

TRAVEL

Travel trends 2024: What's next in cruising, from the rise of boutique ships to the extra-extra long stay

Enhanced culinary greatness, a focus on sustainability and more — what cruising fans need to know about travelling in 2024.

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A view of Silversea's Silver Nova, which joined the fleet in summer 2023. Silversea

Why cruise now? There are all the usual reasons, including on-board amenities and the perennial ease of ship life. Who wouldn't want to unpack once and travel everywhere? But beyond that, new trends in cruising are offering more enticement. Here are just a few reasons to set sail.

The food evolution

Culinary options continue to be a key draw for cruisers, but the more-is-more, buffet-centric attitude is changing. This is reflected in new offerings, like shore excursions that hyper-focus on local ingredients and education — part of the [S.A.L.T. program](#) on several Silversea ships, including the new Silver Nova. Menus are also evolving, with [AmaWaterways'](#) river ships going completely à la carte to help reduce food waste. In the fine dining sphere, Crystal Cruises, relaunched this past summer, features [Umi Uma](#), the only Nobu restaurant at sea, on both its Crystal Serenity and Crystal Symphony ships



The rise of boutique ships



The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's Evrima ship, which sports (as you may expect) hotel-worthy design. Edgardo Contreras/Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection

The 100-passenger [Emerald Sakara](#), sister ship of the Emerald Azzurra, debuted in the Caribbean this December. These shapely vessels, more like floating boutique hotels than mega resorts, can navigate more intimate ports (think: effortless gliding around the islands of the Dalmatian coast or the Seychelles archipelago), while still offering ample stateroom space, bars, pools and more.

Speaking of floating hotels, the [Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's](#) Evrima hosts just 298 passengers but is sturdy enough to make an ocean crossing. The next Ritz-Carlton ship, Ilma, will sleep a few more — up to 448 guests — when it hits the water in 2024.

Sustainable moves

MSC Cruises is investing in the fuels of the future, including for its new luxury brand, [Explora Journeys](#). But it's an evolution: Explora I and II currently run on marine gas oil, which will be replaced by liquid natural gas (LNG) and eventually hydrogen power. The ships will be retrofitted to use more eco-friendly fuel as it becomes available. MSC's LNG-powered World Europa has also been successful in "plugging in" while in port at Valletta, Malta; the company has plans to add 15 ports around Europe.

It's something river ships are already doing: using shore power to connect to the local power grid, so a ship's engine doesn't need to keep running while in port, helping to reduce carbon emissions.

Emerging destinations



A view of Mompox, Colombia, and the Magdalena River, which AmaWaterways will begin cruising in 2024. Uwe-Bergwitz

Scenic will traverse Western Australia's lesser-travelled [Kimberley coast](#) on its latest luxury expedition ship, where the Indian Ocean and the Timor Sea meet, and will offer immersive Aboriginal and red desert experiences.

AmaWaterways will launch on the [Magdalena River in Colombia](#) in November 2024, with two itineraries aboard a newly designed ship, AmaMagdalena. Wildlife spotting and water sports come with the territory, as does cultural immersion, such as a weekly Carnaval celebration on board when docked in Barranquilla, the hometown of Shakira, famous for its food and this annual festival.

Nomads at sea



A suite in Uniworld's Mekong Jewel, one of four ships on the 55-day Rivers of the World itinerary. trung nguyen

One of the biggest trends is the longer cruise, partly due to readily available Wi-Fi, the rise of the "paycation" (business-meets-leisure holiday), and of course the overall ease of cruising.

But we're not talking about your classic seven-day, Southampton-to-NYC transatlantic crossing on Cunard's Queen Mary. We're talking itineraries that last weeks or even months. Holland America Line has its [Grand Voyages](#), for example: Its 73-day Grand Africa inaugural sailing sold out and included overland safaris. Its new, 133-day Pole-to-Pole journey, debuting in 2025, will sail out of Florida and travel to 28 countries on five continents, including Antarctica.

Another way to make a major dent in your bucket list: Uniworld's [Rivers of the World](#) itinerary, which will be even longer than usual in fall 2024, taking you from Lima, Peru, to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The route covers 10 countries, from South America to Europe to Asia, over 55 days on four ships, with flights in between.