

# Sailing Aboard a Legend: Five-star Small Ship Cruising on Sea Cloud

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**AROUND THE WORLD OR ACROSS THE STREET™**

She's nearly 90 and still turns heads. The "she" is the *Sea Cloud*, among the oldest cruise ships afloat and still one of the most luxurious. Seeing this tall ship under full sail, her 30 expanses of canvas swelling in the wind, made my heart swell, too.

Sea Cloud, a small sailing vessel, gives a few exclusive passengers a chance to take to the seas, surrounded by fresh air. Although it canceled its 2020 booking due to COVID-19, Sea Cloud is preparing for the 2021 season and is booking for next season. You can view the advantages of sailing Sea Cloud [here](#). See the Sea Cloud website for program updates and cancellation/booking policies.

## Experiencing the Grande Dame of the Ocean

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Built in 1931 for cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post, one of the richest women in America, *Sea Cloud* was the largest private yacht ever constructed. After years of welcoming movie stars, ambassadors and royalty, she saw duty in World War II and fell into the hands of a Caribbean dictator before German investors rescued and restored her to her former splendor as a five-star cruise vessel.

Passengers may wait more than a year for a chance to occupy her most sought-after cabin, Marjorie's original stateroom, and pay top dollar for the privilege.

Unlike other windjammer cruise ships—which are basically hotels with masts—I found this grande dame to be the real deal. I watched as 18 deckhands worked to set her sails entirely by hand, uncoiling ropes, climbing her four masts, and balancing on her riggings.

This feat of acrobatics amazed me and my fellow passengers, some of whom lent a hand from the main deck. During the 2019 transatlantic crossing from Europe to *Sea Cloud's* winter berths in the Caribbean, she rode the trade winds for 2,647 statute miles, 96 percent of the

journey, without firing up her two diesel engines. Sustainability may be a big buzz word of the 2000s but *Sea Cloud* has lived it most of her life.

## **Sea Cloud Offers a Storied Past**

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An only child, Marjorie inherited her wealth from her father, taking over his Postum Cereal Co. after his suicide. She was 27. She commissioned her yacht, which launched from shipyards in Germany as *Hussar V* in 1931.

Marjorie designed the interior herself, buying art and furnishings from around the world: gold faucets, Italian marble, crystal chandeliers. She and her second husband, Edward Francis Hutton of the financial firm E.F. Hutton, often sailed with their young daughter Nedenia, later actress Dina Merrill, who scampered around the deck to the amusement of the crew.

Renamed the *Sea Cloud* by Marjorie and her third husband, Joseph Davies, the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, she became an extension of the embassy to entertain royalty and political dignitaries.



## Sea Cloud Service During the War Years

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During World War II, Marjorie put *Sea Cloud's* furnishings in storage and chartered her to the U.S. military for \$1 a year.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt protested, saying she was too beautiful for battle. Her masts removed and her hull painted battleship gray, she was equipped with anti-submarine guns and served as a weather station.

## Post-War Changes

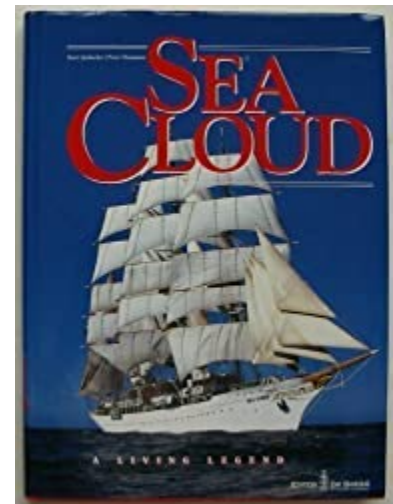
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After years of post-war reconstruction, *Sea Cloud* changed hands several times. For a while, it served as the party boat of Dominican Republic President Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo entertained a host of Hollywood starlets on board.

A dispute left *Sea Cloud* moored and deteriorating in Panama for eight years. Eventually, investors in Hamburg returned her to her birthplace shipyard. They redesigned her for luxury cruises. She relaunched in 1979 and, after renovations in 2011, retains her charm as she prepares to enter her 90<sup>th</sup> year.

You can purchase the beautiful and definitive book on the Sea Cloud.

Buy Now



## Five-star Antique

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Sea Cloud carries 64 passengers and, with a crew of 60, has a passenger-to-crew ratio that's the envy of many luxury vessels. She earns the highest rating—five stars—from respected cruise industry guide *Berlitz Cruising and Cruise Ships*.

I walked burnished teak decks where coiled ropes hanging along the rail evoked the eye-catching appeal of an art installation. The “Blue Lagoon,” nickname for the blue-cushioned semicircle on an aft deck, made a cozy outdoor spot for sightseeing and socializing.



Sea Cloud's teak decks and dark wood paneling evoke the richness of a luxury vessel from the 1930s. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

## Meals and Special Events on *Sea Cloud*

On my cruise, the Blue Lagoon became the venue for a wedding ceremony presided over by the captain. I joined other passengers cheering from the upper deck and sharing a slice of wedding cake with the happy couple at tea time.

We enjoyed tea and most meals on deck when weather permitted. At other times, we dined in the lounge and dining room with its dark wood paneling and original oil paintings.

Fine wines accompanied four-course dinners—five on gala nights—with high-quality cuisine turned out by the chef from the ship's tiny galley. An open-seating policy gave me a chance to mingle with other passengers, mostly well-to-do Germans and North Americans.

The canvas-covered Lido deck became *Sea Cloud's* social center. Cocktail hours featured a pianist. The Lido deck bar doubled as the ship's reception desk.

The evenings on a ship can be cool, even in the summer. A fleece jacket can be just the thing to keep you warm. Shop for a jacket now.

I found one drawback to sailing on this antique vessel: Steep outdoor stairways making it difficult for passengers with mobility issues to move between decks. There are no elevators.

## **Accommodations Onboard *Sea Cloud***

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Eight of *Sea Cloud*'s 32 cabins have been restored to their original splendor and two more—reconfigured crew quarters—round out the lavish main-deck accommodations.

All accommodations sit just above the waterline with views of the sea from portholes. You access staterooms via a spiral staircase from the ship's lounge.

One night during my cruise, an open house allowed the hoi polloi downstairs to gawk. I peeked into Marjorie's stateroom with its Louis XIV-style bed, antique furniture, walk-in closet, dressing table, fireplace—now merely decorative—and Carrera marble bathtub and sink sporting gold taps in the shape of swans. It measures 410 square feet compared to the 366-square-foot stateroom once occupied by husband E.F. Hutton across the hall.



*Sea Cloud*'s modern cabins run small by luxury standards with double, not-quite twin, and bunk beds. All face outside; none have balconies.

## **Sea Cloud Activities**

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Shore excursions occupy passengers in ports mainly in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, where I sailed off the coast of Spain. Without a casino or show lounge, onboard entertainment revolved around simple pleasures: stargazing, lectures on the Lido deck, watching dolphins jump alongside the rail, and touring the engine room with its old-school knobs and dials.





An icon of St. Nicholas, patron saint of sailors, peered down on engine crew members writing in a paper logbook.

One day *Sea Cloud* dropped anchor and the crew lowered one of her Zodiacs to pull a string of floating platforms from the gangway for passengers to use while swimming.



Sea Cloud passengers had a chance to swim in the Mediterranean on a cruise off the coast of Spain. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

The zodiacs also took me on a photo safari, circling the 360-foot-long *Sea Cloud* under sail. On my cruise, she sailed in tandem with her younger sister, *Sea Cloud II*. It was thrilling to view them together.



Sea Cloud zodiacs take passengers on a photo safari around the ship. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

## Love of Sailing on *Sea Cloud*

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For many onboard, myself included, the most popular activity was simply watching the raising and lowering of sails. *Sea Cloud's* chief officer gave instruction to passenger volunteers who felt up to the tasks of hauling lines during the bracing of the yards and the setting and dousing of sails as well as coiling lines.



Deckhands climb *Sea Cloud's* masts and set her sails entirely by hand. Photo by Katherine Rodeghier

Those who own their own sailboats seemed to get a thrill working alongside deckhands. I discovered that many *Sea Cloud* employees have been with the company for years, considering it a calling, not just a job.

Paying guests, unfortunately, cannot go aloft. Only crew members climbed the rigging and slid across the yards to release *Sea Cloud's* 30 sails, including those on the main mast rising 178 feet overhead. With no motors and no computerized controls involved, it takes muscle power, good balance, and the ability to shrug off any fear of heights.

With the job complete, *Sea Cloud's* ivory sails stretched across an azure sky. I'm no sailor, but even my heart beat just a little faster.

## If You Book on *Sea Cloud*

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Booking a cruise with Sea Cloud Cruises is a unique experience. Here is everything you need to know to book your own experience.

## Sea Cloud Cruises

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A Germany-based company operates three luxury sailing vessels: *Sea Cloud*, *Sea Cloud II* and *Sea Cloud Spirit*. *Sea Cloud Spirit* launched the first time in 2020. Bookings are now open for 2021.

## Rates and Itineraries

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*Sea Cloud's* 4- to 16-night cruises are mainly in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. Examples: An 11-night voyage off the coast of Spain and Morocco runs \$17,265 per person in Marjorie's stateroom (the Luxury Owner's Cabin). A week in the Caribbean in the smallest cabin (upper-/lower-bed cabins that are about 102 sq ft) costs \$4,555. Prices include cabin, gratuities, welcoming champagne, all meals, select wines and beers at lunch and dinner, alcohol-free drinks including soft drinks, coffee, and juices, bottled water, fresh fruit, port fees, tour guide, and use of watersports facilities.

## Language and Currency

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English and German are the official languages on board. Announcements and daily newsletters, as well as menus, appear in both languages. The official currency on board is the Euro.

When you are ready to set sail on a small, exclusive sailing yacht, the *Sea Cloud* is the ultimate option. Experience five-star luxury onboard the grand dame of the sea.



# SEA CLOUD CRUISES

*5-Star Small Ship Sailing*

*Aboard a Legend*





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*As is common in the travel industry, the writer received accommodations, meals, and tours. While that has not influenced this review, the writer believes in full disclosure of all potential conflicts of interest.*