

THE ANTI-CRUISE



Coconut Grove-based SeaDream pampers vacationers on its floating resorts.

When a water voyage beckons, but a private yacht is too private. BY BARBARA PERKINS

If you have ever wondered what it might be like to spend a relaxing vacation aboard your own private yacht, some time on SeaDream II just might do the trick.

We recently joined the 344-footer, one of two identical ships owned by Coconut Grove-based SeaDream Yacht Club, for a weeklong jaunt down the coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. We were seriously impressed.

For starters, unlike mammoth cruise ships which haul around thousands of passengers and crew, SeaDream II boasts a scant 55 staterooms — providing a welcome alternative to scheduled activities, crowds and long lines. Traveling due south with just 78 fellow passengers left us no need to jockey for poolside chairs. And with a crew of 92, do the math to see that we were all well-attended-to.

SeaDream II's favorable crew-to-guest ratio meant each passenger was regularly greeted by name. Upon returning from our land adventures, crewmembers handed each of us ice water and a cold peppermint-scented towel. They learned our peccadillos and preferences, too. Prefer multi-grain toast to rye? By day two at breakfast it was waiting at our favorite table.

The well-thought-out layout meant that while the ship was small enough to get around on easily, it felt big enough to carve out some space all our own.

We were especially keen on the over-

sized pool, topped off with an outdoor shower and a bubbling Jacuzzi; it was a perfect spot to enjoy the unlimited complimentary drinks. Upper decks loaded with cushy sun beds for two and hammocks were within a quick walk. The "Top of the Yacht" bar, also on one of the upper decks, offered a comfy horseshoe-shaped hideout.

Thirty-mph winds scuttled our original itinerary, keeping us away from the scheduled small, secluded anchorages and forcing us to spend too many days in ports we would have preferred to miss. We chose, instead, to spend the bulk of our time on the ship, and found more than just indulgent sunning and swimming.

We took a few whacks on the 50-course golf simulator, and took advantage of the high-powered binoculars set out on the forward deck chairs for passenger use. An onboard gym, library and a six-slot-machine casino were less appealing.

Our stateroom, with its ocean view (there are no "inside" cabins on this ship), beckoned as well. The cool, luxurious linens and marble multi-jet showers offered respite from any hot weather we encountered. We spent some time catching up on missed episodes of "The Sopranos" on our flat screen TV (complete with DVD and CD player).

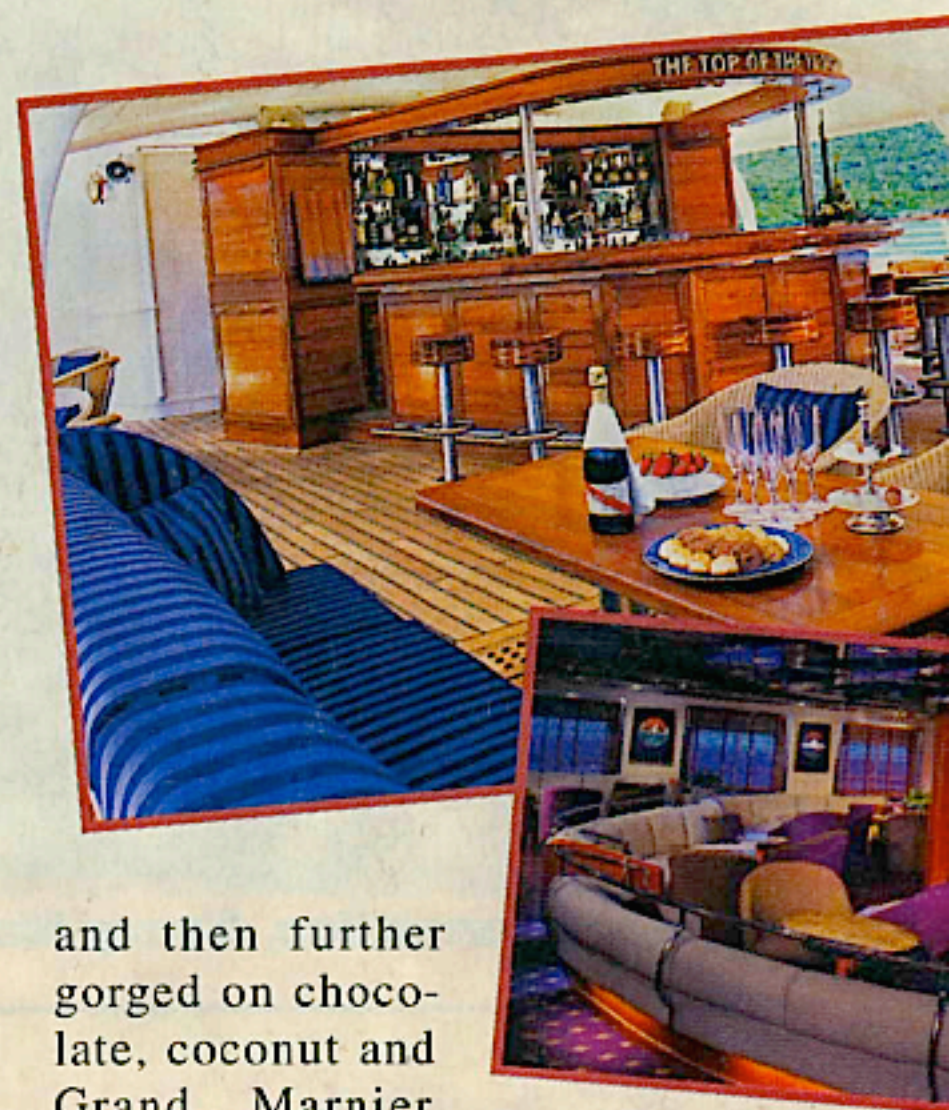
A cruise, however, is really about being outdoors. So while you can revel in

body wraps, facials, saunas and the like at the full-service spa on the starboard side of Deck Four, we say take your Thai massage as we did — outside under the stars with the sound of real waves rolling against the ship.

We also made sure to show up outside each afternoon, when the crew lowered the water sports platform and broke out banana boats and personal watercraft for passengers to grab some extra fun.

Back inside, the ship's interior, adorned with some standout art, was quite elegant. But we certainly needed neither tuxedo nor tie during breakfast or lunch, which was served outside at the open-air café. Dinner too, while served in an enchanting dining room, was also a relaxing "country club casual."

Dinners ran the gamut from basics like broiled salmon to lighter items on the "oriental wellness" cuisine menu. Caviar was available anytime. We found entrées like the melt-in-your-mouth Chateaubriand, grilled lobster tails drenched in butter and a massive hunk of juicy prime rib-eye beef too hard to resist. At dessert time, we scarfed down an assortment of homemade chocolate truffles each night,



and then further gorged on chocolate, coconut and Grand Marnier soufflés, mixing things up on occasion with a divine crème brûlée.

Word to the wise — if you go, take along some spare pants with an elasticized waist.

SeaDream Yacht Club: 2601 South Bayshore Dr., Penthouse 1B, Coconut Grove 33133. www.seadreamyachtclub.com or 305-631-6100.

SE