

Chasing Lewis and Clark with Un-Cruise Adventures

By Jan Ross



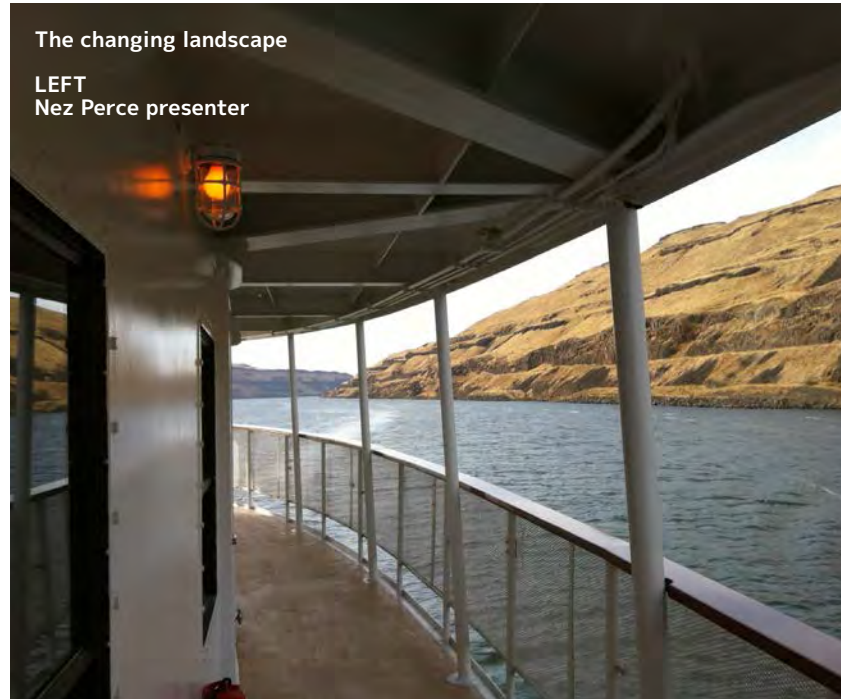
Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, intrepid explorers dispatched by President Thomas Jefferson in the early 1800s to find a route across the western United States, did not have an easy trip. Battling Native Americans, braving extreme heat and cold, making their way down treacherous rapids and starving, they gradually made their way to their ultimate goal: the Pacific Ocean. However, passengers on the luxurious S.S. Legacy with Un-Cruise Adventures are able to traverse part of the same route in ultimate comfort.

Un-Cruise Adventures is not a typical small ship cruise company by any means. Drawing on the combined experiences of their team with 80+ years in yacht and small ship cruising, Un-Cruise Adventures offers an alternative to any traditional cruises by taking their guests into remote areas and offering unconventional and quite amazing excursions.

Their cruise of the Columbia and Snake Rivers duplicating part of the Lewis and Clark expedition is a good example. Designed to emulate a turn-of-the-century coastal steamer that you might have seen during the time of Lewis and Clark, the charming interior of the ship is lovely. Beautifully carved wooden cabinetry, a lounge complete with a full bar (all liquor is included on the cruise), a dining room complete with a wine bar, a saloon, hot tubs, sauna, fitness equipment, yoga classes and a massage suite (a massage is included for every guest) combine to create a luxury atmosphere unlike any other small ship.

The four decks provide plenty of viewing opportunities as the ship cruises through amazing Oregon and Washington scenery and lots of comfortable seating areas as well. Elevator access is available and, with six cabin categories all complete with a flat screen/DVD player and iPod docking station, you are sure to find the perfect cabin. With an open bridge policy, the expansive bridge area is available to anyone who is interested, and many guests spend time there enjoying the passing scenery.

The "Legacy of Discovery" cruise is enhanced by the crew who seem to love their jobs and make every effort to keep the guests comfortable, even donning period costumes for various vignettes and sometimes



The changing landscape
LEFT
Nez Perce presenter



Great view from the open bridge on the S.S. Legacy

just for fun. The cruise leaves from Portland, Oregon, and we boarded the ship with no idea of the wonderful experience we were about to have.

There are a lot of advantages to small ship cruising: smaller number of passengers, ability to navigate into interesting locations and a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. But possibly the best thing about cruising on a small ship on rivers is that there is no danger of seasickness! After exploring the



Letters from Home

Basalt formations in Hells Canyon



Multnomah Falls



ship a bit, we headed to our cabin where we were pleasantly surprised at how large the cabin was and the door to the outside deck made it seem even larger as we could open the door for a breath of fresh air or to check out the passing scenery.

We cruised out of Portland in the evening and the lights of the city reflecting on the water created a beautiful spectacle for our first day on the ship. After drinks in the lobby (the bartender was never stumped by anyone's drink order the entire week), we headed into the lovely dining room where we had the first of what would prove to be many delicious meals. Breakfast every morning offered several choices and orders for lunch and dinner were taken at that time. With plenty of choices offered for each meal, it was hard to imagine that anyone was not pleased with the dining choices.

One of the most pleasant things about the cruise was getting to know some of the other guests, as you are welcome to sit anywhere you like in the dining room. We met several other guests and found ourselves gravitating to them in other areas in the ship; a very pleasant way to spend a week! Everyone enjoyed the classes offered throughout the week; knot-tying, bead-making and yoga classes were all interesting choices.

We were fortunate to be on one of



Yoga class onboard

the cruises which featured the musical talent of the 40s singing group called "Letters from Home". Not only did they provide several very entertaining musical performances, they were also charming dining companions, and everyone enjoyed spending time with them. Beautiful, perfect harmonies, tap dancing, funny little skits and audience participation all made their performances enjoyable for everyone. Erinn Diaz created the group like an Andrews Sisters tribute which would honor veterans, active military, and the families and partnered with Serah Haley to travel and perform.

There were also other skits and

performances throughout the week put on by crew members who were certainly excellent actors as they portrayed various historical events which had occurred in the area through which we were cruising. In addition, a Native American speaker came onboard and entertained us with songs, stories and flute playing.

After a great night's sleep, we found ourselves cruising through the gorgeous Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. We had just spent time in a luxury cabin in the Columbia River Gorge area for a few days prior to the cruise so seeing it from the water was a completely different perspective. We slipped through the Bonneville Dam locks



Historic pioneer village



Bighorn sheep pausing for a drink in Hells Canyon



Amazing to think pioneers headed west in these wagons

(one of many locks on our cruise) and our first shore excursion was a tour of the huge turbines and fish ladders at the dam's Visitor Center. Lewis and Clark must have been amazed at the beauty of this place although I'm sure it was much easier in some ways for them to traverse the river without all the dams and locks which exist today.

The shore excursions on the cruise were all included in the original price – a substantial difference from some cruise companies and one which can really add to their vacation bill. From the dam, we took a bus to one of Oregon's most amazing waterfalls, Multnomah Falls. The tallest waterfall in Oregon, it's a prime tourist destination and a little crowded, but well worth a visit as



Cruising out of Portland, Oregon, in the evening

Guests on the S.S. Legacy enjoying one of the amazing views on the cruise

it's really gorgeous. Back on board, it was time to find a comfortable seat and enjoy a cruise through the spectacular Columbia River Gorge. Eighty miles long and up to 4,000 feet deep, the river canyon makes its way through the Cascade Mountains and the lush forests and soaring mountains are truly an amazing sight.

The next day we were astonished to see Oregon had changed right before our eyes. From the lush green forests of the Northwest, we had cruised to the confluence of the Columbia and

Snake Rivers and plenty of wineries and golden wheat fields. This was no lush Northwest rainforest but a tan, gold, and brown landscape like nothing we had ever seen. More locks and dams provided an interesting spectacle as we made our way along the rivers.

It was about this time that we took advantage of the full massage for every guest which was included in the price of the cruise. What a nice amenity! Step into the massage suite and you will feel that you have arrived in a very nice spa, then just

relax and enjoy your massage as you cruise along.

One of our best days took place on our jet boat cruise of Hells Canyon. After docking in Clarkston and learning about the historical significance of the Nez Perce people and the Lewis and Clark Expedition's encounter with these Native Americans, we clambered aboard a covered jet boat for an exciting ride into the canyon. This section of the Snake River was lined with beautiful yet rustic cabins – very rustic, as they have no plumbing or electricity!



Replica of Stonehenge





This is North America's deepest river gorge and has been protected as a National Recreation Area since 1975. We were thrilled to see deer, bighorn sheep, eagles and 7,000-year-old Native American petroglyphs.

The incredible basalt formations along the canyon walls were truly mesmerizing.

Walla Walla, Washington is not only fun to say (!) but it's also an interesting historical area with a complete pioneer village and museum, along with plenty of galleries and wineries. A visit to the Walla Walla Fort Museum and wine tasting combined to create a memorable day; The Dalles in Oregon provided a day of culture with a tour of the interesting Maryhill Museum and the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center. Tucked away in a quiet town in Oregon, the museum houses priceless European paintings and sculptures along with Native American artifacts and the Queen of Romania's personal effects – truly an eclectic collection! The Columbia Gorge Discover Center had plenty of interactive exhibits which provide a look into the area's geologic history.

We also visited one of the most interesting sites of the entire cruise in Maryhill: a complete, miniature replica of Stonehenge! We couldn't believe our eyes as we pulled up to this fascinating place. Completed in 1929, it was intended as a veteran's memorial and has become a tourist destination that is well worth a visit.

We were sad to visit charming little Astoria because we knew it was very close to Portland and our cruise would be over soon. Situated near the mouth of the Columbia River, the town is near Fort Clatsop, which is a replica of the Lewis and Clark camp when they were in the area. This was their last camp before they headed home to St. Louis to report everything they had discovered. Astoria is an interesting place to stroll around, enjoying the Victorian mansions and the view of the Pacific Ocean and the Columbia River.

The next morning, Portland was our last stop, as we and our new friends headed separate ways to catch a bus, taxis and finally planes to take us all home. We hated to leave our cozy cabin and the beautiful ship that had become our home for the prior week. We left knowing that this would not be our last trip with Un-Cruise Adventures!