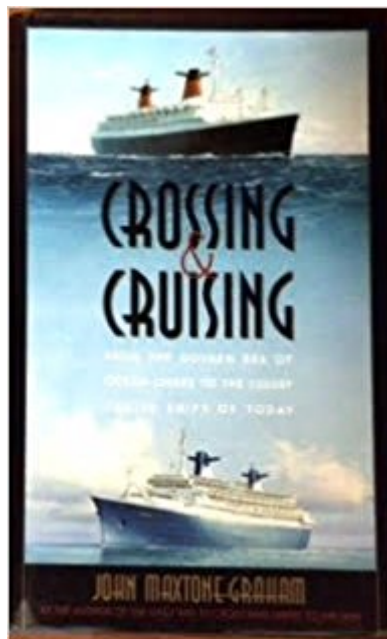




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Crossing & Cruising: From The Golden Era Of Ocean Liners To The Luxury Cruise Ships Of Today



Synopsis

1992 Charles Scribner's Sons hardcover, 3rd printing. John Maxtone-Graham (Normandie: France's Legendary Art Deco Ocean Liner). The history of cruise ships and their journeys across the oceans

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Today's ships are "less grand hotel than grand mall," contends maritime historian and shipboard lecturer Maxtone-Graham in the concluding volume of a nostalgic trilogy (The Only Way to Cross ; Liners to the Sun), a book that is likely to delight steamship buffs. The vessels, he notes, have changed more than their passengers. Liberally illustrated and rich in nautical lore, the book contrasts today's "giant floating theme parks," designed expressly to provide "total-immersion escapism" for fun-bent cruise guests, with the more purposeful ocean carriers of the past. Maxtone-Graham evokes the crowded, stifling steerage quarters of millions of deloused, often seasick immigrants, the ordeal that awaited immigrants upon their arrival at Ellis Island and, in later years, the annual eastbound migrations of vast numbers of culture-hungry tourists and students aboard Edwardian and Beaux-Arts superliners from the Aquitania to the Queens (and the incomparable Normandie , to which he devotes a chapter). Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A disappointing effort from one of the world's foremost authorities on the subject, this overview of

20th-century cruise ships is badly written and poorly organized. In breathless and overblown prose, Maxtone-Graham (Cunard, Sterling, 1989) jumps from descriptions of long-ago salvaged ships to overly personal accounts of his recent cruises. The illustrations (not seen) might offer considerable embellishment, but the detailed and subjective textual descriptions of naval architecture found on ships both past and present do not illuminate their subjects. The author's knowledge and enthusiasm are not enough to sustain the reader's interest. Recommended only for serious cruise ship aficionados.- Gary Williams, Southeastern Ohio Regional Lib., Caldwell Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The author knows and loves cruise ships and the now defunct "passenger liner" and his insights gleaned from many months at sea on these vessels is related in elegant and fascinating prose. One reviewer had complained that the author had a choppy presentation, depending too much upon his personal experiences on various vessels rather than scholarly research. First of all, he has shown a wealth of book-learning about the subject and his opinion of the modern cruise ships on which he has sailed are informed by this research. I don't find his views idiosyncratic, but quite astute. I wish the book had been updated to reflect the cruise ships and industry of the 20 years since this work was published, but one can look forward to more on this topic from the prolific author.

As a shipwreck historian (it's what I do) I study ships of all types and sizes. Currently engaged on a huge project involving the history of passenger-ships, my never-ending quest for information in recent years has favoured that particular genre. Although published in 1992, I came to this work because of the sub-title which reads; "From the golden era of ocean liners to the luxury cruise ships of today" in the expectation of finding an historical treatise on the subject. It is no such thing. This is the third work by Maxtone-Graham to cross my desk recently and each of these informs the reader he is the quintessential expert, the fount of all knowledge, the very sage itself - when it comes to the subject of big passenger-ships. Instead of learning anything of real value, however, his writing might easily be described as the perfunctory outpourings of those back-room people who are paid to produce promotional literature. The sort of people who are employed to make a company look good, make defeat look like a victory and annihilation like a temporary setback. In this particular book, we are subjected to a no-holds-barred view through the rosier of tinted spectacles of how good cruising is and nothing else. Whereas he does occasionally mention yesterday, he does so in a style which does not seek to teach the reader of the historical context or of the technology of the day. Instead it centres on the

hardships and privations of the steerage-class passenger which is then used as a platform for returning to his self-appointed theme of how good it is today. Were he selling the product it would amount to subliminal advertising. There is a lot which is right with cruising and cruise-ships and much that is very wrong. From this work, however, we are subjected to an annoyingly sycophantic repetition of preaching from the pulpit of big ship travel in which the author extols the benefits of how good cruising is now when compared to how bad it was then. It is a message which almost demands the reader partake in a modern cruise just so that their ancestors may now rest easy.

I am mindful of the publication date of 1992 when providing the following statistics - which I have readily to hand. Similar figures for the 26 years to 1992 would take far too long to produce. Nevertheless, the message is clear. What you will not learn from this book is anything similar to the following: Between 1985 and 2010 (26 years inclusive), 177 cruise-liners are listed as having retired from active cruising and you may judge the associated statistics for yourself. 107 of these ships were broken up (i.e. scrapped) at the end of their lives. These were all in poor shape and could not be used at sea any more and yet, had all recently been carrying hundreds of passengers. 18 of the remainder were lost because they sank. Another 19 were lost to fire - with three of those also sinking. Two ran aground, one capsized, one broke in two at anchor, one was abandoned, two are shown as fate unknown and 26 are recorded as having changed their role. Of the latter, two became floating hotels but most of the remainder became freighters, passenger-ships or ferries - mostly in third world countries where the requisite safety regulations are not so strict.

That's OK then! A swift analysis reveals: An average of 7 ships every year ceased operating as cruise-ships. Of these, 23.7% (almost one in four!!!) came to an unfortunate end through sinking, fire or simply falling apart. Although there were four years in which no vessel was lost to accident or misfortune, there were seven when at least three met a very tragic end. These statistics are deliberately included in order to redress the extremely biased, one-sided, pleasant-dreamy-eyed view of cruising in this lengthy piece of promotional blurb. NM

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