

Your comprehensive guide to selling cruise

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cruise

TRADE NEWS

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Season's
Greetings



FROM THE
FRED. OLSEN CRUISE LINES FAMILY



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Mediterranean
Mediterranean Fly

Example voyage:

Mediterranean Fly
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7 nights ♦ 26 September 2022
Cunard Fares from £1,099pp
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the December issue

So, we come to the end of the year. A year that started with much promise for the cruise industry, but which quickly became all about survival and fighting fires.

It would be unfair to paint 2020 as a complete and utter lost 12 months, however, despite the ample evidence for doing just that. We have all joined forces to help one another, offered advice to colleagues and competitors alike, opened up new avenues of communication via video calls, and generally become more invested in our local communities and the people we share our lives with.

Yes, none of this can gloss over the damage that Covid-19 has caused, but I do feel we have become closer as an industry in recent months and I imagine that every person working in cruise has felt that love and support from others when they have needed it.

Which brings me to this issue. You will see the front cover is different from those we usually produce – the reason being that this is of course our annual advent calendar promotion.

We have worked with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines to create a very special campaign that is all geared towards winning prizes, kindly provided by Fred Olsen. Please see The Briefing section for more information on how to play and win.

Prizes alone cannot erase the pain of what many have experienced, but this is about giving something back and showcasing our continued commitment to putting smiles on faces.

We also have a special river cruise supplement pull-out, and a section dedicated to all things expedition.

Best of luck winning those prizes. See you in 2021 – hopefully in person.

GARY PETERS
Editor, Cruise Trade News



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In BRIEF

Oceania's future plans

● Oceania Cruises' summer 2022 Europe and North America voyages are now on sale. The programme features 110 itineraries – 77 of which are new. Highlights to explore include 10 new ports such as the Danish city of Aarhus, and a 46-day voyage sailing round-trip out of New York to Iceland and Greenland and then back down through Spain and the Azores.

P&O puts 2022 on sale

● P&O Cruises has put more than 150 cruises from Southampton, plus Mediterranean fly/cruises, on sale as part of its 2022 summer programme. A number of offers are available, including a five per cent low deposit on all cruises. There is also a 10 per cent discount for past guests. All offers are available until 14 December.

Always included

● Celebrity Cruises has unveiled a new approach called Always Included. The concept means that Celebrity will include wifi, drinks and tips as standard, putting an end to "confusing promotions and limited time offers", the line said.

THE NEWS YOU NEED

Subscribe to the *Cruise Trade News* newsletter for all the latest in cruise news, features, destination guides, interviews and more.

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PRIZES

Festive cheer

This is a Christmas unlike any other. It's usually, of course, a time for work parties, industry gatherings and visiting family and friends, but we all know this year our festive joy will be rather less because of the challenges of Covid-19 and restrictions across the country.

So it's more important than ever to take pleasure in the small things and once again demonstrate that travel is one big family, standing together in solidarity.

It is with this spirit and determination that we hope to play our part in bringing smiles to the faces of our loyal and hard-working readers with our very special advent calendar campaign.

We have teamed up with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines to bring you the cruising version of a traditional advent calendar across our print and digital outlets. Instead of a small chocolate treat, though, this calendar is the biggest prize giveaway in the industry.

Up for grabs are three incredible cruises with Fred Olsen – five to seven-night sailings from the line's 2021 programme – plus shopping vouchers, cuddly toys,

eco refillable coffee cups, water bottles, Fred Olsen backpacks and holdalls.

Every "door", from 1 to 24, on the cover of this issue contains a code, which provides access to that day's competition. The code can also be sent via email.

Please use the pre-registration form – cruisetradenews.com/register-fred-olsen-advent/ – to activate this setting.

To play the game, please visit cruisetradenews.com/fred-olsen-advent/ and enter the code for that day.

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales Geoff Ridgeon said: "Sponsoring the CTN

advent calendar is a great way for us to say thank you to those who have worked so hard to support Fred Olsen Cruise Lines in

Instead of a small chocolate treat, there are cruises to win

2020, whether it be by making future bookings into 2021 and beyond, celebrating the news of our exciting new ships, or sharing the benefits of Fred Olsen's small-ship cruising with their customers.

"What better way to spread some festive cheer than by giving three lucky agents the chance to win a cruise for two with us next year. We can't wait to welcome you all back on board our new-look fleet very soon."

CTN editor Gary Peters added: "We hope that this special advent calendar, coming as it does during this difficult period, will provide some happiness to travel agents across the country.

"We are delighted to work once again with the team at Fred Olsen on this campaign and we'd like to thank them for their support. The best of luck to all who enter."

If you're lucky enough to win, please tag [@cruisetradenews](https://twitter.com/cruisetradenews) on Twitter and Facebook to show off your victory.





Ocean-going lines have halted sailings from the US

INDUSTRY

CLIA members extend suspension

CLIA's ocean-going cruise line members have extended the suspension of US voyages through to 31 December.

In a statement the association said: "As we continue to plan for a gradual and highly controlled return of cruise operations in the US, CLIA members are committed to implementing stringent measures to address Covid-19 safety, including 100 per cent testing of passengers and crew, expanded on-board medical capabilities, and trial sailings, among many others."

The news followed the announcement that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued what it is

calling a "framework for conditional sailing order", which sets out a phased return to service.

The CLIA statement continued: "We share a common goal with the CDC to protect public health, which has been affirmed and reaffirmed consistently

throughout the industry's response to the global pandemic.

"We recognise the devastating impact that the pandemic

continues to have on the 421,000 Americans whose livelihoods are connected directly to cruise operations. We will work with urgency to advance a responsible return to cruising while maintaining a focus on effective, science-based measures to protect public health."

"CLIA and the CDC have a common goal to protect public health"

TESTING

Viking creates on-board Covid test lab

Viking has installed what it claims is the world's first Covid testing lab on a cruise ship.

The full-scale PCR laboratory, on the line's 930-guest *Viking Star*, can be used to test crew and passengers with a non-invasive saliva test.

The laboratory, which will undergo a series of tests to ensure the procedures and protocols that have been designed are fully effective, has enough capacity for daily testing of every crew member and guest. Viking vice-president of maritime



operations Matt Grimes said: "We have been working on this for a number of months and [this] is important as it moves us one step closer to operating cruises again, without compromising the safety of our guests and crew."

APPOINTMENTS



Nick Stace has been named as CEO of Saga Travel. Stace, who was Saga's chief strategy officer, will oversee the company's cruise and tours businesses. Stace said that his priority "is ensuring that our travel businesses are ready to provide exceptional experiences".



Seabourn has named **Steve Smotrys** as vice-president of global sales. Smotrys will be responsible for the line's overall global sales efforts, leading the teams who support the trade in North America, Europe, the UK, Asia, and Australia.



Graeme Buck, previously head of communications at Waitrose, has joined ABTA as director of communications. ABTA chief executive Mark Tanzer said Buck's "experience... will be relevant to the challenges and opportunities facing ABTA's members".



The Briefing

EVENTS

‘Unique’ Cruise Challenge delights attendees

Cruise Trade News has received an overwhelmingly positive response to its new series of Cruise Challenge events.

As revealed in the October/November edition, CTN has created a virtual format for the Cruise Challenge, to once again bring agents and cruise lines together for a fun and educational event. All virtual events follow the format of an online quiz, hosted by CTN's quiz master, Peter Smith, with travel agents participating individually, rather than in teams.

A number of special rounds have also been introduced to ensure that attendees can interact during the quiz, while the new Q&A session with cruise line representatives proved particularly popular.

Travel Counsellor Muriel Morgan said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the quiz and was delighted to have come in second place. The music choice between rounds was also very good and the Q&A at the end is very useful. I'm looking forward to the next one and hope I can put my knowledge to some good use with a few new bookings."

Aurora Expeditions BDM James Turner added: "There certainly isn't anything else quite like it. Agents really get to interact with the operators in a

“Agents get to interact with operators in a very relaxed way – learning is made entertaining”

very relaxed way. Learning has never been quite so entertaining.

"The style [of the event] is very unique and far more engaging – the game-show set-up really encourages agents to actively listen to presentations, with plenty of rewards for doing so. [The Q&A] is definitely useful for agents and there was a good mix of questions."

Meanwhile, Riviera Travel sales development manager, Midlands, Georgina Dawson said the variation of rounds in the quiz was a big plus, "rather than just having a simple question and answer [quiz]".

"What makes it unique is the quiz master, Peter – he's definitely a crowd pleaser. He gets everyone smiling and laughing, which is more challenging than ever at the moment, doing these things virtually, but he still managed to deliver.

"A Q&A is always useful. It's great that the agents get the chance to ask us about the product. Now more than ever the Q&A is important, as I think there are more questions to be asked about Covid-19 – it's important that the agents have that opportunity. It's great exposure and definitely a memorable evening."

Royal Caribbean head of field sales Karen Tucker said: "The Cruise Challenge is a unique event. It's a great opportunity to hear what's on people's minds and to get in front of some agents when we are not able to get out and about on the road."



For more information please email
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A HAL trip to Alaska could boost commission

SUPPORT HAL offering bonus commission

Holland America Line is giving agents the chance to earn two per cent bonus commission on Alaska itineraries booked by the end of the year.

The promotion, which applies to 2021 sailings booked by 31 December 2020, is part of a new 'We Are Alaska' month-long campaign that will feature destination webinars and videos.

Holland America Line director of sales UK & Ireland Wendy Lahmich said: "We want to give our travel partners more confidence to sell Alaska as a destination. Therefore, to help them on their journey we are offering an extra two per cent bonus commission on any HAL 2021 Alaska cruise or Land & Sea Journey booked until 31 December 2020.

"For instance, on an 18-night holiday for two that includes a seven-night Alaska cruise, three nights in a Wilderness Lodge at Denali National Park and a tour of the stunning Yukon territory, that could mean an extra bonus of more than £200."

OCEAN MSC ups safety measures

MSC Cruises has announced new health and safety protocols as part of *MSC Grandiosa's* operations, while also confirming the suspension of *MSC Magnifica* sailings.

MSC Grandiosa resumed service in August and will continue its current seven-night western Mediterranean sailings from Italy until 27 March 2021.

The line, which already has a comprehensive set of measures in place, took the additional action in light of lockdown announcements across Europe.

There is now additional on-board testing for all guests mid-way through their cruise, alongside existing pre-boarding universal testing for all.

The testing of all crew during their time on board has increased from twice-a-month to weekly, and there is increased frequency of on-board cleaning, in particular of public areas



MSC Grandiosa is continuing its Mediterranean schedule

and high touch-points. The definition of close contact for tracing purposes has been tightened, reducing the time that individuals are in contact from 15 minutes to 10 minutes.

MSC Cruises has suspended *MSC Magnifica* sailings in the Mediterranean following travel restrictions in the source markets of France and Germany. At the time of writing the line said the temporary suspension would last until 18 December.



MARKETING GURU

Mark Lewsey, of Accord Marketing, outlines how to communicate effectively in today's world

The past few months have been tumultuous, but despite all that has happened in recent months there is pent-up demand for travel, and cruising in particular. While restrictions are in place, the challenge lies in communicating effectively and authentically with existing and new customers.

It is wise, therefore, to review your content, messaging and creative, in terms of what you do, what you say and what the motivation is.

Our top tips:

Be consistent – a uniform tone of voice that reflects your brand's values and purpose is essential, now more than ever

Be authentic – according to recent research by SEMrush, 65 per cent of customers connect emotionally with brands that make them feel appreciated, while 64 per cent trust a company because of shared values

Be personal – your aim is to connect and create a two-way dialogue, so help people by turning your brand into a platform for doing things, sharing experiences or collective dreaming

Be responsive – listen to the current mood and create moments of calm, joy and hope

Listen – get the cue for your tone of voice while dealing with clients by monitoring customer sentiment

Look forward – remind customers that there will be a future and that you're there to help them plan for it

● Go to accordmarketing.com for more information and tips.

HAL's six for Alaska

Holland America Line will operate six ships in Alaska from April to September in 2021.

Ships that will be stationed in Alaska include *Eurodam*, *Koningsdam*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, *Noordam*, *Oosterdam* and *Volendam*. Itineraries will sail round-trip from Seattle, Washington State, and Vancouver.

Holland America Line president Gus Antorcha said: "We're seeing strong interest for next summer's Alaska season as people anticipate being able to get out again, travelling and being able to spend time with family and friends."

New cruises for 2021 include Pinnacle-class *Koningsdam* returning to Alaska with a seven-day itinerary that will include the spectacular Inside Passage.

There's strong interest in
Alaska sailings, reports HAL

VISIT
cruisetradenews.com
for more on cruise line
restart plans, agent
training, itineraries
and incentives



Regent Seven Seas Cruises
is looking well ahead

Regent unveils 2022-23 itineraries

Regent Seven Seas Cruises' 2022-2023 Voyage Collection features 48 sailings, 17 maiden ports of call and 105 overnight visits.

The line will visit Africa, Alaska, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Canada and New England and the Mediterranean, among other destinations.

In addition, guests can book transoceanic crossings and five Grand Voyages. Sailings range from seven nights up to the 143-night world cruise, departing in 2023.

Highlights include *Seven Seas Splendor's* summer season in Scandinavia and the Baltics and *Seven Seas Voyager's* tour of Africa. A total of 36 sailings in Africa, Arabia, Australia, Asia and South America will also include free pre or post-land tour programmes.

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines

PLAIN SAILING GUARANTEE

A simple deposit scheme is sure to make Fred Olsen a big draw

Plain sailing with Fred Olsen

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has updated its Plain Sailing Guarantee concept to give guests more flexibility. It allows guests making a new booking for 2021 to move their deposit to any other cruise already on sale without any additional fees before they pay their final balance. Guests can also have their deposit refunded.

Those unable to travel due to a positive Covid-19 test can move to any cruise without administration fees or penalties, up to the day of departure, with up to 12 months to choose their new cruise. Fred Olsen is currently planning to return to service from February 2021 onwards.

Riviera releases 2022 options

Riviera Travel has launched a selection of 2022 river cruises, in its earliest ever release.

A number of dates across 11 itineraries are now on sale. The move follows feedback from agents and guests.

Channel director Stuart Milan said: "It's great that we have our award-winning river cruise product now on sale for 2022. We've launched it early in response to demand from guests and our trade partners.

"All of our top-selling itineraries are now on sale for customers to book. The trade has been very supportive over the past few months, and we look forward to their continued support for 2022 departures."



For Riviera Travel customers, the future has come early

APT

APT sticks to 2021 prices

APT has released its 2022 river cruise programme, which features prices held at 2021 rates.

The operator is including Covid Flexible Booking Cover in the new sailings, with a 20 per cent discount on travel insurance.

The cover means travellers can change their date up to 100 days prior to departure and are able to rebook a new date with no change fee. It also includes a reduced deposit of £250pp.

Showcasing Europe's most famous waterways, 2022 sailings include APT's most popular itinerary, the 14-day Magnificent Europe cruise, which sails along the Danube from Amsterdam to Budapest. Prices start from £2,995pp. *More information can be found at aptouring.co.uk.*



The latest promotion gives agents a chance to win a cruise on Windstar

Windstar extends agent incentive

Windstar Cruises has extended its Sell Three, Sail Free travel agent promotion to bookings made through to 31 December 2020.

As part of the promotion, travel agents who sell three qualifying 2021 voyages could win a free cruise for themselves and a guest.

The agent cruise, which will be any eight-day or shorter Windstar itinerary, must be taken by 31 December 2021. Booked guests must have paid in full 89 days prior to departure before the booking counts towards a qualifying voyage.

Those wishing to enter should email UK & Ireland business development manager Anna Perrott on anna.perrott@windstarcruises.com.



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available to research customers are sure to
find the right one for them



CTN investigates



Future VISION

Pent-up demand, clients desperate to sail on their favourite ships to glamorous destinations – cruise can come back with a bang next year. **Gary Peters** reports

Negativity is a dangerous thing. It can spread like wildfire if left unchecked. All optimism can evaporate in an instant and all difficulties appear insurmountable.

The cruise industry has had a curious relationship with these sentiments in recent times. Such was the progress over recent years, and such were the increasing passenger numbers across all sectors, that it had been a long while since the industry had had to entertain anything other than a general feeling of positivity.

And then along came this virus. Boom. Just like that, distressing headline after distressing headline, proclaiming ships to be dangerous hotbeds of disease, unsafe places that

should be avoided. Social media posts appeared – usually accompanied by countless exclamation marks – stating that those who dared to dream of a return to the seas were somehow living in a different reality with no concept of the current worldwide pandemic.

There is, no doubt, a fine line to tread. Industry heads accept there is a need to be mindful of the public perception when encouraging people to buy cruise holidays while, at the time of writing, positive cases of Covid-19 are on the rise.

Nevertheless, the argument goes, what other sector has produced such a comprehensive set of health and safety protocols? What other sector has demonstrated such level of collaboration? What other sector has worked with such an extensive range of

medical experts from around the globe? In short, it is light years ahead of many other sectors.

Building knowledge

It is for these reasons, cruise experts say, that 2021 can be a year to get back on track and back to doing what cruise does best – providing unique holiday experiences, enjoyed by people of all ages. The news that a vaccine – said to have a 90 per cent success rate – could be available in early 2021 has also boosted optimism. As John Ferguson, senior cruise consultant at Thorne Travel, explains, the reality is stark: “2020 was supposed to be bigger and better than any previous year [for cruising],” he tells *CTN*.

Next year, however, can make up for a lost nine months, he believes, adding

MSC Cruises has operated with new measures on board



that clients are very keen on no-fly options. “We have seen a huge increase in [demand for] sailings with smaller ships and those that are departing from the UK. Customers find it easier, as they don’t need to fly and can drive to the port at their own leisure.

“Going forward, we need to keep being passionate and enthusiastic about cruise. In the past few years the industry had its highest sales and number of people at sea – it was booming,” he continues.

“It is our jobs as agents to make sure that we help shake off the bad reputation and pick the right ship for our customers, explaining the new safety measures and, more importantly, the fantastic benefits they can get on board.”

Ferguson has even booked himself on a cruise next year with a group of clients, “so that they have me on board as a point of contact”. He adds: “As soon as I booked and started telling my customers, they all followed and that was so nice – they still have faith in cruising.”

Building on the point of what agents can do to support clients, A-Rosa UK & Ireland MD Lucia Rowe says that the lockdown period has in fact allowed many to complete training courses and agents are “arguably more knowledgeable than ever and ready to get selling 2021 and beyond”. There is also a new opportunity for many to sell more river cruises.

“We have seen a significant increase in the number of ocean-going customers who are now trying river,” she says.

“Traditionally there was not much crossover, as it was felt that the offering was very different. However, while we are wholeheartedly hoping that ocean

“As soon as I booked my own cruise and told my customers, they all followed”

cruising is able to make a full return soon, it is encouraging to see that those who want to get back sailing right now are giving river a try, and this could provide new opportunities for agents in 2021.”

Agents should be quick, however. Rowe adds that the “second half of 2021 is experiencing the biggest demand right now and some of our most popular summer itineraries in the key months are already full”. She continues: “I would encourage all agents to make sure they are encouraging early bookings to avoid disappointing customers if they have a set route in mind.”

The same can be said for MSC Cruises, as the line’s UK & Ireland director of sales, Steve Williams, explains: “In summer 2021 *MSC Magnifica* will return to the UK for another full ex-UK season sailing from Southampton. So far demand for these sailings has been really good, with a particular focus on mini cruises as well as the 14-night Mediterranean cruise that sets sail on 7 August 2021.”

Positive feedback

That clients are booking for next year and beyond comes as little surprise to Craig Upshall, UK & Europe sales director at Aurora Expeditions, who echoes Ferguson’s sentiments and says that that next year is a “bounce-back opportunity”.

The expedition line is looking forward to a summer season in the Arctic and from October 2021 the Antarctic region. It has also announced plans to visit Alaska and Haida Gwaii, the North West Passage and the Russian Far East



Agents should encourage clients to book early, says A-Rosa’s Lucia Rowe



The CLIA pledge is a sign of collaboration across the industry, says Craig Upshall

in 2022 – itineraries that the line says are selling exceptionally well – and is preparing to welcome new ship *Sylvia Earle* next autumn. Aurora is also keen to host up to 50 agents on *Greg Mortimer* when it visits Europe next year.

“With or without a vaccine, the world will need to learn to live with the virus, as we have with past pandemics and other challenges in the world,” says Upshall. “The world will begin to open up and we’ve already seen lines operate in a Covid-free environment, on rivers, oceans and niche destination cruising.

“There’s a huge amount of support for the cruise industry, from both seasoned cruisers and new to cruise, especially in the expedition small-ship sector, and mass-market cruising is making huge strides in terms of dealing with the negativity and in coming together, as we’ve seen with the pledge by CLIA cruise lines for increased testing.”

This pledge by CLIA lines is just one example of the collaboration seen across the industry, and also projects that have involved external bodies, as seen in the work to produce the Covid-19 framework, released at the start of October.

Rowe says that A-Rosa has proved “to our customers and agents alike that taking a river cruise in these new times can be just as enjoyable as it was”, while Upshall believes “there’s no reason

“There’s a huge amount of support out there for the cruise industry”

why customers would not want to travel on a vessel” with new measures in place.

Of the big ocean lines, MSC Cruises’ ship *MSC Grandiosa* returned to sailing in August on Western Mediterranean itineraries. At the time of writing and in the light of further lockdowns across Europe, the line has introduced another layer of safety measures, including additional on-board testing for guests midway through the voyage and more testing of the crew on board.

“The feedback so far from the more than 20,000 guests that have sailed with us since August has been very positive,” says Williams, speaking before the latest lockdown announcement. “Guests have enjoyed the security provided by our protected ‘bubble’ shore

excursions, with many stating that they feel safer on board than they do ashore.”

Looking forward

Progress such as this provides hope and enables the industry to focus on what is to come, which is music to Clare Dudley’s ears. The managing director at Ponders Travel – who has spoken passionately about her own struggles through the pandemic in mainstream media outlets – tells CTN that now is the time to start thinking about tomorrow, not about yesterday.

“I think that there needs to be more talk of the future and less of the past,” she says. “Everyone, more than ever, will want a holiday once this is over.”

Dudley’s call to action is to continually feed clients “holiday inspiration and destinations – but always trying to sell, too”.

She says: “I think more operators need to come out a lot earlier with 2022 and 2023, as people are wanting to book further ahead. Demand will be high. [We] have found that new bookings are mainly for June onwards.”

Williams adds: “With the industry set to welcome new vessels in 2021 including, for MSC Cruises, *MSC Virtuosa* in April 2021 and *MSC Seashore* in August 2021, there are positives to take for the future.”

The industry still believes, that much is certain. As Ferguson says: “I will always go out screaming about cruise as it really is the most amazing experience.”

Times are very tough and often it seems as if there is very little to get excited about. Yes, words can only go so far, but positivity has to be at the forefront of all that the industry says and does over the coming weeks and months. ❶

“Feedback from guests who have sailed with us has been positive”



Steve Williams believes guests have enjoyed protected “bubble” excursions on MSC ships

WORLD-WIDE RIVER CRUISES

CANALS • RIVERS • SEAS



HIGHLIGHTS

- Europe's Largest River Cruise Line
- 43 years' experience and 56 ships
- River facing cabins with panoramic windows and French balconies
- Best All Inclusive Value
- Unlimited Beverages
- Superb French Cuisine
- Free Wi-Fi

”

In conversation with...

CLIA

Gary Peters sits down with **Andy Harmer** to discuss what support CLIA is providing for its travel agent members and the importance of mental health

Who else longs for the day when meetings can be conducted over a cup of tea in a café or something suitably stronger if it happens to be after 5pm? A big fat yes from me.

I thought I had cracked the whole video interview process. Got the intro script down, a somewhat professional background (either bedroom wall or cluttered bookcase), perfected my tone and remembered to watch the language.

I'm also experienced when it comes to remembering to record my interviews. Or so I thought. My initial pleasure at one, finishing a successful interview and two, realising it was fast approaching clocking off time on a Friday afternoon was quickly wiped away. Yes, the video had recorded, but the audio had not. Just a video of nodding heads and smiles. It was most certainly a failure of technology – nothing to do with the operator.



Remote working has become the norm

Thankfully, the man at the other end of the interview, CLIA UK & Ireland director Andy Harmer, is a good sport and soon we are back on track.

An eventful time

“It’s been an eventful few months for CLIA and the wider UK cruise community,” says Harmer, who throughout the whole pandemic has, alongside his colleagues at CLIA, fought a sustained battle to push a positive message and worked extensively behind the scenes with other associations in discussion with the government about a pathway to resuming operations.

“We’ve been working hard to advocate for the safe and gradual resumption of operations when the time is right and continued to create engaging resources for travel agent members,” he explains. “There has been a lot of work going on in

the background, with extensive collaboration between the cruise industry, health experts and government to develop further health protections to be implemented when sailings resume.”

All of this work has of course taken place via virtual formats. For an association that holds all manner of in-person events, including its annual bash – the CLIA winter ball – this change has been a quick transition to a new way of working.

“It has been great to see the dedication and commitment from our CLIA travel agent members who have joined us for all the virtual events spanning across 2020. Our agents have been able to hear from industry experts via our podcasts and webcasts and keep up to date with sector changes through live webinars, where they also have the opportunity to put their questions forward to be answered live,” Harmer continues.





CLIA's events have been conducted virtually



“The reaction has been positive, showing that the industry is working together”

ANDY HARMER

“In the absence of the CLIA cruise conference, which we were sadly unable to hold this year, in December we will be hosting a virtual cruise showcase, where experts will share industry updates alongside the chance for virtual networking. And as always, CLIA continues to provide a host of exclusive online resources, providing agents with current industry insight, trends and statistics,” he adds.

Fear not, however, all those who are desperate to meet face-to-face, as Harmer confirms that next year – if conditions allow – “we plan to host a number of in-person events while continuing to offer a variety of virtual events throughout the year”. Best of both worlds, there.

Framing the framework

Back in October, CLIA worked with the UK Chamber of Shipping and numerous others to create the Covid-19 framework document (see *CTN* October/November and the *CTN* website for the key highlights). This is a hugely detailed piece of work that lays out the foundations on which cruise lines can build to sail again.

The project includes sections dedicated to operators, passengers, and seafarers, each containing specific advice and recommendations.

“The reaction has been positive, as the documents show that the industry is working together,” Harmer explains. “The documents also help to instil confidence in agents to confidently sell cruise and echoes what we have always

said as an industry, that the health and wellbeing of passengers and crew is absolutely paramount.”

The other paramount need is to ensure that agents can understand and explain the messaging in the document. On this point, Harmer highlights an agent toolkit that “breaks down the key information into a digestible format alongside FAQs”.

He adds: “We have also hosted live webinars with cruise industry experts looking at the next steps for the UK industry following the launch of the framework. The toolkit and webinars are available on our website – cruising.org.”

Mental health

Perhaps the key consideration, however, is about mental health and how agents and all in the industry can remain in a positive mindset.

For Harmer, his time away from the hustle and bustle comes in the form a therapeutic dose of fresh air in the countryside close to his home. “I make sure I go out for a walk every day to unwind,” he says.

“My advice to agents would be to make sure they are taking time out at least once a day when they can just focus on the present. Whether it is going out for a walk, or even just reading a book, taking the time to look after our mental health is essential.

“Try to remember that the time will come again when we can sail the seas. The desire to travel and explore the world will never diminish.”

That is most certainly another day to long for. 🕒

Win at selling

River cruising

Stuart Perl & Philip Ordever, co-founders of The Cruise Strategy Company, explain why now is the right time to focus on river cruise sales

We are cheered by good news from *Silver Travel Advisor's* survey of 850 travellers aged 50-70, which found that 67 per cent of respondents might try river cruising once they have proof that lines can operate successfully under the new protocols for more than three months.

A handful of river cruise lines, such as A-Rosa, CroisiEurope, Nicko and VIVA, have proved this can happen, as reduced fleets resumed some itineraries on the Rhine, Danube, Dutch & Belgian Waterways, the Douro and the French rivers. But due to the less restrictive rules concerning movement of nationals within Europe, passengers have in the main originated from those domestic markets.

We have seen and heard from both operators and consumers that with the reduced number of passengers on board and the strict management of the new health and safety protocols, the resumption of some operations was a welcome and successful first step in the right direction for the river cruise sector. This stands us in good stead for the start of the 2021 river cruise season in March.

With the majority of cancelled 2020 river cruise bookings transferring to 2021, plus the reduction in ship capacity, it may look as though there is limited opportunity



Philip Ordever

“We expect more ocean cruisers to become first-time river cruisers”



Stuart Perl

to book for next year. However, in our view, this may not be the case. Historically, more than 80 per cent of river cruise passengers have been sourced from the US and, come the start of next season, who knows what American travel restrictions and consumer confidence to long-haul travel will be? Availability will most likely increase.

Opportunity knocks

Given that river cruising made a quicker return to operations than ocean, and with evidence that passengers will look towards booking on smaller ships, we expect to see more ocean cruisers becoming first-time river cruisers.

A river voyage in Europe is easily accessible on a short flight or even by car and train. And with protocols already successfully tried and tested, it's time to start encouraging clients to book for next season or beyond.

Understand the river lines – the experience they deliver, their value proposition, the varied itineraries and durations, and their book-with-confidence terms and conditions. For those yet to personally experience or sell a river cruise, this may all sound a little daunting. But with dedicated training, a good understanding of the database and some smart marketing, it's much easier than many think.

Knowledge is always king – it breeds confidence, increases sales and improves profit. 📌

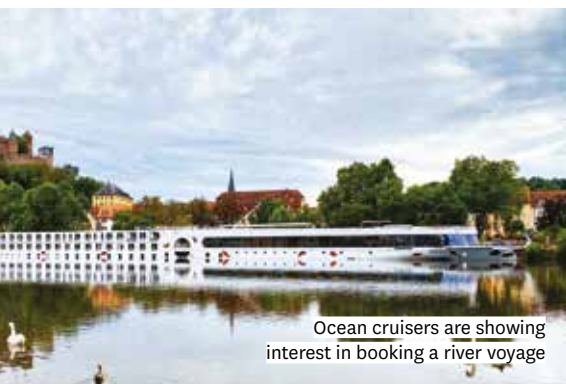
Selling TIPS

Keep communicating regularly with clients. Advice, knowledge and reassurance are now more valuable to them than ever before.

Consumers indicate they will feel more confident sailing on smaller ships and a river cruise presents a perfect option

Agents know the ocean cruise lines clients love, so they should specialise in and focus on the river cruise brand equivalents

Knowledge is the most powerful selling tool. Understand the river lines, their differences, learn the rivers they sail on and highlight the great value of a river cruise



Ocean cruisers are showing interest in booking a river voyage

Spotlight *on...*

Havila Voyages

Matthew Valentine, UK country manager, explains the line's plan to build trade relationships and sell the Havila Voyages experience

When Havila Voyages was set up in 2017, no one could have predicted quite how different life would be now. So it is heartwarming to find that, despite the challenging environment in which we're operating, the launch of our new line has been very warmly received.

While many UK agents and operators will be aware of the Norwegian coastal route, Havila will probably be a brand that is unfamiliar to them.

The company was the dream of Norwegian Per Saevik, who grew up on the west coast of Norway. His father was a fisherman and Per joined the industry at the tender age of 12. A few years later, when he bought his first boat, the Havila Group was born. It now employs several thousand people in a range of businesses, including shipping.

For years Per saw the coastal ships pass his office window and dreamed of being part of the operation he had grown up watching from afar. In 2021, his dream will become a reality and he will be able to watch his own ships sailing by on their regular trips from Bergen to Kirkenes.



“Building good relationships with the travel trade is vital to our success”

Preserve and protect

Our first two ships are under construction and will start operating in 2021, with a further two ships joining the fleet in the following year. One of the outstanding features of these vessels will be their environmental credentials.

Our ships will sail through four UNESCO World Heritage sites and many areas of outstanding natural beauty. We are passionate about doing everything we can to protect the coastline for generations to come. With that in mind, each ship will be fitted with one the world's largest battery packs.

These will allow our vessels to sail through fjords and other vulnerable areas for up to four hours – quietly and emission free. The batteries will then be charged using clean hydropower. They will be the most environmentally friendly ships operating along the Norwegian coast.

Guests will enjoy a range of unique and authentic Norwegian cultural experiences, whether that be through local music or experiences such as husky

sledding, snowmobiling, and sampling the local cuisine.

Dining is also an important part of the experience and I expect it to be a highlight of the voyage for many. It is seated dining, so there are no buffets, and guests will be able to choose from a range of traditional and modern Norwegian dishes – all locally sourced.

I'm very proud of the on-board experience we will be delivering, but of course the highlight for many of our UK passengers will be seeing the Midnight Sun or magical Northern Lights. Whatever reason our guests have for exploring the picturesque Norwegian coast, there will be plenty to keep them occupied.

It is a busy and exciting time for the company as we prepare to launch. I believe that the quality of our ships, on-board experience and cuisine will set us apart from the competition, but we also know that building good relationships with the UK travel trade is vital to our success. 📍



The line's ships will operate along the Norwegian coast



Havila has a green agenda for all its sailings

Fast Facts

VIVA TIARA is the very first ship owned by young European river specialist VIVA Cruises. Thoroughly refurbished, the vessel features 76 elegant outside cabins – most of them with French balconies, offering a relaxed atmosphere and outstanding services and amenities. With the capacity for 153 passengers, VIVA TIARA offers an intimate cruising experience, sailing along the Rhine and Danube rivers.

.....

3

DECKS

76

CABINS

1

SPA

3

RESTAURANTS & BARS

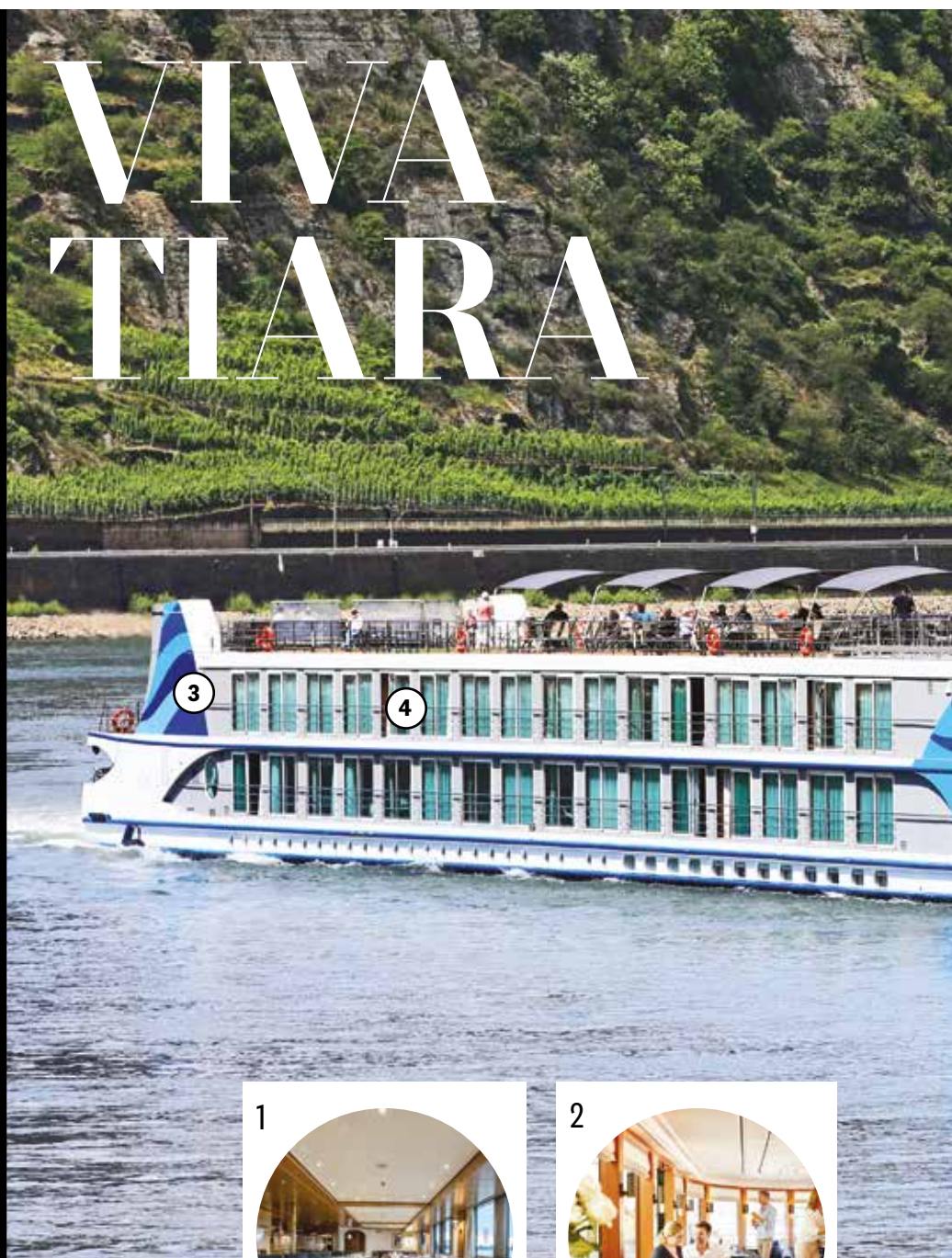
153

PASSENGERS

34

CREW

VIVA TIARA



1



Dining

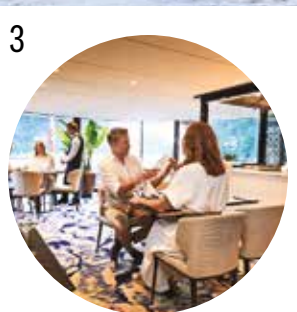
Fine dining is the vibe in VIVA TIARA's main restaurant, which offers à la carte breakfast, lunch and dinner with flexible opening hours. Guests can expect tasty multi-course menus with local products and matching wines. What's more, food and drink are included as part of VIVA's all-inclusive product.

2



Lounge

The spacious lounge is the best spot for guests to watch the scenery and take in the views as the vessel sails along. The lounge offers high-quality alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, snacks and daily afternoon tea with cakes – a gesture that British passengers greatly appreciate.



Bistro

This alternative dining area offers a casual atmosphere, live cooking and a wide selection of snacks and smaller dishes, which are perfect for guests to take the edge off hunger between shore excursions. Options include fresh salads, sandwiches, burgers, and much more.



Accommodation

The ship's 76 cabins were redesigned with a fresh look earlier this year. Cabins are located across three main decks – two of them with French balconies. All are equipped with flat-screen TV, minibar, telephone, and beauty products from luxury cosmetic brand Rituals.

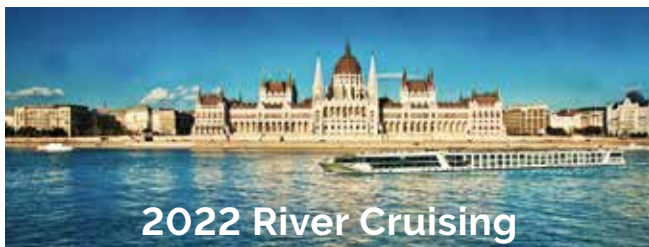


Spa

This area, located on the lower Emerald deck of the ship, features a gym, sauna and a treatment cabin. To comply with the new health and safety measures implemented on board, guests have to book the spa and wellness area exclusively, although this is free of charge.

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EXPEDITION SPECIAL



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A comprehensive overview of expedition news and trends

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Top tips for agents, and how industry leaders see the future

30 Opinion

Monique Ponfoort on life as Aurora Expeditions' new CEO



Expedition round-up



Hurtigruten is changing its structure

HURTIGRUTEN SPLITS OPERATIONS

Hurtigruten has announced it is creating a separate expedition cruise entity to prepare for post-Covid-19 expansion.

The move will see operations split into two – Hurtigruten Expeditions and Hurtigruten Norway.

Expedition cruises include more than 250 destinations from pole to pole, ranging from the Northwest Passage, Greenland,

Norway, Svalbard and the British Isles to the Caribbean, South America and Antarctica, the line said in a statement.

The expedition arm, to be led by Asta Lassesen, will operate a fleet of eight ships, while Hurtigruten Norway will consist of seven ships operating on the Norwegian coast.

Hurtigruten Group CEO Daniel Skjeldam said: “2020 is a tough year for

everyone in the travel industry, but the setback is only temporary. For the second half of 2021 and beyond, we are seeing a strong demand across all markets and all destinations, including the Norwegian coast, the Arctic and Antarctica.”

Hurtigruten recently unveiled a new brochure detailing its 2021/2022 no-fly expedition voyages from Dover. The cruises will take place on *MS Maud*.

Coral restarts Great Barrier Reef cruises

Australian small-ship expedition line Coral Expeditions resumed operations in October with a new series of seven-night voyages.

A total of 46 passengers – a majority of whom were Queensland residents – boarded *Coral Discoverer* to explore the outer reefs and lesser-known islands of the Great Barrier Reef.

All crew and guests followed a comprehensive programme of health and

safety protocols as part of the line’s SailSAFE Plan, which has been developed in conjunction with medical experts and government authorities.

Coral Expeditions group general manager Mark Fifield said: “This is a major milestone in our company history and a significant step forward for our guests and crew. We will be forever grateful for their support over the past six months.”



Lesser-known areas of the Great Barrier Reef are on the Coral agenda

Norway's North Cape is a stop on
Seabourn Venture sailings



Seabourn Venture to debut in Norway

S seabourn's upcoming purpose-built expedition ship will sail a series of 10 to 14-day Norwegian winter voyages when it launches in December 2021.

The luxury line's *Seabourn Venture* will depart from Greenwich on its inaugural voyage on 11 December 2021 for a 12-day exploration of the Northern Lights and North Cape.

The winter voyages, which will run until April 2022, will offer a selection of inclusive and optional outdoor expedition activities, such as skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing, dog and reindeer sledding, among others.

Seabourn president Josh Leibowitz said: "Our Norwegian winter itineraries were carefully designed to offer guests the potential to view the Northern Lights. There will be no better way to explore Norway's winter beauty than on our new ultra-luxury expedition ship with all the activities it offers."



A third Vega-class ship is on the horizon for the revived brand

Swan Hellenic orders third ship

S wan Hellenic has signed an agreement with the Helsinki Shipyard for a third Vega-class ship.

The ship will carry 192 guests and feature an ice-strengthened hull and battery technology to operate in almost total silence and reduce damage to the environment, according to a statement.

The line added that the procurement of the main equipment is under way, and construction will follow a "fast-track schedule".

Earlier this year Swan Hellenic held the keel-laying ceremony for the first ship in the fleet, *SH Minerva*. The vessel is expected to be delivered in November 2021. It will be followed by the second in April 2022 and the third at the end of 2022.

Swan Hellenic CEO Andrea Zito said: "We see the increase in demand for experiences that are truly out of the ordinary and we are confident in the bounce-back of our industry."

Helsinki Shipyard CEO Carl-Gustaf Rotkirch added: "The new order is significant for Helsinki Shipyard. It shows our customers' confidence in our operations and it's a strong signal of the long-term nature of our operations."



Viking's expedition ships will be heading to the Arctic

Viking expands voyage programme

Viking has announced new expedition voyages to the Arctic, Antarctica and the Great Lakes, as it ramps up plans for its entry into the expedition market.

The line will launch in 2022 with two ships – *Viking Octantis* and *Viking Polaris* – which will each accommodate 378 guests. Itineraries include a 13-day Arctic

Adventure sailing, which will take guests to Norway's Svalbard archipelago, including Bjørnøya, known as Bear Island, which is Svalbard's most remote and southerly island. Prices start from £10,795pp.

There is also a 44-day Arctic to Antarctica cruise, with prices from £27,995pp. This itinerary will start in Tromsø before sailing to Scotland's Shetland Islands and Ireland's shores. It will then cross the equator and travel to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, before arriving in Antarctica.

Selling adventure

Gary Peters speaks to a selection of experts to discuss the future of expedition cruising and how agents should market itineraries to clients



SILVERSEA

Rachel Woodward

SENIOR DIRECTOR,
EXPEDITION SALES

What exciting updates can you share with agents?

Our new ship, *Silver Origin*, was purpose-built for the Galápagos Islands, carrying only 100 passengers and 86 crew. What's more, there is also the 2022 expedition world cruise – Silversea is the first to ever offer such a voyage. Leaving on 25 January 2022, this 167-day cruise, on *Silver Cloud*, will start in Ushuaia and end in Tromsø. Other exciting itineraries include the Antarctica Deep South 2022 voyage, from 27 January 2022,

which will journey to the 66th parallel south, crossing into the Antarctic Circle. Our deep Antarctic voyages take clients below the latitude of 66.33 degrees so they can stake their claims as the most adventurous of all.

What's the future for expedition cruising?

I believe expedition cruising is opening up the opportunity to take the average cruiser to

some of the world's least explored and most remote destinations. It's not about the age of the passenger; it's about a passion to see the world.

What are your top tips for agents?

There are a lot of new cruise lines joining the expedition market, which is great as there is so much interest in adventure travel, [but] experience is important when visiting these remote destinations. Silversea started in 2008 and therefore has a lot of experience visiting the polar regions and the Galápagos Islands. We always scout a destination prior to visiting it.

It is also important for agents to let customers know how many expedition guides are on a vessel. Silversea has up to 28 guides for 240 passengers on *Silver Cloud*, for example, so the group sizes are no more than 10-12 passengers. It is always good to do a comparison for clients between cruise lines about what is included.

“Our deep Antarctic voyages take clients below 66.33 latitude, so they can claim to be the most adventurous”

Rachel Woodward



SCENIC

Joseph Grimley

DIRECTOR OF TRADE SALES

What exciting updates can you share with agents?

In May construction started on our second discovery yacht, *Scenic Eclipse II*. The steel cutting of our newest build marked the first stage of five new custom-built vessels planned for the next six years across the Scenic Group portfolio. We can hardly wait for this, our second luxury expedition yacht, to set sail, offering agents even more opportunity to sell expedition cruises.

What's the future for expedition cruising?

I actually believe we've brought the future of expedition cruising forward. Our maiden season in Antarctica truly set the trend in terms of what we were able to do and all the activities we were able to offer our guests

– such as the helicopter and submarine excursions, kayaking trips – all at once.

In addition, Scenic was the first to operate a commercial submarine dive in the Antarctic Circle – an incredible achievement and a genuine first in expedition cruising – something other ships have not done or cannot do. We've set the benchmark for the future of expedition cruising.

What are your top tips for agents?

Size makes such a difference to what a ship can do on an expedition and to the overall guest experience. In places like Antarctica there's a limit to how many people are allowed on shore at any one time – so any more than 200 passengers and it limits the opportunities for guests to be able to do shore landings and how long they might get to spend out enjoying the incredible landscape.

It is also important for agents to check whether zodiac and kayak activities and excursions are included. In the Arctic and Antarctic, this is the best way to really explore the region and many expedition cruise lines will charge extra for these must-do experiences. With *Scenic Eclipse* they are always included.

“Any more than 200 passengers and it limits the opportunities for guests to do shore landings”

Joseph Grimley



POSEIDON EXPEDITIONS

Steve Wellmeier

MANAGING DIRECTOR

What exciting updates can you share with agents?

We all recognise the uncertainties that Covid-19 has brought to international travel, but it hasn't kept people from dreaming about and planning their future holidays. Travel agents can remind their clients of this and that planning a year ahead – even two years ahead – helps to ensure that their clients can confidently reserve space aboard the expedition ship with the departure date and the cabin category that they most want. We're happy to announce that we've just come out with our departure dates and rates for Arctic 2022 and Antarctica 2022-23 programmes, all with early booking discounts of 10-15 per cent.

What's the future for expedition cruising?

This is an exciting time for travellers who want to board a polar expedition ship. There are new itineraries, new ships and competitive pricing. Ships are safer than ever, and they're operated in even more environmentally friendly ways. In addition, guides and



UNCruise ADVENTURES

Dan Blanchard

CEO

What exciting updates can you share with agents?

We have continued to provide consistent outreach to our partners through newsletters and webinars, and we're providing tools and support for them to keep their clients engaged. We know we are all in this together and we're working to protect their bookings and commissions, along with providing the best options for their clients. Most people have chosen to use their future cruise credit and rebook for future sailings, so we are looking towards a bright future as travel begins to return.

What's the future for expedition cruising?

Our research suggests that small boat searches are up. In addition, the desire for outdoor,

small group travel is growing. That has been our speciality since 1996, so we are poised to capture some of the pent-up demand in travel going into 2021. We are sticking to our core values of small ship, small group, small footprint travel, and believe that helping educate our guests on UnTourism – a way of maintaining travel without harming natural and cultural environments – is the only way to support all of us in the industry for the future.

What are your top tips for agents?

Focus on growing travel trends for the outdoors and a more exclusive, personalised experience. For clients who are looking for a multi-sport adventure with comfortable accommodation, then UnCruise is the product for them. Agents can also join our Adventurist programme and become certified to be an UnCruise cruise specialist.

“Agents should understand the general seasons for polar cruising”

Steve Wellmeier

expedition staff are better trained, so the industry is quite confident that it can continue to bring travellers into these pristine, remote wilderness areas with minimal impact.

What are your top tips for agents selling expedition?

Recognise that the better expedition itineraries fill up

well in advance. Agents should understand the general seasons for polar cruising – prime season and shoulder seasons – and familiarise themselves with the different companies operating in these regions, such as luxury, premium, middle-of-the-road and value, and which is best for their clients. 📍

Embracing opportunity

New Aurora Expeditions CEO **Monique Ponfoort** discusses taking the helm during the pandemic and the growing demand for remote expeditions

Taking charge of an expedition cruise company during a pandemic could be seen as rather a unique and courageous step, but it is one that I have thoroughly embraced since

I joined Aurora Expeditions in October.

I remain highly optimistic about the future and have already observed a strong desire from our guests who want to reconnect through small-ship expeditions on future voyages. The world has changed and with that so has the cruise industry. However, like many others, we have embraced these changes positively.

I am fortunate to have come into a team of passionate expeditionary specialists and it is impressive to see their focus and preparation for the restart of operations once it is appropriate and responsible to move ahead.

The team is determined to emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever, so we are now taking the time to reaffirm our purpose, prioritise our trade partners and – importantly – our guests and their expectations. It goes without saying that our number-one priority remains firmly our safe and healthy return to service.

Listening and learning

I think the industry right now is using this time to listen to their customers carefully and to understand how perceptions are continuing to evolve as we progress through the pandemic. I have been both humbled and fortunate to see an impressive level of support from our guests and trade partners.

This unprecedented halt to travel has provided expedition operators with the time to review their product offering and create and introduce even more



“There are many positives to be derived from this downtime”

adventurous and intrepid experiences for their guests. There are many positives to be derived from this unplanned downtime and in doing so, the industry will be in a strong and trusted position coming out of the pandemic.

For me, this time has offered a valuable opportunity to get to know Aurora Expeditions and to understand more about our guests and travel partners, as well as about the team of expedition leaders, crew operators and those working to support the business both in the office and at home.

Resilience is ingrained in the spirit of expedition voyaging and our guests are a true testament to that. As with any real expedition, nature will lead us to better things.

I'm confident that the industry will emerge from this crisis stronger, healthier and more united than ever. We are all focused on the wellbeing of our passengers and, moving forward, the industry's high standards of health and safety protocols will undoubtedly be some of the best in the world.

I can't wait for international borders to open so that we can all recommence doing what we love, which is taking our guests to explore the most remote corners of the world with the greatest of respect. ❶



Sylvia Earle is due to launch next year

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1

6

OF THE BEST

Northern Europe itineraries

A cruise is a great way to see this part of the world, sailing into exciting cities such as Stockholm, Helsinki and more. **Isabella Sullivan** reports

1 Stunning sights

If there's one thing that's guaranteed for passengers on a cruise to Northern Europe, it's majestic landscapes stretching for as far as the eye can see. Guests can experience all of this and more on a voyage with MSC Cruises, on board *MSC Splendida*. The 21-night Northern Europe itinerary departs from Kiel on 2 September 2021. Prices start from £2,239pp.

2 Northern nights

With an astonishing range of more than 28 dining options and a theatre showing Broadway musicals, guests would be forgiven for staying aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Getaway* – but if they step ashore they will discover some of Northern Europe's greatest cities on the line's nine-day Copenhagen cruise, which sails round trip from the embarkation point, taking in Tallinn along with Berlin, Helsinki and St Petersburg. Prices for the itinerary, departing 3 September 2022, start from £1,309pp.

3 Russian admiration

Home to the Hermitage museum, the Mariinsky Ballet and the Peterhof Palace, St Petersburg is a city that deserves more than one day – which is exactly what a seven-night cruise with Royal Caribbean on *Jewel of the Seas* offers. Also on the agenda are Stockholm, Helsinki and Riga. The voyage sails round trip from Stockholm and also takes in the world heritage site of Visby, departing 11 July 2021. Prices start from £841pp.



4

4 Carnival cheer

Not many lines create as much fun on board as Carnival Cruise Line and there are few better

backdrops to experience such fun than the majestic cities of the Baltics and Northern Europe. Cruising from Dover on a 12-day itinerary, *Carnival Legend* sails to Gothenburg, Helsinki, Tallinn and Copenhagen, also spending the night in St Petersburg. Prices start from approximately £911pp, departing 15 August 2021.

5 Christmas at sea

Spending Christmas at sea is always a great way to celebrate the festive season.

Guests who are looking to book in for their next adventure and do just that should consider P&O Cruises' nine-night Baltic itinerary on *Aurora*, departing Southampton on 20 December 2021. This voyage, which takes in Copenhagen, Oslo and Bruges, provides ample opportunity to explore festive markets and admire the snow-clad rooftops of some of Europe's most enticing areas of winter wonderland. Prices start from £1,049pp.



3

5



6 Regal adventure

Princess Cruises' *Regal Princess* is returning to the UK for summer 2021, offering sailings from Southampton – so there's no need for guests to fly to reach the dazzling delights of the region. A 14-day Baltic heritage cruise sails via Kristiansand, Copenhagen, Tallinn and Helsinki, departing 4 September 2021. Prices start from £1,599pp. ①

6



Kotor is a lively if tiny city
that's well worth a visit



The *Med* way

There are hidden gems to discover in the glittering waters of the Mediterranean, as well as big holiday hitters like Spain, Italy and France, as **Isabella Sullivan** finds out



There's no cruise destination quite like the Mediterranean. No mass of water stretches across as many stunning, unique and easily connected countries, where ancient

Greek ruins can be explored one day and an indigo Montenegrin bay the next.

The western waters of the warm, glittering Mediterranean Sea are home to holiday big hitters like Spain, Italy, France and their encompassing paradise islands, while its eastern shores hide enigmatic lands like Croatia and Montenegro. With so many exhilarating ports there for the visiting, there's no better way to take it all in than on a cruise, with countless itineraries and lines offering this timeless trip.



The Côte d'Azur has a reputation for glamour as well as sunshine



Parts of Sicily feel a world away from other, more modern, areas

Spanish treasures

The Mediterranean coastline of Spain runs for 1,600 kilometres, from Andalusia in the south to Barcelona and the Costa Brava in the north. Bordering Portugal and Gibraltar, Andalusia is a history-lover and foodie's dream, home to holiday havens like Cadiz, Malaga and Granada. The inspiration for the Spanish colonised cities in the Americas, the ancient port of Cadiz is a mix of Arabic forts and imposing cathedrals, and in its epicurean Old Town guests can feast on bluefin tuna and fresh oysters.

Cadiz is also the gateway to inland Seville, the heady city where impromptu flamenco dances pop up under the watchful eye of a gigantic Gothic cathedral. Also in Andalusia guests will find Malaga, the home of Picasso and the doorway to the golden sands of the Costa del Sol, and Granada, a palatial Moorish city nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Further north up the sun-baked coastline lies Spain's third-largest city, Valencia. Arguably the star of the coastline is Barcelona, Spain's most cosmopolitan city, nestled between mountains and sea.

As for Spain's Balearic Islands, well, each one dances to its own unique beat. The three largest islands are famous the world over, and the largest of those is

Destination special: Mediterranean

ITINERARIES

Star Clippers

● A six-night Sicily & Greece itinerary on *Star Flyer* calls at Pilos, Syracuse, Sicily and more. Prices start from £1,365pp, departing on 24 April 2022. starclippers.co.uk

Crystal Cruises

● 19-night Grand Journey itinerary takes guests from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, calling at Istanbul, Venice, Corfu, and Sorrento, among other destinations. Prices start from £4,787pp, departing on 28 April 2022 aboard *Crystal Symphony*. crystalcruises.co.uk

Marella Cruises

● A seven-night Highlights of the Mediterranean cruise on *Marella Discovery 2* is priced at £1,107pp. It departs on 11 September 2021 and calls at Palma, Barcelona and more. tui.co.uk

Silversea Cruises

● The 14-day Athens to Lisbon cruise aboard *Silver Cloud* departs from Athens on 28 May 2022. Prices start from £8,550pp. silversea.com

Norwegian Cruise Line

● *Norwegian Epic* sails a seven-day Mediterranean, Italy, France & Spain cruise, starting on 5 June 2022. Prices start from £999pp. ncl.com





Delectable food is just one of the highlights of the island of Sicily



Menorca's vibe is rather more relaxed than its neighbour Majorca's

Menorca is famous for cheese, gin and sobrassada, but also for being a former British colony

much-loved Majorca. Cut in honey-hued stone, its capital city, Palma, is home to an impressive gothic cathedral, and its palm-tree-lined medieval streets are heaving with tapas bars, museums and galleries. While Majorca is full of energy, Menorca sways to a more laid-back tune. The island is famous for cheese, gin and sobrassada, but also for being a former British colony – and the ruins of sprawling fort La Mola are a must-see. Being Balearic, it has a similar

backdrop of craggy landscapes and sparkling seas, with the entire island protected by UNESCO on account of its flora and fauna.

Wine and glamour

Pasta, pizza, wine cheaper than water, gold-dipped cities and vertiginous pastel-painted villages, Italy is La Dolce Vita – and few destinations compare. The nation is home of course to the city of love, the Sistine Chapel, the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and the floating city of Venice.

For cruisers, Italy's appeal is timeless, with many of its most beautiful ports

appearing on Mediterranean cruise itineraries. The northern port of Genoa is a great place to start, the gateway to the gelato-hued villages that make up the Cinque Terre, and Portofino, a fishing village turned A-list hotspot of seafood restaurants and boutiques.

Despite their proximity, Italy's islands of Sardinia and Sicily couldn't feel further from the mainland. The two largest islands in the Med, their capitals, Cagliari and Palermo, often feature on Mediterranean cruises, but each has a distinctly different vibe. Sitting in the shadow of Mount Etna, Sicily is an island of luscious vegetation and crumbling towns, and sun-seekers can choose from pebbly, muddy (volcanic) or sandy beaches.

Sardinia, on the other hand, is the more glamorous of the pair, an island famous

Glamour rules in Sardinia's pastel-hued coastal towns



Selling TIPS

There are a number of Mediterranean itineraries on offer, ranging from short to longer cruises, and voyages to suit all budgets, from luxury to mass market

Med ports of call showcase plenty of ancient history and mesmerising old towns alongside sandy beaches and glamour associated with destinations such as the Côte d'Azur – it's the best of both worlds for clients

Med itineraries are forever popular, so clients really should look at booking their holiday early to get the best deals

Don't forget to highlight the ports of call in the Eastern Mediterranean, as there is much clients can discover in places that do not (yet) have the same appeal as some of the more famous Med destinations

In Majorca there is time to relax and enjoy the great nightlife

Historic Dubrovnik has achieved must-see status for travellers

of Monaco, their turquoise marinas packed with superyachts and designer shops, but there's also a more understated side to this glamorous corner of the world.

Eastern Med magic

It's not just the usual suspects that merit attention, though. If clients are seeking sapphire waters, white sands and terracotta towns with panoramic citadels, then Croatia is the destination for them.

Balanced between the Balkans and central Europe, this country has been fought over by Ottomans, Venetians, Greeks and Romans, and most have left their mark, with temples, amphitheatres and palaces. It's because of its history and beauty that Croatia has become a top sun-seeking destination, attracting travellers with natural wonders like the Dinaric Range and port cities such as Dubrovnik, Hvar, Split and Zadar.

Then there's Greece, which boasts indigo waters and sun-bleached islands dotted with ancient ruins, warm air scented with fresh oregano and friendly family-run tavernas. Spread over the sparkling Aegean and Ionian seas, it's no wonder this ancient country and its countless paradise islands are some of the most favoured destinations for cruisers. More than 6,000 isles make up the Greek archipelago, and each one has its own

unique feel. Some – like Santorini and Mykonos – boast whitewashed villages with sugar-cube houses, sprawling green landscapes and white windmills, while Lefkada and Zakynthos are home to some of the most stunning stretches of sands and vegetation in the world.

Montenegro, a glittering hidden gem on the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean, is a pint-sized country only 300km from top to toe, but it manages to pack in rugged postcard scenery, plenty of sandy white beaches and vivacious cities.

Kotor, nestled in a brooding bay, is sheltered by towering cliffs crowned with emerald plant life.

The terracotta-roofed city is a maze of medieval architecture, churches, café-packed squares and museums. At the heart is the Old Town, a UNESCO heritage site straight out of a storybook.

What makes the Mediterranean such a great cruise destination is that this is just a smattering of what awaits guests on their next voyage. 📍

for its unbelievable natural beauty. Perfect pale apricot sands and sapphire lagoons are a dime a dozen, and the mountainous island is home to an array of pastel-painted towns. In the south, vertiginous Cagliari buzzes with local bars and restaurants, a lived-in ancient city with boutique-lined marina.

Meanwhile, the southern coastline of France was once dotted with sleeping villages, but then Brigitte Bardot came along. While God was creating woman on a St Tropez beach, a jet-set summer playground was also created, the sparkling Côte d'Azur. It's a glitzy, sun-gilded stretch of countless seaside resorts, rolling Provençal rosé vineyards and golden sands scattered with sunbeds.

Of course, there are the big hitters like Nice, Cannes and the nearby Principality

A Danube WALTZ

Before lockdown, **Isabella Sullivan** joined *A-Rosa Donna* for a cruise along the serene and scenic Danube

Sitting on the teak deck, warm wind whipping through my hair, a glass of sweet Hungarian fizz in one hand and a warm, salty mound of pork-fat bread in the other (trust me, it's delicious), I'm in the thick of A-Rosa's traditional sailaway party, and I have a big smile on my face as I'm embarking on a Danube river cruise.

We're waltzing down river on *A-Rosa Donna*, a sleek ship with cheeky scarlet lips emblazoned on her side. She's blowing a kiss to passers-by as we depart from imperial Budapest, gliding past the iconic pinnacles of the Hungarian parliament.

Arriving at a ranch in Hungary, we're treated to schnapps and paprika rolls

This great river weaves its way through 10 European countries, and over the next five days, I'll get to experience three of them, not to mention Austria's famously scenic Wachau Valley.

Part of the family

Joining German cruise line A-Rosa's bilingual Danube river cruise on day three – after my fellow guests have enjoyed Vienna and an overnight in Budapest – I feel immediately at home.

The crowd on board is predominantly German, but I'm part of a large British contingent and cruise manager David goes out of his way to make sure all non-German passengers – including a party from Spain – are well looked after.

Already today I've enjoyed a memorable taste of the real, rural Hungary on an excursion to the great Puszta plains. This vast hinterland is home to the Magyar cowboys, masters of the prized Lipizzaner horses. Arriving at a ranch, we're treated to their version of elevenses – home-made schnapps and warm paprika rolls – before taking our seats for a show.

Whips crack, riders fly through the air in a blur of dazzling blue robes, and we witness the famous 'Puszta five' – a

single horseman riding five steeds at once. Warmed by the (somewhat lethal) schnapps, we have the opportunity to win a bottle of wine by snaring it with a whip. I accept the challenge and – to my amazement – I succeed.

After the morning's excitement, there's still time to discover Hungary's great capital, and on a whistle-stop excursion, I explore both Buda and Pest, the two distinct halves of this sparkling city.

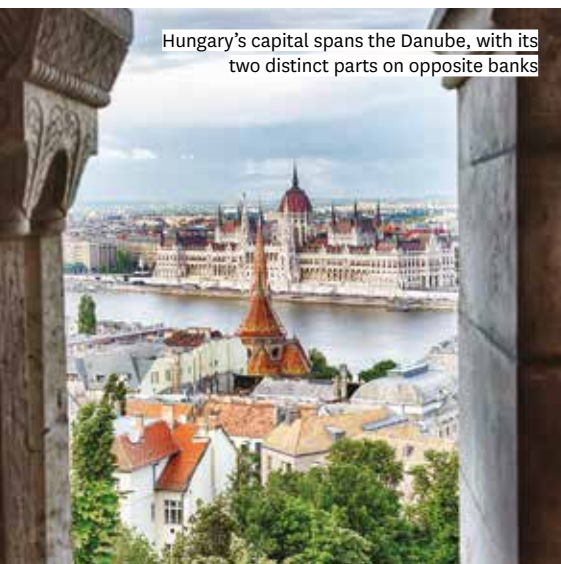
A-Rosa offers a choice of optional cycle, walking and coach-tour excursions, and I take the latter down glamorous boutique-packed Vaci Street, past the bars and cafes of the Jewish Quarter and the brilliant blue and yellow Szechenyi outdoor thermal baths, the largest in Europe.

From modern Pest, crossing into Buda is like entering a different world, filled with pastel-hued palaces and home to the mighty turreted fortress of the Fisherman's Bastion.

Wining and dining

The following day, with the sailing underway, it's time to discover what *A-Rosa Donna* has to offer. The buffet in the panoramic main dining room is exceptional, with German-style plates of juicy meats, fluffy potatoes, crisp salads, sauerkraut and fresh breads joining seafood platters and mounds of dessert options – my favourite being the crêpe station (prospective passengers, please note, A-Rosa is now operating a seated dining service).

Hungary's capital spans the Danube, with its two distinct parts on opposite banks





Clockwise from top left: a homely atmosphere welcomes guests to the dining room; in more ways than one, the castle is a high point in Bratislava; A-Rosa Donna cabins have a cheerful touch; Durnstein tops the cliffs on a bend in the Wachau Valley; A-Rosa Donna is sure to raise a smile; a bike tour is one of the best ways to see and experience Bratislava





The Wachau Valley has a fine reputation for its vineyards

Selling TIPS

A-Rosa operated cruises in the summer and has demonstrated that new health and safety measures can work on board. Remind guests that river cruises are one of the safest ways in which to sample multiple cities in a short period of time

•

The Danube is always a popular river and operators, including A-Rosa, are seeing positive demand for 2021 and beyond. Get clients booked in early to avoid disappointment

•

A-Rosa has long been known for the relaxed atmosphere on board its ships. Even with new Covid-secure measures in place, this aspect has not diminished, so continue to use this as a key part of the conversation with clients



A traditional crossing place because of its strategic position, Budapest is now a large city

For fans of authentic flavours, there's even a regional table, where the changing menu reflects the ship's location (I quickly get a taste for Hungarian goulash and the cheeses from a local market).

A-Rosa is generally an informal cruise line, but for those in search of a special evening, the ship offers an enhanced dining experience, the special waiter-served menu. Here the menu changes every night, and later during our trip, there are Austrian and Hungarian nights, complete with expertly chosen local wines.

After dinner on my first evening, I grab a drink and decide to settle in the lounge, which has both a stage and a dance floor. Tonight is the highly anticipated music quiz, and needless to say, it's Germany v England. I'm happy

to say that it proves to be a thoroughly friendly contest – and even happier to tell you it that it ends in a win for the away side.

Biking in Bratislava

For some reason, waking up early is a lot easier when you're on the water. Perhaps it's the view from the cabin – in my case, gorgeous green banks and a dramatic domed church.

After a tasty breakfast featuring A-Rosa's famous home-made rye bread (they'll even make guests a loaf to take home), we arrive in Slovakia's capital, Bratislava. Here I make full use of *A-Rosa Donna's* fleet of bicycles, embarking on a two-hour exploration of the city, taking in the riverbank, leafy parks and the city centre, before finally ascending to the restored Renaissance castle.



Making our way up cobbled lanes packed with €1 beer joints, we finally reach the storybook castle, and we're rewarded with truly beautiful views. With limited time in port, a cycle excursion is one of the best ways to see this compact city – and all trips should end at the Luculus Ice Saloon.

A homely atmosphere

Stepping back aboard *A-Rosa Donna* feels just like being at home. With friendly David to welcome guests, and tea and coffee on demand, it's an amazingly easy place to relax.

Even the cabins have plenty of personal touches, with jazzy striped canopies above the bed, a dressing table, a seating area and a shower with premium Babor products. Along with a heated pool on the top level, the

designers of the four-deck ship have found space for a mini-spa where you can have massages and beauty treatments. There's also a gym, steam room and sauna with floor-to-ceiling windows.

As I discover, it's perfectly fine to scamper from your room to the spa in just a bathrobe (there are no funny looks). This sense of homely informality also makes it perfectly acceptable simply to sit on the top deck, warm under a blanket, and do absolutely nothing – as I do the next morning, sailing into Austria's magnificent Wachau Valley.

Set between steep green banks, this famous 18-mile beauty spot is a feast of Grüner Veltliner vineyards, Lutheran churches, chocolate-box villages and ruined clifftop castles such as Durnstein, where Richard the Lionheart was imprisoned in 1192. It's all so cinematic

that I half expect to see Maria von Trapp warbling down the hillside.

With a different spectacular outcrop, ruin or village round every bend, hours on deck simply fly by, and cups of tea somehow magically turn into glasses of sparkling wine.

A-Rosa simply cannot be beaten for friendliness, homeliness and flexibility. I leave feeling warmer than after that first tot of Hungarian schnapps, and with a home-made rye loaf tucked under my arm. 🍞

Details

● **Seven-night** Classic Danube Explorer itinerary, departing 11 April 2021. Prices start from £1,415pp, including a premium inclusive drinks package, flights from London Gatwick and transfers. Based on two sharing.

● newmarketholidays.co.uk

This review was written before global travel restrictions. Therefore, some aspects of the cruise may differ from what is described in this article.

The last **word**

Shane Riley, associate vice-president of international sales at Virgin Voyages, explains why the sector's diversity and differentiation can help it bounce back in 2021 and beyond



“For our travel agent partners, we’ve increased commission to help them rebuild their business”

Frankly, it's hard to believe that it was only earlier this year that *Scarlet Lady* lit up Dover and Liverpool for her hotly anticipated arrival ceremonies. Back then, many of us may have assumed that Covid-19 would remain a distant threat.

Well, fast forward to now and I couldn't be more proud to be flying the Virgin Voyages flag as we get ready to set sail on our maiden voyage when the time is right. They say when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and the crisis has allowed Virgin Voyages to demonstrate just how well we'll take care of our guests before they even step aboard *Scarlet Lady*. We're doing this by offering the option of a full refund plus 25 per cent future voyage credit, or the option to double their money by taking an industry-leading 200 per cent future voyage credit.

For our travel agent partners we wanted to reward their loyalty by launching our Brilliant To Do Business With promise. This includes a significant commission increase to support agents with rebuilding their business.

Reasons to believe

We've seen additional protocols being put in place across the entire sector. Health and safety is not something we (the cruise lines) compete on. There is always an opportunity to learn from each other and share ideas. Every new protocol is welcome news and another step forward in reassuring passengers that the industry will take great care of them when the time is right to lift those anchors and set sail.

We are in a fortunate position in that our ships are mid-sized and equipped with the latest technology. Some things that we designed to offer an exceptional experience now lend themselves well to travelling in a socially distanced world.

For example, there is the Sailor app and wearable device, The Band, which allow passengers to join virtual queues and enjoy their experience contactless. Much has been said about our lack of buffets, but the no-self-serve dining options are a real win for us right now.

We've also learnt about new technologies such as AtmosAir, an advanced air filtration system that eliminates 99.9 per cent of viruses from the air, which we will now retrofit to our ships.

The industry has many aces up its sleeve, too. For a start, even in the depths of the darkest months, our research showed that 55 per cent of cruisers would get on a ship at that very moment.

The second is that cruise is not a commodity. It doesn't have sameness; it has diversity and differentiation.

The third ace is transparency – the industry is incredibly well regulated, all illness is reported and the new protocols are well documented and available for guests to see.

As the saying goes, the darkest hour comes before the dawn, and I believe the industry will see a bright dawn. The time to sail will come again and we'll be counting down every moment. 🌅





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