



A STAR JOURNEY

Nothing beats life on the high seas, and the clippers of old may be the most romantic way to set sail. Giselle Whiteaker boards *Star Clipper* to embark on a sailing cruise.

because of the ship,” says Anna Langstrom, cruise director on *Star Clipper*. “A lot of people are sailors themselves, or they were sailors, or they’d like to be sailors.”

Star Clippers was founded in 1989 by Swedish entrepreneur and classic boat connoisseur, Mikael Krafft. Launching with the brand-titled *Star Clipper* and identical twin, *Star Flyer*, the vessels were the first sailing clippers to be built since 1910, bringing a grand old era of sailing back to life. The third ship, *Royal Clipper*, joined the fleet in 2000. A larger vessel, she’s 400-foot long, masted, and fully square-rigged with 42 sails, the largest sailing vessel of its kind in the world.

The three ships in the Star Clippers fleet are contemporary re-creations of the classic clippers that dominated the oceans in the 19th century. There are a few fundamental changes though. The two swimming pools on deck were unsurprisingly not part of the original layout, and the Tropical Bar and dining rooms definitely cater for a more discerning crowd.

The sailors keep the ropes running smoothly on the mechanical winder as the massive sails slowly unfurl. The wind flirts with the sheets as they pull taut, the ship gently tilting to the starboard side.

Passengers line the decks to watch the display, breathing in the lightly-salted air as they watch the sun sink over Istanbul. This is the beginning of a sailing cruise with Star Clippers.

Over the course of the eight days, *Star Clipper* is sailing from Istanbul to Athens, and the 360-foot ship is doing so in style.

With four masts and sixteen sails, she is a beauty in full sail, although she’ll motor through parts of the cruise. It’s all down to the wind.

There are 143 passengers on board, spanning 13 nationalities. Many of these are repeat sailors, returning to sample a different itinerary. The 70-odd crew is equally multicultural, representing 17 different countries. This blend is part of what makes a Star Clippers sailing so unique. Few cruises attract such diversity. “The people who come here, come



As we skim out of the port in Istanbul, passengers fade away to find their cabins and settle in and we do the same. Our cabin is in the perfect spot for foodies – right off the dining room. It's not long before we have our clothes hung in the ample wardrobes, our bags stashed under the bed, and an appetite that can no longer be ignored.

Dining is one area where Star Clippers differentiate themselves from the larger cruise lines. The food, as with most cruises, is exemplary. There is no dieting to be done this week. What is different is the relaxed ambience, with no assigned tables and no set dining time. Instead guests can ask the dining room staff to seat them, or slip into a spot whenever and wherever they feel most comfortable. This is an immediate ice-breaker, allowing for the social interaction that means many people will leave the week not only with new memories, but also with new friends. One group we sit with met on a prior clipper journey then planned this one together.

The clippers do not regularly ply the same waters, instead rotating itineraries and changing ports, to cater for their repeat customers.

This summer *Star Flyer* is in northern Europe, Spain and Morocco, while *Royal Clipper* is in the western Mediterranean, and *Star Clipper* is

covering both the eastern and western Mediterranean. In autumn, the three will move over to the Caribbean, Costa Rica and the Panama Canal. The newest addition to the itineraries is Cuba, coming online for winter and spring 2014.

Our first port on this journey will be Canakkale, our only stop in Turkish waters now that we have cleared Istanbul. There's not much in the port itself – the attraction is the day trips heading out to Troy and Gallipoli. From here on, the Greek Islands will steal our days, each one offering a different allure. Myrina is dominated by the ramparts of the Kastro, overlooking the port town, most guests venturing up to the summit of the fort for the spectacular views across the navy-blue ocean.

We sail past Mount Athos on our way to Ouranopolis, but permits are required to visit the mountain packed with monasteries, and women are not allowed on the island. We settle for the views, instead anchoring in Ouranopolis, a quaint town with a stone watchtower overlooking the port-side beach. Two tenders (small boats) set off from the ship – one to the town and one to the beach, allowing guests to divide their time between sightseeing and an array of water sports.

The next day brings Skiathos, a bustling harbour, packed with cafes and restaurants. The itinerary here allows for a full day in port, so the passengers scatter to the winds.





We rent a scooter and shoot off to a hilltop monastery before making our way to the northern point of the island to see the remains of the medieval town perched on the cliff tops. There is just enough time for a swim at one of the island's many golden coves before our appetites beg us to return to the ship.

We arrive and leave early from Skopelos, so the time disappears in a haze of window-shopping and people-watching over lattes at the harbour cafés, which brings us to our final stop, Poros, a pretty town where a beach tender is again on offer. When we land on Russian Beach in the afternoon, we quickly learn where the name came from – the ruins of a Russian base provide the backdrop for the beach.

Before we know it, the week is over and we are arriving in Athens. We have explored many harbours, eaten food fit for kings, been entertained by the onboard musician and guest performers, climbed the mast, and lay in the boom nets to watch the waves rushing below us. We couldn't have asked for anything more. Well, maybe just one more slice of that deliciously smooth blueberry cheesecake.



Star Clippers offer fully-crewed tall ship sailing voyages in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, Central America and Cuba. A 3-night sailing on board the flag-ship Royal Clipper costs from £680pp, a 7-night Greek Islands sailing on Star Clipper costs from £1470pp and a 10-night Mediterranean sailing on Royal Clipper costs from £2320pp. Prices include all meals on board and port taxes. To book, call Star Clippers on 0845 200 6145 or visit www.starclippers.co.uk

P8: TOP: *Star Clipper* in action. P9: TOP: The view from Myrina's Kastro P9: BOTTOM: *Star Clipper* at anchor. P10: TOP: A cliff-side church in Poros. P10: BOTTOM RIGHT: *Star Clipper*.