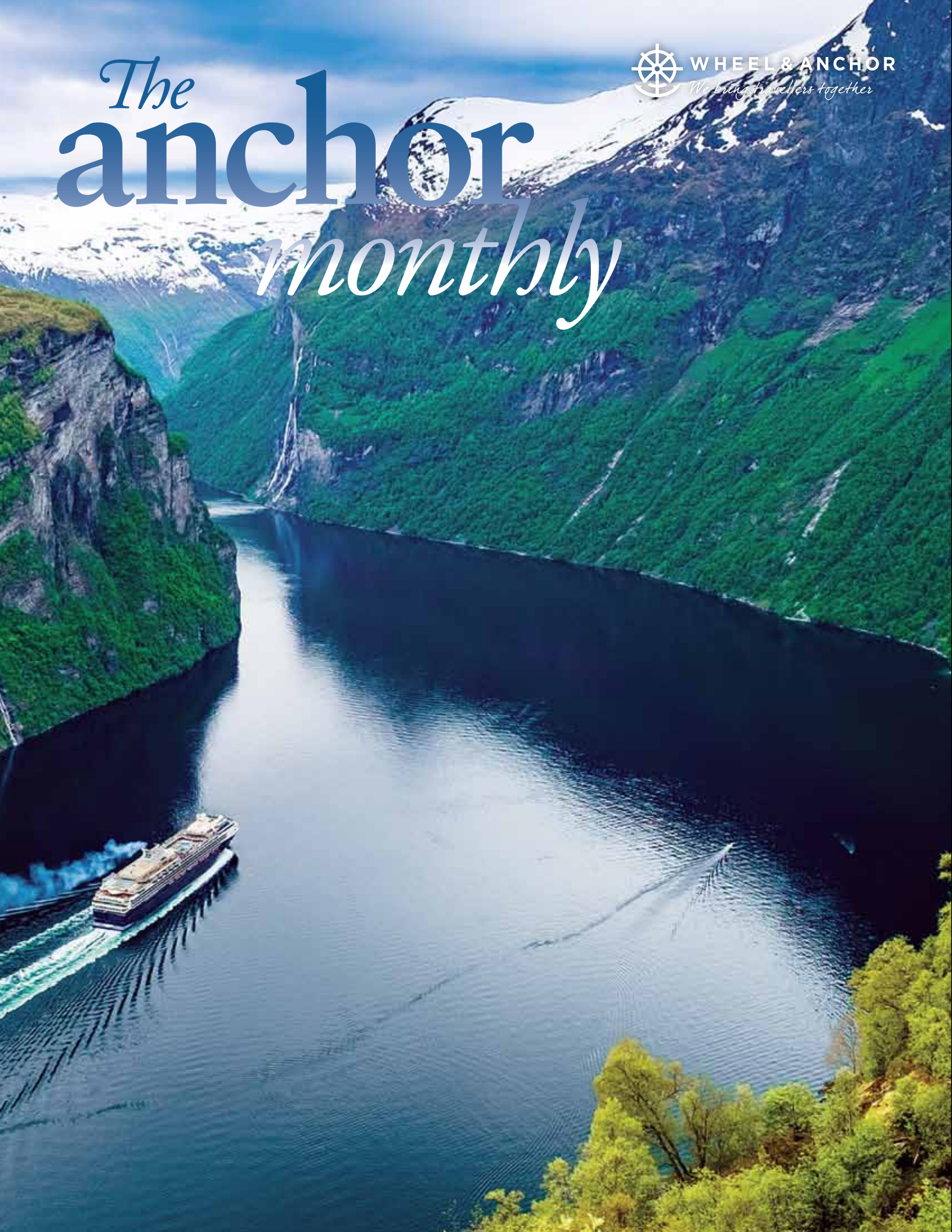


The **anchor** *monthly*



WHEEL & ANCHOR

We bring travellers together



The Cruise edition

Coral reefs near the island of Lombok, Indonesia

contents

VOLUME THREE | SEPTEMBER 2019
The Cruise edition



Graphic design: anythink.ca

Questions or comments?
We'd love to hear from
you! Call us at
1-(888) 531-5101
or email us at
**info@
wheelandanchor.ca**

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On the Cover: A ship sails in the Geirangerfjord.

from gordon's perspective

Travelling by ship is probably the oldest form of long distance travel where people ventured en masse from one point on the planet to the other, for all sorts of different reasons. Today, the most prevalent form of cruising also comes in the form of moving large number of people en masse to some of the most interesting ports of the world.

But thankfully the industry has also evolved in another way, towards smaller ships delivering a more close up experience to the most beautiful scenery, the smallest of towns and villages and to gain a little more insight into the true way of life.

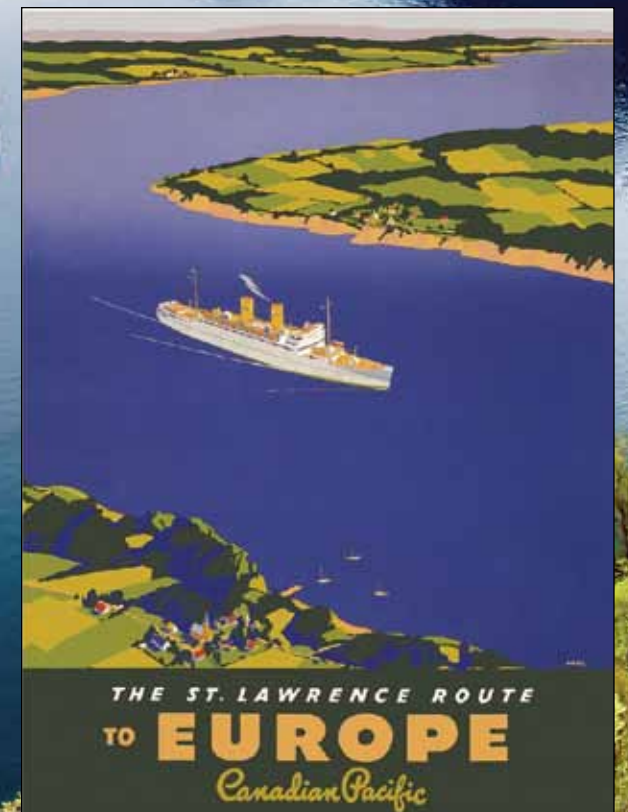
For this special cruising edition, I've put together a smattering of small ship / yacht cruise experiences that I think offer something different than the norm, and that will undoubtedly provide space for learning about these wonderful places, while enjoying the camaraderie and fun that one ought to have while travelling.

Going from cold to hot, Antarctica is truly an experience into one of the last vestiges of unspoilt territories on the planet, still teeming as much as ever with wildlife, thankfully and hopefully for a long time to come. Heading up to the northern parts of Europe, we'll explore the Elbe River, flowing (via tributaries) between the capital cities of Berlin and Prague on a paddlewheel river ship, specially designed to navigate the shallow waters.

I always count the coastal steamer route along the fjords of Norway as one of my best ever cruise experiences. Not as small as river cruise ships, but averaging 600-800 passengers consisting of as many as 50% local Norwegians, this trip takes in the pinnacle of coastal scenery.

I chose to go to the island of Bali and on a yacht exploring the Indonesian islands over to Komodo Islands, home of the largest lizards, in this case dragons, in the world.

These and a few other programs represent a bit of a different form of cruising. Comfortable, educational, real-life and fun. ⚓



Gordon Dreger, Founder

The Majestic Fjords of Norway



A calm morning by the harbour in Hammerfest, Norway

Cruise One

The Majestic Fjords of Norway

I’ve been to Norway 11 times, and I honestly can’t wait to go back again. I am always reluctant to ever answer the question people always ask me: ‘What’s been your favourite country to visit?’, but if pressed, I’d probably say Norway.

The landscape of along Norway’s coastline is absolutely breathtaking, particularly in the fjords around the Lofoten Islands, which have been forever burned into my memory as one of Mother Nature’s most incredible vistas.

Apart from the rugged beauty of the landscape in Norway, a cruise along her coast also offers the chance to mix and mingle with locals who have lived along this unforgiving coast for generations. The ships Hurtigruten run up and down the coast double as the lifelines for the northern communities, and thus your experience is one of everyday life in Norway, and not something created just for tourists.

It’s been called the world’s most beautiful coastline, and personally I wouldn’t challenge that claim. While the sea eagles swoop down catching fish as the sun sets amongst the towering cliffs of the fjords, it’s hard to disagree.

–Gordon

All Wheel & Anchor trips are sold through New Sky Travel,
2900 Warden Ave, Toronto, ON M1V 2S8,
Tico reg. 1817786

To see this and all of our other programs, visit
wheelandanchor.ca/all-tours

Itinerary: April 30 - May 18, 2020	
Day 1: Depart Canada	
Day 2: Arrive Oslo	
Day 3: Oslo	
Day 4: Oslo day at leisure	
Day 5: Oslo to Bergen	
Day 6: Bergen day at leisure	
Day 7: Embark MS Richard With	
Day 8: Alesund	
Day 9: Trondheim	
Day 10: Lofoten Islands	
Day 11: Tromsø	
Day 12: Hammerfest & the North Cape	
Day 13: Kirkenes	
Day 14: Tromsø	
Day 15: Trollfjord	
Day 16: The Seven Sisters	
Day 17: Trondheim	
Day 18: Sognefjord & Bergen	
Day 19: Depart for home	



The Mekong River



A fisherman sails the Mekong at sunrise near Tonle Sap, Cambodia

Cruise Two

The Mekong River

The Mekong is one of Asia’s largest and most important waterways, and to cruise along it is to experience how it functions as the lifeblood of the region. Most travellers who make the journey across the Pacific to explore Southeast Asia will experience the diverse and dynamic cities of the region, where the infrastructure is set up for tourism, but may be challenged to get to the countryside where life continues unchanged in some places for decades. This is precisely what you get to see as you float along the mighty Mekong.

For our program we’ll be going upstream, beginning in the Mekong River Delta around Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. From there we wind our way through Cambodia, first past Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s bustling capital, stopping in some tiny villages along the banks of the river. We’ll also see the charming stick houses in Tonle Sap as we make our way toward Siem Reap, which lies not far from the UNESCO wonder that is the temple complex of Angkor Wat.

There are of course a number of lesser-known temple complexes in the area which we will explore, as well as a number of stops along the Mekong that capture the authentic experience of life along this muddy and magical river.

–Gordon

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Itinerary: Tentative dates: February 2 - 17, 2021		
Day 1:	Depart Canada	
Day 2:	Cross date line	
Day 3:	Arrive Ho Chi Minh	
Day 4:	Cu Chi Tunnels	
Day 5:	My Tho	
Day 6:	Chau Doc	
Day 7:	Phnom Penh	
Day 8:	Kampong Chhnang	
Day 9:	Tonle Sap	
Day 10:	Siem Reap	
Day 11:	Angkor Wat	
Day 12:	Angkor Thom	
Program continues to Bangkok		

To get a printed version of any of these itineraries, just call us at

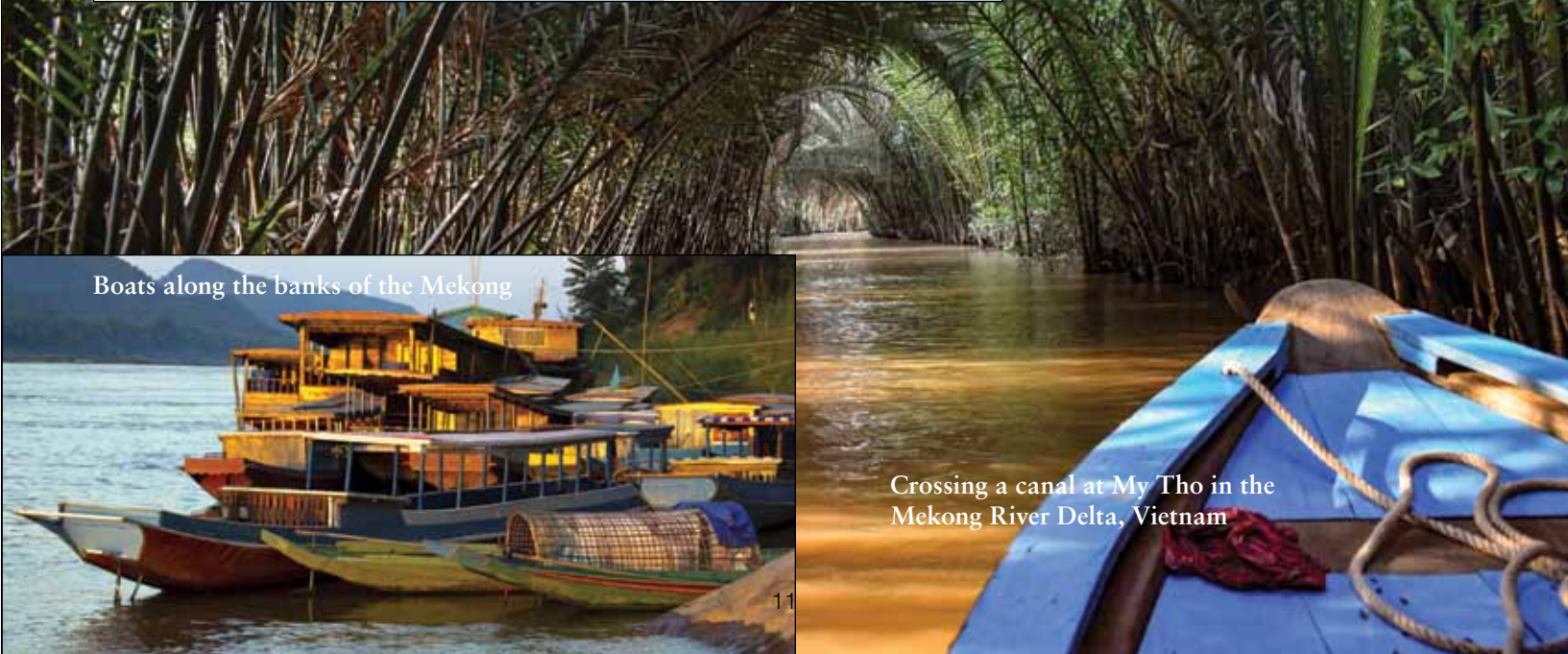
I-(888) 531-5101

or visit

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Sugar palms reflect on the rice field in the flood season, Chau Doc, Vietnam



Boats along the banks of the Mekong

Crossing a canal at My Tho in the Mekong River Delta, Vietnam

future tour ideas

TRAVEL COMPASS: Feedback from members via the questionnaire, our events, calls with Gordon or even just in an email is what spawns the ideas for our future tours. While not all of these programs will necessarily be offered, we appreciate your opinion on these places and the more positive response, the more likely we will expedite development of these programs. Here are a few things we have in store:



TRANSYLVANIA AND BEYOND

Romania & Moldova.

A country that seems to have fallen off the road map in recent years, Romania has some breathtaking countryside in the Carpathian Mountains and into Transylvania, the legendary home of Dracula.

Tentative trip date: Spring 2021

WHEEL & ANCHOR WEEKENDS: THE AZORES

Azores.

In 2/3 the time it takes to get to the European mainland, a direct flight from Toronto takes us to the islands of the Azores, with their undulating green mountains and giant craters. A 4-night stay in a thermal spa followed by a night on the town in the principal city of Ponta Delgada.

Tentative trip date: Spring 2020

NEWFOUNDLAND

Having recently stopped in St. John's to meet members, Gordon was re-inspired to create a tour to this increasingly popular province. It's bigger than you might imagine and one could spend a month and not see a lot of the province but we will try to find the optimal program that delves into what life is really like there out on the Rock.

Tentative trip date: Summer 2020

These and other truly unique programs are all on the drawing board and due for release over the coming weeks and months. Follow our weekly e-newsletter for the latest updates and to be among the first to secure your spots as group sizes will be limited.

Stay tuned to our newsletter for updates on these and more great programs!

Ahoy matey! A sea-worthy dictionary.

Aft

The portion of the boat behind the middle area of the boat.

"Ahoy!"

Term used to hail a boat or a ship.

Avast

Stop, cease or desist from whatever is being done.

Bar Pilot

A bar pilot guides ships over dangerous sandbars at the mouth of rivers and bays. Not to be confused with the Bartender.

Black Jack

A leather tankard, used by dockside pubs to serve alcohol. Also the name for a pirate's flag.

Cuddy

A small cabin in a boat. Also the lead singer of Blue Rodeo.

Fathom

A unit of length equal to 6 feet, mostly used to measure depth.

Futtocks

Timbers that make up a large transverse frame. Not a curse word!

Hardtack

A hard, dry biscuit, used as food on long journeys. Rest assured, you'll eat much better with W&A.

Kissing the Gunner's Daughter

To bend over the barrel of a gun for punitive beating with a cane. Yikes!

Leeward

In the direction that the wind is blowing towards.

Nor'easter

Strong wind or storm coming from the northeast.

Reefer

Not what you're thinking! It's a shipboard refrigerator or freezer.

NEED A TRAVEL PARTNER?
CHECK OUT OUR
"COMPANIONS FOR THE ROAD"
PROGRAM.

Are you looking for someone to travel with? We've launched a program to connect solo travellers looking for a companion to share a room with while travelling and avoid those evil single supplements!

To participate, simply send an email to **companions@wheelandanchor.ca**, and you'll be sent a copy of the application form that asks a number of questions about your habits and preferences while travelling, as well as destinations you'd like to find visit with a travel partner. From this we'll create a profile that we'll use to match you with other travellers. If there's a match, our team will reach out to you and any potential matches, confirm that you're both interested in having a phone call, and facilitate the conversation from there.

It's all part of our mission to bring travellers together around a shared passion for travel and making new friends along the way. So if you're looking for a companion or know someone who is, let them know about the program and we'll do our best to connect you with others looking for the same!

*If you're interested in helping out, please send me an email personally: **gordon@wheelandanchor.ca***

The Elbe River



Morning mist over the Elbe near Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic

Cruise Three

The Elbe River

The Elbe is one of the most important waterways in Europe, yet unknown by most travellers. Mainly this is due to the fact that it has only recently been possible to cruise along it, which required the construction of special ships that can navigate her shallower waters.

Whether you cruise from Berlin downstream to Prague, or vice versa, a trip along the Elbe offers the chance to explore not just the bustling capitals of Germany and the Czech Republic, but also the lesser-known cities and towns along her banks. In Germany you'll explore the home of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, see the castle and famed porcelain of Meissen, and the gloriously rebuilt city of Dresden. After passing through the stunning landscape of Saxon Switzerland, you'll sail through Karlovy Vary and Litomerice in the Czech Republic, before spending a few days in one of my favourite European cities, Prague.

So whether you're an experienced cruiser who has already done the Danube, the Rhine, or one of the other major rivers, or a new cruiser looking for an experience that most travellers haven't had, a leisurely cruise along the Elbe is an excellent choice.

—Gordon

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Tico reg. 1817786

To see this and all of our other programs, visit
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Itinerary: September 7-21, 2020	
Day 1: Depart Canada	✈️
Day 2: Berlin	
Day 3: Berlin day at leisure	
Day 4: Embark on the Elbe Princesse	
Day 5: Charlottenburg & the Sanssouci Palaces	
Day 6: Magdeburg	
Day 7: Wittenberg	
Day 8: Meissen & Dresden	
Day 9: Saxon Switzerland	
Day 10: Litomerice	
Day 11: Prague	
Day 12: Depart for home / Karlovy Vary (optional extension)	
Day 13-15: Karlovy Vary	
Day 16: Depart for Canada	✈️

To get a printed version of any of these itineraries, just call us at

I-(888) 531-5101

or visit

wheelandanchor.ca/all-tours



MS Elbe Princesse

Evening light on the Elbe in Dresden, Germany

Aerial view over Dresden, Germany

Our events are exclusive to our Wheel and Anchor members and their guests. Have the opportunity to mix and mingle with new friends and members. Each event offers something special, including a feature presentation of future Wheel and Anchor tours. Come get the latest, share your tales, and learn something new!

Events

- September 17 - Travel Trivia Night - Ottawa (Biagio's Italian Kitchen)
- September 24: Lunch - Norfolk (Port Dover area) (211 Main Restaurant, Port Dover); Dinner - London (Dolcetto)
- September 25: Lunch - Hamilton area (Banana Leaf Asian Cuisine); Dinner - Niagara-on-the-Lake (Bricks & Barley)
- September 26: Lunch - Oakville (Jonathans Restaurant & J Bistro); Dinner - Kitchener / Waterloo (The Rich Uncle Tavern)
- October 1 - Dinner - Aurora / Newmarket (Location TBA)
- October 2 - Dinner - Oshawa/Whitby (Location TBA)
- October 3 - Dinner Toronto East (Scarborough area) (Location TBA)
- October 8 - Lunch - Markham / Richmond Hill; Dinner - Bowmanville (Location TBA)
- October 9 - Dinner - Toronto West (Etobicoke) (Location TBA)
- October 10 - Dinner - Barrie (Location TBA)

Webinars

- September 19 - South African Secrets
- September 23 - Japan: Land of the Rising Sun
- September 27 - Austria: More than the Sound of Music
- October 3 - Baltic Seafarer
- October 10 - Wheel & Anchor Weekends: The Azores
- October 17 - The Mekong River
- October 24 - Antarctica

Check your weekly member newsletter in your email for a direct link to the webinar registration page, or visit wheelandanchor.ca/webinars.

Travel Trivia Nights

One of the fun ideas we're planning to roll out this fall is a monthly travel trivia series! We're designing it in such a way that it can be done in multiple places across the country. In order to do this, we're looking for emcees to run the event each month. If you'd be interested in being an emcee in your community, please get in touch!

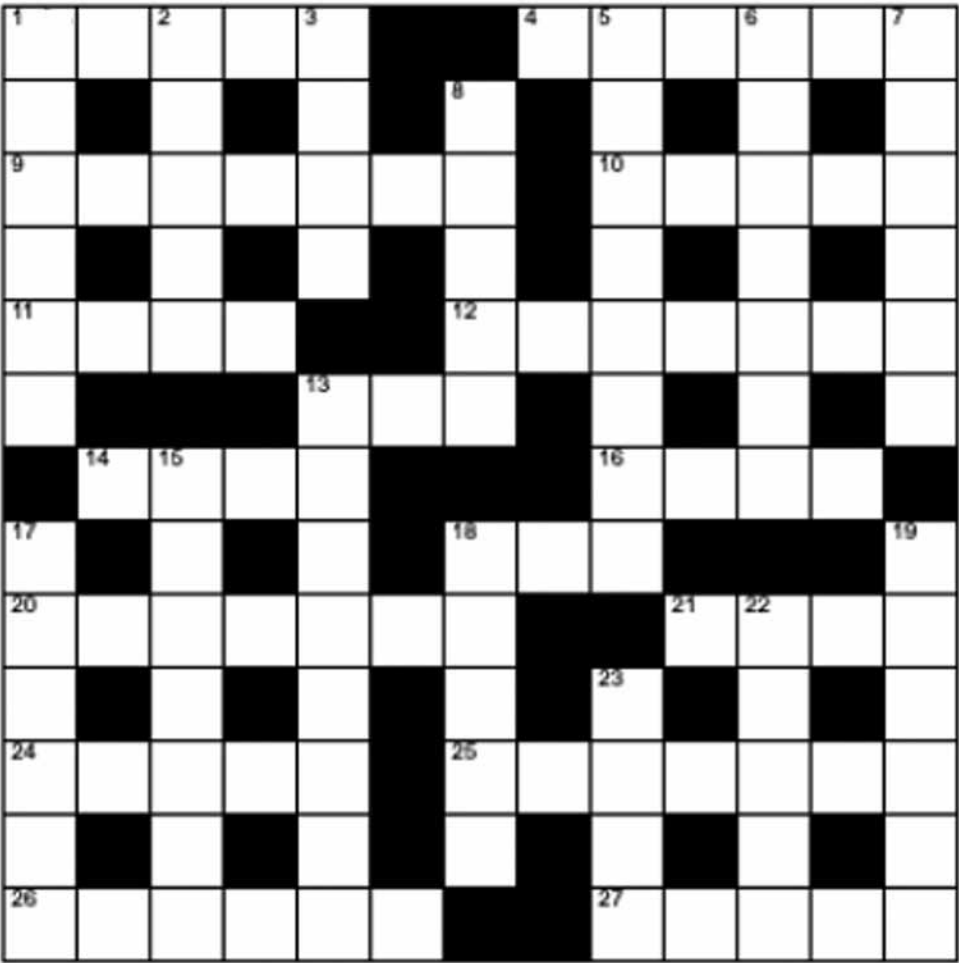
We will provide the questions, structure, and the presentation, and provide assistance finding a suitable location. Your role would be to make it fun and keep the quiz going! Travellers are a naturally curious bunch, and we think this would be a fun way to bring our community together when we're not out trotting around the globe.

We'll have more information on this program in coming weeks.



Don't see an event in your area? Let's set one up! Call us at
1-(888) 531-5101
or email
events@wheelandanchor.ca

upcoming events and webinars



Across

1. Major European river that runs from the Swiss Alps to the Mediterranean (5)
4. Country where you will find UNESCO site Petra (6)
9. Country that is home to the Mekong River Delta (7)
10. Lacking the strength or ability to move (5)
11. Engagement or wedding (4)
12. Country that is home to the Galapagos Islands (7)
13. Spoil or disfigure (3)
14. 'That's a great ____!' (4)
16. Pay money to use something for a period of time (4)
18. Legume with high protein native to East Asia (3)
20. Small water bottle used by travellers or campers (7)
21. Instead of something else (4)
24. Method of exchanging messages over the internet (5)
25. Croatia, Albania et al (7)
26. The 12th longest river in the world (6)
27. One of the eleven countries the Nile passes through (5))

Down

1. Amazon, Nile et al (6)
2. Alternative to river cruising (5)
3. Active volcano on the east coast of Sicily (4)
5. A notice of death you might find in a newspaper (8)
6. German city you'll find sailing along 23 down (7)
7. What you see hiking, diving, or on safari (6)
8. Fossilized tree resin that can preserve fossils (5)
13. Portuguese explorer who was first to circumnavigate the globe (8)
15. One of the Scandinavian countries (7)
17. A loud, long, piercing cry (6)
18. People who believe that their tastes in a particular area are superior to those of other people (5)
19. You might see a beautiful one of these when cruising 26 across (6)
22. Home of Venice and Florence (5)
23. River passing through Germany and the Czech Republic (4)

crossword

Find the solution on page 41.

Croatia & the Adriatic



A view over the harbour in Hvar, Croatia

Cruise Four

Croatia & the Adriatic

Our Wheel & Anchor members made the first trip to Croatia this past June and I think I can safely say that cruising the clear blue waters of the Adriatic was an experience no one will soon forget.

What makes the coastline of Croatia so spectacular (besides those intensely blue waters) is a mountain range along the mainland that provides a perfect backdrop for the islands, many mountainous themselves, and the centuries old villages tucked away in picturesque bays and harbours.

I think my fellow members would agree that cruising the Adriatic on a yacht is really the only way to do it. The big ships call in at the big ports, which although wonderful places to visit, are overwhelmed with cruise ship passengers. On a smaller yacht you can navigate down narrow passages and dock in the middle of town for the most part. This style of sailing also enables us to overnight in port and enjoy the quiet hours of these island towns, dining on Croatian cuisine surrounded by all the history.

—Gordon

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Itinerary: September 21 - October 6, 2020		
Day 1:	Depart Canada	🚢
Day 2:	Bled, Slovenia	
Day 3:	Lake Bohinj	
Day 4:	Ljubljana	
Day 5:	Klagenfurt, Austria	
Day 6:	Plitvice National Park, Croatia	
Day 7:	Embark on MS Paradis	
Day 8:	Mljet Island	
Day 9:	Dubrovnik	
Day 10:	Šipan Island	
Day 11:	Korcula	
Day 12:	Hvar	
Day 13:	Brac Island	
Day 14:	Disembark Split - Opatija	
Day 15:	Rovinj (Istria)	
Day 16:	Kastav (Istria)	
Day 17:	Return home	🚢



Croatian Octopus

Bol, Croatia at night

The old town of Korcula, Croatia, jutting out into the turquoise Adriatic

Bali & the Indonesian Islands



Sunset over islands near West Papua, Indonesia

Cruise Five

Bali & the Indonesian Islands

What image gets conjured up when you think of Bali ? This fabled island in a faraway archipelago of Indonesia is usually close to the top of the wish list for travellers venturing off to Asia and yet it is often not what most people expect.

The islands that form Indonesia form part of the Pacific Ring of Fire and the volcanoes that begat them left behind lush, jungled islands flourishing with fauna. Most of the tens of thousands of the 17,000+ islands never see a foreign visitor, many of them are completely uninhabited. The only way to get to them is by ship, either a local ferry, a cargo ship or a comfortable yacht holding a handful of lucky explorers.


The Komodo Islands lie in a remote part of this archipelago and their principal resident, the fierce Komodo Dragon, is for wildlife enthusiasts, a reason to travel all the way to this remote part of the world.

Our voyage through the Indonesian archipelago will allow us to see some of our tropical earth’s bounty and will culminate in an exploration of the lesser-seen sides of Bali itself.

–Gordon

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Itinerary: Tentative dates: September 2021	
Day 1:	Depart Canada 
Day 2:	Lose a day crossing the Date Line
Day 3:	Bali
Day 4:	Kramat Island
Day 5:	Satonda Island
Day 6:	Komodo National Park
Day 7:	Komodo - Padar Island
Day 8:	Moyo Island
Day 9:	Lombok
Day 10:	Denpasar, Bali
Day 11-17: Explore Bali	

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Sunrise over Komodo National Park, Indonesia

The Nile



The Nile cutting through the sands of the Sahara Desert

Cruise Six

The Nile

As you cruise the longest river on the planet, you'll see firsthand why this river is such an important waterway historically and to present-day North Africa. The life-giving water creates some of the only fertile land in the oppressive Sahara Desert, and the remnants of ancient civilizations you'll discover along her banks tell you this has been the case for millennia.

Our ship for this program is the MS Sunray, one of the finest ships currently sailing the river which will bring us to the archaeological highlights between Luxor and the mighty Aswan Dam.

Whether you take a dive into the Nile to say you've had a swim in the waters of another continent, or if you're content with a glass of wine on the deck to say you've sailed along this legendary river, this cruise offers a number of boxes to check off on your list. We'll also explore the Pyramids of Giza, the museum of Cairo and for the real Egyptology buffs, a side trip to the temple of Abu Simbel.

—Gordon

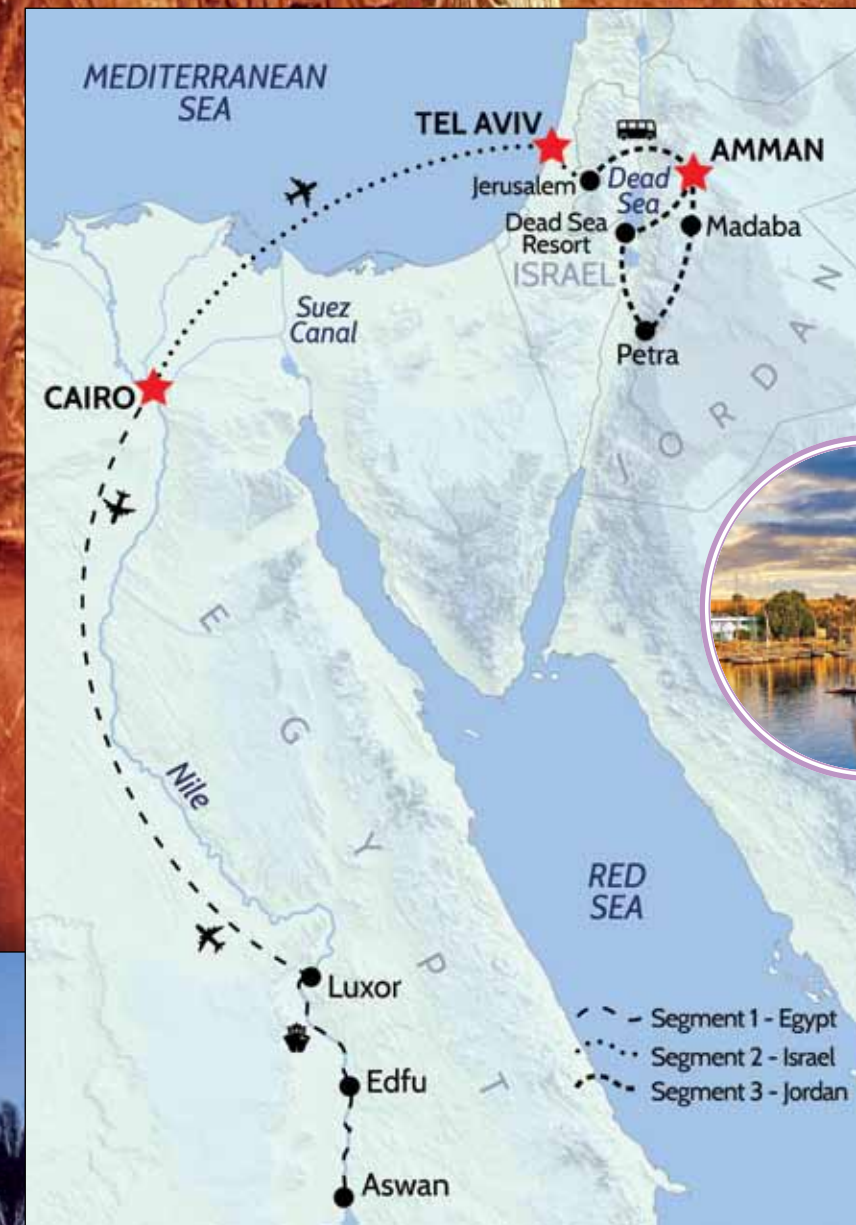
Itinerary: January 14-24, 2020**

Day 1: Depart Canada	
Day 2: Cairo	
Day 3: Luxor / Embark MS Sunray	
Day 4: Valley of the Kings	
Day 5: Edfu Temple	
Day 6: Aswan High Dam	
Day 7: Aswan / Abu Simbel	
Day 8: Kom Ombo	
Day 9: Luxor & Karnak Temples	
Day 10: Cairo	
Program continues in Cairo, Israel, Jordan	

***This cruise is a part of our Egypt, Israel & Jordan: 4 Variations Program. Our January 2020 program is sold out but we will be offering it again in 2021. Please give us a call to get on the wait list and we will send you the 2021 itinerary as soon as it is ready!*

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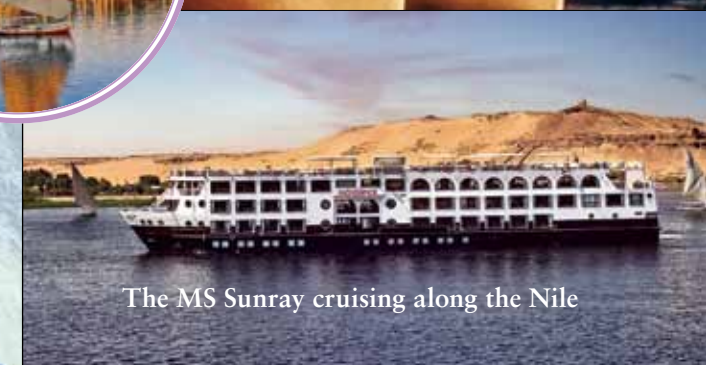
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Pillars at the Luxor Temple complex in Luxor, Egypt



A sailboat on the Nile at dusk near Luxor, Egypt



The MS Sunray cruising along the Nile



Sunset at the Karnak Temple in Luxor, Egypt

Letters to the Editor

Hello Gordon,

Just a short note to say how much we enjoyed the Croatia, Slovenia and the Adriatic Coast trip in June. We do not normally take cruises, but the size of the Motor Yacht Callisto limit of 34 passengers, the excellent on-board staff, the short cruising time between islands, and the fact that we got to know most of the guests for a week prior to the 6 day cruise portion of the tour made for a very enjoyable trip. The food was excellent and ocean landscapes we cruised through were enchanting. The tour was very well organized and you were an excellent tour guide. We highly recommend this trip to others. This was our first trip with Wheel and Anchor and we plan to take future trips.

Take care,

John and Ingrid M., Toronto

* * * * *

Dear Gordon,

I have to thank you for your thoroughness, attention to detail, and ensuring everyone's needs are met. You are great the way you can make programs

work for all people. For those that are active and explorers to those that have physical difficulties and find certain activities a little harder. You make sure everyone is included in everything and allow those that want to explore by themselves that time.

We first met you when you had a wonderful offer on tickets for a show in Toronto. It was with the drive to go. At "Meet and Greet" in our home city you care, explain everything for everyone to understand and on the recent trip to Japan and South Korea, we went on, you made sure everyone's health, diet, and activity needs were met.

You never stop working and caring and making sure we have the best under the situation and circumstances that are possible.

Thank you Gordon.

Bob W., Ottawa

* * * * *

Dear Gordon,

I joined wheel and anchor last year at a friend's recommendation. Next January I will be embarking on a trip

to the Middle East (Egypt, Israel, and Jordan) with W & A. I am beyond excited as I can't remember a time when I haven't wanted to go to those destinations.

Being a solo traveller and knowing that you will be leading this trip is also a big plus. But the best part is that due to the companions for the road program, I have been matched up with another traveller for a portion of the trip. I don't know of another travel group that offers this service and I am only too happy to be one of its first participants. This is truly custom travel in the truest sense of the words. Being a camera buff I am planning to document this trip in some detail much like a travel log. Hopefully if the results are satisfactory it can be shared.

Thanks so much for planning such a great adventure!

Sincerely,

Sandi S., Oakville

* * * * *

THE MEKONG: SIX COUNTRIES, NINE DRAGONS, ONE ENDLESS RIVER

a short story

It's 1535, AND THINGS aren't going terribly well for Portuguese explorer Antonio de Faria. He's trying to establish a trading centre in a remote village, Faifo, on the eastern coastline of Vietnam - and he's just too early for him to make an impact.

There's no local infrastructure to support his efforts, despite the presence of the city of Da Nang, 15 miles to the south. He's the first Westerner in the area, and first in Da Nang. It's proving to be too many firsts, with too few resources.

A trading post here is Faria's attempt to consolidate his country's presence, and make a name for himself in the history books - and it fails. It will be over half a century before a local lord sees the mercantile potential of this stretch of coastline, and turns Faifo into Hoi An, an important trading port on the East Vietnam Sea (now a city of 120,000 people).

Faria seems doomed to become a footnote in world history - except in one aspect.

One day, it is said, he saw a river. He may not have known the epic extent of it. It may have just looked like an unusually wide but pleasantly becalmed river, winding its way to a delta on the



southern tip of mainland Southeast Asia. He might not have given it another thought - but half a millenia later, it's what he's become best known for.

Antonio de Faria, the first explorer from the West to set eyes on the mighty Mekong.

This is the Western-centric view, of course. To the locals, the Mekong is as timeless as the sea or the sky, a place of kingdoms and empires

stretching back thousands of years - and of water that has always connected one horizon with another.

Taking a cruise down the Mekong, and you're joining a monumental watercourse that binds the heights of the Himalayas to the South China Sea, affecting millions of human lives along the way.

The numbers are staggering. As the 12th longest river in the world, the Mekong is over 2,700 miles in length - that's longer than the distance from London to Newfoundland. After leaving the Tibetan plateau in the form of melted snow water, it tumbles through largely unnavigable rapids in China and Myanmar before settling into a calm river winding through Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Ancient statues at the Angkor Wat temple complex, Cambodia



For much of the year, it's relatively slow-moving, hence its growing popularity for river cruising - but from July, when the monsoons dump colossal amounts of rain onto the highlands, it swells and speeds up, cascading 75% of its yearly flow downriver in less than four months.

The name "Mekong", by the way, only applies for some of its length - or more correctly, for none of it. It's a modern contraction of the Thai & Lao name *Mae Nam Khong*, where *Khong* is the true name, and *Mae Nam* ("mother of water") is given to all the great rivers of the area.

Upriver in China, it's *Lancang Jiang* ("turbulent river") - while in Vietnam to the south it's *Cuu Long*, "nine dragons", referring to its nine major branches.

It's tempting to assume the Mekong has had much of the same role as the Nile, or even the Mediterranean, creating a super-highway for ancient people to explore along and establish trade routes with their neighbours. In

fact, along most of its upper length, it has historically been turbulent to sail across, often turning it into a natural barrier, a point to define the limits of your territory. (This is presumably why the Mekong forms the entire border between Myanmar and Laos, and much of it between Laos and Thailand.)

It's also a resource of staggering natural wealth. Today, around 60 million people (across 300,000 square miles) depend on the river for their income and their diet, with 2 million tonnes of fish being landed per year along its banks, farmed from 1,300 different species. As the second most bio-diverse river in the world after the Amazon, it's absolutely brimming with wildlife.

It's a river that brings life to every region it touches - so of course every country wants a piece of it. To the north, China and Laos are keen to develop more dams to create hydroelectric power from those fast-moving waters; to the south, Thailand is rightly concerned about

any possible threat to its fish supplies. The future of the river depends on how the needs of each country will be balanced in the future.

For now, though, the Mekong is alive and well - and open to visitors like never before, with river cruising at the heart of it. It's really not hard to see why.

For one thing, it's about access. The lower Mekong's navigability lends itself perfectly to visitors wanting to see the most famous sights (since many of those landmarks were built because of access to the river).

There are cruises travelling between Siem Reap in northwest Cambodia - gateway to the famous, stunningly handsome Angkor Wat temple complex - and Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon; between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh; and to the north, between Laos's Luang Prabang and Myanmar & China, along more adventurous and unpredictable stretches of the river.

For most visitors, the comforts of the lowlands are where all the fun is - and a cruise of the

lower Mekong is almost always about gliding through vast landscapes of cliffs, jungles, temples and caves, where agriculture is the primary source of income, and bamboo plantations and rice fields are never far from the water's edge. You'll pass sampans and other boats carrying goods to market, or piled high with fruit and vegetables for sale on or alongside the river.

It's the gateway to six entirely distinct countries, a cross-section through everyday life in the rural areas of Southeast Asia - and a really fabulous opportunity for people-watching, as more and more visitors each year will confirm.

You certainly won't be the first to see these sights, but for a second, maybe for just a moment, you might glimpse what it must have been like for a Portuguese explorer, far from home, to see an exciting new world open up before him, on the banks of the river that runs from the sea to the sky. ☸

by Mike Sowdon

a short story

FULL LIST of TOURS

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Italy: North to South. October 14-29, 2019	The Elbe River: Berlin to Prague. 7th - 21st September 2020
Wheel & Anchor Weekends: Havana. November 13-18, 2019	The Trans-Siberian Railway. 10th - 28th September 2020
Egypt, Israel & Jordan: Four Variations. January 14-26, 2020	Croatia & The Adriatic Coast. September 21 - October 6, 2020
Austrian Spa & Wellness. April 16-27, 2020	Tastes of Eastern France. 30 September- 19 October, 2020
Austria: More than Sounds of Music. 16- 30 April 2020	Boating the Canal du Midi. 20 October- 1 November, 2020
The Majestic Fjords of Norway. 30th April - 18th May 2020	Kangaroos & Kiwis - Australia & New Zealand. October 27 - November 25, 2020
Japan: Land of The Rising Sun. May 10-22, 2020	

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Antarctica



An expedition ship near a huge iceberg in Antarctica

Cruise Seven

Antarctica

Admittedly not every traveller desires to cruise through some of the roughest seas on the planet, but for those who do, the reward is the otherworldly experience of Earth’s southernmost continent. The icy landscapes are stunningly beautiful, though in a stark and unforgiving way, reminding you that this is no place for humans to stay for long. Which is not to say of course that it is devoid of life - quite the contrary. You’ll see the seals and whales that frolic and swim among the waves and icebergs, and the massive colonies of penguins that exist like a strange civilization on the snowy shores.

Apart from the alien-like experience of Antarctica, you’ll also get to explore the Chilean port town of Ushuaia, ‘The End of the World’ nestled in the Tierra del Fuego archipelago that is the southernmost tip of South America. Taken together, a cruise to Antarctica is full of extremes, and a chance to explore a region that is under threat of a warming climate. I’ve been twice myself, and I would jump at the chance to go back, as it truly is one of the penultimate voyages one can undertake.

—Gordon

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Itinerary: Tentative Itinerary		
Day 1:	Depart Canada	🚢
Day 2:	Buenos Aires	
Day 3:	Ushuaia	
Day 4-5:	Drake Passage	
Day 6-9:	Antarctica	
Day 10:	Drake Passage	
Day 11:	Ushuaia	
Day 12:	Ushuaia	
Day 13:	Buenos Aires	
Extension in Argentina or return home		🚢



Two emperor penguins, largest of the 18 penguin species



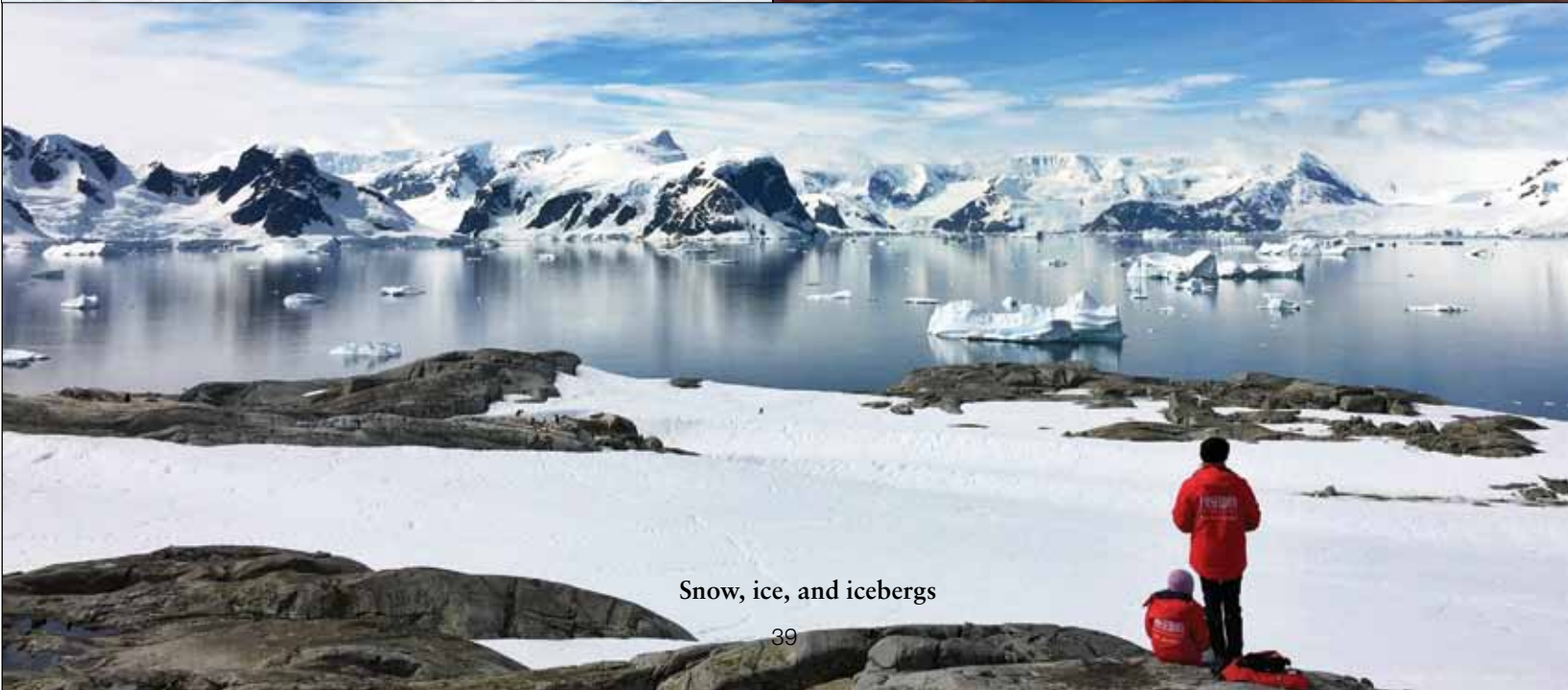
Pink sunrise over snowy rocks



A happy denizen of the frozen continent



Sunrise near the South Shetland Islands



Snow, ice, and icebergs

memories of *the Adriatic Coast 2019*



Some photos from our lovely exploration of Slovenia, Croatia, and Montenegro in June 2019!



Crossword answers. *(No peeking!)*

R	H	O	N	E		J	O	R	D	A	N
I		C	T		A		B		R		A
V	I	E	T	N	A	M		I	N	E	R
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A		R		A		S		B		L	E
M	E	K	O	N	G			E	G	Y	P

Clockwise from the top: High up over Dubrovnik; Krka National Park; A view over the stunning Bay of Kotor; The harbour in Primosten, Croatia; Wine tasting on Korcula ; Wheel & Anchor at Lake Bled, Slovenia; Wheel & Anchor members at Bled Castle; The Tower at Diocletian's Palace, Split, Croatia.





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The Cruise edition

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