

Winter 2026-27 Small-ship Adventure Travel News, Tips & Trends

AdventureSmith Explorations is the global leader in small-ship, adventure cruise vacations, three-time winners of the *Sunset Travel Awards* for “How to Get There,” and repeatedly recognized among *Condé Nast Traveler’s* Top Travel Specialists, with four awarded specialists on staff. As we head into the winter season and look ahead to 2027, we’re honing in on the very best itineraries, deals, trends and travel news. Here’s some of what we’re watching:

ANTARCTICA

The 2026-27 cruise season kicks off this month, with some of the top [Antarctica cruise operators](#) **reporting over 90% occupancy**, so this season will have less space for last-minute travelers. Don’t sleep on this season expecting better deals. Most operators now employ on-demand pricing (similar to airlines) so rates will go up for coveted cabins and dates.

This December, the 76-guest [Magellan Discoverer](#), the Americas’ first hybrid-electric ship build, **launches** for [Antarctic air cruise](#) operations out of Punta Arenas, Chile. Sustainable hybrid propulsion is the next wave in the expedition cruise space, and this ship is among six other examples we’re seeing launch globally in the next five years.

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

The 16-guest [Grand Ocean Spray](#) catamaran **launches this month** in the islands, with 16-guest sister ship [M/C Galapagos Eminence](#) following behind in April 2027. Both are built for luxury travelers, with carbon-neutral operations and all suite cabins, but look to the Eminence for added features like an onboard infrared sauna, solar panels and two very unique two-story Loft Suites.

Overall for [Galapagos Islands cruises](#) in the past two years, new build ships have been leaning heavily into the luxury space, but an exciting new ship is expected to shift the emphasis toward sustainability. The 8-guest [Conservation](#) **will be the Galapagos Islands’ first hybrid-electric yacht** when it launches in late 2027.

ALASKA

Europeans will have easier access to Alaska in 2027 with **new Alaska Airlines nonstop international routes** connecting Seattle to Athens and Paris starting in May. And with the **Denali Park Road reopening after being closed for six years**, there’s easier access within the state as well. We’ve redesigned our [Denali National Park tours](#) to now offer the best of both worlds: travel in via Park Road bus, spend a few days hiking and exploring the backcountry, then fly out by small plane.

[Alaska small ship cruises](#) are seeing some big changes in 2027:

- 154-guest [Greg Mortimer](#) **will replace Lindblad Expeditions’ longtime Sea Bird and Sea Lion ships**. This change brings a season-long model of 8-day cruises up and down the coast between Vancouver and Sitka starting in May. No other truly small expedition ship in Alaska has [a route like this](#)—or a spa, sauna and other experience upgrades typically found only on larger vessels in this region.
- 74-guest [Wilderness Explorer](#) **starts sailing five different routes starting June 13, 2027** after a multi-year hiatus from Alaska cruising. The ship is currently under renovation before it begins sailing again.

Now is the time to book the popular [Aleutian Islands small ship cruise](#). This route has sold out its inaugural two seasons (years in advance), but 2028 is getting some more capacity with a ship change from carrying 36 guests to 74 guests.

GLOBAL TRAVEL TRENDS

2026 could use a few more vacation photos.

The people have spoken, and they still want to travel this year! Our year-in-year bookings are strong, with Galapagos the most popular among new 2026 trips booked from July to present. Some top [winter cruises](#) still have deals going right now, including for close-to-home Hawaii and Costa Rica. And we're pointing prime holiday-date seekers the right way quickest thanks to our updated availability spanning the full range of expedition cruise operators.

Agentic travel inquiries are on the rise & we can speak to it.

We can lend expertise to your stories about what we are seeing in real time—from what agentic inquiries are asking to what we've seen shift in the past few months. A few common threads: they always include bullet points, many include "non-negotiables," most also include off-menu trips or requests for ships no longer in service, and they all still value our human touch at the end when finalizing their choice.

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE ADVENTURESMITH'S SPECIALISTS?

Our team of travel experts regularly cruise aboard or personally inspect nearly every small ship and lodge on our website in an effort to match traveler requests and advise on logistics coordination. Here's where we've been recently:

- We had an expert in **Svalbard** every month of the sailing season this year. We now offer more than 30 cruises in this wildlife-dense region: see all our [Svalbard cruises](#).
- We've just disembarked from a [Glacier Bay cruise](#), fresh with updated insight on logistics within that national park. Read our expert's take: [Is Glacier Bay worth it on an Alaska cruise?](#)
- Last month, we had two experts at the Adventure Travel World Summit in Quebec City, where we offer [Canada small ship cruises](#) along the **St. Lawrence River**. Hear us interviewed in the official [Travel Trends Podcast recap of the event](#).

Contact: Jess Weaver

JVP Communications for AdventureSmith Explorations
(530) 448-6981 or jessica@jvpcommunications.com