

## TRAVEL &amp; RECREATION

getaway



...CONTINUED experts in various fields (on our trip we had an archeologist guide us to the Viking sites, and naturalists on the kayak and Zodiac trips), as well as on-board lectures and activities such as bird-watching from the bow. The option to dine at The Grill by Thomas Keller ranked high on many lists, as well as being able to take meals solo or a deux (versus other ships, where the smallest tables seat six), seemingly unlimited quantities of Champagne and a complimentary caviar service that could be ordered via room service. The diversity of the guests in terms of age and nationality was also a draw. While most were American, there were a fair amount of other countries represented, including the U.K., Belgium, France, Netherlands and, even, South America. Everyone seemed to echo the sentiments of the cruise director who, during a welcome toast as we passed the famed "Little Mermaid" statue on our way out of Copenhagen Harbour, spotted a massive cruise ship docked nearby, lifted her glass of bubbly and said: "Let's toast to the fact we're not on that."

I'd chosen this particular cruise because it covered a lot of ground: We woke up in a different, usually quite remote, town almost every day, which offered many opportunities to kayak or hike in spectacular scenery, or to simply observe while having a cocktail on my balcony. There were a number of experts on board—a historian, an archeologist, various naturalists—with daily talks that would detail what to expect at each stop, as well as a guest services team available 24/7 to assist with everything from setting up Internet to getting reservations to giving insider tips on shopping in certain ports of call.

We sailed in midsummer—the time of year when the days are very long in this part of the world, where the sun sets around 10PM and rises only a few hours later, providing ample time to take in the scenery. The fjords of Southern Norway were incredible—long narrow inlets

surrounded by snowcovered peaks, some soaring as high as 6,000 feet, with waterfalls and charming towns below. In Skjolden, for example, we were docked in water that was as clear and blue as the Caribbean, yet at the foot of Norway's highest mountains and largest glacier, where we spotted professional ski teams doing offseason training. It was unseasonably warm, and the area was a lush green farmland dotted with lambs, goats and llamas. We had a similar experience in Runavik in the Faroe Islands, where we hiked along twin lakes, then up a hill to take in the countryside.

In Scotland, the drives to the Viking architectural sites in the Orkney Islands were as picturesque as the sites themselves—passing farms with Angus and Hereford cows, Shetland ponies, and beaches where seals were sunning themselves, on the way to incredible spots like the Ring of Brodgar, literally a ring of (now) 27 7- to 15-foot-high stones believed to have been erected between 2500 and 2000 B.C., and much larger than Stonehenge. We kayaked with dolphins in Ullapool before going ashore in this

town of 1,500 for lunch at famous The Seafood Shack and to get a glimpse of a local oddity—trees that look exactly like palm trees, but are actually New Zealand cabbage trees.

After each exploration, whether organized or not, we returned to the ship, where there would always be a surprise waiting, be it Caviar on Deck, served poolside; a special lunch set up in the galley kitchens allowing guests a peek behind the culinary scenes and the opportunity to chat with some of the 47 chefs on board; a tour of the ship's bridge and the high-tech navigation devices; the option to partake in a sound bowl meditation; or a shuffleboard tournament, with yours truly taking home the top prize.

All of this came as a very pleasant surprise to me, as the one time I'd cruised before, I couldn't wait to get back on land. But on this trip, when we disembarked in Dover, I was shocked to find myself feeling a bit wistful, and more shocked when, weeks later, I was still talking about the journey and recommending it to friends. *Similar 14-day excursions from \$7,499 per person, seabourn.com* ■



From top: Seabourn Quest docked in Olden, a town filled with cafes and boutiques, among other traveler attractions; featuring a full-length window and a sliding glass door to a private veranda, the Veranda Suites on the Seabourn fleet offer panoramic views. They also include a living area, a dining table for two, walk-in closets, a fully stocked bar and a marble bath with double vanities.

PROMOTION

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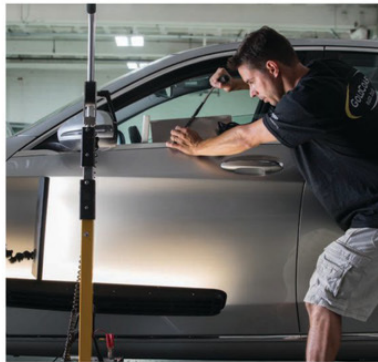
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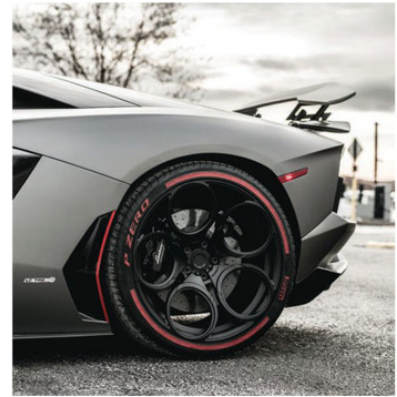


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