



01

SAILING ON AN ARISTO-CRAFT

Debbi K. Kickham sets sail with William D. Kickham, Esq. on *Azamara Journey*, a privileged place where there is no 'No'.

I'll never forget the night I surprised my husband, Bill, with a belated birthday dinner-for-two on Azamara Club Cruises – a loving gesture that he, in his wildest dreams, had never expected. We sat in the dining room and viewed the sunset, whereupon I told him he was to have a delicious, heart-healthy dinner that I had specially requested from the executive chef: grilled salmon, low-fat ratatouille and two desserts – indulgent carrot cake and Nutella crepes. He got a tear in his eye, especially after dinner when I presented him with a pair of Venetian glass cufflinks – this of course, after the staff sang 'Happy Birthday' to my beloved and, later, placed balloons in our suite.

It isn't every day you sail on a deluxe 680-passenger ship in the Mediterranean, with staff there to attend to your every request with smiles as big as the continent of Europe. But that's what sailing on Azamara is like. It hits our sweet spot – not too small, not too big, with all the amenities we love on ships: fitness centre, spa, production shows, entertainment (from classical to pop), in-suite movies, spectacular pool deck, choice of restaurants and much more. It's a we-will-wow-you world where guest satisfaction reigns supreme.

Azamara is all-inclusive and has a country club atmosphere; because of its small, intimate size, sophisticated travellers on board get to know and befriend one another (and, for sure, trade travel secrets, investment opportunities and shopping tips). We also love that there are no formal nights.

Back-to-back benefits

We recently luxuriated on a 23-day Mediterranean itinerary consisting of two back-to-back cruises on Azamara's stately *Journey* from Venice to Rome. In fact, back-to-back sailings are a popular new trend, which we highly recommend on Azamara. Savvy, well-travelled guests desire to stay aboard as long as possible to make the most of one airline and one cruise ticket.

Says Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor of CruiseCritic.com, "In cruise travel today, sailing on back-to-back voyages is an increasingly popular option for travellers who want to customise the length of their vacations. Cruise lines are responding to that, offering plenty of seven-day options for those who are time-impaired but also offering a range of itineraries, rather than simply repeating them, to appeal to travellers who want to spend two or three weeks



02



03

01 A grand entrance
02 Watch the ocean go by from the Club World Owner Suite
03 Elegance at Mosaic Café



04

– or longer – on board the same ship without seeing the same ports over and over again.”

Complimentary ‘AzaMazing’ experiences are included on all Azamara voyages – these are over-the-top events for all passengers, simply so they can experience the ultimate in local culture. In Malta one evening, we visited the Old Town of Mdina where, in a medieval cathedral, we listened to the angelic voices of a choir. The ship had also orchestrated torches to light up the area, with Knights of Malta guards in costume heralding the event. In the Greek town of Chania, we also enjoyed an unforgettable live outdoor piano concert at the harbour, complete with fireworks. These special efforts within Azamara’s Destination Immersion programme definitely add pizzazz.

“WHAT’S NOT TO LOVE? ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SIT BACK AND BE ENTERTAINED ALL DAY LONG.”

Australians Shirley-Ann Clark and Chris Breeze sailed on *Azamara Quest* in 2012 on their honeymoon, and loved it so much they booked this Athens to Rome sailing. They tell everyone they know to take an Azamara cruise.

Oceans of reasons for Azamara
Another plus to this dreamboat: Many competitor ships leave a destination in the afternoon, limiting sightseeing options. On Azamara, you spend longer in port, with many overnights, so you can see more. For example, we enjoyed an extended stay in Livorno, providing

the opportunity to further explore the Renaissance cities of Florence and Pisa. In Florence, for example, we taxied to Santa Maria Novella, perhaps the world’s oldest apothecary, to check out its museum – and its cult beauty products.

Make sure to book a 25-square-metre Club Continent Suite (where specialty restaurant charges are waived). Suites feature spacious wardrobes, bathtubs and the services of a butler (who will iron four garments, complimentary), along with internet access and four bottles of top-shelf spirits. You can also bring your own alcohol on board for a



05

04 The new Club Spa Suite
05 The Drawing Room
06 Mosaic Café by night
07 Spacious bathroom in the Club Ocean Suite
All images courtesy Azamara Club Cruises

Travel file

Cruise

Read about *Azamara Journey’s* debut Australian season on page 22.
www.azamaracruises.com

\$10 corkage fee. Dessert wine costs extra – so pack that special bottle of Château d’Yquem you’ve been saving for a special occasion.

The cuisine on Azamara is excellent. Chef Iwan Pennings and his team ensure delicious, dynamic meals, whether it’s kebabs in the poolside Patio Grill, simple paninis at the informal Windows Cafe, Mediterranean in Aqualina, or prime rib and shrimp in Prime C Steakhouse. Azamara offers gluten-free, low sodium and low-carb menus, and everything in between. (Don’t miss the chocolate lava cake.)

We would also gladly pay admission to see the talented performers Azamara presents. Every night you’ll see great performances worthy of Broadway, Carnegie Hall and London’s West End. Backing the performers is a wildly talented seven-piece orchestra – a great addition to this small-sized ship.

So, what’s not to love? As one New Zealander put it to us so humorously, an Azamara cruise lets you get away from working, cooking, cleaning, dusting, “and all you have to do is sit back and be entertained all day long”. ♦



06



07