



Cruise of a Lifetime

Story by Ellen Bocuzzi

Pictures courtesy of Silversea Cruises

The voyage is the destination on a new Southeast Asian luxury cruise route.

Boarding Silversea's ultra-luxury *Silver Whisper* cruise liner in Singapore, I was greeted with champagne, and then more champagne. If check-in on some ships can feel like trudging through a post-9/11 airport, boarding the *Whisper* felt more like entering a five-star hotel. My luggage was whisked away, and once I crossed the gangway, I emerged somehow, magically, in the bar. After a glass of champagne (okay, two), I went to my cabin where I found fresh fruit and... more champagne. My travel companions and I spent the next half hour enjoying these on our private balconies - until an alarm sounded.

No, there was no real emergency - it was time for the safety drill. We all hurried up on deck wearing reflective orange life jackets and toting glasses of champagne, which, alas, were taken away from us in the name of "safety considerations". All I can say is that I'm glad there were no real emergencies during our trip, because it seemed like most participants in the safety drill spent more time giggling at the other tipsy cruisers than absorbing the talk. (Dangers on cruise ships can range from small fires to unexplained passenger disappearances to terrorists shooting missiles at the ship; I luckily encountered no such events during my cruise. I did hear a rumour, however, that one of the elderly passengers had to be escorted off in Singapore after having one too many welcome drinks.)

If your image of a cruise cabin is a small cubicle with beds that fold down at night but remain up during the day so that there is room to walk, then you have not been on a Silversea cruise. My veranda suite - one of the ship's mid-range options - looked like an upscale hotel room, with separate sleeping and sitting quarters, a walk-in closet, and a large marble bathroom stocked with Bulgari products. The housekeeper informed me, moreover, that if Bulgari was not to my liking, I could choose from alternate brands.

The highlight of my suite was its private veranda. Eighty percent of the *Whisper's* suites feature these serene spaces for quiet reading or contemplative gazing at the sea. The veranda also offers the ideal place from which to view the ship's next port of call. As the *Whisper* generally docks early in the morning, stepping out onto the veranda upon waking gives you a first, private glimpse of the next city you will visit. Morning coffee and croissants here was, perhaps, the best part of my cruise. (Digressing slightly, a web forum dedicated to luxury cruising poses the question: "Is it possible to sunbathe naked on your veranda?" My heads-up: small boats occasionally pass by.)

For those of you who want to experience the ultimate in luxury (or those of you who are into Isabella Rossellini), there is the "Rossellini Suite". This suite features three teak verandas with floor-to-ceiling glass doors, a full-sized Jacuzzi, and towels monogrammed with the initials "IR". The suite was designed by Ms. Rossellini, and she stays in it whenever she voyages on Silversea, so if you don't mind spending about USD 30,000 a week for a double occupancy room, you can feel a bit closer to her.

Luxury and personalised service are hallmarks of a Silversea cruise, and these are joined most clearly in the wide range of dining options aboard. The *Whisper* hosts five restaurants offering a variety of cuisines, including Italian, continental and regional dishes reflecting the flavours of the locale in which the ship is currently sailing. Two complimentary wines are paired with each meal, and the sommelier is happy to suggest an alternate option if neither of these is to the guest's liking. A wide range of exceptional wines is also available for purchase. For those who would prefer to dine in-suite, 24-hour room service is available. During restaurant operating hours, guests can order from any of the restaurants' menus and have the meal served course-by-course in the privacy of their room.



I must admit that one night, after watching old movies until 4am on my in-suite DVD player, I ordered a (delicious) plate of porcini mushroom ravioli. Somehow the cruise seems to sweep you up in its over-the-top luxury and lead you to such extravagances. I noticed, for example, that one man had breakfast served to him each day on the starboard deck of the ship - where there were usually no tables. When I asked a waiter about this, he explained that this particular guest preferred eating on the starboard side and so requested that a waiter carry a table there for him each morning. When I heard this, I felt a little better about ordering room service at 4am.

I did feel a bit uncomfortable, however, about sailing into Burma on such a luxury vessel. The contrast between the wealth of the ship and the poverty visible in many parts of Rangoon couldn't have been more evident, and this is something you may want to consider when deciding whether to visit a poor country on a luxury cruise ship. If cruising offers benefits - enabling one to visit many different cities without ever having to pack and unpack, for example - it is a form of travel that insulates the traveller somewhat from the host culture. This is

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'Legend of the Golden Land' - Singapore to Singapore, 11 Days

One of Silversea's new Asian routes, the *Legend of the Golden Land* embarks in Singapore and sails through the Straits of Malacca and up the Andaman coast. The ship stops at Port Klang (Kuala Lumpur), Penang, Phuket, and Rangoon and spends three days at sea before returning to Singapore.

Accommodation on board begins at USD 7,295 for the Vista Suites up to USD 20,895 for the Owner's One Bedroom Suites. Optional Air Add-On fares from USD 2,099 (Includes one-night pre- and post-cruise hotel accommodation plus transfers). Port charges, government fees and taxes of USD 350 per guest are additional.

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particularly true if you rely on package tours that the cruise provides in touring the ports of call.

Another practical thing you may want to consider when booking a cruise is how far the ports of call are from the actual places you will be visiting. On this particular cruise, which began in Singapore and stopped in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Phuket and Rangoon, the only destination in which the ship actually docked was Penang. In all of the other cases, we docked at least an hour’s drive away from the city. The additional two hours’ travelling time not only cut into sightseeing, but also required that we negotiate our own transportation or pay for transportation provided by the cruise at some ports. I decided, in fact, not even to disembark at Phuket, as I live in Thailand and visit the island relatively often; relaxing onboard by the pool seemed a better option than sitting in traffic on the island for two hours that day.

Given the increasing popularity of cruising, especially in Asia, readers of this magazine have probably considered a cruise (if you have not already taken one). But how should you determine which itinerary is right for you? You might want to begin with the question, ‘Am I a retired millionaire?’ If not (or if you are a younger, ex-Silicon Valley type of millionaire), you may want to try a relatively short itinerary (about one week) and a European route, as these tend to attract a younger, hipper crowd. Year long, around-the-world journeys, in contrast, cater to those with lots of time and money on their hands.

My Silversea cruise was a fabulous experience, and if you’re into Italian-style luxury, this cruise may be for you. For the first few days after I returned home to Bangkok, I woke up smiling, looking forward to coffee on my veranda and a trip to the buffet. After a minute, I would ask myself where I was, before remembering that I was home. Why was Dorothy so happy to be back in Kansas, anyway? 🍷



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