

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

On new waters

There's a world of cruise companies outside the mainstream, catering to markets that might not get widespread attention. They're worth a look.

Hurtigruten. The most comprehensive Norway cruises — 34 ports of call, including several above the Arctic Circle — are operated by this line, with a dozen passenger freighter ships going up and down the coast. The ships carry 646 or fewer passengers. Hurtigruten also operates the 278-passenger expedition ship MS Fram in the Arctic and on unusual itineraries to Greenland and Iceland.

CroisiEurope. This French company, founded in 1976, has a fleet of nearly 40 river ships and barges. The 84-passenger MS Lafayette was recently christened. Itineraries explore France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Belgium. Michelin-starred chefs advise on menus. CroisiEurope also just purchased four river ships on the Mekong for Cambodia/Vietnam cruises.

Quark Expeditions. Adventure is the name of the game with this line, which operates five III- to 189-passenger ships with ice-strengthened hulls, able to navigate in ice-packed polar waters. The environmentally conscious line explores the Arctic, Antarctica and the North Pole. The most famous ship is the nuclear-powered 50 Years of Victory.