

LIVING THE DREAM:

Tall Ship Sailing Across the Mediterranean

By Doug Wallace

While luxury cruise trends take on the future, those out for something unique and intimate take their cue from the 18th century – aboard classic tall ships built for real sailing adventures.



THE CREW ©STAR CLIPPERS



STANDARD CABIN ©STAR CLIPPERS

It feels like I'm starring in a TV commercial for something exquisite – chocolates or diamond rings or suntan lotion – or for a luxury tall ship cruise vacation. The upper deck of a bona fide sailboat has a cool quotient that's hard to top. Here, I am living the dream: the sun going down over the Mediterranean, cocktail in hand, a fresh sea breeze filling the sails, European friends, and an international crew.

I set sail with Star Clippers, a specialty cruise line operating three of the world's tallest clipper ships, and spent a blissful week on the 16-sail *Star Flyer*, touring to Mallorca, Menorca, Corsica, St. Tropez and Cannes.

An alternative to the bigger 2,000-passenger ships, these old-school beauties give a true sense of freedom, like you've rented a private boat and can pop into small ports for an afternoon or spend an afternoon with a paperback in the bowsprit net, suspended above the waves. The Star Clippers fleet is built to make the best use of the open-air areas. "You're meant to be as close to the elements as possible – the sun, the sea and the wind," says Captain Mariusz Szalek.

For ultimate fresh air, Szalek encourages guests to sign up to climb up to the crow's nest for a bird's-eye view. Gone are the days when you had to actually send a crewmember up the mast to set the sails; motorized sails do all that. And though the sailing schedule – and more specifically the port timetables – limits the number of hours of sailing versus using the engine, the experience is breathtaking.

With Atlantic crossings, passengers are at sea for 12 days "with no ports, no excursions, nothing to do but relax – which is exactly what they sign up for," says Szalek. You really have to be good at doing nothing; this is no place for the fidgety. "As a result, passengers get very close to each other, grouping together like a family."

STAR CLIPPERS FLEET

Star Clippers launched in 1991 with the 170-guest *Star Flyer*, followed in 1992 by the 170-guest *Star Clipper*, and then in 2000 by the 227-guest *Royal Clipper*. Winter 2017 will see the addition of a fourth ship, the 35-sail, five-mast *Flying Clipper*, which will carry 300 passengers. Modelled on the *France II*, the largest square-rigged sailing ship ever built, the multi-million dollar *Flying Clipper* will be the largest of its kind on the seas today.

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STAR CLIPPERS' STAR FLYER ©STAR CLIPPERS

“You need to have a passion for the sea. This is what ties all Star Clippers guests together”

And who is this new kin of yours? Simply put, these are people who love sailing. “You need to have a passion for the sea. This is what ties all Star Clippers guests together,” says Szalek. These travellers are not looking for comedy acts, grand theatres or casinos. They are young and old, newlyweds to retirees, all very interesting and kitted out with wardrobes that fit right into the ship’s warm nautical décor.

Life on board falls into an easy routine very quickly. Dinner seating is casual and open, and there are little snack tables set up throughout the day. If you don’t make it to the bottom of your bottle of wine, they’ll keep it for you in the cellar. You can have a massage, play deck hockey, visit the bridge anytime or take a yoga class. The tenders that whisk you to shore and back are painless and practical.

Although I didn’t have the nerve to climb the mast to the crow’s nest, I did manage to send my GoPro camera up on the head of a friend. Did she get footage of me living inside my tall ship TV commercial? Absolutely.



DINING ON THE STAR FLYER ©STAR CLIPPERS



A DELICIOUS DESSERT ©STAR CLIPPERS

MEDITERRANEAN MUST-SEES

To keep itineraries fresh, Star Clippers mixes up both the ports of call and the ships sailing into them each season. Here are a few highlights on Mediterranean itineraries:

PALMA DE MALLORCA SPAIN

MUST-DO: The Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma is a Gothic masterpiece. The nearby Royal Palace of La Almudaina was once a 13th century Arabian fort.

TAKE-HOME: The soil, climate and sea breeze work miracles on Mallorca’s centuries-old olive trees, which produce some of the finest extra virgin olive oil in the world. Stock up.

MAHON, MENORCA SPAIN

MUST-DO: Wandering is the order of the day here – along the shops of Carrer de ses Moreres and Carrer Hannover, and on through to the restaurants along the waterfront.

TAKE-HOME: Menorca is famous for its shoe industry – in particular, the traditional leather sandals known as avarcas, an icon of the island.

BONIFACIO, CORSICA FRANCE

MUST-DO: At the top of Old Town, take the King Aragon Staircase – 187 steps down the southern limestone cliff wall. They were carved by monks creating a path to an underground well.

TAKE-HOME: Corsican honey comes in a variety of strengths and tastes, from the fruity, caramel flavours harvested in spring to the bitter and strawberry-flavoured varieties in the fall.

CALVI, CORSICA FRANCE

MUST-DO: The port citadel and beach are *de rigueur*, but try to take a winding tour up the nearby mountains to the northeast to the villages of Sant’Antonino, Corbara and Pigna.

TAKE-HOME: Napoleon said he could smell his homeland before he could see it. He was referring to the wild herbs, the scents of which fill the air. Look for exquisite essentials oils.

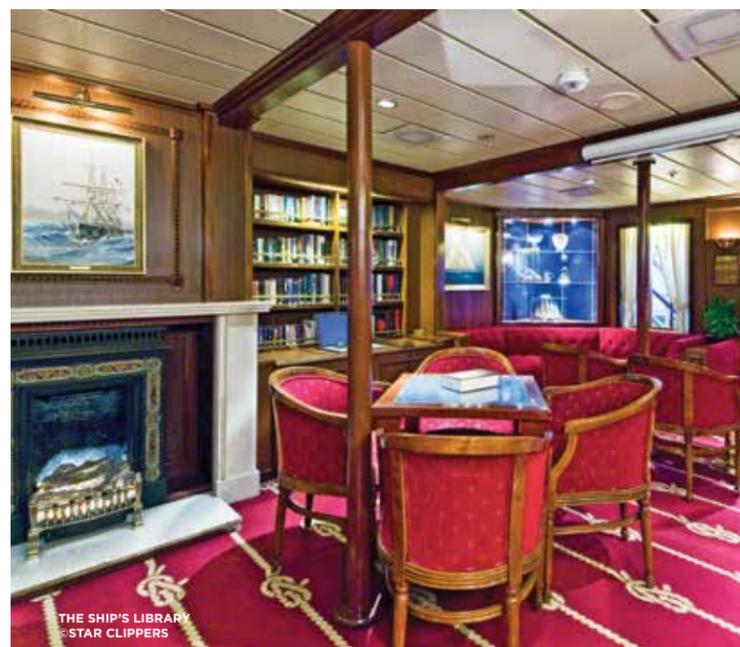
ST. TROPEZ FRANCE

MUST-DO: Before you find the perfect café table at the marina, stop in at the Annonciade Museum, a converted 16th-century chapel devoted to modern art from the region.

TAKE-HOME: While the town’s famous pastry, the Tarte Tropézienne, can’t be packed in your suitcase, you can buy the cookbook and DIY.



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