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WELCOME...

TO THE DECEMBER ISSUE

The magic of Christmas doesn't diminish as you grow up, but instead evolves into something different. Once upon a time the allure of a new games console or (in hindsight) way too many sweets were the only things on my mind when the clock struck midnight on 24 December. But now, it's about being with family and taking time to relax, reflect and give to others.

And this year, we're in the giving mood. We've once again partnered with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines for our special advent calendar competition, giving you the chance to win a sack-full of goodies, like cases of wine, spa treatments and two free cruises.

To take part, simply register online at cruisetradenews.com/register-fred-olsen-advent-calendar/. Once you've signed up, you'll receive a code via email each day, from 1-24 December, which you can use to log on to the website and 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.

Your usual digest of news, insights and inspiration can be found overleaf, where CLIA UK and Ireland managing director Andy Harmer OBE offers his take on the industry's good fortunes in 2025, and how the

On the cover: Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines



ABOVE Christmas is a magical time, whatever age you are

organisation will support the sector in reaching new heights in 2026. That's on page 66, and on page 39 we look at the exciting sports tourism market and the opportunity it presents to cruise and travel agents.

December also sees the return of our annual Ultimate Destination Guide, packed with everything you need to excite your customers and boost your sales in 2026. Finally, I'd like to say a sincere thank you to everyone who's supported our publication in 2025. We can't wait to show you what we have planned for next year. We wish you all a wonderful Christmas, and we'll see you in the new year.

Will Payne
Editor

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Travel with confidence



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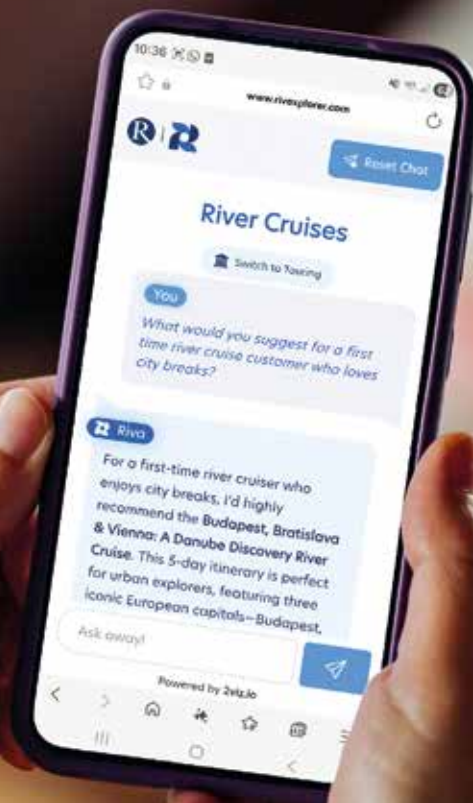
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what you need to know

Navigator

Shifting sands

► As cruising continues its upward trajectory, consumer habits and booking trends are evolving fast. This year saw a further reshaping of perception about holidays at sea, with Brits broadening their horizons beyond traditional ocean voyages. Emerging river destinations continued to excite, and shorter sailings enticed younger travellers.

Cruise lines have responded to shifting priorities over flexibility, exclusivity and value for money by expanding their reach through new itineraries and onboard activations. A greater focus has been placed on 'ship within a ship' concepts, solo travellers, and partnerships with other cruise lines from different sectors to attract a larger clientele that share the same ethos. Here, we've canvassed the thoughts of the industry leaders



Continued overleaf



who are witnessing this evolution first-hand. Lee Haslett, chief commercial officer for Celestyal, says: "We've seen our average guest age fall. For the Arabian Gulf it now sits at 44 years, reflecting a shift that's being mirrored across the wider industry, and one we believe will continue into 2026."

Haslett feels shorter itineraries allow first-time cruisers to dip their toe in without committing to a fortnight at sea. That flexibility has been instrumental in attracting younger couples, groups of friends and multigenerational families, proving

that cruise is now a holiday choice for all ages.

Tony Andrews, managing director of Cruise.co.uk, thinks travellers want more bang for their buck when planning a trip. "With affordability as such a clear priority, cruising remains one of the most cost-effective ways to enjoy a holiday," he says. "Full-board dining is included, as well as West End-style entertainment, children's clubs and fitness facilities. Compared to hotels, the difference is clear."

For Graham Carter, co-founder of Unforgettable Travel Company,

“Cruising remains one of the most cost-effective ways to enjoy a holiday

demand for boutique cruising has remained strong due to the personalised, immersive experience.

"We're also seeing a growing desire from multi-gen guests and large groups for small-ship cruising and itineraries that offer a more intimate way of travelling," he adds. "We recently had a group of 18 people, all from the same family, aged from 30 to 80 years old, join us for a Croatian cruise, sailing from Split to Dubrovnik. We've also had younger guests, aged 17, travelling with their parents and grandparents."

This highlights the versatility of small-ship cruising as an experience that brings generations together while still delivering the intimacy and authenticity which travellers seek.

The message is clear: cruising has evolved into one of the most adaptable and inclusive holiday choices available. Looking ahead, the industry shows no sign of slowing.

IN NUMBERS

28%

of guests sailed with multiple generations



70%

of ships in CLIA's fleet are small- and mid-sized



68%

of travellers are eyeing up their first cruise

Data from: Clia

BRITS INSPIRE CARIBBEAN BOOKING BOOM

➤ Virgin Voyages has seen a sharp rise in Caribbean bookings this year after it refocused its efforts on boosting business from the UK. Revenue from the UK, which is now the line's second largest global market, jumped 17 per cent in 2025 compared to 2024, with average selling values rising by 34 per cent over the same period.

The most enticing destination, the line reported, was the Caribbean, which saw a 154 per cent increase in bookings. Across Europe, Australia and New Zealand, extended Mediterranean sailings and long-haul getaways to the Caribbean have driven record numbers of new-to-cruise

travellers. "2025 has been a landmark year of growth across all our international markets," says SJ Walker, director of UK sales. "The UK travel trade has truly embraced our brand, and we've seen travellers are booking earlier, sailing longer and choosing more high-end experiences."

Turn to page 21 for more insight from Virgin Voyages.





SCAN

to read more about NCLH's
\$100k donation to Hurricane
Melissa relief efforts

SPOTLIGHT

Hayley Moore



Princess Cruises' UK and Europe sales director Hayley Moore has joined Hurtigruten as its new vice president of sales and marketing.

Moore, who was director of marketing communications UK and Europe for Princess prior to her promotion to the line's sales lead in January 2024, was also previously senior brand manager for Carnival UK. In her new position with Hurtigruten, Moore will lead the Norwegian coastal operator's sales operations and trade relationships.

Moore commented: "For me, cruising has always been about discovery and connection. These values are deeply personal and ones I see reflected in Hurtigruten's experiences for so many guests.

"I'm honoured to join Hurtigruten and excited to share our stories and experiences with new audiences. I look forward to collaborating with such a talented team to elevate our sales and marketing strategies, connect with guests in new ways, and drive the next wave of growth."

“For me, cruising has always been about discovery and connection

MSC ORDERS TWO NEW VESSELS

➤ MSC Cruises will add two further World class ships to its fleet at a cost of €3.5 billion, due to be delivered in 2030 and 2031.

The order takes its total spend with French shipbuilder Chantiers de l'Atlantique to €7 billion.

The construction of both World Class 7 and 8 will begin in 2029, with both having LNG fuel capability. Details on the number of cabins and other onboard features are yet to be revealed.

Pierfrancesco Vago, executive chair of MSC Group's cruise division, says: "The World class platform is a symbol of our vision to set new standards for the future of cruising.

"These are some of the most energy-efficient ships in the world and we continue our commitment to LNG, ensuring we are ready for future renewable fuels."

“The World class is a symbol of our vision to set new standards for cruising



BRITANNIA TO SAIL YEAR-ROUND FROM SOUTHAMPTON

➤ P&O Cruises has confirmed that *Britannia* will sail year-round from Southampton in 2027.

For the first time since its launch in 2015, the P&O Cruises flagship will be based in the south coast port year-round, with a mix of itineraries stretching from the Atlantic islands to the Caribbean and Mediterranean.

It comes as the line revealed its collection of holidays for winter 2027 through to spring 2028, including new itineraries, ports of call and the line's longest world cruise sailing.

Iona will join its sister ship *Arvia* in the Caribbean and operate 14-night fly-cruise holidays with departures from Barbados.



MAGICAL MAGDALENA

AmaWaterways has marked the launch of its second luxury river cruise ship in Colombia, *AmaMelodia*, following the christening of *AmaMagdalena* earlier this year. Accommodating 64 guests, *AmaMelodia* offers staterooms with twin balconies, as well as locally inspired Latin American cuisine and Western favourites in the Main Restaurant. There will also be a Main Lounge and a Sun Deck whirlpool. "After seeing the incredible response to *AmaMagdalena* earlier this year, we are thrilled to welcome *AmaMelodia* to the AmaWaterways fleet," says Catherine Powell, CEO of AmaWaterways.

"Launching these two ships has been an extraordinary collaboration with our Colombian partners."



RIVIERA TO HOST LATITUDE CONFERENCE

The Advantage Travel Partnership has confirmed Riviera Travel as the sponsor and host of the Latitude Cruise Conference 2026.

The partnership was announced by the organisation's director of cruise Jonny Peat during this year's conference onboard Princess Cruises' *Sky Princess*.

Next year's three-night event will set sail from Budapest on 14 November along the Danube onboard the line's recently launched *MS Riviera Radiance*.

Vicky Billing, director of trade and partnerships UK&I, said: "We're thrilled to be partnering with Advantage for their Latitude Cruise Conference in 2026."

SPOTLIGHT

TUI Bahareya



TUI River Cruises has blessed its second ship on the River Nile, *TUI Bahareya*, ahead of its debut sailing from Luxor.

The ceremony took place onboard with a traditional 'Prayer to Hapi', the god of the River Nile. The ship's pool was decorated with rose petals, with guests of the blessing being given locally sourced commemorative engraved plaques made from traditional alabaster, to signify the start of its debut season of itineraries.



VIKING BRINGS UP CENTENARY

Viking has become the first cruise line to reach a centenary of ships, following the launch of nine new river vessels in Basel, Switzerland.

Cruise line staff, ship godparents and international press were in attendance for a special naming ceremony on board the new *Viking Honir*, which saw all nine vessels

take part in a simultaneous virtual bottle smash.

The ceremony was connected virtually to the eight other new ships, which were located across five other countries around the world, including Paris, France; Rostock, Germany; Porto, Portugal; Luxor, Egypt; and My Tho, Vietnam.



FUTURE PROOF

Hurtigruten's *MS Richard With* has departed Bergen on the line's first climate-neutral voyage. The ship set sail on 29 October, charting a course along the operator's Coastal Express route to Kirkenes and back, carrying local passengers, goods and tourists. The battery-hybrid ship will complete a 5,000-kilometre round trip using 100 per cent advanced biofuel HVO100, produced from waste and residual materials like used cooking oil and fat waste. "This marks a historic moment in Hurtigruten's more than 130-year legacy along the Norwegian coast," says Hedda Felin, CEO of Hurtigruten.



REDEFINING EXPEDITION

Scenic Group's third Discovery Yacht is on track to be delivered in late 2027 ahead of its April 2028 inaugural season. *Scenic Ikon*, which the company says will "redefine" ultra-luxury expedition cruising, will cater for up to 270 guests in 135 all-veranda suites ranging from 34 to 250 square metres over five decks.

The vessel will be purpose-built for polar regions and warm water destinations and rated Polar Code 6

with an Ice Class 1A Super strengthened hull. It will be equipped with two Airbus helicopters, a custom-designed Triton AVA submersible, Zodiacs and tenders.

Glen Moroney, founder and chair of Scenic Group, comments: "*Scenic Ikon* has been conceived, engineered and built with our in-house shipbuilding division at MKM Yachts and will be operated entirely by our own dedicated Scenic crew."

SPOTLIGHT

ExplorEarth



ExplorEarth has partnered with Travelpack to co-design and offer expedition cruise packages for agents.

Using ExplorEarth's platform, agents can present clients with expedition cruises backed by ATOL protection through Travelpack.

Jos Dewing, CEO of ExplorEarth, said around 30 per cent of the platform's traffic comes from the trade, "so it feels right to provide these agents with exclusive packages for their clients".



ELECTRIC RESHUFFLE

HX (Hurtigruten Expeditions) has bolstered its sustainability credentials with the addition of two new electric Zodiacs. The two fully electric MK 5 boats feature RAD Propulsion's RAD 40 system – one of the most advanced electric drives available.

The vessels join *MS Fram* and hybrid-powered *MS Fridtjof Nansen* in polar waters ahead of

the organisation's 130th anniversary. They'll support science teams, guest research trips and visiting scientists in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The launch of electric Zodiacs is also a key step in HX's move away from petrol-powered engines. The line says the move supports its commitment to scientific integrity, environmental responsibility and low-impact exploration.



WORLDWIDE WONDERS

Cunard has revealed its 2027-2028 sailing programme, with 110 new itineraries visiting 97 destinations in 47 countries between October 2027 and May 2028. The new season offers trips to 52 UNESCO World Heritage sites, 22 overnight port calls, and 23 late-evening departures. The line will sail two World Voyages, with its newest ship, *Queen Anne*, embarking on a 111-night Western Circumnavigation, and *Queen Elizabeth* heading east for a 113-night sailing. The programme also includes six maiden calls for *Queen Anne*, including Lautoka, Fiji and Halong Bay, Vietnam. *Queen Elizabeth* will also make maiden calls to St Georges in Grenada, Kingstown in St Vincent and Durban in South Africa.



PRESTIGE AT SEA

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has placed an order with Italian ship builder Fincantieri for a third Prestige class ship to be delivered in 2033.

The yet-to-be named vessel will be sister ship to *Seven Seas Prestige*, the first in the new class, which is currently under construction at the Marghera shipyard and set for delivery in 2026.

A second ship in the same class is already scheduled for delivery in 2030.

With a gross tonnage of 77,000 tons and a length of 257 meters, the third vessel in the class will host 822 passengers.

"This newbuild order continues our measured, strategic expansion within the luxury space, providing guests with yet another way to experience the unrivaled aboard The World's Most Luxurious Fleet," said Jason Montague, chief luxury officer at Regent parent Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings.

SPOTLIGHT

Carol Cabezas



Silversea has appointed former Azamara president Carol Cabezas as its new SVP of global sales.

She will report to the line's president Bert Hernandez and oversee the brand's global sales organisation, including trade sales.

Bringing 25 years of experience, Cabezas returns to the Royal Caribbean Group (RCG) after holding senior roles across sales, finance, revenue management and investor relations.



UNIWORLD TO BOLSTER FLEET

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises has announced plans to introduce four new ships and six new itineraries in 2027.

The launch includes three new Super Ships, *Audrey*, *Marlene*, and *São Rafael* on Portugal's Douro River, as well as sailings on *Aqua Blu*, marking the brand's

debut in Singapore and Indonesia. *SS Audrey* and *SS Marlene* will join the fleet in 2027 with a similar layout to sister ship *SS Emilie*, which is set to debut in 2026. *Audrey* and *Marlene* will each showcase interiors inspired by their namesake screen legends, Audrey Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich.



SCAN
to find out more about
World of Cruising TV

Behind the scenes

World of Cruising TV season four has wrapped filming. **Will Payne** takes a sneak peak at what's been happening beyond the camera

With the third instalment of our sister title *World of Cruising*'s television show, World of Cruising TV, coming to an end, we join the cast and crew in Palma, Majorca, for a look behind the scenes of season four.

The week of filming started with a chat between our host, award-winning presenter Dean Wilson, and Andy Harmer, managing director of CLIA UK & Ireland. Then, back at the studio, the cruise lines in focus for this upcoming season were revealed.

The series will feature six episodes where experts discuss the unique offerings of first-time partners Celestyal Cruises, Crystal Cruises and Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, as well as returning favourites Princess Cruises, Riviera Travel and Virgin Voyages. First



The Independent's freelance travel correspondent and media personality, Simon Calder, who shared the tips and tricks he gleaned from more than three decades of travelling.

This season will also see the addition of three influencers who have recently travelled on some of the cruise lines in focus. David Solomon discussed all things Virgin Voyages, while Nicole Stevens gave us the low-down on her recent Celestyal sailing, and Cathy Rogers talked about her time onboard a Riviera Travel cruise.

All this was enough to whet the team's appetite. Thankfully, celebrity chef Marc Fosh was back behind the stoves, cooking interpretations of some of the dishes guests can enjoy while sailing with our featured cruise lines.

All this made for a busy week. But it's not quite time to rest yet – all the shows need to be edited and finalising, ready for you to discover in February 2026. 📺

on the sofa was regular guest Riviera Travel's Vicky Billing, who spoke about the company's river cruises and touring product. The filming continued with conversations about all things cruise with Sarah Jane Walker of Virgin Voyages, Josh Smith of Princess Cruises, Lee Haslett of Celestyal, Luke Smith of Crystal Cruises and Geoff Ridgeon of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines.

INFLUENTIAL CONTENT

Beyond our cruise line guests, World of Cruising TV welcomed back

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Award-winning presenter Dean Wilson; the cast and crew are buoyant about the new series; there'll be more great cruise-inspired recipes; Simon Calder is back with his travel tips and recommendations

“
Series four will feature new cruise partners alongside returning favourites



Changing tides

While the appetite for forward planning remains strong, the latest *World of Cruising* data shows a more defined picture of travellers' intentions, says **Raphael Giacardi**

Every month, up to 180,000 people visit the site of our sister publication, *World of Cruising*. Thousands of these visitors use its search tool to plan their next voyage, giving us valuable insight into how intentions are changing.

Spring and summer still dominate, together accounting for 52 per cent of all searches, up from 45 per cent last month. But the real winner is spring, which has jumped from 25 to 30 per cent of searches. Summer has also edged up, rising from 20 to 22 per cent.

The months attracting the most attention are May and September, each representing 12 per cent of searches – both traditionally strong periods for Mediterranean and European sailings.

“A strong year for Europe – both north and south – looks to be taking shape



WINTER WONDERS

That said, it would be a mistake to assume that last-minute and winter-sun markets have faded away completely. One in four searches still target these departures, underlining the ongoing relevance of both short-lead and seasonal getaways. For operators, that means balancing campaigns between capturing immediate demand and nurturing longer-term interest.

Digging deeper into the data reveals clear hotspots. Mediterranean sailings in September (6.4 per cent of total searches) and April (5.9 per cent) remain particularly sought after, while the Caribbean continues to shine in January (5.8 per cent) and December (4.5 per cent).

NORTHERN POWERHOUSE

There's also a growing story further north. Interest in the Norwegian fjords is strengthening, taking 6 per cent of spring searches. In fact, across all departure dates, 10 per cent of all searches are now



IN NUMBERS

50%

of WoC visitors are looking for spring or summer departures

25%

of people are searching for winter and last-minute sailings

10%

of searches are for Northern Europe

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM Interest in the Norwegian fjords is strengthening; winter and last-minute sailings account for 25 per cent of searches

for Northern Europe itineraries, including the fjords and the Baltic.

That suggests travellers are seeking variety beyond the Med and Caribbean – and northern waters could be one of 2026's strong performers.

The message for the trade: keep spring and summer front and centre, but don't overlook the balance by keeping an eye on last-minute opportunities. And a strong year for Europe – both north and south – looks to be taking shape. ●

“What destinations should I recommend to well-travelled cruisers?”

Keeping seasoned sailors returning for more is just as important as enticing new customers. Althams Travel’s Michelle Green asks which ports of call will help boost repeat business. **Rashmi Narayan** reports

As cruise continues to expand, so does the appetite for more unique and enriching travel experiences, especially among well-travelled customers. They’ve basked in the Caribbean sun, marvelled at Alaska’s glaciers and explored Europe’s cultural capitals several times. Now, they’re looking for something different, through both sailings and destinations that offer a deeper sense of discovery, adventure and authenticity.

Travel consultant Michelle Green from Althams Travel asks: “What destinations should agents recommend to well-travelled cruisers?”

For travel agents, this demographic presents an exciting opportunity to showcase more off-the-beaten-path itineraries and lesser-known cruise regions that still deliver luxury, comfort and top-notch service. Whether it’s venturing into the Arctic and daring to do a polar plunge, exploring remote Pacific islands, or navigating the lesser-travelled rivers of Asia, the right recommendations can turn a repeat cruiser into a lifelong client.

So where should you be guiding your most experienced cruise travellers next? We’ve canvassed the thoughts of industry professionals to highlight a range of standout destinations that will impress even the most experienced guests.

Sharon Bayliss from Travel Counsellors advises that well-travelled cruisers know “exactly what they want and what they don’t”. She adds: “Typically, aged 50 and above, they’re comfortable with sea days – as long as there’s not too many.

“They prefer ships that dock close to town to avoid shuttle buses, so mid-sized to smaller vessels are increasingly popular. Roller coasters, go-karts and family-centric facilities hold little appeal. Many travel out of season for the best deals, and repositioning cruises are particularly sought after for value.”

Bayliss recommends South America, with cruises from Buenos Aires to Brazil and Uruguay, or full South America voyages from Chile to Argentina around Cape Horn. Alternatively, she says: “For Mediterranean enthusiasts, Croatia, combined with Montenegro and smaller islands like Hvar, remains a favourite among seasoned cruisers.”

“
Well-travelled cruisers need itineraries with a deeper sense of discovery, adventure and authenticity





SCAN
to read more about Oceania
Cruises' first full winter season
in the Mediterranean



Bayliss also believes that agents need not shy away from pitching popular destinations like Alaska to well-travelled cruisers. "Cruises can be paired with

pre- or post-cruise experiences such as the Rocky Mountaineer, Canadian Rockies coach tours, or Denali National Park excursions in northern Alaska." She reiterates that the South Pacific, mainly cruises from Tahiti, including Bora Bora, and itineraries that include Hawaii are increasingly accessible beyond just luxury lines.

RIVER RE-AWAKENING

Cruise lines are shining a light on destinations which were once overlooked. AmaWaterways, for example, recently launched tours along Colombia's Magdalena River, giving guests the chance to discover regions such as Mompos, where deep-rooted cultural traditions remain largely untouched.

Andrea Stafford, sales director UK and Europe for AmaWaterways, who is proud of the launch of the Magdalena fleet this year says: "The beauty of river is you can have a different holiday at a different time of year. You can sunbathe on deck along the Danube in the summer whereas in December, it is all sparkly with Christmas markets. As well as Europe, we're also

“Cruise lines are shining a light on destinations which were once overlooked

in Colombia and Egypt; in the rest of Africa we work with the *Zambezi Queen*. We're also on the Mekong. We're even building a new ship for the Mekong because of demand."

From 2027, Riviera Travel will introduce new itineraries that allow agents to promote tours through Sri Lanka, including Jaffna in the north – a destination re-emerging with a vibrant heritage and excellent gastronomy.

For Uniworld managing director Chris Townson, river journeys through India's Golden Triangle are striking a chord with travellers, particularly following recent television exposure. "Demand for our India's Golden Triangle & the Sacred Ganges has soared after Channel 5 featured the itinerary on *Susan Calman's*

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Jaffna in Sri Lanka is a re-emerging destination with a vibrant heritage; well-travelled cruisers are looking for off-the-beaten-track itineraries; Michelle Green from Althams Travel



LEFT Visitors to Jaffna can explore the remains of ancient Buddhist stupas

“Recommend lesser-known regions, culturally rich itineraries and unique expedition routes

Mynt adds that these regions give customers an opportunity to experience places which are slightly more off the beaten track and offer more authentic shore experiences at destinations which might otherwise be difficult to reach by air. They're also generally one-way cruises which give opportunities for pre- and post-stays in different destinations.

Mynt continues: "I've recently booked one of my regular cruise customers on a 12-day South Pacific from Tahiti to Honolulu, stopping at three other French Polynesian Ports and three other Hawaiian ones, all of which are ports that she's never seen, so we also tagged on three-night stays either side of the cruise."

For well-travelled cruisers, it's not just about the destination, it's about the depth of experience. By recommending lesser-known regions, culturally rich itineraries and unique expedition routes, agents can add real value and keep the most experienced travellers coming back for more. As the cruise industry expands its global footprint, it offers agents fresh opportunities to inspire clients with new horizons and help them create lasting memories on journeys of a lifetime. ●

Cruise of a Lifetime," he says. "Twinning the Golden Triangle with a Ganges cruise aboard the luxurious *Ganges Voyager II*, guests will uncover India's vibrant spirit and culture in absolute comfort."

Townson asserts that world-renowned hotels, exclusive experiences and expert guides create an unforgettable journey through India and can delight the most adventurous travellers, with the assurance of unmatched quality throughout. "Guests can explore the spiritual heart of the Ganges more deeply with an extension to Varanasi, to witness the Hindu ceremony of Ganga Aarti, honouring this most sacred of rivers."

NEW FRONTIERS

Alexander Davis from Mynt Travel says: "Our more seasoned cruisers are looking to the likes of Africa and the South Pacific, with the likes of Madagascar, Reunion, Tahiti and Fiji proving attractive."

"What destinations should I recommend to well-travelled cruisers?"



Andrea Stafford, AmaWaterways

"River cruising is having its moment, and beyond the Danube that many have already experienced, it's the Magdalena in Colombia and the Zambezi through Africa that agents should be pitching."



Alexander Davis, Mynt Travel

"Seasoned cruisers are now looking to Africa and the South Pacific, with destinations like Madagascar, Réunion, Tahiti and Fiji offering off-the-beaten-track adventures and authentic shore experiences often hard to reach by air."



Lee Haslett, Celestyal

"Ras Al Khaimah is a rising star for well-travelled cruisers - offering authentic Arabian culture, desert landscapes and pristine beaches, all within easy reach of Dubai yet refreshingly undiscovered."

New beginnings

Virgin Voyages' UK sales director **SJ Walker** offers insight into the upcoming peak season, and why travel agents should begin preparations sooner rather than later

As we head into the new year, Wave season once again takes centre stage, that exciting period when travellers are eager to plan their next big escape. It's one of the most important moments in the cruise industry calendar, bringing fresh energy and opportunity for agents to inspire and convert.

Across the sector, confidence continues to build as travellers seek experiences that feel meaningful and easy to book and enjoy. At Virgin Voyages, we've seen particularly strong demand for both European and Caribbean sailings, with Sailors booking further in advance and prioritising quality over quantity. 2025 has been a landmark year of growth across all our international markets and our First Mates have truly embraced our brand.

Value remains a key motivator, but it's clear that "value" now means more than just price. Travellers are looking for holidays that offer inclusivity, elevated experiences, and a sense of freedom, something that feels both aspirational and effortless.

ON THE HORIZON

With so much choice in the market, agents play a vital role in helping clients navigate their options. My advice is to lead with the experience rather than



“Travellers are looking for holidays that offer inclusivity and a sense of freedom

the headline offer. For us, that means highlighting our adults-only concept, our award-winning dining across more than 20 eateries, and our boutique, design-led ships that offer a fresh take on luxury at sea.

These elements resonate especially well with those travellers who may never have considered a sailing before but are drawn to something modern and relaxed. Of course, offers remain an important part of the Wave season story, and this year ours is one of the most

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT SJ Walker is excited about Wave season; Virgin Voyages' boutique ships offer a fresh take on luxury at sea

exciting yet: 80 per cent off a second Sailor, plus up to \$400 in free drinks.

It's a fantastic way to add extra value while helping travel agents close sales with confidence.

With new itineraries, expanded deployment, and plenty of reasons to inspire clients to book early, 2026 is shaping up to be a standout year. Let's ride this wave together – and make it one to remember. 🌊



IN NUMBERS

17%

jump in Virgin Voyages' UK revenue

34%

rise in average selling values

154%

increase in Caribbean bookings

Amazing Arabia

If you have customers on the hunt for an Arabian adventure like no other, look no further than Celestyal's range of short sailings to one of the world's most enticing destinations

Last year, the Arabian Gulf recorded some of its highest cruise visitor numbers in its history. Qatar saw more than 378,000 passengers and 73 cruise calls, while Abu Dhabi welcomed record numbers with more than 100 visiting ships. The region is a developing hub, with growth predicted to reach nearly 10 per cent through to 2032.

This burgeoning desire from cruisers to uncover the gems of the Gulf has been pounced on by Celestyal. The cruise line, well-known for its range of immersive shoreside experiences and enticing onboard activations, has deployed *Celestyal Journey* and *Celestyal Discovery* in the region to offer a series of destination-rich itineraries.

“**Celestyal's vast array of shoreside excursions sets it apart from the rest**”

The line offers a seven-night Desert Days itinerary and three-, four- and seven-night Iconic Arabia cruises, giving guests the option between shorter breaks – ideal for new-to-cruise clients looking to test the waters – and week-long sailings for cruisers wanting to get beneath the skin of the destination.

The line's vast array of shoreside excursions, meanwhile, sets it apart from the rest. The more clients book in

advance, the more they save. Guests can enjoy 10 per cent off two pre-booked excursions, 15 per cent off three and 20 per cent off more than four. All pre-booked packages earn commission, too.

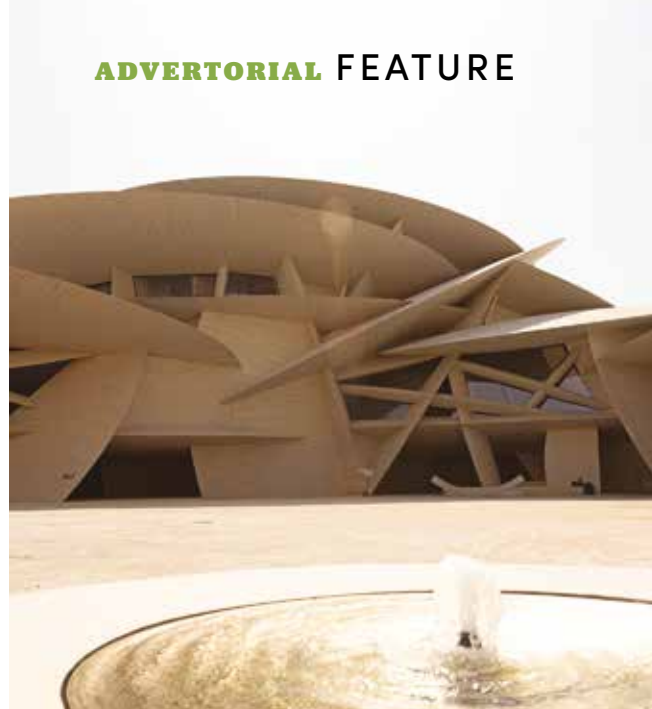
Here, we delve deeper into the line's Arabian cruises, as well as its new Learning Management System (LMS), Celestyal Stars, designed to help you sell the region more effectively.

DESERT DAYS

Sailing from Doha and Dubai, this seven-night itinerary onboard *Celestyal Journey* takes guests beyond the precipice to the likes of Sir Bani Yas Island and Bahrain.

Travellers can journey along breathtaking coastlines where islands, mountains, fjords and endless golden sands come together in perfect harmony, while hearing tales of ancient civilisations and exploring historic sites. Excursions include camel rides to stargaze among the golden dunes, or, for the adrenaline junkies in your database, 4x4 rides and racing events.





CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Celestyal offers a Conquer the Dunes excursion in Dubai; recommend a visit to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi; trips to the National Museum of Qatar are available

The A Champion Day Out excursion takes guests to Ferrari World and offers the chance to sample an immersive 5D rollercoaster with the world's first sideways drop. For the competitive visitors, there's also the chance to race friends, family and fellow passengers on a 290-metre-long go-karting track.

ICONIC ARABIA

Meanwhile, *Celestyal Discovery* offers Iconic Arabia sailings from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, featuring full days and longer stays in the coastal cities of Doha, the town of Khasab, Ras Al Khaimah and Sir Bani Yas.

During their cruise, guests have the option to join expert guides on a half-day cultural discovery tour through stunning Abu Dhabi.

They'll first stop in the presidential palace of the United Arab Emirates, the Qasr Al Watan Palace, where they can meander through the great hall and browse the opulence and glamour of the extensive gardens. Then, guides will take travellers to Sheikh Zayed

“Tranquil pools are framed by the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque's stunning architecture

Grand Mosque, which is the largest of its kind in the country. Rising out of the beautifully manicured gardens are tranquil pools, framed by the mosque's stunning architecture which is inspired by several Middle East designs.

Remind your clients to pack their cameras, as pictures here are a must.

IN THE KNOW

Formerly known as Celestyal Campus, Celestyal Stars will launch on 1 December to give agents the opportunity to complete the training and brush up on their Arabian Gulf knowledge ahead of the upcoming wave period.

The refreshed programme introduces specially curated learning paths, where modules unlock progressively as agents

advance through Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum certifications, earning one- to four-Star Navigator status along the way. Each level will feature unique incentives designed to reward engagement and achievement.

Training will cover everything from Celestyal's brand identity and fleet to destination knowledge and business development content such as “How to Grow Your Celestyal Business.” All modules will be accessible via the cruise operator's dedicated trade portal, Celestyal Compass. ●



Scan to visit Celestyal's trade portal, Celestyal Compass, for access to Celestyal Stars





Fly, sail, stay, *explore.*

Celestyal Travel is the whole package. Our brand-new, UK-exclusive packaging solution means every element of your customer's holiday is taken care of. Celestyal Travel gives you the tools to create seamless, fully protected holiday experiences that are simple to sell, and even more rewarding. Flights, transfers, hotels, cruise and experiences are all included – not to mention customer bonuses like onboard credit. Plus every trip is **ATOL** and **ABTA** protected. All you have to do is enjoy the extra commission potential.

Iconic Greek *Weekender*

Greek Island 4 Night Sail & Stay

Athens • Mykonos • Kusadasi
Patmos • Heraklion • Santorini

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 1 Night hotel stay in Athens
- 3 Night Greek Island cruise
- 2 Excursions included

Prices start from only

£879 pp*

Iconic Gulf *Explorer*

Arabian Gulf 7 Night Sail & Stay

Dubai • Sir Bani Yas Island
Abu Dhabi

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 5 Night hotel stay in Dubai
- 2 Night Arabian Gulf cruise
- Excursion included

Prices start from only

£1,199 pp*

Iconic Desert *Experience*

Desert Days 7 Night Sail & Stay

Abu Dhabi • Doha
Ras al Khaimah • Khasab

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 3 Night hotel stay in Abu Dhabi
- 4 Night Iconic Arabia cruise
- Excursion included

Prices start from only

£1,499 pp*

Included in our packages



All flights to
and from UK



All overseas
transfers included



Handpicked
hotel stays



Celestyal
Cruise



ATOL and ABTA
protection

Heavenly Med *Escape*

Mediterranean 14 Night Sail & Stay

Rhodes • Athens • Kefalonia
Dubrovnik • Kotor • Bari • Corfu • Katakolo

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 7 Night hotel stay in Rhodes
- 7 Night Mediterranean cruise

Prices start from only
£1,399 pp*

Iconic Gulf *Adventure*

Iconic Arabia 7 Night Sail & Stay

Abu Dhabi • Dubai
Sir Bani Yas

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 4 Night hotel stay in Abu Dhabi
- 3 Night Iconic Arabia cruise
- Excursion included

Prices start from only
£1,349 pp*

Idyllic Med *Explorer*

Greek Island 14 Night Sail & Stay

Çeşme (Turkey) • Athens • Kusadasi • Rhodes
Crete • Santorini • Mykonos • Milos

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 6 Night hotel stay in Çeşme
- 1 Night hotel stay in Athens
- 7 Night Mediterranean cruise

Prices start from only
£1,799 pp*

Idyllic Greek *Escape*

Greek Island 14 night Sail & Stay

Rhodes • Athens • Kusadasi • Rhodes • Crete
Santorini • Mykonos • Milos

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 7 Night hotel stay in Rhodes
- 7 Night Mediterranean cruise

Prices start from only
£1,499 pp*

Iconic Gulf *Getaway*

Iconic Arabia 7 Night Sail & Stay

Abu Dhabi • Dubai
Sir Bani Yas Island

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 4 Night hotel stay in Abu Dhabi
- 3 Night Iconic Arabia cruise
- 2 Excursions included

Prices start from only
£1,349 pp*

Heavenly Maldives *Escape*

Desert Days 9 Night Sail & Stay

Maldives • Abu Dhabi
Dubai • Sir Bani Yas Island

Included:

- Return flights from the UK
- 6 Night hotel stay in the Maldives
- 3 Night Arabian Gulf cruise
- Excursion included

Prices start from only
£3,099 pp*

Always included in every cruise fare



Delicious dining -
all main meals
and snacks



Unlimited free pour
sodas with meals



Unlimited filter coffee,
tea, water and juice
during specified hours



A range of onboard
activities and dazzling
entertainment



Complimentary
WiFi



All port fees
and gratuities

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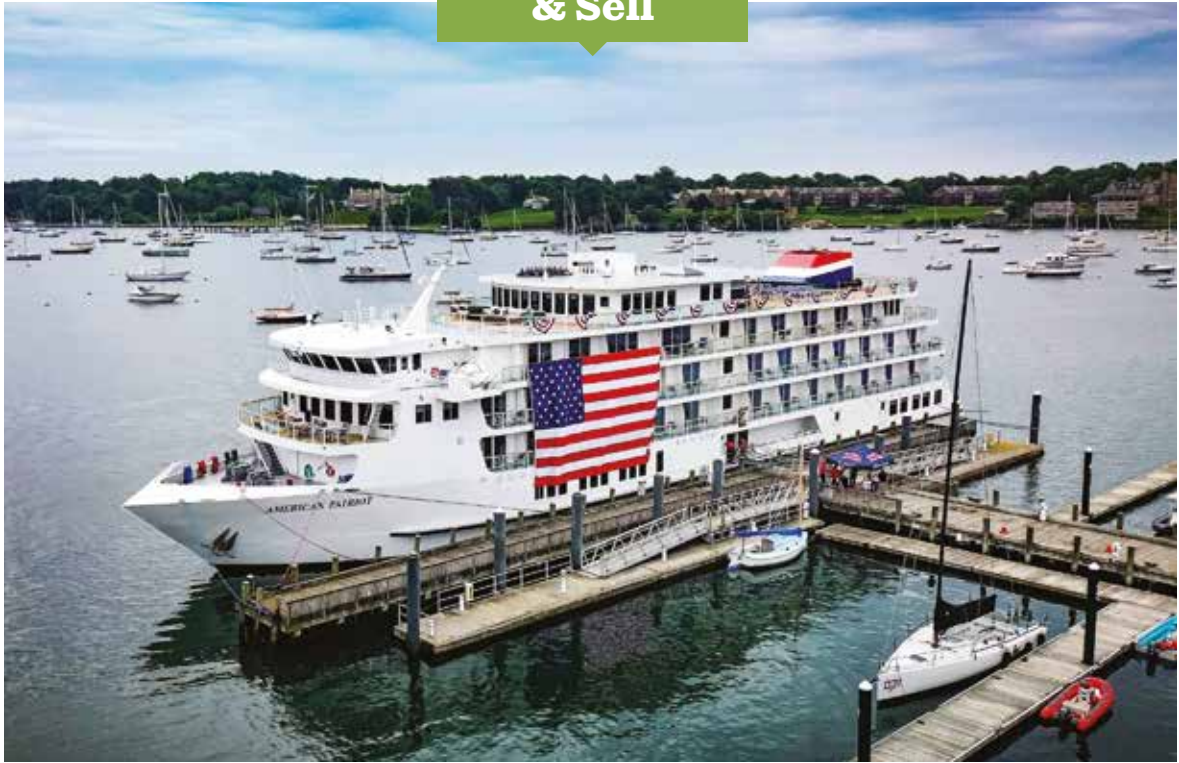
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To learn more and to
download our Marketing
Toolkit, visit our Trade Portal
- **Celestial Compass** today.



*Pricing is based on 2 passengers sharing a cabin and is accurate at the time of search on the 10th September 2025.



American Cruise Lines

With new ships on the horizon and new itineraries to celebrate the USA's 250th anniversary, there's plenty of opportunity for agents to boost their US sales with this specialist cruise line

IN THE KNOW

Founded in 1972 by shipbuilder Charles A. Robertson and his wife Carol, American Cruise Lines operates the largest small-ship fleet in the US. Its 21 vessels include modern riverboats, classic paddlewheelers and new coastal catamarans, with further ships under construction.

The fleet is split between 10 river vessels and 11 small ships, allowing the company to combine inland and coastal routes for extended itineraries. On the Mississippi and its tributaries – including the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee and Arkansas rivers – six riverboats and four paddlewheelers carry between 110 and 180 guests. In the Pacific Northwest, ships sail the Columbia and Snake rivers, while coastal vessels operate along the East, West and Gulf coasts. New 100-passenger catamarans cruise the Hudson River



from New York and Florida's lesser-known waterways such as the St Johns and Tolomato rivers. In the Northwest, small ships cross Puget Sound to the San Juan Islands, with one excursion reaching Canada's Butchart Gardens. West Coast voyages also reach Alaska via the Inside Passage and Glacier Bay.

In New England, cruises depart Boston for ports including Martha's Vineyard, Portland and Bar Harbor. Further south, itineraries explore Chesapeake Bay, Charleston, South Carolina, and Florida's Gulf coast and Keys.

THE FLEET

Every ship is built in Maryland and sails under the US flag. Carrying between 90 and 180 guests, the vessels are designed to navigate rivers, bays and harbours. The line operates over 50 itineraries lasting six to 55 days, offering more than 400 shore excursions.

Now halfway through its Project Blue series, launched in 2022, it is adding 12 new coastal vessels to its fleet, which blend river and ocean cruising.

American's riverboats span five or six decks and are equipped with bow gangways for easy shore access. All feature Rolls-Royce stabilisers and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT All ACL ships sail under the US flag; itineraries cover the Pacific Northwest; subtly shaded interiors provide an onboard haven; the Mississippi is a popular destination

“ The Mississippi on a paddlewheel is a bucket-list moment

open-seating dining rooms serving regional and seasonal American cuisine.

The 180-guest vessels have private balcony cabins, a multi-storey glass atrium, a dining room top-deck lounge, walking track and fitness centre.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

In 2026, to mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, American Cruise Lines will operate five extended sailings, including a 52-day Great United States cruise

visiting 18 states on three ships, and a 36-day Civil War itinerary along the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers visiting key battlefields.

Following *American Pioneer's* debut, American Cruise Lines' orderbook expands to ten new ships through 2028, including five modern American Riverboats and four new Patriot Class vessels under Project Blue. Highlights include *American Encore* (2026), *American Anthem* (2027) and *American Grace* (2028), alongside coastal Patriot Class ships *Maverick*, *Ranger*, *Mariner* and *Navigator*.

WHO'S WHO?

The line's sales operation in the UK is managed by Fred. Holidays. Andy Hawke, river product and sales manager, is the main point of contact for agents.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Product and sales manager – river cruise, Andy Hawke

What's selling well?

The Lower Mississippi onboard an iconic paddlewheel is currently our best seller – it's a true bucket-list experience for UK travellers. Many clients choose to add our Graceland extension and additional time in New Orleans, which we package with flights. Our Music Cities cruise between Nashville and Memphis is also performing strongly, particularly with those interested in American history and music heritage.

What type of traveller is the ideal fit for an ACL itinerary?

ACL cruises are ideal for people who want to explore American destinations in comfort, without the need for constant packing and unpacking. They appeal to a wide range of travellers – from those who've enjoyed European river cruising or long-haul touring to anyone simply looking for a relaxed and enriching way to experience the best of the USA.

SELLING TIPS

1 With ten new ships coming by 2028 and itineraries marking the USA's 250th anniversary, ACL offers agents opportunities to sell authentic, all-American cruising experiences across rivers and coastal waterways.

2 Each itinerary is fully inclusive, with drinks, gratuities, Wi-Fi, shore excursions and operated by small, American-built ships with all-American crews, making it an easy, premium sell for clients seeking comfort and cultural depth.

3 Itineraries such as the Lower Mississippi and Music Cities cruises perform strongly, appealing to travellers interested in American history, culture and music, ideal for clients who've enjoyed European river cruising.



SCAN
to see the shortlist for this
year's Cruise Stars Awards,
taking place in London

INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
ITINERARIES

What's in It For You?



‘RIVER CRUISE NEEDS FOCUS & EDUCATION’

> InteleTravel has confirmed plans to host its second river cruise event in 2026 following the success of its inaugural conference this year, which led to a marked growth in river cruise sales for the homeworking network. The River

Cruise Experience will be an exclusive charter with Riviera Travel onboard *Riviera Rose*, departing from Porto on 29 March 2026. The aim is to help agents boost their confidence in selling river cruises after the sector reported a

15 per cent growth over the past year. UK and Ireland managing director Tricia Handley-Hughes says: "The growth in the river cruise sector and the addition of new ships for 2026/27 requires focus and education to maintain our momentum."

Visit

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



PROMOTION

VIVA Cruises

VIVA Cruises is offering its trade partners the chance to win a spot at the christening ceremony of *VIVA Beyond* in Paris next May.

The winning agent will receive round-trip travel, accommodation at a top Paris location and attendance at the official naming ceremony of the line's first ship in its new VIVA Boutique premium offering.

To enter the competition, agents must book and confirm *VIVA Beyond* and *VIVA Unique* sailings between 1 November 2025 and 31 January 2026. One travel agent winner will be chosen at random at the end of the campaign.

CHAMPION'S MENTALITY

> CLIA UK & Ireland has announced the return of its Cruise Champion training programme for frontline travel agents.

Two dedicated hybrid courses have been announced, one focused on river cruising and the other on the expedition sector. Having kicked off with an in-person launch day in November, the six-month programmes will support nearly 80 travel agents and conclude with a graduation ceremony in June 2026.

Now in their second year, the Cruise Champion programmes are tailored for agents who are either new to the river and expedition cruise sectors, or have limited experience with them. Each course offers a blend of virtual learning, including product training webinars, panel discussions and interactive workshops.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

> Audley Travel has launched a new agent training programme to equip emerging travel agents with the skills and professional insight needed to thrive in the evolving luxury landscape.

The luxury cruise and travel agency's Future Faces of Luxury Travel initiative is the brainchild of trade sales manager Sarah Turner. "Participants will explore topics

ranging from brand storytelling, sales skills and customer profiling to sustainability in luxury travel, with a focus on real-world application and creative thinking," she says.

The first cohort of the Future Faces of Luxury Travel begin their studies in March 2026, with the course running online for eight weeks and the final session in person in London.

Roll the dice

Insightful training, impactful networking and the most exciting gameshow in travel came together once again this year as The Cruise Challenge hit the road. **Will Payne** looks back at the event's highlights

Cruise Trade News' agent training series was back with a bang this year, reaching more agents and hosting more special events than ever before.

The season began in March with an evening of fun-filled training at the Hilton Hotel in Liverpool, where nearly 60 travel agents heard from Fred. Olsen's Mathew Foxcroft, Tauck's Tom Dumbrell, Celebrity Cruises' Leon Hand, Virgin Voyages' Layla Davies and Havila Voyages' Matthew Valentine.

The Cruise Challenge also hosted its first-ever overseas event in Germany, as part of IntelTravel and Riviera Travel's inaugural River Cruise Conference. More than 100 agents took over *Emily Brontë* for the three-day event in Cologne.

During the event, agents were split into teams and suppliers presented their brands, offering insights and updates. The highlight of the evening was The Cruise Challenge Game Show, hosted by the effervescent Pete Smith, where teams answered questions based on the presentations to proceed around the gameboard and win a range of prizes.

Real Response Media senior commercial manager Nathan Emtage



“Events like these are pivotal for taking your cruise business to the next level

says: “It’s been our best year yet for The Cruise Challenge, with agent attendance at an all-time high and still increasing as well as some exciting firsts.”

‘EVENTS LIKE THESE ARE PIVOTAL’

For WestyNations' Scott Weston, The Cruise Challenge is a great way to meet other travel professionals while learning something new and having fun.

“The Cruise Challenge is always a fantastic event – informative, engaging, and a great opportunity to network with suppliers,” he says. “It’s always a pleasure catching up with Nathan, and of course, the game master extraordinaire Pete, who never fails to bring laughs, fun and knowledge that truly sticks.

“Events like these are pivotal for taking your cruise business to the next level, and I’m genuinely thankful to have been able to attend these events on numerous occasions.”

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM The Cruise Challenge is a great way to meet other travel professionals; one of the event highlights is the game show

Rivera Travel's strategic account manager Claire Hills says The Cruise Challenge is something the line “always looks forward to”.

“It’s such an engaging and fun evening for agents to attend. You get to learn about the products, then test your knowledge in the gameshow. We’re amazed at how much agents can learn.”

Emtage adds: “2026 is already shaping up to be even bigger and better as we celebrate 10 years of The Cruise Challenge! If you haven’t been along before, you really are missing out. We have 15 events locked in for next year with more in the pipeline. Book your free space now and we’ll see you there!”

2026 Cruise Challenge dates

Liverpool	12 March
London	18 March
Sunderland	25 March
Norwich	29 April
Chesterfield	13 May
Southampton	3 June
Cardiff	10 June
Edinburgh	17 June
Glasgow	18 June
Leeds	1 July
Manchester	8 July
Birmingham	14 July
Sheffield	9 September
Newcastle	16 September
Belfast	23 September



On the
road with...

Megan Saunders

Explora Journeys' business relationship expert on why now is the time to focus on the luxury cruising market and how she navigates current challenges in agent training

Why did you make the move to Explora Journeys?

Luxury cruise has been my passion for nearly a decade, and this offered an exciting time to join an emerging brand with new ships still on the horizon and new destinations opening, such as Alaska in 2027. I'd always kept an eye on what Explora were doing in the sector and the trade spoke so highly about the product, so I knew that as a brand they were doing something right.

How has it been so far?

It's been amazing. I was lucky enough to travel on *Explora II* quite quickly after I joined and that has been so beneficial to really get to grips with the product. I was so impressed by the attention to detail and thought put into the design of the ship. The trade has been so welcoming, and my diary is already filling up with events and conferences for the rest of this year. It's great to be able to reconnect with partners I've worked with before.



What do you hope to achieve with the luxury brand?

For me, it's all about growing our production with current partners and bringing more partners onboard. We have so much growth in terms of capacity coming over the next few years which is exciting and it's a great time for the trade to still get involved at the beginning and for the UK market to continue to grow.

What points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

Tailoring the message to match each partner's speciality and client base to give them the tools they need. For example, in regard to our partnership with F1, watching the Monaco Grand Prix was incredible and being the only ship docked in

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

A great detail of attention to detail has gone into *Explora II*'s design; Megan Saunders is passionate about the world of luxury cruise

the heart of Monte Carlo for that race is a great opportunity for those partners that sell those luxury sports trips.

How important is in-person engagement with agents?

You can have some meaningful and productive virtual meetings, and of course digital communication has the advantage of enabling us to connect with more agents all over the country at any time. However, there is still something special about in-person engagement, whether that be store visits, events or conferences where you can really build deeper connections and relationships.

What are the challenges in training?

We are a different proposition and intentionally use terminology to steer away from the cruise jargon, but that does come with a whole new mini-language to learn for me, as well as the trade. We are still relatively new and lots of the trade have really got behind the brand and supported us, but there is always more we can do in terms of brand awareness and giving agents the confidence to recommend Explora Journeys to both their luxury cruise and land clients. ●

“

We are a different proposition and intentionally use terminology to steer away from the cruise jargon





Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

BLACK FRIDAY

SAVE ^{UP} TO £200 _{pp}

on a selection of 2025 & 2026 cruises

HURRY, SAVINGS END 1ST DECEMBER





From exploring charming destinations they've always dreamed of, sharing special moments with new-found friends, or savouring a quiet morning coffee on deck as the world drifts by. Whether your customers are looking to escape this festive season or soak up the warmth of winter sunshine, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines exclusive Black Friday cruise offers are their ticket to memorable adventures.

These Black Friday cruises are available for a limited time only, so we recommend booking now to avoid disappointment! Ends 1st December



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Terms and conditions apply. Offer valid 27th November to 1st December 2025.
For full details of included sailings and saving, please visit Travel Agent Centre. E&EO.

Dondra Ritzenthaler

Nearly a year and a half on from her pulsating “lion’s mentality” speech at CLIA Conference 2024, the CEO of Azamara talks to **Will Payne** as she reflects on her first 18 months at the helm of the cruise line

There’s only a handful of people in the cruise industry that can cause the room to fall silent when they speak. One of those is Dondra Ritzenthaler.

During last year’s CLIA Conference, she took to the stage and captivated delegates with stories of her career as a woman in the executive sphere, while urging agents to adopt an animalistic-like desire to excel in everything they do.

The rousing cry was made just days after she took up the role of CEO of Azamara, a year after retiring from her post as senior vice president of sales for Princess Cruises, a position she had held for nearly two decades.

Just over a year later, I’m sitting opposite her in a cafe in Southampton, eager to find out how her first 18 months at the helm of the company has panned out and what more advice she has for travel agents.

‘AUTHENTIC’ SUPPORT

“I feel very blessed that I get to be the CEO of Azamara Cruises,” Ritzenthaler says. “It is my first time being a CEO and, as a female, that comes with a lot of responsibility. I have a lot to prove, not only to myself, but also to the wider industry. I intend to run the business to make it ultimately successful and for it to be known all over the world.

“I can tell you that there are multiple reasons why they decided I was the right one to lead the company. But one of them, and probably the largest one, was the relationship I had with travel advisors.”

The majority (86 per cent) of Azamara’s product, Ritzenthaler explains, is sold by the global travel trade. “That is a massive number, so when our board was looking for somebody to run the company, they



knew that they needed to get an individual who was supportive of travel advisors,” she says.

“How dare I be arrogant, come in and act like I know everything, without taking in what our agents know. They are our lifeline; we wouldn’t be in business without them.”

In the last year, Azamara has demonstrated its commitment to the UK with the opening of a dedicated call centre, which led to a 67 per cent uptick in bookings, and a new agent reward scheme.

The brand also hosted its largest-ever ship visit programme. “We have very little of our business coming in direct, so we see [agents] as a valuable extension of us, not as an expense or just as the distribution,” Ritzenthaler continues. “That mentality is why you’re going to continue to see us invest not only with things like people in call centres, but also in commission and training, because what we do is authentic and effective.”

“

You’ll see us invest not only in things like people in call centres, but also in commission and training

What my career has taught me

See beyond the screen

"To see beyond spreadsheets to human stories is revolutionary. The future belongs to leaders who understand that business success and human connection aren't opposing forces."

Be patient

"Be patient with your growth, surround yourself with mentors who celebrate your authentic leadership style, and never underestimate the power of intuition in boardroom decisions."

Find your voice

"If you're looking for a career in cruise, the industry needs vision, a voice and the unique ability to create experiences that touch souls."

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Dondra Ritzenthaler; Azamara's fleet of luxury vessels; the cruise line offers worldwide itineraries

"But if that is not an option, and until we feel it would be safe for our crew and our guests, we're not going to do that. However, I believe there will be a time that we will get to go back there."

Key to deployment decisions, she continues, is consumer sentiment and revenue possibilities. "I'm so bullish on the fact that this business will continue to be strong for many years. And if you look at up to 2030, as an industry, we will continue to grow."

ON THE HORIZON

When asked about the opportunity for new ships to join the line's fleet, Ritzenthaler is not drawn on specifics: "I have committed to my team and [agents] that we will deliver on our promise to our guests for our four beautiful ships. I'm concentrating on that."

She urges agents to "deliver on your promise" to hit their numbers at the current capacity levels and new ships "will come".

"We're not there, but I do believe we will be," she admits. "We've invested a lot in the UK. The UK is the second largest market; we literally need you." In 2026, Azamara will shift further share to the UK.

"Part of the beauty of coming [to the CLIA Conference] is not just about learning, but also about networking with those who have made time and money investments to be here," she says. "The people who are serious about this are the ones who will make it. If the phone isn't ringing, then get dialling." 📞

"WE WILL CONTINUE TO GROW"

Despite ongoing uncertainty in some parts of the world – like the Red Sea conflict, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the "Trump tariffs" – Ritzenthaler is bullish in the face of adversity.

"The one thing about our world is that there's always something," she says. "If the pandemic proved anything it's that we, as an industry, will come back stronger from anything. We are also very blessed that our assets are moveable."

She praises cruise customers' resilience in trying times, and their loyalty to holidays at sea for helping the sector bounce back from several industry-altering events. "When we opened the floodgates [after the pandemic], they certainly came back," she adds. "I will always pay attention to what's going on in our world, and we must be smart about it. We would be so thrilled if things would settle [in the Red Sea] and we'd be able to go back there."

SHIP OF THE MONTH

STAR SEEKER

Windstar Cruises is preparing to usher in a new era of small ship cruising with the launch of its first new-build Star class yacht, *Star Seeker*, slated to make its debut in January 2026. With capacity for 224 guests, the vessel offers 112 suites, 102 of which with private verandas or sliding floor-to-ceiling infinity windows. Guests will find four included dining options, like the ship's main restaurant, Amphora, and new Mediterranean-Asian fusion restaurant Basil + Bamboo. Customers can make the most of the ship's spa, fitness centre and Watersports Platform, which allows sea access from the stern. *Star Seeker*'s maiden voyage is a Transatlantic sailing from Málaga to Miami on 28 December 2025, ahead of its inaugural Caribbean season. Future deployments include Alaska, Japan, and Southeast Asia.



1 Dining

Guests will struggle to go hungry onboard. Restaurants include Amphora, Basil + Bamboo and Star Grill, a casual open-air venue offering grilled meats and seafood. The Yacht Club Café serves breakfast and lunch, and 24-hour complimentary room service is available, too.

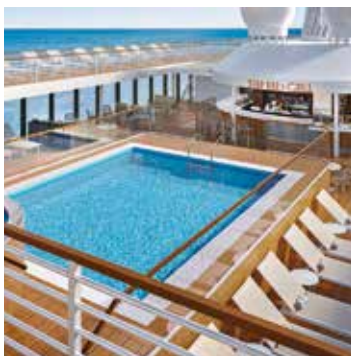
Fast facts

224
passengers

135
crew

112
suites

5
dining options



2 Entertainment

An entertainment lounge and bar offer live music performances in the evening and enrichment talks and seminars during the day. Elsewhere, guests will find two Jacuzzis and a pool on the top deck, where they can enjoy a cocktail or two while soaking up the winter sun.



3 Suites

Star Seeker will offer two Horizon Owner's Suites, a new category for the line, which can be combined with adjacent suites for more space for families and groups. There is a total of 12 different accommodations to choose from, many of which allow triple occupancy.





4 Watersports

Windstar's signature Watersports Platform is every aquatic addict's dream. Allowing direct access to the sea, guests can enjoy paddleboarding, kayaking and floating mats as they work up an appetite for the evening. Remind customers to bring their goggles.



5 Spa and fitness

The ship's two-deck World Spa features a panoramic design and a stocked list of treatments, from facials to full body massages. Guests will also find a well-stocked gym, as well as a quiet lounge to allow for some downtime in between adventurous shoreside jaunts.



6 Sustainability

Star Seeker is equipped with shore-power capability, advanced wastewater treatment systems and twin Rolls Royce engines which reduce nitrogen-oxide emissions in line with maritime standards, to help the line bolster its environmental footprint.

LAST FEW TICKETS REMAINING



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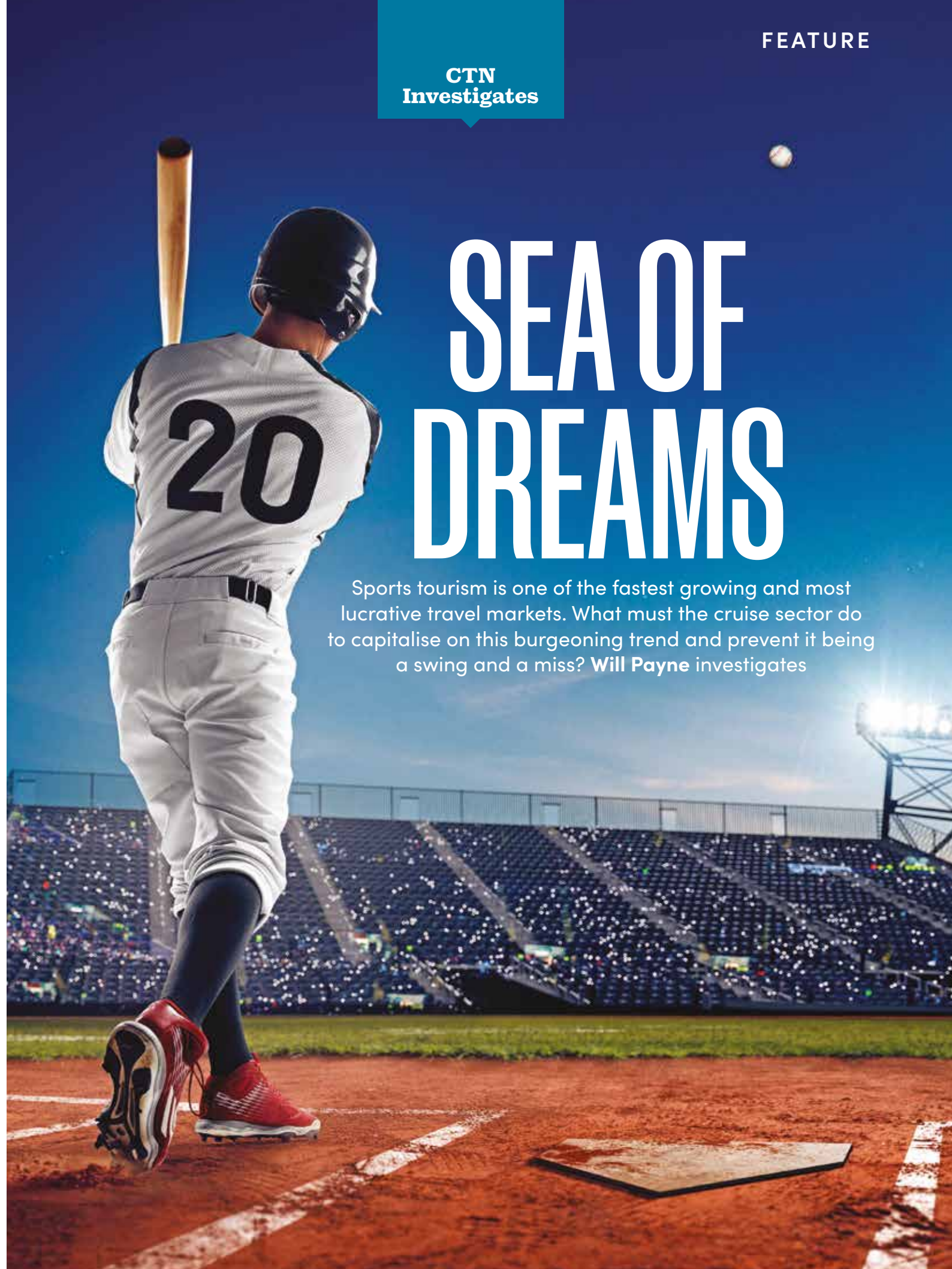
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SEA OF DREAMS

Sports tourism is one of the fastest growing and most lucrative travel markets. What must the cruise sector do to capitalise on this burgeoning trend and prevent it being a swing and a miss? **Will Payne** investigates

47%

increase in Travel
Counsellors' year-on-year
sports bookings



You'll win no prizes for guessing what the UK's most watched television broadcast of all time is. The 1966 FIFA World Cup Final drew the gaze of 32.3 million Brits, which, at the time, represented nearly 60 per cent of the population. The match even surpassed the likes of Princess Diana's funeral and the Apollo 13 splashdown by millions of viewers.

But it's not the only sporting event in the top 12. The FIFA Euro 2020 Final clocked in at 29.8 million viewers, the 1970 FA Cup final replay at 28.5 million and the 2012 Summer Olympics closing ceremony at 23.2 million. Sports are a vital part of the domestic economy and, in the modern era, diehard fans are willing to travel to the ends of the earth to see their team play.

According to UN Tourism, sports holidays generate around 10 per cent of the world's total expenditure on travel. It has an estimated growth rate of 17.5 per cent between 2023-2030, making it one of the fastest expanding sectors in travel and tourism.

The association says "mega" sports events, like the Olympics and FIFA World Cup, "can be a catalyst for tourism development if successfully leveraged in terms of destination branding,

infrastructure development and other economic and social benefits".

Qatar Tourism reported a 157 per cent surge in year-on-year visitor numbers in 2023, which it says was heavily influenced by the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The chair of Qatar Tourism, Akbar Al Baker, says the growth in the number of international visitors to Qatar bared "the fruit of the country's strategy to leverage the momentum of the world's biggest sporting event".

'IT'S A WIN-WIN-WIN'

How can the cruise industry capitalise on this growing market? The sector is well known for its ability to create unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, which sets it apart from traditional land-based breaks. While not every sporting event can be accessed via a cruise, add-ons such as meetings with legendary athletes, access to exclusive areas and onboard activations make cruising even more attractive to fanatics.

This opportunity has been pounced on in recent years by some of the world's biggest operators. MSC Cruises, for example, deployed *MSC World Europa* and *MSC Poesia* as floating hotels in Doha to help with the shortage of accommodation during the 2022 World Cup.

Since then, the line has bolstered its partnerships with leading sports brands to further capitalise on this growing market.

CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP LEFT Cruise packages can offer an accessible way to take in a major F1 event; last year, Celestyal featured Grand Prix champion David Coulthard as an onboard speaker; many golf fans love to visit iconic courses around the world



SCAN

Cruise Corner Podcast: The story behind Scenic's rapid trade growth

Vice president of international sales Antonio Paradiso says the company's collaborations with the likes of Chelsea FC and Formula 1 play a key role in raising the operator's visibility and connecting it with audiences it hasn't engaged with before.

"By aligning with globally recognised sports brands, we can showcase our presence across multiple markets and reach passionate fans worldwide, while also supporting local communities," he adds.

"We're also seeing strong enthusiasm for sport-themed cruises, such as our Rugby Champions Cruise back in the summer from the UK, where guests connected directly with England's 2003 Rugby World Cup legends. Bringing these sporting heroes onboard proved a real draw for fans and reinforced MSC Cruises' commitment to celebrating sports and connecting with communities worldwide."

For Celestyal, sports tourism is proving a big draw for new customers and returning cruisers alike. "With the addition of F1-themed cruises, Celestyal is tapping into a new and emerging sports tourism demographic," chief commercial

“There's a growing segment of travellers who view luxury travel as a gateway to global sporting and cultural moments



officer Lee Haslett says. Last year, for example, the brand hosted an onboard speaker event with 13 times Grand Prix winner David Coulthard.

"Sport and travel are two of the UK's favourite things – add in cruising and it's a win-win-win," says Haslett. "Celestyal's next Arabian Gulf programme revs up with the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix race in early December 2025, and packages offer an accessible and affordable way to take in a major F1 event with accommodation, transfers, a cruise and grid access all bundled together."

Collaborations with sports teams have been identified by operators at the upper end of the market, too. Earlier this year, Regent Seven Seas Cruises partnered with the Aston Martin Aramco Formula One Team. The partnership saw a range of trade activations, including a Silverstone race day experience, as well as the launch of new shoreside programmes, such as VIP driving experiences and tours of the team's AMR Technology Campus.

The line also introduced a new 10-night European cruise preceded by an Aston Martin event in the home of the Italian Grand Prix, Imola, and a Spotlight itinerary from Barcelona with Pedro de la Rosa, Aston Martin team ambassador and former F1 driver.

In June, the line sailed a 14-night itinerary with golfing legend Annika Sörenstam, taking guests to some of the world's most iconic courses. Vice president of UK and Ireland sales Paul Beale says the line's partnerships with world-renowned sports brands are "critical" for engaging new-to-brand guests.

"There's a clear and growing segment of travellers who view luxury travel as a gateway to global sporting and cultural moments," he ►





70%

uptick in IntelTravel's sports business in 2025 compared to 2024



continues. “We are always looking for events of interest that pair with our scheduled itineraries – this combination presents real opportunity for agents as well.”

VIEW FROM THE DUGOUT

But have these partnerships translated into trade business? For IntelTravel, sports tourism has seen a 70 per cent uptick in bookings compared to the same period in 2024. UK and Ireland managing director Tricia Handley-Hughes puts this increase down to several factors. “F1 continues to attract visitors, generating interest in destinations hosting these races. Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Las Vegas are prime examples,” she says.

Handley-Hughes predicts a further spike in sports-related bookings following the Autumn budget at the end of November, when consumers will have a better idea of household expenditure.

“We may see an increase in FIFA World Cup enquiries, but right now customers remain cautious with large purchases and non-priority spend,” she continues. “However, should England perform well, we may see a totally different picture and a surge of enquiries.”

Despite not taking place until 2028, Handley-Hughes urges agents to remain aware of the next Summer Olympic Games. “History tells us that during the period of Olympics, hotel prices are inflated in the lead-up and then when accommodation is left unsold, availability emerges and late sales initiated. So, customers may delay their decision-making to nearer the Games period,” she advises.

“Customers are planning holidays around sporting moments, often combining them with cruise itineraries

For Travel Counsellors, bookings linked to major sporting events are up by 47 per cent compared to last year. Commercial director Alex Gavalda puts this increase down to events like the British and Irish Lions’ rugby tour in Australia, as well as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics. “We expect interest in sport-inspired travel to keep building across further host cities,” he says.

“We’re seeing more customers plan their holidays around these sporting moments, often combining them with cruise itineraries or longer touring adventures. Cruise lines are responding in kind, offering itineraries that coincide with key events and adding ever-more sporting and wellness experiences at sea, from golf simulators and pickleball courts to climbing walls, surf simulators and full wellness programmes.

“For many guests, it’s about combining their passions with the joy of travel in one seamless journey, and we’re pleased to support this with a global community of both cruise and luxury travel experts who can craft bespoke itineraries and experiences, combining sporting events on land and at sea.”

Iglu, meanwhile, has developed a new range of tailor-made itineraries to events like the USA’s National Football League (NFL), tennis

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT F1 generates interest in the host destinations; the World Cup is a major draw for fans all over the globe; MSC Cruises’ Antonio Paradiso and Chelsea FC manager Enzo Maresca celebrate the cruise line’s partnership with the club; sports tourism continues to grow



As sports tourism grows, the industry's next big opportunity lies in the packed calendar of events in the next few years

and cricket matches. Head of tour operations Paul Frost says: "We are seeing definite interest in mixing land tours with cruises, and in a specific sports event as a catalyst for a trip. We're adding more and more of these all the time. We expect 2026 to show steady growth in this type of trip."

The story remains the same in Scotland. Jacqueline Dobson, president of Barrhead Travel Group, reports a growing interest in sports tourism over the past few years.

"Live events – such as sports events and concerts – are becoming a big part of the decision process when people are choosing dates or destinations," she adds. "Particularly with sports where teams have a big fan-bases, such as football, there seems to be increasing demand for people following their teams to important or iconic matches."

For cruise, Barrhead has seen a marked shift towards sporting experiences both on and off ship over the last few years. "Onboard, we've already seen cruise lines adopt the global trend of pickleball and padel, for example, and I think we're gradually going to see more shore excursions that include sporting experiences as well as an increase in demand for cruise and stays that take in live events," Dobson continues.

The sentiment was shared with Canadian sports experience provider and Barrhead Travel Group member Roadtrips, which has noted a fast-growing opportunity for cruise lines and agents to extend excursion programmes and combine sporting packages.



"Where events are held in port cities, cruising can offer a smart alternative, providing access and the chance to combine a luxury voyage with attendance at marquee events," says president and founder Dave Guenther. "It will be interesting to observe the cruise industry evolving over the next few years to adapt their shore programmes to include more sporting events."

FINAL WHISTLE

As demand for sports tourism continues to grow, the cruise industry's next big opportunity lies in the packed calendar of events in the next few years. Lines like MSC Cruises, Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Celestyal have cemented the sector's position in the market, with swathes of shoreside and shipside activations offering something different to the land-based alternative.

These unique factors – meetings with sporting legends, the allure of a dedicated resort-at-sea in between fixtures and the ease of travel between matches – are key attractors that hotels simply cannot match. As fans increasingly plan their travels around the world's biggest fixtures, cruise lines are uniquely placed to turn those passions into premium, experiential holidays at sea.

With the 2025 FIFA World Cup, 2026 Italian Winter Olympics and 2028 Summer Olympics in the US, the potential for collaboration between cruise lines and events is poised to hit new heights. For agents, these partnerships not only open the door to new customers, but also the opportunity to get closer to the action with trade incentives and competitions.

The question now isn't whether cruise can capitalise on this booming trend, it's how fast it can stay ahead of the curve. And if there's one thing history shows, it's that when the whistle blows, the home nations will be watching – and now, perhaps, sailing too. ●

32.3

million Brits watched the
1966 World Cup Final



EPIC VOYAGES

From the high-octane thrills of Super Bowl LX to the spooky sounds of All Hallows' Eve, Virgin Voyages' line-up of themed itineraries is sure to make your clients happy in 2026

Do you have customers on the lookout for a holistic wellbeing cruise next year? Or sports fans eager to sail and support their favourite teams? Perhaps stargazers hoping to get close to the path of totality during the eclipse next summer?

If so, look no further than Virgin Voyages, as its 2026 itineraries are now live. There has never been a better time for First Mates [agents] to engage early and drive bookings during the peak season. From immersive voyages to sought-after destinations, Virgin Voyages is offering more reasons than ever for Sailors [clients] to book early. But act soon, as itineraries are filling up fast.

So, what's new for the brand in 2026? Bold, themed voyages crafted to tap into niche markets. Imagine wellbeing cruises designed to help your clients relax at sea, eclipse sailings offering the chance to witness one of nature's most beautiful occurrences or World Cup celebrations lasting till the early hours. Here, we've rounded up three reasons why you should book your customers on a Virgin Voyages cruise in 2026.

“
Virgin Voyages' 2026 calendar is packed with bold, themed voyages offering a raft of experiences

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Virgin Voyages' 2026 calendar is packed with bold, themed voyages, offering a raft of experiences throughout the year. From Super Bowl LX cruises from Miami to George Town and a Scarlet Valentine's Voyage to special Mother's Day sailings, there's something for every occasion. Wellness seekers can enjoy Wellbeing Season in January, while food lovers can indulge in Eat & Drink Festival sailings across Rome, Mykonos and Florence in August and September 2026. Eclipse Voyages in Iceland and the Mediterranean offer total solar experiences and, with the FIFA World Cup in the USA, it's the perfect time to sell pre- and post-cruise itineraries.

DEDICATED SAILINGS

For clients seeking high-energy, experience-led holidays, 2026 offers dedicated music and entertainment sailings. Virgin Voyages' signature comedy festivals from New York to Bermuda and DJ-curated parties on *Scarlet* and *Valiant* are classic examples of these vibrant, unique experiences. These sailings are ideal for new-to-cruise clients and seasoned travellers who want more than sightseeing – the ones who want to dress up, dance, laugh and connect with like-minded Sailors. First Mates can use



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Virgin Voyages' *Valiant Lady*; Pink Agave is one of the dining options available onboard

these itineraries to target adventurous audiences looking for story-worthy moments at sea.

LAST-MINUTE WINDOW

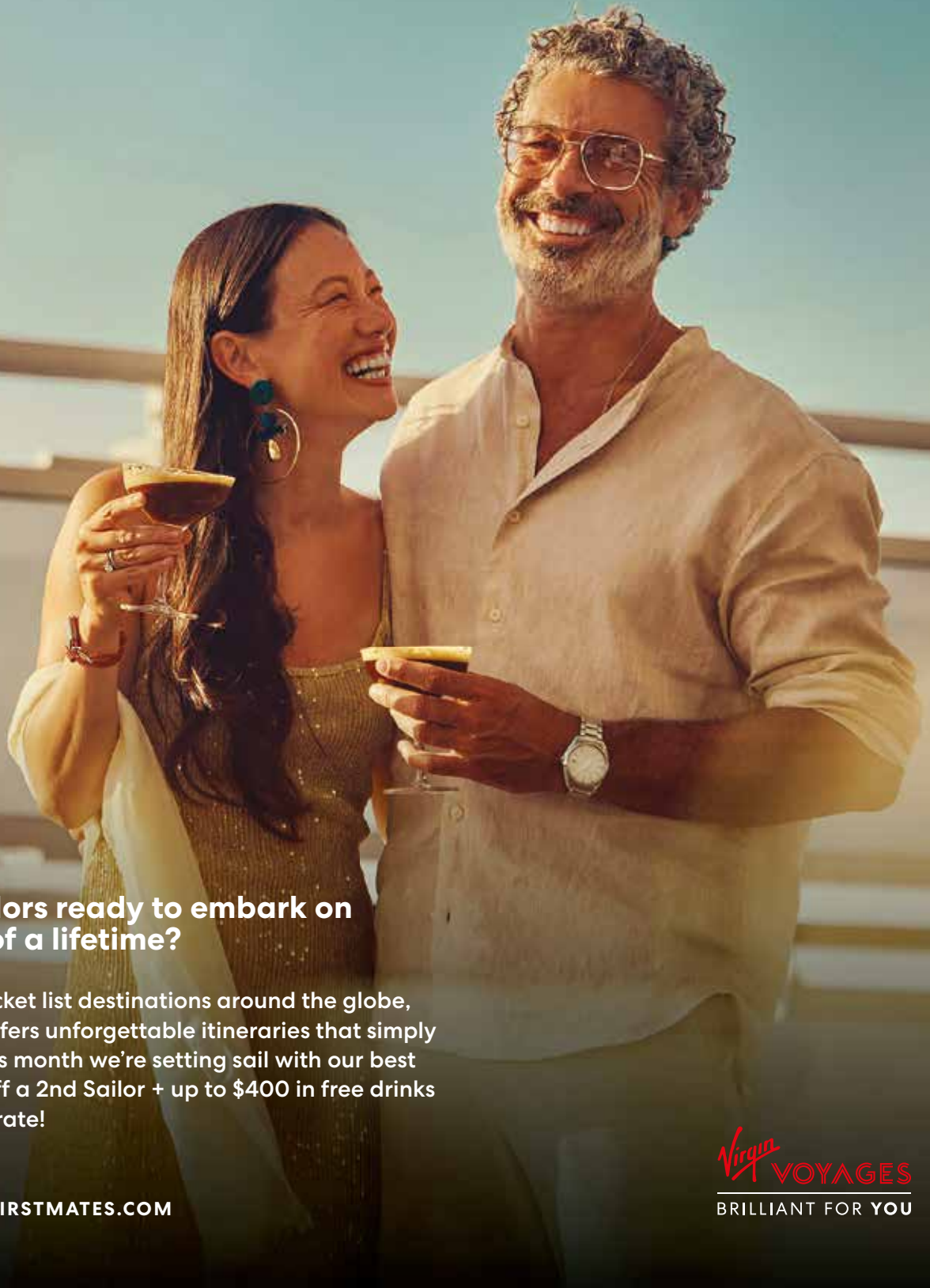
While cruises do get booked well in advance, not all clients plan far ahead, so 2026 will offer pockets of last-minute booking potential. From spontaneous escapes like Miami to Bimini or Dominican Daze, to seasonal highlights such as Halloween sailings to Grand Turk or New Year's Eve on *Valiant Lady*, First Mates can capture clients who are ready to travel now. Underlining these flexible options helps fill cabins, maintain momentum during slower booking periods and ensure every voyage reaches maximum occupancy. ●



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"HAVING ATTENDED THE LIVERPOOL CRUISE CHALLENGE LAST NIGHT, I
WOULD ABSOLUTELY RECOMMEND YOU GET TO ONE OF THEIR FABULOUS
EVENINGS, FROM START TO FINISH THE EVENT WAS WELL ORGANISED, THE
SPEAKERS WERE INFORMATIVE ON THE PRODUCTS AND ALSO FUN, THE
CRUISE CHALLENGE QUIZ WAS ONE OF THE BEST GAMES I HAVE PLAYED
HAVING TO USE THE KNOWLEDGE WE WERE GIVEN TO GET US AROUND THE
BOARD GAME, THE HOST -PETER- WAS JUST BRILLIANT.
THANK YOU FOR A FANTASTIC EVENING OF LEARNING AND FUN"

Juli Hodson
Travel Counsellor

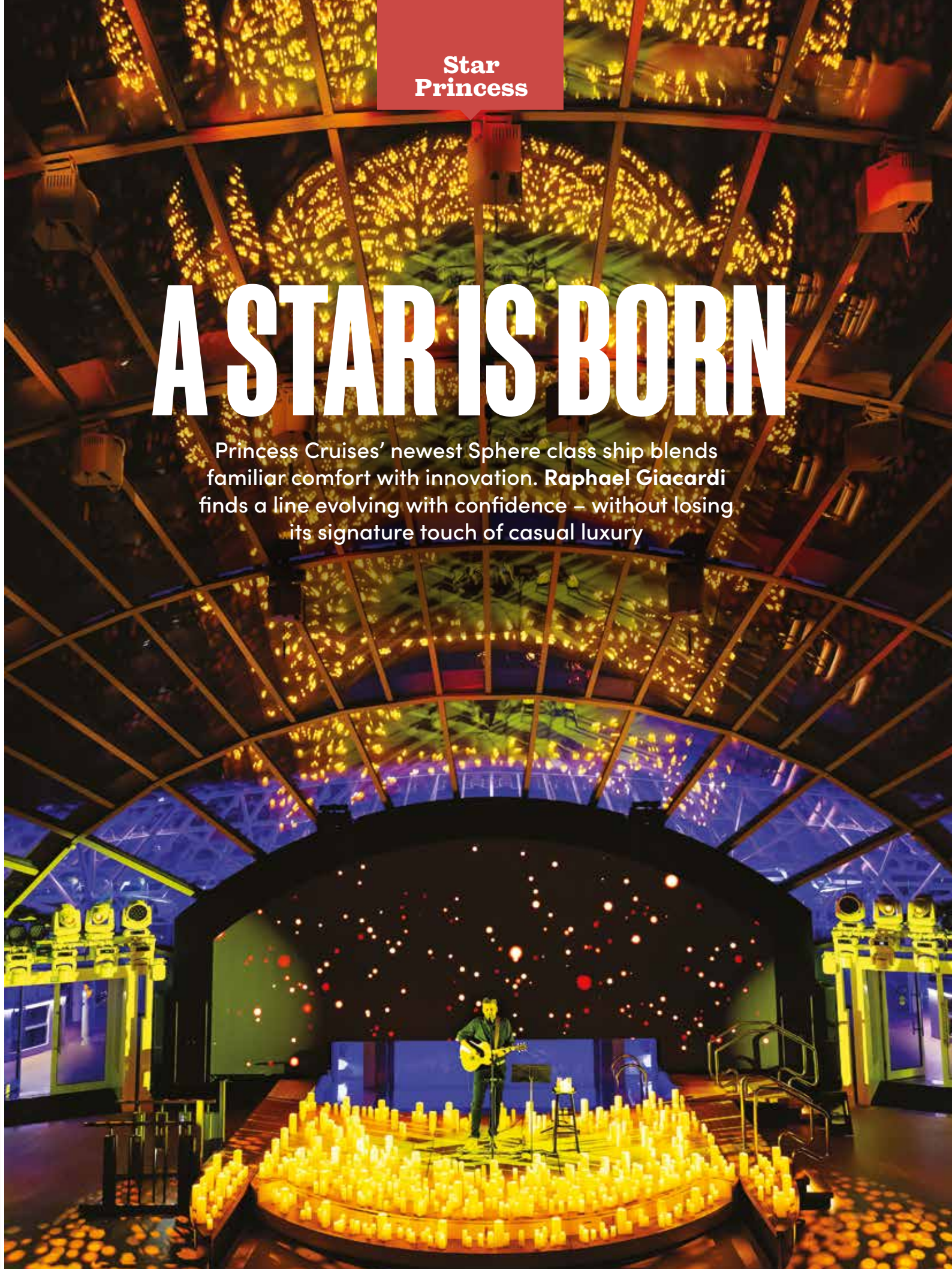


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A musician in a dark jacket and jeans stands on a circular stage, playing an acoustic guitar. The stage is surrounded by a large number of lit candles, creating a warm, golden glow. The background is a dark, curved wall covered in numerous small, glowing lights, resembling a starry night sky. The ceiling is a complex, arched structure with a grid of metal beams and is covered in a dense layer of warm, golden lights. The overall atmosphere is intimate and magical.

Star
Princess

A STAR IS BORN

Princess Cruises' newest Sphere class ship blends familiar comfort with innovation. **Raphael Giacardi** finds a line evolving with confidence – without losing its signature touch of casual luxury



I was lucky enough to board *Star Princess* for one of its first sailings only a few months after cruising on *Discovery Princess*, the final iteration of Princess Cruises' preceding generation of ships, the Royal class.

That recent comparison proved invaluable. *Star Princess*, the second vessel in the new Sphere class after 2024's *Sun Princess*, marks a clear evolution for the brand: larger, sleeker and more imaginative, yet still unmistakably Princess.

It can be a challenge for a line to scale up without losing intimacy or warmth, but *Star Princess* manages both. The ship carries 4,300 guests – around 20 per cent more than its Royal class predecessors – yet rarely feels crowded.

Light and space define the experience, reflecting Princess Cruises' evolution toward modern, resort-style design while maintaining its “casual luxury” DNA.

“*Star Princess* manages to scale up without losing intimacy or warmth

A CONFIDENT EVOLUTION

With *Star Princess*, Princess Cruises has built on everything that worked well in the Royal class, addressing niggles and introducing meaningful innovations that improve day-to-day life at sea.

At the heart of the ship lies The Sphere, a vast glass-enveloped atrium that floods the central Piazza with daylight. The Sphere is not the only change in the Piazza – the number of surrounding venues has been streamlined, giving the ship's central hub a more spacious and uncongested feel.

Bellini's Cocktail Bar becomes the Piazza's social heart, while O'Malley's

Irish Pub and Good Spirits at Sea now occupy their own dedicated spaces, creating a more intimate ambience than the open-plan versions found on *Discovery Princess*.

The colour palette continues the Princess tradition of blues, creams and coppers, but textures are richer and finishes sharper. The result is a ship that feels more contemporary without alienating long-time loyalists.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Star Princess carries 4,300 guests, yet rarely feels crowded; the decor of Spellbound will spirit you to another era; The serene Sanctuary Club; guests can enjoy close-up illusion with their cocktails



AGENT INSIGHT Selling Star Princess

Key selling points:

- Second ship in the new Sphere class
- The Dome: a striking glass-topped pool area for lounging and performances
- Exclusive Sanctuary staterooms and suites with private dining and club access
- 30 dining venues, including new speciality concepts
- Cleaner, quieter LNG and Azipod technology for smoother sailing

Ideal for:

- Couples and families seeking premium-yet-relaxed cruising
- Loyal Princess Cruises guests
- First-timers who are looking for an introduction to premium cruising

Less suited to:

- Travellers who prefer ships packed with thrill rides
- Those clients seeking small-ship intimacy

DISTINCTIVE SPACES

Among the standout new features of the Sphere class is The Dome, a striking spherical glass structure designed by creative agency ICRAVE – the same studio behind the interiors of Las Vegas's Sphere. By day, it's a calm, light-filled pool deck perfect for lounging; by night it transforms into an immersive performance venue.

The Dome leads into the Sea View Terrace, a pool, bar and lounging area sitting towards the bow of the ship. In addition to being one of the best spots for panoramic sea vistas, this additional pool area also relieves pressure on the Lido Deck, giving the main pools a more peaceful feel.

Another talking point is Spellbound by Magic Castle, a partnership with Hollywood's private members' club. Also present on *Sun Princess*, this speakeasy-style lounge combines close-up illusion with cocktails and theatrical flair.

“By day, The Dome is a calm pool deck; by night, it's an immersive performance venue

Other changes, while smaller in scale, benefit the cruising experience greatly: the new smart lifts make moving around the ship quicker, and the staterooms and suites have been thoughtfully updated.

A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

The accommodation on *Star Princess* has taken a step forward compared to the previous generation of ships. Gone are the walk-in wardrobes that, while spacious, could give the stateroom a messy feel after a few days.

In their place is enclosed storage that keeps cabins neat and visually uncluttered. In the bathrooms, the



shower curtains, a long-standing niggle with some guests, have finally been replaced with proper glass doors.

The main beds are wonderfully plush. The one slight downside: the sofa-bed's mattress is on the firm side and would benefit from a topper. Still, the comfort level is overall excellent, and the look polished and contemporary.

A key evolution in the accommodation offering is the introduction of Sanctuary Collection staterooms and suites, signalling a more exclusive version of the

Sanctuary concept. The Sanctuary Club, once an adults-only pool and bar space available on a first-come-first-served basis for a fee, becomes an exclusive area for Sanctuary Collection guests.

Sanctuary accommodation also comes with access to the Sanctuary Restaurant and the Princess Premier package, which covers Wi-Fi, gratuities, drinks and speciality dining.

As a light-hearted touch, guests can ring a bell after 3pm at the Sanctuary Club to receive a glass of Champagne.

FOODIE DELIGHTS

With 30 venues across the ship, Princess Cruises has expanded its range of dining and drinking options while maintaining quality. Two main dining rooms – Aurora and Celestial – anchor the complimentary offering, joined by the buffet-style Eatery on Deck 9 and the Americana Diner. The Eatery now extends onto an open promenade with sea-view tables, creating one of the most pleasant informal dining spots on board. Pizza, tacos, burgers, hot dogs and salads



available poolside on the Lido Deck are also included in the fare.

The speciality offering has been expanded: The Catch by Rudi, Sabatini's Italian Trattoria, Crown Grill and Makoto Ocean remain firm favourites, joined by newcomers to the Sphere class: The Butcher's Block by Dario, Umai Teppanyaki and Love by Britto. The latter, a pop-art-themed venue, developed with artist Romero Britto, is arguably the fleet's most romantic dining experience.

As for drinking options, guests won't go thirsty with more than 10 choices around the ship. Many old favourites are back, including Good Spirits at Sea, O'Malley's Irish Pub, Crooners and Bellini's, while the Sea View Bar

“ The retail space now spans two decks and features more than 200 brands

(aft of The Dome) and the Cascade Bar (within The Dome) are exclusive to *Star Princess* and *Sun Princess*.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Service quality often wobbles during a new-ship launch, but not here. The crew were polished and confident from day one – friendly without being over-familiar, and clearly well-versed in the new layout.

Facilities are extensive. Beyond the spa, gym and beauty salon, the retail space now spans two decks and features more than 200 brands. A new sports court and running track occupy Deck 19, while the casino introduces an expanded smoke-free zone.

The ship's technological core is equally impressive. *Star Princess* is powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG) and uses Azipod propulsion – electric pods that rotate 360 degrees beneath the hull. This configuration reduces vibration and noise, making the ship remarkably quiet.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT There's a dazzling array of entertainment to occupy guests; the Sanctuary Club offers a peaceful retreat with lots of special touches; Spellbound by Magic Castle offers a mesmerising experience

LET THE SHOW BEGIN

The main Princess Arena theatre debuts with two original shows – *Meridian* and *Illuminate: A Spectacle of Joy* – both created with Black Skull Creative. The scale of staging, sound and lighting feels close to a West End standard.

Elsewhere, entertainment spills out across the ship. The Piazza hosts the 15-piece Princess World Orchestra for Princess Jamz concerts, while the Celestial Champagne Soirée combines multimedia visuals with a Champagne Waterfall. At The Dome, the Candlelight Concert Series turns sea days into something quietly spectacular, mixing classical and modern music beneath a canopy of stars. 🍷

OUR TAKE

Star Princess – and Sphere class predecessor *Sun Princess* – are a confident step forward for Princess Cruises: evolving the design language, broadening appeal and sharpening its premium edge without losing the brand's approachable soul. The innovations feel thoughtful rather than flashy, the atmosphere relaxed yet elevated. For agents, it's an easy sell to both loyal Princess fans and first-time cruisers seeking resort-style polish with familiar warmth.

Get on board

Princess Cruises' seven-day Inside Passage cruise aboard *Star Princess*, roundtrip from Seattle via Ketchikan, Endicott Arm and Dawes Glacier, Juneau, Skagway and Victoria, departs 23 August 2026, from £779pp.





Gulf of
Mexico

GEMS OF THE GULF

Recline on Cozumel's blissful beaches, soak up New Orleans' soulful nightlife, imbibe Tampa's care-free charm, and explore Galveston's artsy treasures, says **Renate Ruge**

Cruising the Gulf of Mexico – now known as the Gulf of America in the USA – is the chance to imbibe a region rich in beauty, history and flavour. This humongous tropical inlet, stretching 932 miles from East to West, laps the coasts of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, curving towards Mexico's Yucatán and Cuba's shores.

Turquoise seas meet pristine sands in lively ports as itineraries criss-cross a tapestry of cultures: Creole rhythms in New Orleans, Tex-Mex zest in Galveston, Mayan roots in Cozumel and Latin vibes in Tampa, Florida's Gulf gateway. Guests should set sail from mid-December to early spring when the weather's balmy with plenty of sunshine and the welcome from locals just as warm, discovering a mosaic of experiences, including historic ports, world-class cities, pristine nature and fresh seafood feasts.

COZUMEL: FOR MAGICAL MARINE DISCOVERIES

An eagle manta ray shakes off sand from the seabed before floating into the blue like a bird in flight. "Eagle rays gather in 'fevers', their spots all totally unique like the stripes on a zebra," says local Ramon Escalante, owner of Reef Riders. Ramon has been snorkelling and diving in Cozumel's stunning underwater world all his life; now he guides small groups among the 50-metre corals, a happy hunting ground for green turtles. "Listen carefully and you'll hear parrot fish chewing hard coral," he adds.

There's a kaleidoscope of Western Caribbean colours and Latin American flavours ready to be discovered on this island off the coast of Mexico, where cruise ships dock minutes from San Miguel's seafront shops. However, the real magic takes place offshore, where visitors can swim with dolphins, snorkel in the shallows of Chankanaab ►



lagoon while riding in a glass-bottomed boat and swim into the crystal-clear waters of Kuza Beach.

Elsewhere, customers can see the butterflies flit around exotic blooms at the Botanical Gardens, or unearth Mayan roots in Tulum's pre-Hispanic ruins by taking the ferry to Playa del Carmen.

GALVESTON: FOR 'ON-THE-GO' ART

From its globally inspired dining scene to out-of-this-world experiences at the Nasa Space Center and the exhibition-packed Museum District, there's plenty for guests to sink their teeth into during a shore day in Houston. However, if they'd rather skip the hour-long transfer and stay a little closer to the ship, they'll find plenty to savour in laidback Galveston.

They can follow the Art Walk where paintings, sculptures and photography spill from studios and exhibitions spaces, finding their way into boutique stores, restaurants and ever-changing pop-ups. Elsewhere, they can peruse Victorian architecture in the Strand Historic District, savour spicy Gulf shrimp tacos at a waterfront café or spot sloths in the trees of the Moody Gardens' rainforests.

WHO SAILS THERE?

Gulf of Mexico sailings include a mix of mainstream and luxury lines, with a slew of new options launching in 2026 and 2027. Sailing from March 2026, Carnival Cruise Line is expanding in Galveston with four ships, including *Carnival Horizon*, while MSC Cruises will add Gulf sailings from Tampa and Galveston in 2027 aboard *Seascope*. American Cruise Lines, meanwhile, will debut a new Gulf Coast itinerary on *American Symphony*, as Oceania Cruises launches ultra-premium voyages from Tampa Bay.

They say "everything's bigger in Texas", and Galveston's new supersized port is living proof. Completed this year to the tune of £116m, the terminal is now a homeport for MSC Cruises, Royal Caribbean and NCL.

NEW ORLEANS: FOR NOTE-PERFECT NIGHTLIFE

"Let the good times roll" is the motto of fun-loving locals in New Orleans, which has been a rocking cruise destination ever since the first steamboat arrived in 1812. Nicknamed "The Big Easy", its blend of African, Caribbean and French cultures has infused the city with a freewheeling spirit that seeps out of every bar, restaurant and music venue.

Visitors can get acquainted by riding the historic streetcars to St Louis Cathedral and Jackson Square in the heart of the Vieux Carre (French Quarter), stumbling upon the hidden courtyards and magnolia-draped 18th-century houses. Afterwards, they can nibble sinfully good pralines at the French Market and stop for chicory coffee and sugar-dusted beignets at Café Du Monde before hot footing it

“
New Orleans' blend of cultures has infused the city with a freewheeling spirit





to the historic Preservation Hall for some late-afternoon jazz. The venue famously welcomed inter-racial bands and audiences during the Jim Crow era and remains one of the most respected music venues in the world today.

Recommend a trip to the beloved drinking den Bar Tonique, famous for its Sazerac (the city's aniseedy take on an Old Fashioned).

PORT OF TAMPA: FOR WILDLIFE WONDERS

A distinctly Latin personality greets cruisers to this Floridian gateway to the Western Caribbean, Cuba and the Panama Canal. The TECO trolley has been transporting visitors to and from the historic Ybor City district since 1885 and still offers free rides today.

“Kick back under a palapa shade and snorkel in reefs full of tropical fish

Travellers can hop aboard to visit the shops, cafes and distilleries housed inside old turn-of-the-century cigar factories, before ordering the legendary Tampa Salad for lunch at Columbia, which has been served tableside ever since the restaurant's opening in 1905. Andrea Gonzmart, a fifth-generation restaurateur, will share the recipe, plus tips for shopping in the area. “La France Vintage Clothing is where I go for beautiful jewellery, hats and big flowers for my hair,” she says.

Alternatively, guest can step into nature and spot manatees at Apollo Beach's Big Bend Power Station, get up close with gators and lizards at 3,700-acre Weedon Island Preserve, or go wild for tigers and elephants at Busch Gardens' 335-acre theme park.

For a slow-paced shore excursion, they can paddleboard the Hillsborough River or stroll along the Riverwalk connecting cultural sights like The Museum of Arts and Florida Museum of Photographic Arts. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

New Orleans' picture-perfect French Quarter; get around Galveston on the trolley streetcar; New Orleans is a wonderland for music lovers; explore Cozumel's stunning underwater world; the wild chickens of Ybor City have freedom to roam with their protected status

Four unmissable experiences

- 1** For sugar-white sand beaches: what could be better than kicking back under a palapa shade and snorkelling in reefs teeming with tropical fish?
- 2** For ancient discoveries: unravel threads of Mayan history on the Yucatán Peninsula's incredible hidden archaeological sites.
- 3** For getting into the groove from jazzy toe-tapping rhythm and blues to impromptu brass bands playing on street corners, New Orleans is a wonderland for music lovers.
- 4** For the food and cocktails: gorge on Gulf shrimp tacos and crawfish gumbo, and sip spicy margaritas and icy daquiris at sunset.

Get on board

Royal Caribbean International's five-night Western Caribbean Cruise aboard *Enchantment of the Seas*, sailing roundtrip from Tampa, via Puerto Costa Maya, and Cozumel, Mexico, departs 11 April 2026, from £320pp. royalcaribbean.com

Carnival Cruise Line's four-night Western Caribbean cruise aboard *Carnival Breeze*, sailing roundtrip from Galveston Texas, via Cozumel and Progreso Yucatán, departing 26 September 2026, from £340pp. carnival.com





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Wine
cruising

MESSAGE *in* *a* BOTTLE

From vineyard escapes to barnacle-encrusted bottles aged in the sea, **Rashmi Narayan** examines how wine experiences can provide a gateway to the world's most storied cruise destinations

“May I order a mint tea?” I ask my good-humoured stewardess Mila aboard *Crystal Serenity* as we leave the port of Buenos Aires. “I’ll bring you some after dinner, but now it’s time for wine,” she says with a cheeky smile before handing me an iPad. “We have an extensive wine menu, but if you are feeling adventurous, take this short quiz.”

Intrigued, I swipe through the customary wine list then go straight to the questionnaire, answering each prompt with curiosity and fascination. Who’s your favourite celebrity? What’s your preferred holiday type? Do you know your circadian rhythm and what kind of cuisine you’ll be eating later?

Having spent several days in Argentina, I’ve had plenty of opportunities to acquaint myself with the country’s wines. I enjoyed a glass of crisp white Torrontés from the Salta province. This was followed by a fruity Malbec from the high-altitude Terrazas de los Andes, which I sipped at a neighbourhood taverna while watching a couple perform an impromptu tango on the street. Craving something a little more familiar, I’m happy to see Mila return with a full-bodied Barolo from northern Italy, which is what I would have ordered anyway.

Cruise and wine are a match made in heaven for travellers like me – not least because I don’t need to take turns being the designated chauffeur – but it hasn’t always been this way. There was once a time when a ship’s wine list was limited to one red, one white and a single champagne, and that’s if you were lucky. However, as clients’ appreciation for wine has matured, so too have cruise lines’ cellars, many of which are stocked with Old and New World varieties. Vineyard tours have become more commonplace too, inviting guests to sniff, swirl and sip their way through some of the world’s most picturesque wine-growing regions.



Take AmaWaterways, for example, which invites travellers to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into some traditional grape stomping. Then there's Celebrity Cruises, which recently swept the 2025 Wine Spectator Awards with 21 honours.

"Wine tourism is becoming increasingly popular among travellers who are eager to get a deeper understanding of the destinations through which they travel," says Bernardo Marquez, general manager for

“ Wine tourism allows us to break away from the rhythm imposed on us by our devices

World of Wine, a new cultural district in Porto dedicated to celebrating Portuguese viticulture. "Here, guests don't just taste wine – they absorb Portugal. This immersive experience leaves a lasting impression, creating memories that are far richer and more personal than conventional sightseeing."

VINTNER WISDOM

Nearly every cruise ship today has a sommelier on board, so you're often in good hands. But there's more to your wine history than what your wine list on board displays. I decide to meet London-based sommelier Mateusz Kowalczyk, who works as a consultant for the likes of Moët Hennessy, for a tête-à-tête.

"How you show your greatness as a producer and a brand is by making a good white wine. If you are a talented winemaker, you'll make a sensational

chardonnay," he tells me. "Wine bridges the gap between the Old World and the New World," he adds, giving his glass of white Malbec a swirl. "Take this Malbec for instance. Before the 1850s, it would have been the main grape variety used in Bordeaux. After being decimated by phylloxera, winemakers then introduced Malbec plantings to Argentina and Chile. So, clients must understand that there is a classical and traditional link between France and South America."

He draws my attention to regions witnessing a growing pilgrimage of oenophiles, particularly a shift towards favouring volcanic wine regions. Perhaps the most profound benefit of wine tourism is the way in which it connects us not only with a region, but with each other, too.

"Visiting a winery means meeting people, feeling welcomed, and sharing values rooted in respect for nature," says Piero Rossi Cairo, chairman at La Raia, a 180-hectare luxury wine estate located an hour's drive from Genoa. "Much like silent group reading or yoga classes, wine tourism allows us to break away from the rhythm imposed by our devices."





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The luxury Italian wine estate La Raia; guests can immerse themselves in the World of Wine experience in Porto; savour La Raia's carefully curated wine tasting (left) and exquisite local cuisine (below); Spain's vibrant annual Caballos del Vino festival

A NEW DAWN

Back on board, cruise lines have begun looking closer to home for their wine, with the growing popularity of English sparkling driving demand for domestic labels. Sourced from vineyards across southeast England and along the Cornish coast, many of these wines are made using the labour-intensive Champagne method, which includes a second fermentation period inside the bottle.

Some producers, however, are taking things a step further by immersing their bottles in the sea, where stable temperatures aid the ageing process. One such company is Sussex-based Rathfinny Wine Estate. Its sunken wines spend six months in the Arctic Sea, before making their way onto Hurtigruten's menus. Andy Gadd,

“ Step off the ship into family-run vineyards and enjoy pairings with local cheeses

brand ambassador at Rathfinny Wine Estate says: “English sparkling wine is drastically growing in popularity. There are around 3,900 hectares of vines, an increase of 74 per cent in the last five years, with more than 200 wineries and 1,200 vineyards.

“English wine is now more readily available than ever before. If you look at wine lists in the best restaurants and hotels, you will see a collection of English producers from various regions, especially Sussex and Kent.”

The idea of English wines standing with French or Italian varieties would have been a preposterous notion not that long ago. However, when you consider the number of countries that are having their own wine revolutions (Montenegro, Morocco and Turkey, to name a few), is it all that surprising?

As the remnants of my Barolo pool in a tiny puddle at the bottom of my glass, I reflect on how a humble fruity red can acquaint you with an entire country. Wine has the power to evoke a true sense of place through its salinity and hints of sweetness or smokiness. After all, it's more than a drink. It's a cultural connection that brings the spirit of a region and its history to life. ●



How to sell wine cruises

Andreas Cossenias, hotel operations manager for Celestyal Cruises

“Wine is such a natural expression of place, and our travellers love discovering something new, whether that's sipping a glass of chilled Moschofilero on deck as the Aegean rolls past, or trying a bold Xinomavro alongside a traditional gyro at our Greek Deli. Our shore programme brings this connection to life even further. You can step off the ship into family-run vineyards where generations have been making wine using the same method for centuries and enjoy pairings with local cheeses. Looking ahead, we see wine tourism as a growing passion point, and we'll continue to build experiences that go beyond the glass, creating moments where travellers not only taste but truly ‘tread like a local’.”





Christmas
markets

Wiener Christkindlmarkt

Yuletide **JOY**

From finely crafted toys in Rudesheim to anise-flavoured Anisbredle biscuits in Strasbourg, Christmas market cruises will transport your guests into the heart of Europe's festive flare.

Words by **Gilly Pickup**



The run-up to Yuletide sees many of Europe's medieval squares packed with All Things Jolly because that's when Advent markets, heavy with the fragrance of hot apple cider and freshly baked ginger biscuits, open for business.

The European Christmas market tradition dates back centuries when places like Dresden and Vienna hosted Wintermärkte (winter markets) or Dezembermärkte (December Markets) mainly so that locals could stock up on necessities at the beginning of winter. Back then, Advent markets only lasted for a couple of days, while nowadays they are typically open from mid-November until 23 December and a few, including Vienna's Schönbrunn market, stay open until the new year.

Though Christmas market-focused cruises are more common on the Rhine, Danube and Moselle, it's worth remembering the Douro also offers up seasonal delights in the shape of visits to festive markets in Porto and other riverside towns.

“There is no better way to experience several markets in one trip than on a river cruise

Wherever your clients choose to travel, there is no better way to experience several markets in one trip than on a river cruise, and this year, operators including Viking, AmaWaterways, Travelmarvel and TUI are joined by a newcomer to river cruising.

Trafalgar managing director Kelly Jackson says: “Following our expansion into river cruising, Trafalgar is delighted to introduce two Christmas itineraries, Danube Christmas Markets and Rhine Christmas Markets.

“The festive season is a wonderful time to travel and there's no better way to experience Europe's most magical markets than on a relaxing river cruise. Guests can enjoy the expert guidance of a Trafalgar experience director, the

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Strasbourg's market treats; the lights of Vienna will get you in the mood; Vienna's Christmas market tradition dates back centuries; the cafes of Strasbourg rise to the occasion; Strasbourg's Gothic cathedral offers a majestic backdrop

camaraderie of like-minded travellers and the peace of mind that comes with having every detail taken care of.”

The onboard experience complements the season with mulled wine tastings, singalong carol evenings and Christmas dinner celebrations, while Santa often pays a visit too. As Alex Pinelo, chief of sales for AmaWaterways says: “From mid-November, our ships become floating winter wonderlands, offering guests the magic of the season both onboard and ashore.”

Here, we highlight four unmissable festive markets for your guests to add to their Christmas lists this year and next.

GERMANY - RÜDESHEIM

There is nowhere that can compete with the Christmas Wonderland that is Germany, at its romantic best this time



of year. Rudesheim's global-themed festivities have led to its Christmas market being dubbed the 'Christmas Market of Nations', an apt description given there is everything from Finnish salmon, French crepes and Hungarian deep-fried flatbreads on the food front.

Every year, around 120 stalls groaning with handmade decorations, finely crafted toys and ceramics are spread across the central marketplace and along the old town's winding cobbled alleys. The life-sized nativity scene is one of Europe's biggest, while there is also something rather special about taking a break from the mulled wine and bratwurst to hop on the cable car that winds its way high above the market to the Niederwald Monument for an aerial view of the festivities.

Get on board

AmaWaterways' seven-night Christmas Markets on the Rhine cruise aboard *AmaCerto* from Amsterdam to Basel via Düsseldorf, Rudesheim, Ludwigshafen, Strasbourg and Breisach departs 25 November 2026, from £4,126pp.

FRANCE - STRASBOURG

"Our guests are increasingly keen to spend time exploring more Christmas markets on one single journey, so

“ Strasbourg packs a punch with abundant cheer whether your budget is bijou or bling

we have introduced longer festive itineraries such as our 11-day Christmas on the Rhine and Main itinerary," says Neil Barclay, head of sales for Viking UK. The itinerary includes a visit to a couple of Strasbourg's Christmas markets in conjunction with a canal cruise through the town's picturesque Petite France area.

During the Christmas season, this merry destination is transformed into a festive wonderland festooned with thousands of twinkly lights and a giant Christmas tree, making it easy to understand why Strasbourg is referred to as France's 'capital of Christmas'. It can't be denied that Strasbourg, home to one of Europe's oldest Christmas markets, packs a punch with abundant festive cheer whether your budget is bijou or bling. Tip - make sure to tell your customers they can't leave without trying some local anise-flavoured Anisbredle biscuits or a baguette flambée, topped with cream and raclette cheese then toasted.

Get on board

Trafalgar's eight-day Rhine Christmas Markets cruise aboard *Trafalgar Verity* from Düsseldorf to Basel via Cologne, Koblenz, Rudesheim, Mainz, Speyer and Strasbourg, departs 25 November 2026, from £2,889pp.

AUSTRIA - VIENNA

Like the Three Wise Men, visitors travel from afar to enjoy the bustling festivities this idyllic city offers. Vienna isn't somewhere that does things by halves and sets out to make the season a real occasion, which is why several captivating Christmas markets are dotted throughout the city bringing festive magic, carolling choirs, parades and brass bands to the historic streets of the Austrian capital.

Rathausplatz, the square in front of the town hall, is where to find the biggest and most magical market of all; one of the highlights of this colossal frosty wonderland is the illuminated ice-skating rink. No skates? No worries. You can rent a pair for a small fee then have fun gliding along a glittery Christmas trail where lanterns fill the trees turning them into colourful sculptures.

Refuel with sizzling sausages, Kaiserschmarrn (chopped pancake) and roasted chestnuts or gather round one of the alfresco bars serving hot gluhwein



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Strasbourg is transformed into a festive wonderland; Vienna makes the season a real occasion; spiced aromas add to the atmosphere of the markets; there's an abundance of food on offer to tempt every traveller's tastebuds

“ The Christmas card backdrop of Bratislava Castle evokes a festive glow of nostalgia

(mulled wine). For a raft of vegetarian or vegan delights, the nearby Spittelberg market is a good option.

Get on board

Amadeus' six-night Magic of Advent on the Danube cruise aboard *Amadeus Amara* from Nuremberg to Vienna via Regensburg and Passau departs on 11 December 2026, from £1,614pp.

SLOVAKIA – BRATISLAVA

There are no fewer than three Christmas markets in the Slovakian capital; two are in the centre of town, while the medieval

market complete with lantern-lit stalls is set against the Christmas card backdrop of Bratislava Castle and always evokes a festive glow of nostalgia.

These markets offer sackloads of festive paraphernalia in the shape of live concerts, carousels for children, ice-skating and sometimes even a few pipers piping and drummers drumming. Drift through stalls selling a range of goodies such as handmade wooden toys, delicate mouth-blown glass baubles and pottery.

When it comes to drinks on offer, adventurous options include 'turbo punch,' a glass of alcoholic spirit, often rum, with a slug of absinthe to ensure its 'turbo kick'. Foodwise, the potato pancake 'lokša' is worth a try, with one popular filling of plum jam mixed with poppy seeds. All shopped out? Step away from the yuletide jamboree to hop on the fairylight-covered Christmas tram which travels a loop round the city, free of charge. ●

Get on board

Viking's eight-day Danube Christmas Delights cruise aboard *Viking Skadi* from Passau to Budapest via Linz, Krems, Vienna and Bratislava, departs 28 November 2026, from £3,295pp.



Selling Tips

Andy Hawke, product manager for Amadeus River Cruises

"Sell the atmosphere. Europe's rivers are at their most enchanting during Advent with their twinkling lights, festive markets and scent of mulled wine drifting through historic streets. It also makes sense to highlight authenticity. From Cologne and Strasbourg to Vienna and Linz, each port reveals its own festive traditions and regional delicacies. The cruises are ideal for couples or friends seeking a pre-Christmas getaway filled with warmth, culture and seasonal charm. Since festive sailings have limited capacity and sell quickly, early booking is strongly recommended."



RIDING THE WAVE OF 2025

Andy Harmer OBE looks back at the cruise industry's good fortunes this year while setting his and CLIA's targets for 2026

I am delighted to report that this has been another landmark year for the UK cruise industry – one of achievement, investment and successful collaboration.

At CLIA UK & Ireland, we've worked side by side with the travel trade, as well as the government, ports, destinations and cruise lines, to ensure growth remains on an upward trajectory for all of us.

The headline news is that cruise holidays continue to flourish. We're projecting a record 37.7 million ocean-going global cruise passengers this year, with well over 300 ships in operation. For the UK and Ireland market, 2.4 million of us took a cruise in 2024 – also the highest volume recorded, while the number of holidaymakers ready to try a cruise for the first time has also hit a record high.

That momentum means exciting developments in our home market including new-build ships, upgraded port infrastructures and an expanding



variety of itineraries. From a wider industry perspective, we've collaborated on several landmark initiatives. This includes the UK Cruise Growth Plan, in partnership with the UK government and the UK Chamber of Shipping. Underpinned by cruise's vital economic contribution, it sets out commitments around workforce development, sustainability, accessibility and infrastructure, so

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM The government is playing its part in the UK Cruise Growth Plan; Andy Harmer is optimistic about what 2026 holds

“
The number of holidaymakers ready to try a cruise for the first time has hit a record high

we're ready to continue delivering into 2026 and beyond.

Our membership of the Visitor Economy Council and joint chairing of the Cruise Industry Government Forum also demonstrates how cruise is now firmly embedded in the UK's broader tourism strategy. As we head into the new year, our ambitions are clear. We'll continue to prioritise sustainability, from shoreside power connectivity to next-generation fuels, support the implementation of smooth borders, and promote maritime skills development that opens up careers.

For the trade, the potential is clear. There are opportunities across the board, from the growth in younger demographics and new-to-cruise, to an evolving holiday landscape where multi-generational and experiential cruises become more popular.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this year's momentum. Let's make sure we carry this wave into 2026 and beyond – and hopefully we can catch up at an event or two to help mark our progress. ●





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