

Travel

The high life on the high seas

Heaven is a place at sea, discovers **STAN CULLIMORE**, as he hops aboard the Sea Cloud 2 for a Caribbean cruise

DON'T know about you, but I have long hankered after a cruise around the Caribbean. Of course, it would be easy to find some square-shaped, monster massive cruise ship holding thousands, one that would glide you gently round the sun-kissed islands. But I wanted something more exotic, more unique, more... out of this world. In short, I wanted an exclusive experience, something to savour for a lifetime. Which is why I was so pleased when I stumbled across Sea Cloud cruises.

Their craft are things of consummate charm. Gorgeous sailing ships holding fewer than a hundred guests, they actually do sail around the sea, powered by the wind. Allowing you to imagine you have taken a trip back in time, to experience the elegance and wonder of travel from a bygone age, when opulence, grandeur and class came as standard. But still with all the mod cons and digital trappings of the 21st century. Basically, you get to sail around the seven seas, feeling like a king (or queen) of your own private paradise, all while living in the absolute lap of luxury.

Our cruise started from Barbados, so we took a direct flight from Heathrow. I have to say, it was the friendliest eight-hour flight I have ever taken. The whole plane was full of smiles and happiness. An amazing way to start the trip.

Things got even better when we arrived, stepping out into blazing sunshine, passing quickly through the tiny airport and being met by our

transfer taxi. We drove across the island with the windows wide open, filling our senses with the sights, sounds and smells of adventure before heading to Bridgetown, where our ship was waiting for us.

Our first sight of Sea Cloud2 was enough to take our breath away. Looking for all the world like a traditional, full-masted schooner from a golden past, she is a mere 23 years old. Put me in mind of the TV show *The Onedin Line*. Although, of course, being only a few years old, she has everything you could possibly wish for on a decidedly upmarket, upscale, luxurious cruiser. Out of this world. Like something from a blockbuster film set. It was all gold mirrors, gleaming dark woods and sumptuous furnishings. The marble-clad, gold-soaked ensuite, complete with columned bath and ornate fittings would have looked at home in any palace. The rest of the room was equally over-the-top too, with champagne on ice awaiting us beside the comfy sofa. Taking centre stage was an enormous creamy bed with overhead swag curtains and cloud soft pillows, just perfect for dreaming the night away. There were all the usual suspects too; free minibar, TV, incredibly generous wardrobe space, cuddle-cosy dressing gowns and, of course, WiFi throughout.

As a side note, if you happen to have a crown, cape and jewelled tiara hidden away at home just waiting for a special occasion, this stateroom



The luxurious Sea Cloud 2 was Stan's home as he cruised the Caribbean



Beautiful St Barths

would be the perfect place for them. It's fabulous.

The food was a very tasty mix of buffet-style meals or sit-down formal dining. With snacks, top-up bites and drinks available throughout the day. Each and every one of the many (many) dishes we had during the week was superb. With a bit of

everything for all tastes along the way. One of my particular favourites was the lunch we had on deck one afternoon, sitting in the shade, with sunshine blazing down around us, seafood paella on the menu. Delicious.

With food that tastes this good, panoramic views of glittering seas

and tropical islands as far as the eye can see, this cruise is the perfect place to pamper your tastebuds with fantastic feasts. What's more, you can do it several times a day.

The ship usually motored through the night, but on most days the crew set the sails, taking about 45 minutes to get them up and working. It was a

stunning sight to behold. Crew members clambering high into the rigging, releasing sails, pulling tight the sheets. Remarkable stuff. Another reminder of how lucky we were to be enjoying such an exotic island adventure.

There is so much to do onboard, it's hard to know where to start. When we weren't eating or drinking in the restaurant, lounge or up on Lido deck, we spent time in our spectacular stateroom, just enjoying it. When you're done with those delights, you can always take time out on one of the comfy wooden steamer chairs that line the deck. If you're in the mood, you can head up to the library, or down to the shop. If you fancy something for your health, the spa and fitness centre are waiting to soothe your aches and pains away.

You can also sign up to climb the rigging yourself. With full safety harness and help from the friendly crew, some of us went up top for a bird's-eye view of the ship. Another glorious memory to add to the many we were making.

The islands of the Caribbean are spread out like a string of pearls, with Barbados somewhere towards the bottom end. Our cruise called at a different island every day, making its

way slowly up the string until we reached our destination, the Dutch/French island of St Maarten.

On the first morning we sailed to St Vincent, mooring in a gorgeous deepwater bay. The ship's tenders then took us to the nearby town of Port Elizabeth. Brightly painted houses, shops and bars clustered round the beach, like a bouquet of flowers. A walkway went round the headland, to the soft sand and crystal clear waters of Princess Margaret Beach. If this is Caribbean living, no wonder so many people love it.

Next morning we went on an excursion. Different ones run every day and are definitely worth doing. A catamaran transported us to the National Marine Park of Tobago Cays, where we snorkelled in the shallows with a flotilla of sea turtles. Charming creatures who look for all the world like sleepy old men bumbling about the sea floor in search of their reading glasses.

In the evening, the ship moved to St Lucia, sailing past its famous, mountain-capped headlands before mooring up in another picture-post



Paella served on deck

card bay. Taking the tenders to the beach, we strolled beneath the palm trees, staring at pelicans skimming low across the sea before diving down for their fish supper.

After that, the days drifted by in a delightful rhythm. Lulled to sleep by the motion of the ocean as we ploughed on through the night, we awoke to find a new and pretty island paradise outside our window. After breakfast, we would head off on an excursion. Or, if the mood took us, take a walkabout near the ship, to see how the locals lived. Strolling through street markets, soaking up the sights. Ending with a delicious swim in some secluded spot, before heading back to the ship to be enfolded into her warm and homely embrace. Where the eternally smiling staff saw to our every need, keeping us in heaven until we our heads hit the bed once again.

Travel



The rather opulent stateroom and, below, Stan climbs the rigging



The restaurant

As the week unwrapped, we stopped at St Barths, a decidedly posh island full of high-end, designer shops with prices to match, along with a lovely shell beach just a moment's stroll from the shops. As always, something for everyone.

We finally moored up at St Maarten, said a fond farewell to the ship and enjoyed one last excursion. A tour round the island, finishing with a waterside lunch. A wonderful way to end a completely awesome cruise.

If you're looking for a holiday that lifts you above and beyond any kind of cruise experience you could ever possibly imagine, making you feel like a movie star, or multimillionaire, this could be the one for you. Everything about it is completely and

utterly amazing. The ship, the staff, the sun-kissed seas, the postcard-pretty islands. It's something everyone should try at least once. Or, better still, several times.

Only question is – what are you waiting for?

NEED TO KNOW

- Seven-night cruises around the Caribbean start from around £2,720 per person.
- Sea Cloud cruises also visit the Canaries, the Azores and the Mediterranean.
- For further details and to book go to www.seacloud.com/en/