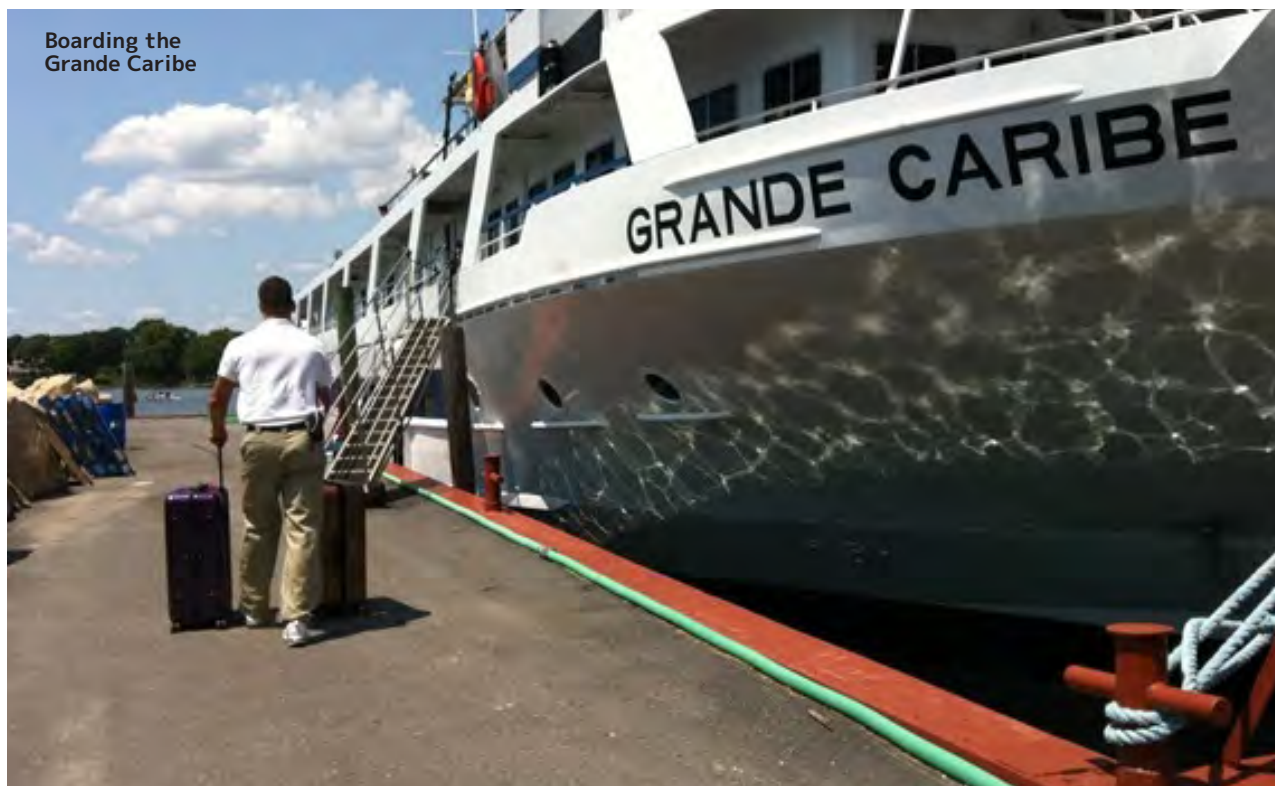


# Cruising the Islands of New England with Blount Small Ship Adventures

By Jan Ross







If you have never visited New England, as my husband and I hadn't, a cruise of the area is the best way to visit and really enjoy your trip. And the Islands of New England cruise on the Grande Caribe from Blount Small Ship Adventures is the best cruise to take. One of the best things about cruising is that you can take your cozy, comfortable cabin along with you on your travels! Spend your week relaxing on board as you cruise, visiting some of the most well-known locations in New England.



The Grande Caribe is not a huge cruise ship; it has space for about 80 passengers in small but comfortable staterooms and is just the right size to be homey. The lounge area on the main deck is furnished with plenty of comfortable upholstered furniture and tables for playing games, reading or just enjoying the passing scenery. The adjoining bar area includes space for the liquor and wine bottles that Blount encourages you to bring aboard and soda dispensers where you are welcome to fill a glass with ice and a drink whenever you want. Not only do they encourage you to bring aboard your own liquor and wine, they even provide snacks and mixers to accompany them, and two very nice cocktail parties during the week-long cruise with scrumptious hot appetizers.

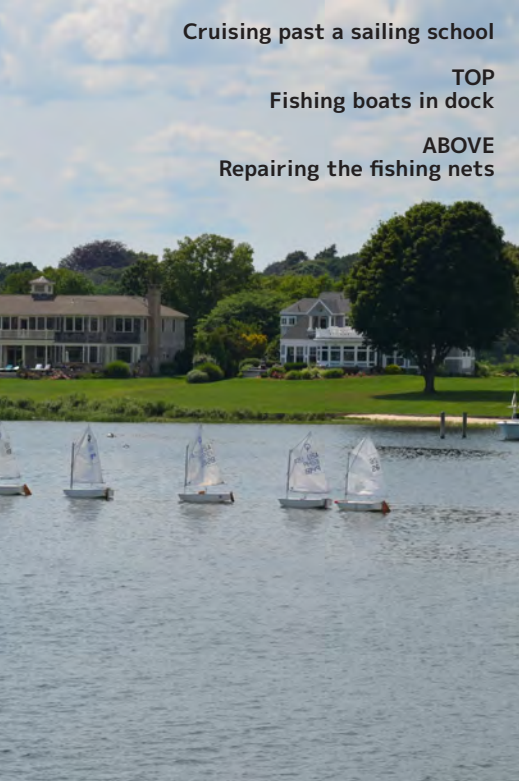
The upper deck includes a shaded area and lots of tables and chairs, along with loungers for relaxing in



Island home and bridge in Newport



Sunset on Cuttyhunk Island



Cruising past a sailing school

TOP Fishing boats in dock

ABOVE Repairing the fishing nets



Beautiful New England home with an amazing view!



Gorgeous home on Martha's Vineyard



unpacking and finding a place for everything in our small stateroom (this is made easier by the fact that you can stow all your luggage under the beds) and a delightful lunch of fresh lobster salad, we headed to the top deck to watch our ship begin the short journey to Cuttyhunk, the outermost of the Elizabeth Islands in Massachusetts, where we would drop anchor for the night. The beginning of our voyage set the tone for the rest of the trip, with friendly fellow passengers, gorgeous weather, and calm water. Quiet Cuttyhunk was mainly a place to spend a night sleeping blissfully but a few of us did disembark and stroll the quiet island paths in the dusky evening.

Nantucket was our next stop and a bus tour was provided by Blount. We were properly awed at the beauty of the gray shingled New England homes, something we would see on every island on our cruise. Quaint cobblestone streets, bicyclers, lines for the ferry on and off the island, dozens of shops with clothes way above our budget and a local farmer's market set up for the morning seemed to epitomize the island. There was an optional walking tour offered by Blount, but we just picked up a walking tour map at the tiny visitor center and strolled around the neighborhoods on our own, trying to imagine how many millions of dollars some of the mansions must cost.

Martha's Vineyard the next morning provided another bus tour, but this time we made a stop at the historic Southeast Lighthouse to appreciate the astonishing view and get some photos. After lunch back on the ship, we decided to brave public transportation, as a bus stopped precisely where we were docked. We hopped aboard, paid the extremely

the sun as the ship cruises along the waterways. The dining room downstairs has tables of varying sizes where you will meet and get to know your fellow passengers much better than you could on any large ship cruise. There's also a soft drink dispenser, along with fresh coffee and other hot drinks and plenty of cookies, pastries and fresh fruit for snacking in between meals. You will not go hungry on this cruise and you will enjoy every bite.

The cruise embarks from tiny Warren, Rhode Island, where Blount Small Ship Adventures is based. It's convenient to park for free in their parking lot, hand over your luggage, and walk aboard with no fuss. After



Beautiful homes on Nantucket

Charming downtown on Block Island



Lunch with a view!



Windmill in New England



reasonable fare and headed back to Oak Bluffs for a stroll along the coastline and, once again, to marvel at the astonishingly beautiful Victorian mansions in the area. A large and very popular park lies in the middle of town, surrounded by truly amazing mansions, all of which are single family dwellings and many of which are only used in the summer. Families were relaxing in the park, many with picnics and several with kites which caught the strong wind from the ocean.

New Bedford, Massachusetts was once the whaling capitol of the world and their fascinating and historic whaling museum was where we headed the next day after our arrival in port and a walking tour of the waterfront. We also strolled around the dock and saw plenty of fishing boats and fishermen.

Lunch, a nap, and an afternoon of reading on deck made this the perfect day. Soon enough, it was time for another fabulous dinner. Our meals onboard the Grande Mariner were absolutely delicious, each one better than the last. We had lobster in some form every day. For our authentic lobster bake, the chef and assistants set up a steamer oven on the top deck consisting of a plywood frame enclosing a stove with seaweed layered under the freshly caught lobsters, potatoes, and fresh corn. When we were served a whole lobster that night, some of us had no clue how to eat this monstrosity, but, after a demonstration of how to crack the claws and tail, we all dug in and relished every buttery bite.

Heading back in the direction of Rhode Island the next day, we stopped on Block Island -- which was a shock! Expecting a quiet island



Mansion in Newport

with a few homes, we were surprised by the busy town with shops and restaurants full of tourists. Our bus tour soon pulled away from town,

and we saw the island we were expecting, with wonderful views, beautiful oceanfront homes, stone fences, lighthouses and ponds filled with gorgeous, blooming lily pads.

We spent some time strolling around town and had lunch on yet another restaurant patio, this time with a view of the ocean. We couldn't get enough lobster rolls and ordered yet another one for lunch. This ubiquitous New England treat is basically a lobster salad comprised mainly of cut up lobster and mayonnaise, served on a buttered and toasted bun. It's delicious! Don't leave the area without sampling one – or possibly two or three.

Blount Small Ship Adventures planned well and included an extra-long stay at the end in Newport, our favorite location on the cruise. Don't leave Newport without touring some

of the incredible mansions which were summer homes for some of the most affluent families in America a hundred years ago. The Breakers is especially stunning and allows you access to the Cliff Walk, a sidewalk that winds along the cliffs overlooking the gorgeous Atlantic Ocean.

We all woke early on our last morning as the Captain skillfully steered us out of the Newport harbor and back towards Warren, where we would sadly disembark. After last minute packing and breakfast, we waited in the lounge, chatting with our new friends as the passengers who had planes to catch were helped off the ship; then we disembarked, loaded up our suitcases, and headed home. We were sorry to see our cruise come to an end but excited that Blount has lots of other itineraries to choose from because we are already making plans!

