

A photograph of a person's legs and feet on a boat deck. The person is wearing a dark swimsuit. The deck is made of wooden planks. In the background, there is a calm lake reflecting the sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a summer setting.

# Condé Nast Traveler

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## THE SCIENTIST'S APPRENTICES

Researchers like Allison Cusick are recruiting cruise passengers to help them carry out their life's work

There is a huge incentive nowadays for scientists to break out of the ivory tower and connect to have a broader impact," says biologist and oceanographer Allison Cusick. For four years she has been one of a growing number of scientists lending their expertise to the travel industry. In 2017 she founded FjordPhyto, a citizen-science project in which travelers aboard the expedition vessels of Chile-based cruise operator Antarctica21 help collect scientific samples for research. Sailing along the western Antarctic Peninsula from the South Shetland Islands down to the polar circle, guests do things like record the temperature and salinity of seawater to aid the vital mission of tracking the impact of melting glaciers in one of the fastest-warming spots on earth. Citizen scientists also drag nets between ice floes to collect concentrated samples of phytoplankton, which are later sent to Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. Cusick puts these findings online so that everyone who participates can stay connected to the project long after their adventure ends.

Citizen-science projects have popped up all over the globe in the past five years, from studying bandicoots in Australia to researching manta ray genetics in Peru. But Cusick believes the cruise industry offers a unique platform for the pursuit. "You have a captive audience that's immersed in the environment and can help with the science," she says, "so it's a collaborative effort."

Along the fjords of the Antarctic Peninsula, where most cruise ships sail, tourism has been booming. At any given time, there are up to 5,000 scientists on Antarctica, but in the season before the pandemic there were more than 80,000 visitors to these steely blue waters. Cusick sees citizen science as an opportunity to bridge the gap between researchers and tourists, helping the former gather more data while directly involving the latter in the Antarctic mission of "peace and science."

"Antarctica is a harsh ecosystem, and each nation's research



Biologist and oceanographer Allison Cusick on Cuverville Island in Antarctica

program might only have one ship available for all the scientists," Cusick says. "So I think that the more partnerships that can happen with tour ships supporting science—and also scientists sharing their knowledge—the better."

During the 2019–2020 season, FjordPhyto expanded to seven ships, owned by operators like Hurtigruten and Polar Latitudes. Armed with new funding from NASA, it plans to add more companies

when Antarctic cruising resumes later this year, helping the program reach more than a thousand seasonal participants.

In addition to FjordPhyto, sites like Happy Whale and PolarTag allow polar visitors to upload vacation photos for researchers to comb through to help track the migration patterns of elephant seals and whales. Cusick thinks ventures like these encourage visitors not only to revel in the frosty fjords of the seventh



A Zodiac ride from an Antarctica21 ship to Pleneau Bay

continent but also to become actively involved in their protection.

“I remember this entrepreneur who had multiple companies and was kind of looking for the last hope of inspiration,” she recalls. “After he had done the science boat, he told me that it was the first time in a long time that he’d felt that childlike spark of curiosity.”

That, to her, is what citizen science—and the future of Antarctic cruising—is all about. MARK JOHANSON

*Six-day sailings on Antarctica Express Air-Cruise Ocean Nova from \$4,795 per person; fjordphyto.ucsd.edu*

Condé Nast Traveler’s **1 in 10 Project** celebrates the more than 10 percent of people around the globe whose jobs are tied directly or indirectly to tourism. To support the industry’s recovery, we’re spotlighting these individuals and telling stories that give a glimpse into their everyday lives and the work they do in travel.

## This River Is Your River

Some of the world’s best waterways are in America’s backyard. And new cruise launches are making it easier than ever to explore them

### American Melody

As the name suggests, this 91-stateroom-and-suite boutique vessel has stopovers that include music capitals like Nashville (on its Music Cities itinerary) and Memphis (Complete Mississippi). But the August launch of this newcomer from American River Cruises will also ferry passengers through historic Vicksburg, a key battleground in the Civil War, on a loop originating in New Orleans. *Eight-day sail from \$4,920 per person; americancruiselines.com*



American Queen Steamboat Company’s American Empress on the Columbia River

### American Countess

The American Queen Steamboat Company, known for its throwback paddle wheelers, plies the Ohio River this summer with this whitewashed 123-room lady of the river. Book one of the deluxe outside staterooms with a veranda for prime viewing of Louisville’s historic harbor as you pull away on a journey through Indiana and Ohio to Pittsburgh. *Eight-day sail from \$2,399 per person; americanqueensteamboatcompany.com*

### Celebrity Millennium

Known for its upscale design and thoughtful itineraries, Celebrity Cruises returns to Alaska in July with the recently redone *Millennium*. The just-added Retreat private lounge has plump white sofas and glass walls to catch all the sights as you glide along the Dawes Glacier and the Inside Passage. Glass of Krug not optional. *Seven-day sail from \$1,639 per person; celebritycruises.com* CORINA QUINN