

It's still possible to find luxury at sea

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Even in this age of mass travel, it's still possible to find old-style luxury - and not necessarily at a prohibitive price.

The place to look: The sea. Whatever the degree of luxury that may have prevailed on cruises and ocean crossings between the two world wars, it is surely surpassed on the great ships of today such as Queen Elizabeth 2, Vistafjord, Royal Princess and Star Princess, to name only a few out of many.

Present-day technology - air conditioning, of course and stabilizers and the like - have allowed modern ships to achieve levels of comfort and luxury that were impossible at any price a couple of generations ago.

And today's customary option of flying one way has brought sea travel within the grasp of people whose career responsibilities put a strict limit on the length of any one journey.

Cunard, for example, has a long established program that provides transatlantic passengers with a one-way ticket on British Airways (which itself is a consistent winner when travellers are asked to rank airlines in terms of service) with the purchase of a ticket on the ship. In some cases, the flight may be a supersonic one, aboard the luxurious Concorde.

ANNIVERSARY GALA

Cunard is currently taking reservations for gala transatlantic crossings aboard QE2 in July of 1990 that, it says, "will recreate the ambience of the Vanity Fair Years, that golden age of transatlantic travel in the 1920s and 1930s."

Entertainment for the crossings (marking Cunard's 150th anniversary) will include a concert orchestra, performances by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Britain's National Theatre and fashion shows by a "royal" designer. It is expected that 12 retired QE2 captains will be aboard and that all passengers will be presented with a commemorative piece of Waterford crystal.

Between the eastbound crossing from New York and a westbound crossing from Southampton, the 83,673-ton "city at sea" will do a six-day circuit of the British Isles. She will participate in a naval review at Spithead with ships of the Royal Navy and will make calls at the Scottish port of Greenock, where early Cunard ships were built, and at Liverpool, the great English port from which Samuel Cunard initiated regular transatlantic shipping in 1840 with

his wooden paddle-steamer, Britannia.

DICKENS IN A BOX

A century and a half ago, luxury wasn't a consideration. When Charles Dickens crossed the Atlantic aboard Britannia during 15 days in January of 1842, he was evidently driven to exasperation, describing his cabin as "an utterly impractical, thoroughly hopeless and profoundly preposterous box."

When Samuel Cunard was running things in those early days, he decreed that safety was always to be put first. The owner instructed his officers that there was to be "no racing, rivalry or risk-taking" - and there were no fatalities at sea for the first 35 years of the Cunard fleet's operations.

Besides QE2 (which will carry out another unusual voyage, starting Dec. 1, through the Panama Canal to Los Angeles and Honolulu), today's Cunard fleet consists of three pairs of twins - Vistafjord and Sagafjord, Sea Goddess I and II, and Cunard Countess and Cunard Princess.

With that choice of ships, and the broad range of fares aboard each, there's something for every budget. In U.S. funds, AE2 fares can exceed \$20,000 (for penthouse suites) or go below \$900 on a stand-by basis and without one-way airfare.

Whatever the fare and whatever the ship, today's sea-going travellers have the freedom of their entire ship. All passengers enjoy the same entertainment, use the same sports-and-fitness facilities (on some Cunard ships, these are operated by the famous Golden Door Spa), breathe the same fresh sea air and contemplate the same far horizons. The basic fare includes all meals, of course, and virtually everything else except tips, shore excursions and alcoholic beverages.

Taking into account the many extras such as recreational activities and entertainment, as well as the generous discounts that many shipping lines offer for early or stand-by bookings, for the second person in a cabin and so on, then ships' fares compare favorably with the cost of a holiday of similar duration at a resort.

On such ships as Vistafjord, operating a series of 14-day cruises in Northern European waters this summer, and Sagafjord, doing week-and-a-half voyages between Vancouver and Alaska, passengers find bathrobes awaiting them in their staterooms and the International Herald-Tribune outside their door each morning.

All ships have modern hospital facilities and pharmacies. But the medical staffs can't do much about the possibility of over-eating by

passengers faced with tempting menus and between-meal collations, although most people don't experience any lasting weight increase.

And while some would-be travellers are reluctant to sail because they fear boredom, the fact is that ship passengers can keep as busy as they want to throughout every waking moment.

Here, for example, is the program for a typical day's activities on a voyage of Vistafjord, not including mealtimes, which are ma-

joir events in themselves:

Wake-up exercises on deck at 7:30 led by the Golden Door Spa staff; tournaments in ping-pong, golf-putting and shuffleboard; lectures on computers (in a well equipped computer room), investment, personal motivation, bridge, and beauty and fashion; ballroom dancing lessons by a professional dance team; Holy Mass, a Jewish Sabbath service and a Masons' meeting; three current movies and a wide-ranging entertainment program that includes a dance band,

an instrumental trio, a piano soloist, a magician, a chorus line, operatic singers and several pop vocalists.

As well, of course, passengers could ward off boredom in a gymnasium or swimming pool, cocktail lounges or library, at the roulette table or slot machines, or by lingering over the table at the one-sitting meals.

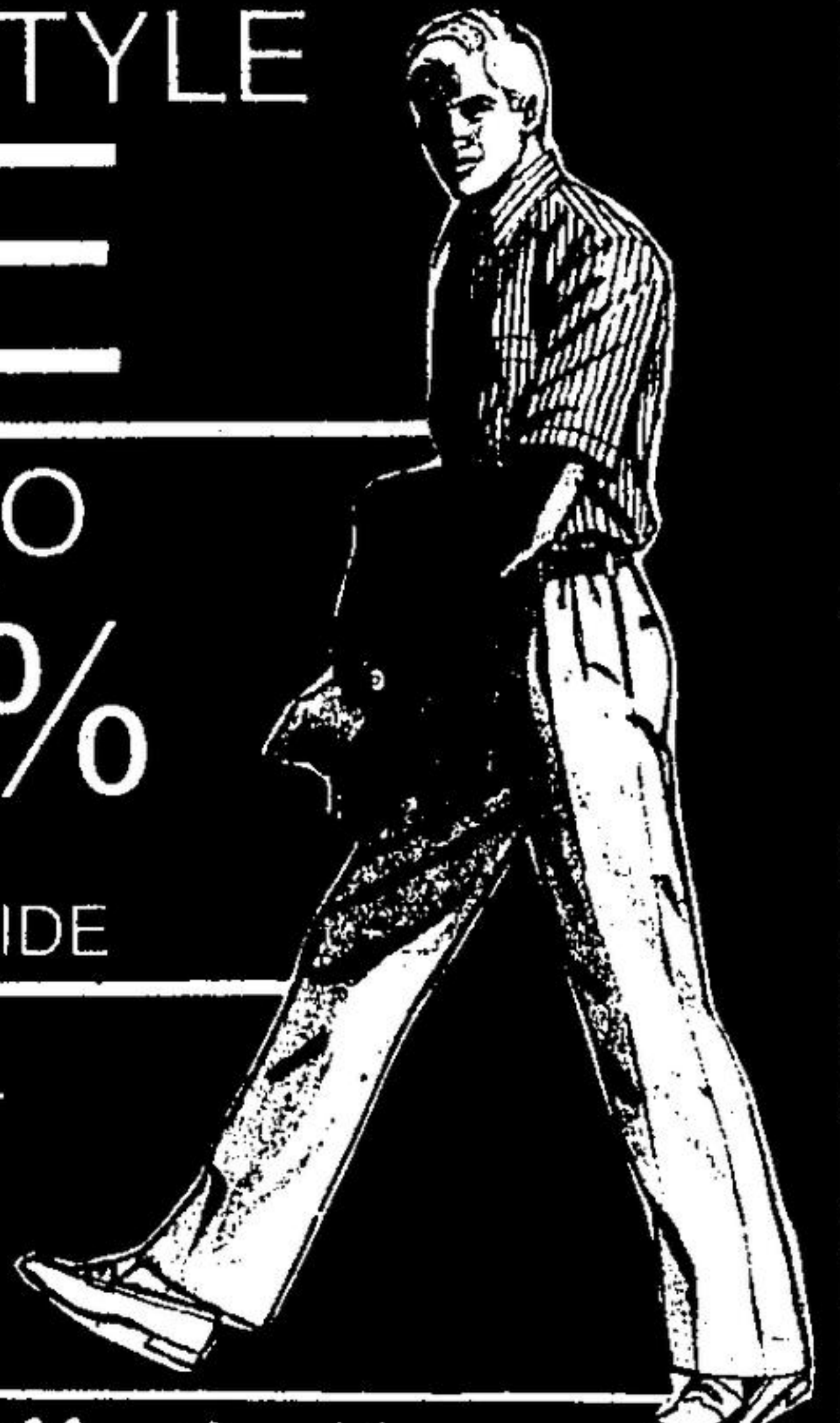
On top of everything, there's the luxury of anticipating the next full day in a new port or serenely sailing the sea.

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