



Nature Overboard!

Garish, gargantuan cruise ships try to woo passengers with all the amenities of home—that is, if your home happens to be the Playboy Mansion. Scenery is incidental, voyagers are busy taking in a Zeigfeldesque extravaganza. What they won't get to do, as they travel at upwards of 20 knots, is sidle up to a mama bear and her cub who are attempting to get their paws around some slippery salmon in the pristine waters of Alaska's Inside Passage.

This is exactly the type of unscheduled lollygagging that small-ship cruising affords, as on pint-size Cruise West, where up-close and personal communing with snoozing otters and cascading glaciers proves that bigger ain't necessarily better. Holding nary a hundred passengers, Cruise West's fleet of ships are some 600 feet smaller than the *Love Boat* variety.

But lavish living doesn't take a back seat to the humpbacks and their aquatic wonderland. Vessels feature elegant five-course dining, old-world charm, and modern conveniences in each cabin. Some ships offer private balconies and hot tubs, and *The Spirit Of '98*, featured in the Kevin Costner film *Wyatt Earp*, emulates turn-of-the-century coastal steamer.

Cruise West sails to Alaska, the South Pacific, Costa Rica, and other stunning spots. Just leave your tux at home.

www.cruisewest.com

— erika milvy