

ISSUE 125 • FEBRUARY 2024

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SMALL - MID
SIZED SHIPS



9 OUT OF 10
CUSTOMERS
SAIL AGAIN

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PUBLISHED BY

Real.
RESPONSE MEDIA

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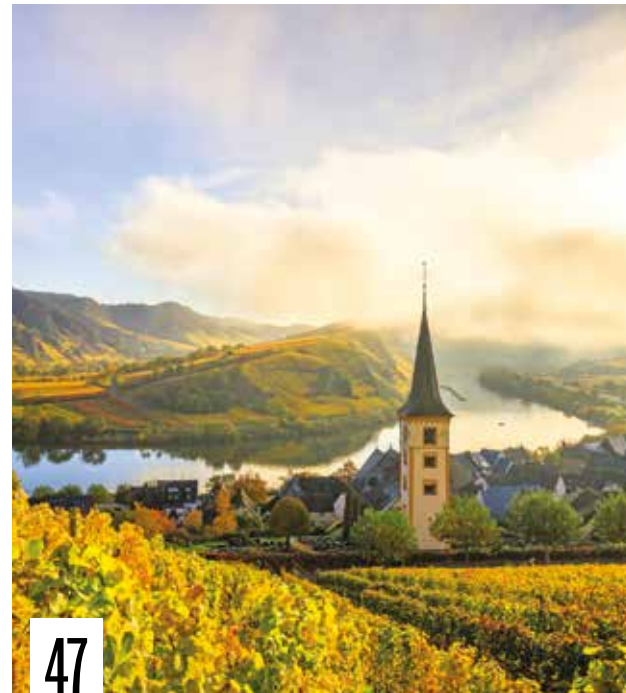
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WELCOME...

TO THE FEBRUARY ISSUE

We hear a lot about the positive impact the cruise industry has on ports around the UK. After all, what other sector of the travel industry could transport holidaymakers into regional towns and cities, all of whom are looking to spend their money in restaurants, museums and other local businesses, at such a volume?

However, overtourism and the environmental impact of large ships are serious issues for port communities, who are often left to grapple with large passenger numbers while seeing little of the benefit. This is the subject of our February issue's CTN Investigates feature on page 40, in which we weigh up the cost of the cruise industry's success on the UK's coastal regions.

While it's important to drive these difficult conversations, there's no denying that the cruise industry is in rude health at the moment. Bookings are up across the board and there's compelling data to show that the type of holidays people being sold are changing in a variety of interesting ways. More on that on page 21.

On the cover: Havila Voyages



ABOVE Some UK port regions are grappling with overtourism

It's exciting times for *Cruise Trade News*, as well, as we officially announce the return of our roadshow-cum-gameshow event, Cruise Challenges, which will be celebrating its eighth year by travelling to more towns and cities than ever before. Turn to page 26 and find out how you can sign up today.

There's all that, plus a stellar line-up of in-depth travel features and ship reviews designed to get your customers dreaming of their next holiday.

Happy reading!

Jack Carter
Editor

cruisetradenews.com

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Cruise Corner

BARRHEAD BUOYED BY 'EXCEPTIONAL' CRUISE DEMAND

Exclusive



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Barrhead Travel president Jacqueline Dobson; consumer favourites such as the Mediterranean continue to drive bookings

> Barrhead Travel has seen a string of record-breaking booking days bolstered by a sharp uptick in cruise sales.

According to Jacqueline Dobson, president of the Scottish agency group, cruise is one of the business's top-performing products with demand coming in across all areas of the sector.

"We're up around 25 per cent on cruise bookings so far compared with the same period last year and, with wave ongoing throughout February, we expect that cruise bookings will continue to grow," she said.

RIVER CRUISE BECAME ONE OF THE AGENCY'S BIGGEST GROWTH AREAS LAST MONTH

Despite consumer favourites such as the Caribbean, Western Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean continuing to drive bookings, Barrhead has also seen a rise in popularity for trips to the Fjords, which are currently up by more than 50 per cent.

River cruise, meanwhile, became one of the agency's biggest growth areas last month, with trading up by more than 170 per cent.

"Last year, we identified that river was a fantastic opportunity [for the business] and there's been a real appetite from our customers to enjoy this type of product," Dobson added.

The Rhine and the Danube are attracting the most interest from clients, but Asia is becoming one of the fastest growing long-haul river cruising destinations, according to Dobson.

IN NUMBERS

25%
increase in
Barrhead bookings

170%
uptick in river
cruise trading

50%
more Fjords
bookings



CELEBRITY PROMOTES CLAIRE STIRRUP

➤ Celebrity Cruises has promoted Claire Stirrup to senior sales director EMEA as part of a restructure of its sales operation in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

In her expanded remit, Stirrup will oversee all sales for the UK & Ireland and EMEA. Meanwhile, Jody Wallace has been promoted to commercial marketing director for the region. The restructure comes as Celebrity hopes to improve efficiencies and accelerate growth in key markets.

"The new structure will transform how we conduct business in key international markets, driving efficiency and effectiveness to allow the sales team to align on core business objectives across the entire region," Stirrup said.

“
CELEBRITY HOPES TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCIES AND ACCELERATE GROWTH IN KEY MARKETS



CRUISE AGENCY NAMES FIRST CHARITY PARTNER

➤ Specialist agency The Cruise Room has confirmed family bereavement support network Reuben's Retreat as its first charity partner, which will see the agency donate £10 to the organisation for every Celebrity Cruises stateroom or suite booking it makes. The agency will also make donations for all trips booked in January 2024.

"When we started planning The Cruise Room way back in yesteryear, we were adamant that we would always try and find ways to give back to local communities and charities wherever we could," said founder Robert O'Grady.



PRINCESS CRUISES COLUMN

By Eithne Williamson

As February unfolds, the season of love, here at Princess we are embracing the spirit of romance.

For those familiar with US sitcom *The Love Boat*, filmed on *Pacific Princess* in the 1970s, you may have seen how we have embraced our romantic heritage within our branding.

We invite guests to 'Come Feel The Love' on a Princess ship, with the promise that we'll ensure everything is taken care of, because when you don't have to worry about anything, you can fall in love with everything.

This month, our Love Boat Sale allows guests to upgrade to our inclusive Princess Premier package for the price of Princess Plus, alongside 30 per cent off a cruise and a £50pp low deposit. The offer runs from Valentine's Day until 4 March – our agent website [onesourcecruises.com](https://www.onesourcecruises.com) has more details.

The topic of love also leads me to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the travel agent community who are the beating heart of the cruise industry.

We are forever grateful for your unwavering support in connecting us with passionate holidaymakers. Here's to a fantastic year ahead.

Adventure of a lifetime

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' Geoff Ridgeon on the joys of seeing the world, one cruise at a time



ABOVE Overwater bungalows in Moorea French Polynesia

Modern life is often lived at such speed that we forget to pause for breath and take it all in. It's the same when it comes to travel and why travelling by cruise remains such a popular holiday option, because when you take time to embrace your surroundings and the emotions they conjure, the journey becomes a joy.

Grand Voyages – Fred Olsen's Around the World cruise itineraries – offer the chance to do just that. They give your customers the time to explore longer itineraries and reach the furthest corners of the world. They visit a variety of destinations, such as bustling capital cities and natural wonders, and invite cruisegoers to delve into history and embrace local ways of life.

When else can one single holiday offer your customers the chance to visit the paradise islands of French Polynesia, sail the Sounds of New Zealand and spot the Big Five in Africa? If your guests have a list of places they would like to visit, the chances are they can tick every box with a Grand Voyage.

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has two new Grand Voyages setting sail in 2026. We have the 99-night 'Discovering the World's Idyllic Islands and Iconic Cities', taking guests on an exploration of vibrant, captivating metropolises and paradisaical islands, with a



A Grand Voyage, once you know your stuff, can be a great booking and a great guest to have for many reasons

TOP TIPS

1 Make sure your knowledge is up to scratch so you can identify which customers would be open to a Grand Voyage.

2 Highlight the benefits of longer itineraries, such as more time in ports and a slower pace of travel.

3 If clients have a travel wish list, a Grand Voyage will likely tick most destinations off.

glimpse into the diverse array of cultures they have to offer. If that's too long, we have the 76-night 'Exploration of South America and the Antarctic', showcasing remote landscapes, diverse wildlife and Latin American culture.

Now let's face it, Grand Voyage guests don't grow on trees but that is why you need to make sure your knowledge is up to scratch, so you can understand all the great experiences that are on offer. As you get that enquiry, the expectation is on you to be the expert and every line with a Grand Voyage will be on hand to guide you through the best of their sailings.

A Grand Voyage, once you know your stuff, can be a great booking and a great guest to have for many reasons – of which commission value would naturally be one. Until next time. ●



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GARDENS BY THE BAY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



CHEQUERED FLAG

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has partnered with the Aston Martin Aramco Formula One Team, becoming the team's first official global cruise line partner. To celebrate the partnership, Regent is offering agents in the UK a chance to win an Aston Martin Aramco VIP race experience at Silverstone between 5-7 July 2024. The package includes a tour of the Aston Martin garage and a meet and greet with driver ambassadors, with food and wine offered throughout the day. The winner will be drawn at random and announced live on a Regent webinar on 8 May 2024. For a chance to win, agents must enter the competition by 5 May.



CRUISE CROATIA ADDS SOLO CABINS

Cruise Croatia has boosted its solo traveller offering with dedicated single occupancy cabins on every departure throughout 2024.

It marks the first time the luxury small-ship cruise operator has offered cabins exclusively for individual passengers.

Alongside the cabins, which will be available at no additional charge,

Cruise Croatia will provide exclusive experiences on board and ashore for those travelling by themselves.

Graham Carter, chief commercial officer at Cruise Croatia, said: "We know that demand for solo travel is growing, with more people seeing the value in exploring the world at their own pace."

Appointments



Crystal snaps up Joyner

Former A-Rosa River Cruises head of sales Stephen Joyner has joined Crystal as its new UK and Ireland sales manager.

Joyner, who joined A-Rosa in 2019, has also held roles as cruise club manager for The Travel Network Group (TTNG) and strategic account manager for Royal Caribbean.

Joyner said: "I'm thrilled to be part of the new era of Crystal, along with the driving force of A&K behind this iconic brand we've all come to love."



COLE NAMED PATRON OF SAIL 4 CANCER

James Cole, the founder and chief executive of luxury cruise agency Panache Cruises, has been appointed patron of marine charity Sail 4 Cancer.

Founded in 2001, the charity raises funds and provides days out and holidays to give respite to families who are affected by cancer, all of which have a

nautical focus, from sailing days to longer holidays on canal boats and cruise ships.

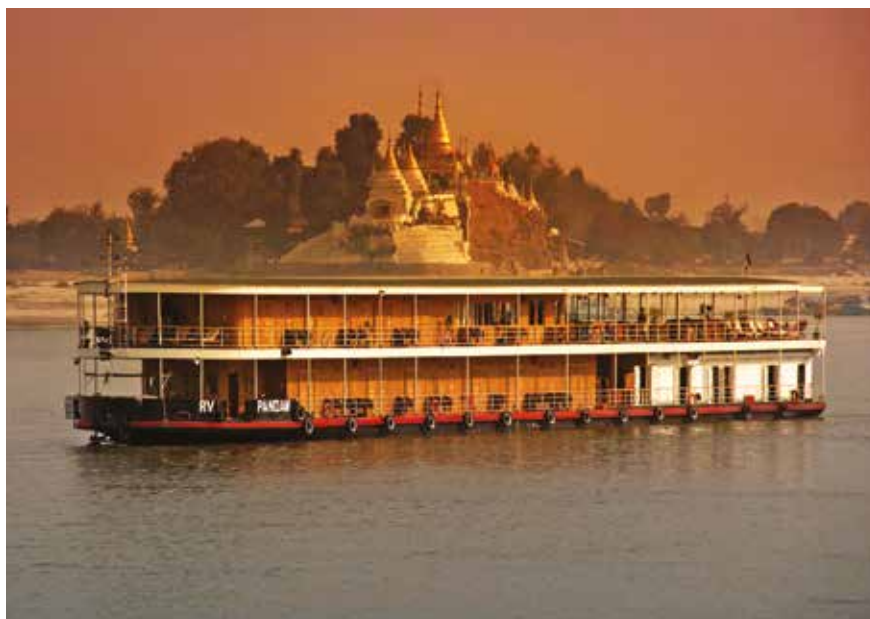
"I have seen first-hand the impact that Sail 4 Cancer makes, having nominated several families in need of holidays to them," Cole said. "This is an incredible charity which makes a massive difference to the lives of many."

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



GOING WITH THE FLOW

Amadeus River Cruises has launched its 2025 European programme, featuring 19 itineraries in 13 countries across ten luxury river ships. The sailings range from five to 16 days and include two new excursion categories – Amadeus Active and Amadeus Taste. Amadeus Active excursions feature a variety of activities for travellers with different interests and a range of energy and fitness levels, while Amadeus Taste excursions offer interactive experiences which include visits to wineries and markets. Cruises are available on the waterways of Belgium and Holland, the Rhine, the Rhone, the Saône and the Seine.



NEW BRAHMAPUTRA ITINERARY REVEALED

Fred Holidays has launched a new 10-night sailing on the Brahmaputra River between Guwahati and the northern city of Dibrugarh.

Launching in October, The Full Brahmaputra itinerary will visit the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Majuli, Kaziranga and an estate which produces Assam tea.

The cruise will be on *RV Kalaw Pandaw*, which can accommodate 36 guests across 18 staterooms with French windows and a bistro-style dining room.

Departures are available in 2024 on 12 and 23 October, 3 and 14 November and 29 December; and in 2025 on 9 and 28 January and 8 February with prices from £6,295 per person.

Appointments



Paul Mellon joins Fred Holidays

Former Riviera Travel key account manager Paul Mellon has joined Fred Holidays as its new business development manager. He joined Riviera in 2017, where he sold both river cruises and escorted tours. In his new role, which he took up on 12 February, his focus will be on supporting the company's GSA river cruise partners and working alongside product manager Andy Hawke and relationship executive Brooke Dunn.



RIVIERA CONTINUES TRADE TEAM EXPANSION

Riviera Travel has continued its ongoing trade team expansion with the appointments of Lloyd Morris and Christopher McCloskey.

Morris will take on the role of key account manager for the UK & Ireland, while McCloskey has been appointed as key account manager for Scotland and Ireland.

Reporting into head of trade and partnerships, Vicky Billing, the pair will be primarily field-based and focus on building travel agent relationships and growing awareness of the line.

The additions come after Riviera announced plans to increase its field-based sales team by 75 per cent with the recruitment of three key account managers.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

The UK launch of Atlas Ocean Voyages is changing the game for expedition cruises

Did you know expedition cruises are now the fastest growing sector of the industry? According to the Expedition Cruise Network Insights report 2023/24, 70 per cent of expedition operators saw their business grow in 2023. Clearly, the desire to experience the most remote and breathtaking parts of the world in a more intimate, luxury setting is soaring. This in turn has forced expedition cruise lines to up their game and offer itineraries that get guests even closer to exotic wildlife and enchanting cultural landmarks.

Few expedition cruise lines encapsulate trend this better than Atlas Ocean Voyages, which, after a successful launch in the USA, is now looking to establish itself in the UK. Specifically built for the Polar regions, its fleet of three identical yachts visit some of the world's most sensational destinations, from South America and the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, Antarctica and



“ATLAS OCEAN VOYAGES OPENS THE DOOR TO AUTHENTIC, PERSONALISED EXPERIENCES

The Arctic. And because everything on board is included – from gratuities, Wi-Fi and L'Occitane En Provence bath amenities to craft beer and premium wines and spirits – guests can anticipate a rejuvenating cruise.

ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME ADVENTURES

Atlas Ocean Voyages' yachts are ideal for those looking for a more intimate cruising experience. Its three ships – *World Navigator*, *World Traveller* and *World Voyager* – accommodate fewer than 200 guests and boast a 1:1 guest-to-crew ratio. The vessels are yacht-sized, which means they can tuck into remote destinations, opening the door to more authentic, personalised experiences, whether that's dining in a family-run taverna on Italy's Amalfi Coast or

FROM LEFT Guests can unwind on a Discovery Suite Balcony; Atlas Ocean Voyages is perfect for those who want to sail somewhere new

spotting whales mere metres away in Antarctica.

To help guests decide which expedition is right for them, Atlas has divided its experiences into three categories. Polar Expeditions, for example, invites guests to discover the natural wonders of places such as Antarctica, the Arctic and the Falkland Islands. Epicurean Expeditions spotlights local culture through the lens of food and wine, while Cultural Expeditions is perfect for those keen to revel in a city's art and architecture.

And if Barbados is at the top of your clients' wish lists this year, Atlas is about to launch a new eight-day itinerary, departing 24 April 2024, offering the chance to discover the beaches and colonial architecture of the Caribbean's smaller, more intimate islands. With prices starting from £2,789pp for a veranda stateroom, including direct return flights from the UK – which comes in at nearly £1,000pp less than similar land-based holidays – there's never been a better time to book. ●



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Exclusive

HURTIGRUTEN CCO REVEALS UK PLANS

Hurtigruten chief commercial officer Patrick Brewer has unveiled his vision for the British market and shared tips on how agents can attract an additional strain of clients by promoting the line's new Norwegian coastal sailings.

The cruise operator has seen a shift in the traditional booking window, with customers in the UK purchasing trips further in advance. "In Q1 2025

we are seeing a very positive pick up, while 2024 is where we see the major volumes coming in," Brewer said.

Last year, the company launched two new itineraries – Svalbard Express and North Cape Express – to mark its 130th anniversary. As well as recently refurbished ships, the new itineraries offer 16 ports of call to allow customers to "take a deep dive" into the disembarkation points.

Appointments



AE promotes Tait and Harber

AE Expeditions has demonstrated its desire to grow its presence in both the UK and EMEA markets by promoting Andy Tait and Katie Harber to new roles.

Tait's title will change to senior business development manager EMEA. It follows on from Harber's recent promotion to senior business development manager, UK & Ireland.

The promotions come after the small-ship expedition operator reported 53 per cent growth in its UK and Ireland markets last year.



ECN ADDS THREE NEW MEMBERS

The Expedition Cruise Network (ECN) has added Scenic, Aqua Expeditions and Aranui Cruises to its membership of expedition cruise operators, bringing its total to 23.

Nichola Absalom, managing director, sales and marketing of Scenic UK, said the line

has "been impressed" with the momentum the Expedition Cruise Network has built to date.

Scenic joins the association alongside luxury small-ship specialist Aqua Expeditions and Aranui Cruises, which offers voyages to the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia.



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

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Solo sailing

With lines increasing the number of dedicated cabins for individual travellers while slashing single supplements, could 2024 be the year of the lone cruiser? **Will Payne** reports

While the thought of cruising alone may be alien to some, stats show that an increasing number of travellers are embarking on solitary voyages, either to take advantage of some much needed 'me time' or to foster new relationships with like-minded travellers.

According to research from cruise.co.uk, more individual travellers are opting for a sea escape. A survey of 800 people found that more than 70 per cent would choose a cruise over a land-based break for a solo adventure. These findings have been bolstered by the fact that lines are beginning to enhance their offering for unaccompanied travellers.

Cruise Croatia, for example, has added single occupancy cabins on every departure this year, while Riviera Travel will offer 15 dedicated solo departures from March to November. Norwegian Cruise Line has introduced more than 1,000 solo staterooms, while Uniworld Boutique River Cruises is waiving its 100 per cent single supplement for solos across 17 sailings departing until July.

Tony Andrews, managing director of cruise.co.uk, says cruising is becoming an increasingly popular option for solo travellers, "offering a convenient and safe way" to explore the world.

"Cruises provide so much onboard through their entertainment, spa facilities and restaurant choices," he explains. "When combined with the ability to see multiple destinations, in the safety and comfort of a cruise ship, it's clear why a holiday at sea is the preferred choice for solo travel."

Andrews' opinion is echoed by Alison Earnshaw, managing director of World Travel Holdings, who reports "great growth" among solo travellers right across the firm's brands, which include Cruise118 and Six Star Cruises.



"We are seeing great growth in solo travellers across all our brands which is not a surprise when you consider how sociable and inclusive cruise is with group dining, excursions and even special events and meetings for solo travellers. It's a great way to travel on your own but not feel alone," she says.

However, Earnshaw admits pricing "can be a barrier" to solo cruisers when lines fail to offer reductions for individual passengers.

"Whenever cruise lines have special, reduced or nil single supplements, it is a hugely popular message and drives increased interest and bookings from these customers," she continues.

"It's something we'd like to see more of as we know [solo travellers] are an increasingly large sector of the market and something that cruise is uniquely positioned to deliver outstanding customer experiences for."

“WE ARE SEEING GROWTH IN SOLO TRAVELLERS ACROSS OUR BRANDS – WHICH IS NOT A SURPRISE



Robert O’Grady, founder of Wirral-based cruise agency The Cruise Room, shares a similar sentiment, declaring solo pricing “always has been, and remains” a problem. “The problem for solo cruisers is the price point,” he admits. “There are decent prices out there from some lines but, overall, it remains restricted.”

O’Grady says the firm has seen a steady flow of solo cruise customers, but nothing out of the ordinary. “To put people’s minds at ease when selling a solo cruise, we always remind them they are in a safe space,” he says.

“If they want to make friends they can, but if not, they don’t have to. But nearly every solo cruiser we send away will come back telling us stories about the people they met, and then book again.”



“**THERE ARE DECENT PRICES FROM SOME LINES BUT, OVERALL, IT REMAINS RESTRICTED**”

Meanwhile, Shona Thorne, managing director of Scotland’s Thorne Travel, has seen an uptick in customers looking to take a holiday at sea on their own.

“We are having a lot more enquiries for it,” she says, claiming some lines are better than others when it comes to costs. Despite the issues surrounding pricing, Thorne believes the solo cruise trend will continue to grow throughout the year.

“Customers who have lost their partners are now travelling for the first time on their own, and cruise is the perfect option as it is safe and there are plenty of chances to meet like-minded people,” she explains.

Meanwhile, Janet Whittingham, head of cruise at Travel Counsellors, says although the homeworking agency continues to work closely with operators to support solo travellers, there remains room for growth in the market.

“We’re supporting many of our cruise partners to surface their latest solo offerings, whether that’s a ship dedicated to singles, or adding further solo staterooms,”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT There has been an increase in solo cruising popularity; cruise ships can facilitate socialising or solitude; Travel Counsellors head of cruise Janet Whittingham



she explains. “What’s more, many of our customers really appreciate the fact their [agent] is only ever a phone call away throughout their trip, which we find is especially comforting for our solo travellers too.”

According to CLIA, 10 per cent of UK & Ireland cruise passengers sailed on a solo basis in 2022. “I think there’s a growing awareness that cruise is a great holiday option for people who choose to travel solo,” says CLIA UK managing director Andy Harmer.

“As these ships are being built and launched with additional capacity for specific solo travellers, it indicates cruise lines are optimistic they’re attracting more solo travellers.”

The makeup of cruise guests has shifted in recent years, with CLIA reporting an uptick in multi-generational cruise bookings. Harmer believes solo cruisers could soon be the industry’s most emergent demographic. “Cruise offers solo travellers great value for money and it is one of the most inclusive types of holiday,” he adds.

He advises agents to identify solo travellers in their databases who traditionally opt for a land-based holiday, and wax lyrical about cruise’s safety and value-for-money propositions to convince them to try an independent trip at sea for the first time.

“[Cruise] is a naturally sociable place if people want that, but I also think cruise ships are built in such an amazing way that if people want that solitude, they can,” Harmer says.

Hayley Moore, UK and Ireland sales director for Princess Cruises, says the brand can “play strongly” in the solo cruising market with its accommodation

“ CRUISE OFFERS SOLO TRAVELLERS GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY

options. The line’s latest vessel, *Sun Princess*, will have four solo cabins when it launches – a first for Princess.

Augustus Lonsdale, head of sales UK for Windstar Cruises, says solo cruising is “really important” to the small-ship operator, but admits that as these kinds of fares increase, it’s becoming harder for guests to travel alone without paying high single supplements.

“We’ve dedicated a range of sailings with less than 50 per cent supplements across our cruises, including a number with zero per cent single supplement,” he adds. The line organises special diners for solo guests so they can meet like-minded travellers.

Lonsdale continues: “For our winter in the Mediterranean season, both for late sailings and the new season next year, we’ve seen a very positive reaction to the zero per cent solo supplements particularly, as it’s something they are not accustomed to seeing with a luxury cruise line.”

While some cruisers will inevitably be put off by the higher prices associated with solo travel, consumers’ appetites for taking to the high seas independently continues to grow. ●

ABOVE Customers love having the ability to see multiple destinations in the safety and comfort of a cruise ship

Tech Talk

Slowly does it

Traveltek chief commercial officer
Cressida Sergeant reveals why travellers
are favouring longer cruises

Royal Caribbean's nine-month Ultimate World Cruise, aboard *Serenade of the Seas*, has garnered a lot of attention recently. While around-the-world cruises are nothing new, it seems that travellers are increasingly open to the idea of spending more of their precious holiday time on board.

You only have to look at Traveltek's booking data to see that demand for longer cruises has never been higher. While seven-night cruises remain the most popular option for travellers, accounting for 48 per cent of bookings in 2023, two-week voyages accounted for a remarkable 29 per cent of bookings during the same period. This was followed by 12-night cruises at 11 per cent. And since 2019, bookings for 14-night cruises have grown more than any other duration.

According to CLIA, 43 per cent of cruise travellers plan to book longer cruises for their next trip. As many of these longer itineraries book up sooner, people are beginning to book further in advance, too, even as far out as 2028.

The reasons for travellers seeking longer voyages are myriad, though most indications show that it's fuelled by the fact people are eager to make up for lost travel time during the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, cruise trip duration tends to correlate with age. Although the six-to-eight-day cruise is most popular across certain generations (particularly Baby Boomers and millennials), gen x travellers often opt for shorter cruises that last five days or less. On the flip side, those born before 1945 are most likely to choose longer cruises lasting nine days or more.



“
**Since 2019, bookings
for 14-night cruises
grew more than any
other duration**

The most popular destinations for 14-night cruises are (in order) the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Canary Islands, Northern Europe from Southampton, and the Western Mediterranean. The leading cruise lines, meanwhile, are P&O Cruises, Princess Cruises, Royal Caribbean, and MSC Cruises, with an average price of £3,240 for trips over 14 nights.

With evolving traveller preferences, shifting demographics and a growing enthusiasm for early planning, it's clear that the appeal of longer cruises will continue to capture the attention of cruise bookers, bringing more options and perhaps even a new sense of adventure to voyages at sea. ●

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant says Traveltek's booking data reflects more demand for longer cruises

IN NUMBERS

43%

of cruise travellers plan
to book longer cruises

29%

of bookings in 2023 were
for 14-night itineraries

£3,240

The average price of
a 14-night cruise



Swan Hellenic

The boutique expedition cruise line goes under the microscope as we reveal the key selling points to help you get your clients on board

IN THE KNOW

Having been founded in the 1950s to ferry itinerant university lecturers to Greece's top archaeological sites, Swan Hellenic relaunched as a boutique expedition cruise line in July 2020. Education and geographical exploration remain at the heart of the line's itineraries, which sail to all corners of the world, from the Mediterranean and Latin America to both polar regions. The line also has a series of impressive partnerships with industry-leading experts, with speakers imparting their knowledge to guests through lectures and citizen science projects.

SHIPS IN THE FLEET

Swan Hellenic's fleet is made up of three boutique-sized ships. *Vega* and *Minerva* can accommodate 152 guests across 76 cabins, while *Diana*, which was unveiled early last year, offers accommodation for 192 guests across 96 staterooms and suites. Each ship boasts three distinct dining venues, as well as a host of high-end features, including saunas, hot tubs and an intimate observation deck for star gazing.



FROM TOP Zodiac excursions can make a trip truly memorable; guests can delve into the hidden history of Mediterranean destinations such as Sicily

And thanks to a partnership with JRE-Jeunes Restaurateurs, guests can also enjoy specialty dishes using locally sourced ingredients, exclusive menus and cooking demonstrations from one of the collective's esteemed chefs.

WHO'S WHO?

Swan Hellenic is headquartered in Cyprus, though it has teams in the UK, Germany, the US, Hong Kong, Scandinavia and Sydney. The UK team is led by Mario Bounas, general manager, UK & Ireland, with support from Luke Clarke, sales director UK, and Joanne Korfhage, sales & trade coordinator.

The line is a predominantly trade-based company, with around 80-90 per cent of its business placed by agents. A digital library packed with videos, brochures, images and other useful assets is available to agents looking to promote the line to their clients.



“ THE LINE HAS IMPRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY-LEADING EXPERTS

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

The expedition cruise line recently announced a host of new itineraries for 2025, including sailings to east and west Africa, Latin America and the Mediterranean. A 19-night Exploring South America from Barbados to Brazil will set sail on *Vega* from Bridgetown, Barbados in October next year, detouring along the Amazon River before finishing in Salvador, Brazil. Meanwhile, a new 10-day Mediterranean itinerary will tour the region's UNESCO World Heritage sites before docking in the heart of Venice.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Mario Bounas, general manager, UK & Ireland, explains why the UK trade is vital to Swan Hellenic's growth plans

How are you looking to promote the line in 2024?

We're members of CLIA and the Expedition Cruise Network, which helps us raise awareness of both the brand and the expedition cruise industry. We have ships in the UK in May and June and we're eager to host agents on board so they actually get to see



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The expedition line is perfect for travellers in search of the epic; new sailings to Latin America take in tropical wildlife; Swan Hellenic's Mario Bounas

the product. It's easy to watch a video, but unless you've been on board it's difficult to fully imagine what the experience is like for guests. We're also looking to invite the trade to sail with us, as well.

What resources are currently available to agents? We continue to improve our video content, which is available on our digital asset library. We also have training portals especially for travel agents who can access our booking page directly or they

can go through me and the team to ensure they're getting the best prices.

How important is the trade to Swan Hellenic?

The company is still growing in the UK market, so we're focused on getting the right partners on board and providing them with the right assets. Everything agents might need to promote our experiences is at their disposal, and we support that by having regular face-to-face conversations with agents, communicating when we have special offers and promotions available for guests. ●

TOP TIPS

1 Having a deep knowledge of Swan Hellenic's product is vital. Being able to tell clients what wildlife they're going to see, for example, or what life is like on the ship will be key to getting them onboard.

2 Ensure you're signed up to be one of Swan Hellenic's preferred travel partners so you can gain access to a wealth of helpful information, from news and updates on the fleet to marketing assets.

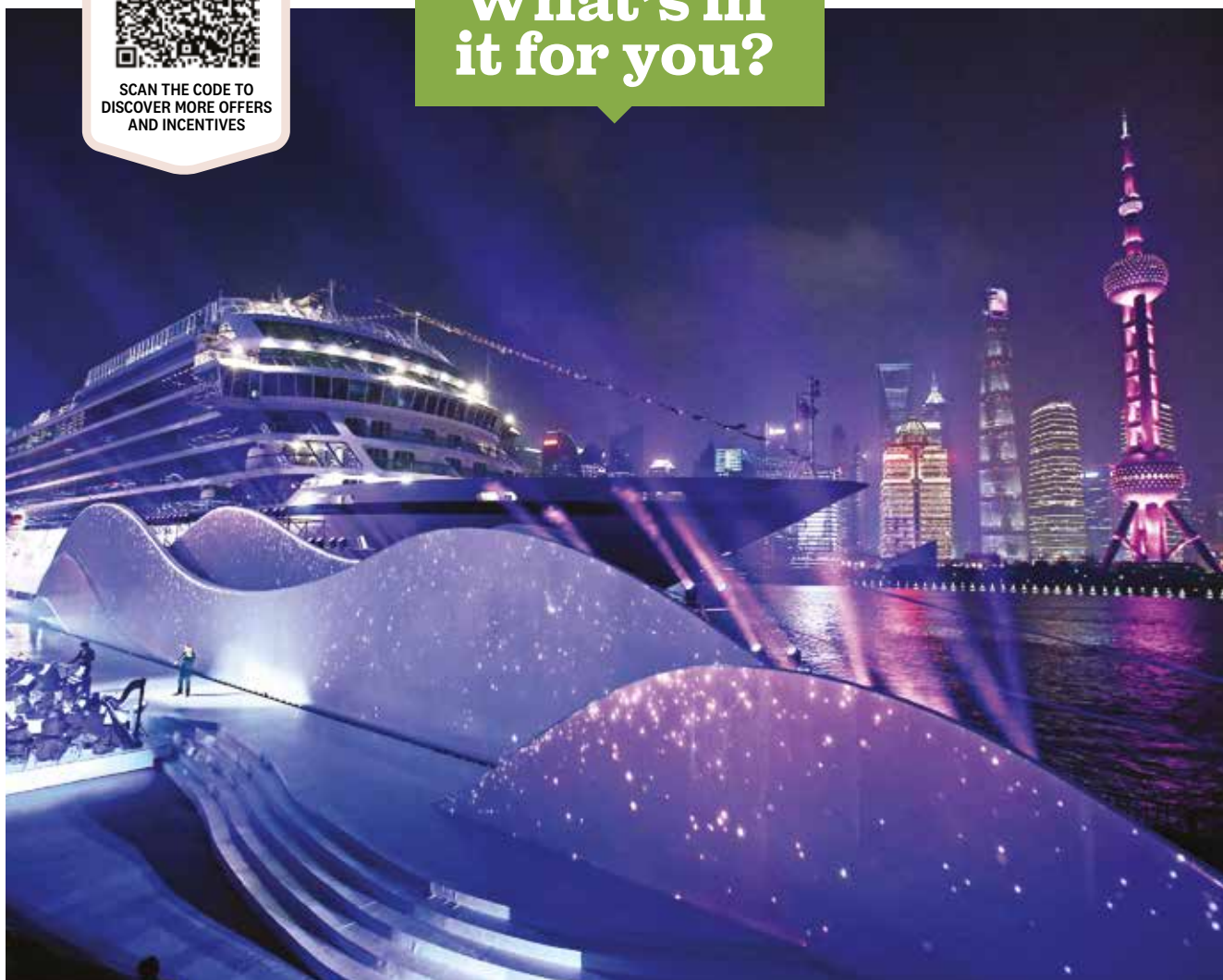
3 Swan Hellenic has forged partnerships with a diversity of high-calibre experts in a range of fields. For example, the line's wellness programme has been designed by best-selling author Dr Deepak Chopra.

INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
ITINERARIES



SCAN THE CODE TO
DISCOVER MORE OFFERS
AND INCENTIVES

What's in
it for you?



VIKING LAUNCHES CHINA SAILINGS



Viking has become the first line to offer British passengers the chance to experience a domestic sailing out of China with three new itineraries.

The new voyages range from 10 to 20 days and explore cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Each sailing includes an itinerary off China's coast, which highlights rarely seen destinations and ports, to which only Viking has access – something that has never been offered for international visitors.

Itineraries will operate from September to November on *Viking Yi Dun*, the first ship dedicated specifically to the foreign market to operate domestic sailings in China.

"We are proud that Viking will be the first to operate domestic sailings in China for international travellers," said Torstein Hagen, chair of Viking. "Our guests are curious travellers who are interested in experiences that broaden their mind. China, with one of the richest cultures in the world, has been inspiring travellers for centuries."

Sign up

to the Agents Club by Cruise Trade News on Facebook and visit cruisetradenews.com for the latest incentives, itineraries and training news



AGENTS GIVEN CHANCE TO WIN TRIP TO BAHAMAS

Carnival Cruise Line has launched a new trade booking incentive, which offers agents the chance to win a cruise to the line's new private Grand Bahama destination, Celebration Key.

There are 20 places available as part of the campaign, which runs from 1 February to 1 November 2024.

Agents need to make a Celebration Key booking via the line's website and register it on Loyalty Rocks Club.

The more bookings made, the higher agents will climb on a leaderboard. Agents can also win 30 Loyalty Rocks Club points, equivalent to £30, for bookings made up to 1 April.

ROYAL CARIBBEAN ROLLS OUT EUROVISION PRIZES

Agents have been given the chance to win tickets to the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest as part of a new Royal Caribbean booking incentive. The Book Your Way to Eurovision competition runs from 18 January to 29 February and will see winners bag return flights to Sweden, a hosted two-night getaway, dining and a VIP hospitality ticket at one of the four Eurovision events.

With 34 spaces available via a leaderboard system, agents must head to the line's learning and rewards platform, Club Royal, to be in with a chance of winning. Once they've selected their avatar, agents need to book and claim a 2024 or 2025 Royal Caribbean cruise to earn points. Those at the top of the leaderboard at the end of the competition will win the top prize and be jetted off to Malmo later this year.



A-ROSA DETAILS £50 BOOKING INCENTIVE

A-Rosa is offering agents a £50 voucher for every booking they make until 29 February.

The incentive applies to any of the river cruise line's itineraries and can be earned on any of the company's bespoke packages. The more bookings that are made, the more vouchers an agent will receive.

The line is also offering savings of up to 20 per cent on the cruise element of the booking for 2024 departures, including on the line's two new ships, *A-Rosa Alea* and *A-Rosa Clea*, which enter service in April.

Packages currently start from £1,149pp for a five-night Rendezvous cruise, including flights and premium all-inclusive drinks and dining.



Let the games begin

Cruise Challenge is back and bigger than ever. Here's why the roadshow event is an essential date for every travel agent's diary

Now in its eighth year, Cruise Challenge, presented by *Cruise Trade News*, returns to the industry calendar once again, with plans to visit more UK towns and cities than ever before. Packed with fun, interactive presentations, great food and, of course, the Cruise Challenge gameshow, this agent training event with a difference offers the chance for guests to boost their knowledge and network with some of the UK's biggest lines and industry suppliers.

What's more, this year's roadshow will be reaching more people than ever, with a host of new regions added to the schedule, including Edinburgh, Belfast, Chelmsford and Exeter. The Cruise Challenge has hosted more than 2,000 guests since it launched in 2016, and with 2024 set to be another record-breaking year for the industry, now's the perfect time for agents to replenish their knowledge and learn all about the latest products on the market.

“THE ROADSHOW WILL REACH MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER WITH A HOST OF NEW REGIONS



“Not only does Cruise Challenge provide a great opportunity for agents to network with their peers, it's also a chance for cruise lines to educate travel partners in a wholly fun and unique way,” said Lina Slater, chief operating officer of Real Response Media. “The fact that this year's roadshow will be travelling to more towns and cities than ever before goes to show how important these face-to-face events are for our industry.”

A GAMIFIED EXPERIENCE

Each Cruise Challenge kicks off with a welcome reception before a series of short, interactive presentations invite the evening's cruise line or tourist board partners to share their latest ship and itinerary updates. Then, a sit-down dinner is served by the respective venue before attendees are split into three colour-coded teams, at which point

CRUISE CHALLENGE 2024 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Liverpool	▶	21st March
Leeds	▶	11th April
Maidstone	▶	9th May
Southampton	▶	23rd May
Belfast	▶	13th June
Edinburgh - River Cruise	▶	26th June
Glasgow	▶	27th June
Manchester - Luxury	▶	11th July
Cardiff	▶	16th July
Chester - Expedition	▶	12th September
Sheffield	▶	19th September
Exeter	▶	26th September
Chelmsford	▶	7th November
Norwich	▶	21st November
London	▶	28th November

“
**GUESTS CAN WIN
CHAMPAGNE, LUXURY
CHOCOLATES AND EVEN
A FREE CRUISE HOLIDAY**

the evening's main event begins. The gameshow, led by our sparkly-jacketed host, takes place around a giant board in the middle of the room, with participants taking turns to answer questions based off of the information they gathered from the presentations. Guests who were listening attentively have the chance to win a host of prizes, including Champagne, luxury chocolates and sometimes even a free cruise holiday.

Spaces are filling up fast so head to the website and secure your place today! 📍

thecruisechallenge.com



Michelle Tingley

The brand training manager for Fred Olsen Cruises explains how Cruise Challenge has helped her forge better relationships with her agent partners

What first attracted you to the Cruise Challenge event?

Cruising holidays are on the rise, but not all cruise ships are the same. The Cruise Challenge is a perfect way for agents to strengthen their knowledge of the many different brands that are out there while having fun. When I last attended the Newcastle event in October 2023, I shared information on what makes Fred Olsen Cruises different, who the Fred Olsen customer is and how we can help agents keep on top of our campaigns, and what tools are available to help them be successful.

How has Cruise Challenges helped build and strengthen your agency relationships?

Last year I attended 10 Cruise Challenge events all around the country; this year I am attending 11. I get to meet so many agents, and talk to them about how we can help support them with their sales. It's also nice to be able to put a face to a name. Once you have met someone it is far easier to build a relationship with them.

What would you say to agents who are thinking about attending?

My message to agents would be that it's a fun experience, where you learn lots of invaluable expertise in a way that is unrivalled. If you don't attend you are missing out, that's for sure.

On the
road with

Andrew Jeans

With a new ship launching this month, Princess Cruises' sales development and engagement manager shares details of the line's ambitious agent outreach programme

The long-awaited *Sun Princess* launches this month. How will Princess Cruises help agents sell the experience to their clients? We love agents here at Princess Cruises and with the launch of two Sphere Class ships across the next 24 months, there's plenty for them to be excited about. In 2024, we plan to have a record-breaking number of agents onboard our ships, experiencing the Princess Difference. This includes hosting more than 240 agents on a *Sun Princess* fam trip, and even more for a day event when the ship visits Southampton in September, marking the first time a brand-new Princess ship has visited the UK in its inaugural season for more than 10 years.

What key Princess Cruises selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents? Princess' unique selling point is providing an effortless and personalised service via the Medallion, a 10p-sized wearable device, which our guests are given across the fleet. When meeting agents, we focus



FROM LEFT Andrew Jeans, Princess Cruises sales development and engagement manager; Princess sails 15 mid-sized ships to 330 destinations

agents over a cuppa or a training event is one of my favourite parts of the job and it's a great opportunity to give them exciting updates from Princess.

What key points should agents focus on when selling Princess? We are currently sailing 15 mid-sized cruise ships to 330 destinations across seven continents, with two new ships joining the fleet in 2024 and 2025, so there's never been a better time to consider a Princess cruise for your clients. Princess distinguishes itself by focusing on personalised service, innovation and delighting millions of guests every year. As well as our crew, who ensure our guests return again and again, the Medallion helps us offer a personalised service that is customary of small, yacht-class ships.

What are the current challenges in agent training? We appreciate how busy our agent partners are, so we are doing what we can to make learning about Princess easier. Our brand-new academy, where our agent partners can log in and learn about all things Princess, launches this year. We are also looking to revamp our YouTube channel with some new bite-sized content. 📺

on highlighting how the Medallion technology can enhance the guest experience, from the moment their clients book a cruise to when they are onboard. Powered by the Princess Cruises app, the medallion enables guests to enjoy a host of features, from ordering drinks and food to wherever they are to locating their travelling party onboard.

How important is it for you to meet agents? This is extremely important. While we are a small team, we maximise our time on the road and meet as many agents as we can to share the Princess love. Building relationships with our



“
IN 2024, WE PLAN TO HAVE A RECORD-BREAKING NUMBER OF AGENTS ONBOARD OUR SHIPS



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



KEY 2024 DATES

Liverpool March 21st	Belfast June 13th
Leeds April 11th	Edinburgh June 26th
Maidstone ... May 9th	Glasgow June 27th

Nine more towns and cities now added!

"THE CRUISE CHALLENGE EVENTS GIVE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN IN AN INTERACTIVE AND FUN ENVIRONMENT. THEY ARE VERY ENJOYABLE"

Carol Smith
Personal Travel Advisor



Sign up today at thecruisechallenge.com
or visit cruisetradenews.com for more information

TRUE IMMERSION

With its focus on local cuisine and authentic experiences, Havila Voyages' year-round itineraries are just the ticket for travellers eager to imbibe Norwegian culture

The Norwegian coastal specialist knows better than any that delving deep into the heart of a destination is the key to an unforgettable holiday. Rather than just exploring Norway's surface, the line immerses its guests in the destination's towns, ports and cities through authentic, local-led excursions.

Gastronomy is just one of the ways the line does this, with its Havila Food Stories concept focusing on flavours that reflect the unique cultures found along the Norwegian coastline – prepared with the best ingredients the country has to offer.

To help guests differentiate the new and enticing dishes on offer, the line has categorised them into four different 'food universes' which can be sampled at different moments in the itinerary. Even the menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner are changed every third day, so customers can get to know the different cuisines of the region they're sailing through. However, guests needn't worry about having to choose from a limited menu. On the contrary, clients can try a new local dish, such as Norwegian fish soup, every single day of the holiday or they can combine them with a few comforting favourites.

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Complementing Havila's onboard culinary adventure are a variety of authentic excursions, run and operated by local businesses. Guests can meet the indigenous Sami people; catch a king crab and



cook it for lunch; or strike out into the wilderness while snowmobiling and dog sledding.

Supporting local businesses is a selling point which keeps customers coming back time and time again. The ships are operated by Norwegian crew and every aspect of the business is designed to, where possible, buoy communities along the coast. Take the furniture and the artwork on board, for example, which are provided by local companies and artists.

And guests will never be far from the sweeping views of the stunning Norwegian coast. That's because the ships don't just stop at one big port before heading back out to sea – they hug the coastline, giving those onboard a real sense of how the landscape changes as they travel north.

**“
OUR VOYAGES GIVE
GUESTS A TRULY
IMMERSIVE TRIP**

HOW TO SELL

When selling Havila, agents needn't limit the product to a certain time of year. Indeed, the Norwegian coastal route has something to offer





Did you know?

Havila Voyages is on a mission to make its ships carbon-neutral by 2028 and emission-free by 2030

all year round, with spring often described as offering three seasons in one.

While Bergen and the south of Norway are lush and green, with wildflowers and waterfalls, by the time guests reach the far north seven days later, Norway turns into a winter wonderland, with snow-capped mountains and swathes of frosted woodlands coming into view. And in the summer, long days are kissed by the midnight sun, while in autumn, the foliage starts to darken, creating a spectacular backdrop for a hike or a gentle cycle along the coast.

“Our voyages give guests a truly immersive trip,” said Matthew Valentine, head of sales for Havila Voyages. “From eating local specialities to meeting local people, indulging in local pastimes and exploring with local guides – they don’t just visit Norway, they come away feeling they have experienced it.



Do it like a local

Three ways to immerse yourself in local culture

1 GASTRONOMY

In the on-board Havrand Restaurant, guests can sample four regional menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner which change every few days to reflect the part of the coast they are sailing in.

2 EXCURSIONS

Kayak in Alesund, take a hike at Sukkertoppen or visit rural Norway and the hidden gems of the Hjørundfjord, including the historic village of Oye, which once could only be accessed via the sea.

3 COASTAL SAILING

Get up close and personal with the picturesque landscape from the comfort of your accommodation as Havila sails serenely along the coast, allowing you to witness Norwegian coastal life as it unfolds.

“Havila Voyages doesn’t just appeal to experienced cruisers, either. The nature of the product means it also attracts guests who have never considered a cruise. As well as the fixed cruise itineraries, we also offer point-to-point travel, ideal for those planning a longer trip who might be looking for interesting ways to get around this incredible country.”

From culture buffs to thrill seekers, foodies to nature lovers and experienced cruise aficionados to holidays-at-sea beginners – whatever your client’s interests, Havila Voyages offers something to suit. ●

havilavoyages.com

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT excursions include horseback rides; *Havila Castor* in Norway; menus are changed every third day



Experience the Edge of the World with Havila Voyages

Embark on an unforgettable 6-day Voyage South with Havila Voyages, traversing Norway's majestic coastline. Book now and get a free excursion, *Breakfast at the North Cape Plateau* included.

Booking period:
1. February - 31. March, 2024

Travel period:
8. May - 30. September, 2024



Book your voyage on havilavoyages.com

*Price example from May 2024 for two guests sharing an interior cabin.
All meals included. Voyage only, excludes flights and transfers.



SUMMER OFFER

Voyage South

Kirkenes → Bergen (6 days) from

£643

Per person*



INCLUDED:
Breakfast at
the North Cape
Plateau



SHIP OF THE MONTH

CELESTYAL JOURNEY

Launched in September last year, *Celestyal Journey* is a statement addition to the challenger brand's fleet, which begins its year-round programme from March this year. This will include seven-night itineraries around the Greek islands and the Adriatic over the summer months, as well as a full winter programme, with round-trip cruises from Doha commencing in November 2024. The ship has 149 balcony suites, six dining venues, two swimming pools and an entire floor dedicated to wellness experiences.

Fast facts

1,260
guests

630
cabins

581
crew

8
bars

6
restaurants



1 Stargazer Suite

This is the line's first-ever penthouse suite with its own private terrace. The Stargazer Suite can sleep four people and features a jacuzzi bath and private dining area, as well as exclusive access to Rays, a secluded sunbathing and relaxation area, and the Compass Lounge.



2 Dining

Dining is taken seriously on *Celestyal Journey*. For a casual experience, there's the Taverna, with a plethora of delicacies and a rotation of international menus spanning every corner of the globe, while Grill Seekers is the spot for steaks and fresh seafood.



3 Bars & lounges

Guests looking for a pre- or post-dinner tippie will be well served on board, with a total of eight bars offering everything from laid-back lounges with live pianists to top-deck hangouts primed for sunset. Fizz Club is the pick of the bunch thanks to its hand-crafted cocktails.



4 Wellness

The ship's wellness offering calls on influences from around the world, from the Sozo treatment rooms taking inspiration from Greece, to Balinese hot stone and shiatsu massages. A dedicated relaxation room – the Drift Den – is the spot for quiet solitude.



5 Pools

The Galazio Pool and Terrace and Halara Cove come complete with a dedicated bar and are within easy reach of the Greek deli for tasty poolside fare. Guests staying in the Grand Dream Suites or the Stargazer Suite can also visit Rays, the private sun deck and bar.



6 Entertainment

The two-deck Amphitheatre is the heartbeat of entertainment on *Celestyal Journey*, featuring memorable evening shows. There is live music throughout the ship, as well as cooking workshops, wine tastings and a range of activities for children.

SHIP OF THE MONTH

SS VICTORIA

This latest addition to Uniworld's fleet of boutique ships offers some of the largest suites on Europe's rivers. *SS Victoria*'s initial sailings will include voyages along the Rhine, taking in medieval castles and private tastings of Germany's renowned Riesling wine, as well as the Moselle's picture-perfect riverside towns. On board, two Royal Suites offer 506sq ft of space, with an adjoining standard suite increasing that to 759sq ft, while three dining restaurants are joined by a rooftop bar, offering guests a stylish hangout for when golden hour arrives.

Fast facts

8-10

day itineraries

110

guests

55

staterooms and suites

41

staff

4

itineraries



1 Wellness

Guests will be able to book themselves in for a variety of treatments throughout their trip, including facials and massages. The ship also has a fleet of bikes which can be borrowed at leisure, and a wellness programme that includes yoga sessions and other restorative activities.



2 Accommodation

SS Victoria can accommodate 110 guests in 55 luxurious suites and staterooms, which includes the largest premium rooms on the rivers, such as a 759sq ft two-bed suite, a first for Uniworld. Other luxury features include walk-in closets and fireplaces.



3 Shore excursions

Uniworld's itineraries include a range of experiences designed to give guests an authentic taste of each destination. From hikes and wine tastings to visits to Cologne and Strasbourg's must-see cathedrals, there is plenty to dive into offshore.



4 Cuisine

Guests will be able to enjoy all-inclusive dining across the ship's three restaurants, with menus using farm-to-table ingredients sourced from the regions through which the ship sails. Premium drinks, including fine wines and spirits, will also be included.



5 Itineraries

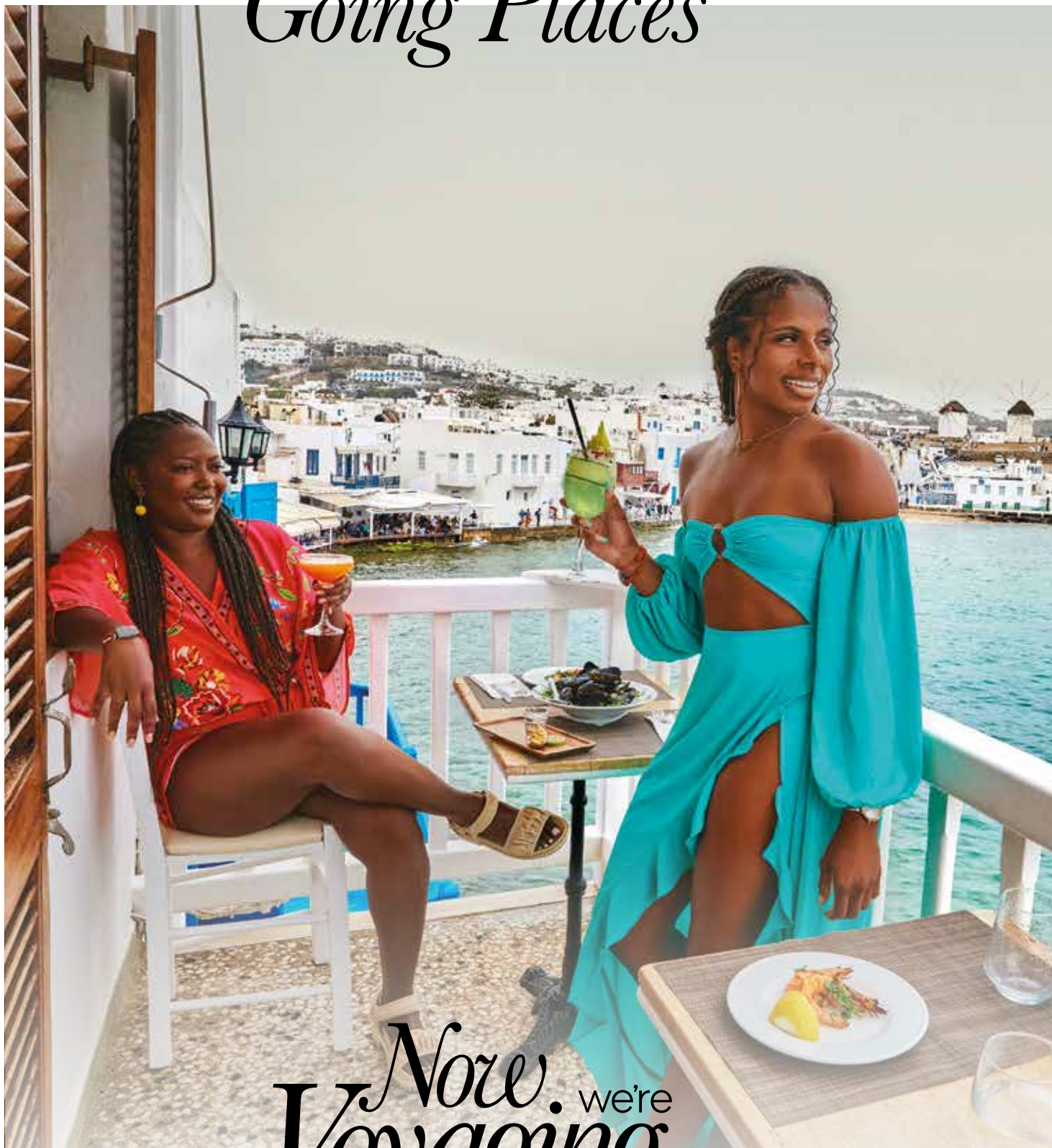
SS Victoria will be in service for the majority of the year, starting with its inaugural sailing, Holland and Belgium at Tulip Time. The ship then sets sail for Uniworld's Castles Along the Rhine and Magnificent Moselle and Rhine itineraries before touring Belgium's winter markets.



6 Luxury service

Each of *SS Victoria*'s suites comes with its own butler service and packing and unpacking assistance. Butlers are trained to the same standards required by Buckingham Palace and are educated at the renowned Ivor Spencer Butler School in London.

Now we're
Going Places



Now we're
Voyaging



Award-winning, kid-free cruises from Virgin.

Follow the sun in style.

As winter weather sets in, it's the perfect time to plan your Sailors' new sun-drenched summer holiday. From Travel & Leisure and Cruise Critic to Condé Nast Travel Readers' Choice Awards — award-winning dining, cabins, nightlife, and brilliant service are just the beginning of their next kid-free getaway, should it be a gorgeous weeklong Mediterranean sailing or a dreamy escape from the UK.

Plus, we're Brilliant for You as well. Earn a brilliant 16% commission on the voyage fare, plus 10% for each pre-voyage bookable when you get your Sailors on board today.

From England to Amsterdam (& Back)

PORTSMOUTH • AMSTERDAM • PORTSMOUTH

Summer 2024 sailings
(August & September)

French Daze & Ibiza Nights

BARCELONA • MARSEILLE • CANNES • PALMA DE MALLORCA • IBIZA •
BARCELONA

Summer 2024 sailings



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For You**

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DOMESTIC DREAMING *or a* NAUTICAL NIGHTMARE?

The cruise industry is often praised for its ability to transport thousands of people in and out of a destination in a single day, but should it be more accountable for its impact on local communities?

Will Payne investigates



From action-packed tours of the British Isles to laid-back voyages around the Med, being able to visit multiple destinations over the course of one holiday is arguably the biggest selling point for a holiday at sea. It's one of the reasons why cruising remains one of the fastest growing sectors in the travel industry.

Last month, Barrhead Travel revealed that cruise sales helped the agency record its "best-ever" Sunshine Saturday, while Riviera Travel reported a 50 per cent increase in year-on-year wave period sales through its travel agent partners.

Passengers aren't the only ones who stand to gain from a cruise holiday, though. Thanks to the hop-on, hop-off nature of cruising, local economies benefit from an influx of passengers who otherwise might never have visited the region ordinarily. However, as the volume of tourists disembarking during peak periods increases, some communities aren't seeing the benefit.

Councillor Frank Lott, who represents the Riverside Ward in North Tyneside which covers the Port of Tyne, told *Cruise Trade News* that coach companies, which provide excursions for passengers, "deliberately" avoid the local area. He thinks it's a ploy to appear to passengers that they are providing a "worthwhile tour" by going beyond the port's immediate vicinity.

"The coach companies which provide excursions for passengers deliberately avoid the local area as it would appear that they were not providing much of a tour by staying in the locality

"Thanks to the hop-on, hop-off nature of cruising, local economies benefit from an influx of passengers"

– which has a great deal of interest to offer," Lott said. "They travel to places of interest around the north-east, such as Durham, Holy Island and Beamish Museum."

And of course, there's the environmental impact, too. According to Friends of the Earth, a single mid-sized cruise ship emits the equivalent pollution of a million cars each day. When in port, ships emit 20 times more than a highly polluted roadway, so it's not simply a case of small port towns carrying the burden of welcoming large passenger numbers and not seeing the benefits of increased tourism spend.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

The Scottish government is considering plans to clamp down on cruise calls with a tax on vessels docking in port cities. The Scottish Green Party said the proposed levy will tackle the "twin challenges" of reducing emissions released by ships while they're in port and the impact tourists have on local communities.

Jacqueline Dobson, president of Barrhead Travel, told *Cruise Trade News* one of her aims in her new role as president of the Scottish Passenger Agents' Association is to convince Holyrood to "create a positive cruise policy" in the country.

ABOVE Some communities are concerned about ships' impact on the local environment

“We need to decide what exactly this tourism levy is,” she said. “We’re working with the government to try and avoid it at first, and then if it does come in to force, how it will be managed and what it will be used for.”

Dobson warned the levy could have a “detrimental” impact on cruising in Scotland by putting lines off from stopping in the country. Between 2014 and 2019 there was a 90 per cent growth in cruise ship calls in Scotland, and Port of Aberdeen is gearing up to welcome more than 100 cruise ships annually by 2027, compared to just 21 in 2022.

Buoyed by the arrival of larger ships at the port’s new Aberdeen South Harbour, local businesses and attractions are preparing up for another busy year of increased footfall from cruise calls.

Success stories from 2023 include the expansion of Aberdeen Whisky Shop to accommodate whisky tasting for cruise tourists and St Machar’s Cathedral, which saw 42,000 visitors.

According to CLIA, passengers spend £600 per person in port cities over the course of a seven-day cruise. It is estimated that cruise calls in Scotland generate £104,000 per cruise, which suggests £40.6 million was spent by passengers shoreside in 2019. CLIA UK and Ireland managing director Andy Harmer said: “It’s about working with Scottish politicians so there’s an understanding of the economic value cruise brings.

“Cruise already contributes to the Scottish economy, and that’s not just through guest spend, but also through lines buying local produce, taxes and job creation.”

Elsewhere, Liverpool saw its cruise terminal welcome just three ships when it opened in 2007. Since then, it has handled more than 1,000 cruise



“UK cruising remains vital to local economies, through port fees and the generation of thousands of jobs”

ships, welcomed more than 1.8 million passengers and injected over £111 million into the local economy.

According to Liverpool City Council (LCC), which owns the terminal, the hub is now worth approximately £18 million per annum.

Despite the uptick in value in recent years, LCC confirmed its intention to transfer the ownership of the port to the private sector in a bid to cut its losses on the terminal – which it deemed “unsustainable” – signalling its lack of faith in the port as an income-generating outlet.

Regardless of what the council described as “healthy” income generated from berthing fees, “increasingly high, uncontrollable costs” have resulted in a net shortfall to the authority of circa £300,000-£700,000 per year, which it says it can no longer sustain.

CLIA data shows one full-time job is created for every 24 cruise travellers, and more than 63 per cent of cruisers say they have returned to a destination they first visited via cruise call.

POSITIVE SIGNS

While Liverpool and Scotland have aired their concerns about cruising, Hull City Council has moved to increase the number of cruise ships it takes after councillors gave the green light to a new terminal late last year.





According to a report on the plans, the majority of responses received were supportive of the 2027 proposal for a new cruise facility, recognising the boost it could provide to the local economy.

However, some locals expressed concerns regarding the impact the new terminal could have on residents, while others questioned whether there was either demand for such a facility or the funds required to deliver the project.

Harmer is still adamant that domestic cruise calls in the UK are a force for good. “We take people to coastal communities that, in some cases, have been left behind over the past 10 years economically,” he explained. “We take people to places they may not ordinarily visit on a UK holiday. As a way of showcasing other parts of the UK, it’s perfect.”

Associated British Ports (ABP), which operates the UK’s biggest cruise terminal in Southampton, calculated that there is a £2.7 million benefit to the regional economy per cruise ship call, equating to around £1.35 billion per year based on an average of 500 ship calls.

A stone’s throw from the port is WestQuay Shopping Centre, a retail and leisure destination that acts as a gateway to the city centre for passengers disembarking from cruise ships. “We are lucky that we are situated beside such a thriving cruise port and can see as many as five ships docked per day,” a spokesperson for the centre told *Cruise Trade News*.

While not being reliant on cruise ships, WestQuay admitted passengers were a “welcome boost” to its footfall, which is roughly 17 million people per year.

Neighbouring port Portsmouth, meanwhile, estimated each cruise call can bring in up to £1.5 million to the local economy, and in 2022 the

hub contributed £189 million to the area.

As a council-owned port, it contributes around £9 million to Portsmouth City Council’s budget each year, making it a vital economic driver for the city and its essential services.

The government’s Levelling Up Funding contributed £11.25 million towards Portsmouth International Port’s new terminal extension, which was required due to an anticipated increase of 250,000 passengers over the next few years.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

During the pandemic, domestic itineraries were the cruise industry’s saving grace as international ports shut up shop in a bid to curb an influx of Covid-19 cases. At the same time, UK sailings helped inject vital funds into local communities while taking people away from the dreary reality of furloughs and lockdowns.

Fast-forward three years and UK cruising remains vital to local economies, through port fees and the generation of thousands of jobs. To push this message through to critics, the industry must clearly demonstrate the positive work it does to support port towns, while encouraging customers to visit smaller communities as well as the larger hot spots.

Questions will always be raised over cruise’s impact on port destinations, as ships increase their capacity while UK cities struggle to make ends meet in trying financial times.

But ports strengthening their mooring capabilities, lines launching more UK sailings and the government investing more in developing cruise terminals all suggest that domestic itineraries remain critical to both the cruise industry and the UK’s local economy. ●

MEASURING THE IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMIES

SCOTLAND

Cruise calls north of the border generate £104,000 per cruise, says CLIA.

NEWCASTLE

The Port of Tyne’s cruise and ferry business contributes £57 million to the local economy and more than 1,600 jobs.

PORTSMOUTH

The city estimates that cruise calls bring up to £1.5 million to its economy.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The UK’s biggest cruise terminal in Southampton is a major contributor to the regional economy; Liverpool’s hub is worth approximately £18 million per annum

In
conversation
with



SCAN TO DISCOVER
MORE INTERVIEWS

Hayley Moore

The new UK and Europe sales director for Princess Cruises tells **Will Payne** how the line's agent partners will play a vital role in the launch of the line's highly-anticipated *Sun Princess*

“I’ve never been so excited to start a new role,” says Hayley Moore, who is barely two weeks into her new position at the helm of Princess Cruises’ sales operation in the UK and Europe when we meet. Moore replaced Nick Hughes at the start of the year when the latter confirmed he was joining Scenic Group as UK and Ireland sales director, and she already appears ready to shake things up.

“Having worked closely with Nick and seeing the work he’s done with the sales team and agents across the past year, I saw a great opportunity to bring my brand and marketing expertise to enhance that,” Moore explains.

SALES TEAM GROWTH

While praising the Princess trade sales team for forging “lasting relationships” with agents across the UK, Moore remains eager to grow the line’s presence even further in the coming years.

“I’m confident, given the demand that we’re seeing across the markets I look after, we will have further growth in 2025,” she predicts. “If we see demand continue at current growth projections regarding agents, interest and cruises, I hope we can grow as a department. But the way I’m feeling about the trajectory now is super positive.”

**“THE AGENTS THAT
HAVE ENGAGED WITH
OUR BRAND LOVE
PRINCESS AND WANT
TO SELL IT AGAIN**



For Moore, establishing a “personal touch point” between her sales team and agents will be the linchpin to the ongoing success of the company’s trade output. “We listened to what [agents] wanted in regards to training, and we’ve delivered on that,” she says.

AGENTS REMAIN ‘VITAL’ TO PRINCESS

Moore urges agents who are looking to boost their Princess business to experience the brand, which she says will help convert new-to-cruise customers.

“I’m astounded at some of the established partnerships we’ve got within the sales team, and that’s really important to me, because it tells me



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The line boasts enriching experiences such as stargazing; *Discovery Princess* allows guests to enjoy the wonders of Alaska in comfort; Hayley Moore, Princess Cruise UK and Europe sales director

the agents that have engaged with our brand love Princess and want to sell it again.”

To help the trade familiarise themselves with the Princess brand, the company will look to bring a record 3,000 agents on board throughout 2024. But Moore isn’t stopping there. “We are always open to new ideas,” she says. “We listen to our agent partners, so if there are other opportunities to get them on board we’re open to that as well. Cruise is a specific experience, so it can be quite a hard sell at times, which is why it’s really important that we get agents on board our ships.”

Moore and her sales team will ensure agents unable to join in-person events remain in the loop with frequent on the road visits and training events, too. Business development managers will be deployed to deliver targeted training initiatives to help agents capitalise on their current business with the brand, or to help them reach a new strain of clientele.

“ GIVEN WE’VE GOT PRODUCT ON SALE IN 2025, I’M NOT SURPRISED WE ARE SEEING GROWTH

“Getting out and reaching more people is always a challenge, especially in a busy marketplace, but at Princess we have so many unique selling points that we’re really proud to be able to talk about.”

MED SAILINGS ON THE UP

Moore attributes Princess’s successful start to the year to the early launch of its wave campaign, which was done to encourage clients to consider their 2024 holidays before the Christmas break.

In a bid to ensure Princess doesn’t suffer from post-campaign fatigue, the line has strategically launched several trade-focused incentives throughout its peak season campaign to keep agents engaged.

“The successful start to the year really underpins the fact demand is there for 2024 and 2025,” Moore says. “Given that we’ve got product on sale into 2025, I’m not surprised we are seeing such a strong performance.”

Fly-cruise Mediterranean sailings and ex-UK departures continue to prove popular for Princess, a segment of the business that will be bolstered by the addition of *Sun Princess* and *Star Princess* in February 2024 and summer 2025, respectively. ●





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Cultural odyssey

Famed for its wine and medieval towns, a cruise along the Moselle is to encounter Europe's most spectacular countryside, says **Nicole Carmichael**

Charting a course through some of the most stunning sites in France, Luxembourg and Germany, the Moselle River flows from its source in the French Vosges mountains, meandering along 545km until it meets with the Rhine in Koblenz in western Germany.

While the Rhine gets most of the plaudits, many seasoned river cruisers will say the Moselle is perhaps the prettiest river in Europe. Flanked by verdant hills and mountains, and fringed with vineyards that slope down to its calm waters, it's more peaceful than

its larger counterpart. And although it doesn't pass through as many other countries as the Danube, it holds a unique charm of its own.

"There is no more enjoyable setting in which to enjoy a crisp glass of Riesling wine," says Brad Bennetts, head of sales and business development for APT & Travelmarvel. "We include a section of the Moselle on our seasonal Travelmarvel Rhine & Moselle Christmas Markets cruise.

"Our guests glide from the Rhine towards the idyllic town of Cochem, nestled in the heart of the Moselle Valley." Here, Bennetts continues,

guests can explore a "patchwork" of narrow alleyways and their striking, half-timbered houses. "An included experience, and one not to be missed, is a visit to Cochem's magnificent castle. Perched on a hill overlooking the beautiful Moselle as it unwinds below, the castle could have been lifted straight off the pages of a fairytale."

WHAT TO SEE

Many tales are often told about the region and, as well as getting a taste for some of the fine wines of the Moselle, visitors will also come away with plenty of stories. There are legends of



SCAN THE CODE TO
DISCOVER MORE RIVER
CRUISE DESTINATIONS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Amsterdam's picture-perfect scenery is always worth a visit; Moselle Valley is flanked by verdant hills and vineyards; the A-Rosa Alea promises the amenities of a larger ship on a boutique scale

“There’s a plethora of picture-perfect towns to discover and the pace of life is slower than usual whistle-stop tours”

the mysterious healing properties of Bernkastel wine, produced in what is said to be one of the best-preserved medieval towns in Germany. There’s a plethora of picture-perfect towns to discover and the pace of life is slower than whistle-stop tours in other regions, plus there’s a variety of activities designed to appeal to a mix of travellers.

“Our Active and Discovery cruises are perfect for those who want the peace, tranquility, great food, and of course amazing destinations of a river cruise but also want to raise their heart rate

or try something different at times,” says Phil Shipman, director of sales for Avalon Waterways.

The line’s Active & Discovery on the Moselle sailing allows guests to take their pick and enjoy everything from wine tasting in the Moselle Valley to a tour of a 214-year-old mustard mill.

Emerald Cruises also encourages clients to see the Moselle from a different perspective. “For those wanting a slower pace, we offer a canal boat tour of Utrecht and wine tasting at Schloss Johannisberg, the castle and winery in the Rheingau wine-growing region of Germany,” says Nichola Absalom, managing director, sales and marketing for Scenic & Emerald Cruises.

Riviera Travel, meanwhile, tailors its Moselle cruises for passengers who are seeking a blend of explorative learning and relaxation. “We ensure the schedule has a balanced mix of port visits and leisurely scenic sailing,” says Will Sarson, head of product at Riviera Travel. “This slower-paced journey appeals to UK passengers in particular, as well as those who want to experience a more immersive style of travel.”



CroisiEurope’s USPs are value for money, longevity and experience, having been operating for 47 years. Cruises are very relaxed and informal and may interest customers who enjoy a more contemporary ambience than the more traditional river cruise ships. It offers a selection of sailings on the Neckar, Rhine, Moselle and Saar and a seven-day cruise on the Rhine, Moselle and Main.

“For many years, A-Rosa has been shaking off the formal image of river cruising to create a fun, relaxed and refreshingly different way for all ages to sail Europe’s stunning rivers,” says Lucia Rowe, managing director at A-Rosa River Cruises UK & Ireland. “A-Rosa’s river cruises all have something

Selling tips

1 Cruising from Amsterdam to Cologne involves sailing along industrial landscapes, offering up much more picturesque views for passengers.

2 Clients can take advantage of well-priced flights from London to Luxembourg with just a short road transfer to the ship. Embarkation points are available either side of the German/Luxembourg border.

3 July and August are the best months to visit the Moselle, but it’s a busy period as German schools are also on holiday. Wine festivals are held in many Moselle towns throughout April to October.



EXPERT VIEW

“The Moselle is a personal favourite of mine. It’s the most scenic of all cruises with the river having vast S bends, pretty towns and villages along its banks, and steep hillsides planted with vines tumbling right down to the river. It’s home to many wonderful Riesling vineyards and towns like Trier, Cochen and Bernkastel are terrific for history fans with many character buildings, regular local fairs and cultural events.”

James Hill, GoRiverCruise.com

reassuringly in common: a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, an emphasis on independent exploration and a generous premium all-inclusive package, wrapping up everything from quality drinks to pampering.”

For 2024, two additional ships will join the fleet, *A-Rosa Alea* and *A-Rosa Clea*. These smaller, more intimate vessels promise the amenities of bigger river ships, on a truly boutique scale.

TASTING NOTES

The Romans conquered the Moselle region around 50BC and 30 years later founded Trier, Germany’s oldest town, which later became one of the capitals of the Roman Empire. Originally, they imported their wine from Galle and Italy before beginning to grow wine along the banks of the river. Moselle is now Germany’s fifth largest area of wine production. Its annual temperature of around 10°C, its unique positioning and rich slate soil are the perfect ingredients to produce amazing wine.

The river itself has an important role to play, too, reflecting heat and light while moderating the temperatures to protect the vines from extremes such as frost.

“The Moselle is a great choice for wine lovers, with plenty of vineyards in which to learn about the Gewürztraminer and Riesling wines,” says Andrea Stafford, sales director UK and Europe for AmaWaterways. “Guests joining one of our wine cruises on the Moselle will enjoy panoramic views of the vineyards from a gondola, can hike among the grapes in Rüdesheim and explore the city of Cochem. Each dedicated wine cruise is also accompanied by an expert who will arrange a series of tastings along the way, both on land and while on-board. It’s a great way to learn more about the region.”

AmaWaterways has also recently launched a new training programme, highlighting a selection of its most popular European itineraries which complements the Course 2 learning module which focused on Danube

itineraries. Newcomers will have the chance to earn £75 in reward gift cards by completing all three courses and making three reservations within 90 days of each course’s completion.

Emerald also offers Moselle-focused training. “We are committed to ensuring our agent partners are equipped with comprehensive offers, support and training via our 24/7 e-learning platform, Agent Academy,” says Absalom. ●

Itineraries

CroisiEurope

The six-night Four Rivers cruise from Luxembourg to Strasbourg calls in Saarburg, Trier, Cochem, Mannheim and Heidelberg. Prices from £1,002pp.

croisieurope.co.uk

Amadeus

Saar & Moselle Fairytales is an eight-day cruise from Cologne on the Rhine, with calls in Cochem, Luxembourg, Koblenz and Trier. Prices from £1,696pp.

amadeus-rivercruises.com

Riviera Travel

The line’s 11-day Moselle, Luxembourg & the Majestic Rhine itinerary departs Cologne and calls in Bernkastel Luxembourg and Cochem. Prices from £3,014pp.

rivieratravel.co.uk

PEACE OF MIND

Five reasons why Marella Cruises is the perfect partner for your globe-trotting clients

What are the main components to an unforgettable cruise? A spectacular destination and a cruise ship to match, for starters. Almost as crucial, however, is a travel partner that can be trusted. This is where Marella Cruises comes in. Not only does the TUI-operated line sail to some of the dreamiest destinations on the planet (more than 125 to be precise), its fully integrated service means travellers are guided through the entire process, from booking to boarding. Here are some other reasons why Marella Cruises is a sound choice for your clients.



STANDOUT SERVICE

We all know how important good service is, particularly when plans change unexpectedly or if a guest requires special assistance on board. Marella's onboard team are there to help 24/7, no matter how big or small the request is. And should they need to pick up the phone to discuss their booking, the TUI Pre-Travel team will be there to help.

PLENTY TO EXPLORE

Because Marella keeps sea days to a minimum, guests have more time to experience the destinations they're sailing to. From the Med's irresistible towns and cities to idyllic Caribbean islands, plus a host of bucket-list stop-offs in India, Thailand and Indonesia, there's simply so much to explore.

AWARD-WINNING CUSTOMER SERVICE

On a Marella Cruises sailing, guests will find a warm welcome from the moment they step onboard. The line's familiar and friendly atmosphere gives the ships an unmistakable 'home-from-home' feeling, with cabin staff setting high standards for their attentive service, whether that's dealing with any special requirements in

“
GUESTS WILL FIND A WARM WELCOME FROM THE MOMENT THEY STEP ONBOARD

your client's travelling party or making a proper cuppa as and when they please. What's more, Marella is also endorsed by *Good Housekeeping* – winning the Good Housekeeping Reader Recommended 2023 for Customer Service Experience badge – while 90 per cent of customers said its service was good or excellent.

EVERYTHING'S INCLUDED

Every single one of Marella's cruises are all-inclusive as standard, so budgeting on board is simple. Everything from flights and transfers to food, drinks and tips are all part of the package. Plus, there's a huge choice of dining options to tuck into on board, as well as daily entertainment and a range of activities – all of which are included, too.

ABOVE Marella Cruises sails to more than 125 of the dreamiest destinations on the planet

GUESTS CAN TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Holidays aren't always smooth sailing, which is why Marella's cruises are ABTA and ATOL protected and come with a package refund guarantee, meaning that if a trip is unexpectedly cancelled, guests will receive a full refund within 14 days. Meanwhile, payments can be managed at a rate that suits your clients and if things happen to go awry while overseas, Marella Cruises will be on hand to deal with any issues as smoothly as possible. ●

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Port Focus



MAGIC MIAMI

With its golden sands, pastel-hued Art Deco hotels and the tropical wonderland of the Everglades, **Nicole Carmichael** reveals why the Florida jewel is the departure port you won't want to leave

The biggest cruise port in the world, Miami is a powerhouse of stunning Art Deco architecture, world-class museums and galleries, and colourful neighbourhoods. There's incredible shopping here, too, and a short hop from those world-famous beaches takes you to the Everglades, one of the world's most amazing wildlife havens. In fact, there's so much to do here that we recommend guests bookend their cruise with a hotel stay, so they can truly immerse yourself in the cultures and flavours of this captivating Florida city.



Must see

SOUTH BEACH

Fans of photography should head to the Art Deco district in South Beach for more than 800 examples of iconic 1920s and 1930s architecture, such as the cool curved Carlyle Hotel (which has appeared in classic movies such as *Scarface* and *The Birdcage*). There's also the chance to snap pictures of the brightly painted lifeguard towers along South Pointe Beach, constructed in the early 1990s after the destruction wrought by Hurricane Andrew. Visitors can skip the beach altogether and head over to The Bass, a contemporary art venue showcasing thought-provoking works from across the globe.

miamiandbeaches.com

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Miami Beach's famed Ocean Drive; enjoy Key Biscayne's long, sheltered beaches; go in search of rare and endangered species in the Everglades; the tropical climate is home to a spectacular array of plants and wildlife



KEY BISCAIYNE

Feeling a million miles away from Miami, yet within just a few miles of its urban bustle, lies the stunning island town of Key Biscayne. Sandwiched between two nature parks, this former coconut plantation offers long, sheltered beaches, tropical forests and incredible wildlife, including exotic birds and loggerhead turtles. There's also the famous Cape Florida lighthouse, built in 1825 and a sturdy survivor of Civil War battles and countless hurricanes.

visitflorida.com

THE EVERGLADES

Spanning 1.5 million acres of southern Florida, the Everglades National Park is the largest sub-tropical wilderness in the USA. Home to many rare and endangered species, including the Florida panther, American alligator, West Indian manatee and snail kite, it's a wildlife-lover's dream. Guests can





explore the park by tram or canoe or get up close to the action in the cypress swamps with a thrilling ride on an Everglades airboat.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

Dine & drink

JOE'S STONE CRAB

Joe Weiss opened his first lunch counter on Miami Beach in 1913, and from these humble beginnings he grew his restaurant into a beloved institution. Seasonal stone crab still tops the menu, along with lobster, shrimp and other seafood favourites, plus – so the locals say – the best key lime pie in town.

[joesstonecrab.com](https://www.joesstonecrab.com)

“**CALLE OCHO GIVES AN INSTANT HIT OF CUBAN CULTURE WITH DELICIOUS AUTHENTIC DISHES**

CALLE OCHO

Slicing east-west through Miami's Little Havana, Calle Ocho offers an instant hit of Cuban culture, with any number of restaurants serving deliciously authentic dishes, such as vaca frita (thinly cut steak) and lechon asado (roast pork). And the famous Cuban sandwich is a meal in itself, packed with ham, cheese, mustard, pickle and pulled pork. Washing it down with a tiny cafecito Cuban coffee is perfect for the ultimate slam-dunk caffeine punch.

[miamiandbeaches.com](https://www.miamiandbeaches.com)

Shopping

BAYSIDE MARKETPLACE

With more than 150 shops, around 40 places to eat and live performances from local musicians, this yacht-lined location is the city's number-one tourist attraction. Visitors can shop till they drop, then chill out with a sunset cruise across Biscayne Bay.

[baysidemarketplace.com](https://www.baysidemarketplace.com)

LEFT Calle Ocho is the go-to spot for Cuban culture and cuisine; Key Biscayne feels a million miles away from Miami; a boat tour in the Everglades National Park; the wildlife in Coral Gables is a sight to behold; South Beach's iconic boulevard

Local tips



“Head downtown to the latest and greatest food hall, Julia & Henry's – it's the talk of the town.”

ANDREA BAIGORRIA
PR Director



“The Design District is well worth visiting for its cool outdoor art installations and entertainment for adults and kids.”

JACOB RILEY
Student

Itineraries

MSC Cruises

The four-night Caribbean and Antilles cruise on *Magnifica* starts and ends in Miami, with stop-offs in Nassau and Ocean Cay along the way. Sails 25 March 2024, from £439pp

Royal Caribbean

The line's four-night Eastern Caribbean cruise aboard *Independence of the Seas* sets sail from Miami, stopping off at Labadee in Haiti before heading back to the Magic City. Sails 26 September 2024, from £290pp.

The Enchanted Islands

Cruising in the land of blue-footed birds, pink iguanas and half-tonne tortoises is a dream come true for most travellers. Sarah Holt reveals the wonders that await guests on an epic voyage around the Galápagos islands



SCAN THE CODE
TO DISCOVER MORE
CRUISE DESTINATIONS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Visitors to Bartolme Island can swim and snorkel with the rare Galápagos penguins; the distinctive red-footed booby lives on Genovesa Island

Referred to as everything from ‘The Living Museum’ to the ‘Enchanted Islands’, the Galápagos archipelago is the setting for some of the most awe-inspiring adventures on the planet. It’s home to more than 900 different species of flora and fauna, including dozens that can’t be found anywhere else on earth, many of which can be discovered on volcanic hikes and guided tours. And while the coast that surrounds it is a scuba diver’s dream, kayaking and glass-bottomed boat tours offer a more relaxing way to experience the destination’s stunning marine biodiversity.

“Few destinations are as iconic as the Galápagos islands, known for its wide array of wildlife, vastly different ecosystems and incredible opportunities to fully immerse in the environment,” says Trey Byus, chief expedition officer at Lindblad Expeditions.

“An expedition through the volcanic archipelago allows travellers to get the most out of each locale and feel at one with the flora and fauna that completely encompasses them 24/7.”

This spellbinding destination has been safeguarded for millions of years largely because of one reason: getting there isn’t easy. Located roughly 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador, all but three per cent of the islands’ surfaces are protected by national parks, so strict rules determine how many people can visit and in what capacity they’re allowed to explore. Fortunately, cruise companies know the regulations inside out, meaning going by sea is one of the best and simplest ways to experience it.

Most cruise itineraries commonly begin with an overnight stay in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, or the port town of Guayaquil in the south, ahead of a flight into the Galápagos. Cruise ships carry a maximum of 100 passengers in the Galápagos, so vessel sizes are relatively small across the board.

The level of luxury on Galápagos cruise ships varies. Having sailed her inaugural season in 2021, Silversea’s *Silver Origin* is undoubtedly the plushiest ship currently cruising the region. Specifically designed to sail the Galápagos, the vessel has the highest crew-to-guest ratio and offers fine dining, a top-deck hot tub and eight Zodiacs for exploring.

WHEN TO GO

Temperatures rarely fall below 23°C in the Galápagos, so there’s never really a bad time to visit, although the sea can get a little choppier around August and September. Clients who want to snorkel and scuba should consider booking around February time, when sea temperatures are a balmy 26°C, while bird watchers might want to think about a July cruise, as that month is mating season for species like blue-footed boobies.

NEW ITINERARIES

In 2023, Hurtigruten added three new sailings to its Galápagos offering and its itineraries now range from the nine-day In Darwin’s Footsteps to the 15-day South America Expedition Cruise, which also includes the opportunity to visit Machu Picchu.

“The Galápagos Islands is fast emerging as one of our most popular destinations,” says Alastair Newton, director of expedition operations at HX Hurtigruten Expeditions. “Last year, we introduced the additional sailings to support increased demand, and we have evolved our offering to create a truly memorable expedition onboard *MS Santa Cruz II* for all our guests.”

Lindblad Expeditions has also launched a new itinerary for 2024. The 12-day trip onboard the 48-person





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT One of the islands' legendary giant tortoises; Silversea's Silver Origin has been purpose-built to cruise the Galápagos region

National Geographic Islander II takes passengers to 10 different islands, more than any other Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic itinerary.

WHO TO PITCH IT TO

Galápagos cruises lend themselves particularly well to solo travellers, as days are action-packed, hands-on and involve frequent interactions with other passengers and guides.

However, the opportunity to learn about the islands' unique biodiversity makes the destination appealing to younger sailors, too. Lindblad Expeditions refers to the Galápagos Islands as a natural classroom and welcomes families onboard its ships.

“**A GALÁPAGOS TRIP IS A GREAT CHOICE FOR ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF CLIENTS**

Children and teens up to the age of 18 can take part in the National Geographic Global Explorers programme, a hands-on interactive experience that encourages young travellers to explore their burgeoning interests in marine biology, geology and photography.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

There are around 15,000 giant tortoises in the Galápagos, weighing up to 400kg and measuring as much as 1.8m in size. Cruise passengers can catch a glimpse on Isabela, Santa Cruz and San Cristobal Island, where they roam around a six-acre forest reserve.

It's the Galápagos penguins, however, that steal the show. This species of penguin is the only one that can be found north of the equator and there are fewer than 2,000 left in the world. Bartolme Island is one of the best places for sightings, as visitors have the opportunity to swim and snorkel with them around Pinnacle Rock.

Located in the north of the Galápagos, Genovesa Island is nicknamed bird

Selling tips

1 Pitch the destination to solo travellers by emphasising how it's a great way to meet other like-minded passengers.

2 Secure bookings from families by telling them about the range of hands-on education programmes that are available for children on board.

3 Get bookings year-round by emphasising how the weather stays warm and mild from January to December.

island, for obvious reasons. The island is one of the best for spotting red-footed boobies with their London bus-coloured feet as well as a range of other bird species such as swallow-tailed gulls.

AGENT VERDICT

“A trip to the Galápagos is a great choice for all different kinds of clients,” says Scott Harrington, product manager at Audley Travel. “The bird and sea life on the islands and the surrounding waters is a big draw for wildlife enthusiasts. “The islands also appeal to people who are keen for an off-the-beaten-track adventure while travelling in luxury.”

Harrington strongly recommends that clients book as far in advance as possible to secure their first choice of ship, cabin type and itinerary. ●

Itineraries

Windstar

The eleven-day Marvels of Ecuador, Peru and the Panama Canal cruise from Colon to Lima on *Star Pride* starts from £4,339pp. windstarcruises.com

Lindblad Expeditions

The seven-day Wild Galápagos Escape cruise round trip from Guayaquil on *National Geographic Islander II* starts from £5,339. world.expeditions.com

Hurtigruten

The nine-day In Darwin's Footsteps Galápagos voyage starting in Quito and ending in Guayaquil is priced from £5,403 per person. hurtigruten.com

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**Icon of
the Seas**



LEFT From the six record-breaking water slides to adults-only hangout Cloud 17, there's something for everyone on *Icon of the Seas*

Star POWER

Curious as to what life is like on the world's largest cruise ship? **Jack Carter** reveals all as Royal Caribbean's ambitious *Icon of the Seas* makes its maiden voyage

When *Icon of the Seas* sailed into PortMiami for the first time on 10 January, the residents of the Magic City couldn't help but take notice. It was first thing in the morning and Royal Caribbean had decided to announce its arrival with fireboat salutes, banner planes and an onshore welcome party at the nearby Pérez Art Museum. "We were unapologetic," says Michael Bayley, CEO of Royal Caribbean International. "We had \$100k worth of speakers on board. We woke Miami up."

Indeed, there's nothing apologetic about *Icon of the Seas*. The inaugural ship in the line's new Icon series boasts 2,805 staterooms, 15 entertainment areas and 20 distinct restaurant concepts, not to mention a glut of extravagant features like the first suspended infinity pool at sea. Naturally, a ship of this size will have customers questioning if this is the right cruise for them. Will teenagers enjoy it? How do all those passengers move around? Does the ship actually have a golden retriever on board called Rover? Read on, as we answer all that and more.

IS THERE ROOM FOR LARGE FAMILIES ON BOARD?

Absolutely. In fact, around 80 per cent of the rooms on *Icon of the Seas* can host up to five guests, which is more than double the amount on other Royal Caribbean ships. According to vice president EMEA for Royal Caribbean, Ben Bouldin, families have never had a better or more varied choice of accommodation. "This ship has so many categories to choose from, you can find something that suits you," he says.

A total of 1,815 balcony cabins, 535 interior cabins, 276 ocean-view rooms and 179 suites are spread across the ship's 18 passenger decks, a portion of which can be joined together. Larger rooms like the Surfside Family Suite and the Family Infinite Ocean View Balcony offer bunkbeds and sofa beds, while split bathrooms and generous storage space ensure things don't get too cramped.

Travellers who are looking for something extra special, however, needn't look further than the Ultimate Family Townhouse. The three-storey suite is the largest accommodation on board, with space to sleep up to eight guests, so even gran can come along. There's a mini cinema room, a musical



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Powered by LNG, *Icon of the Seas* is the line's most eco-friendly ship to date; The Overlook's wraparound windows provide the perfect view; the Ultimate Family Townhouse spans three decks; the spectacular onboard entertainment on offer includes *The Wizard of Oz*

staircase and a private entrance to the ship's family neighbourhood, Surfside. Guests will have to move fast, though: it's already fully booked for 2024.

WON'T IT FEEL OVERCROWDED?

Royal Caribbean expects to have as many as 7,600 passengers on board during peak season, so ensuring guests can flow seamlessly from one end of the ship to the other was of major importance to the line. One particular area of focus was the construction of the ship's smart lift system. Royal Caribbean took inspiration from Manhattan skyscrapers during the design phase, even going as far as building a mock elevator lobby in a warehouse so they could test it properly before construction began.

Each floor has a total of 24 express

elevators – 12 at the front and 12 at the back – which guests are intuitively directed to upon entering their floor into built-in iPad-sized screens. Each lift is pre-programmed before they step inside the elevator, with those going to similar areas of the ship grouped together. Anyone going from the Main Dining Room on floor three can make it in time for sunset on the top deck without needing to stop half a dozen times on the way up.

The response from agents and guests has been overwhelmingly positive, with wait times for lifts significantly reduced compared to other large ships.

IS IT JUST FOR FAMILIES?

While there are plenty of ways to treat the tribe on board, rest assured those travelling without children will be well sated. The new Chill Island neighbourhood, for example, is primed for guests who want to relax by the pool with a G&T or mix with other like-minded travellers in one of the cantilevered whirlpools. A plethora of bars serving drinks and pool snacks throughout the day include Swim & Tonic, the line's first swim-up bar at sea, and Lime & Coconut, situated in the new adults-only hangout Cloud 17.

Then there's The Hideaway, a beach club concept with a multi-level sun deck and infinity pool suspended 135ft

Fast facts

7.6K
passengers

2.8K
staterooms

50
musicians and comedians on board

6
record-breaking water slides



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE NEW ATTRACTIONS ON BOARD?

Returning Royal Caribbean passengers will have plenty of exclusive features to enjoy, including a giddy array of new night-time hangouts. Dueling Pianos, for example, sees two pianists go head-to-head in a nightly battle of the baby grands, with sing-alongs and crowd banter complementing the bar's line-up of inventive cocktails (we recommend the Snap, Crackle and Pop).

The Overlook, with its iridescent lighting and futuristic foliage is a great spot for a sunset tippie thanks to the enormous wraparound windows overlooking the nose of the ship. And if you wondered if the rumours about the line's first chief dog officer were true, Rover and her chief of staff Allison will be on board and reporting for duty. 🐕

Selling tips

1 Assure guests who are concerned about overcrowding by telling them that *Icon of the Seas'* wide-open thoroughfares and smart lift system have all but eliminated overcrowding and choke points.

2 The wide variety of accommodation on board means that everyone from couples on a romantic getaway to large, multi-generational families will be able to find a stateroom to suit them.

3 Guests who enjoy chilling by the pool will love the fact that *Icon of the Seas* has 62 per cent more water surface on board than any other Royal Caribbean ship.

“The three-storey Ultimate Family Townhouse is the largest room on board and can sleep up to eight guests, so even gran can come along”

above the ocean. Royal Caribbean is so excited by The Hideaway concept it's extended it to Perfect Day at CocoCay. With swim-up bars, a vast lagoon-style beach and back-to-back DJ sets, imagine Ibiza in the Bahamas and you've got the picture.

IS A SHIP THIS SIZE GOOD FOR THE PLANET?

This is Royal Caribbean's first ship to be powered by liquified natural gas (LNG), a transitional fuel that's been endorsed by the cruise industry for its ability to cut greenhouse gas emissions. However, the jury is still out on LNG, with environmentalists saying that more research needs to be done

to track its long-term impact on the environment. It's not the only measure being taken to reduce *Icon of the Seas'* carbon footprint, however. For example, the ship includes the first waste-to-energy system at sea. “There's a system onboard called a microwave assisted paralysis (MAP) machine, which allows us to convert waste directly into useable energy via steam,” says Royal Caribbean's vice president – head of ESG, Nick Rose. “There are multiple things that go into making this ship more efficient.”

Royal Caribbean states that *Icon* is its most eco-friendly ship to date, coming in at 24 per cent more energy efficient than required standards for today's large vessels.

Vista



Fresh perspective

With chic décor and an ambitious culinary offering, **Vicky Mayer** discovers a new approach to luxury sailing while on board Oceania Cruises' newest ship, *Vista*



“From the jostling crowds in the narrow streets to steam bellowing from espresso machines, nothing feels more Italian than this”

The pizza in my hands is almost the size of my head. Served straight from the oven, it's a wonderful molten mixture of stringy mozzarella cheese, tangy fresh tomato paste and charred edges.

Standing on the streets of Naples, I take my first bite of a genuine Neapolitan pizza in the birthplace of this beloved dish. Now that's what I call an immersive tour.

This is my first visit to Naples, courtesy of Oceania Cruises, and it's a sensory overload. From the jostling crowds in the narrow streets to graffiti on every corner and steam bellowing from the espresso machines in the cafés, nothing feels more Italian than this. Chatting with the charming guide who is giving us a potted history of the city as we chomp down on our pizzas, I realise that this is how all cruise shore excursions should be – informative but fun too.

Great food is important to Oceania and with a claim to have the greatest cuisine at sea, it's no surprise that it puts culinary experiences front and centre of the guest experience. In fact, Oceania offers more than 300 foodie-inspired shore excursions throughout the world. Whether that's eating a humble pizza on a street corner in Naples or enjoying a sumptuous six-course tasting menu at a traditional farmhouse in Sardinia, there's something on offer for all tastes.

My visit to the Campania capital is just one of the stops on my Mediterranean voyage aboard Oceania Cruises' eagerly awaited new ship *Vista*. As the first vessel to be built by the company in 10 years, a lot is resting on her reputation. The first in a new Allura class, she's a sleek 1,200 passenger luxury vessel with 613 staterooms, 12 eateries and 8 bars and lounges.



The line has promised passengers a more contemporary style of cruising with some exciting new additions, so I'm keen to see what's in store as I board in Rome. I'm instantly wowed by the stunning cream and coffee-coloured atrium on deck five. With a curved staircase and striking double-story light display, it's easy to forget you're on a ship and not in the lobby of an opulent five-star hotel.

But of course, that's the whole idea. Miami-based design team Studio Dado were given the brief to design a ship that combined the feel of a modern hotel with first-class service. From my sumptuous Veranda Stateroom on deck nine, decorated in soft creams and navy blues, to the super-stylish pool deck that overlooks a private beach club, the ship feels like a floating White Lotus resort.

Like any new ship, there's a delicate art between retaining onboard features and restaurants that are popular among returning guests while introducing some new ideas, and *Vista* has nailed it.

On board, you'll find new dining experiences, including breakfast and lunch café Aquamar Kitchen, which serves up delicious poke bowls, made-to-order smoothies and avocado toast; as well as Ember, a modern take on the US-dining experience where the lobster mac 'n' cheese is sublime. Then there's the new onboard bakery, next to Baristas, where an Illy coffee and croissant make for a tasty quick breakfast before you leave the ship. Such is the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT The outdoor spa offers relaxation with a view; enjoy a coffee in style at Baristas; sample the culinary delights of Corsica's markets; the sumptuous Veranda Stateroom





ABOVE There's ample space to lounge on the pool deck

“There’s an easy rhythm to life onboard where you are totally spoilt and looked after by the excellent crew”

instant popularity with all these new areas that Oceania boss Frank A Del Rio is already talking about adding two onboard bakeries when *Vista*'s sister ship *Allura* launches in 2025.

As for returning favourites, restaurants Toscana, Polo Grill and Red Ginger all feature on board, albeit with a few tweaks. If you like your steak extra juicy, you'll love the new cuts at Polo Grill while you'll find two great new Italian dishes at Toscana including Capri-inspired lemon spaghetti. The Grand Dining Room has been given a total makeover, too. If you can bag yourself a table by the windows, even better – this eatery has some of the best views on the ship.

Equally impressive are the onboard watering holes with new cocktail joint Founders Bar on deck six packing a punch. The talented team offer a menu of unusual craft cocktails that include whisky-smoked tipples and herb-infused G&Ts. Equally popular is the Horizons bar, where you can enjoy a tipple as the sun sets. And when it's time to

Selling tips

1 Culinary experiences are key to Oceania Cruises' guest offering, so why not pitch *Vista* to travellers who enjoy eating their way around new destinations?

2 Oceania Cruises' eagerly awaited *Vista* is the first vessel to be built by the company in 10 years and there are a host of brand new features throughout.

3 Oceania mainstays like Toscana and Red Ginger mean there are plenty of crowd favourites for guests to tuck into, as well.

Fast facts

1,200

guests

800

crew

613

staterooms

12

eateries

send those envy-inducing photos back home to friends and family – whether it's lounging by the pool, enjoying a sundowner or drinking Champagne on your balcony – Oceania's new Starlink WiFi system, which has been installed on all its ships, makes sending selfies easy. I really love this ship – there's an easy rhythm to life onboard where you are totally spoilt and looked after by the excellent crew. The hardest decision is working out whether it's ok to treat every day as a sea day and enjoy every inch of the ship.

My curiosity finally gets the better of me and I leave the ship to visit Ajaccio, the capital of Corsica. I stroll around the picture-perfect market looking for a chic Corsican café so I can watch the world go by. My week on board *Vista* has been a total delight – modern and unstuffy, it's an accomplished ship that delights guests, both young and old. As new ships go, it's a total hit. 🍷

Details

12-night 'Mediterranean Tapestry' cruise aboard *Vista*, from Venice to Barcelona via Korcula, Split, Kotor, Igoumentsa, Katakolon, Sicily, Amalfi, Rome, Ajaccio, Monte Carlo and Marseille, departing 29 June 2024, from £5,509

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In pictures

We cast our gaze across the industry, offering a sneak-peak of the key events you may have missed



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lionel Messi officially names *Icon of the Seas* in Miami alongside Royal Caribbean Group president Jason Liberty; Silversea's *Silver Nova* is officially named in Fort Lauderdale by godmother Nina Compton; Virgin Voyages' sales team takes over Travel Counsellors' Manchester hub for a training day; Celebrity Cruises celebrates its trade partners during its 2024 Travel Agent Achievement Awards; Lyn and Steve Stokes have ticked off 46 countries on 124 Fred Olsen Cruise Lines sailings, spending 1,330 nights at sea; Angus Drummond, co-founder and CEO of Limitless Travel, with guests on a sailing to Amsterdam on board P&O Cruises' *Aurora*



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