

Why Were Comboships Popular?

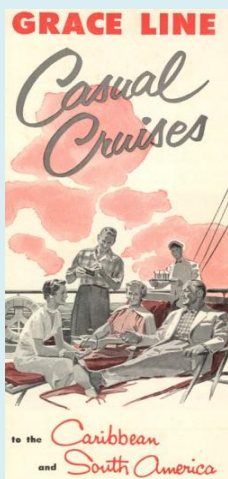
There was a time before airline travel became affordable and popular when the only way to get to a lot of places on earth was by ship. On routes with heavy passenger demand (such as the North Atlantic), ocean liners provided the services. A number of large passenger liners made regular scheduled sailings between the eastern United States and Europe and between ports of San Francisco and Los Angeles and larger ports in the orient.

However, to most ports in the world, like those in Africa and South America, the passenger demand on a regular basis did not justify the cost of operating very many passenger-only vessels. Travel to these locations was done mostly on ships that carried both passengers and cargo. Countries around the world had merchant fleets that included many comboships.



What is a Comboship?

Comboships differ from regular cargo freighters in the number of passengers carried and the amenities provided. Cargo ships carrying 12 passengers or less are considered pure freighters. The reason for the number 12 is that international law requires that vessels with over 12 passengers must have a doctor on board. Cargo ships had limited amenities and voyages were lengthy because the cargo determined schedules.



There is really no distinction separating a comboship from a passenger liner as there is with the 12 passenger freighters. Even larger liners like the *Queen Mary* and the *United States* carried cargo that was equivalent to that carried by a small freighter. The comboships carried doctors and passenger accommodations ranged from 40 passengers to sometimes as many as 200 passengers.

Comboships had spacious cabins, mostly outside, and most had large windows rather than portholes. All cabins had full bathroom facilities. Ships had fine dining and most had swimming pools and movies. Many had various forms of entertainment including live music groups. There was usually plenty of deck space and the area per passenger often exceeded that of larger passenger liners. Passengers enjoyed the lack of crowds. There was more access to the captain and officers and while at sea areas such as the bridge were open to passengers. This type of access never occurred on larger passenger ships.

A few ships remained until the mid 1980s, but the era of the comboships has long passed and remains only a memory for those of us who had the pleasure of traveling on these fine ships.

The only known remaining ship today is the [RMS St Helena](#) operating from Britain to Africa and to Islands like St. Helena where there is lack of adequate air traffic.

Note that pictures were either taken by me or come from shipping company brochures that had no copyright notice