



The Luxury of Cruising

By Susan B. Barnes

Some travelers may define luxury as opulent accommodations, personalized service, and fine dining, others may see it as opportunity to visit remote bucket-list destinations. Whatever the definition, luxury is one of the fastest growing segments of the cruise industry – and among those attracted by luxury cruising are younger generations of travelers.

Proof of the popularity of luxury cruises is in growth. According to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the luxury cruise fleet has tripled over the past 15 years, from 28 ships in 2010 to 97 ships in the luxury category in 2024. That growth promises to continue: 1.5 million cruise travelers are forecast to choose a luxury cruise experience by 2028, accounting for 4% of the projected 42 million cruise passengers globally within that same timeframe.

Luxury cruise brands are well poised for the fanfare. “If you look at everything from the big ships in the contemporary brands to where we are with small ship luxury cruising, everyone is upping their game, and consumers are really benefitting from it,” says Samuel Chamberlain, CEO of PONANT EXPLORATIONS Group Americas.

Growth has come from new ships and even new luxury lines such as MSC’s Explora Journeys, joining established high-end brands including Silversea, Seabourn, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, and Ponant. Additionally, popular cruise lines such as Celebrity Cruises, Crystal Cruises, Cunard Line, MSC Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, and Princess Cruises offer luxury ship-within-a-ship options, affording guests in select cabins and suites access to dedicated dining, lounges and other exclusive spaces, plus enhanced service and amenities.

Luxury cruise vs. hotel

Cruise ships offer all the fineries of leading luxury hotels, even butler service. But a big bonus of luxury cruising is cruise ships go places – the dreamy beaches of the Caribbean and Mediterranean, world class cities around the globe, and even to some of the most remote destinations on earth, such as Antarctica, the Arctic, the Galapagos and the Kimberly region of Australia.

“Guests can sail to destinations that luxury hotels simply can’t reach, such as remote landscapes and hidden ports that feel worlds away from the ordinary,” says Rob Coleman, Senior Vice President of Sales with luxury line Seabourn. “Luxury cruising delivers the sophistication of a world-class resort and the soul of genuine hospitality, but with the added power to take travelers to the most extraordinary corners of the world.”

Most luxury cruise ships explore with fewer than 1,000 passengers, some far fewer. According to CLIA, ships under 3,000 passengers account for more than 73% of today’s global fleet.

Overall, travel agents are seeing the highest growth in cruise bookings in the premium, luxury and expedition segments compared to a year ago, according to CLIA’s 2025 State of the Cruise Industry report.

Chamberlain observes that with cruising, travel logistics are easier than on land-based trips, which he says is “a luxury in itself.” Guests enjoy oceanfront cabins and suites and only need to unpack once, and luxury cruise fares include everything from intuitive, personalized service to enriching cultural experiences that connect guests with the places they visit.

Today’s Luxury Cruisers

Traditionally, luxury cruisers have been Baby Boomers, the wealthiest retiring generation in history, spending \$157 billion a year on travel with a significant amount of that spent on cruises, according to CLIA. Other generations are also taking note.

“Today’s luxury cruisers are engaged explorers who are curious, confident travelers, and want to see and experience the world in comfort and style,” says Coleman. “Many are couples in their 50s and 60s who have the means, time and curiosity to travel deeply.”

Luxury cruisers ages 29 to 49 are a growing segment, whether traveling on their own or as part of multigenerational families. Another growing segment of luxury cruising is solo travelers, attracted by social aspects of the cruise experience.

Cruise lines are responding to increased demand with updated ships and over-the-top enhancements, such as memorable dining experiences, creative wellness offerings, and adventures ashore. Many lines have “slowed” their itineraries, affording more time in ports by day and opportunity to experience local nightlife.

Back onboard, spacious staterooms and thoughtfully designed public spaces afford the luxury of room to relax and unwind, all while admiring the sea.

© 2026 Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). All rights reserved.

This content may be shared or republished with clear attribution to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). Content must remain intact and may not be altered, edited, or excerpted in

any way that changes its meaning or context. For additional permissions, media inquiries, or additional information, please email krobinson@cruising.org.