

The Cruising World

By

Lew Toulmin

Sail a Tall Ship to Adventure

Cruise ships are wonderful, but there is one thing that is better -- sailing a real tall ship. What's the attraction? Well, how about: true adventure, real sailing, living the history that most people just see on TV, visiting exotic places, seeing things that many folks ashore don't even know exist, meeting fascinating people and really getting to know them, and working together as a crew. It just doesn't get any better. This month I'll tell you a little about what to expect on a tall ship sailing vacation abroad, and next month I'll list some of the most interesting tall ships around the world that are available for your sailing pleasure.

Tall ships vary widely in the range of sailing intensity and work required of their passengers. At one extreme are "sailing cruise ships" like the Windjammer fleet of Caribbean party boats, the beautiful *Sea Cloud*, the Star Clipper automated tall ships, and foreign naval sail training ships. These ships do not require or really expect paying passengers to help out with the sailing. At the other extreme are vessels like the *Picton Castle*, which circles the globe under sail every two years, and the passengers are the crew. When a passenger asks the the captain of the *Picton Castle*, "Do we really have to go aloft in a storm at night and furl the sails?", his answer is a very firm, "Oh, yes." Most tall ships fall somewhere in between these extremes, and will tailor their demands to the individual passengers' needs, interests and physical abilities.

Tall ships usually divide the people on board into professional crew (PCs - the paid staff) and voyage crew (VCs - the paying but participating passengers). The PCs stay on the vessel for months or years, and are professionally trained and certified. The VCs usually stay aboard for a few days, a week, or a several weeks, and pay for their experience, generally at a rate of \$90 to \$200 per day per person. (This is quite a bargain, considering it includes transport (but not airfare), meals, training, adventure, and most shore excursions.)

VCs need not have any previous sailing experience. They should be in reasonable physical condition. Ages range from 17 to 75. VCs help raise and lower the sails, assist in weighing anchor, stand watches (usually four hours on

and eight off), learn to steer the vessel, undertake “safety rounds” (inspecting the bilge, checking lines for chafe, logging the weather, etc.), and may go aloft if they feel up to it.

Accommodations for passengers or VCs vary widely aboard tall ships. The magnificent *Sea Cloud*, formerly owned by heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post, has cabins fit for a billionaire. Many vessels, like *Soren Larsen*, have very small cabins with 2 or 3 berths. Some vessels like HMS *Bounty* and *Picton Castle* accommodate most VCs in three sided “pilot” berths with privacy curtains; these berths are arranged around an open dining or lounge area. The most extreme vessels, like the *Endeavour* replica, utilize hammocks similar to those used in the Royal Navy 200 years ago, with about 22 inches per person of space! Bathrooms are generally shared, except on the “sailing cruise ships,” and hot water is not always available or may be rationed. Food is usually “family style” and is generally plentiful and hearty but not distinguished.

“So why would I want to do this?”, you’re saying. Well, some of the amazing things I have seen aboard tall ships include:

- Isolated islands with exotic cultures, little touched by Western civilization
- A huge meteor that raced all the way across the night sky, then broke into five pieces, each with its own long trail of glory
- Four satellites passing overhead in ten minutes
- Huge humpback whales spouting just a few feet away
- A school of porpoises at night, racing around our vessel in a phosphorescent sea, leaving underwater trails over 100 feet long that glowed for over ten seconds.

Some of the things I still hope to see at sea include: St. Elmo’s fire, a waterspout, sun-dogs (illusory suns to the right and left of the real sun, seen in Arctic waters), the green flash, and the even rarer blue flash. (My wife Susan claims she saw a green flash in the same sunset where I saw nothing. HmMMM. But even she does not claim a blue flash.)

And some of the fascinating characters I have met on tall ships include:

- The 59-year-old Irish bosun of the Irish tall ship *Jeannie Johnston*, who had run with the bulls at Pamplona over 50 times (yes, that is possible: he ran each day of the 9-day festival on many occasions). He said his greatest achievements were “breaking into the heavily guarded Topkapi Palace in Istanbul – but I was too drunk to remember how,” and “spending five dollars for every dollar I’ve made.”

- A young Australian lad who sailed aboard two tall ships, then went on to crew aboard HMS *Rose*, the ship used in making the Russell Crowe movie “Master and Commander.” He got a part in the movie, met several movie stars, and earned his prized A.B. ticket (able-bodied seaman certification, issued by the US Coast Guard for 180 days under sail and passing an exam), all before his 19th birthday.
- Captain Bill Pinkney, 67 years old, the only black American to sail solo around the world via Cape Horn, and only the fourth American to achieve this feat. He went on to retrace the infamous “Middle Passage” slave route in a ship and PBS special, helped build the *Amistad* re-creation, and then captained her for several years.
- A young professional crew-woman named Karen aboard *Amistad*. She thrived in the ship’s forecabin, a tiny, tossing space 13 feet by 12 feet by 9 feet, which she shared as the only female with eight male deckhands. Of all the crew, she was the toughest and the best seaman, although she had only one year of total sea time – less than any of the men.
- A 57-year-old retired oil man from California, who had sailed as VC in every ocean, aboard 10 different tall ships. He had even rounded Cape Horn as a VC in the tall ship *Europa*, in a re-creation of Richard Henry Dana’s voyage in Two Years Before the Mast. As he said, “Most tourists don’t even know this kind of vacation exists. But it’s unforgettable.”

Next month I will list some of the most interesting tall ships around the world. In the meantime, I suggest you contact the American Sail Training Association (ASTA; 240 Thames St., Newport, RI 02840, 401-846-1775; tallships.sailtraining.org) and obtain their excellent \$18 book, Sail Tall Ships! It lists over 300 tall ships from around the globe, and for each gives a picture, ship’s history, rig and dimensions, sailing program, Coast Guard or other certification, and contact information. Another useful contact is Sail Training International, www.sailtraininginternational.org, a charitable institution which organizes international tall ship events and races.

Happy sails to you!

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Sail One of These Tall Ships

Last month I described the romance of tall ship sailing. This month I will give some specific suggestions for fascinating tall ships around the world. Cruising grounds for tall ships cover the entire globe. There are various tall ships in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan and South America, and of course in America we have scores. Many US cities and states have built or are building tall ships as roving ambassadors, and these often go overseas. There are numerous tall ships in Britain and Europe, and these usually get together each year in the late summer or early fall for races, parades, and "sailing in company." This latter is the best type of event, because an entire fleet of gorgeous tall ships will stay together for several days, and the photo ops are fantastic.

The biggest foreign event planned for 2006 will be the July 6 to August 22 tall ships festival in Europe, which includes a race from St. Malo (France) to Lisbon, a "cruise in company" from Lisbon to Cadiz and on to La Coruna (Spain), and a race from La Coruna to Antwerp (Belgium). See www.tallshipsraces.com for details. A major tall ship event in 2006 on this side of the Atlantic will be the America's Sail event, starting in Fortaleza, Brazil on May 27, continuing on to the Dominican Republic, and ending in a festival in Beaufort, North Carolina on July 4, 2006. See www.americassail.com for updates and a more detailed schedule. In 2007 a large gathering of tall ships from all over the world (and perhaps the Queen of England) is expected in Virginia for the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. A trans-Atlantic race and "cruise in company" is likely. See www.jamestown2007.org.

Some of the greatest tall ships in the world, with some of the best voyages, include the following:

The *Sorlandet* is a graceful, 217-foot full rigged ship (meaning she has square sails on all three masts). She was built in 1927 and sunk in World War II but re-floated. She is one of the best run tall ships in Scandinavia, and since many of her crew, cadets and VCs speak English, she is an excellent ship to begin on.

Sorlandet usually participates in the European tall ships races and festivals. She is based at Gravene 6, N-4610 Kristiansand, Norway; tel: (47) 38 02 98 90; www.fullriggeren-sorlandet.no.

The *Soren Larsen* is a brigantine (foremast with square sails, mainmast with fore and aft sails) built in 1949 in Denmark as a Baltic trader. She is 106 feet overall, and can carry 22 VCs. She is now based in Auckland, New Zealand, and each year sails from Auckland to Easter Island, Pitcairn, Tahiti, Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu and back to New Zealand. This voyage was described by National Geographic Adventure magazine as "one of the 25 greatest trips on Earth." Contact: Squaresail Pacific Ltd., P.O.Box 310, Kumeu, Auckland, New Zealand; tel: (64) 9-411 8755; www.sorenlarsen.com.

The *Lord Nelson* (140 feet overall) and the *Tenacious* (213 feet overall) are two amazing ships run by the equally amazing British Jubilee Sailing Trust (JST). The JST's mission is to teach sailing skills to disabled persons, regardless of type of handicap. The JST has taken over 21,000 people to sea, of which 8,500 were disabled, including 3,000 wheelchair users. Each vessel can carry 40 voyage crew, with 20 able-bodied VCs paired with 20 disabled VCs. Special lifts carry wheelchair users up the masts, and special "talking compasses" allow blind VCs to steer the ship. The vessels usually cruise in British waters, with summer voyages to the Canaries or Caribbean. Contact: Hazel Road, Woolston, Southampton, Hampshire, SO19 7GB, England; tel: (44) 870 4435783; www.jst.org.uk.

HM Bark *Endeavour* is a museum quality replica of Captain Cook's famous exploration ship of 1768-71. *Endeavour* recently completed a voyage from England to Australia, and will be on display and sail Australian waters in the near future. The sailing program is run quasi-military style, and accommodations for regular VCs are in hammocks. Four more expensive small cabins are available for persons recreating the roles of the scientists and officials who accompanied Captain Cook. Contact: Pier Road, Whitby, North Yorkshire, U.K. YO21 3PU; Tel: 44 (0)8707 458 958; www.barkendeavour.com.au.

Europa was built in 1911 but completely refurbished in 1994, and re-rigged as a barque (three masts, with the mizzenmast fore-and-aft rigged). She is 185 feet long overall, and is very well prepared for long distance sailing. She will spend the fall of 2005 sailing from the Mediterranean to Ushuaia, Argentina, and then will undertake three 22-day voyages in the winter of 2005-6 across the Drake Passage to Antarctica. She will be one of the only tall ships ever to have sailed to that continent. Now, that's adventure! Contact: PO Box 17402, NL-2502 CK, The Hague, Netherlands; tel: 31-(0)70-331 7475; www.barkeuropa.com.

The *Pride of Baltimore II* is a fast, weatherly topsail schooner (two masts, fore and aft sails on both masts, but with a square sail aloft on the foremast), built on the lines of a War of 1812 Baltimore Clipper. This type of vessel was built for privateering and smuggling. She is 108 feet long overall. *Pride* voyages overseas and in US waters as a sailing ambassador for Baltimore and Maryland. She is currently in the Mediterranean and will return to the US via the Canaries and Puerto Rico in the fall and early winter of 2005. Training for VCs is very intensive and well thought out. There are three passenger cabins sleeping two guest crew each. Contact: 401 E. Pratt St., Suite 222, Baltimore, MD 21202; tel: 410-539-1151; www.pride2.org.

The *Picton Castle* undertakes the ultimate sailing adventure. About every two years she circles the globe, spending about 18 months on a voyage from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia to Panama, the Galapagos, South Pacific, Bali, Indian Ocean, South Africa, and back to Canada. Accommodations for 40 voyage crew are in pilot berths with privacy curtains. VCs can sign up for one of three legs, or for the entire voyage. The vessel is a 179-foot-long barque, with a huge cargo hold, which is used to carry school supplies and trade goods to isolated islands in the Pacific. Contact: P.O. Box 380695, Cambridge, MA 02238-0695; tel: 617-532-4446; www.picton-castle.com.

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