stern.

On board, guests are encouraged to pull on some ropes to help raise the sails, tie a few sailor's knots to hold them in place, visit the bridge, lay in the bowsprit net suspended above the briny deep, or climb the mast for a stunning view. If that all sounds like work, you can just relax in casual elegance while smartly clad waiters offer you drinks.

The ship is a realm of teak and brass. Her top deck is lined with deck chairs, a pool and a sea of polished instruments, coiled ropes and nautical gear. A piano bar leads down to a lovely dining room, which could be from a golden-age liner, with its brass portholes, beamed ceilings and tufted velvet booths. On my cruise, there are 104 fellow scallywags of 14 different nationalities, looked after by a crew of 70.

Our seven-night voyage takes us from Rome to Cannes on the French Riviera. We invade Portoferraio where Napoleon was exiled, before drifting stealthfully between the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. Highlights include the narrow-sheltered harbour and fortified clifftop village of Bonifacio, the booty garnered at the wineries of Alghero in Sardinia, the town of Calvi with its 13th century Citadel, and the soft sand beaches of St. Tropez. Whenever the Star Clipper heads out to sea, it's all hands-on deck for the pomp and ceremony of sails being raised, accompanied by the inspirational strains of Vangelis' "1492: Conquest of Paradise."

The Star Clipper hosts a pirate night on each voyage, which has me dressed in a skullcap, eye-patch, earring and hook, trying to impress the fair wenches on board – with absolutely no success. Shiver-Me-Timbers! Perhaps I'll try a different tact as a luxury yacht leisurologist.

► The Luxurious Emerald Azzurra

I am back on the Mediterranean, but playing a decidedly different nautical role. I am on a cruise through an ancient world, on a vessel so modern and intimate, I feel like I'm sailing on my own private yacht – transforming myself seamlessly from swashbuckling Captain Jack Sparrow to swish celebrity George Clooney.

The Emerald Azzurra was built in 2022 for immersive adventures with intriguing itineraries. Not your typical cruise ship, the vessel is only 110 metres in length, carrying a maximum of 100 passengers looked after by an amazingly friendly crew of 76. I am astonished that the staff all knew my name on day one, and not due to anything silly I had done, nor because they recognized me as the celebrity I was pretending to be. The Azzurra is also so cozy and practical that we are able to slip quietly into each port. Our sleek ship is always the only cruise ship at the wharf, and locals gather on shore to photograph and ponder the impressive yacht and, I suppose, catch a brief glimpse of me disembarking. I wave (They seem disappointed).

I had jumped aboard in Athens on an adventure through some of the Greek islands, to Sicily, the Amalfi Coast, Naples, Pompeii and Rome. Port highlights include a visit to Sparta, where 300 Spartans defeated the Persian army in 480 BC, and the western Greek island of Cephalonia, where 9,000 Italian soldiers were shot by German troops after changing allegiances and aiding the island's inhabitants. In Sicily, the *Godfather* theme music echoes in my head as I clamour up the narrow cobblestone streets of Savoca to the Bar Vitelli. I channel Al Pacino; for a brief moment I'm a young Michael Corleone, sitting on the terrace sipping a limoncello.

Back on board, I head to the top deck for a soak in the jacuzzi at the bow with a cold drink from the Sky Bar, or aft to the infinity pool on the aqua deck – it depends whether I want to see where we are going or coming from. Afterwards, I gather with newfound friends in the Amici Bar & Lounge for a pre-dinner cocktail and musical entertainment. The laid-back, small-ship atmosphere encourages comradery amongst fellow travellers. Dinner is at La Cucina, the ship's well-appointed main restaurant designed by Chef Tom Götter, featuring meals made with regional ingredients paired with a selection of excellent local wines. Breakfast and lunch are served buffet style, while dinner is à la carte.

If the good food on board is getting the better of me, I visit the gym in the Elements Spa and then relax in the infrared sauna. Or, when the sky is blue and water calm in a port, guests can get active swimming, snorkelling, kayaking or paddleboarding right off the ship's marine platform. Falling off and climbing on the available SUPs great exercise.

In the early morning I sip a coffee on my suite's balcony, or head to the observation lounge at the bow, kind of a living room and library in one. I sit in one of the cozy chairs with a history book from the shelves on my lap, while meditatively watching as my own (not quite) private (not really) yacht plows gently through the wondrous Mediterranean.

GETTING ONBOARD

Luxury yacht or tall ship sailing cruise? Both vessels visit ports untouched by larger cruise ships and offer passengers the activities, amenities, comradery, and atmosphere of an intimate, private charter. For Information and Itineraries visit [starclippers.com](https://www.starclippers.com) to satisfy your buccaneer spirit or [emeraldcruiises.ca](https://www.emeraldcruiises.ca) to play the part of celebrity yachter.

