



can handle the big seas with stabilisers allowing a smoother passage for guests prone to seasickness.

Barlow is a qualified diver and on our trip his skills were pressed into action when he plunged into the waters to free up a tangled anchor. One passenger joked that he should dive down again to pick up king scallops and he duly obliged! Rob's skipper skills got us into St Kilda for two full nights and days and also out to a flurry of tiny isles like the Monachs you just cannot normally reach in larger ships. Rob is also adept at making sure guests have as much time ashore as they need.

Argyll Cruises are a new operator this year. Their 20m long *Splendour* is another converted fishing vessel that sleeps only seven guests. Unusually she offers

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**Below:** Lagavulin is a single malt distillery on the island of Islay.

**Bottom:** The seafood on Majestic Lines is as fresh as it can get.

landing on Port Ellen on Islay to spend a morning exploring a trio of whisky distilleries, before returning to a lunch laden with local prawns and langoustines. The itineraries are flexible with guests very much having an input. There will be even more choice next year when their new purpose-built vessel, the *Glen Etive*, comes on stream to offer 10-day cruises to Islay, the Outer Hebrides and St Kilda, as well as six-day cruises to Skye.

**LAST YEAR A** new operator, Hebrides Cruises, started plying Hebridean waters. I went out on one of their first cruises to the epic archipelago of St Kilda, which was the first place in the world to be recognised twice on UNESCO's World Heritage list, both for its human and its natural heritage. St Kilda is the sort of truly unique destination that you just cannot get to spend proper time in any other way. Their sturdy rather than comfortable *Elizabeth G* is an old Norwegian rescue vessel captained by Rob Barlow that sleeps a dozen guests. She

