

# EXPERIENCE

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# TOP OF THE WORLD

More than a decade after its launch, a unique luxury residential community at sea continues to circumnavigate the globe, taking its residents to some of the most remote places on earth and bringing aboard the best that the world has to offer.

BY NATASHA MEKHAIL



**BUOYS AND THEIR TOYS**  
From scuba diving gear to kayaks, all water-sports equipment imaginable is at the disposal of residents; (opposite) *The World* on its Northwest Passage voyage.

“We have a polar bear on the port side,”

says a voice over the intercom, sending passengers scrambling for their parkas and binoculars to head out on deck. On this Northwest Passage voyage, such announcements have become a daily ritual, drawing attention to deep blue icebergs, towering fjords and isolated Inuit villages. As the ship presses onward from Pacific to Atlantic through the Arctic Ocean (where so few have ventured and from where many never returned), this once-in-a-lifetime voyage is particularly poignant.

But the ship making the passage is not an icebreaker, freighter or research vessel. It's *The World*, a one-of-a-kind residential community at sea and the largest passenger ship to have ever made the Arctic crossing.

The Northwest Passage marks one of several expeditions on the 2012 itinerary. *The World's* 10th year also took its 200-odd international residents from the seldom-traveled islands of Melanesia on to Polynesia. Such encounters are firsts even for the experienced global travelers who spend their time aboard the ship, and the ability to create these moments is what makes this exclusive vessel so unique.

A month after the Arctic crossing, I'm soaking up the sun on the 11th-floor pool deck, listening to a resident's stories about Melanesia and sipping a craft beer, picked up in Nova Scotia on the ship's descent from the Arctic (along with crates of the local ice wine, lobsters and oysters). The resident tells of watching the land divers of Pentecost Island build an 80-foot-tall wooden scaffolding, tie vines to their ankles and plunge off the top.

“I mean, I've seen it in *National Geographic*, but in real life, ouf!” he says, swiping the back of his hand across his forehead. He is genuinely awed by the experience – a surprising reaction from a man whose professional life has him crisscrossing the globe 200 days a year.

But then again, *The World* is not known for supplying everyday experiences. Its expeditions are the result of years of planning. En route to the ship's destinations, residents and guests receive an education from a handpicked

team of specialists. In the Northwest Passage, for example, naturalists, historians, anthropologists and Inuit translators accompanied the expedition, the logistics of which required three years of preparation.

The instructive component is just one reason why *The World's* residents have chosen this lifestyle over yacht ownership. Being part of a community, however, doesn't mean giving up their say. As owners of not just their private apartments, but of the ship itself, residents collaboratively determine the year's itinerary.

The White Sea this year, Asia in 2014, and a plan for Antarctica the year after. Whatever this superlative “condo board” collectively decides in conjunction with the captains provides the basis of the route map. A logistics team fine-tunes the details, including lengthy stays in each port of call (averaging three days but running as many as nine), which allows the community to truly get the feel for each destination.

In 2012, that meant stops in 31 countries. Residents are free to come and go as they please, selecting which part of the itinerary they wish to join. The average annual combined stay is four months, but a few residents remain on board all year.

Their autonomy continues to the 165 apartments, where owners have carte blanche over the design of their spaces, ranging in size from studios to a six-bedroom penthouse. They also have input into the look of common areas, such as the 2013 refurbishment of the pool deck, Regatta Bar and Tides restaurant, for which they voted on everything from the color to the furniture.

Another powerful draw is the onboard dining. That evening as I settle into a table at East, the Pan-Asian restaurant under the direction of chef de cuisine John Poh, who trained under Nobu Matsuhisa, I give in to the sommelier's suggestion to try the tasting menu. Frankly, after staring at the dizzying array of sakes (many sourced by the sommelier herself from microbreweries while the ship docked in Japan), it's a relief to leave the pairings in her hands. The meal does not disappoint as I tuck into a chef's selection of maki, followed by Peking duck and prime beef, ➤





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complemented by delightful wines that include a rare sparkling sake.

East is one of the ship’s four major restaurants, along with Tides, for Mediterranean fare, and the Marina steakhouse. For haute cuisine, *The World* offers the recently redesigned Portraits. This signature restaurant, with its sophisticated art deco ambiance created by Lalique chandeliers, Brazilian hardwood and illuminated onyx, never repeats a menu. Chef Lionel Catherin ensures that each dining experience is unique, whether that means staging a seven-course caviar-themed tasting menu or bringing in guest chefs local to the port of call, such as Japanese sushi master Katsumi Yakamoto or Peruvian chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, whose dishes incorporate ingredients foraged from the Amazonian jungle.

“Our benchmark is top international hotels, not cruise ships,” Arjan Scheepers, the ship’s general manager, tells me over dinner. Where *The World* certainly has an advantage over landlocked restaurants is in its ability to source food and beverages the world over. Its sommeliers are trained not simply in the attributes of the core list (their cellar can reach 12,000 bottles), but in the *terroirs* of the globe. On the approach to any destination, beverage manager Marinela Ivanova will arrange to have bottles from the upcoming port of call available to passengers.

“The flavor of the day is the destination,” she says to me later, whether that’s Bordeaux or Goa. In France, for example, the sommelier team secured a private dinner for 70 residents at Château Margaux in the owners’ family home. In the history of the château, there had only been three dinners that size. “Normal tourists would never have been invited to do that,” says Ivanova of the experience, “and the château certainly doesn’t have to do it, but they made it possible for us.”

Other wineries such as Opus One and Henschke, as well as world-renowned restaurants like Catalonia’s now-defunct el Bulli and Copenhagen’s Noma have made similar exceptions to host *The World* residents.

But these exclusive experiences aren’t just of a culinary nature. *The World*’s dedicated enrichment team also themes its events based on the port of call. In Norway they surprised residents by parachuting in a crew of base jumpers to land on the upper deck. In Russia, passengers were treated to an im-

promptu performance by the folk ballet troupe Sudarushka. In New York, musicians from Juilliard performed in common areas.

Guest lecturers are also a regular feature of *The World*’s programming, which I discover by way of my apartment’s video-on-demand channel. Delivering an afternoon talk on Iran’s nuclear program is Mark Johnson, former deputy inspector general of the U.S. State Department and expert on Middle East affairs. Curiosity draws me to the auditorium, where I expect to hear a watered-down speech. Instead, the audience erupts into spirited debate and the question period runs a half hour over schedule.

When I mention the scene later to Tim Spicer, the ship’s enrichment manager, he laughs and tells me that’s typical. “We don’t want residents to shy from controversy,” he says. “In an audience of a thousand people, there are 10 who ask all the questions. Here, there may be only 10 people in the audience, but they’re *those* 10.”

Spicer nonchalantly rattles off a list of past speakers: the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Desmond Tutu’s daughter Reverend Mpho A. Tutu, Argentinian anthropologist Dr. Constanza Ceruti, who discovered the 5,000-year-old “ice mummy” in the Himalayas. Challenging minds, he says, for people who appreciate a good challenge.

If there’s one word that summarizes the experience aboard *The World*, it’s *anticipation*. Often it’s the residents’ anticipation of their next adventure, but mostly it’s the crew’s anticipation of your every need.

It happens to me that night, while dining in the elegant Tides on a meal of homemade squid-ink pasta and lobster Bolognese. Ivanova checks in and I mention that I’ve reserved a night in one of Deck 12’s open-air beds. “The Bali beds must be enjoyed with Champagne,” she says with a wink. Later, when I head outside in my robe, locate my pristinely made bed and sink under the down duvet, I find a bottle chilling bedside. It’s perfect. Glass in hand, I’m reminded of the legendary words of Dom Pérignon upon tasting his first Champagne: “Come quickly, I am drinking the stars!” What better accompaniment for an evening under the night sky?



I awake early to the sight of land – Hamilton Harbour, Bermuda – and of the pink-, yellow- and apricot-hued houses that dot the lush slopes of Paget Parish. Now my Champagne is the crisp morning air. I drink it in, sinking deeper under the covers and enjoying the snug feeling of having a cold nose, but warm body.

Land means a shore visit, with groups of participants breaking off to pursue their preferred hobbies. The cycling groups will take to the twisting Bermudan coastal roads, the hikers will climb craggy outcroppings to visit 18th-century fortifications and I will join the divers to explore Bermuda under the sea.

*The World*’s fitness instructors know the best and most secret dive locations the world over (they have introduced residents to the giant gorgonian sea fans of the Solomon Islands and the submerged ruins of Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria). I’m excited to discover what’s in store for us on this island surrounded by centuries-old shipwrecks.

But before that, there is the small matter of rousing from the Bali bed. I take it slowly, using the bedside telephone to order a smoothie. It arrives almost immediately, a tall glass of frothy mango, banana and ginger juices. I drink it down, thinking that sometimes the greatest luxury is just receiving what you want precisely when you need it.

The thought recalls a fond and often-repeated story from the Northwest Passage voyage. No matter who tells it – staff, crew, owners – it brings a smile to their faces. It happened as residents returned to the ship from a long day of sightseeing among the fjords. They were cold and a little tired. Their hair was wet from the bouncing of the Zodiac in the waves and their cheeks stung from the chill of the wind. Suddenly another dinghy carrying *World* staff rounded the side of an iceberg, surprising the weary passengers with hot dogs and Champagne. The residents whooped with excitement, grateful in equal measure for the celebratory bubbly and much-needed caloric boost of the dogs, laughing with each other about how simple pleasures can mean so much. For among the things *The World* has perfected is the art of knowing that sometimes luxury is getting what you want when you *didn’t know* you wanted it. ■

**CUSTOMIZED COMMUNITY**  
(Top) Apartment design and decor is up to the owners, who frequently hire their own designers; (bottom) *The World*’s spa menu was carefully crafted after consultation with residents about their treatment preferences.

## THE WORLD

Many of *The World*’s residents travel by private aircraft. The onboard concierge will assist with coordination of travel arrangements.

For trial and purchase opportunities, contact **T 1 954 538 8449** [aboardtheworld.com](http://aboardtheworld.com)

