

Travel Time

WITH CHASE BINDER | CRUISING

HOW DID CRUISING  
GET SO POPULAR?

The big news in the cruise world this month is that the largest cruise ship in the world, the Royal Caribbean's new *Icon of the Seas*, is on its maiden voyage out of Miami. It's about four football fields long and carries just short of 10,000 souls. For perspective, the total population of the town of Bow is about 8,400 souls!

Those numbers had me shaking my head. Bud and I took our first cruise on the Regency Cruise Line's *Regent Sea* back in the early 1990's. We sailed from Montego Bay across the Gulf of Mexico and down to Panama Canal for a partial transit. Very cool, or so we thought! The *Regent Sea* didn't even hold seven hundred passengers — and two of her could fit inside the *Icon of the Seas*. Alas, Regency went bankrupt in 1995 and the *Regent Sea* sank in the Pacific on her way to a Chinese scrap yard.

How did we get from a total of 3.3 million cruising passengers worldwide when Bud and I sailed on the *Regent Sea* to 31.3 million passengers in 2023? Look back to the ocean liners of the late 1800's, the advent of passenger jet travel in the 1960's and, yes, ABC's *The Love Boat* TV series of the 1970's and 1980's for clues.

The idea of cruising for the experience itself emerged in the early 1800's in the Mediterranean as part of The Grand Tour for nobility and the upper classes. Ships were small and took several months to visit ports in Greece and Italy—many of them still on today's itineraries. By 1844, P & O (Peninsular & Oriental Cruises, the world's oldest cruise line) introduced passenger cruising to a broader market, but still centered in Europe.

Towards the later 1800's the demand for transatlantic crossings grew and along with it, the demand for ocean liners—large ships designed for transporting several classes of people to America and back, maximizing capacity. Think the White Star Line (*the Titanic*), the Cunard Line, Norwegian Cruise Line, Holland America, and others. The primary function of these ships was transportation, not vacation—although the rich certainly had access to lovely suites.



Royal Caribbean's newest and largest cruise ship 'Icon of the Seas.'

But change and progress happen. By the 1960's and 1970's passengers could take to the skies and arrive at their destinations in a fraction of the time it took to sail. By the late 1970's and 1980's cruise lines virtually ceased focusing on passenger service and started re-tooling and modifying their ocean liners into cruise ships—more focused entertainment, casinos, and vacation amenities. Holland America's *Rotterdam* was one of the first to make the transition.

The cruise ship industry might have spent decades modifying fleets and looking for ways to generate a robust market but for one serendipitous thing—a somewhat silly ABC comedy, *The Love Boat*, set on a Princess Line ship, the *Pacific Princess*. The TV series ran on Saturday nights for 250 episodes from 1977 to 1986 and captured the imagination of millions. Few could resist the romance, the fun, the entertainment and glamour. Who wouldn't want to board *The Love Boat*?

Since then, with a hiccup or two like the COVID pandemic, cruising has become the vacation of choice for millions and millions worldwide. The industry offers options from small ship expeditions to Antarctica and the Galapagos, to “round the world” itineraries on spanking-new ocean-going ships, 3-and 4-day mini cruises to the Caribbean, and more. The options and price points are quite literally endless.

As for Bud and me, we have done our share—two Transatlantics, Alaska, South America, two Panama Canals, the Baltics, the coast of Norway, a few Caribbean and two Mediterranean. It's a great and often cost-effective way to experience any area of the world. You unpack once and let others do the cooking and cleaning.

In fact, we've just booked a Mediterranean cruise with travel pals Chuck and Debra Douglas and Erle and Linda Pierce. We'll be on a smaller NCL ship with a fall sailing that avoids the usual stops of Rome, Florence, and Barcelona—crowds are not high on our lists. More on this in next month's column. Meantime, if you're looking to experience life at sea, start with Google and don't forget to pour yourself a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. You'll be online for a while!

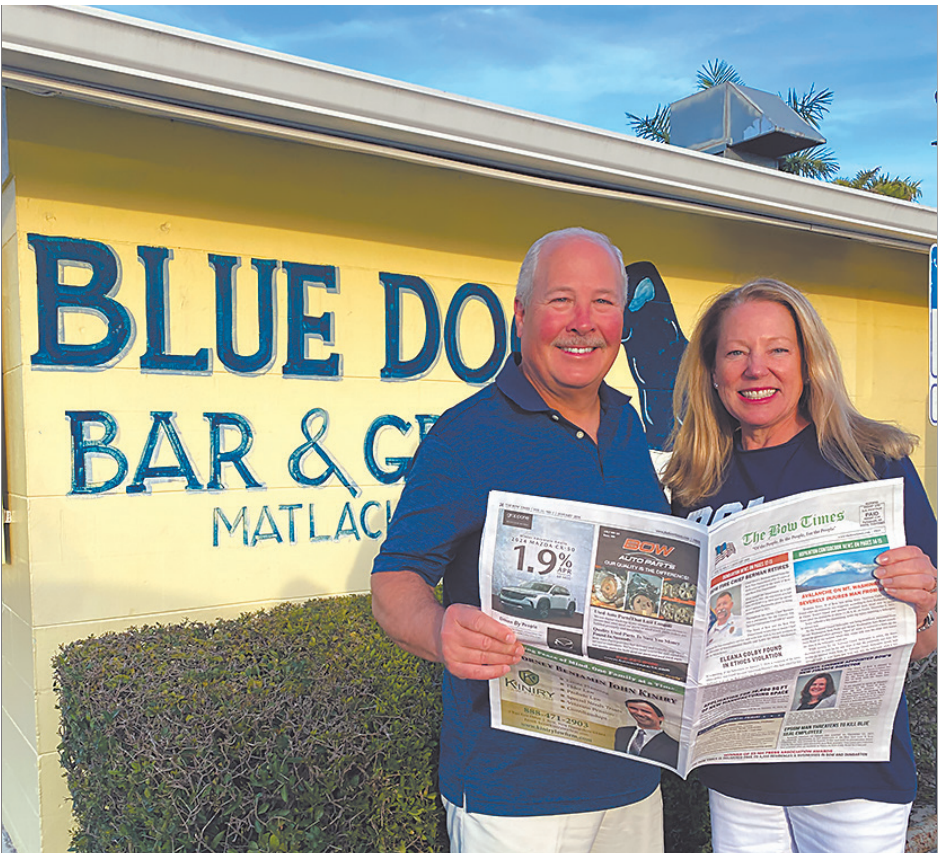


Bow Young at Heart Club

Upcoming Events

- WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024 — 12:30 PM  
Jo Radner, presents “Tangled Lives: Native People & English Settlers in Colonial New England.”  
This event is sponsored by the NH Humanities Council.
- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024 — 11:30 AM  
Pizza and Bingo Day Pre-registration is required.  
Please contact Peter at fairfield\_a@hotmail.com
- Social Hour precedes all programs at 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM  
Bring your own lunch, dessert is provided.
- Meetings are held at Old Town Hall, 91 Bow Center Road  
The public is always welcome to attend meetings.  
Membership is open to all residents 55 and older.

Travel with The Bow Times



Bow residents Randy and Debra Barnes traveled with The Bow Times to Matlacha, Florida. Here they are at the Blue Dog restaurant.

Send your travel photo to nmannon1@comcast.net and The Bow Times will share it with all of our readers!