



A large white sailing ship, the Star Clipper, is shown from an aerial perspective, sailing on a deep blue ocean. The ship's numerous white sails are fully deployed, creating a striking contrast against the dark water. The ship is moving towards the bottom right of the frame, leaving a white wake behind it. The ocean surface is textured with small waves and ripples.

It's the pirate's life for me

"My imagination gets the best of me as I sail away on an eight-day high sea's adventure aboard the classic, four-masted, tall-ship Star Clipper!"

JAMES ROSS



This page:
(Clockwise from
above)

The author ventures
up the ratlines,
50 feet above
the deck.

Dining room.

Tropical bar.

Facing page:
(Clockwise from top)

The sheltered
harbour and fortified
cliff-top village of
Bonifacio, Corsica.

The library.

Typical stateroom.

I am feeling a little like Captain Jack Sparrow, standing on the bridge of the rakish *Star Clipper*, in the face of a salty Mediterranean breeze. Filled with a newfound buccaneering spirit, I shout orders to the busy crew. "Ahoy me hearties – prepare to hoist the mainsail. Come on you scurvy seadogs, heave ho!" I realize the ship's real skipper, Captain Yuriy Slastenin, is giving me a look that might soon have me walking the plank, so I jump in to help my mates. Yo Ho Ho!

Travel can stimulate one's imagination, and a voyage aboard a regal and historic tall ship in full sail, has me feeling like a high seas pirate. With the magical Mediterranean as a backdrop, the elegant *Star Clipper*, an authentic re-creation of the classic clipper ships that ruled the waves during the 19th century, is a stunning 115-metre apparition, with four masts, (the tallest of which rises 208 feet above the sea), 16 billowing sails, a dashing bowsprit and a stylish schooner stern.

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* booming from the ship's speakers.



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 open bridge (as long as you stay quiet), lay out in the bowsprit net dangling above the briny ocean deep with a chance to see dolphins playing in the surging seas, or climb the mast to the crow's nest for a stunning view. And if that all sounds like work, you can just relax in casual elegance in the upper deck loungers 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, a gleaming wood-spoked wheel, and other nautical gear. It's a delight to watch the captain and crew deftly navigate the ship through the narrow channels and cliff-side passages into the sheltered harbours.

The intimate *Star Clipper* is able to visit destinations untouched by larger cruise ships, and her size allows us to slip quietly and seamlessly into each port without overwhelming them like an invading army. Often, we tie up at the wharf, other times we tender in – in either case the fine lines of our vessel draws a crowd.

The convivial indoor-outdoor Tropical Bar, where most of the ship's onboard activities take place, is sheltered under a canvas cover. A cozy library offers a quiet escape inside its beautiful haven of mahogany wood, sailing ship art, and a faux marble fireplace. 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. It can accommodate all guests at once, which means there is one leisurely open dining time for meals.



In the morning my wife heads to the stern for a complimentary yoga class, while I show off my own dexterity by maneuvering through the swinging doors from the coffee nook to the upper deck without spilling my cup. In the evenings a group of us more unsavoury swashbucklers gather astern to howl at the moon and gawk up at the sky's universal beauty, as a blanket of stars reflect off the calm Mediterranean waters – stars that once guided lonely pirates homeward.

The *Star Clipper* is large enough to offer first-class accommodation and dining, but in a relaxed atmosphere. Superior service is provided by an attentive crew.

On my cruise there are 104 fellow scallywags of 14 different nationalities, looked after by a staff of 70. I am astonished that the crew all know my name on day one, and not due to anything silly

I've done, (well, maybe my Captain Jack impersonations).

Our seven-night voyage takes us from Rome to Cannes on the French Riviera. We invade Porto Cervo where Napoleon was exiled, before drifting stealthfully between the islands of Corsica, France, and Sardinia, Italy. Highlights include the narrow-sheltered harbour and fortified cliff-top village of Bonifacio, the booty garnered at the wineries of Alghero, Sardinia, the town of Calvi, Corsica, with its 13th Century Citadel, and the soft sand beaches of St. Tropez.

In Elba, we stand in a small bird-cage basket gondola which whisks us to the top of Monte Capanne for outstanding views. Outside of Calvi our small group careens around treacherous mountainside curves on a bus tour to the highland villages of Sant'Antonino, with its medieval





Pigna, Corsica

cobbled alleyways, and Pigna, a community saved by art, where more than 50 artisans craft everything from pottery to paintings. I pillage (buy on my wife's decree) an exquisite music box in the beautiful shape of a horse.

The *Star Clipper* hosts a number of theme nights on each voyage. A dance party sees us waltzing around the upper deck in a romantic stupor under a Corsican moon, a talent night has us, fortified by extra rations of grog, cheering on our wonderful waiter Hero, from Indonesia, as he belts out *New York - New York*, and a pirate night 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!

The opportunity for guests to clamber the web of ropes to the lofty crow's nest is another wonderful adventure. The captain orders me up (perhaps in response to my earlier indiscretions), so I scramble 50 feet up the ratlines high above the deck. Perhaps it's the heights, or possibly just my fanciful mind, but I suddenly imagine myself making the climb in gale-force winds while avoiding the cannon balls and musket fire of angry Corsican pirates. Truthfully, we're



San Tropez sunset



Pirate night

safely moored, sheltered beneath the sheer cliffs of Bonifacio, and the only unfriendly fire was the heckling coming from my wife. Still, I believe the ascent displayed a certain measure of bravery. Okay, I was harnessed in – landlubber that I be.

Traveling under sail offers a sense of intrigue and mystery, and a journey on the Mediterranean aboard a luxurious sailing ship specializing in immersive and intriguing itineraries makes this a special cruise, with the activities, amenities, comradery, and atmosphere of a private charter. ■