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1

8

13

3

5

21

11

18

7

15

19

24

4

20

12

6

14

2

10

23

9

17

22

16



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[^]Seabourn Sojourn. 20/9/25 cruise is 9 days.

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• [^]Seabourn's Caviar on the Surf Beach Party



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16[^]*, 26[^] Nov; 6[^], 8, 18 Dec 2025; 5[^], 7, 15[^], 17 Jan; 6[^], 8, 16[^]; 28 Feb; 10 Mar 2026

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WELCOME... TO THE DECEMBER ISSUE

They say Christmas is the time of giving. Well, we're being extra charitable this year thanks to the return of the annual *Cruise Trade News* and Fred.

Olsen Cruise Lines advent calendar competition, giving you the chance to win a sleigh-load of prizes, including shopping vouchers, reusable coffee cups and two free Fred. Olsen cruises.

To take part simply register online at cruisetradenews.com/register-fred-olsen-advent. Once you've signed up, you'll receive a code via email each day, from 1-24 December, which you can enter on the website listed above to see if you've won one of that day's prizes. You can also collect your code by opening one of the numbered doors on the front cover of this issue.

Meanwhile, your usual digest of news and industry insights can be found overleaf, where we round off an outstanding year for cruise by asking if collaborations with celebrity chefs hold the key to unlocking the new-to-cruise market. That's on *page 47*, while on *page 30* we look back to the biggest party of the year, sharing highlights from last month's glittering Wave Awards ceremony.

On the cover: Fred. Olsen Cruise Line



ABOVE A host of fabulous prizes are up for grabs this festive season

December also sees the return of our annual Ultimate Destination Guide, with this year's edition jam-packed with everything you need to sell cruise with confidence.

Finally, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who's supported our publication in 2024. Exciting plans for 2025 are afoot, so watch this space. In the meantime, have a wonderful Christmas and we'll see you in the new year.

Jack Carter
Editor

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Cruise Trade News



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Cruise Trade News



The biggest thank you!

We are thrilled to announce that we have won **Best Trade Sales Team** at this year's Wave Awards! This recognition is an incredible honour, and we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to our valued trade partners and the wider cruise community.

This award belongs to each of you who continue to trust us, support us and work alongside us to make cruising with Princess the best experience possible!



From left: Sue Perkins - TV Presenter and Host, Yasmin McKechnie - Princess Senior Sales Manager, Hayley Moore - Princess UK & Europe Sales Director, Millie Spicer - Princess Sales Operations Manager

CONTENTS

ISSUE 131 | DECEMBER 2024

CRUISE Trade News

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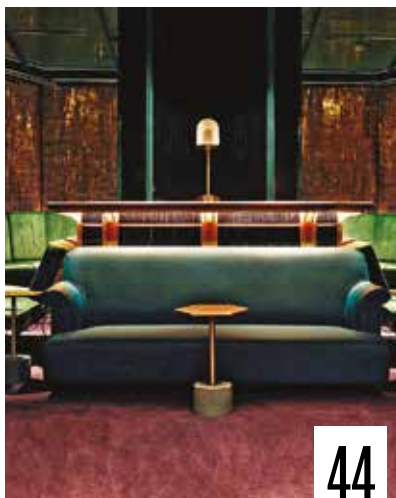
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44

INSIGHT

6 Cruise Corner

Your essential industry news roundup

8 Column

Why it's time to start selling 2026

10 News updates

Get up to speed on the latest
from expedition, river and luxury

20 Behind the Headlines

Is it time cruise lines ditched branded
freebies for eco-friendly alternatives?

25 Tech Talk

The 2024 trends that changed travel

30 Wave Awards 2024

A look back at the 'Oscars of cruising'

TRAINING

36 Learn & Sell

Get the lowdown on Crystal Cruises

38 What's in It For You?

Fam trips, incentives and more

41 On the road with...

Riviera Travel's Amanda Docherty

FEATURES

44 Ship of the Month

Spotlighting Virgin's *Resilient Lady*

47 CTN Investigates

Do collabs with celebrity chefs hold
the key to the new-to-cruise market?

52 In conversation with...

Andrea Stafford, AmaWaterways



66

EXPLORING

57 The Great Lakes

Take a whistle-stop tour of Canada
and the US' famous five

62 The Douro

Six themed river cruises for
curious travellers

66 New Zealand

White-knuckle adventure and resurgent
Maori culture create the ultimate cruise

70 Cruise review –

Explora II

Rachel Reilly enjoys a slice of *la dolce
vita* on Explora's newest ship

FINAL WORD

74 The CLIA View

Andy Harmer OBE casts his gaze
on an exciting year ahead for cruise



30

Cruise Corner

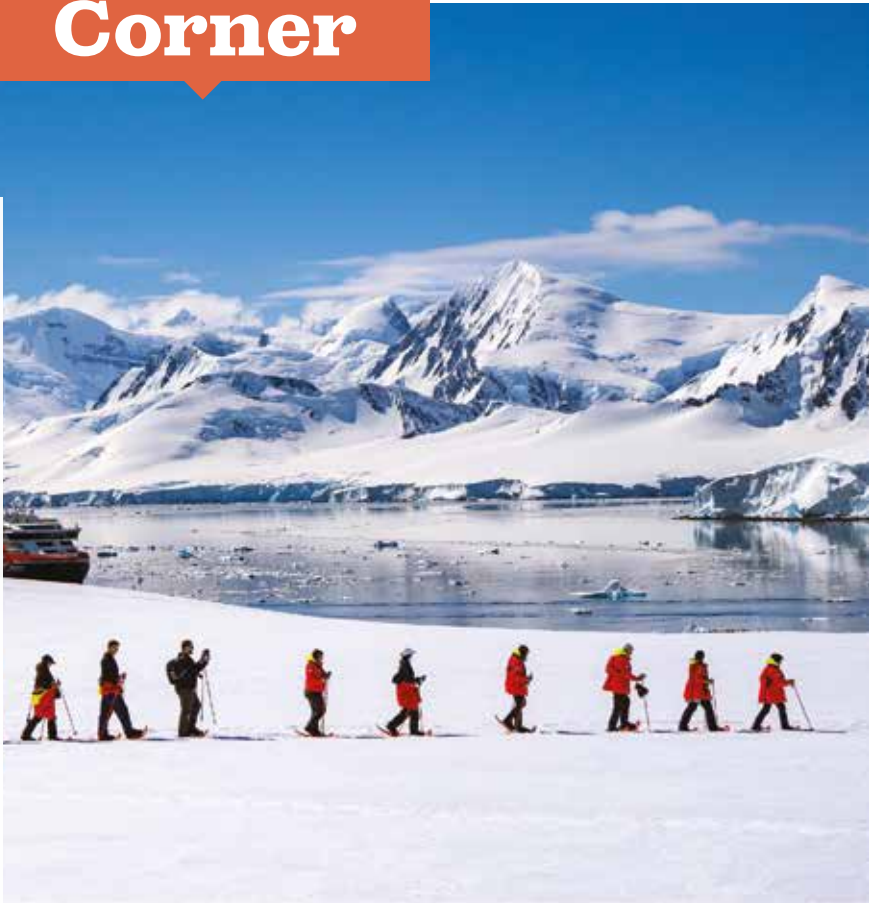
DESTINATION DRIVES CONSUMER CHOICE

> Where a cruise sails to is the main driving force behind consumers' decision making when it comes to picking a holiday at sea, a new survey has found.

Carried out by Iglu, the study of 4,763 people found that 67 per cent of respondents say itinerary is the key driver for picking a cruise, with value for money coming in second place with 47 per cent.

Gastronomy (43 per cent) and ease of travel (42 per cent) were also key.

Iglu CCO Dave Mills said: "It's fascinating to listen to how customers feel about cruising and what factors are important to them."



IN NUMBERS

4,763

people surveyed

88%

research cruises online

67%

say itineraries are key



GOVT COMMITS TO CRUISE

The maritime minister has reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting the cruise industry in its pursuit of net-zero and its ongoing contribution to the UK economy.

Mike Kane MP joined cruise industry leaders in November for the first meeting of the Cruise Industry Government Forum since this summer's general election.

The meeting, attended by senior representatives of five

government departments, saw industry leaders discuss a joint plan for the UK's cruise sector.

This will include shared objectives related to skills, net zero and economic growth. The attendees also discussed the role of cruise in bringing tourists to parts of the UK that can be difficult to reach.

Kane said: "The cruise industry plays a vital role in supporting UK maritime and tourism, boosting jobs and growth in coastal communities in the UK."



ROL BECOMES EMPLOYEE-OWNED

> ROL Cruise has confirmed it will operate as an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT), granting a majority stake of the company to its staff members.

The cruise agency said the move “marks the beginning of a new era” for the business as it enters its 30th anniversary in 2025.

In tandem with the shift to the EOT model, ROL Cruise has appointed Rosie Cairns, formerly joint managing director, as CEO.

Sarah Wikevand will be working alongside Cairns in her current role as managing director, continuing to focus on strengthening key relationships and expanding strategic collaborations with commercial partners. Jez Dickinson, who previously served as chair, will join the Board of the Corporate Trustee.

“This move marks the beginning of a new era for ROL Cruise



CELESTYAL RESHAPES FARE STRUCTURE

> Celestyal has overhauled its fare structure and pre-cruise packages with two new initiatives to “enhance the guest experience”.

Celestyal One, which will replace the current Experience and Experience Plus packages, will include the cruise fare and Wi-Fi, filter coffee, tea, water and juice throughout the day from 6am-10pm, unlimited soft drinks in the main restaurants with meals, and port fees, taxes and gratuities.

In a bid to simplify its drinks offering, Celestyal has replaced all beverage packages with a prepaid food and beverage wallet called CelestyalPay, which will be used onboard for any non-comp food and drink purchases.



Cruise helps Jamaica boost visitors

Cruise arrivals have helped Jamaica attract more visitors in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period last year.

The island’s minister of tourism Edmund Bartlett revealed that based on preliminary figures, Jamaica welcomed just over two million stopover visitors and some three million total visitors, including cruise arrivals, between 1 January and 14 September 2024.

Bartlett described the figures as a “remarkable achievement”. Since the year began, the destination’s tourism sector has earned roughly US\$2.97 billion.

“Despite various challenges, including Hurricane Beryl and tightness in airlift, the sustained recovery and growth demonstrates the strength and resilience of our tourism sector and the continued appeal of Jamaica as a premier travel destination,” he added.

“Sustained growth demonstrates the resilience of our tourism sector

Getting ahead

Fred. Olsen's **Geoff Ridgeon** believes there's no time like the present when it comes to pushing 2026 itineraries



There is nothing like the launch of new itineraries to inspire a sense of wanderlust. Whether it's the Norwegian Fjords, the Mediterranean or far-flung tropics, such as the Caribbean, South America and Asia, there are plentiful opportunities for customers who are looking to explore the world by ship.

Many cruise lines have already launched their summer 2026 cruising schedule, some of which feature sailings to coincide with the solar eclipse, along with a variety of fly-cruise or cruise-only itineraries. By launching 2026 cruises now, your guests can plan further ahead and commit their holidays to you in the longer term.

For us at Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, our hand-crafted itineraries for summer 2026 launched in early November, with a brochure brimming with opportunities to see the best destinations at the best times to visit them. For example, August 2026 will see the natural phenomenon, the solar eclipse, and we have curated three cruises for passengers to witness the spectacle.

Your customers can choose from cruises to Iceland to experience whales, waterfalls and geysers, while being in the area where the moon will cover the sun for the longest period. Alternatively, they can head to Spain



ABOVE Iceland's geographical position means the 2026 solar eclipse will be particularly memorable there, as well as the usual whale-watching activities



Many cruise lines have already launched their summer 2026 schedule, featuring sailings to coincide with the solar eclipse

TOP TIPS

1 Ensure you understand the points of difference between each cruise line so you pair your clients with the right experience.

2 The most popular destinations might only be at their most beautiful at certain times in the year.

3 Shorter five-night cruises around the British Isles are perfect for first-time cruisers.

to discover old towns and promenades along with a full eclipse before the sun sets. Other highlights include sailings to Norway to see the waterfalls at their most powerful in May and June; British Isles cruises taking in summertime views of remote isles and rugged coastlines; and short five-night cruises to coincide with bank holidays, perfect for the first time cruiser.

So, now is the time to truly get to know and understand the points of difference between each cruise line, what makes them special, and what service they provide to guests as part of the booking process before they embark on a holiday of a lifetime.

Every single one of your customers wants to create unforgettable memories, and now is the time to help them by booking their dream holiday. ●



THANK YOU

From Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

At **Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines**, we channel our 175 years of experience into making every single cruise simply unforgettable by meticulously crafting our sailings to provide a memorable journey for our guests.

We're delighted that the hard work and dedication of our teams, both on board and ashore, has been recognised – we are thrilled to have been named as the **Best Specialist Cruise Lines** at the 2024 Waves Awards, and would like to extend a huge thank you for your ongoing support.



Fred.Olsen Cruise Lines

NEED TO KNOW



ALL EYES ON EXPEDITION

Interest in expedition cruising has “never been higher”, according to CLIA UK’s Andy Harmer. As a result, CLIA is on the lookout for two cohorts of 30 frontline agents to enrol in two new learning initiatives focused on expedition and river. “We want to ensure that agents are equipped with specialist knowledge and advice that will allow them to take advantage of this growing demand,” Harmer said. After a graduation ceremony, agents will be given special certification that recognises them as river or expedition “Cruise Champions”.



ALBATROS JOINS CLIA

Albatros Expeditions has joined CLIA in a bid to enhance its brand awareness across the industry. The line, which has joined with immediate effect, will benefit from access to the cruise body's in-person and virtual events and learning programmes, as well as the opportunity to share cruise line and ship information resources online. The line will also have the opportunity

to promote agent incentives and competitions via CLIA's e-newsletter and social media pages.

Jens Rasmussen, chief operating officer, Albatros Expeditions, said: "We're excited to join CLIA, recognising the crucial role that trade engagement plays in shaping the future of the cruise industry. We look forward to contributing to its growth and innovation."



Seabourn details new expeditions

Seabourn has unveiled its new 2026-27 expedition itineraries, with luxury vessels *Seabourn Venture* and *Seabourn Pursuit* scheduled to visit up to 161 destinations in 31 countries across 24 sailings.

"Exploring the smaller, less-travelled corners of the world in ultra-luxury style has always been a priority for Seabourn," said Natalya Leahy, president of Seabourn.

Destinations will include Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, the British Isles and Antarctica, as well as South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

PONANT SECURES EU FUNDING

Ponant has secured funding from the European Commission (EC) for its plans to launch the first transoceanic carbon-neutral cruise ship. The line was selected to receive support from the EC's INNOVFUND – a scheme which supports the development of a combination of renewable energies to achieve its decarbonisation objectives – for its Swap2Zero project.

The initiative is pinned on several decarbonisation technologies, including a sail power system and hull providing 50 per cent of the propulsion energy using the force of the wind; a surface area totalling over 1,000m² of next-generation, eco-designed photovoltaic panels produced in France; and a low temperature fuel cell operating on liquid hydrogen.





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LUXOR-IOUS LIVING

TUI River Cruises launched its first Nile River ship, *TUI Al Horeya*, with an onboard ceremony in Luxor. The event saw 100 biodegradable candles in coconut shells placed on the river to signify the blessing before the ship sailed to Luxor Temple. Throughout the night, a sand artist showcased the story of the river, traditional Egyptian acts were on display and a gala dinner took place. The vessel will now sail a series of seven-night, all-inclusive round-trip sailings from Luxor, accommodating 141 passengers across 72 cabins.



AMERICAN REVEALS NEW SHIPS

American Cruise Lines has signed contracts with Chesapeake Shipbuilding for four more ships, bringing the line's total orderbook to 10 vessels over the next three years.

Each of the newbuilds will operate in the US, which the company claim is the "fastest growing" segment of the river cruise industry. The 10 new ships from Chesapeake begin with the delivery of

American Legend, which passed sea trials and departed on its first cruise on 25 November.

The remaining newbuilds on order, *American Patriot* and *American Pioneer* for 2025 and *American Maverick*, *American Ranger* and *American Encore* for 2026, will roll out every few months over the next three years. More details will be released in due course.

APPOINTMENTS



Scenic to bolster team

The Scenic Group has announced plans to expand its sales and partnership team with three new roles.

The company is currently recruiting for a new sales manager, key account manager and senior charter operations executive.

Nick Hughes, director of sales, partnerships and strategic growth, said: "Ahead of the critical wave period, we want to ensure our agent partners are prepared to support what we all expect to be a very busy sales period."



TAUCK EXPANDS FRENCH FLEET

Tauck has confirmed that two new ships will join its fleet in spring 2026 following construction in Serbia and the Netherlands next year.

The two vessels, which have not yet been named, include a 135-metre ship that will sail on Tauck itineraries along the Rhone, accommodating 130 guests in 68 cabins. A slightly smaller sister ship will host up to

124 guests along the River Seine, offering 20 suites, each 300 sq ft in size, on its Diamond Deck; 30 cabins at 225 sq ft each and 12 Category 1 cabins, measuring 180 sq ft on the Emerald Deck.

Tauck chief executive Dan Mahar said the two new ships will continue the company's "proven formula for success" on Europe's rivers.



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RACING WITH REGENT

Regent Seven Seas Cruises worked with its travel agent partners in the north of England to give a selection of past guests an Aston Martin driving experience. Previous customers based in Newcastle and the northeast were given a vehicle from Aston Martin Newcastle for a day's drive from the Port of Tyne to a Michelin-starred lunch in Northumberland. A selection of Aston Martin Newcastle's clients were also welcomed to the Port of Tyne to board *Seven Seas Splendor* for a tour of the vessel and to learn more about the brand.



CRUISE CROATIA TO LAUNCH NEW SHIP

Luxury small-ship cruise line Cruise Croatia has revealed plans to launch a new-build ship in 2025.

The 36-guest *MV Aretis* is the first of its kind to be built in Croatia in three years and will join the Cruise Croatia fleet in early spring next year, offering 19 seven-night departures from Dubrovnik to Split, and vice versa, from 7 June to 11 October.

Cruise Croatia has partnered with the Radež ship yard in Korcula and made a 20 per cent investment in the build process, allowing exclusive use of *Aretis* through the 2025, 2026 and 2027 seasons. The ship will feature 18 en-suite cabins measuring up to 160 sq ft in size, as well as a restaurant and bar area on the upper deck.

APPOINTMENTS



Andrew Bolton

Ponant has appointed former Celebrity Cruises strategic account manager Andrew Bolton as its new UK sales manager for the north of England, Scotland and Ireland.

Bolton, who spent more than 20 years with the ocean cruise line, has also held roles with Cunard and Seabourn. He joined Ponant on 11 November.

Reporting into Ponant UK and Ireland general manager Anthony Daniels, Bolton will support required passenger, revenue and profit targets, while also sourcing new routes to market.



US SOARS FOR PANACHE

Panache Cruises' expansion into the US has seen the luxury retailer generate an additional £2.3 million in sales in four months.

The Chorley-based firm, which opened its first office in Orlando in June, is now looking to relocate to a larger premises. In the last 12 months Panache reported a turnover of £22.2 million in the UK, but founder and CEO James Cole

believes US sales will eventually eclipse those in the UK.

The company launched in 2020 and employs a team of 58 in the UK and another eight in the US. "We've spent the last 12 months understanding the cultural differences between the US and the UK markets because they are different from a marketing point of view," said Cole.



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Tired of returning from a conference with tote bags full of branded merchandise? **Will Payne** asks if it's high time cruise lines scrapped these environmentally unfriendly freebies for good

There are three certainties in life: death, taxes, and leaving a travel industry event with a bag full of branded goodies. Don't get us wrong – no one appreciates free swag more than journalists, but a desk can only hold so many notebooks, calendars, pens and novelty ducks. However, there's a more important issue at play here, and that's the impact these gifted items have on the environment when they slide from the desk and into landfill.

In a bid to curb over-production, P&O Cruises made the bold move in October to scrap all promotional items it would usually hand out at trade conferences and instead donate £10,000 towards its £1 million fundraising target for Teenage Cancer Trust, which it hopes to hit by the end of the year.

"We are confident agents will support us in this decision," says sales director Ruth Venn. "The best takeaways from conference season are the ideas shared and the relationships built,

and we encourage agents to talk to us more now than ever before. We are so proud to be coming into our tenth year of supporting the incredible work undertaken by Teenage Cancer Trust so there couldn't be a better time for us to redirect funds."

TIME FOR A RETHINK

Events specialist Clare Forestier hit the nail on the head in a recent social media post which garnered thousands of interactions, where she urged



“ The best takeaways from conference season are the ideas shared and the relationships built

companies to “make it count” if they’re planning on giving things away for free.

“Think about what your attendees would actually appreciate and use,” she wrote. “No one’s leaving your event raving about the free pen they picked up. It’s time to ditch the wasteful, meaningless giveaways and start thinking creatively about how to connect with your audience in ways that actually matter.”

P&O Cruises isn’t the only line scaling back production of promotional items. Vice president international sales for MSC Cruises and Explora Journeys Antonio Paradiso says both lines have purposefully scaled back on branded merchandise.

“We have always used very limited branded merchandise and are finding that we are ordering less and less,” he continues. “We bulk buy what we need six months in advance so that we cut

down on delivery fuel and packaging. We also choose products that can be recycled, such as our business cards, which are printed on recycled paper instead of high gloss.”

MSC Group prefers to put its money behind a range of charitable initiatives through its charity arm the MSC Foundation. This includes the MSC Cup, a football tournament at Chelsea FC’s Stamford Bridge, with teams made up of travel industry professionals. The event has raised more than £55,000 for the past two years running.

For Paradiso, the real value of agent engagement lies in ship visits, hosted training events, product webinars and ongoing communication. “We regularly offer trade incentives and competitions. For example, our Big Cruise Giveaway offers a chance for top-performing agents to win a seven-night MSC cruise and last year more than 200 free cruises were awarded to agents who produced strong sales results,” he explains.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

For some cruise lines, branded merchandise has never played a major role in their conference marketing efforts. AmaWaterways director



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Promotional items have always been a regular feature of industry events; Antonio Paradiso says MSC Group limits brand merchandise in favour of charitable initiatives

of sales UK and Europe Andrea Stafford said P&O Cruises’ decision to scrap conference merchandise was “interesting”.

“We’ve never been massive on conference merchandise. In my view, it’s more about engaging with agents to see if we can help them improve their business,” she says.

The line still offers a selection of merchandise, but Stafford says it must be “really considered” in what it provides, and all items are reviewed on a regular basis. “Some agents do like to work with brochures, leaflets and flyers as that works for their customer base, while others like to work in a more digital way. We like to give our agents a choice; I think that’s the most important thing.”



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Concern for the environment is a major part of the call for less freebies; P&O Cruises is donating to Teenage Cancer Trust

“ There are countless ways cruise lines’ funds could support the agent community

For Cunard, director of UK sales Thomas Mahoney says the line’s focus is geared towards offering its agent partners “quality and long-lasting” reusable items that “enhance their everyday lives”.

He explains: “We tend to give away luxury coffee cups and wash bags – branded items that travel agents tell us they often use time and again. Cunard also engages with the trade via in-person meetings and immersive hosted experiences on our ships that are proven to deepen product knowledge.”

THE RIGHT THING TO DO

What about the agents who are on the receiving end of all these items handed out by cruise lines at industry events? “I’ve long believed branded merchandise

and ‘freebies’ do little to influence sales,” says World Travel Holdings UK managing director Alison Earnshaw.

“I think there are countless ways cruise lines’ funds could be reallocated to better support the agent community. Obviously charitable contributions are critical and are the right thing to do, but I wouldn’t expect that funds assigned to support brand promotion are the same as those allocated to charity donations.”

Founder of The Cruise Room Robbie O’Grady, meanwhile, admits “everyone loves a freebie”, but raises concerns over how much merchandise is used by attendees after a conference.

“Rather than gather dust, we look to pass on the merchandise to our customers, and we personally will use items like branded pens rather than buy them in,” he says. “We gather up everything we get and then we’ll have a little blitz to give it all away to customers when they book.

“If they book a specific cruise line, we’ll give them a book and a pen or a little goodie bag, whatever it may be, if

we have it. Our customers absolutely love it because it’s a surprise-and-delight moment.”

Despite his concerns, O’Grady admits that merchandise is a tried and tested form of advertising and appreciates the need for cruise lines to cut through at trade shows where they’re battling with competitors for attention.

“There’s no doubt that things like books, pens, water bottles and drinking cups are useful, unlike multi-colour highlighters and plastic key rings. Perhaps rather than just mass-produce a range of items, a focus on the product produced might be required.”

Travel Counsellor Sarah Bolton says the majority of cruise line merchandise is “useless” and either doesn’t get taken or goes straight in the bin. “I personally love a good brochure and anything useful such as pens and Post-It notes. I certainly don’t need any more reusable bags, drinks bottles, keyrings and anything that we already have,” she says. “I’d much rather they had a few useful items, and then put the rest of the budget either to charity or some kind of bigger ‘prize.’”

Few other industries are under as much scrutiny as cruise when it comes to sustainability. And while initiatives such as shore power connectivity and liquefied natural gas (LNG) are helping reduce the sector’s environmental footprint, it is also important to ensure the industry is working in a sustainable way at all touch points. Indeed, even a single-use plastic biro could be more than a drop in the ocean. ●



WE APPRE-SEA-ATE YOU

Your feedback inspired us to take action!

Following the introduction of our exciting new shows onboard Marella Discovery 2 and the newly introduced speakeasy-style experience onboard Marella Voyager, we've been named the winner in the Wave Awards 'Best for Entertainment' category.

Christopher Hackney, Managing Director of Marella Cruises, said: "We're continually exploring new ways to elevate our onboard entertainment, and introducing 'Jumbo the Wonder Circus' – a life-sized puppet – marked a first for the cruise industry. These West End-style shows offer our guests a fresh variety of entertainment onboard, and we're delighted that the industry has recognised the enhancements across our fleet."



**MARELLA
CRUISES**



ROYAL CARIBBEAN

A BIG ROYAL THANK YOU

We are celebrating our monumental wins at the Wave Awards, as we won Best for Accessibility, Best for Accommodations Design, Best Family Cruise Line, and the Grand Prix Award.

To all the Travel Agents who voted, Thank You



Tech Talk

Year in review

In January, Traveltek CCO **Cressida Sergeant** highlighted the trends she believed would shape cruise in 2024. As the year draws to a close, she revisits these predictions to see how they played out

AUTOMATION

While automation has been on the rise for years, it became an industry staple in 2024. Royal Caribbean's *Icon of the Seas* is a great example, using automated systems to manage tasks like adjusting cabin air conditioning when guests leave their room. This approach not only reduces energy usage but also ensures rooms are comfortable upon guests' return.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI and machine learning have taken significant strides this year, and have quickly been integrated into daily operations across travel businesses. Going beyond our predictions, these technologies have driven even bigger gains in consumer engagement. In particular, we've noticed a rise in referral traffic from platforms such as ChatGPT.

PAYMENTS

We anticipated a shift towards simplified and diverse digital payment options, and recent research from McKinsey confirms this trend. Digital payment flexibility is now standard across major cruise lines, making the booking process easier and enabling guests to budget for premium experiences. As demand for cruising grows, these flexible payment solutions offer travellers greater confidence.

ONLINE BOOKABILITY

This last year has seen us smash our cruise booking records, with an impressive start to the wave season that surpassed last year's total bookings. JP Morgan says cruise bookings will continue to rise in the coming years as online booking become increasingly important to attracting new customers, particularly first-time cruisers.

“**Online booking have become key to attracting new customers**”

BUY VS BUILD

We forecasted that cruise companies would favour purchasing established tech solutions over developing their own, fostering new partnerships and collaboration in the tech landscape. This year, more major players have embraced this collaborative approach, working with technology partners like Traveltek to expand their technology more efficiently, without the high costs and time requirements associated with building custom software or platforms.

As we look forward to 2025, we're excited to see how these tech trends evolve further, driving innovation and redefining travel experiences in the year to come. ●

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant is pleased to report 2024 has been a record-breaking year for Traveltek's cruise bookings

In NUMBERS

63%

uptick in the number of bookings made via Traveltek during the 2024 wave period

16%

price drop in 2024; a 'significant decrease' on 2023 levels

193K

Traveltek bookings made during January–March 2024, compared to 118,900 in 2023



Sailing into the sunset

Following a successful night at the Wave Awards, Celestyal's VP of business development **Janet Parton** looks back on a groundbreaking year for the challenger line

It's been a really exciting year for Celestyal, topped off with two wins at the Wave Awards last month. Is there anything you're particularly proud of?

We've achieved an immense amount in the last 12 months and I'm so proud of the team. As well as investing in multimillion-pound refurbishments for our two ships, *Celestyal Discovery* and *Celestyal Journey*, we completely refreshed our brand identity. One of the awards we won at the Waves was for Best PR & Marketing Campaign; to receive recognition that the brand narrative and identity is working is fantastic.

The team was also delighted to win Best for Shore Excursions. We put so much work into creating authentic and local encounters to ensure we stand out from the competition and we've recently launched new itineraries in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf. This means we can now offer a year-round programme, which is on sale all the way through to March 2027.

What sets Celestyal apart from other cruise lines?

Celestyal is all about out-of-this-world value and we're really passionate about that, whether that be value for money in terms of what's included in our fares or offering port-intensive itineraries to ensure we're value for time.

“

We put so much work into creating authentic and local encounters to ensure we stand out from the competition

We offer cruises which range from three and four nights to seven nights, so we have a real breadth of durations that we can work with. Our three- and four-night itineraries are very destination intensive, offering six ports of call and seven ports of call respectively, and they're perfect for people who might want to have a land stay before or after a cruise. Then we have our more traditional seven-night cruise product which offers a port visit a day.

Why do you think the Wave Awards judges singled you out for your shore excursion programme?

I think it's to do with our 'tread like a local' approach. Our shore excursions are really about local encounters, so we try to give people things they wouldn't necessarily find in a guidebook. We know destinations such as Greece like the back of our hand; we're trying to utilise that knowledge in the ports of call that we go to.

Take Santorini, for example, which we know can get really crowded in the summer months. We arrive later in the day when other cruise ships have gone and the crowds have dispersed. You can sit on an amazing terrace with a cocktail while enjoying the sunset, then you can meander back to the ship. You're doing it in complete comfort.

How important has trade been to your success?

We are truly grateful for all the support the trade have given us. The amount of phone calls and emails I've had in the last 12 months from new agents wanting to work with us because they can see all of the exciting enhancements we've made





has been phenomenal. They're not just looking for product and itinerary information either, they're really keen to understand what we're doing for the 2025/26 seasons and they've really embraced the new Arabian Gulf programme.

Can the trade expect any new developments from Celestyal in 2025?

We are working hard on improving our tools for agents, which will include a new website for 2025. Within the site will be a new trade portal, which will be a one-stop shop for travel agents, where they'll find campaign information, downloadable

marketing materials and bookings platforms. We've also developed an amazing AI tool to help agents with their customer service. For example, they can log in and enter how many drinks their client might want on an average day and how many specialty meals they want to buy over the course of a week. It will then instantly tell them how much CelestyalPay credit they recommend buying.

Do you have any plans to further your expansion into the Middle East?

We're hoping to make the region attainable for everyone. We're offering a seven-night cruise starting at £489, including an overnight in Dubai where you can stay onboard the ship. That's a seven-night product with all of your food and entertainment included; you can't get two nights in a hotel in Dubai for that price.

We recently announced that we will also be putting *Celestyal Discovery* in the Arabian Gulf from December 2025 and it will do the three- and four-night itineraries, which is great as a stopover product for those flying east. Having two ships positioned there in the winter will be huge for us. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Celestyal netted two wins at the Wave Awards last month; the line has launched new itineraries in the Arabian Gulf; VP of business development Janet Parton; *Celestyal Journey* has undergone a major refurbishment



For more information,
visit celestyal.com

Tread like a local in the **Arabian Gulf**

You'd expect us to say it, but trust us, the places we visit on a **Celestyal** cruise are seriously something else. And now we've gone even further.

We're talking one of the most mind blowing, jaw dropping and legendary destinations in the world. Get ready for **Arabian adventures** that will blow your socks off. We know how to create the most sensorially stunning cruises that our guests can't get enough of, and now with our new **7-night Desert Days** and **3&4-night Iconic Arabia** itineraries, we're the go-to guides for this epic region as well.

Whether you're into soaking up history, absorbing different cultures, or you're all about stunning natural landscapes and pristine golden beaches, this is one not to miss.

Join us as we fire up the imagination and delve into the mystical magic of the **Arabian Gulf**.





If a long weekend or midweek break is on your horizon, **Celestyal Discovery** offers three and four-night '**Iconic Arabia**' cruises sailing round-trip from **Abu Dhabi**, starting in December 2025.

Should you wish to venture for longer, **Celestyal Journey** offers seven-night '**Desert Days**' cruises sailing round-trip from **Doha**.



7 Nights
Desert Days

Celestyal Journey

Itinerary

**Doha • Dubai • Sir Bani Yas Island
Abu Dhabi • Bahrain • Doha**

2025: Dec 6, 13, 20, 27

2026: Jan 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; Feb 7, 14, 21, 28;
Mar 7, 14; Nov 28; Dec 5, 12, 19, 26

2027: Jan 2, 09, 16, 23, 30; Feb 6, 13, 20, 27;
Mar 6, 13

Now from only **£469** pp



3 Nights
Iconic Arabia

Celestyal Discovery

Itinerary

**Abu Dhabi • Doha • Sir Bani Yas Island
Abu Dhabi**

2025: Dec 12, 19, 26

2026: Jan 2, 9, 16, 23, 30; Feb 6, 13, 20, 27;
Dec 11, 18, 25

2027: Jan 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; Feb 5, 12, 19, 26

Now from only **£249** pp



4 Nights
Iconic Arabia

Celestyal Discovery

Itinerary

**Abu Dhabi • Fujairah • Muscat
Khasab • Abu Dhabi**

2025: Dec 15, 22, 29

2026: Jan 5, 12, 19, 26; Feb 2, 9, 16, 23;
Mar 2; Dec 7, 14, 21, 28

2027: Jan 4, 11, 18, 25; Feb 1, 8, 15, 22; Mar 1

Now from only **£309** pp

A Celestyal cruise offers your customers more



**Iconic & Hidden
Gem Destinations**



**Time in Port
to Discover**



**Out of this
World Value**



**Home from Home
Hospitality**



**A 'Tread like a
Local' Approach**

Visit our **Trade Portal** and download our **Marketing Toolkit** today
trade.celestyal.com or email tradesupport@celestyal.com

All prices are per person, based on a double occupancy of the stateroom and are quoted in GBP. Offer is valid for new, individual bookings. It is not valid for groups and cannot be held as group block. Reduced rate space is capacity controlled and may be withdrawn at any time with, or without notice. Celestyal Cruises reserves the right to add, change or modify reduced rate conditions at any time, without notification. Port and service charges and any other surcharges are not commissionable even if indicated as included in the cruise rate. Celestyal's Deposit and Cancellation standard policies apply based on the booking/sailing date. Celestyal reserves the right to correct any incorrect information due to a human error, typographical error or technical error. Other restrictions may apply. In the event of any discrepancies between the rates stated herein and the rates displayed in the Reservation System, the rates provided by the Reservation System shall prevail and be deemed as the correct and binding rates for all purpose. Ports of call and their order may vary. The general terms and conditions of Celestyal apply.



AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

The winners of the Wave Awards 2024 have shared what it means to be among the very best in the cruise industry as well as their thoughts on the ceremony's glittering 10th anniversary

Dubbed the 'Oscars of the cruise industry', the 10th anniversary of the Wave Awards certainly lived up to the billing. Cruise industry executives, travel agents and content creators descended on The Dorchester on London's Park Lane on 11 November to celebrate the cream of the crop in cruising.

Welcome drinks sponsored by Regent Seven Seas Cruises kicked off proceedings before headline partner Fred. Olsen Cruise Line welcomed attendees to the gala dinner and award ceremony with a show-stopping performance from Pop Up Global, the line's award-winning onboard entertainment provider.

During the ceremony, hosted by comedian and television presenter Sue Perkins, awards and prizes were handed out while scintillating performances from electric violinist Lizzie Ball and musical theatre star Tosh Wanogho-Maud, courtesy of Cunard, wowed the audience.

This year's awards included four brand new categories, including Best For Accessibility (Onshore and Offshore), celebrating cruise lines that cater for travellers of all mobility needs, whether it be through accessible corridors and boarding processes to specially designed cabins and accessible shoreside excursions.

Best Consortia, meanwhile, was dedicated to companies that support and equip independent agents with the latest tools and knowledge to make more cruise sales, while Best Homeworking Network highlighted those that support and champion remote-working agents.



Lastly, Best Trade Sales Team was open to both cruise lines and agencies and was awarded to the trade division that went above and beyond to ensure clients were constantly supported with marketing materials, immersive training sessions and sales tips.

Over the course of the night, *Cruise Trade News* caught up with the winners to find out what their wins meant to them.

“We are one team and we are on a mission to bring the best cruise holidays to the world



**Royal Caribbean International senior manager
Ruth Gardiner**

“We’re absolutely blown away. We weren’t expecting to win the Grand Prix; it’s the icing on the cake. It’s an amazing accolade for the brand and the whole team, we wouldn’t have done it without the amazing people who created these ships. We are one team and we are on a mission to bring the best cruise holidays to the world.”

WINNER of the Grand Prix Award, Best for Accessibility, Best for Accommodation Design and Best Family Cruise Line

The Cruise Room co-founder Robbie O’Grady

“It’s amazing, we’re so pleased and it’ll take a little while to sink in. It’s an exciting time for us and an exciting time for the cruise industry. We’re riding that wave, and people have been so supportive of us. It’s our first Wave Awards so we’ve set the bar high. The venue is amazing, the food is great and the entertainment is outstanding.”

WINNER of Best Independent/Solo Agent

**Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales
Geoff Ridgeon**

“It feels amazing to pick up this award, and what an amazing night. It’s great to spend it with all these fantastic people. We’re over the moon, and I feel so blessed to stand up there with our team, but it’s not about us – it’s about the people back in Ipswich building the itineraries, it’s about the crew looking after our guests and to everyone who ensures that what we offer is so different.

We’ve embraced the challenges and partnered with trade to not only achieve a record year of sales, but our highest guest satisfaction rate too.

We’re setting ourselves some hefty goals for next year and we’re going to need the trade to get behind that.”

WINNER of Favourite Specialist Cruise Line

**Princess Cruises sales director UK and Europe
Hayley Moore**

“For me the trade is the most important part of Princess Cruises, so thank you so much. We are so proud to have been chosen for this amazing award. Personally, I love the Wave Awards. I have always had a big affiliation with cruise and this event embodies what it means to be a part of the sector.”

WINNER of Best Trade Sales Team

**The Advantage Travel Partnership senior
commercial manager, cruise, Jonny Peat**

“Around a third of our leisure business can be attributed to the cruise sector, and we’re working as hard as possible so that our members put cruise at the centre of their clients’ holiday choice. The marketing we put out to members, whether it’s magazines or emails, it’s all about driving cruise business. We just have to pinch ourselves every time we come here.”

WINNER of Best Consortia

AE Expeditions director of sales EMEA

Andrew Turner

“It’s really exciting, we’ve done such great work in the last year to ensure we are purpose-driven when it comes to sustainability. Our ships are purpose-built, we know where our rubbish goes and we know where our food comes from.

“We are doing as much as we can in this space. Everyone at HQ back in Sydney has done so much great work banging the drum after we became a B Corp. We encourage more travel companies to get their certification.”

WINNER of Best Sustainability Initiative

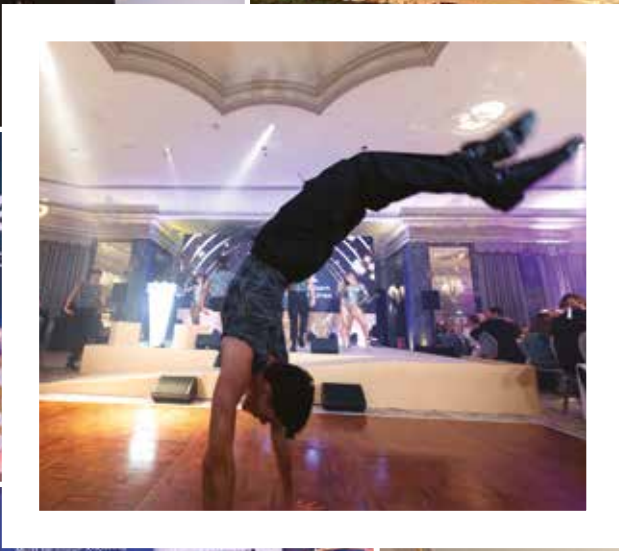


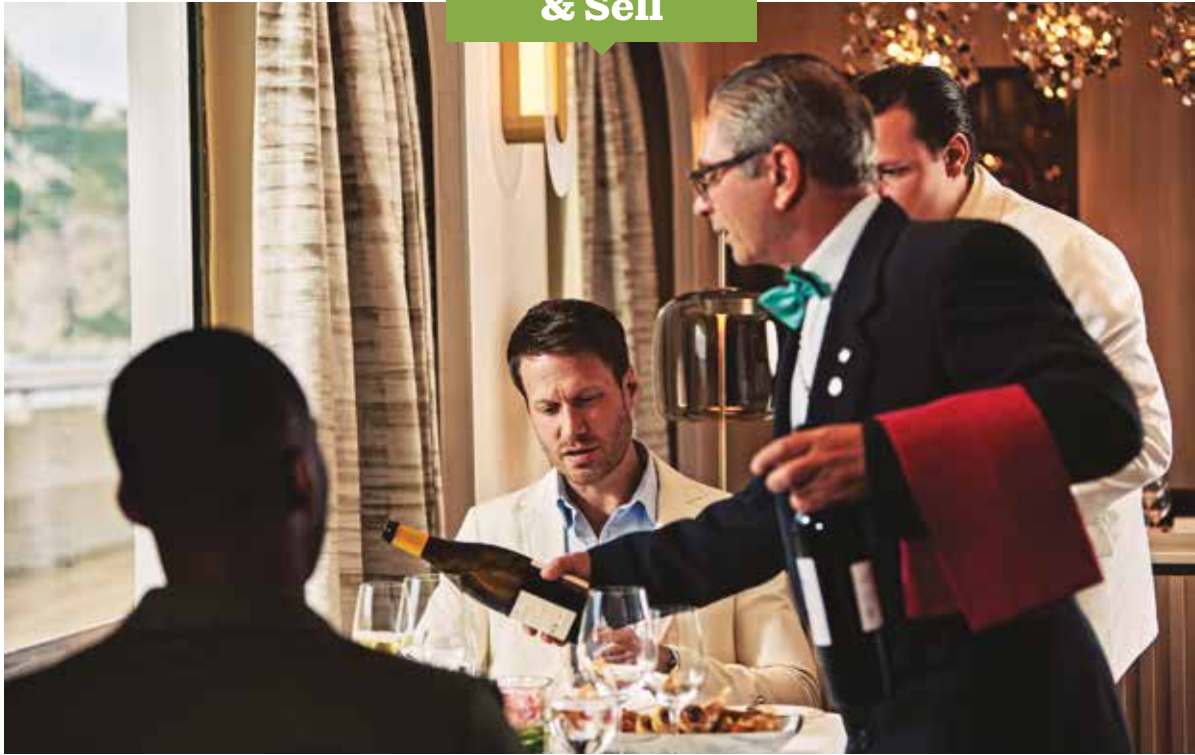
Scan the QR code to
see the full list of this
year’s winners











Crystal Cruises

Fresh from its acquisition by luxury travel brand Abercrombie & Kent, the cruise line has its sights set on exciting expansion plans

IN THE KNOW

When it was announced in June 2022 that Abercrombie & Kent was acquiring Crystal Cruises, along with its two ships, *Crystal Serenity* and *Crystal Symphony*, it was met with relief by many in the industry. The line, which had been forced to suspend operations in January that year after parent company Genting Hong Kong had filed a winding up order, would resume sailing the following year after a complete refresh to its fleet.

The partnership with Abercrombie & Kent is also good news for guests, with the luxury travel company's collection of worldwide onshore excursions and tours now included in Crystal's guest offering. As a result, Crystal is currently up 83 per cent year-on-year and is already 60 per cent sold for 2025.

The onboard experience is further heightened by the fact that Crystal's ships are 50 per cent larger than other lines in the luxury cruise sector, while the line also proudly states that it offers



more than 35 entertainment options per sailing. This ranges from Broadway-style shows and live musicians to magicians, comedians and Ted Talk-style lectures.

THE FLEET

Crystal currently operates two luxury ships, both of which were extensively refurbished in 2023. Last month the line announced the addition of a further three new ocean vessels, which are set

to be unveiled in 2028, 2030 and 2032 respectively. The new ships will feature all-suite accommodations with private verandas, as well as a single occupancy category with veranda designed for the growing cohort of solo travellers.

The 606-guest *Crystal Symphony* and the 740-guest *Crystal Serenity* offer nearly one staff member per guest and boast a variety of dining options including Umi Uma, the only Nobu at sea, and Beefbar by Riccardo Giraudi. Guests can also up their golf game on the designated putting green or practise their swing at the golf driving nets. A PGA golf pro is onboard to offer classes on most sailings.

WHO'S WHO?

Following the departure of vice president of sales UK & EMEA Andrew Magowan in May this year, SVP trade sales Matias Lira now heads up the UK-based team. He is supported by Stephen Joyner, who was



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT
Crystal is renowned for outstanding service and cuisine; the ships' suites offer pure luxury with a perfect view; relax on *Crystal Serenity's* spacious pool deck; *Crystal Symphony* has undergone a major refurbishment

“Crystal has more than 35 entertainment options per sailing

promoted to senior sales manager, UK & Ireland having joined the line from A-Rosa River Cruises in January.

Two regional sales managers – Danny Giles for the north and Ryan Bishop for the south – make up the on-the-road team, while three inside sales roles have been created to ensure the trade are supported at all times.

ON THE HORIZON

Crystal recently unveiled a revamped agent hub, allowing travel partners

to search and book online through a dedicated portal, create their own digital flyers and brochures and email specific itineraries to clients. Agents will also be able to log on and keep up to date with the latest trade rates ahead of the upcoming wave season.

Additionally, the line also announced an exclusive collaboration with Monte-Carlo Société des Bains de Mer (SBM), a leader in the world of entertainment, hospitality and gaming, to host the first and only Casino de Monte-Carlo at sea. The new experience will officially launch on *Crystal Serenity* on 18 December, offering guests a variety of gaming options at sea, including slot machines, Blackjack, American Roulette and Ultimate Texas Hold'em.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Stephen Joyner reveals what separates Crystal from other ocean cruise lines

What would you say Crystal is known for?

We're renowned for outstanding service and cuisine, with the only Beefbar and Nobu at sea. Add to this one of the best staff-to-guest ratios in the industry, butler service in every guestroom category, Broadway-standard entertainment and the seriously indulgent Aurōra Spa, and you get a really special guest experience.

What advice would you give to agents looking to sell Crystal?

When attracting a new-to-brand customer, don't focus on just the price but factor in the quality Crystal offers. Price is what you pay, value is what you get. It's the same difference when someone is torn between two excellent hotel brands. They know that the premium they pay at one versus the other is because the quality and reputation are at another level.

SELLING TIPS

1 Being part of the Abercrombie & Kent brand means guests sailing with Crystal can enjoy the same choice of excursions available to the company's luxury customers. Think luxury African safaris and private jet holidays.

2 Crystal's ships offer more than 35 entertainment options during a standard cruise, from Broadway-style shows and live musicians to magicians, comedians and lectures, plus fitness, golf and tennis facilities.

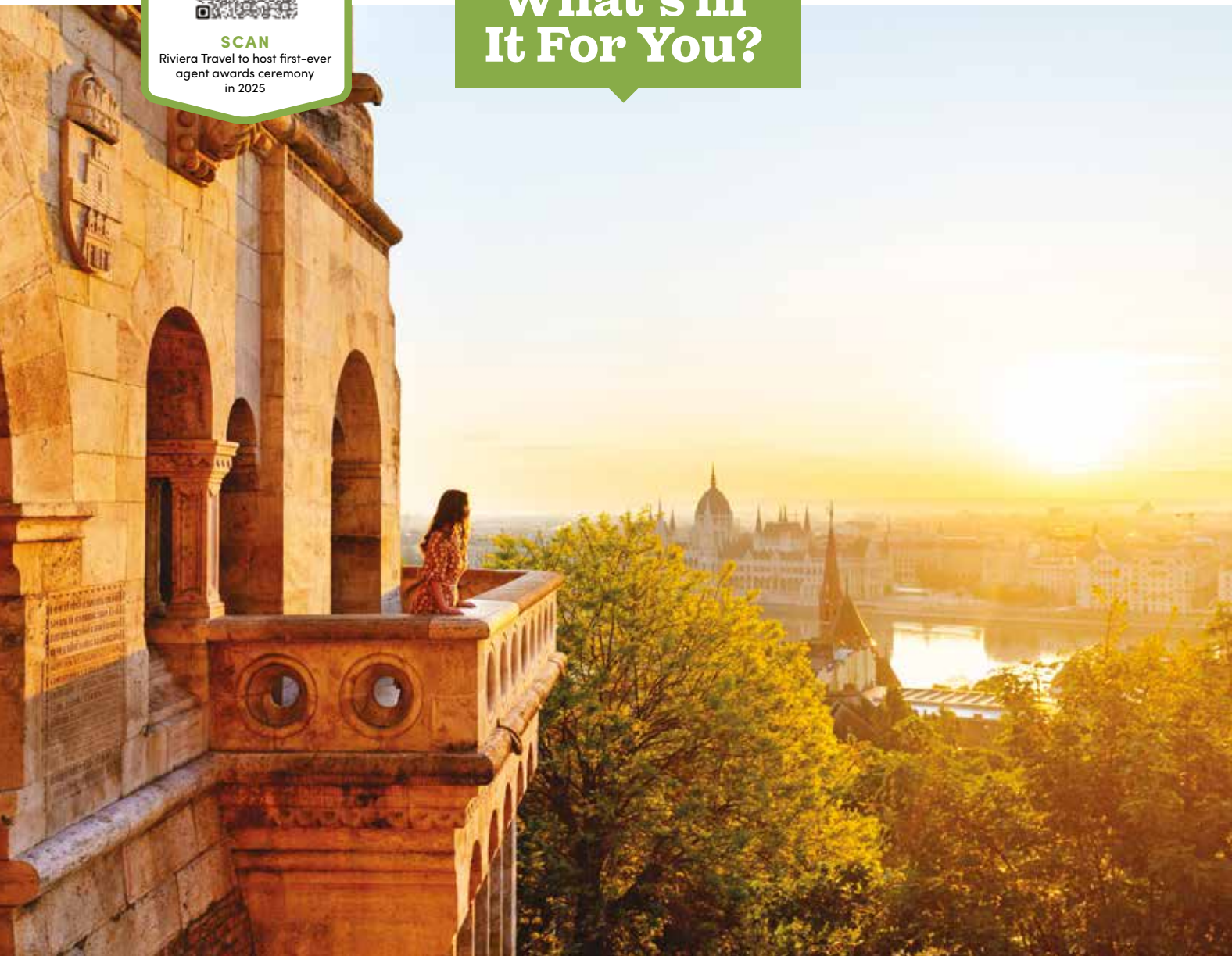
3 The line is currently seeing huge demand for the Mediterranean, northern Europe and Baltic from UK guests, while interest is also ramping up for its 2025/26 Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia itineraries.



SCAN
Riviera Travel to host first-ever
agent awards ceremony
in 2025

INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
ITINERARIES

What's in It For You?



CLIA BOOSTS BENEFITS

CLIA has announced plans to increase its benefits package for members and refresh its calendar of events in 2025.

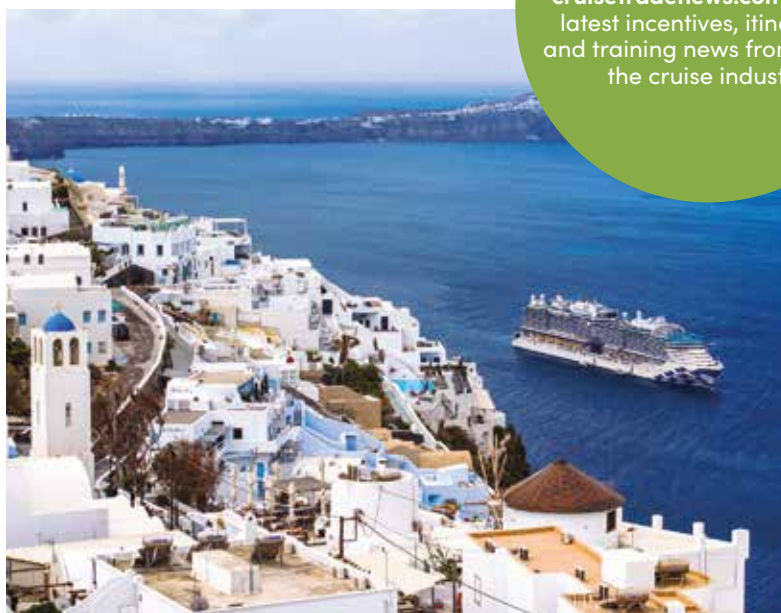
Following what it described as a "record" year in 2024, CLIA said it will refresh its events line-up to meet the demands of the travel agent community and reflect the ongoing development of the wider cruise industry.

The Expedition Champion and the River Champion hybrid learning programmes, new for autumn 2024, will get another outing in the second half of 2025 with a further intake of travel agent learners.

Meanwhile, a new full day event – The Art of Selling Cruises – scheduled for the summer, will provide an industry-wide day of support to agents who wish to grow their cruise sales.

Visit

cruisetradenews.com for the latest incentives, itineraries and training news from across the cruise industry



Regent reveals co-branding solution

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has launched a new co-branding solution for its travel agent partners.

The new initiative, named Regent Connect, comes as the line looks to bolster its ties with the trade following the launch of its agent training programme earlier this year.

The system will help boost agents' marketing and sales efforts while supporting client engagement throughout the sales process.

"Regent Elevate was a game changer for our travel partners, and we are thrilled to expand the opportunities in the market with Regent Connect," said Paul Beale, vice president sales UK for Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

PRINCESS RELAUNCHES TRAINING PLATFORM

Princess Cruises has relaunched its agent training platform, OneSource.com, in a bid to provide agents with tools and resources to bolster their sales.

The revamped platform features an upgraded customer service hub, where agents can access a library of FAQs and guides, reducing the need to contact Princess Cruises' customer service team via phone or live chat.

There will also be an expanded training series available, which includes updated guides on Princess' booking systems, as well as revamped destination content and marketing toolkits.

A new webinar page provides access to eight training videos, in addition to links to the Princess Cruises Sales YouTube channel, which features 29 new training guides.

APEX CELEBRATION

Celebrity Cruises hosted nine agents onboard *Celebrity Apex* after the ship concluded its record-breaking first homeport season from Southampton.

Agents in attendance won their places following the cruise line's partnership with CLIA during cruise week in September.

The winners and their guests took part in behind-the-scenes tours, backstage meet and greets with

theatre cast and performers and sampled Japanese cuisine at sushi restaurant Raw on 5.

Agents included Carmel Troy and Tracey Cowhey from TUI, Jaclyn Wilson from Just Travel Group, Jo McPherson from Hays Travel, Lyn Cooper from Prestige Travel, Carly Cockburn from Blue Bay Travel, Kenton Cockburn from Travel Bag and Caroline Dillon and Fiona Ollerhead from Inteletravel.





CRUISE CHALLENGE

PRESENTED BY
CRUISE
Trade News



Boost your knowledge of the latest
ship launches, itineraries and travel
trends by signing up to our 2024
Cruise Challenge roadshow



KEY EARLY 2025 DATES

Liverpool	March 13th	Southampton ..	May 21st
Birmingham	April 23rd	Leeds	June 12th
Edinburgh	May 7th	Basildon	June 25th
Manchester	July 9th		

"I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS EVENT TO ALL AGENTS
WHETHER YOU ARE NEW TO CRUISE OR VERY MUCH
ESTABLISHED AS THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW TO LEARN
& WHAT BETTER WAY THAN AT A FUN NIGHT OUT. I'M ALREADY
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2025 EVENT IN SCOTLAND."

Muriel Morgan
Travel agent at Travel Counsellors



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or visit cruisetradenews.com for more information

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On the
road with...

Amanda Docherty

Riviera Travel's national account manager for homeworkers shares the importance of her unique role and how the river cruise line hopes to stand out from the crowd in 2025

How does being a BDM for homeworkers differ to a traditional, location-based BDM?

Overall, the role has the same principles that any BDM prides themselves on: being easily accessible and recognising agents for their contribution. For me, the main differences are around flexibility in terms of being available outside of traditional retail working hours and putting in place training options to suit agents over weekends and evenings.

How important are UK agents to the success of Riviera Travel in 2024 and heading into 2025?

Agents are absolutely vital to our success, and we never take their support for granted. We have seen fantastic sales growth from our agent partners this year and have lots of exciting plans and initiatives to support further growth in 2025. We are constantly looking at new ways of working to support our agent partners, to give them the tools



and resources they need. We also pride ourselves on being open to feedback, to learn and evolve.

How are you supporting the homeworking community?

We strive to reach and support as many agents as possible. To that end, we have face-to-face meetings and webinars, which have received excellent feedback.

We are also very active in supporting regional roadshows and events, including *Cruise Trade News*' fantastic Cruise Challenge events.

What key points should agents focus on when selling Riviera?

Value is a priority – so much is included on our river cruise holidays. We also stand out

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Riviera Radiance is set to launch in 2025; Amanda Docherty joined Riviera Travel in April

from the crowd with our range of regional flying options, with 17 different UK airports alongside no-fly options, too. Our Superior Drinks Package, introduced for 2024/25 sailings, has gone down a treat so far and we will improve this further for 2026 with our new All Inclusive drinks package. Another key focus is talking about our new additions to the fleet. We have two ships – *Riviera Radiance* and *Riviera Rose* – joining us in 2025, followed by *Riviera Resplendence* which is set to launch in 2026.

You've been at Riviera now for around eight months – what are your goals for next year?

It's certainly been an eye-opening few months in terms of understanding the wide range of options available in what is a growing sector of the cruise industry. Looking forward, I will continue to network and build relationships with the homeworking community and do everything I can to educate agents on our award-winning product. It's important that we give our agent partners the confidence to sell river cruise. ●



Agents are absolutely vital to our success, and we never take their support for granted



WIN

Any Riviera booking made each week will go into a draw to win a £200 M&S Voucher.

Closes 15 December and bookings must be registered on the Riviera Travel Agents Facebook page



HAT-TRICK HEROES

There's no beating a triple triumph at an awards ceremony. For Riviera Travel, however, its trio of wins at the Waves is just the beginning, writes **Will Payne**

When you scroll through the list of iconic hat-tricks over the years, a few spring to mind.

Helen Mirren's triple Bafta haul from 1991-1993, Wayne Rooney's three goals on his UEFA Champions League debut and Usain Bolt's three-time 100m Olympic glory, to name a few. With Riviera Travel securing the triple crown during the 2024 Wave Awards, it's time to add another to the list.

The escorted touring and river cruise specialist took home Best for Solo Travellers, Best River Cruise Line and Best Escorted and Specialist Tour Operator, making it one of the most successful lines on the night.

That wasn't all – the line also sponsored one of the most engaging features of the event, a picture booth

equipped with props so attendees could leave the evening with a cherished souvenir. In the wake of these triumphs, Riviera is refusing to rest on its laurels and has teed up a tantalising selection of new initiatives, training opportunities and giveaways for agents in 2025.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

In October Riviera launched a new e-learning platform to help its travel agent partners improve their brand knowledge. Riviera Explorer, which represents the company's most significant investment to date in digital agent support, is designed for experienced sellers and those new to selling the brand's product.

The launch of the new platform comes as the line looks to bolster agents' brand knowledge ahead of the wave period,

while helping them secure higher commissions by putting customers on more unforgettable holidays.

It features the latest news and bite-sized training modules that highlight the firm's itineraries and selling points across its river and escorted tour products. Agents can complete the training programme in four to five hours to become a certified Riviera Expert.

Those who finish each module by 31 December 2024 will be in with the





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Riviera Travel's William Wordsworth; the Riviera team was out in force to collect the brand's triple-haul at the Wave Awards 2024; the company sponsored a photobooth at the ceremony to help attendees capture lasting memories; a Deluxe Balcony Suite

Riviera Travel's 2025 line-up of themed cruises

An eight-day Music, Arts & Craft of Switzerland and the Rhine cruise aboard *Geoffrey Chaucer*, from Basel to Bonn via Stanserhorn and Lucerne, Breisach, Strasbourg, Speyer, Rüdesheim, Rhine Gorge and Koblenz, departs 28 August 2025, from £2,399pp.

An eight-day Gastronomy on the Seine cruise aboard *Jane Austen*, from Conflans to Auvers-sur-Oise via Les Andelys, Rouen, Bayeux and Arramanches, Honfleur and Giverny, departs 1 August 2025, from £2,499pp.

An eight-day Gardens and Natural Beauty of the Rhine cruise aboard *Emily Bronte*, from Cologne to Rhine Gorge and Bonn via Koblenz, Boppard, Heidelberg Castle, Strasbourg and Rüdesheim, departs 4 May 2026, from £2,349pp.



achievements". The event will take place in 2025 and recognise the success of the operator's retail, homeworkers and OTA trade partners across categories such as Best Newcomer, Best Cruise Agent, Best Homeworker, and Best Long-Haul and European Tour trade partner.

Winners will be chosen by the senior Riviera trade team, based on performances and results in 2024. An awards ceremony will take place at The Lookout in London on 10 April.

Billing says agents "are the lifeblood of what we do", going "above and beyond" to promote the line's product and boost awareness of the brand. "Their tireless work has been crucial to the growth of the business and now it's our time to give back and show how much we appreciate their support," she adds.

EXPLORING EUROPE

If you have customers keen on spending an extended holiday on the continent next summer, recommend Riviera's Burgundy, the River Rhône and Provence River Cruise with Lake Geneva and Golden Pass Extension cruise.

The 11-day exploration features an eight-night river cruise from Avignon to Alphonse via Arles, as well as a three-night extension featuring a trip to Annecy, Chillon Castle, Lausanne, Glacier 3000 and the Golden Pass.

However your clients intend to travel in 2025, you'll be on to a winner if you recommend a Riviera Travel holiday. ●

chance of winning a space on a Sri Lanka fam trip departing in 2025 or a Blue Danube Cruise trip on *Riviera Radiance*.

Vicky Billing, head of trade and partnerships at Riviera, says: "I am a believer in giving our trade partners all they need to immerse themselves in Riviera, and this tool does just that. It has been designed to put the agent in control of how they learn, at a pace that suits them. Riviera Explorer will set the benchmark in agent training and will grow and evolve, offering exciting new opportunities as we move forward.

"Over 1,000 active agents have so far taken the modules, with 50 per cent of them never having sold a Riviera holiday before. We have had great feedback from the trade and our agents are loving the certification side and being recognised as a Riviera expert."

ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

If that wasn't enough, the company has launched the Riviera Travel Agents Awards to celebrate agents' "talent and



For more information, visit
rivieratravel.co.uk

SHIP OF THE MONTH

RESILIENT LADY

Virgin Voyages hit the water with a splash in 2020 with the launch of *Scarlet Lady*. The line has since debuted three ships in as many years, with its latest vessel, *Resilient Lady*, turning heads when it launched last summer. In its inaugural season, *Resilient* sailed two seven-night itineraries around the Greek Isles and Adriatic Sea from Athens. Over the summer it repositioned to Portsmouth to offer a series of European itineraries. In 2025, it will head westbound to the US to sail a season of Caribbean cruises, taking in ports such as San Juan, Bridgetown and Basseterre on a mixture of seven- to 14-night sailings. Onboard, guests will find a range of amenities, including new shows in the multi-form theatre, more than 20 dining options and even a running track.

Fast facts

2,762
passengers

1,404
cabins and suites

1,150
crew

20+
eateries



1 Cabins

Guests are invited to awaken their inner rock stars on a *Resilient Lady* sailing. As well as standard cabins, two Massive Suites are on offer, which come complete with a private music room stocked with guitars, an amplifier and a vinyl turntable. Throwing the TV out the window is not encouraged.



2 Dining

Culinary options are aplenty onboard, with more than 20 included in the cruise fare. A stand-out is Razzle Dazzle, named after the camouflage pattern on warships in WWI and WWII, offering twists on vegetarian dishes which can be made “naughty” with meat and alcohol add-ons.



3 Entertainment

Unique to *Resilient Lady* from its sister ships is its entertainment offering. New shows include Persephone in The Red Room, which transforms into three configurations: a traditional Proscenium-arched stage, an alley stage for fashion shows and a dance floor.



4 Wellness

After hedonistic nights – and days – of fun and exploration, guests can head to the ship's wellness area for a reviving treatment. A wellbeing pool sits next to one of the ship's gyms which has a calisthenics area, two hot tubs and a fully equipped fitness room.



5 Richard's Rooftop

A chic outdoor lounge marked by iridescent design, two hot tubs, plush daybeds and a private bar makes Richard's Rooftop the perfect spot for an afternoon cocktail. Reserved for the ship's suite guests, this area is known for its daily Moët happy hours.



6 The Manor

Decked out in 70s stylings, the nightclub is modelled on Virgin Group founder Richard Branson's first music studio. The entrance is the perfect spot for an Instagram snap, with mirrored floors, walls and ceilings creating the illusion of a starry night at sea.



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STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

From collaborations with celebrity chefs to 'specialty dining', cruise lines are increasingly reinventing their restaurants in an attempt to appeal to today's discerning travellers.

Jack Carter asks whether the industry is hitting the sweet spot for guests



As waves creep up the Port Isaac harbour toward the entrance of the restaurant, the sound of sea bass searing over a scorching hot stove indicates that another plate of food will soon be on its way. The waitress approaches to clear our plates so I quickly tear off a piece of tiger bread and use it to mop up the remaining coriander oil from my cured bream ceviche, the third instalment of an eight-course tasting menu prepared by award-winning seafood chef Nathan Outlaw.

The bass arrives moments later, resting on a romesco sauce made from sunflower and pumpkin seeds. Hot on its tail is a plate of scallops covered in an unctuous salsa verde butter, before Outlaw emerges from the kitchen – his six-foot-something frame just about fitting beneath the beams of this 15th-century fisherman’s cottage – carrying four large shanks of grilled turbot on a platter. “What a treat this is,” I think as I search for the dessert menu.

I’m here at Outlaw’s Fish Kitchen, a small, convivial seafood restaurant on Cornwall’s north coast, which in 2021 netted the chef

his third Michelin star. Soon, this experience will be available to cruise-goers, with Outlaw becoming the latest celebrity chef to partner with Cunard for a series of intimate onboard dining experiences ahead of 2025’s summer season.

“I’ve admired Nathan Outlaw’s skill and commitment to seasonal, simply prepared dishes for many years,” says Gareth Bowen, head of culinary development at Cunard. “Achieving that level of simplicity without sacrificing depth of flavour is a real art. We want our guests to experience the same quality they would at Nathan’s restaurants, which is why we’re excited to host his Fish Kitchen aboard *Queen Victoria* in the Mediterranean next summer.”

STAR TREATMENT

Cruise lines partnering with celebrity chefs is nothing new. Many agents will remember when Jamie Oliver helped Royal Caribbean launch its Quantum class series in 2013 by unveiling the first Jamie’s Italian at sea. Since then, TV chef James Martin has overseen a successful cookery school concept with P&O Cruises, while celebrated French chef Arnaud Lallement has brought his three Michelin-star cooking to Disney Cruise Line. We’ve even seen

CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP LEFT Guests expect exquisite desserts; Tom Kerridge is one of Uniworld’s celebrity chefs; Raymond Blanc OBE is a major draw for cruise-goers; Virgin Voyages’ Gunbae Korean BBQ is perfect for guests wanting a dining experience that’s out of the ordinary



We invite guests to join the chefs on a tour of the local markets where they can talk about the produce and be themselves

Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, the brainchild behind the world-famous Nobu restaurant brand, open sushi bars on two Crystal Cruises ships.

The trend isn't exclusive to the ocean sector either, with luxury river line Uniworld Boutique River Cruises recently renewing its partnerships with Tom Kerridge, Monica Galetti and Raymond Blanc OBE. They'll be embarking on a series of celebrity-led cruises next spring. According to the line's managing director, Chris Townson, securing household names from the world of mainstream TV has opened river cruising to a whole new audience.

"We often see more first-time cruise-goers on these itineraries," Townson says. "A lot of the guests joining a cruise with Tom, Monica or Raymond probably wouldn't have booked a river cruise without their name being attached to it."

Dining with Michelin star chefs whose restaurant waiting lists could stretch down one side of the Danube is an irresistible prospect to food-loving travellers. However, the intimate nature of river cruising means Uniworld guests get to forge genuine connections with these superstar chefs. "It's just a lovely environment," Townson explains. "When James Martin worked with P&O Cruises, he would have been in a theatre and there wouldn't have been the same connection."



"With us, I think he enjoys that pure connection with guests. We also invite guests to join the chefs on a tour of the local markets where they can talk about the local produce and they can be themselves without having to put on a show."

Scotland-based travel agent Linda Hill Miller praises lines for attracting a new market to the industry by evolving their dining offering, saying more of her clients are booking cruises because they offer quality food experiences. "That's why Virgin Voyages has done very well in the cruise market because it's offering something different. Explora Journeys is trying to do the same by appealing to the typical Ritz-Carlton customer who has high disposable income and thinks cruising is for old people."

SUBSTANCE OVER STYLE

There's no denying that food is an increasingly influential factor when it comes to deciding where to travel next. According to a 2023 study from Eurostar of 2,000 travellers, six out of ten holidaymakers go abroad just for the food, with 36 per cent of respondents feeling that eating in local, independent restaurants provides the most "authentic" experience of a region's cuisine.

Is it any wonder, then, why cruise-goers are increasingly put off by identikit restaurants and buffet stations? "Our guests expect the highest quality of ingredients and menus and to deliver these, we spend a lot of time and focus on the





quality and precision of each dish,” says Bowen.

Outlaw has also noticed a shift in travellers’ dining habits, saying they are less concerned about style and more focused on substance. “Restaurants on land are starting to be more relaxed but people expect quality,” he says. “Fine dining used to cover up a lot of sins, whereas now people are interested in things like where the ingredients come from. The style of dining we do is very clear and honest and there’s nothing to hide behind.”

As cruise-goers become more discerning over what they’re eating, lines are under pressure to ensure their restaurants can compete with the land-based market. This is particularly true for lines such as Uniworld that combine a land touring element with a cruise, where guests can make immediate comparisons between on and offshore restaurants.

Townson explains: “On our India river cruises, guests are staying in some of the finest hotels in the world which offer outstanding food and we have to replicate that on our ships. If you’re going to India, you need to serve the best Indian food – that’s a basic requirement. We have to deliver that level consistently otherwise the guests won’t come back.”

“Cruise lines have upped their game because they’ve had to,” adds Hill Miller. “Guests are a lot more sophisticated so traditional ships with a main restaurant and a buffet option aren’t enough for people now, they want alternatives.” Hill Miller says Oceania and Virgin Voyages are great options for foodie clients, adding that she’s

“

Guests are a lot more sophisticated so traditional ships with a main restaurant and buffet option aren’t enough now

also impressed by what’s on offer in the river sector. “The quality of food from lines like Scenic is incredible, which is surprising because it’s a much harder product to do different things with.”

Sheffield-based agent Craig Goodridge agrees that guests want a greater choice of restaurants while onboard, saying his clients like to be able to combine fine dining with more casual food experiences. “The most common feedback I get from my clients is they like to mix it up,” he says. “They like to dress up some days and have a nice fillet steak with wine, but they don’t want to be tied down to anything too formal after a full day of excursions.”

TOP TABLES

As onboard restaurants become more refined, an alluring – albeit slightly ambiguous – term has emerged: ‘specialty dining’. Often situated in smaller venues with bespoke menus offering higher quality of food than what guests can expect in the main restaurant, specialty dining is reserved for the extra-special foodie moments craved by today’s travellers.

However, while cruise lines would argue that guests should expect to pay a premium for dishes that cost more to prepare, agents like Hill Miller

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Nathan Outlaw is renowned for using high-quality, freshly caught fish; guests on *Queen Victoria* will be able to enjoy fine dining at Outlaw’s Fish Kitchen

believe specialty dining should be included in the standard sea fare, especially on cruises that are marketed as an all-inclusive experience.

She explains: "If you're selling a cruise as an all-inclusive product, then sell it as an all-inclusive product. On some ships you still have to pay for the high-end restaurant and I think that's a disgrace. I went on Silversea's *Silver Ray* last year and the food was incredible. I was blown away by the quality of every restaurant we ate in, but we didn't pay for the exclusive one because we didn't need to."

It's not just the extra cost that risks alienating some guests. Sometimes cruise lines can push the envelope a little too far when it comes to cuisine. Hill Miller recalls when she was invited by Oceania to sample a 12-course tasting menu as part of a new culinary experience, in which she only enjoyed two courses while her husband – a vegetarian – was unable to eat anything on the menu. "There's a fine line when it comes to delivering what consumers are looking for," she says.

There's no doubt that the restaurant experience on cruise ships has come a long way from set dining times and death-by-buffet. It's been six years since Goodridge's first cruise, and he describes the food back then as being "really beige". "It was all chicken nuggets and pizzas," he says. "I've been back on that same cruise line since and it's far superior now."

However, while partnerships with world-leading chefs like Nathan Outlaw will undoubtedly elevate cruise lines' dining offerings, they shouldn't lose sight of what some guests value most: simplicity. Goodridge adds: "Cunard has an ice cream machine in the buffet area and guests still absolutely love it." 🍷



Meet the chef

Cruise Trade News sits down with British seafood star Nathan Outlaw to learn more about his partnership with Cunard

Are you excited to implement your cooking ethos on Cunard's ships?

As guests get a chance to see different destinations, I'll have a chance to visit different markets to source ingredients from. For me it's all about the produce. That dictates what I'm going to be putting on the plate, so it's a big advantage for me because I get to develop new ideas as we travel around the Mediterranean, which in turn should make the experience for guests quite unique.

Are there any regions you're particularly eager to source ingredients from?

I have high expectations for regions like Barcelona and Italy, but it's places like Croatia and Istanbul where I've not been to that excite me most. You start accessing spices from the Middle East and Africa which have very vibrant flavours and I find that really interesting. Hopefully we'll discover some new ingredients along the way.

Are there any cruise destinations on your bucket list?

I'd love to go to the fjords. The peacefulness and the nature really appeal to me, as well as the chance to see the whales – that's high on my bucket list. Being a chef, you don't really get much time away from the kitchen so I'm mainly looking to relax, but I like breaking it up with visits to a few port cities.





SCAN

Carnival's Iain Baillie: "The key to more bookings lies in destination immersion"

Andrea Stafford

As AmaWaterways' trade business hits new heights, the line's director of sales UK and Europe tells **Will Payne** how she intends to harness this momentum in 2025

It's no surprise Andrea Stafford is beaming with excitement as we sit down to discuss her first year as director of sales UK and Europe for AmaWaterways. The luxury river cruise line's agent distribution has so far grown by 21 per cent in 2024, with sales coming in from more individual UK agencies than at any time in its history. Meanwhile, overall sales through both new and existing travel partners have risen by more than 65 per cent in the same period.

"It's been brilliant," Stafford says. "From the top down, everyone is so engaged. It really is a family atmosphere and I'm absolutely loving it. And it's fair to say the river sector is having its moment in the sun this year in terms of growth."

Stafford is further buoyed by the number of new agents who have reached out to her, eager to sell the brand's products across Europe, Egypt, Vietnam, Cambodia and Colombia. "Agents that I haven't spoken to in a while are now getting in touch and are keen to work with us, which is really great to see. I can't see it slowing down either."

PILLARS TO SUCCESS

Stafford has implemented a three-pronged approach to boost the line's trade portfolio. The first is ensuring that she has an experienced trade sales team who are knowledgeable, approachable and passionate about luxury river cruising.

"I've got four brilliant women in my team who are incredibly experienced and excellent at their jobs. They all have a really engaging way about them, which is exactly what you need when you're working with agents."



Agents have been impressed by the way we collaborate as a team and with our clients



The second approach is working with agents who have the right consumer demographic for Ama's product. "River can be a little bit of a challenging sector, but we've managed to translate the benefits of waterway cruising by bringing it to life with our agents and their client databases," she continues.

The third revolves around engaging with consortia and agency groups to understand which of their agents are best placed to sell AmaWaterways. "That's led to some good discussions which in turn have forged true partnerships. Agents have been impressed by the way we collaborate as a team and with our clients. I often get emails saying, 'I've been working with a member of your team and they've really helped us grow our business'. What more could I ask for?"

LOOKING AHEAD

Next year, AmaWaterways will welcome six ships to its fleet, which Stafford hopes will give agents even more opportunity to engage with the river cruise line. The brand also joined travel trade training organisation Tipto earlier this year to provide its partners with more in-depth educational opportunities.

What my career has taught me

Champion others

Encourage rising stars and new talent and help them on their journey to be their best self. Think of it as payback for the support you have received along the way.

Don't stand still

You shouldn't be afraid to experience different sectors of the travel industry. Trying new things and gaining more experience will broaden your future opportunities.

Be authentic

If you're your authentic self, not only will people respect you for it, but it will also help you form bonds and deep connections. Friends and colleagues you meet early in your career will most likely prove useful contacts as you both progress.

"Agents are key to our success. We've already done four fam trips this year and we have three coming up, one of them in Egypt, which is really exciting," she continues. "We'll also be at the CLIA Riverview conference in March and we will be launching our 'Sell Five, Sail Free' incentive for agents, offering opportunities to win cruises monthly. We also have great agent rates for the trade to get onboard."

A significant part of AmaWaterways' Asia business comes from the UK, which is what inspired the line to launch *AmaKaia* on the Mekong in the summer of 2026.

"The Mekong is a very well-sold product for us and our owners saw an opportunity to nurture our success in that part of the world by adding a new ship. A large percentage of our Mekong business comes from the UK, because it really captures the imagination of agents," Stafford says. "We often hear from agents that when customers come looking for a

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Andrea Stafford; the line's core product of European sailings continue to perform well; overall sales rose by more than 65 per cent in 2024

land-based holiday in Asia, they ask if they have ever considered seeing that part of the world on a river with AmaWaterways – and most of the time, they secure the booking."

LONG-HAUL FOCUS

Stafford admits that although the line's core product of European sailings continues to perform well, consumer appetite for long-haul itineraries to destinations like Egypt, Colombia and Cambodia is increasing.

"Next year we will be getting the trade excited about long-haul and placing an additional focus on that section of the market," she adds. "I think the demand for long-haul and more immersive itineraries will continue into next year, as people want to see different destinations and have different experiences."

Prices, meanwhile, continue to hold up well, Stafford says. "We've grown our business year on year and, prior to the pandemic, the average selling price for river held well.

"Then Covid arrived, and everyone was coming back into the market and more offers were rolled out. I think that will continue to a degree but, generally, we see the price holding well, which also runs true with our exotic programme." ●



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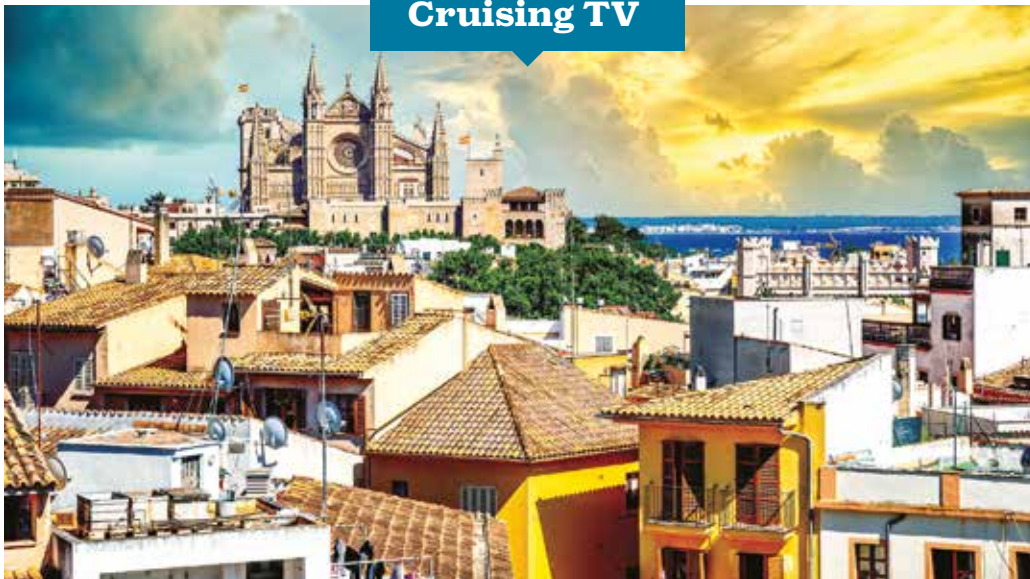
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World of Cruising TV



Guess who's back

Get clued up on the hottest lines by watching *World of Cruising* TV's latest series, which returns to screens in the New Year

We knew we were on to something when *World of Cruising* TV launched earlier in 2024 – and we were right. Come January, we'll be keeping all your favourite bits in season two, but we'll also be shaking things up.

Expect to see host Dean Wilson (*Create and Craft* TV) present outside on location, offering you a glimpse into the world away from the purpose-made studio in Palma, on the Spanish island of Mallorca. Fans will notice another change in the second season, with the addition of Atlas Ocean

Voyages, alongside returning favourites Ambassador, Hurtigruten, Riviera Travel, Saga Holidays and Virgin Voyages.

In the Ambassador episode, you can look forward to the Michelin star chef Marc Fosh talking you through how to make farmhouse chicken galantine with fig chutney – which the line serves at its farewell dinner – followed by a classic crème brûlée.

The Atlas episode meanwhile will enlighten you on the brand's polar, epicurean and cultural expeditions, which are hosted by doctors, university fellows and guides from The British Museum.

PLAYBACK

Missed season one? There's still time to catch up on the 30-minute episodes – each of which are dedicated to a particular line to help match your clients with their perfect cruise.

In each episode, Dean chats to a cruise line representative and *World of Cruising*'s Kaye Holland about the brand and highlighted itineraries, before Marc prepares dishes and cocktails inspired by the cruise lines' menus in a kitchen before the guests taste them. After enticing footage of destinations and experiences and a Q&A with a travel

BELOW Michelin star chef Marc Fosh whips up more delicious dishes based on cruise line menus for host Dean Wilson

expert, Dean talks viewers through an exclusive offer before announcing a competition.

Look out for the second season on screens in January and February 2025 and on *World of Cruising*'s YouTube channel. The third and fourth season are also confirmed, and you can expect a peek aboard a ship in season three's Marella Cruises' episode. 📺



For more

information and to watch the show, scan the QR code or visit worldofcruising.tv

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An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. A wide, light-colored sandy beach runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right. A dark, winding river or stream flows from the bottom left, through a patch of green trees and shrubs, and then empties into the ocean. The ocean water is a deep teal color, with white foam from waves visible where they meet the shore. The sky is not visible, as the image is focused on the coastal scene.

**The Great
Lakes**

The **FAMOUS FIVE**

From brilliant birdlife to stellar street art, Canada
and the USA's Great Lakes region harbours
hidden depths, writes **Sarah Freeman**



Spanning the Canadian-US border, the Great Lakes – Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior – make up the largest freshwater system on the planet. From fur traders to French explorers, history runs deep in these fabled waters.

Whether it's cold-water wreck diving in Superior's 'Graveyard of the Great Lakes' or ziplining in Niagara Falls' spray, this region promises thrills above and below the water line. In a few kilometres, you can experience a landscape that morphs from rippling sand dunes to lake-kissing vineyards.

Also straddling its shores are Toronto and Detroit, where world-class museums and revitalised neighbourhoods spill out along the waterfront.

LAKE ONTARIO

Marked on maps as early as 1656, Ontario is the most easterly of the Great Lakes. It's the smallest, too, but it packs a punch thanks to its cinematic coastal scenery, a wealth of wineries and lush green spaces such as Sandbanks Provincial Park, where trails snake between bridal-white beaches and undulating dunes.

Ontario was naturally separated from its four sibling lakes by the

legendary Niagara Falls. Guests looking to experience this thunderous trio of waterfalls can soar in the spray 70m above Niagara River Gorge on WildPlay's zipline, board a vintage shuttle bus or a take a boat tour.

Bloggers Richard and Helen Chalu sailed on Viking's Niagara and the Great Lakes itinerary in September. Richard says: "Niagara Falls attracts more than 12 million visitors annually and was a bucket-list destination for us. The Hornblower boat tour takes you for a soaking right into the heart of Horseshoe Falls."

Many cruise itineraries begin or end in Toronto, which is home to one of the world's longest urban waterfronts. At least 200 languages are spoken here, and this multiculturalism is reflected in a diverse culinary scene. "Brunch is massive here," says Toronto native and food blogger Alice Phan. "My go-to dish is Maha's mind-blowing chicken sandwich, as you get all the flavours of Egyptian food, the spices and freshness."

For a city escape, Alice heads to Prince Edward County (PEC). Not to be confused with Prince Edward Island (PEI) off Canada's eastern coast, PEC hugs Lake Ontario's northeastern shore. "When people think of wine country they think of Niagara, but PEC is a

hidden gem," she adds. Fanned by the lake's breezes, its 40 or so wineries can be visited and combined with field-to-plate fare by Vintage Car Wine Tours, and artisan cheesemakers and pear orchards make for one delicious afternoon.

LAKE ERIE

This luminous lake takes its name from the Erie people or 'people of the panther' – the native North Americans who called its southern shore home and crisscrossed its waters in birchbark canoes.

Come September, Erie becomes a stopover for migratory monarchs which paint the skies in orange





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Lake Erie is a stop-off for migratory monarchs; the expansive Point Pelee National Park; Toronto's Coronation Park; the legendary Niagara Falls still excites and delights

butterfly clouds. Guests can slop on the mainland's southernmost beach, paddle through freshwater marshes or weave along an elevated 800m-long boardwalk while looking out for Pelee's turtles. There's also year-round stargazing, thanks to the park's designation as a dark sky reserve.

Another mecca for migratory species – this time songbirds – is the Lake Erie Islands. Local man Tom Bartlett has been ringing birds' legs on behalf of the US Geological Survey for more than half a century. "It's possible to see 30 species of warbler here in spring," he says. "Other birds move through too, so seeing 100 species in a day is fairly easy. There is even a Kelleys Island owl festival."

Erie also holds plenty of urban appeal thanks to Cleveland – home of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame – and the comeback city, Detroit. Better known as the birthplace of Motown and the home of American motoring, Michigan's largest metropolis is also home to one of the US's most visited galleries – Detroit Institute of Arts Museum.

LAKE HURON

Despite being the first of the Great Lakes that Europeans discovered, Huron has retained a raw and unspoilt feel. Its 6,160km shoreline – the longest of the quintet – is freckled with craggy cliffs, rippling dunes and rare species.

Superior lakes

Which of these mighty American and Canadian bodies of water are best-suited to your clients?

Lake Ontario connects cruise-goers with Niagara Falls, where daredevil guests can enjoy a soaking via boat tours and ziplines.

Lake Erie is a bird lover's paradise, where it's possible to see 100 different species in a single day.

Lake Huron is the place to go for travellers wanting to step back in time, with some 31 historic lighthouses and an island where noisy cars have been swapped for horse-drawn carriages.

Lake Michigan is arguably the pick of the bunch for urban dwellers, with Chicago – the home of street art and skyscrapers – boasting one of the US' most impressive and eclectic cultural offerings.

Lake Superior is primed for cold-water diving, with underwater visibility reaching up to 30m in certain places.

As well as being a protected marine sanctuary, its waters teem with Atlantic and chinook salmon, walleye and pike, making it an angler's paradise.

Visitors can turn the clock back and visit some of Huron's 31 historic lighthouses or Mackinac (pronounced 'mack-in-awe') Island, which harks back to a bygone era of horse-drawn carriages. Listed as a National Historic Landmark, Mackinac has banned motor vehicles since 1898, creating a unique old-world atmosphere. The concierge team at the island's Grand Hotel recommend hitting the Jewel Golf Course's greens. "It's the only course in the country with horse-drawn carriage rides between nines," one says.

Killarney is another popular port of call. One of Canada's oldest villages, it nestles on the pink granite northern shores of Georgian Bay, referred to as 'the sixth Great Lake' for its sheer size. An outdoorsman's playground, Killarney sits among sapphire lakes and cloud-piercing pine forests where bears, beavers and bobcats roam.

LAKE MICHIGAN

With its fur trade and timber shipping days behind it, today the US's 'third coast' – as Lake Michigan is known – is a place of all-natural superlatives. The only one of the famous five to be entirely within the US, it boasts more coastal wetlands than any other great lake and has Earth's largest freshwater sand dunes. Along its shores stands prosperous Traverse City, known as America's cherry capital and also as a hotspot for wine making.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Chicago reflects of the shore off Lake Michigan; guests can join street art tours in the city; Whitefish Point Light Station



Culture runs deep here, too, especially in Wisconsin's harbour cities such as Algoma; a firm fixture on Great Lake sailings thanks to its postbox-red Pierhead Lighthouse, Victorian-style homes and Crescent Beach boardwalk. It's sandwiched between the city of Green Bay and Door County; yet another highlight of Great Lake sailings. Jutting into Lake Michigan, Door's namesake limestone peninsula is full of surprises, from lavender farms and lobster-bisque lunches to live concerts held in a starlit amphitheatre.

Many sailings begin or end in Milwaukee – of 70s sitcom *Happy Days* and Harley-Davidson fame – which is sometimes called 'the big city of little neighbourhoods' (all 191 of them!). Known for its beer heritage, the city has a thriving craft brewery scene along its lakefront, where you will also find a sprinkling of enticing museums.

Heading 145km south to Chicago, cruisers can rent bicycles from Bobby's Bike Hike and cycle a scenic 30km stretch of lakefront or swim in the shadow of the high rises along Lake Shore Drive.

Another Chicagoan invention – this one born in its suburbs circa the mid-1900s – is aerosol spray paint. The co-owner of Chicago's Offbeat Street Art Tour, Brian Murray, says: "Chicago's street art scene is a mix of public and vandal art, and private and commercial murals. The Bucktown and Logan Square neighbourhoods are chock-full."

LAKE SUPERIOR

Superior by name, superior by nature, this is the northernmost and largest of the five Great Lakes, holding a staggering 10 per cent of Earth's surface freshwater. Superior's original name, gichigami or 'great sea', was given by the Ojibwe people, who traded beaver pelts for tobacco and other goods with the British and French in the 1600s.

Said to have the cleanest, chilliest and clearest waters of the five lakes, Superior is primed for top-class cold-water diving, with underwater visibility reaching up to 30m in areas such as Thunder Bay. A city and inlet in northwestern Lake Superior, Thunder Bay has a rich maritime history, which guests can discover via the glass-bottomed boats of Alpena Shipwreck Tours. Alternatively, they can enjoy a guided kayak with Such a Nice Day Adventures, or go on an organised wreck dive with Thunder Country Diving.

Some 350 sunken vessels are believed to lie beneath the waves on the once perilous 129km stretch of water between Munising and Whitefish Point – dubbed 'the shipwreck coast' – and more are

found every year. Corey Adkins, who works for the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point Light Station, says: "A law was passed in the 1980s whereby all artefacts on the bottom of the Great Lakes must stay there. When we discover a shipwreck we take only video and pictures and give the public the story of what happened to the vessel."

Duluth, a popular port of call on many Great Lakes sailings, lies 644km away on Lake Superior's western tip, at the mouth of the St Louis River. The hometown of the singer-songwriter legend Bob Dylan, this unsung city is home to the USA's only freshwater aquarium, where visitors can feed a Great Lakes 'living fossil', the formidable bottom-dwelling sturgeon. ●

Get on board

Viking's seven-night Undiscovered Great Lakes cruise aboard *Viking Polaris*, from Thunder Bay to Milwaukee via Silver Islet, McGarvey Shoal, Battle Island, Duluth, Soo Locks and Mackinac Island, departs on 2 June 2025, from £6,195pp.
vikingcruises.co.uk

Ponant's seven-night A Voyage Along the Great Lakes with Smithsonian Journeys cruise aboard *La Champlain*, from Toronto to Milwaukee via the Welland Canal Locks, Port Colborne, Detroit, Little Current, Sault St Marie and Mackinac Island, departs on 17 September 2025, from £7,300pp.
ponant.com



Poseidon Expeditions Named Best Polar Cruise Operator for the Third Straight Year

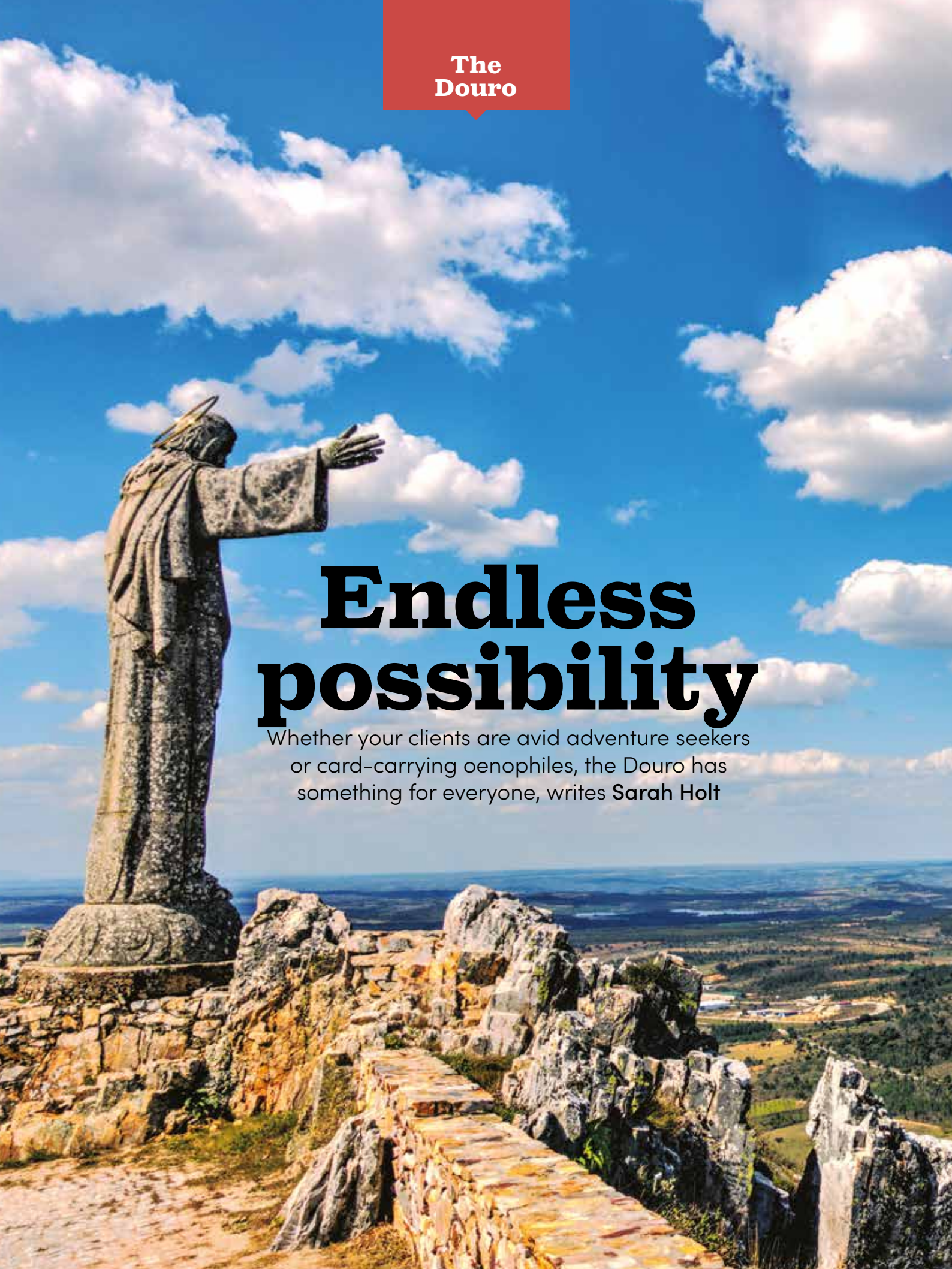
2024 marks the 25th anniversary of polar travel for Poseidon Expeditions, and we continue the celebrations at this year's International Travel Awards. For the third year in a row, our company has been voted Best Polar Expedition Cruise Operator!

Winning this prestigious award takes more than just a passion for travel. Since 2018, our operators worldwide have been recognized for their professionalism and outstanding service with this award, and we are honored to be the winners once again.

It's been an extraordinary year for us so far. We celebrated our 25th anniversary, unveiled our newly designed website and proudly accepted this year's prestigious travel award. We're ready to start the upcoming Antarctic season, and can't wait to welcome our travelers back aboard the Sea Spirit.

Choose your cruise and let Poseidon make your polar dream a reality!





The
Douro

Endless possibility

Whether your clients are avid adventure seekers or card-carrying oenophiles, the Douro has something for everyone, writes **Sarah Holt**



While the Douro River ebbs for 557 miles from Soria in northwest Spain to Porto on Portugal's northwest coast, it's only navigable for 75 miles. While this may seem short, this river is most definitely sweet. The Douro courses through landscapes of Kermit-green hills, neatly pleated vineyards, and traditional villages of red-roofed houses and spikey church spires.

Cruises in this part of the world are continual crowd-pleasers. There's an itinerary for every taste, whether your clients are into hiking, feasting, wine-tasting, city-sauntering or Unesco World Heritage Site exploring. Here, we match six sailings to beloved holiday pastimes to help you pitch a Douro cruise to the right client

FEASTING

Eating lunch at a traditional 'quinta' is a rite of passage in the Douro. These red-roofed, stone-walled estates are often swaddled by vineyards and their restaurants serve up soul food like bacalhau (cod hash), caldo verde (a warming green soup) and alheira (a smoky sausage). On AmaWaterway's Flavours of Portugal and Spain sailing, quinta dining is just one of the foodie experiences included in the itinerary.

Bolas tasting is another highlight. Bolas de Lamego are plump pillows of bread filled with cured meats and they've been produced in the Douro since the 12th century. The Flavours of Portugal and Spain itinerary also includes a day trip to Castelo Rodrigo, which is known as The White Village for the almond trees that produce flurries of white flowers between February and March every year. AmaWaterways' passengers will get to sample these almonds during their visit along with other local produce such as cheeses and breads.

Get on board

The 10-night Flavours of Portugal & Spain cruise aboard *AmaVida*, sailing return from Madrid via Porto, Entre-os-Rios, Régua, Pinhão, Barca d'Alva, Vega de Terrón, and Salamanca, departs 29th November 2025, from £3,689pp. [amawaterways.co.uk](https://www.amawaterways.co.uk)



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Explore Porto before setting off along the Douro; the river is lined with vineyards; the striking Baroque architecture of the Palacio de Mateus; the traditional caldo verde soup

“ The Douro promises breathtaking views as ships pass through stunning valleys dotted with castles, monasteries and vineyards

Get on board

The eight-night Douro Delights cruise aboard the new *MS Estrela*, sails Madrid to Porto via Vega De Terron, Barca D'Alva, Pinhão, Régua and Entre-Os-Rios, departs 18 June 2025, from £4,295pp. aptouring.co.uk

HIKING

Spilling out for more than 300 square miles, the Douro National Park is one of the largest protected areas in Portugal. With a landscape that rises into peaks and topples into valleys, it's known as the Grand Canyon of the Iberian Peninsula, and it's laced with walking trails.

On CroisiEurope's Cruise and Hikes in The Douro Valley itinerary, passengers can take a five-mile guided hike through the park to a point called Vulture's Cliff, which is named after the griffon and black vultures that can be seen riding the thermal currents in the air above the park's granite cliffs.

Other hikes on the itinerary take visitors through forests and brush to Provesende, one of the oldest villages in Portugal, across vineyards for picnic lunches, and along the banks of the Douro River from Porto to the coast for simultaneous city and sea views.

Get on board

The seven-night Cruise & Hikes in the Douro Valley cruise aboard *MS Infante Don Henrique*, return from Porto via Régua, Pinhão, Vega de Terron, Salamanca, Barca d'Alva, Senhora da Ribeira, Ferradosa and Bitetos, departs on 21 April 2025, from £2,127. croisieurope.co.uk



sitting down for a tasting session and a lunch of traditional dishes like veal, cooked in yet more red wine.

Get on board

The seven-night Highlights of the Douro Valley & Salamanca, sailing return from Porto to Régua, Castelo Rodrigo, Pinhão and Lamego, aboard *MS Porto Mirante* or *MS Riviera Rose* costs from £2,099pp (including flights). rivieratravel.co.uk

HISTORY HUNTING

There are history lessons to be had all over the Douro region. You could spend a week plunging into the past of Porto alone, as the city's timeline burrows all the way back to the 2nd century BC. APT includes a guided tour of Porto's Medieval Old Town on its history-heavy Douro Delights itinerary for travellers looking to combine history with a river cruise.

Elsewhere on the agenda, there's a visit to Palacio de Mateus, an ornate 16th-century winery and manor house set in 20 hectares of painstakingly planted gardens. The palace is said to be one of the best examples of Baroque architecture in Portugal and it gives its name to the Mateus brand of rose wine.

The cherry on the top of this itinerary for history lovers is a trip to Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, a hilltop village wrapped up in mighty town walls where visitors can explore the ruins of a medieval castle that oozes history.

WINE TASTING

Wine has been produced in the Douro for more than 2,000 years and the Upper Douro Wine Region is now protected as a Unesco World Heritage Site. Port is the area's signature drink, but it's not the only tipple that's made here.

Fruity reds, zesty whites and fortified moscatels also thrive in the Douro. On Riviera's Highlights of the Douro Valley & Salamanca itinerary passengers get to dive headfirst into the world of moscatel. The trip includes a visit to the Quinta Avessada, a 160-year-old, 1,000-hectare wine estate that specialises in growing moscatel grapes (also known as muscat outside of Iberia).

Visitors get to learn about the production process and how winemaking has changed over the decades, before



GUEST VERDICT

Emma Otter,
Travel Counsellors

"Outstanding beauty awaits in the stunning Douro River Valley, classified as a World Heritage site by Unesco for celebrating 2,000 years of winemaking. The Douro promises breathtaking views as ships make their way through stunning valleys dotted with 13th-century castles, monasteries and vineyards. Guests will enjoy learning about Portugal's rich Moorish history, while enjoying some of Portugal's finest exports, Mateus Rose and port wine. Most river cruises sail the Douro between April and November, enabling your customers to enjoy the best of Portugal, its delicious food and wine throughout the seasons."

CITY SAUNTERING

Salamanca, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is just under a two-hour drive from the Douro port of Vega de Terron, so some cruise itineraries – such as AmaWaterways' Enticing Douro – include coach excursions to the city. Grand buildings made from golden sandstone, Spain's oldest university, two cathedrals, and a Gothic house decorated with more than three hundred seashells are just a few of the must-see sights here.

Another treat on the Enticing Douro trip is a visit to Castelo Rodrigo. This hilltop town with its spaghetti streets and muscular medieval defensive walls

has been the site of multiple dramas, wars and sieges over the years, involving everyone from counts and princesses to kings. Passengers who opt for a guided tour here should ask to be told the story of Castelo Rodrigo's upside-down coat of arms.

Get on board

The seven-night Enticing Douro cruise aboard *AmaSintra*, sailing return from Porto via Régua, Vega de Terron and Pinhão, departs 28 November 2025, from £2,810pp. amawaterways.co.uk

MUSEUM MARVELLING

The Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa, which is included on Tauck's Villages & Vintages itinerary, is often referred to as an open-air art gallery as it's home to more than 5,000 examples of prehistoric rock art. The images were carved and picked into the rock over the course of several millennia and they depict animals such as deer, horses and a now-extinct form of bovine called an auroch.

There's a museum in the valley that runs guided tours of the rock art sites in off road vehicles – the valley gapes out over 77 square miles, so 4x4s are

the best way to take it all in. Inside, meanwhile, the interactive exhibits help visitors understand the significance of the artworks. There's a restaurant on site, too, which serves Portuguese specialities like cabidela rice made with rooster, smoked sausage, and local cheeses alongside Douro wines, in view of the yawning valley.

Get on board

The seven-night Villages & Vintages itinerary on *MS Andorinha* sails return from Porto to Porto, Pinhão, Peso da Régua, Guimarães and Côa Valley from £4,390pp, departing between April and November 2025.

tauck.co.uk 

**New
Zealand**



EXPLORING
DESTINATION FOCUS

Land of the **LONG WHITE CLOUD**

Untamed landscapes, exhilarating outdoor adventures and immersive cultural experiences await on a cruise to New Zealand. **Lauren Jarvis** gets us up to speed





Cruising around New Zealand is the perfect way to experience the spectacularly diverse attractions of this

wonderfully wild Antipodean country.

With more than 14,485km of coastline, and epic excursions around its North and South Islands – plus the chance to explore smaller isles such as Stewart Island and the sub-Antarctic Islands for a remote sense of adventure – it's little wonder that New Zealand is a favourite destination for adventurous cruise travellers.

Aotearoa – or Land of the Long White Cloud – is the indigenous name for New Zealand, referring to the cloud formations that guided early Polynesian travellers to the country's North Island. Guests can board a ship in Australia or join a cruise from Auckland to follow in the wake of these intrepid adventurers on a voyage of discovery.

ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

According to the country's indigenous people, the Maori, the first explorer to reach New Zealand was Kupe, who sailed his canoe from Polynesia to the North Island using the stars and ocean currents to navigate. More people followed, bringing with them traditions that became uniquely Maori, including the powerful ceremonial war dance, the haka, the waka canoe and the hangi, where food is cooked by hot stones buried underground.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Maori people mark Waitangi Day; Napier has a variety of intriguing architecture; enjoy a soothing sunset at Tauranga marina; Rotorua's geothermal pools are a must-see

Selling tips

1 There are New Zealand cruises to suit all styles and budgets from lines including Celebrity, Cunard, Disney Cruise Line, Lindblad Expeditions and P&O Cruises. Most ships arrive between October and April, departing from Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane in Australia.

2 Tell clients they can combine an expedition cruise to Antarctica with a visit to New Zealand's South Island, where some ships visit smaller ports, such as Kaikoura and Stewart Island.

3 The best time to visit New Zealand is during the summer months of December to March, which bring long, bright and sunny days and temperatures of 16°C to 24°C.

The English navigator Captain James Cook first sighted New Zealand in 1769, followed by whalers, sealers and missionaries, who brought guns and diseases that sadly ravaged the Maori population. In 1840 the British negotiated an agreement with Maori chiefs and the country became a British colony under the Treaty of Waitangi.

NORTHERN STARS

Fortunately, Maori culture is on the rise again and there are plenty of opportunities for cruise-goers to learn more about their fascinating culture, including watching cultural performances at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds in the Bay of Islands, a popular cruise stop on North Island's northeast coast.

A little further south, New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, is the country's main cruise hub. From here guests can take a ferry to the volcanic island of Rangitoto, wander the elegant halls of Auckland Art Gallery, sky jump from Sky Tower or join The Hotel Britomart's Nourishing Nature tour to learn about regeneration and biodiversity at Velskov, a native forest farm.

Velskov's founder, Mamakan Oustrup Laureijs, says: "There's a profound sense of renewal that comes with immersing yourself in the land. One of the most meaningful ways to do this is through planting a native tree: a ritual that leaves you with a lasting bond to the New Zealand landscape."

From the port of Tauranga, cruise-goers tend to head inland to take in the geothermal wonders of Rotorua, with its natural hot springs and mud pools, or soak up some rays on Mount Maunganui's golden beach.

Jessica Easton, director of Kitchen Takeover, which hosts pop-up culinary feasts around New Zealand, explains: "Maunganui offers a walk to the top of an ancient volcano, providing 360-degree views and the chance to spot seals, dolphins and orcas. Alternatively, venture to the equally stunning but underrated Papamoa Hills to take in the view of Maunganui and learn about the region's Maori history."

Another destination rich in Maori culture is the east coast city of Gisborne, which is the first location in the world to see the sun rise each day and a great spot for a winery tour or a surf lesson on one of the region's beautiful beaches.

Around 200km south in Napier, guests can take a spin in a vintage car to see the elegant buildings of New Zealand's 'Art Deco capital,' or have lunch overlooking the vines in Hawke's Bay, one of the country's leading wine regions. And further south, Wellington – New Zealand's compact capital city – has fantastic dining, shopping and museums, including the interactive Te Papa, which brings the stories of the nation's land and people to life.

SOUTHERN WONDERS

A playground for penguins, dolphins and seals, Marlborough Sounds is the South Island's gateway for cruise ships, which



“ Gisborne on the east coast is the first location in the world to see the sun rise each day

stop at the pretty town of Picton with its galleries and boutiques, with Blenheim's wineries nearby.

Some expedition vessels stop at Kaikoura to experience the region's marine life, including orcas, while further south lies the French-inspired centre of Akaroa, where groups can take a boat tour to see the world's smallest and rarest dolphin species, Hector's dolphin. From here it's a short hop to the ever-evolving city of Christchurch, which has been revived after the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes.

Amiki Tours offers walking excursions that combine dining and indigenous culture in the city known to the Maori as Otautahi. Amiki's chief of visitor experiences, Riwai Grace, says: "Spend a day meandering around our city, taking in the beauty, tasting local produce and soaking up the relaxed pace of my hometown."

"My Maori and European heritage is woven through the rebuild and there is plenty to see. On the banks of the river, chefs design seasonal menus paired with local wine and beer, their restaurants nestled in restored and new buildings that shimmer against the water."

The port city of Dunedin on the southeast coast of South Island is a New Zealand nugget, offering a glimpse into

the country's Gold Rush past with its grand historic homes. Birders, meanwhile, can visit the world's only royal albatross breeding colony at nearby Taiaroa Head. To the southwest, Fiordland National Park's dramatic cliffs rise from the ocean at Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, as silver waterfalls plunge into the deep, dwarfing the tour boats below.

Ability Adventures specialises in inclusive, accessible tourism and experiences in New Zealand. Its occupational therapist, Sandie Grant, says: "The west coast is a fantastic area to explore, with a slow pace and the super can-do attitude of the locals."

"It offers a glimpse of what New Zealand might have looked like before the arrival of humans around 1,000 years ago." ●

Get on board

Ponant's nine-night New Zealand's North and South Islands by Sea with Smithsonian Journeys cruise aboard *Le Jacques-Cartier*, from Lyttelton to Auckland via Dunedin, Dusky Sound, Doubtful Sound, Milford Sound, Picton, Napier and Tauranga, departs on 7 January 2025, from £6,658pp.

uk.ponant.com

Heritage Expeditions' 13-night New Zealand Coastal Odyssey cruise aboard *Heritage Adventurer*, from Queenstown to Auckland via Fiordland, Stewart Island, Dunedin, Akaroa, Wellington, Nelson, Marlborough, Napier and Tauranga, departs on 28 February 2025, from £4,595pp.

heritage-expeditions.com



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a cruise ship's deck. A large, rectangular swimming pool is the central feature, with a person floating in the water. Surrounding the pool are multiple lounge areas with beige and brown outdoor furniture, including sofas and armchairs. There are also potted plants and decorative lighting. The ship's structure, including railings and upper decks with glass windows, is visible around the pool area.

Explora II

High life

Cartier boutiques, Andy Warhol artworks and Italianate stylings: the new *Explora II* exudes luxury at every turn, writes **Rachel Reilly**

EXPLORING CRUISE REVIEW

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The conservatory pool also functions as a cinema at night; *Explora II*'s maiden voyage was around the western Mediterranean; every detail is carefully curated



It's hard not to hear Nino Rota's haunting love theme from *The Godfather* when lazily exploring the plangent streets of Civitavecchia. The port's sun-baked mantra radiates with rich culture and heritage. You can feel the presence of previous generations that have passed through, and also of the iconic ships to have sliced across the skyline – the *Andrea Doria*, *SS Leonardo da Vinci* and *SS Michelangelo* to name only a few. Their shadows feel etched into the harbour walls.

To some, *Explora Journeys*' newest vessel, *Explora II*, looks like the next step in cruise progression, but the ship represents far more than that. After watching the glittering christening ceremony, I was excited to experience it for myself as the ship embarked on its maiden voyage around the western Mediterranean.

Sharing DNA with its sister ship *Explora I*, the new 922-passenger vessel pushes the cruise line into fleet territory – not bad for a family-owned brand. Yet after listening to passenger feedback, the family introduced subtle differences to *Explora II* – which I soon discovered as I boarded in Civitavecchia.

“Slabs of marble, polished glass, swathes of leather and wooden panelling combine to create an opulent aesthetic

CRUISING IN STYLE

Explora Journeys is known for its sophisticated style, and *Explora II*'s interiors are no exception. Stepping into the foyer feels akin to entering the millionaire's mansion in F Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Slabs of marble, polished glass, swathes of leather and wooden panelling combine to create an opulent aesthetic, although one that isn't too overstated, much to the interior designers' credit.

As I make my way through the guest areas, I remark at *Explora II*'s chic and luxurious yet comfortable and laidback atmosphere. It really does feel like a home at sea. The ship has four types of penthouse: Ocean, Deluxe, Premier and Grand – the latter, at 60sqm, is the largest. I'm in a Deluxe Penthouse, which is 48sqm. Clever use of space, soothing, neutral colours and natural light make it feel larger than the blueprint digits suggest.

Explora Journeys' owners, the Apontes, still curate all the line's materials and artwork such as original Andy Warhols, and it shows. Furnishings haven't come from a formula, but rather from people who actually know a thing or two about fine art.



From large mirrors to a plasma TV, the styling choices enhance the abode, rather than overpower it. Everything feels as though it belongs together, like yin and yang. Floor-to-ceiling windows, clever mood lighting, sculptures and abstract prints are soothing to be around, and there is plenty of storage space.

The Apontes show they care through their attention to detail. As well as a walk-in dressing area, my bathroom features underfloor heating, Dyson hairdryers and a black and grey marble rainfall shower. A bath – something of a rarity in today’s cruise world – feels particularly decadent and I very much approve as I scan the room, locating the Champagne bucket, glasses and a bottle that’s calling out to be popped. Browsing my mini library, I curl up with a book and a coffee on a chaise

Fast facts

922

guest capacity

461

ocean-facing suites

6

restaurants

5

heated pools



lounge in my room’s dining area. A spacious balcony features its own small dining table and I begin thinking about what to treat myself to from the room service menu knowing in-suite dining is included.

The smaller staterooms – the 35sqm Ocean terrace suites and 11sqm Ocean grand terrace suites – are just as glamorous. Again, the layout feels well calculated, so there’s plenty of space and storage.

All staterooms come equipped with black-out curtains, binoculars, a bottle of Champagne and wireless charging bases. Plug sockets are designed for European and American devices though, so UK guests are advised to pack an adapter. You can’t have everything.

CHAMPAGNE AND CUISINE

Champagne is available along with unlimited fine wine and premium spirits, speciality tea and coffee and soft drinks at all times, meaning you can enjoy a glass of bubbly at breakfast (with or without orange juice) if you choose, or pre-dinner aperitivos in the oyster bar while mingling with other guests.

The ship’s 18 restaurants, bars and lounges use local ingredients to create an array of global and native dishes from each port of call. The all-day Emporium Market Place is a highlight, where the intoxicating aroma wafting from the carving station is almost impossible to ignore. Each dish appears like works of art, especially the sushi, while the charcuterie station’s Italian



“ Everything onboard is designed to provide the utmost in comfort and indulgence, providing a premium, bespoke voyage

salami, olives and grapes compete for real estate on my plate with a nearby fromagerie. But of course, *Explora II* is proudly Italian, which means the pasta station has eight types varieties – more than I knew existed – and the pizza is served straight from the oven. Staff don’t judge you on your toppings, either.

Marble & Co. Grill dishes up heavenly plates of meat with a sense of occasion thanks to its marble décor and monochrome images of farmers hard at work during harvest season. Meanwhile, Asian-fusion Sakura – named after the Japanese for cherry blossom – has a ceiling covered in petals and glowing lanterns which are complemented by folding shoji screens dividing the tables. The whole set-up transports me

to Kyoto. *Explora II*’s premium Italian, Anthology, is the only restaurant not included in the cruise fare.

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

The staff on *Explora II* ensure every moment is thoughtfully catered to with personalised and attentive service that remains unobtrusive – facilitated by a 24-hour concierge, twice-daily housekeeping, shoe shining staff and an evening turndown service. A ratio of 1.25 crew to every passenger also helps. Staff are trained to anticipate your preferences, and although my attempt to telepathically communicate my hankerings for a Bloody Mary were unsuccessful, the staff’s attention to detail ensures every request is handled with grace and efficiency.

Packages also grant access to the Ocean Wellness Fitness Centre and Spa, which offers a variety of health-focused features like a Finnish sauna and hydrotherapy pool, as well as exercise and mindfulness activities. Both 60- and 90-minute massages take place in one of the 11 treatment rooms, while in-suite treatments can also be booked.

When it comes to retail therapy, guests can visit the onboard boutique, selling Cartier, Panerai and Piaget jewellery and watches, as well as pieces

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The Sky Bar offers panoramic views from the ship’s highest point; clever use of space and light make the deluxe penthouse feel roomy; *Explora II* boasts five heated pools; children can have fun in the Nautilus Club

from famed Italian fashion houses – all bearing the connected butterfly mark of assured quality.

High-speed complimentary Wi-Fi can be found throughout the ship, while complimentary shuttles whisk you from ports to your excursions when required.

THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT

Concerts, theatrical shows and cultural performances take place in the intimate, beautifully designed Journeys Lounge, which can seat up to 210 guests, while the ship’s small yet intimate casino isn’t quite as brash as *Explora*’s ocean cruise counterparts.

Guests who prefer more low-key forms of entertainment can sink into a chair in the library, browse one of the onboard exhibitions or participate in expert-led lectures and cultural workshops.

Children are catered for, too, and the Nautilus Club is designed to keep them entertained. The kids’ zone is filled with activities and game consoles such as a Playstation 5 and Nintendo Switch.

While *Explora II*’s all-inclusive ticket cost may be higher than other mainstream cruise lines, the price reflects its high level of service, state-of-the-art hardware and diverse culinary offering – which in my opinion makes it exceptional value for money.

From spacious, ocean-facing suites with private terraces to exquisite meals prepared by world-class chefs, everything onboard is designed to provide the utmost in comfort and indulgence, all aimed at providing a premium, bespoke voyage. 📍

Get on board

Explora Journey’s seven-night A Journey of Picturesque Piazzas & Soulful Souks on *Explora II*, sailing from Civitavecchia (Rome) to Barcelona, via Naples, Sicily, Tunis and Palma de Mallorca, departs 7 July 2025, from £2,665pp.



The CLIA View

Andy Harmer OBE looks back on a buoyant year for cruise, before casting his gaze to 2025 and beyond

This year has been pivotal for the UK cruise industry, demonstrating both growth and resilience. Of course, one of the biggest successes has been the rise in trade bookings, with increasing demand across all cruise sectors, including ocean, river and expedition. We've also seen more ships than ever before taking guests to destinations around the world.

Onboard innovation has played a huge role in the industry's success this year. Cruise lines have introduced enhanced passenger experiences and expanded itinerary options to accommodate both rising demand and traveller expectations. Meanwhile, the industry's commitment to sustainability and destination stewardship continued to be a priority, positioning us as a responsible and desirable holiday choice.

The CLIA team has worked closely with the trade to support this growth, launching new resources and expanding opportunities for agents to enhance



their industry insight and knowledge. A key aspect of our efforts has been boosting our online communications, hosting large-scale events such as May's CLIA Conference in Southampton, which we're pleased to say attracted a record number of delegates.

Looking ahead, the launch of nearly 15 new ocean ships next year will bring further capacity growth, offering even more choice for passengers, whether they're seeking innovative

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Andy Harmer; cruise lines have expanded itinerary options to accommodate both rising demand and traveller expectations

onboard experiences, adventure-focused itineraries or an all-inclusive luxury getaway.

Solo passengers have really embraced cruising and this trend will continue in 2025. The combination of affordability, convenience and the wide array of options available make a sea escape an attractive choice. Cruise lines are increasingly catering to this market with single occupancy cabins and tailored amenities, allowing passengers to enjoy both independence and a new-found sense of community during their voyages.

Cruise-and-stay packages are another area of significant growth. These provide passengers with the best of both worlds – the benefits of everything available via a cruise ship, combined with the opportunity to explore on land before or after sailing. With so much ahead of us, we've ensured we're offering agents as much support as possible to take advantage of the amazing opportunities our industry presents.

I want to finish by saying a huge thank you to agents for your support, engagement and enthusiasm across 2024. We can all be very proud of the incredible progress the cruise industry has made. I can't wait to see what awaits in 2025. ●



“
The launch of nearly 15 new ocean ships next year will bring further capacity growth



PRINCESS®

TURNING
WAVE
Princess Pink

This WAVE season, think Princess Pink and get ready for your chance to win BIG! Hundreds of prizes are up for grabs over the next 3 months.

DECEMBER

Join us on social media for our Princess Pink Advent Calendar. Packed with tools to boost your bookings before Christmas —training guides, support resources, interactive webinars, plus daily prizes!



JANUARY & FEBRUARY

Keep winning in the New Year with our Princess Pink Envelope Prizes! You will have daily chances to win rewards for every booking you make in January and February!



DON'T MISS OUT!

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†2025 river cruises include an unlimited quantity of drinks at lunch and from 6pm to midnight while on board (selected drinks available), for 2026 river cruises, the free all-inclusive drinks includes unlimited quantity of drinks from 10am to midnight while on board (selected drinks available).