



A NEW LIGHT SHINING

*Silver Ray is
a luxury ship
packed with
bright ideas.*

by Jon Fleming



It's not easy to put the sun-drenched Greek Islands in the shade, but Silversea's latest offering — *Silver Ray* — shines a new light on luxury cruising. Silversea took their ship design in a new direction with the introduction of the innovative *Silver Nova* in 2023, and *Silver Ray*'s launch this year continues this trend of offering a more contemporary look to the luxury sector.

These new ships follow a totally different layout from Silversea's previous vessels — rather than all the bars and restaurants being aligned at the back of the ship, Silversea has opted for a horizontal layout of facilities being concentrated across Decks 4 and 5, plus the Pool Deck on Deck 10. It makes for a smoother flow, as you pass from bar to restaurant to theater, although the new layout has been a bit of an adjustment for some regular Silversea passengers — some commenting that it's taken them a few days to get fully oriented.

Where the designers get top marks is in thinking outside the box, to come up with an asymmetrical design that positions the swimming pool on the side of the ship, rather than sticking with the traditional pool-in-the-middle orthodoxy. What this does is make the whole pool deck feel much more open, and gives the bathers a greater connection to the ocean (or port) directly alongside. In fact, it's the constant views of sea and land that distinguish your time on *Silver Ray* — whether that's from the glass elevators that run up and down the side of the ship; or from the large Jacuzzi with its solid glass wall that makes it a great place to watch a stunning sunset with a cocktail; or even from the saunas whose windows look out directly over the sea.

RADIANT PLACES

Inside *Silver Ray*, there's such a huge amount of striking original artwork decorating the public spaces, that to some extent it gives the ship the feel of an art gallery. This is complemented by a display of superb travel photography by long-term Silversea collaborator, the celebrated photographer Steve McCurry — a reminder of the exotic places that cruising can take you to.

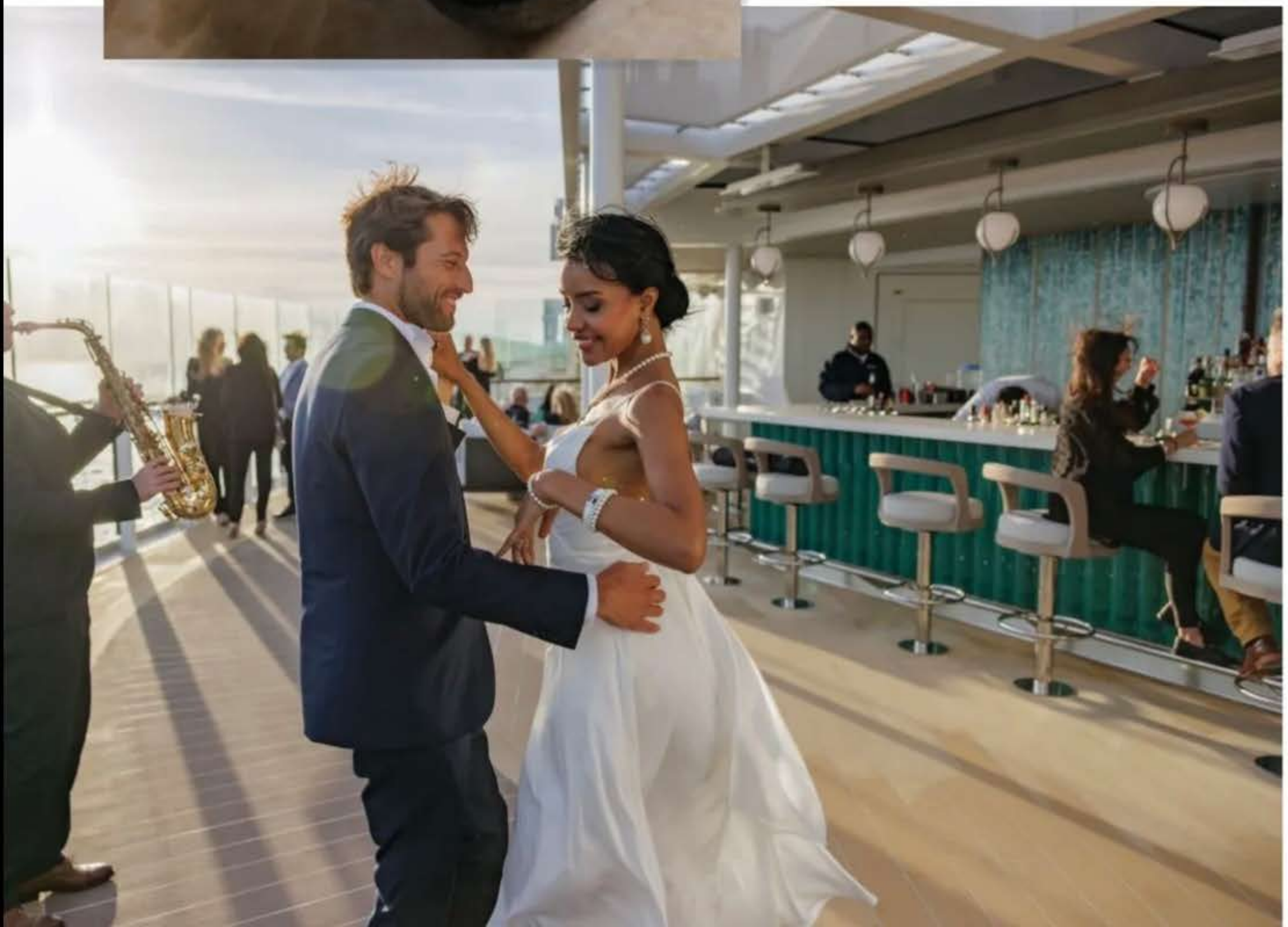
Where other ships have to deal with the ongoing phenomenon of too many passengers reserving sun beds with towels, *Silver Ray* has plentiful lounging space (both inside and out), with so many hidden nooks and crannies that you can always find somewhere to hang out. So many hideaways in fact, that it can take days to discover new "secret" areas, and to decide on your favorite spot. The sense of space, of being able to get away from it all, is the overriding sensation.

Some long-term Silversea passengers have expressed a regret that, with its more contemporary feel, *Silver Ray* has less of a "Country Club" atmosphere than previous ships, where everyone tended to head to the same bar, and where socializing with other passengers was more of a ritual. That's still available on other Silversea ships; and, of course, old favorites for meeting new friends remain — like on tour, or at the ever-popular afternoon trivia sessions, which alternate between hilarity and intense competition.

However, with a choice of 10 contrasting bars and lounges, each with its own distinct vibe, this is a ship where you can get to enjoy a different experience every night. During the daytime, the lively Arts Café acts as the hub of the ship, where everyone calls in for a coffee (or something stronger). In the evening, if you want a more social piano-bar experience, head to the busy Dolce Vita Bar for music and conviviality; but if you want to sample specialty cocktails with subdued lighting and unrivaled views,



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Clockwise from top: SilverSea Cruises, Tracy Fleming, SilverSea Cruises (4), Tracy Fleming, SilverSea Cruises



head up to the cool SALT Bar, where you can test the knowledge of the well-trained mixologists. For a more sedate atmosphere, the Shelter offers a great place for sophisticated Champagne cocktails, as you relax to live violin music; while for alfresco drinking cooling off warm evenings to the chilled-out sounds of a saxophone player, then the Dusk Bar off the back of the ship is another place to experience the sights and sounds of the sea beyond.

Silver Ray's dining scene is similarly diverse. Of the included restaurants, the plush furniture and classy ambience of the Atlantide Restaurant (the closest that the ship has to a traditional Main Dining Room) has the upmarket feel you'd expect from

Silversea; while the buzzy atmosphere and cool furnishings of the outdoor Marquee Restaurant has the mood of a trendy beach club on the Cote D'Azur — this is the perfect place to have a tasty pizza or steak grilled by yourself on a hot rock. (Of course, this being Silversea, where every guest need is catered to, those who have come to get away from any form self-catering whatsoever can get the chefs to cook it for them!) A taste of Italy, reflecting Silversea's Italian roots, can be found at La Terrazza, but a firm favorite remains the *Silver Note*, which has the dimly lit feel of an old time jazz club thanks to the toe-tapping backing of

a superb jazz duo — creating a mood so romantic that we even got to witness a tear-inducing marriage proposal on the dance floor.

In keeping with Silversea's attempts to bring the atmosphere and tastes of the destinations that it visits right aboard its ships, *Silver Ray* takes full advantage of the line's groundbreaking S.A.L.T. program (Sea and Land Taste). The ship's bright SALT Kitchen showcases the flavors and recipes of the local area — here we sampled a selection of delicious dishes from the Eastern Mediterranean, while wines from lesser-known terroirs (like Greece, Turkey, and Lebanon in this case), brought a few pleasant surprises. As part of this taste-immersion, passengers can even enjoy cooking lessons from expert chefs that showcase the highlights of the local cuisine. We joined a cooking class in the shiny new SALT Lab, donned our aprons and learned all about phyllo pastry, creating some delicious spanakopita and baklava. These are experiences that will definitely inspire us to bring the cuisines we experienced on the cruise back home with us.

MUCH TO SEE

In the last year, Silversea has revamped its onboard entertainment with a combination of brand-new production shows and international guest entertainers who are flown in on a regular basis. The ship's impressive two-story theater is a great place to see these shows, or to attend lectures that tend to

concentrate on the local areas and issues around them. When the ship is as good as this, sometimes you need reminding that the destinations you're visiting are pretty spectacular too!

With so many days in port (many of them staying in port quite late into the evenings), Silversea isn't particularly renowned for its vessels being late-night party ships; however, the ship's resident DJ caters for those who want to dance after dinner in the Panorama Lounge, while the weekly deck parties can get pretty lively.

Silver Ray seems to be an indication that Silversea is perhaps attempting to target a slightly younger audience, who want to indulge in luxury lifestyles and sample the latest trends in cruising. With the relaxation of its traditionally formal dress codes into "elegant casual" most nights, there is definitely a more informal atmosphere on board. On shorter cruises, you will still see a few people in tuxedos and cocktail dresses on the "formal optional" nights (which tend to be once a week), however the majority of passengers seem to be opting for a smart casual look. This is now bringing Silversea into the range of "hand-baggage-only" cruisers — again, something that might help attract a younger crowd. At the same time, the ship's eco-credentials, with its hybrid LNG propulsion system, will appeal to the environmentally conscious too.

STELLAR SERVICE

While the introduction of *Silver Ray* and *Silver Nova* represent a new direction for Silversea, some things have remained reassuringly constant. For many people, Silversea's incredibly conscientious staff have always been the line's greatest asset, and the quality of service is as impeccable as ever — waiters do their best to remember your dining preferences, bartenders serve up your favorite drinks before you even need to ask, and your dedicated butler strives hard to exceed expectations. It was difficult to resist the constant offers of in-room canapés from our butler; with thoughts of trying not to overdo it slowly weakening as the cruise progressed, he finally persuaded us to have some appetizers on our veranda. It really doesn't get more decadent than eating iced caviar on your terrace with a chilled bottle of Champagne as the sun sets over the medieval walls of Rhodes Town. From start to finish, you feel like you've entered a world of luxury.

For those who are seeking to get a glimpse into the changing world of modern cruising, the new *Silver Ray* has been a fantastic addition to the Silversea fleet. If this is the future of cruising, the future is looking bright. ●



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