



# ONLY BY BOAT



Three once-in-a-lifetime cruises  
to destinations defined by the sea

The *True North*  
(page 58)  
anchored among  
Indonesia's  
Waygag Islands

COURTESY OF TRUE NORTH ADVENTURE CRUISES

# DARWIN'S DREAM

Galápagos cruising at its most evolved aboard the *MV Origin*

BY TERRY WARD

**TWO CRAZY THINGS** occur simultaneously on my first day in the Galápagos Islands. One: I am voluntarily snorkeling in water barely 59 degrees Fahrenheit. Two: Kicking just ahead of me is my septuagenarian mother—calling out, “Shark!” before swimming toward the animal for a closer view.

In the months leading up to our family cruise in the Galápagos, my sister and I had taken my parents on a few training sessions, so we’d be better prepared to snorkel in Darwin’s realm. It hadn’t been pretty. In the Florida Keys, my father had bellied back onto the boat, mask completely fogged up and gasping for breath. And in Jamaica, my mother had been terrified by the open water and what might be lurking in it. Yet here we were, minutes into our Galápagos vacation and finning toward a toothy predator.

The Galápagos has that effect: In the wild, you grow bold.

And while we may be swimming with the sharks, we are cruising in a floating lap of luxury. Our home for seven nights is the 20-passenger mega yacht *MV Origin*, stretching a pristinely polished 142 feet long. The 10 staterooms have large windows for eyeing the volcanic scenery, and the ensuite baths are similarly open to the outside, so you can sightsee while you shampoo. There’s a hot tub astern for stargazing. And the upper deck is a sleek assembly of off-white daybeds, chaises, and hammocks.

It’s an intimate ship, but a mighty crew: 13, including two Galápagos National Park naturalists whose informed commentary appeals as much to the 7-year-old Manhattanite among us as it does to my 71-year-old parents. But this is not a lecture cruise. “If you think you’re on vacation, I’m sorry. It’s like a summer camp,” says our naturalist, Maria Gabriela Espinoza Peña, as she details



The volcanic shores of the Galápagos Islands

## TAKE IT HOME

Buy a bag of organic Galápagos-grown coffee from family farm Lava Java in the highlands of Santa Cruz.



Galápagos sea lions



Marine iguana



Blue-footed booby

MATT DUTILE (5)



Private-yacht pleasures aboard the *MV Origin*

## TOP SECRET

September to mid-December is low season for cruising in the Galápagos, when the *garúa* (mist) brings cooler temperatures but mostly dry, comfortable days. You’ll share the ship with fewer people at this time, heightening the private-yacht effect.

another day’s itinerary that will include more snorkeling, sea kayaking excursions to spot sea lions, and nature walks ashore.

At Punta Suarez, on the southernmost island of Española, we step from our Zodiac to part a sea of marine iguanas commandeering the pathway like a welcoming committee. (“They’re charging their batteries in the sun,” Peña quips.) On Bartolomé Island, my sister and I opt to climb 400 wooden stairs to a viewpoint, while my parents join the wee New Yorker and Peña for a shoreline cruise. We hear later that they hit a Galápagos jackpot: mating penguins.

I feel like everything is a Galápagos jackpot. We paddle past blue-footed boobies, have our swim fins nipped by a baby sea lion, and simply loll in a hammock on deck while watching frigate birds ride the ship’s thermals.

Just like savvy managers in a casino who arrive with a free cocktail at the moment that you’re thinking of leaving the slot machine, our crew anticipates our need for recovery with the perfect incentive: a fresh juice and warm empanada, or a table laden with Ecuadorean seafood specialties for lunch. On our final day, my sister and I consider bailing on the sunset snorkeling excursion for a celebratory coupe of sparkling wine. We are tired from squeezing into our wet-suits, and happy hour is calling.

But there are our parents—born-again snorkelers if ever there were—already zipped into their neoprene and shouting from the Zodiac. “C’mon, girls! Who knows what we’ll see!”

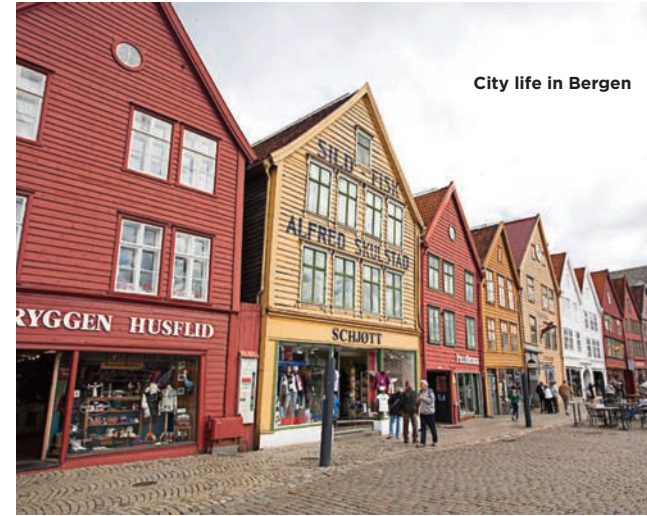
Cocktails can wait. The wildlife and shared wonder of the Galápagos, I remind myself, will not.

*Terry Ward is a freelance travel writer based in Tampa, Florida.*

## BOOK IT NOW

Ecoventura’s *MV Origin* runs year-round, seven-night cruises in the Galápagos from San Cristobal. Rates start at \$7,850 and include all meals and snacks, open bar, excursions, watersports, and gear; [originalgalapagos.com](http://originalgalapagos.com).

Norway's mist-veiled Geiranger Fjord



City life in Bergen

### TOP SECRET

Norwegian salmon may be high on your to-eat list, but local preparation overcooks the fish by our standards. A high-end restaurant catering to cruisers is your best bet.

### TAKE IT HOME

Traced back to Norse mythology, trolls rule Norwegian folk tales and most city streets: stamped on T-shirts, carved into statues that guard shops, and lined up inside those same shops in row upon row of differing sizes and degrees of, frankly, ugliness. And while a Norwegian troll may not be your prettiest souvenir ever, it will fittingly remind you of this strange and wild place. Don't leave the fjords without one.



## BLUE HEAVEN

Fjord-borne journeying among Norway's eternal wonders with Silversea

BY JANICE WALD HENDERSON

I CAN'T EVEN COUNT the ports of call around the world I've arrived at by sea, but I can say this: Among all the wild, sophisticated, and distant places I have explored from the water, it was a meditative journey up the Norwegian coast that rocked my personal boat the most. The epiphany was delivered by Silversea's *Silver Whisper*, which traced Norway's west coast to the country's—and Europe's—northernmost region. And delivered discovery, both external and internal, all along the way.

Perhaps it began with the counter-intuitive companionship of a midnight sun. On our first night at sea, we stayed on deck most of the night to celebrate the novelty, sipping our butler-poured Champagne and belting out the Beatles' "Good Day Sunshine" as the sun skirted the water's edge until its dawn ascent.

This was a potent precedent, as doing nothing but watching was never easier, or more rewarding. I spent hours leaning against the teak railing, enchanted by the coast's sheer verticality, cobalt water, and

emerald islands made entirely of mountain. Through the hug of mist along the shore, clutches of tiny, gabled-roof cottages popped out in bright, Crayola-like scarlet and lemon, as though planted by the illustrator of a fairy-tale.

But not all scenes were of whimsy and charm. In a narrow strait of the Geiranger Fjord, we passed slowly between the Seven Sisters and the Suitor, two towering waterfalls that roar in stereo down their rocky steepes. And while it made no sense that I could reach out and touch



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: APEX PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES, COURTESY OF SILVERSEA/RICHARD SIDLEY, RICHARD CUMMINGS/GETTY IMAGES, VVVITA/GETTY IMAGES

both cataracts, I set down my camera and actually tried to do so. High-drama scenery does that to a person.

I did manage to leave my post on deck, though, and found more to love ashore. In Bergen—Norway's second-largest city, teeming with art galleries and seafood restaurants—we cultured up. In Hammerfest, we huddled inside a tepee-like *lavvu* tent at a Sami village, nibbling homemade reindeer jerky around a campfire while listening to stories of Europe's northernmost indigenous people. On a bus from Honningsvåg to Nordkapp, we lumbered along winding roads as reindeer scampered away from us up sparse hillsides. And finally, at that northern outpost called Nordkapp, I fought strong gusts to reach the cliff's edge. The ferocious wind did what no hairstylist can—blew my curly hair stick-straight. The whitecapped water below led to the North Pole, some 1,300 miles away. I felt mythic myself, infused with that strange Norse magic.

As we made our round-trip journey back into port at Copenhagen, I realized the greatest gift of this part of the world and seeing it by boat: Norway's very features—fjords, waterfalls, mountains—felt as eternal as mythology. I could return next year or 10 years on, and that same magic would await me. What other journeys could I say that about with such certainty? In a world where change seems to pace in nanoseconds, and we pant to keep pace, I felt comforted by that constant. The rocks of Norway became my rock, and I exhaled, deeper and longer than ever before or ever since.

Janice Wald Henderson is an award-winning cruise journalist based in Southern California.

### BOOK IT NOW

Silversea often tweaks ships and routes to retain devotees' interest. *Silver Spirit* and *Silver Wind* cruise similar Norwegian journeys in June and July 2018, including 15-day round-trip Copenhagen and round-trip London routes. Rates start at \$8,280; silversea.com.

# CALL OF THE WILD

Exploring Indonesia's exotic archipelagos on the *True North*

BY EMMA SLOLEY

DOES YOUR CRUISE SHIP have its own helicopter? If not, you might want to rethink your life choices. I'm certainly reflecting on mine as I embark the *True North*, a handsome, 164-foot ship reminiscent of the sleek pleasure vessels you see in celebrity magazines, usually with people like Leonardo DiCaprio and Rihanna aboard. This sailing isn't about tanning and cocktails, though—or at least not exclusively about those things. The mission of Australian-owned True North Adventure Cruises is to provide intrepid travelers with experiences in some of the world's most dreamy and inaccessible places.

Thanks to my Australian homeland, the Asia-Pacific region is close to my heart, but I'm here to explore a corner unfamiliar to me—the Raja Ampat (“Four Kings”) archipelago in West Papua, Indonesia. Even the name sounds somewhat mystical. My pulse quickens by the time we approach our first port of call, the Banda Islands, a onetime epicenter of the world's spice trade, where the ship is escorted to shore by long green war canoes flying various flags. We ride into Banda in tuk-tuks and on scooters, explore the village and its elegantly faded colonial buildings, and then repair to the top of the fort for sunset drinks. There, locals regale us with traditional song and dance, and it feels as if we are being serenaded at the ends of the Earth.

Over the next nine days, we motor, float, and drift—virtually alone on the sea—through scenery that gives CGI a run for its money. I swoon at the undercut limestone cliffs, hidden lagoons, and vibrant birds of the Fakfak Coast, where we leave the ship often to swim, snorkel, and stand beneath the looming Mommon Waterfall, which spills bracing



Small-boat excursions to secret coves

## TAKE IT HOME

On the island of Banda, look for the beautiful woven cane baskets traditionally used to gather nutmeg: Locals tend to lay out market wares when ships come into port.



Playtime in West Papua

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF TRUE NORTH ADVENTURE CRUISES; FRITS MEYST (2)

## TOP SECRET

Pack small gifts to present to children in the villages. The True North team recommends items like pencils, pens, basic sporting equipment (footballs, soccer balls), shoes, and small or stuffed toys.



Islands fit for a king in the Raja Ampat archipelago

freshwater from the lush jungle high above into the warm ocean.

Cruising in the sapphire waters of the Raja Ampat is also a chance to get acquainted with its marine population; the archipelago is home to manta rays, walking sharks, Pacific leatherback turtles, dugongs, and orcas. I'm content to let others stalk the big game, though. I prefer to stick close to the rocky shore, savoring the bright flashes of inquisitive fish milling with me in the shallows.

The adventures unfold and surprise with every new day at sea. We soak up the mesmerizing beauty of the sacred Tomolol cave system by swim-drifting through a serene, cathedral-like cavern before being served wine and snacks onboard the ship's six “adventure boats,” which are lashed together to create a floating cocktail-hour party. Visiting a remote Melanesian village one misty morning, I meet some of the sweetest children this side of the equator, while another pre-dawn excursion has us gliding through the darkness as if on a stealth raid, to stalk the rare red bird of paradise on Gam Island.

And always, after the day's exhilaration, we decompress aboard the *True North*, plied with delicious Modern Australian-meets-Pan Asian dishes like crab baked over red-gum coals and presented ceviche-style, or congee served with a blizzard of traditional accompaniments. But the rarest privilege of all is climbing into the sleek black helicopter, which perches on the ship's deck like an avian lucky charm. I thrill to it each time, as we lift off to swoop, hover, and soar above the incredible land and seascapes of one of the Earth's most beautiful undiscovered gems.

*Emma Sloley is a New York-based travel writer, author, and frequent contributor to Coastal Living.*

## BOOK IT NOW

Ten-day cruises to the Raja Ampat depart from Darwin, Australia, with sailings in October. Rates start at \$17,245; [truenorth.com.au](http://truenorth.com.au).