

Good Fellowship

Why cruising still puts wind in our sails

BY PAUL LASLEY AND ELIZABETH HARRYMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN SALERNO

Paul's first cruise was a transit through the Panama Canal aboard a Royal Viking Line ship. The service was so extraordinary that whenever he returned to his cabin, any towel he'd used had been picked up, and any apple he'd eaten had been replaced. Although Royal Viking shuttered in 1998, the ship hooked Paul on cruising.

Elizabeth's first cruise was around the Hawaiian Islands with now-defunct American-Hawaii Cruises. Overcooked meat and bland vegetables characterized the food, and service was so casual that one morning, two waitresses got into an argument across Elizabeth's table. But she embraced activities from diving for spoons in the ship's pool to taking hula lessons, and seeing Hawai'i's islands from the sea enchanted her. She, too, was hooked on cruising.

Some of our well-traveled friends scoff at our affection for this vacation option, which continues to grow in popularity: A record 23 million passengers are expected to cruise this year, up 4 percent from 2014, according to the Cruise Lines International Association.

"I'm just not a cruise person," a friend told us recently. "I can't imagine being stuck on a ship with all those strangers." Well, you don't stay strangers for long. Being cut off from land creates a sense of camaraderie. People meet over coffee or at shows.

"You don't get to really experience a place on a cruise," sniffed another friend.

Although you're not in port long enough to explore a country in depth, you get intense snapshots. Like seeing the circa 1600 BC stone remnants of Santorini's Akrotiri, thought to be Plato's inspiration for Atlantis. Or dining with locals on goat water, a savory broth, at a shack a few miles from St. Thomas's tourist-haunted stores.

But for us, the ports aren't really the point. Cruising is its own experience. The more we cruise, the more we relish the days at sea: Life aboard ship is like being in a floating city, with shops, restaurants, and nightclubs. You can attend lectures or classes (Elizabeth does), or sit in a deck chair and watch for whales (Paul's favorite activity).

On a ship, far from the pressures of work or other shoreside obligations, people become who they really want to be—their best selves. Women are beautiful and witty; men are charming and handsome. Families bond. Everybody flirts. Different from traveling, cruising has a magic of its own. **W**



[Worth the Trip]

In Boston's North End there must be a dozen Italian pastry shops, including some that make their way into guidebooks. At **Modern Pastry Shop**, the same family has operated the more than 70-year-old authentic Italian bakery for three generations. A specialty is cannoli—those fried tubular shells filled with a soft mixture of ricotta cheese, sugar, and vanilla. We've devoured cannoli in Sicily, but hadn't found their equal in America—until stopping at Modern Pastry last fall. As Italian chefs do, the Picariello family makes the shells ahead of time but doesn't fill them until the treats are purchased, ensuring freshness. Our cannoli had the perfect balance of crisp shell with rich, slightly sweet filling. Suddenly, we were back in our favorite Taormina café. (617) 523-3783; modernpastry.com.

TOP RIGHT: MOE KAFFER FOOD/ALAMY; BOTTOM LEFT: MASTERFILE

[From the Insiders]

Rather than renting a car when traveling in a foreign country, consider hiring a **car and driver**. You won't have to worry about navigating strange roads and can gain local insights. Many tour companies offer this option.

