

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

ARE YOU MISSING YOUR BOAT?

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

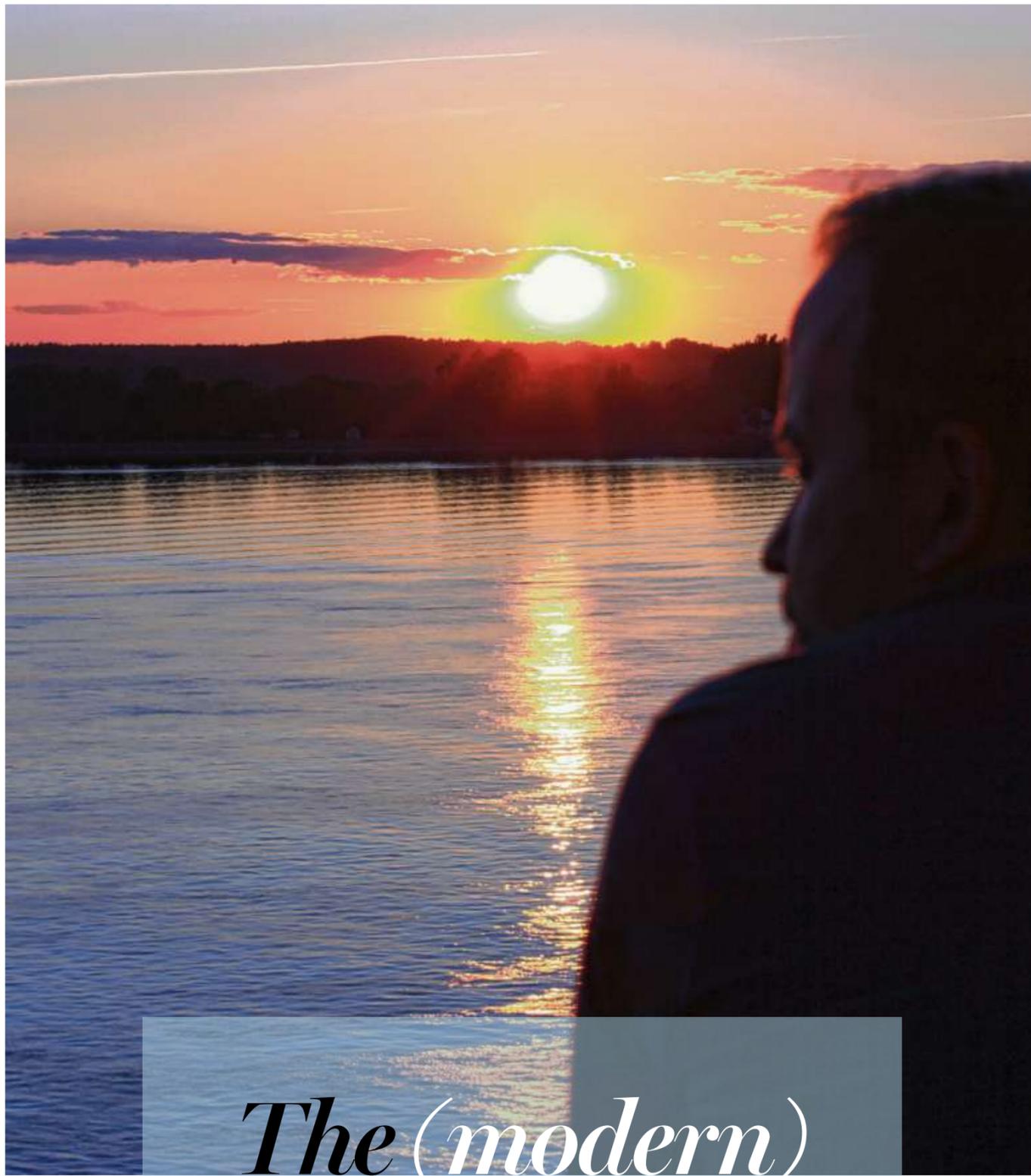
Not all cruises have big casinos, Broadway-style productions, and more shopping fliers than your Thanksgiving newspaper. Nor do they involve sharing deck chairs and dining space with thousands of fellow passengers.

Companies that offer one-of-a-kind adventures, journeys to less-visited destinations, or more personalized experiences aboard smaller ships continue to grow. The cruises here offer non-traditional twists to their floating adventures that may even attract you, the apprehensive cruiser, to come aboard.

HURTIGRUTEN's ships sail up and down the Norwegian coast, stopping at 34 ports between Bergen in the south and Kirkenes up north, some of them tucked away in fjords and otherwise inaccessible inlets. These working ships have been plying the coast for 121 years, transporting supplies, shuttling locals, and carrying curious passengers like you between towns and cities along the way (locals often hop from port to port on Hurtigruten ships to do errands, visit relatives, or avoid driving over snowy passes in wintertime). Your simple cabin will have all

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Adventure Canada cruises in Arctic Canada visit Native Americans.



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

The (modern) family cruise

Then a lovebug makes them all feel at home

BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER | GLOBE STAFF



It was a good run, but this was clearly the end for me. My heart raced, I experienced shortness of breath, light-headedness, and I thought I was going to faint. These were either symptoms of some terrible, mystery illness that had secretly festered in my body for years, or, more likely, the anxiety and panic I felt as I packed for a family cruise.

This may sound like a melodramatic reaction to a simple vacation, but please, hear me out. I was going to be on a boat with my partner, Alex, his parents, and my parents. Easy as lemon merengue pie, right? Well, no. The two sets of parents had never met. Also, Alex's parents don't speak English — they're from Spain. My parents don't speak Spanish — they're from the Jell-O belt of north central Massachusetts.

What better way to introduce parents who can't converse with each other than a weeklong cruise up the coast of Maine, into the Canadian Maritimes, and down the Saint Lawrence River into Montreal. Seven days of long, awkward silences.

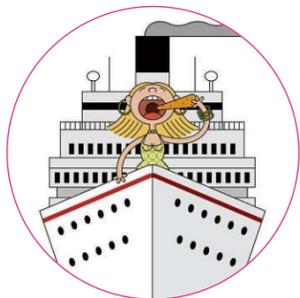
Cue the ulcer.

A hurricane bore down on Boston as I packed for our departure. Ever the

MUTHER, Page M6

Alex Gonzalez savors a sunset from aboard a cruise ship on the Saint Lawrence River between Quebec City and Montreal.

Inside | cruise



Don't let the buffet beef you up.

M4



It's not a cruise — it's a crossing.

M3



TOM HARPER RIVER CRUISES



KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



MINORU MASUJIMA

There's a boat leaving now with you in mind

►CRUISES

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you need: a bathroom with a small shower-bathtub, a single or double bed, and a small desk. Take an organized tour and meet the indigenous Sami people and their reindeer, visit the northernmost point of mainland Europe, and go on walking or boat tours above the Arctic Circle. Or just wander around charming towns where the ship's passengers (650 at most) typically won't outnumber the locals. Winter rates, as of Nov. 1, start at \$1,311 per person for five-night (one-way southbound) to \$2,093 for 11-night (round-trip) journeys. 866-552-0371, www.hurtigruten.us

UN-CRUISE ADVENTURES caters to those with little interest in rigid schedules and restricted elbow room. This Seattle-based company runs trips aboard small ships or boutique yachts in Alaska, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest that embody Un-Cruise's "unrushed, uncrowded" motto. Join up to 35 other people on the Safari Explorer yacht for a one-week adventure cruise to Maui, Lana'i, Moloka'i, and Hawaii (the Big Island), for instance. You and your fellow passengers can go night snorkeling with giant Pacific manta rays off Maui, and on a tour to less-visited Moloka'i, where you can hike to a waterfall in the ancient Hala-wa Valley, see taro fields and learn to make poi, and visit a local family to learn about traditional Hawaiian life and "talk story." Like most small cruises, you'll have a schedule that's flexible enough to accommodate chance encounters with dolphins, whales, and green sea turtles. The all-inclusive price means no surprise charges, and

includes kayaking, paddleboarding, skiff excursions, a massage, yoga on deck, and meals. Rates for the 7-night trips start at \$3,595 per person, double occupancy. 888-862-8881, www.un-cruise.com

TOM HARPER RIVER CRUISES (named after Tom Sawyer and his best friend Joe Harper in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer") attracts travelers interested in cultural experiences, such as home-hosted visits and regional cuisine, and adventure. The company, launched by Boston University graduate Bret Gordon and based here, offers trips in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its new Scotland trip proves perfect for tentative cruisers: It starts with three land-based days, followed by a week cruising the country's lochs and rivers from Edinburgh to the wild Highlands, offering plenty of off-ship excursions en route. The MV Lord of the Glens, with its 27 staterooms, will take you to rugged Trossachs National Park, made famous by Sir Walter Scott; to Loch Nevis, home to "the remotest pub in mainland Britain"; to a musical quartz beach off the rugged west coast; and to the Sound of Mull, with its white-tailed sea eagles and colorful fishing villages. Or just hang out on the bridge and watch the castles go by. Rates for this 10-night cruise start at \$5,199 per person, double occupancy, and include all food and excursions, so no surprise charges on disembarkation day. 855-464-2773, www.tomharper.com

AQUA MEKONG, a 20-suite luxury vessel, takes you on a cruise that follows the Mekong River through Cambodia and Vietnam. Travel between Siem Reap near Cambodia's Angkor Wat,

and My Tho near Saigon, stopping in Phnom Penh along the way. You won't run into other tour groups on this ship's private excursions, when you can sit with Buddhist monks, paddle through a floating market on a flat-bottom wooden boat, visit a remote fishing village that's only accessible by water, and accompany the ship's chef to a Vietnamese market. The luxury cruise, run by Aqua Expeditions, offers five-star boutique accommodations with floor-to-ceiling windows, and cuisine by celebrity chef David Thompson. The ship even has a gym, spa, pool, library, and screening room. Rates for the seven-night cruises start at \$7,735 per person, double occupancy. 866-603-3687, www.aquaexpeditions.com

ALASKAN DREAM CRUISES, a locally owned company, offers small ship adventure cruises and special trips geared to families. On these laid-back, personalized trips, wear your jeans, fleece, and hiking boots, enjoy meals with 56 people at the most in one dining room, and unplug from your devices — there is no cell or Internet service for much of the trip, nor are there any televisions onboard. Instead, tune into your surroundings: Keep an eye out for calving glaciers, breaching whales, and more bald eagles than you can count. Learn all about the region from the ship's onboard scientific and cultural expedition leaders, and wander up to the bridge to chat with the captain. You will have private access to wilderness areas, and a chance to explore smaller communities inaccessible to big ships, such as Kake and Petersburg, where you can meet local naturalists, educators, and artisans. The

True Alaska Family Cruise also includes scavenger hunts, geocaching, a chance to make native crafts, and family friendly cuisine. Rates for the seven-night Glacier Bay and Island Adventure start at \$2,749 per person, double occupancy; \$3,699 per person for the eight-night family cruise (children's prices available). 855-747-8100, www.alaskandreamcruises.com

ADVENTURE CANADA, family-owned and operated for the past 26 years, specializes in cruises to the remote Canadian Arctic on small ships with up to 198 passengers. The Ocean Endeavor, renovated for 2015, has Inuit staff and guides onboard who share their knowledge of the local landscape, wildlife, and culture (keep an eye out for polar bears and icebergs). The 11-night Arctic Explorer adventure includes stops in many rarely visited communities on Baffin Island, including Pont Inlet, one of Canada's northernmost villages. Excursions typically involve immersive experiences that enable passengers to interact with the locals: Join in a community-versus-ship soccer game, visit with Inuit carvers and weavers, or learn about traditional throat singing and drum dancing. On the 12-night Heart of the Arctic trip, two world-renowned Inuit artists offer printmaking workshops onboard, and local children challenge guests in a variety of Inuit games in their school gym in Kimmirut. Each trip includes a chance to meet with community elders who share stories about traditional and modern-day life. Rates start at \$3,995 per person, double occupancy, for Heart of the Arctic, \$5,595 for Arctic Explorer. 800-363-7566, www.adventurecanada.com

From left: Tom Harper River Cruises explore lochs and rivers in Scotland; Adventure Canada cruises go to Arctic Canada; and Paul Gauguin Cruises visit Bora Bora in French Polynesia.

PAUL GAUGUIN CRUISES in French Polynesia, with no at-sea days, offer you plenty of time to explore the lush forests, ancient sites, sandy beaches, and fascinating culture of the Society Islands. Take Tahitian language classes onboard, learn how to harvest and open a coconut, and visit a private island where you can learn about traditional Tahitian dishes from Les Gauguins, the ship's Polynesian ambassadors. Spend two days in Bora Bora, where you can feed stingrays in a lagoon, ride an underwater scooter on an aqua bike adventure, or go on an aqua safari, when you walk along the sandy ocean floor using a helmet for breathing and a weight belt to keep you submerged. On Moorea, go trekking with a renowned anthropologist and learn about ancient Tahitian sites, or go dolphin watching with a marine specialist. Passengers can also get their PADI SCUBA certification onboard, and even go kayaking, paddleboarding, and windsurfing off the back of the boat (it has a retractable marina). The ship may have up to 332 passengers, but it offers a 1:1.5 crew-to-passenger ratio. All-inclusive seven-night trips start at \$3,995 per person, double occupancy, and include airfare from Los Angeles — a nice bonus. 800-848-6172, www.pgcruiises.com

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