

Wind Surf – April 2018 – Kelly Bates

What a beautiful ship and a different cruising experience to larger cruise ships. On this voyage we experience the small ship cruising culture of the French Riviera. Smaller ships mean smaller ports and the chance to explore hidden treasures along the French coast.

As hoped with small ship cruising, embarkation was an easy and quick experience! Once we had cleared security we were allowed on board. Flashed our passport at gangway and on we go to the main lounge for check in. Again passport out (they do keep this), credit card over, photo taken and all done.

Cabins are all ready and in we go. Nice wee upgrade for me - a beautiful suite on deck 3, cabin 319. Very spacious as it's the size of two standard cabins. It has a lounge with two different wardrobe spaces, two TVs plus two bathrooms!! Big room for me on my own but I will manage!! The suite has all the usual in cabin extras, such as a safe and a nice bonus of a Bose sound system.



Once unpacked we head up to the pool deck for a chilled cocktail and await sail away. I met a lovely British couple who were doing their 4th Wind Surf cruise. They love the ship, the size of her and the staff.

We pulled away from the port of Barcelona and headed out to sea. When we got to the edge of the port that is when the magic happened! The music started, Conquest of Paradise, and the sails start to unfurl. What an amazing experience and this is repeated when we leave every single port. It is spine chilling and absolutely fantastic!

All Windstar ships have an open bridge policy. If the sign is out then you are welcome to visit the captain. Again something different that you can't experience on the large ships.

Dinner is served daily between 7-9pm and the food is out of this world. There is the main dining room called Amphora plus two speciality restaurants on board that are also complimentary. Candles Restaurant (that they have on all Windstar ships) plus an extra special restaurant on board called Stella Bistro. This is French cuisine (perfect for this area) and you must book this once on board but there is plenty of space!

James Beard Foundation:

I now have a new appreciation of this amazing foundation. Windstar Cruises pride themselves on this partnership and they source their food from all local sources depending on where they are sailing ie in the Med more seafood. The James Beard Foundation is a non-profit organisation based in New York City. It not only creates programmes that helps educate people about American cuisine, but also

support and promote the chefs and other industry professionals who are behind it with scholarships amongst other things.



Prior to dinner every night we found ourselves in the main lounge listening to James, our shore excursion go-to-guy, on talks for the next port. Very interesting and great to hear his recommendations too. This itinerary doesn't offer many excursions mainly due to the size of the ports visited but still enough to keep those passengers happy that do enjoy the day trips. Once James had finished up, a live five piece band come on and play till we head into dinner. Then after the restaurant closes up, they come back and play on as long as guests are enjoying. There is also generally a duo that plays in the Compass Rose, the other bar on board Wind Surf.

The cruise we were on was called *Yachtsman's Harbors of the Riviera's* and was truly a stunning and relaxing itinerary. This 7 night cruise departed Barcelona and headed to Port Vendres, Sanary-sur-Mer, Monte Carlo (wow how the other half live...), Cannes, Portofino, Portoferrio and finishes in Rome.

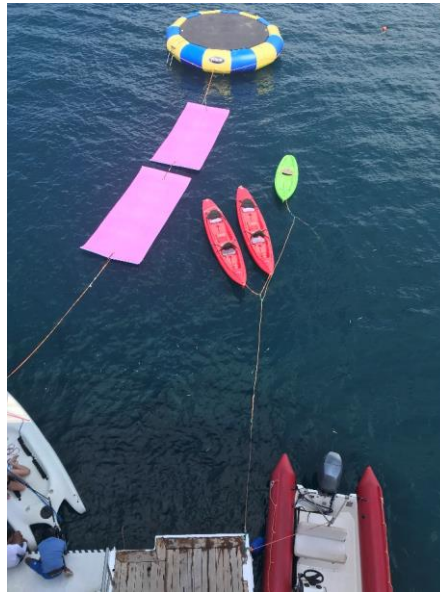
The itinerary was filled with visits to the small 'fishing' ports of the French Riviera's, all unique in their own way. One of my favourite was Port Vendres, but you HAVE to hop the small train that will take you to the next village of Collioure - includes a small tour up and over the hill back to the Port with all the history of the area. This village was just lovely with beautiful shops and restaurants and stunning views of the Mediterranean.

I spent my birthday in Cannes (not many people can say that ah?!) enjoying looking at the way the other half live with the super yachts dotted around, to the famed Carlton Hotel! Amazing.

Another favourite was Portofino. A stunning little (and I mean little) village tucked into a little bay. What a beautiful place and lovely locals. Took a big walk up the cliff and found the perfect view.

Back on board and I finally got to swim in the Mediterranean!! Unfortunately, it was FREEZING!!! Dived in straight off the marina deck at back of the boat. Another great feature of small ship cruising, you can dive off the back of the boat! The Marina deck opens right out on the back of the boat and this is where the guests water-ski, swim and sail from – all sorts of water activities right here! All 6 Windstar

ships have this amazing feature and is available when the ships are anchored (all the tender ports, unless the weather is bad).



Come Friday night and unfortunately only two nights left to enjoy this gem of a ship. It's BBQ night tonight. All restaurants are closed and all guests have gathered out the back of the boat by the Compass Rose for the deck BBQ. Food galore....I had about 4 lobster tails....Divine!

Overview:

I absolutely recommend anyone's next cruise to be a Windstar cruise. The food, the crew, size of the ship, the crew - a complete sense of relaxation and did I mention the crew?? What an amazing experience and such a different cruise to the previous ones that I had experienced. This was like cruising was 20 years ago, before all the big ships came into play with their climbing walls, dodgems and all manner of on board entertainment, those ships are the destination..... With Windstar and small ship cruising, the small out of the way and exciting ports are the destination!

With this sort of cruising, you notice the little things that can amount to big things. For example no queues, and you'll be treated to water, bickies and shade when you return from viewing these amazing small ports along the French and Italian coastlines.

