



## JANUARY

Health & Wellness

◀ Jan. 24: North Carolina's Art of Living

Jan. 31: Giving yoga a second chance

### EUROPE



David G. Molyneux/Special Contributor

**Silver Spirit** passengers explore the ancient city of Alanya, Turkey.

## Life can be a suite dream

Cruise ships emphasize spacious accommodations and amenities

By **DAVID G. MOLYNEUX**  
Special Contributor

Big, fancy, expensive suites with butlers are among the fastest-growing accoutrements on cruise ships. Their size seems to increase with each new ship.

The top suites, which can cost \$1,000 a day per person or more, tend to be among the first accommodations sold, an indication that an increasing number of well-heeled couples and families are willing to spend big chunks of disposable income vacationing at sea.

Popularity and profitability explain why cruise lines, from luxury to mainstream, are putting new emphasis on spacious suites. They are hiring top designers and decorators to create a dazzling look, adding private restaurants and lounging areas, and offering extras such as concierge or butler service, free laundry and Wi-Fi.

The best suites and service staffs tend to be on the most luxurious cruise lines, such as Silversea, Seabourn, Crystal and Regent. Regent is bragging about a rate of \$10,000 a day for two in the top suite on its new Seven Seas Explorer, to begin sailing next summer. The 3,875-square-foot suite is fully booked and wait-listed.

But if you are looking for a dazzling suite, don't forget that premium and mainstream ships tout some of the biggest, grandest suites you can imagine, especially on the newer, gigantic vessels such as Norwegian's Escape, Breakaway and Getaway, and Royal Caribbean's Anthem, Allure and Oasis of the Seas.

Norwegian invented the "ship within a ship," and the impressive cluster of suites in its Haven work like an exclusive boutique hotel atop the bustle of restaurants, shows and waterworks below. Haven is on the new Escape sailing out of Miami.

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### ADVENTURE TRAVEL



Photos by Brian Irwin/Special Contributor

**A room with a view:** Conrad Yager settles into the bivouac campsite on the toe of Mount Shuksan's Sulphide Glacier. The team elected to camp here due to close proximity to water for cooking and drinking.

## Summits in the mist

Ice climbers apply their hard-earned skill in Washington's Cascade Range

By **BRIAN IRWIN**  
Special Contributor

I've been enamored with Washington state's Mount Shuksan for years. It's a mountaineer's dream, with broad shoulders, heathered arms of granite and winding, cascading glaciers. It holds such complexity that it rings like a dinner bell for alpinists. In September, I struck out to climb this peak with my longtime climbing partner, Conrad Yager. Yager and I



**A sturdy** climbing anchor ensures safety on Ingalls Peak in Enchantment Mountains.

have completed some of the most iconic ice climbs in New Hampshire, peaks in Ecuador and others in Alaska.

At Shuksan, we planned to attempt the Sulphide Glacier route, which climbs 6,700 vertical feet through old-growth forest before reaching the glacier's bony, boulder-strewn moraine, where we'd camp on a precarious ledge amid scalloped granite cliff bands. The next day, weather permitting, we would attempt the summit. But the weather had other plans for us.

The first few days of the trip were plagued by classic Pacific Northwest rain. We held off on an attempt, instead dodging the weather by heading east to Leavenworth, Wash. It's a peculiar place with affirmed charm. Everything from Das Subway sandwich shop to München Haus rings of the old country. It's so contrived that one feels a certain Busch Gardens atmosphere, but it's a friendly town close to outdoor

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**Yager** looks out over the Cascade Range. Ice climbing is arduous and yields inspiring views.



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# Ice climbers learn to be tougher than granite

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pursuits and endless climbing options.

## Land of enchantment

Yager and I headed deep into the Enchantment Mountains, a range of serrated granite peaks with sharp ridgelines and bold buttresses. After a 1-hour drive down a tooth-rattling, washboardlike road that cost us a flat tire, we arrived at the trailhead. From there we'd depart on a 5-mile approach hike that courses through the forest.

The final scramble to the ridge was steep and character-building, but brought us to the 1,000-foot-high South Ridge of Ingalls Peak, an idyllic, bone-dry sheet of rock that was deeply fissured with tempting cracks, our thoroughfare to the summit in the sky.

Ingalls was a spectacular climb with inspiring views of a sapphire alpine tarn below that reflected the hulking Mount Stuart across the valley. Stuart has been revered among climbers since its inclusion in *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America* by Allen Steck and Steve Roper. We wound up flanged cracks and crystalline overlaps to a tiny summit block no larger than my kitchen. After a few selfies, we rappelled the route and hiked out to our car, driving west to attempt Mount Shuksan.

The approach hike to Shuksan was arduous and beautiful. We were saturated by Cascade drizzle, leaving us to settle into our camp on a series of granite slabs that rest at the toe of the winding Sulphide Glacier. We settled into damp sleeping bags, our body heat fueled by a bellyful of reconstituted, freeze-dried chicken stew, hoping that the dense fog would break in time for a 3 a.m. start up the glacier under



Photos by Brian Irwin/Special Contributor

**The ingredients** for an alpine climb: a tent, a rope, a rucksack and a lot of granite.



**Yager ambles** up high on the Sulphide Glacier. Mount Baker is in the background.

the light of tungsten headlamps. Such is the norm on alpine climbs — one must cross the glacier before the heat of the day weakens the snow bridges that allow passage over deep crevasses.

## Low visibility

The weather didn't break. Visibility was a mere few hun-

dred feet until 9 a.m., when the clouds somewhat broke and we struck onto the glacier to attempt the peak. We fashioned sharp crampons to our feet, unholstered ice axes and tied into our rope for our climb up the Sulphide. As we crested the height of land, the gigantic bulk of Mount Baker and its winding glaciers came into view, inspiring us for a



**In and out of the clouds**, the fickle weather did not shut down the team's ascent of Ingalls Peak's South Ridge.

multihour, deliberate and careful climb of the tenuous glacier.

Visibility was slight at times, and as we approached the final crux, 600 feet of rock climbing, it became apparent that the summit pyramid was glazed in a thin sheet of verglas ice and plastered in rime. Rime is wind-deposited frozen fog the consistency of plastic

foam. It doesn't secure protective climbing ice screws well, so we made the heartbreaking but responsible decision to retreat just below the summit.

We slept well that night at our bivouac campsite and hiked out under blue skies the next morning, just in time to make our flight back to Boston, the closest hub to our New Hampshire home. As I

## If you go

**Trails and seasons:** The trails to reach these climbs and many other in the region are complex. Summitpost.org has an abundance of information about the Cascades and can guide your adventure. Most of the peaks in the Cascades are in best condition from June to August, but September can be a great season to climb if the weather cooperates.

**Gear:** We climbed in early September and Shuksan had a foot of fresh snow early in the week. Pack for winter conditions. Ice axes, crampons and technical climbing gear are imperative, as are the skills to use these tools safely.

**Guides:** For those with less experience or simply desire a guide, there are options. The most reputable is Mountain Madness (mountainmadness.com). Based in Seattle, it offers guided ascents of the Sulphide and many other options. Shuksan from \$895 for three days.

walked the steep trail out, the puttylike consistency of drying mud held obvious tracks of a moose or elk. I heard a rustle in the woods ahead of me but saw no animal. For the next hour I hiked swiftly and softly to see it, but had no luck.

As I dropped into the deep valley and out of the forest, a broad meadow unveiled. I was focused on the tracks, but raised my head to gain a glance at the field below. Deep in the brush, a set of fuzzy elk horns became visible. I stared deeply, looking for eye contact to the sound of an old favorite song leaking from my iPod's earbuds.

As the song played the lyrics "... nothing I see can be taken from me," the elk raised its head, shot me a communicative look and turned, walking away unhurriedly into the deep forest canopy.

*Brian Irwin is a freelance writer in North Conway, N.H.*

# Cruise like a celebrity in lines' suites

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Royal Caribbean's largest ships have top-of-the-line two-story loft suites that range from 696 to 1,500 square feet. Popular top suites on premium lines include Celebrity's Solstice ships, and Oceania's Marina and Riviera. Don't overlook Disney's Magic, Wonder, Fantasy and Dream; the latter two ships offer the nearly 1,800-square-foot Walt E. Disney and Roy O. Disney suites.

## It'll cost you

Many of the largest cruise ship suites start at about \$1,000 per person, per night for two people, and charge lower rates for additional family members housed in your suite. Recently, on Royal Caribbean's new Anthem of

the Seas, I met with travel agents who were figuring the cost of a cruise in one of the ship's top suites for a large family. "About \$30,000 to \$40,000," said one agent. "I can sell that."

Just once in my life, I wanted to cruise in such fancy digs, which I dreamed would be on a well-staffed ship on the Mediterranean Sea. And just once I did.

For 10 nights in October, my wife and I lived in one of two Grand Suites at the bow on the top deck of luxury cruise line Silversea's 540-passenger Silver Spirit. The ship was on a round trip out of the Athens port of Piraeus to Israel, Cyprus, Antalya and Alanya (Turkey), and three Greek islands.

The Grand Suite, which is listed in brochures at \$1,164 to \$1,825 per person, per day,



Regent Seven Seas Cruises

**The Regent Suite** on the Seven Seas Explorer, debuting next summer, will be 3,875 square feet and cost \$10,000 a day for two people. It's already fully booked and wait-listed.

depending on itinerary and season, measured about 1,400 square feet, larger than many apartments on land. Outside the bedroom were living and dining areas, a big marbled bathroom containing a double vanity, tub with whirlpool jets and a separate shower.

The suite was wrapped on two sides by a private balcony of about 600 square feet, roomy enough for tables and

chairs, including two loungers. It has been used, members of the crew said, for a dinner party of eight under the stars.

Best of all, we had a butler to make us feel at home (not ours, but one we could aspire to). In the first hour, he noticed that my evening shoes needed a shine; on the last day, he cleaned our luggage before we packed to go home (and he offered to do the packing). In

between, Priyesh Chowdhari of Mumbai was always ready for a special request, from room service breakfast on the deck to cocktails and a daily array of afternoon canapés.

He always brought a white tablecloth to set a fine table, made espresso for my wife from a fancy Illy machine, and stopped to chat about what was happening aboard the ship.

## What an upgrade

My brief life as a temporary millionaire was not in the plans when we boarded the Silver Spirit in Athens and unpacked in our assigned cabin. All of the ship's 270 cabins have an ocean view and are at least 312 square feet; Silversea calls these suites because of a roomy sitting area that can be curtained off from the bed. The cabin's outdoor private balcony housed two reclining chairs.

Silversea says it offers the world's highest level of luxury cruise ships, with rates to match its reputation. You can pay as much as \$600 to \$900 a

night per person for two people in the basic suite, though I found travel agency ads for my 10 nights at less than \$400 a day per person, as we were sailing in the less expensive, so-called shoulder season, and the ship was only about two-thirds full. That is considered a good rate because it includes most on-board expenses such as alcohol and gratuities. All cabins get butler service.

That first afternoon, we were offered an opportunity to move to a larger suite. We had already unpacked and I doubted that we'd get much more than a few extra square feet or a bigger couch.

But with both Grand Suites on Deck 8 empty for the cruise, this turned out to be the granddaddy of all upgrades, with more closets than we had clothes, far more shelves than we had gadgets and devices, a living room area with seating for six, and, in the entrance hallway, an additional bathroom for guests.

*David Molyneaux is editor of thetravelmavens.com.*



Silversea

**Silversea's** Silver Spirit Grand Suite has living and dining areas, a bedroom, a bathroom and a walk-in closet.



David G. Molyneaux/Special Contributor

**Silversea's** 540-passenger Silver Spirit docks at the Greek island of Rhodes.