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# Arctic Cruises With Butlers: Expedition Ships Go Luxe

Thanks to upscale adventure cruises—the biggest trend afloat—the Arctic, Antarctica and the Amazon—just got a lot cozier



AN UNCOARSE COURSE The National Geographic Quest, one of many new high-end expedition ships, at work in Alaska. PHOTO: IAN STRACHAN/LINDBLAD-NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

By Susan Hack

Sept. 12, 2017 4:09 p.m. ET

1 COMMENTS



**Not long** ago, the only way to sail to Antarctica and the Arctic was aboard charmless research vessels and icebreakers, while plying the Amazon and Mekong meant public ferries with dubious plumbing and no air conditioning. But now **adventurous cruisers** needn't freeze, swelter or hit the public head: Several top-line cruise companies are spinning out rugged ships outfitted for remote locations and the expectations of a luxury-addicted clientele.

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Is photographing the giant tortoises of Aldabra Atoll on your bucket list? Silverseas' 120-passenger Silver Discoverer, extensively spruced up last year, explores the remote islands in the Seychelles, offering guests 12 Zodiac inflatable boats and a glass-bottom vessel to explore Indian Ocean beaches, reefs and sea life up close. Back onboard, butler service awaits. Meanwhile, her newly remodeled sister ship, the famously

plush Silver Cloud, has set her sights and strengthened hull on chillier climes—she now motors around Antarctica and the Arctic, with a Relais & Châteaux restaurant daintily poised on one of her decks ([silversea.com](http://silversea.com)).

Next summer, the luxury French cruise line Ponant plans to launch two new ice-class expedition ships of its own: Le Laperouse and Le Champlain. Each will offer 92 cabins, a spa and a boatload of French wine and cheese, as well as a futuristic underwater observation lounge. Screens will project live images from submerged cameras, as you sip a digestif, ensconced in a vibrating “body listening sofa” to which hydrophones transmit sounds of the sea ([usponant.com](http://usponant.com)).

More modestly, Norwegian line Hurtigruten is also planning a big reveal next year: the hardy 530-passenger MS Roald Amundsen, another exploration class ship purpose-built for the Polar waters and able to sail on hybrid electric power in total engine silence ([hurtigrutencruiseline.com](http://hurtigrutencruiseline.com)).

When it comes to more intimate expedition vessels, consider the 50-cabin National Geographic Quest, which launched in June. Swankier than the others in the National Geographic-Lindblad fleet, the Quest was built to cruise around Alaska’s Inside Passage, British Columbia, the San Juan Islands and the Mesoamerican reef off Belize. Its shallow draft enables the ship to access coves and fast-moving channels where guests can set out by kayak, paddleboards or snorkel gear-equipped Zodiac. Prefer to admire the scenery from a comfortable distance? Twenty-two balconied cabins ensure fine views with zero exertion ([expeditions.com](http://expeditions.com)).



The well-appointed Delfin II on the Amazon. PHOTO: RODRIGO RODRICH

Farther afield, Delfin Amazon Cruises is launching the spa-equipped 43-passenger Delfin III, crafted specifically for the remote northern Peruvian Amazon. Like its smaller sister ship, the 14-cabin Delfin II, it's a replica steamer with picture windows, five-star hotel service and, crucially, air conditioning ([delfinamazoncruises.com](http://delfinamazoncruises.com)).

In October, the 31-cabin RV Indochine II, furnished with tropical hardwood interiors, sets out on the Mekong for voyages between Cambodia's Siem Ream and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City. And in December, the same company plans to introduce the 16-passenger RV African Dream along southern Africa's Chobe and Zambezi Rivers with eight staterooms, a pool and roof terrace for sundowners. If only Stanley and Livingstone had it this good ([croisieuroperivercruises.com](http://croisieuroperivercruises.com)).