

BOLD

FALL 2023

Traveller

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ESCAPE!

ULTIMATE CRUISES
from expedition ships to super yachts

READY, SET, GO!

If you're an explorer at heart, there's nothing more exciting than taking a journey to rugged parts of the world. And, if you might need a bit more TLC or accessibility to travel, we've got you. Here, **Judi Cohen** looks at five expedition cruise ships and finds some of the best for people with limited mobility.



Photo courtesy of Yuri Matisse Choufour / Hurtigruten Expeditions

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD lately about expedition cruising, where you can travel to far flung, off-the-beaten-track locations and get up close with nature in comfort, accompanied by expert expedition staff.

In the past few years, expedition ships have become a lot more luxurious, even with fine dining, and these cruises have become

extremely popular (particularly in the Arctic and Antarctic) by adventurous travellers of all ages and levels of mobility.

However, it's important to know that – despite all the new comforts – these exhilarating expedition cruises can be quite physical and demanding. They can involve transfers from the ship to Zodiacs and tenders, challenging landings with steep steps and rocky beaches under varying skies and weather conditions.

One thing I have noticed in my travels on these ships is that these cruises attract a wide variety of guests – of nearly all ages and most levels of mobility. If you're an adventurous traveller looking for something different, who is older, or with limited mobility, there are a number of expedition cruise lines that can accommodate you. A travel advisor that specializes in expedition cruises is also a good place to start.

THE CRUISE LINE: HURTIGRUTEN

THE BONUS: Focus on older experienced adventurers

Hurtigruten Expeditions attracts explorers of all ages but guests are mainly 60+. The company's expedition fleet, including MS *Roald Amundsen* and MS *Fridtjof Nansen*, have accessible cabins – with the exception of *Santa Cruz II*, which is part of their subsidiary Metropolitan Touring operating in the Galapagos, and has no accessible cabins. All ships, except for the *Santa Cruz II*, have guest elevators.

Guests who use walkers embark the same way as other passengers. Hurtigruten staff are available around the ships to assist guests, however guests with low mobility are advised



Photo courtesy of Quark Expeditions / David Merron

to bring a fellow traveller with them who can provide additional assistance.

Guests who are able to take a few steps can easily use the tenders and Zodiacs. Walking poles can be rented on board for no-fee and are mainly used for landings, excursions and hikes. All you need to do is make a request at reception. Excursions are described with varying degrees of difficulty and mobility in mind, and guests can choose excursions that best suit their situation. hurtigruten.com

THE CRUISE LINE: VIKING EXPEDITION CRUISES

THE BONUS: Submarines and special operations boats

Viking Cruises recently introduced its new expedition ship, *Viking Octantis*, for use in the polar regions and Great Lakes. Similar to their ocean and river ships, passengers tend to be 55 plus, and are interested in up-close nature and cultural adventures. *Octantis* delivers both in abundance.

The ship has elevators serving all passenger decks with loads of indoor and outdoor viewing and dining areas, should you choose not to leave the ship. It's also the best of a traditional cruise with comfortable cabins, walk-in showers with large nozzles, well-positioned grab bars, and easy to open toiletries.

The expedition equipment includes kayaks, six-passenger submarines, special operations

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THE CRUISE LINE: QUARK EXPEDITIONS

THE BONUS: Multi-generational appeal

Quark Expedition's *Ultramarine* and *World Explorer* are both ideal vessels for accommodating guests with limited mobility. The ship layouts allow meals and presentations to take place on one deck, while access to Zodiacs happens on another, which reduces the need to go up and down stairs. Although both ships have elevators, they are not always available and may be closed during inclement

weather. Accessible cabins geared towards the mobility-challenged are available, with extra space and grab bars in the bathrooms.

challenged to enjoy expedition cruising in style. Every Silversea excursion has a clear description to indicate the level of mobility required to enjoy the excursion. The company's newest ultra-luxury expedition ship, *Silver Endeavour*, even has options for Fly-Cruise voyages to both polar regions. While some consider "crossing the Drake Passage" to Antarctica a rite of passage, others will find it easier to fly to a local air base at the start or end of their cruise. Silversea has Fly-Cruise options from Puerto Williams in Chile and King George Island to Argentina.

quarkexpeditions.com

THE CRUISE LINE: SILVERSEA CRUISES

THE BONUS: Next-level luxe

Known best for their impressive fleet of luxurious all-suite ships, Silversea Cruise's expedition ships including *Silver Explorer*, *Silver Origin*, *Silver Wind* and *Silver Cloud* provide opportunities for the mobility

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For adventures on land, hiking poles are available. On one of my excursions, there were many passengers with canes and hiking poles enjoying the hike in the provincial park and a visit to a rustic fishing lodge.

It is also possible to travel in the ship's submarines, however this would not be suitable for those with claustrophobia, motion sickness or the inability to climb a ladder. While this

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Getting in and out of a Zodiac can be compared to getting in and out of a bathtub. And in terms of mobility, those that have a level of fitness where they can walk their dog once a day, are completely suitable for a voyage to the polar regions with Quark Expeditions.

Noting that both active and adventurous travellers, as well as more relaxed leisure travellers, are onboard Quark Expeditions, Cara Matthews, Regional Sales Director and Public

challenged to enjoy expedition cruising in style.

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Expedition ships frequently embark with a Zodiac, which may not be suitable for those with a walker. That said, the vast majority of embarkation on *Endeavour* and *Explorer* is done via a staircase, with crew assistance or via Zodiac in King George Island for Antarctic itineraries. Only about one percent of their ports embark via ramp.

Origin sails year-round in the Galapagos Islands and embarkation is always by Zodiac. At times these seas have swells, so to embark via zodiac guests must be able to hold their body weight and be able to make a positive step up. The company explains that "expedition staff does assist guests, but embarkation can be challenging at times even for able-bodied guests." Trekking poles can be rented for a small fee through the company's expedition outfitting partner.

All Silversea ships have elevators. However, *Endeavour's* elevator does not extend to her top deck, deck 10. *Cloud*, *Wind* and *Endeavour* offer accessible cabins. silversea.com

THE CRUISE LINE: ADVENTURE CANADA

THE BONUS: Top-notch and in our own backyard

Family-owned Adventure Canada offers expedition cruises aboard *Ocean Endeavour* to the Arctic, Antarctic, Canada, South and Central America and Europe. The majority of clients are age 60+ with an adventurous spirit. Guests with very limited mobility who use canes and walkers are welcome, and ideally should be able to navigate at least one flight of stairs as wheelchairs cannot be accommodated on the vessel.

A variety of guided experiences are available in destinations and range in difficulty and distance to assist guests in choosing appropriate excursions. With everything from beachcomber walks to challenging 10 km hikes, passengers are broken into smaller groups for the best experience.

In discussing the itineraries, Cedar Swan, CEO of Adventure Canada explained: "It's

easier to accommodate limited mobility on Atlantic Canada and European programs, in communities where infrastructure and transportation are provided. The physical landscape in the Arctic, combined with the Zodiac ship-to-shore landings, can create some challenges. Some guests are fearful for the first time; however, they find their rides on Zodiacs to be unexpected highlights and a lot of fun. There are six steps from the Zodiac platform into the ship, and then the majority of clients take the stairs up to their cabins. There is an elevator serving decks 3 through 6, but not 7 through 9." She added that for couples with a big discrepancy in their mobility levels, there are options for both to have a guided experience. Onboard education is always provided for those choosing not to go ashore.

While cabins are not accessible, they have walk-in showers and safety grab bars for stability and lots of room to move around comfortably.

adventurecanada.com

Photo courtesy of Quark Expeditions/ David Merron

