

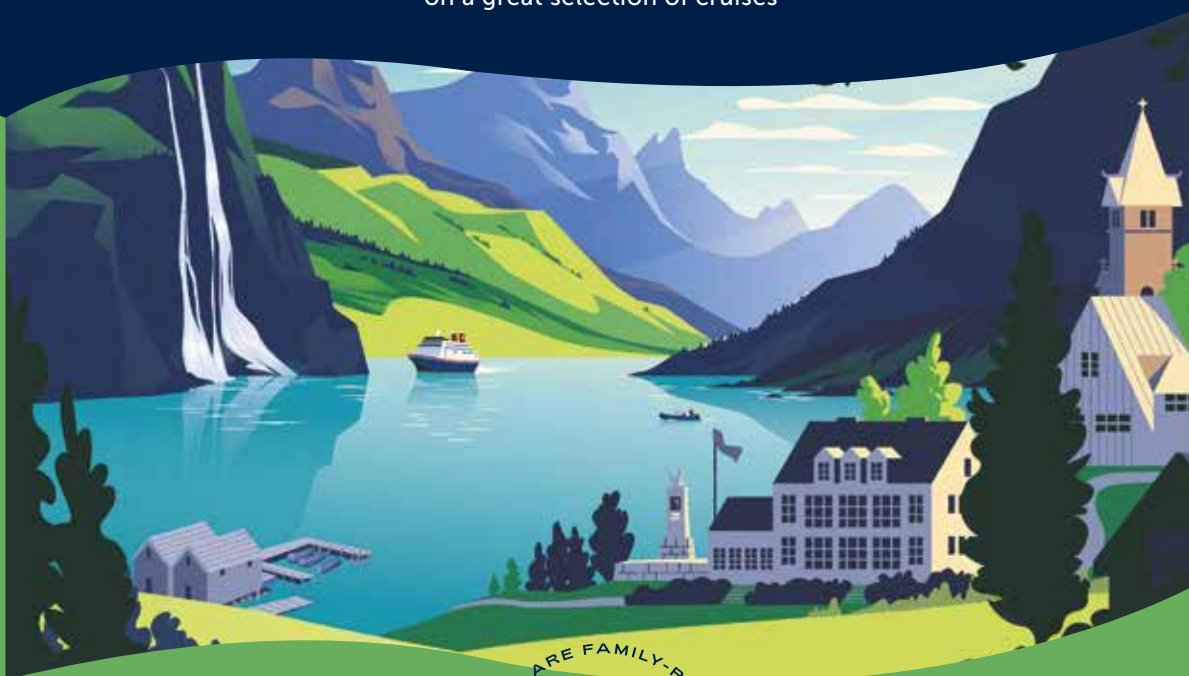


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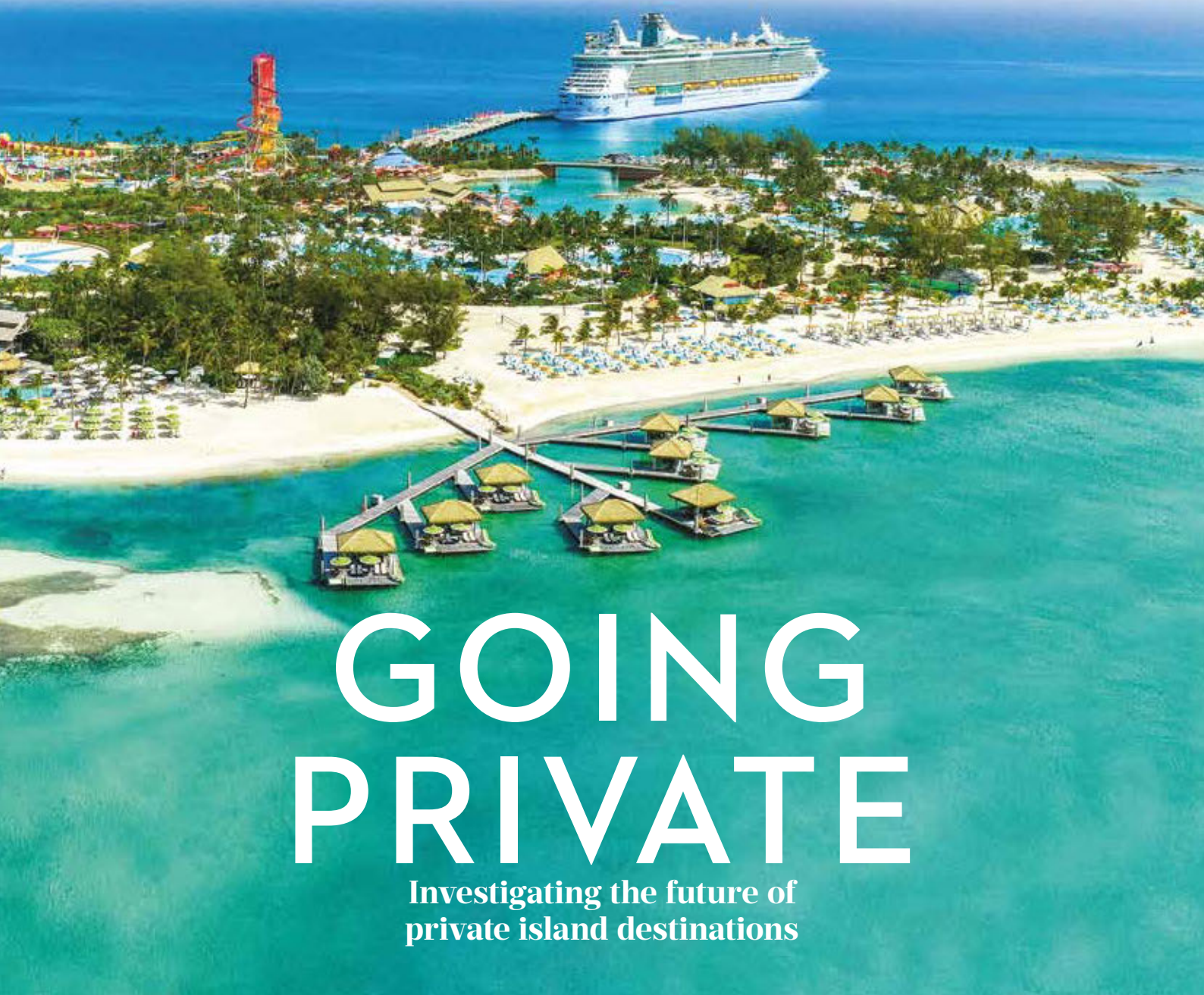
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ISSUE 116 | JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023



cruise

TRADE NEWS



GOING PRIVATE

Investigating the future of
private island destinations

INTERVIEW

In conversation with
Riverside Luxury Cruises

DIGITAL DREAMS

Top tips on how to boost
digital marketing results

MAKING WAVES

Havila Voyages'
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Editor's Letter

WELCOME TO THE JANUARY/FEBRUARY ISSUE

So, it's time to get back to work. I do hope you all had a joyful Christmas break and managed to find some time to relax and recuperate, in preparation for what is sure to be another interesting and – I'm certain – fruitful year for the cruise sector.

We start 2023 much in the same way in which we left 2022 – with an iron-clad focus on delivering everything you need to not only sell more cruise holidays but also widen and boost your knowledge of the industry. That means more in-depth investigations, more first-hand experience of ships and destinations, and bigger and better interviews with the people you need to hear from.

In terms of practical tips, in late November we held a workshop in partnership with CLIA, called Supercharging your Digital Marketing. This first-of-its-kind event included a range of experts discussing how modern marketing solutions can boost cruise sales. We speak to Adido CEO Andy Headington, who moderated the event, who talks through the ways in which online results can be improved.

For this issue, we look at the growth in private island destinations and what this means for cruise lines and passengers, and speak to Riverside Luxury Cruises MD Stuart Perl about what the new river cruise line will offer.



Above: Riverside Luxury Cruises will launch in April

We also hear from APT's Becky Baumbach, who at the end of last year took up the new position of business development manager for homeworkers. As she explains inside: "Our homeworking partners are looking for brands to go beyond the typical business development approach."

As ever, you'll also find all the latest news, itineraries and incentives.

Until next time.

Gary Peters

Editor, Cruise Trade News

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Cruise Trade News

The Briefing

THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR CRUISE NEWS

IN BRIEF

A-Rosa charity cruise

● A-Rosa River Cruises has partnered with social enterprise Charitable Travel to launch a new running cruise holiday in October 2023. The 'Run the River' itinerary – to be led by Rory Coleman, a leading lifestyle and marathon coach – will include the challenge of running 10km a day, over five days.

Viva Two launch plans

● Viva Cruises has announced that its second new-build ship will be christened in its homeport of Dusseldorf this March. The 190-guest *Viva Two* – a sister ship to *Viva One* – will then set sail on its inaugural voyage from Frankfurt to Passau on 1 April.



TRADE

Join the new CTN Agents Club

APPOINTMENTS



● Cunard has announced the appointment of **James Scott** as business manager, development and engagement. Scott was previously sales manager at Oceania Cruises, and also had spells with Holland America Line and Seabourn.



● Silversea has named **Barbara Muckermann** as its new president and CEO, with Roberto Martinoli taking on the role of senior advisor for parent company Royal Caribbean Group CEO Jason Liberty.

Cruise Trade News is starting 2023 with a new initiative to support travel agents.

The Agents Club by *Cruise Trade News*, which is now live on Facebook, is designed to improve our engagement and digital output, and provide a space in which to create a community.

David Broad, who recently joined *Cruise Trade News* as cruise manager and is leading the project, said: "As we move into 2023, we want to engage with the travel industry more than ever before. That's why we are delighted to launch the Agents Club by *Cruise Trade News* on Facebook.

"This group adds to the range of content we have across different platforms, not least of course the printed magazine, digital publications, the *Cruise Trade News* website and social channels.

"I want to share my knowledge and travel experiences with you all, and also give you the chance to ask questions, join in and engage with cruise lines. I will

be adding valuable training videos and interviews to the group, along with new campaigns and competitions. So, join now and chat with me and join my weekly videos – it will be great fun."

In addition, there are plans to boost *Cruise Trade News*' presence on YouTube as well as relaunching the Cruise Corner video interviews on the *Cruise Trade News* website.

Cruise Trade News editor Gary Peters added: "We are excited to see how the Agents Club by *Cruise Trade News* develops over the coming months. It's an important part of our plans for this year, to ensure we are engaged with the trade to build a stronger community. This new group will open up more avenues of communication with our readers, in turn influencing what we do and how we do it."

To join, search 'Agents Club by Cruise Trade News' on Facebook

THE NEWS YOU NEED

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Cruise customers say where they go is an important factor when booking

TRENDS

Destination 'dominant influence' for bookings

A study has revealed that destination will be the dominant influence for customers booking a cruise holiday in 2023. The survey, carried out by cruise specialist [cruise.co.uk](https://www.cruise.co.uk), asked almost 1,000 respondents what the key driving force was behind their choice of cruise.

A total of 44 per cent stated destination was the main factor in their decision-making process. A quarter of respondents said price was most influential, while a fifth indicated it was the cruise brand that swayed their choice.

The specific ship and departure date were lowest ranking, with five per cent of

responses each. The survey also revealed that more than 50 per cent of respondents had travelled on three or more different cruise lines.

[Cruise.co.uk](https://www.cruise.co.uk) deputy managing director Tony Andrews said: "Cruising is such a great way to see the world, so it's easy to see why destination came up trumps in our survey.

"The ability to reach all corners of the globe from the comfort of a ship, combined with the value for money a holiday at sea offers, means we're seeing customers coming back time and time again to discover new destinations or revisit firm favourites.

"In fact, our tailor-made packages have never been more popular, with customers looking to immerse themselves in a destination both on and off the ship."

PORTS

Southampton reveals 2023 plans

Southampton port has revealed that it expects to welcome 492 cruise calls this year.

That would follow what the port described as a "significant year" in 2022. Last year, the likes of *Azamara Onward*, *Celebrity Beyond*, *Silver Moon*, *Norwegian Prima*, *Aida Perla*, *Aida Cosma* and *Enchanted Princess* all called into Southampton. More recently, the port celebrated welcoming P&O Cruises' newest ship *Arvia* on 21 December.

Last spring, Southampton port also switched to shore power at two of its five cruise terminals – Horizon and Mayflower. Since then, a total of 15 ships have used the shore power facilities 42 times, reducing emissions in port.

Associated British Ports head of cruise Rebekah Keeler said: "We're proud to provide



Shore power is now available at two of Southampton's five terminals

award-winning cruise operational support year-round to the world's biggest and smallest cruise ships.

"Alongside this, our ongoing roll out of our air quality strategy sees us take huge strides in facilitating zero emissions at berth. Supported by our port-based cruise services providers, we look forward to another successful year in 2023."



TAKE ON THE Cruise Challenge

Cruise Trade News'
David Broad looks ahead to what is sure to be a great year for the Cruise Challenge

I have been in the travel industry for 20 years, first working overseas with Tui and Crystal Ski, before then managing teams in high street travel agencies and turning my hand to selling cruises with [cruise.co.uk](https://www.cruise.co.uk). During that time, I fell in love with the cruise sector and I've made it my mission over the years to sample as many ocean and river cruise lines as possible.

It will come as no surprise, then, to hear that when the opportunity came to join *Cruise Trade News* as cruise manager, I did not hesitate. A key part of my role is to drive engagement and really push the Cruise Challenge which, if you don't know, is the most unique travel agent training event in the business.

For this year, we have several events planned, spanning the entire country and in partnership with a number of ocean, luxury, river and expedition cruise lines, ensuring we leave no stone unturned in our quest to deliver training that makes a lasting difference.

Alongside this, I intend to launch a series of training videos with cruise lines and associated suppliers, adding another dimension to what we can offer. Please get in touch if you want to get involved or have any questions, at david.broad@realresponsemedia.com. I look forward to meeting you all very soon.

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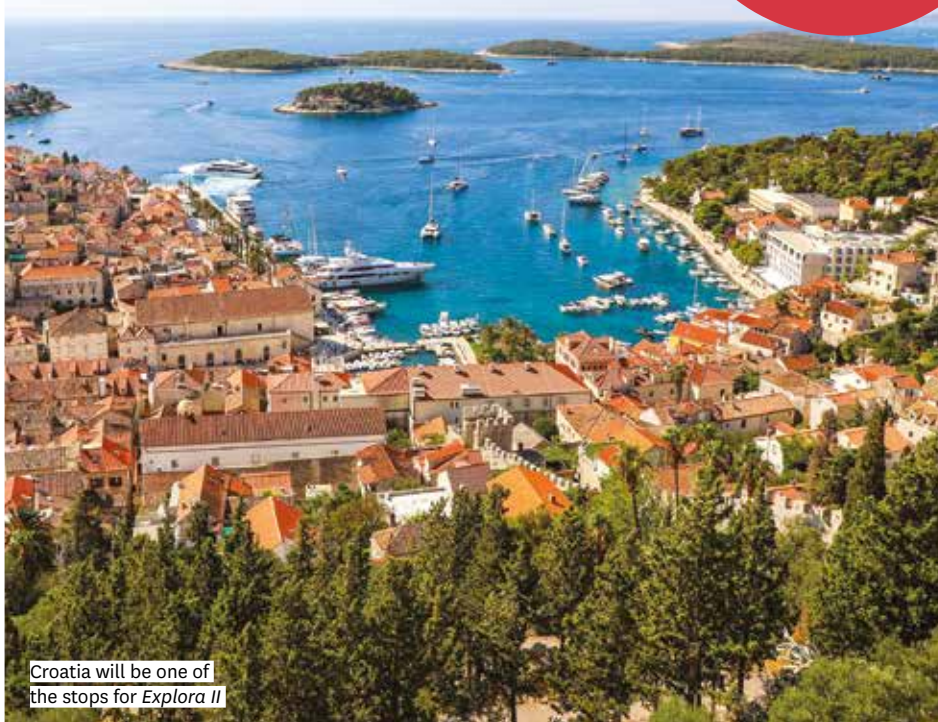
Explora II sailings unveiled

Explora Journeys has announced details for the inaugural itineraries for *Explora II*, its second ship.

The itineraries, on sale now, will run from August 2024 to the end of April 2025 and feature sailings in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, India, the Indian Ocean and Africa.

The ship – scheduled to launch in summer 2024 – will start in the Mediterranean, visiting ports in Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Croatia. After calling into Israel, *Explora II* will pass through the Suez Canal and visit Egypt. The ship will then sail onto the Arabian Peninsula towards Saudi Arabia, cruising the coastline of the Red Sea.

Cities such as Doha, Dubai and Abu Dhabi will also be on the agenda, before *Explora II* reaches the coast of India.



Croatia will be one of the stops for *Explora II*

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Celebrity Cruises has a host of rewards in store for agents

Celebrity Cruises goes big for wave

Celebrity Cruises will give away a total of £125,000 to travel agents during its new wave campaign.

Agents will have the opportunity to earn up to £1,500, via Celebrity Rewards, and the cruise line said it was prioritising rewarding agents with cash prizes over the next three months. The 100 top performing agents between now and 1 March 2023 will earn £500 each.

Agents will also have the chance to win additional cash prizes for multiple bookings. The first of the

'Sell More, Win More prize' draws will see 50 agents who make 10 or more bookings win £500 each. In the second draw, 25 agents who secure 20 or more will win £1,000 each.

Celebrity said it will also reward new starters in the industry, as well as those new to the brand, with a £25 bonus per booking for the first five they claim through Celebrity Central.

All agents will be able to earn £5 when booking an Inside or Oceanview stateroom, £10 for a Balcony, Concierge or AquaClass stateroom, and £20 when booking in the Retreat, or for sailings to the Galapagos Islands.



Princess reveals biggest-ever ex-UK season

Princess Cruises has revealed that 2024 is set to be the biggest UK and Europe season in the line's history, with almost four million cruise nights available.

There will be a total of 162 departures available on 85 itineraries across five ships, including the new Sphere-class *Sun Princess*. The 4,300-guest ship will spend its inaugural season in Europe, with 10-night Grand Mediterranean and Western Grand Mediterranean itineraries departing from Barcelona or Rome (Civitavecchia), and seven-night cruises departing from either Rome (Civitavecchia), Barcelona or Athens. *Sun Princess* will make an inaugural visit

to Southampton for an overnight stay on 22 September 2024.

In addition, *Sky Princess* will return to Southampton as its homeport for the fourth year running, sailing on a variety of voyages from four to 31 nights. *Regal Princess* will sail on 12-night British Isles voyages featuring Dublin, Belfast, Liverpool and the Orkney Islands.

Caribbean Princess also joins the Southampton lineup, sailing to destinations throughout Europe, including Northern Europe capital cities on a 12-night Oktoberfest European Capitals itinerary, departing 12 September 2024.



RIVIERA'S PEAKS PRIZES

Riviera Travel has launched a peaks trade incentive for travel agents, giving away almost £10k worth of prizes across nine weeks.

The river cruise and escorted touring holiday specialist will be rewarding select agents with iPad pros worth £899, alongside weekly Amazon vouchers of £150. Running through to 3 March 2023, a prize draw of agent bookings will take place every week to win one of nine iPads, while the highest weekly value booking will win a voucher.

Riviera Travel head of agency sales Tom Morgan said: "We had a fantastic year [in 2022], which we couldn't have achieved without the amazing support from our agent partners. The team and I wanted to say thank you."



Win 'Moments of Wonder' with Scenic

Scenic Group – consisting of Scenic and Emerald Cruises – has released a 'Moments of Wonder' incentive prize programme.

Agents who make a new river or ocean booking with Scenic or Emerald up until 28 February will be entered into a prize draw to win one of six 'Moments of Wonder' that showcase some of the Scenic Enrich and EmeraldPLUS experiences available to clients.

Activities include helicopter rides, private dining and cooking

experiences at a five-star restaurant, a private vineyard tour, and a luxury evening of wine and whisky tasting. Scenic Group is also offering a new e-bike to one lucky winner.

Scenic and Emerald Cruises director of trade sales Andrea Stafford said: "In the long, dark winter months, travel agents are always at their busiest, so we thought it would be great to give them the chance to brighten things up with a fun competition."

For the *unwinders...*

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Forever Curious



AIM HIGH

In his first column of the year, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon** sets his sights on a prosperous 2023

Hello all and welcome back. I hope you all had a great break over Christmas and enjoyed some downtime with your nearest and dearest. After a Christmas hiatus, we come back to what is typically the busiest period for our industry – and there's not a mince pie in sight to help us through it.

I am particularly pleased to be starting 2023 with a renewed sense of optimism and excitement for the year ahead. It is fair to say that confidence in travel is returning, and for the first time in a while we can go into the turn of year or wave period with much more certainty than in previous years.



“A lot of customers have waited for this time of year to book, so maximise that opportunity for them”

GEOFF RIDGEON

HEAD OF SALES

FRED OLSEN CRUISE LINES

It's certainly a very busy time for you as agents, as every cruise line will be sharing news with you about what they are offering. January and February are key booking periods for us all, and don't forget that a good first quarter sets a great foundation for a strong rest of the year.

Catch up on campaigns

It comes back to that old cliché, but listen to the customer and try to put yourselves in their shoes. Take time to understand

not only what kind of holiday they want, but what represents value for them when it comes to offers. A lot of your customers will have waited specifically for this time of year to book as they know they can get a great deal, so maximise that opportunity for them.

Set aside the time to reacquire yourself with the turn of year campaigns that each cruise line is running and consider which of those is going to present the best value and the best experience for your customer based on the type of cruise holiday they want.

It will be time well spent for you, and your efforts will be returned in dividends when you find the perfect match for your customer. At Fred Olsen, for example, we are offering sailings from £499, but also adding value with their choice of an all-inclusive drinks package or credit to spend on board – plus dedicated solo offers, too.

Let's not forget the challenges we all faced this time last year, with Omicron on the rise following threats of Christmas lockdowns. However, we now find ourselves in a much better position to create a fruitful 2023. So, let's go and get it. 🍀

The historic city of Riga in Latvia is on *Bolette's* itineraries this year



TECH TALK

Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant** highlights how, according to the data, last year showed real progression for the cruise sector

Happy New Year and I hope you managed some well-earned rest and relaxation over the festive period and are now in the full swing of work and knee deep in fabulous cruise bookings.

I'm certainly full of much more optimism as we enter another year of recovery. This time last year we were all a little concerned, but thankfully the recovery was fast and furious for the UK market. A great thing about having all your bookings in a technology system with good data insights and reporting capability is that you can track trends and use this for marketing purposes.

For example, during 2022 we tracked against 2019 as the last year of normality. Our data tells us that 2022 cruise bookings were up 24 per cent compared to 2019 for the UK cruise market. The average price in the UK paid for a cruise in 2022 was £2,600 – four per cent higher than in 2019.

In 2019, the most popular month to make a cruise booking was January, very much reflective of the usual peaks behaviour, but in 2022 the most popular month was August 2022, highlighting new booking patterns.

The most popular duration of cruise – at 51 per cent – was a seven-night itinerary, followed by 14-night cruises at 26 per cent of bookings. Also, 41 per cent of the bookings made sailed within the same year, so demand for lates and good deals enticed people back. The most popular month for sailings was September, which is a month earlier, while last year we also saw 49 per cent of bookings for 2024 and 10 per cent of bookings made for 2025.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Look at your data. Is it in the right shape so you can use it to make informed decisions? If not contact a technology company and ask for advice
- Check out CLIA's regular reports for data insights to the cruise market
- Look to external resources such as *Cruise Trade News*, ABTA and others who collate cruise data

Early indications for 2023

In 2019, the most booked future date was February 2020, compared to 2023, which is May. As for destinations, last year the Canary Islands was the hot cruise destination, followed by Northern European itineraries, the Norwegian fjords, Mediterranean and then the western Med. It is probably not a huge surprise that people stayed closer to home in 2022.

TRENDS

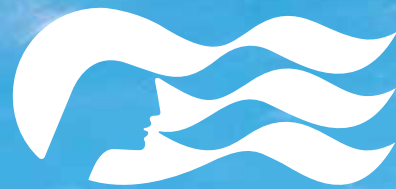
Data shows 2022 cruise bookings were up 24 per cent for the UK cruise market compared to 2019

Looking forward to 2023, the Norwegian fjords has the top spot, followed by the Mediterranean and then the Canary Islands. However, although the Norwegian fjords again come out on top for 2024, the Caribbean features second and then the Mediterranean third, showing that consumer confidence is strong on the return of long-haul travel for the UK market.

Drilling ever further down into the data, in 2022 Royal Caribbean was the most popular cruise line for guests, while the likes of Princess Cruises, P&O Cruises, Celebrity Cruises and MSC Cruises also featured prominently. 📊



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PURE AMBITION

With a strong foundation now in place, Havila Voyages is poised to capitalise on new opportunities in 2023 and beyond

In its relatively short existence, Havila Voyages has punched above its weight on numerous fronts. With a focus on exploration and sustainability – as well as one eye on the future – it has begun to carve out its own niche in the market.

As of now, it operates two ships – *Havila Castor* and *Havila Capella* – designed to be the most environmentally friendly vessels to operate along the coastal route from Bergen to Kirkenes in Norway. An additional two ships, *Havila Polaris* and *Havila Pollux*, are due to join the fleet this year, following the same design and technology traits.

When *Capella* was christened during a ceremony in Fosnavåg, Norway, in November 2022, Havila Voyages CEO Bent Martini said: “The characteristics

of *Havila Capella* make her a guiding star along the coast, like her sister ships.

“We have already sailed in the World Heritage Geirangerfjord emission-free, four years before the authorities’ requirements, and have ships that have been built to meet the future requirements and opportunities for completely emission-free sailings. It is therefore fitting that *Havila Capella* is named after a guiding star.”

Reaching goals

Havila’s own guiding star since launch has undoubtedly been its sustainability drive, which continues to be one of its foremost selling points, with no sign of that focus dwindling this year. Havila Voyages is supporting an initiative, alongside a series of other maritime and shipping organisations, to work towards reducing emissions from shipping by 100 per cent by 2030, in line with Norway’s national climate goals.

Martini explained: “This is completely in line with our visions for the future of our industry in general, and along the coastal route. Therefore, it was only natural for us to support this initiative. In many ways, we have already set a new standard both in the world heritage fjords and along the coastal route and have proven that it is possible today to reduce our emissions significantly, while at the same time have forward-looking and achievable thoughts for the future.”

As for those achievable aims, the line is pushing ahead with plans for its “ultimate goal” of operating its 12-day voyages

emission-free. A key part of this will be switching its ships to run on biogas, which it says will happen as soon as local supplies allow.

The cruise line is also working with its sister company Hav Hydrogen on a pilot project designed to bring hydrogen to the cruise market. Once such technology is readily available, it could be used on the line’s existing ships.

Keeping promises

Fundamental to spreading this message is the line’s relationships with trade partners. Havila Voyages head of sales UK Matthew Valentine has spoken of his and the company’s desire to work closely with UK agents, and new partnerships are emerging rapidly. The next step in the process is its application for ABTA



New excursions include dog sledding in Tromsø. Photo: TromsøVillmarksenter



“Havila Voyages is pushing ahead with plans for its goal of operating its 12-day voyages emission-free”

membership, which is in its final stages – something that Valentine told *Cruise Trade News* in 2022 would “open a number of new doors”.

Havila has also sought to reach out to clients, not least with its Northern Lights promise. This means any guests booking a 12-day cruise along the Norwegian coast (Bergen-Kirkenes-Bergen) will be eligible for a free six or seven-night voyage if the natural phenomenon doesn’t appear during their trip. It is valid for all departures up to 31 March and the replacement trip (if needed) will take place the following winter.

This year is also the 130th anniversary of the Norwegian coastal route and Havila is celebrating the milestone by including all meals and baked goods in the Havly cafe (plus a tea and coffee package) in the price of all cruises.

Meanwhile, the Havila Gold upgrade package has been improved and now includes a non-alcoholic drinks package, as well as an upgrade to a five-course signature dinner in the Hildring fine dining restaurant and a 20 per cent discount on Havila-branded products in the on-board store, among other things. This package is priced at approximately



Havila Capella is an environmental guiding star. Photo: Havila Kystruten

£430pp for a round voyage. For this year, Havila has also introduced new excursions, including an exclusive husky tour in Tromsø, giving guests the opportunity to be a musher of their own team of huskies. In Honningsvåg, a sauna and swimming excursion – called Hot & Cold on Top of the World – includes a refreshing ice bath experience in the Arctic Barents Sea. 🐾

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VOYAGES

Spotlight On



SUPPORT FOR HOMEWORKERS

APT & Travelmarvel's new BDM for homeworkers **Becky Baumbach** discusses why now is the right time to expand support

At the end of last year, APT & Travelmarvel announced the next phase in its trade team expansion plan with the appointment of Becky Baumbach in a new business development manager role focusing solely on homeworkers. The operator said at the time that the move acknowledged "the vast potential that homeworkers have to play in the future of the sector".

In fact, travel agents make up 75 per cent of APT & Travelmarvel's total sales, and "homeworkers have led some of the largest sales increases within this group", says Baumbach. As part of the new position, Baumbach will focus on sales, relationships and partnership opportunities with homeworking agents, lead an extensive training programme and create customer and engagement events to help enhance sales conversions for agents.

"Before the pandemic, we had begun to see an increase in the number of agents making the shift towards homeworking," Baumbach tells CTN. "That movement then grew, as working practices evolved. For us at APT & Travelmarvel, it was important to acknowledge this trend and develop resources accordingly, ensuring

that we continue offering the best support to all our valued trade partners, whatever their working set up."

Baumbach says a key objective for her is to be "on-hand" when homeworking agents need support, adding: "This will ensure I can familiarise them with the destinations and products that we offer, as well as the APT difference, and help them to further build their businesses, increasing their sales and margins. Working together, I also want to help homeworkers to identify and target 'new to' or 'yet to' river cruise customers."

Setting a new standard

Prior to starting the new role in December, Baumbach had been with APT as a BDM for more than four years. She believes that the key differences between the two positions will come to the fore as she continues to get her teeth into the new job.

"We know that being a homeworker differs wildly from being a retail agent, and this will be reflected in my role," she explains. "Our homeworking partners are looking for brands to go beyond the typical business development approach. When you're home-based, you don't have the benefit of in-store colleagues, meaning that these agents want more support from the companies that they work with.

"My new position will ensure APT sets a new standard in partnerships, forging relationships to help homeworkers build and sustain a thriving business from their river cruise sales," she continues. "We have also recognised how integral it is for homeworking agents to connect directly with their customers, so another part of my new role will be helping them to do just that, utilising our core product and destinations."

As for the training programme, Baumbach is keen to offer more face-to-face events. She adds: "Our content will be directly tailored to the needs and requirements of home-based agents, which differ from those working in retail stores or in call centres." 📌



BECKY BAUMBACH
HOMEWORKERS BDM
APT & TRAVELMARVEL

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Kusadasi (Ephesus~); Mykonos, Skopelos;
Skiathos & Bozcaada (Turkey)

HIGHLIGHT: Our private classical concert
at Ephesus, exclusive to Seabourn guests

*Lead fare based on 23 Jul 2023

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SEABOURN OVATION

CRUISE FROM £3,095pp | INCLUSIVE AIR

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(Iceland); Heimaey (Westman Islands);
Grundarfjörður.

HIGHLIGHT: Discover Iceland's wonders
by Zodiac and Kayak

*Lead fare based on 20 Aug 2023

10-night Riviera & Mediterranean Jewels

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Barcelona to Civitavecchia (Rome)
SEABOURN SOJOURN

CRUISE FROM £4,419pp | INCLUSIVE AIR

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(Sicily); Mgarr (Gozo); Valletta (overnight); Giardini
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HIGHLIGHT: Discover Valletta, a designated UNESCO
site on an overnight stay

*Lead fare based on 25 Aug 2023

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Going PRIVATE

Private islands are attracting more interest, but what does the future hold for these idyllic destinations? **Gary Peters** investigates

There are many ports of call that lay claim to stunning beaches, pristine waters, countless activities and sunshine. However, over the years, certain cruise lines have sought to develop their own private enclaves, all in the name of offering unique getaways and making each and every guest feel like a VIP. And, in recent times, their appeal has appeared to be getting stronger.

These private islands, or private slices of other destinations, could be described as their own little microcosms of what every port of call (at least the warm weather ones), aims to achieve. Take, as the first example, Royal Caribbean. The line's Perfect Day at CocoCay in the Bahamas and Labadee in Haiti are jam-packed with things to do, often adding to the activities found on many of the line's ships.

Something for everyone

"Our private destinations enable us to offer guests an extension of the Royal Caribbean holiday on land and include

unique activities they may not be able to experience elsewhere," says Royal Caribbean International director of sales Stuart Byron. "Guests love the fact the island [Perfect Day] offers something for everyone. Thrill seekers can race down the tallest waterslide in North America or ride the tide of the Caribbean's largest wave pool. Those looking to unwind can do so at the largest freshwater pool in the Caribbean, or enjoy an idyllic beach day.

"On Labadee, feedback shows that guests love the abundance of activities including Dragon's Breath Flight Line, the longest zipline in the world over water at 2,600 feet, and Dragon's Tail Coaster, a thrilling high-speed ride through 2,232 feet of the destination's tropical flora and rock formations."

The appeal is also growing. In November last year, Royal Caribbean Group president Jason Liberty highlighted that more and more passengers will call at Perfect Day in 2023. It's not just Royal Caribbean that

can lay claim to island success, however. There's Holland America Line with Half Moon Cay, again in the Bahamas; Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve from MSC Cruises; Norwegian Cruise Line with Great Stirrup Cay and Harvest Caye; Paul Gauguin's Motu Mahana, and others.

"With a private island, Holland America Line can create a destination for the wishes of our guests," explains the line's sales and marketing director Karen Farndell. "We run and operate the port so we control how many ships visit each day and can manage the number of guests arriving."

Meanwhile, Norwegian Cruise Line UK & Ireland senior director of sales Gary Anslow adds: "The benefits of having not one but two private island destinations range from one-of-a-kind excursions, such as stingray tours, to exquisite dining and beverage options. Guests relish in the tranquillity of our private islands and the chance to escape from their day-to-day routine."

"These private islands could be described as their own little microcosms of what every port of call aims to achieve"



Private islands cater for all ages, with an abundance of activities and ways to relax





Coral reefs are the focus of a restoration project at Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve

Norwegian Cruise Line established three in-water coral nurseries around Great Stirrup Cay



Private islands such as Half Moon Cay make it easier to fulfil guests' wishes



“Royal Caribbean International predicts nearly 65 per cent of its passengers will call at Perfect Day at CocoCay this year”

Building a better future?

Going by what Anslow and others describe, it's not hard to see why some guests are keen to experience these destinations. Indeed, Travel 1st's Lee Ashton says his agency wants to tap into the concept more in the future. “Many private island resorts are dedicated to redefining the word privacy, giving exclusivity and that extra special magical feeling of ‘a world of your own’.

On a cruise, nothing says luxury more than being able to say, ‘I spent a day on a private island,’” he tells *Cruise Trade News*.

However, what about the other side of the coin? Private islands are not universally popular, with concerns raised in the past by local action groups and also the wider tourism industry regarding the environmental effect of large ships and large numbers, and also the impact on the local population.

Anslow tackles it head on: “Much of the concern around private islands is environmental – from overcrowding

to worries about disrupting ecological areas in this secluded part of the world. Rest assured, at NCL we take this very seriously and do everything we can to support and authentically reflect our host communities.

“We’ve undertaken core projects and partnerships including working with the Wyland Foundation, cruising for conservation with the Guy Harvey Foundation, and coral reef restoration with the Nova Southeastern University to help establish three in-water coral nurseries around Great Stirrup Cay.

“Meanwhile on Harvest Caye, all of our development preserves and improves the local eco system. From using local materials in our buildings, to creating 500 direct and 1,500 indirect jobs for the local economy, we’re careful to ensure we maintain the carefully balanced eco-systems of our private island destinations.”

Anslow also says it's important to “put sustainability principles first, especially



Guests can enjoy exclusive experiences such as Perfect Day at CocoCay's infinity pool

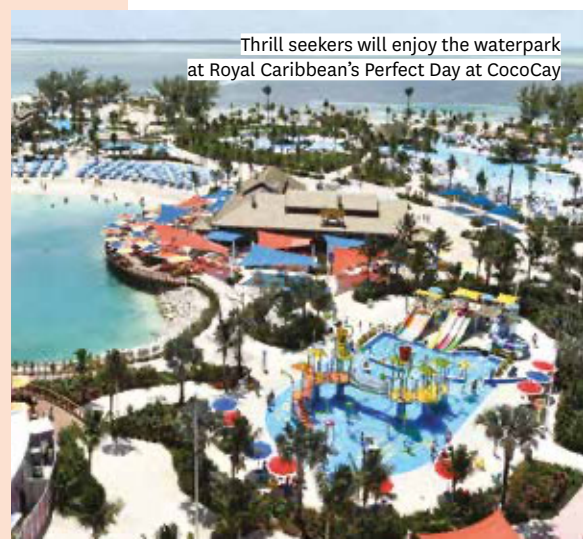


The Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve is designed to allow ships to dock right on the island

from a destination perspective. By restricting the number of ships that call to our private islands, and therefore the number of guests and crew onshore, we can ensure an optimal experience for both guests and the environment."

At MSC Cruises, UK and Ireland MD Antonio Paradiso pinpoints a "super coral programme" that is underway on Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve to restore coral reefs in the area. He explains: "The programme is so much more than a local initiative to protect and restore the coral reefs in the 64 square mile area around Ocean Cay – it is designed to build unique expertise in the study and practice of coral resilience, developing a model that can be successfully replicated around the world."

Thrill seekers will enjoy the waterpark at Royal Caribbean's Perfect Day at CocoCay



In Labadee, Royal Caribbean Group built "one of the first schools in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, which continues to educate more than 230 local children a year", says Byron. He adds: "In 2017, the group placed 200 reef balls – used to create an artificial reef – to calm the waves and minimise erosion while providing a marine habitat."

'Watch this space'

Royal Caribbean International predicts that nearly 65 per cent of its passengers will call at Perfect Day at CocoCay this year. With such numbers, it's no surprise that interest is ramping up in developing more private island ports of call.

Clare Weeden, a principal lecturer in tourism and marketing at the University of Brighton, says the concept is a "win-win for cruise lines", adding: "We saw the development of cruises to nowhere during the pandemic, so private islands are possibly a gateway to fewer destinations being visited. It's a tightrope for cruise lines though, as passengers always say the itineraries are important and what appeal to them when deciding on a cruise."

Weeden believes that it is likely more private destinations will open, but "whether they will actually be islands is debatable". She adds: "[They are] more likely to take place in areas of the world that are developing and not European or post-industrialised nations, for instance."

As for the cruise lines themselves, Byron says: "We wouldn't rule out adding more to our global offering. In fact, we're looking to grow our current

offering with the creation of our newest private island, Lelepa, in the natural gem of the South Pacific, Vanuatu. Perfect Day at Lelepa will have a different look and feel, creating the ideal South Pacific experience. We are continually looking at our land-based offering, so watch this space for the future."

Paradiso suggests that expanding MSC's portfolio of private islands is "not something that we would ever rule out", while NCL's Anslow explains that he "can't reveal too much just yet" but adds: "I'm confident that, as our fleet continues to expand, we'll continue elevating our shoreside offering."

In short, don't be surprised if more cruise lines decide to go private in the near future. ❶

Peaceful, pristine beaches are part of the attraction for Holland America Line passengers



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In conversation with...

Riverside Luxury Cruises' Stuart Perl

Come this April, a new ultra-luxury river cruise line will set sail. Riverside Luxury Cruises MD Stuart Perl speaks to Gary Peters about the operator's ambitious plans



Stuart Perl says Riverside Luxury Cruises has a unique offering

As 2022 was winding down, news emerged that hotel group Seaside Collection would enter the world of cruising to tap into what it saw as the under-served ultra-luxury segment of the river cruise market.

And so, Riverside Luxury Cruises was born, beginning with one ship, *Riverside Mozart* – which was formerly part of the Crystal Cruises fleet – and sailing in April 2023 on the Danube. At the time, Seaside Collection owner Gregor Gerlach explained: “We had been watching the market for river cruise ships for a number of years, and when the opportunity arose to take over the *Mozart*, we didn’t hesitate for long. With only 100 to 150 guests on board the *Riverside Mozart* and around 80 crew, we can offer the highest level of personal service on the rivers.”

What also caught the attention of many when the news was announced was the appointment of Stuart Perl as managing director. Perl has been involved in cruise for many years, including as UK & Europe MD at AmaWaterways, and says the opportunity to join Riverside came at the perfect time.

“This is a very unique opportunity in that the owners of Riverside are a hotel company operating in the ultra-luxury area,” he tells *Cruise Trade News*. “They were looking at the river cruise sector and felt that there was no true ultra-luxury product. For me, this is a hugely exciting venture as we are positioning ourselves in our own space and with what we believe is a unique offering.”

Awareness is key

As mentioned, *Riverside Mozart* is just a few short months away from embarking on its inaugural itineraries, and will offer guests chances to embark in Vienna, Budapest and Passau. Perl confirms he has actively started plans to build the team in the UK, and hopes to have “one if not two people in place in the very near future”, and says he is focused on driving brand awareness and relationships with agents, ensuring the idea of Riverside begins to take shape in people’s minds.

“Challenge number one is awareness,” he explains. “Alongside that, it is also about developing the right distribution network to get to our target audience. While of course there are excellent cruise agencies out there that are part of the picture, there are also many other luxury holiday sellers that we want to start working with.”

He continues: “We are going to offer a game-changing approach to selling river

cruises. I’ve never come across it before – we will not take any deposit, rather we will take full payment at final payment time. When it was first suggested, my jaw dropped, but they don’t take deposits in the hotel sector, so why can’t we do the same in cruise? This is something that I love about the product – a new and fresh approach.”

Flexibility and choice

This new approach also applies to the overall experience, as well as itineraries and the line’s pricing structure. “The Riverside experience will be just that bit better than what is out there,” explains Perl. “We will have more choice and flexibility. For example, with itineraries on the *Mozart* itineraries we have 32 departures on the Danube, ranging from three to 14 nights. We will also have combination sailings, providing that flexibility to guests.

“Our crew to guest ratio is better than any other line operating. We have a maximum capacity of 160 passengers and we have crew of 85. Other cruise lines have half that number for probably slightly more passengers.”



The luxurious Palm Court on *Riverside Mozart*



Refreshments are always on hand at the Vista Bar



Every suite has elegant furnishings and fine materials



Menus on board are carefully curated to reflect local cuisine

Perl adds that Riverside Luxury Cruises' pricing model is also "something not currently in the market". He adds: "We will offer prices right up front that can be cruise only, which in fact we are calling full board because that's what they do in the hotel industry. That basic fare will include all gratuities on board and ashore and transfers. We then have a full board fare plus drinks, but no excursions, so why are we doing that? Well, many travellers who will buy this product might not want the group excursion and prefer their own private guide.

"We do have a cruise-only plus excursions, which could work for first-time cruisers. They want to do the excursions that we're offering, but they're not drinkers, so why should they pay for the drinks? It's a question that's been going around the industry for years – should it be all inclusive or not? It allows passengers to make a choice and it replaces the plethora of offers that keep getting put into the market. It's the luxury of choice. If it is communicated



Riverside Mozart promises to provide outstanding personal service

"Our pricing model replaces the plethora of offers that keep getting put into the market"

simply and clearly, then it should be an easy message to get across and a huge point of difference for us."

More to come

As for the fleet, starting with *Riverside Mozart* – which, Perl says, will not undergo any dramatic decor changes – it was revealed in January that *MS Bach*, *MS Ravel*, *MS Mahler* and *MS Debussy*, originally designed and operated by Crystal Cruises, will also become part of

Riverside. "I see 2022 as having laid very solid foundations for this year, in terms of getting back to how the sector was operating pre-pandemic," Perl says. "We can never predict what's going to happen but, as things stand, I think the general feeling is that we're all learning to live with what is going on and there is a very common consensus that says, 'I want to go on holiday, no matter what is happening with inflation, geopolitical or health situations.'" ❶



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MSC Seascape

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Fast Facts

MSC Cruises launched its latest flagship, *MSC Seascape*, in December 2022 in New York. The ship pays tribute to the beauty of the ocean with a whole host of innovative design features to enable guests to enjoy new horizons at sea. Think impressive outdoor spaces designed for relaxation, dining and entertainment, as well as the breathtaking glass skywalk Bridge of Sighs. Beyond that, the new immersive high-tech entertainment, with innovative technology, provides guests with endless options.

5,877

GUESTS

323M

LENGTH

2,270

CABINS

11

DINING VENUES

20

SPECIALITY BARS



1

Times Square

Seascape pays tribute to New York in various ways. The destination represents the spirit of discovery and cultural experiences that is at the heart of the guest experience. Design features, public areas and venue names are inspired by the metropolitan US city, including Times Square.



2

Uptown Lounge

MSC has packed *Seascape* with numerous bars and places to grab a drink, but one in particular that stands out is the Uptown Lounge. This beautiful piano bar and cocktail lounge has the ideal atmosphere in which to wind down after dinner or a long day of sightseeing.



3



TimeVallée

Seascope features the first TimeVallée boutique at sea. TimeVallée is a heavyweight in the luxury watch retail sector and their curated multi-brand selection makes for a destination store that offers some of the most prestigious watches available on any cruise ship in the world.

4



Robotron

MSC Seascapes is home to the first robotic amusement ride on a cruise ship. This robotic arm, with an attached gondola, can seat three guests at a time, flying them 53 metres above the sea. Riders can personalise their experience and also curate their musical journey.

5



Sky Bar

There are few things better than watching the waves and taking in the sea views, and on *MSC Seascapes* a perfect place for this is the Sky Bar. This rooftop cocktail lounge is a charming spot in which to get away from the hustle and bustle and take time to enjoy the simple things in life.

LIFE ON MARELLA CRUISES

What goes on behind the scenes at Marella Cruises? We speak to two crew members to find out

Marella Cruises is known for its cheery, helpful staff who work tirelessly to make every holiday a truly memorable experience.

But what happens behind the scenes to ensure the ships sail smoothly? We meet two of the line's staff to find out and discuss what itineraries are proving most popular.

Ben Hardwidge

DESTINATION MANAGER

Which ship do you work on?

I'm currently on *Marella Explorer*, but this year, I have the exciting opportunity to be part of the start-up team for *Marella Voyager*.

What does your job involve?

I'm in charge of planning and organising our shore excursions in each port. I'm always looking at keeping things interesting for our guests, so if I spot a new opportunity or adventure, I try to add it to our programme.

Can you describe a typical day?

My day normally starts with a brisk walk on the open deck to check out the weather for the upcoming day, followed by a visit to the office to catch up on emails. I'll brief the team so they understand how the morning should play out, and then we'll head ashore to meet our local destination partners.

Sometimes I'll find the time to join one of our tours and, even if I've visited somewhere before, I love to return again and again. As the evening approaches, I'll head back ashore and welcome our guests back to the ship from their excursions. Once everyone is back on board, I like to chat to guests and share some of my personal recommendations on the best things to see and do in port.

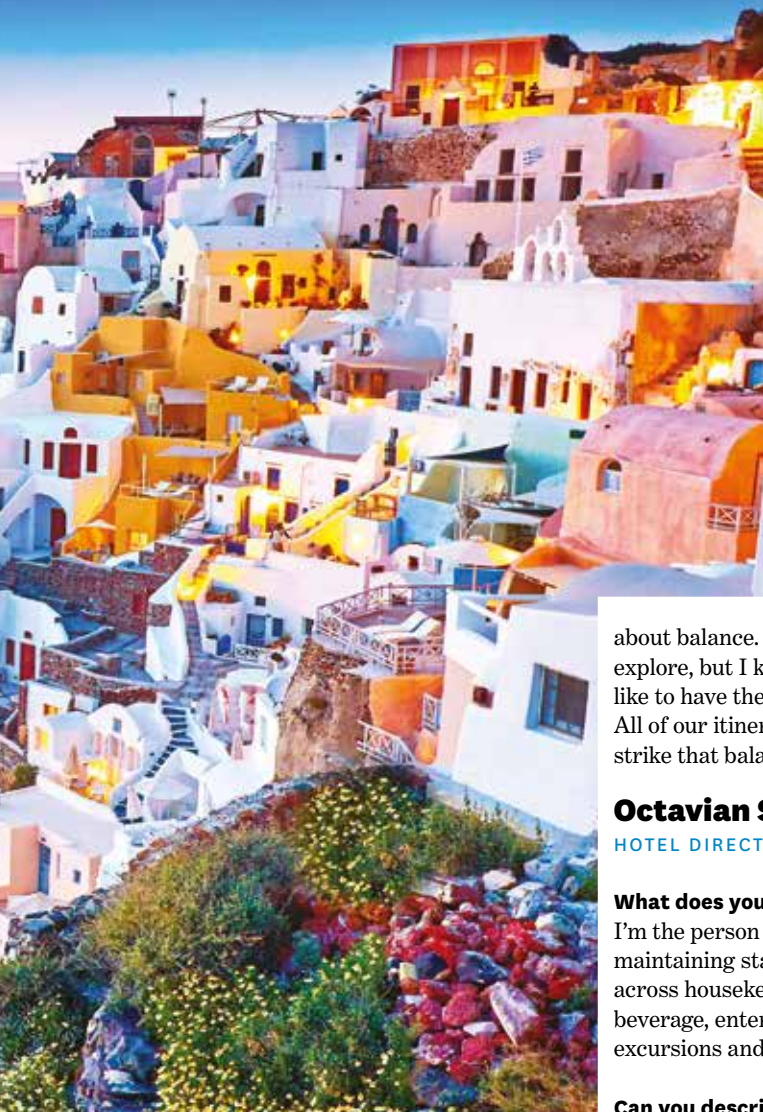


Ben Hardwidge is one of the line's destination managers

"The cable car ride up to the top of Santorini is a fantastic experience"

Santorini's iconic white-washed buildings and blue-domed churches make it a popular port of call

Marella Cruises advertorial



What are the most popular destination choices for Marella guests?

One of our most popular ports of call is Santorini in Greece. This place has buckets of Greek charm, with its blue-domed churches and white-washed buildings. There's something special about wandering the narrow pathways, discovering local Greek restaurants – and the cable car ride up to the top is a fantastic experience, delivering outstanding views of the ship down below.

What do guests look for in their destination choice?

Most guests look for a mixture of adventure and relaxation – so it's all

about balance. It's nice to get out and explore, but I know a lot of people also like to have the option to totally chill out. All of our itineraries are designed to strike that balance.

Octavian Serbanescu

HOTEL DIRECTOR

What does your job involve?

I'm the person responsible for maintaining standards and services across housekeeping, food and beverage, entertainment, shore excursions and reception.

Can you describe a typical day?

First thing in the morning, I walk around the public areas and check in with the night cleaning team – it's very valuable to thank this team, they do an important job and they're not always seen and recognised. Then I walk through the restaurants to see how the breakfast service is going and do some food testing – this is always a good part.

After the guests leave on their excursions, I catch up with the Guest Relations Manager. This is also a good time to chat to the guests on board. We have a lot of loyal customers who sail with us time and again so it's great to hear their feedback. Evenings are a nice part of the day in hotel operations and I really like the atmosphere when all the venues and lounges are open.



Marella Explorer visits some of the world's top cruise destinations



Octavian Serbanescu relishes time spent chatting to guests

“Some of our regular guests become a bit like extended family”

How would you describe the guest accommodation?

It's comfortable and modern. We pride ourselves on making sure our guests feel at home so we also provide super comfy mattresses and we stock Yorkshire Tea in every cabin.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Working with people and ensuring all guests have a memorable experience. Some of our regular guests have done more than 40 or 50 Marella cruises and they become a bit like extended family. It's also great to see some of the hotel staff successfully climb their career ladders. 📌

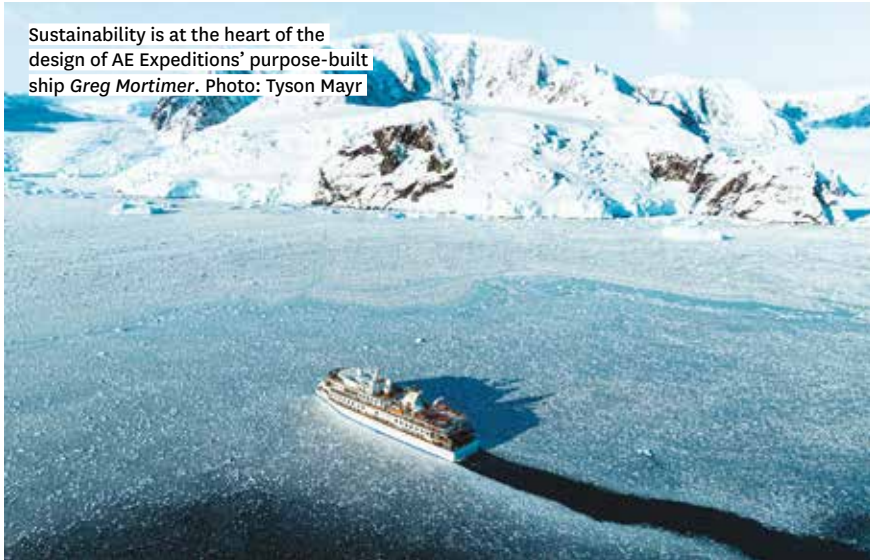
MARELLA CRUISES

Win at Selling

Cruises to 'green' guests

With sustainability changes happening at a fast pace, how best can you sell cruise holidays to those who are environmentally aware?

Sustainability is at the heart of the design of AE Expeditions' purpose-built ship *Greg Mortimer*. Photo: Tyson Mayr



As Havila Voyages head of sales UK Matthew Valentine puts it: "Gone are the days when holidaymakers turn a blind eye to the environment. The cruise sector has taken some big steps forward in recent years, making meaningful changes to the way it operates."

Valentine's own line is one such example, with the whole ethos focused on sustainable sailing, showcased when in June last year it completed the first zero-emission cruise through the Geirangerfjord in Norway.

Likewise, at AE Expeditions (formerly known as Aurora Expeditions in the UK), much of its focus in recent years has been to highlight its sustainability credentials and do more than simply pay lip service to the idea that cruise can become greener. The operator has launched its second purpose-built ship,

"Sustainability is an easy word to say but it is complex in its meaning and context"

Sylvia Earle – a sister to *Greg Mortimer* – described as a "floating ambassador for the conservation of the planet", and is running a special climate expedition cruise this February.

That is a mere scratch of the surface, with many other projects underway or scheduled to start over the coming months and years. AE Expeditions UK MD Jos Dewing highlights: "It is important to begin conversations with clients from a place of knowledge and understanding. Sustainability is an easy word to say but it is complex in its meaning and context."

"Explain to clients that sustainability in travel is progressive and continually evolving. It is now possible, with select ship operators, to offer travel that minimises environmental impact on pristine and precious environments."

Focus on the hardware

Dewing believes that education around the "hardware" in cruise is crucial, adding: "Strong knowledge of an operator's fleet is essential. Next generation expedition ships are also small by comparison to industry averages. At AE Expeditions, we limit their capacity

to approximately 132 guests on a voyage. Put in perspective, that is over 40 times less capacity than the largest ships in the wider cruise sector. In a cruise and sustainability context, size really does matter, so it is imperative that agents understand capacity."

This, of course, requires time and effort to get to know the nitty gritty of how newer ships operate. Valentine appreciates this, but explains: "There is a lot of information out there, produced by industry associations and the cruise lines themselves. We know agents are busy, but it is important they take time out every week to keep up to date with current trends and industry issues."

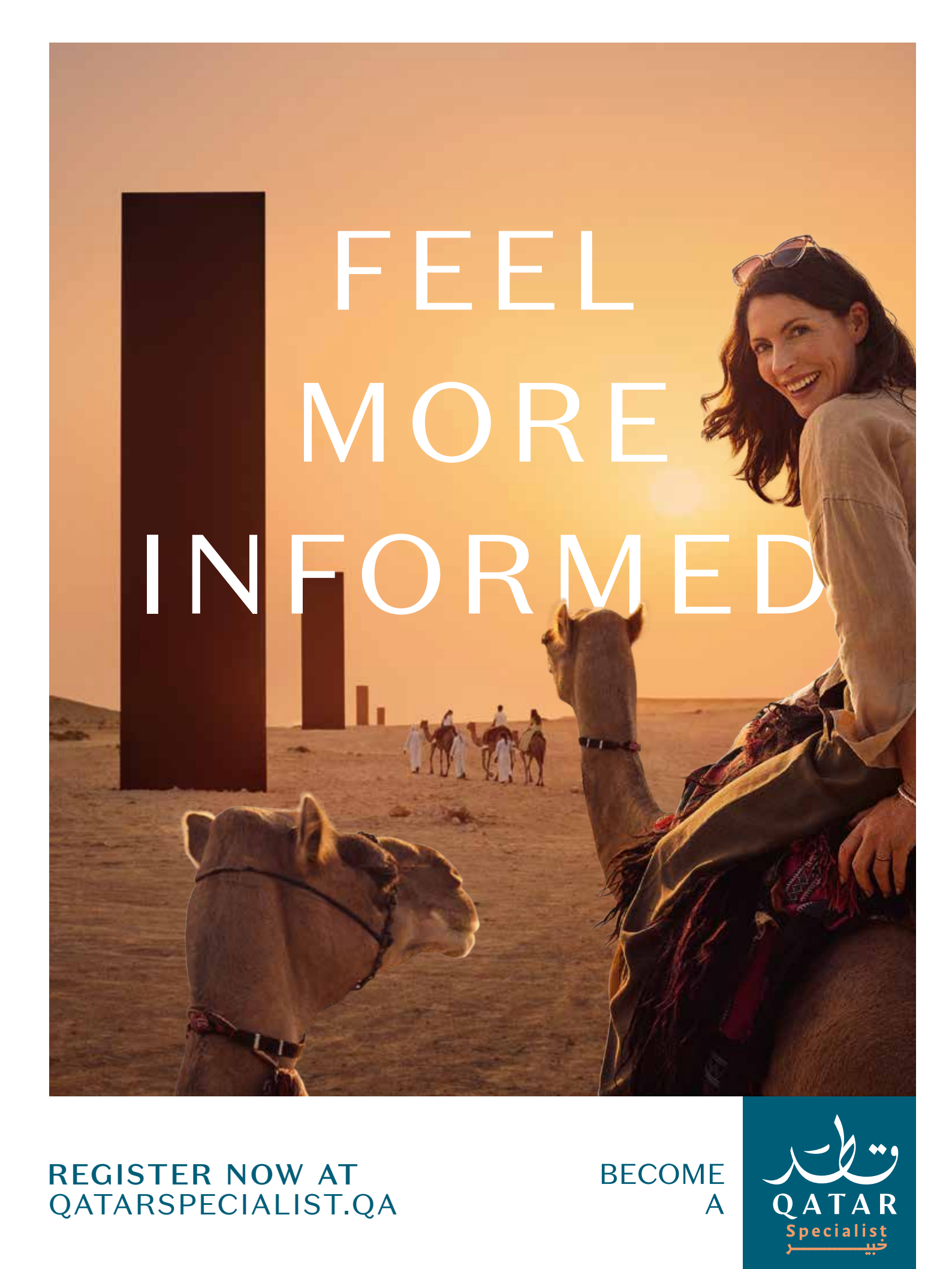
It's also beneficial to focus on more than just emissions, says Valentine: "Clients who are environmentally aware will want to ensure that the company is not just focused inwardly, but is considering the wider impact of its operations." ❶

SELLING TIPS

● Dewing says: "Take the time to understand sustainability, as clients will expect in-depth detail, from how carbon credits are specifically achieved to what it means to be B-Corp and net-zero accredited."

● Valentine explains: "Having a good level of knowledge will pay dividends longer term, as clients will appreciate the value this adds to the booking process."

● "Don't talk about plastic straws with clients. Discuss measurable action plans towards carbon-zero," adds Dewing.



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A new month-long Arctic Circle itinerary will be the most immersive ever offered by the line in the region

THE NEXT CHAPTER

This year, Holland America Line celebrates its 150th anniversary and is using its heritage and experience to help shape the future



Throughout 2023, Holland America Line will operate a total of 48 Heritage Cruises. These, essentially, are what they say on the tin – itineraries designed to pay homage to the cruise line's long and successful history, with region-specific stories that connect destinations to the cruise line.

Voyages will take place in Alaska, the Caribbean, Northern Europe, Mediterranean, Australia/New Zealand, Hawaii, South America and Mexico, allowing guests to become fully immersed in Holland America Line's Dutch seafaring heritage.

When the itineraries were announced, the line's president Gus Antorcha said: "As a beloved company that's been around for 150 years, these special

Last year, the line celebrated this anniversary with a special transatlantic crossing. Sailing from Rotterdam to New York, the voyage retraced Holland America Line's first cruise back in 1872 aboard *Rotterdam I*.

A highlight of the crossing was a performance of a musical piece by Emmy Award-winning producer and Emmy-nominated composer Steven Schoenberg, written exclusively for the anniversary and to accompany a special short film about the cruise line's journey.

Cultural voyages

That's not to say, however, that the brand is solely looking to the past. These stories of how Holland America Line came into being and what it is today go hand in hand with the line's plans for the future. A key part of this is a dedicated UK team, giving the line a more defined identity.

As part of these changes, Karen Farndell is now leading the UK team as director of sales and marketing. Farndell said: "As we start the new year and with a new team in place,

all of us at Holland America Line are really excited to work with our travel agent partners to make our 150th year a huge success."

For itineraries, its 2024 Europe season will cover the entire region, with voyages designed for cultural immersion. There

will be nine overnight ports and 33 late-night departures, as well as time to explore the Baltic, British Isles, Canary Islands, French and Spanish rivieras, Israel, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, including Iceland, Greenland and Norway.

Of course, it wouldn't be Holland America Line without Alaska featuring on the list, and so in 2024 it is planning a new month-long Arctic Circle itinerary, described as "the most immersive we've ever offered in this region". Alaska cruises will take place aboard *Eurodam*, *Koningsdam*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, *Noordam*, *Westerdam* and *Zaandam*.

As for this year and travel agents, the line has big plans for its education and training incentives, and some exciting fam trip opportunities. 📍

The 2024 Europe season will cover the whole region, aimed at providing cultural immersion

Heritage Cruises allow us to continue celebrating Holland America Line with our guests in a meaningful way. We have a deep connection to ports around the world, and we're excited to show how each highlighted destination has shaped our brand."



KAREN FARNDELL
DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING
HOLLAND AMERICA LINE UK & IRELAND



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TERMS & CONDITIONS Unless otherwise noted, all elements of the Wave Offer are available only on Summer 2023 – Winter/Spring 2024 cruises/Cruisetours and exclude Grand Voyages and any voyage lasting 5 days or less booked between 14 December 2022 and 28 February 2023. Stateroom upgrades are available in select stateroom categories and ships and are subject to the availability of the staterooms in the next highest category. Entire Wave Offer has no cash value, is subject to availability, is capacity controlled, may be modified or withdrawn at any time, is available for new bookings only, is not combinable with any other discounts, and is neither transferable nor refundable. Guests who make an eligible booking through this Offer will receive up to 25% off their cruise fare. Up to 25% off discount is based on Have It All launch fare. The percentage off discount will not apply to Taxes, Fees & Port Expenses. Kids Cruise Free: Guests ages 17 and under ("children") are eligible to travel free (Taxes, Fees & Port Expenses are additional) when booked as a 3rd and/or 4th guest on select 2023 and 2024 cruises. Limit up to two free children per eligible booking. Kids Cruise Free rates are available only when booked with promotion code Z3* with a 1st/2nd guest booking with promotion code VV*. Guests booking with Z3* are ineligible for Have It All (01). Reduced Deposit is a reduced per-person booking deposit available only for 1st/2nd guests in a stateroom on new bookings on select cruises and Cruisetours booked outside of the final payment date. Balance is due on final payment of the booking. Offer is available only on select cruises and Cruisetours unless sold out or otherwise withdrawn. Standard refund and cancellation conditions apply.



DIGITAL DREAMS

Late last year, *Cruise Trade News* and CLIA held a workshop named Supercharging your Digital Marketing. Andy Headington, CEO at travel marketing specialists Adido, who moderated the event, outlines key themes from the day that can improve online results

Think about budgets

Cruise saw a significant increase in demand in 2022, which is expected to carry on this year. CLIA MD UK & Ireland Andy Harmer highlighted the changes and improvements that are coming within the industry.

For cruise businesses to make more of this demand – in both search and booking volumes – they need to think analytically about how they spend their digital marketing budgets and where they see the best returns from. Top tips include looking in more detail at brand traffic compared to non-brand traffic and spending more time looking at where to get the best results from investments by marketing channel.

Make more of technology

The cruise industry can better harness technology to improve the customer experience, marketing efficiencies and business decision making. Speakers,

including Traveltek, demonstrated that better systems can enhance customer delivery and give more engaging data.

Google's travel expert Jay Chauhan provided insight on the developing technologies that will help shape our future such as automated AI driven assistants, which will be able to understand human conversation and take bookings, answer questions and deal with customer feedback. Agents and cruise brands can learn from other industries and use technology to improve every customer touch point to drive enhanced loyalty and experiences.

Be real and authentic

Both Fred Olsen and Royal Caribbean stated at the event that cruise travellers are increasingly looking to platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, not only for inspiration, but also for information about routes, facilities and to give feedback on cruises they have

“The industry can better harness technology to improve customer experience, marketing efficiencies and business decision making”



Andy Headington says developing digital strategy is key for growth

been on. Brands must make the most of social media, and there are great examples of how interacting on these platforms helps them engage more effectively with their audience and increase reach with potential customers.

Another key theme was authenticity. Social media is often a personal activity,





CLIA's Andy Harmer looked at improvements on the horizon

“Using new channels and content is allowing forward-thinking brands to increase reach, engagement and ultimately cruise bookings”

whereas brands need to think more about what they stand for and how to get key messages in front of their audiences. Businesses must have easy access to good quality videos, images and other assets to help tell their story.

Customer data

The marketing world has seen big changes to online data collection in recent years. GDPR, iOS updates, Apple's operating system and a clampdown on cookie use throughout the marketing ecosystem has meant that every brand needs to focus more on collecting better quality customer information.

The importance of first party data – namely collecting e-mail addresses or other data that can help understand user needs – and how it can play a role to help deliver better marketing

effectiveness in the future, cannot be underestimated.

Jay Chauhan touched upon the privacy-centric approach to Google Analytics, a wider challenge facing the cruise industry and marketing industry. By collecting better information and storing it within their own systems, cruise brands can make more informed decisions – and gain a competitive advantage – by determining where customers spend their time and money.

Test new ideas

While the traditional cruise audience hasn't changed radically in recent years, the ways that cruise brands interact and communicate continues to evolve. However, there are still a lot of agents and cruise lines who are yet to adjust, and some still finding their audience are discovering new ways to get in contact.

Across the industry, new channels are being tested in order to enhance online customer engagement. For brands looking to grow their revenue and bookings in 2023, it is important they keep an agile mind when it comes to the digital world and don't rest on their laurels when looking to generate interest.

Channels such as TikTok are getting a lot of attention, but they are not necessarily relevant for engaging with most target audiences. Nevertheless, there are still new ways that Facebook, Instagram and channels such as Pinterest, Twitter and even LinkedIn can be used to engage with customers hoping to sail now and in the future. Using new channels and content is allowing forward-thinking brands to increase reach, engagement and ultimately cruise bookings. 📌



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WINDSTAR WONDERS

Windstar Cruises' small ships are known for sailing to luxurious ports, and the choice just got bigger with the launch of its 2023/2024 brochure

Starting in November 2023, Windstar Cruises will embark on cruises to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf for the first time in its history.

The small-ship line is promising one-of-a-kind itineraries, enabling guests to immerse themselves in local cultures, with a range of sailings in the Middle East on the 312-guest *Star Legend*.

For example, the 18-day Wonders of Arabia will sail from Athens to Dubai, transiting the Suez Canal and spending five days in Egypt and Jordan, including an overnight in Luxor to take in the majestic Karnak and Luxor temples, followed by two days in Oman.

Guests might also want to enjoy overnights in Doha and Abu Dhabi on the

Windstar Cruises is promising one-of-a-kind itineraries with a range of Middle East sailings

10-day Sparkling Sands & Cities of the Persian Gulf voyage. Sailing on 11 dates from Dubai to Muscat, Oman (and in reverse), this will also feature stops in cities such as Fujairah or Khasab, as well as time on Sir Bani Yas, an island known for its wildlife conservation.

Ancient ruins

Highlights of the nine-day Arabian Nights & Egyptian Days cruise include an overnight in Sharm El Sheikh and in Safaga, with the opportunity to visit Luxor and see the turquoise waters of the resort ports of Ain Sokhna and Hurghada.

The ruins of ancient Al Balid and Zafar will be on offer during an eight-day Realm of the Queen of Sheba voyage, sailing from Muscat to Jeddah. This cruise will combine days at sea watching deserts and mountains pass and dolphins playing in the gorgeous Omani fjords.

Elsewhere, the 12-day Red Sea Revelries via the Suez Canal will sail from Jeddah to Athens, featuring an

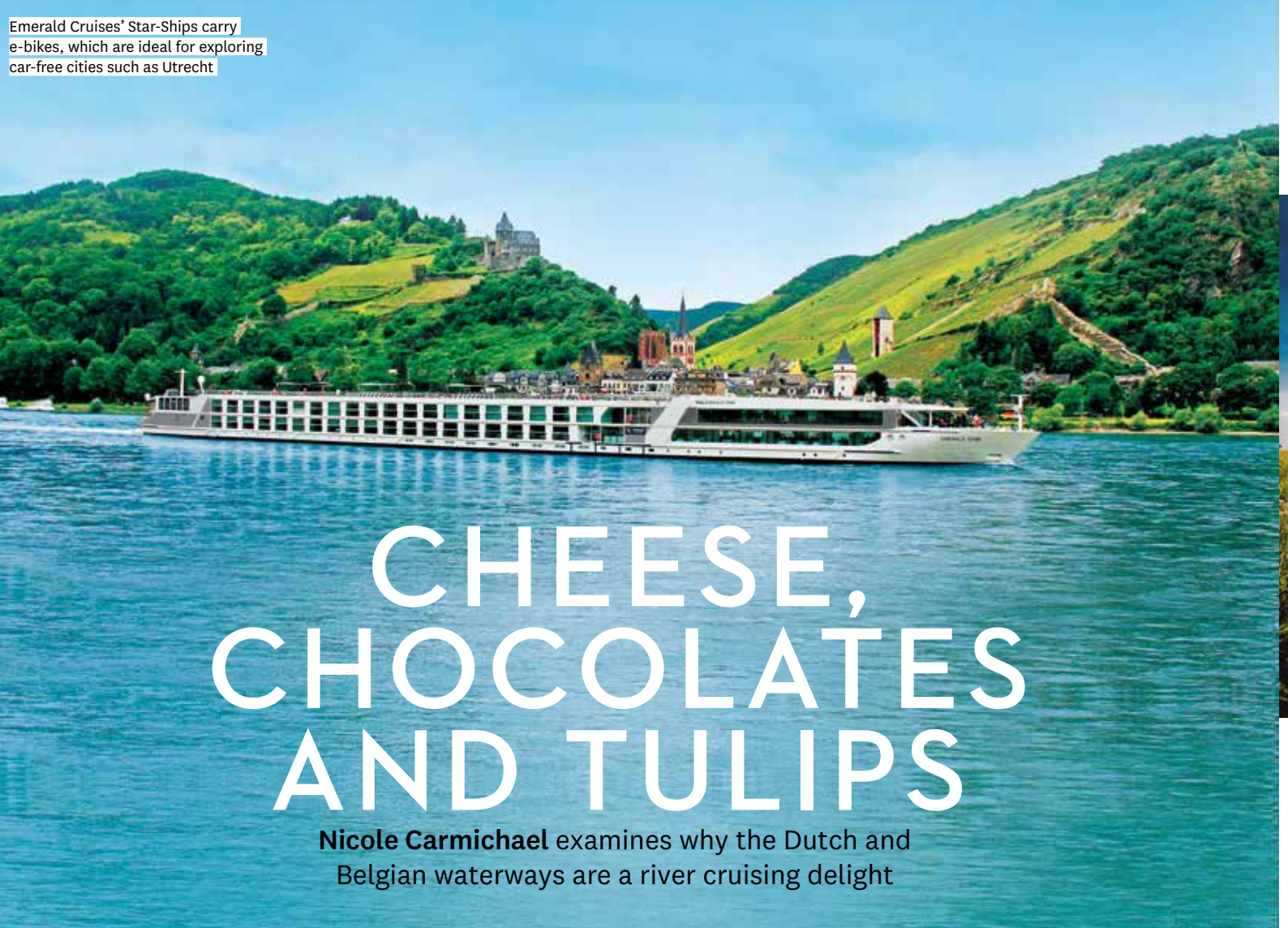
overnight in Luxor, a later night in Ain Sokhna, Egypt, as well as a transit through the famous Suez Canal and a day in Heraklion, Crete.

On all these voyages, guests can indulge in some of the finer things in life, not least an extensive range of spa therapies all geared to improving wellness and overall wellbeing. Guests can jump into the ocean from the on-board watersports platform, or enjoy complimentary access to the thermal lounges, sauna, fitness equipment, classes and more.

Wellness treatments are tailored to each itinerary, with locally sourced ingredients and authentic rituals and therapies from cultures around the globe.

Windstar Cruises president Christopher Prelog said: "With impressive UNESCO sights, beautiful beaches and wildlife, top-rated golf courses, amazing snorkelling and diving and, of course, great shopping, Windstar is excited to introduce our guests to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf with new itineraries in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar." 📍

Fujairah's landmark Grand Sheikh Zayed mosque



CHEESE, CHOCOLATES AND TULIPS

Nicole Carmichael examines why the Dutch and Belgian waterways are a river cruising delight

If there was a premier league of European river cruising, the Rhine and the Danube would constantly top the tables, but there are more hidden gems waiting to be uncovered in Belgium and the Netherlands. Whether it's spectacular springtime colour that's called for, unique architecture, inspiring cultural delights or world-class gastronomy, this little piece of Europe needs to be shouted about – especially as the newspaper headlines haven't always been kind.

While Amsterdam is trying to shrug off the reputation of being a tourist Mecca for red-light boulevards and legalised 'coffee' shops, Belgium has to battle a long-standing belief that it's not exactly the most exciting place to visit. Even Belgium's own King Leopold II once said "Je suis le souverain d'un petit pays et de petites gens" ("I am the sovereign of a small country and small people").

However, CroisiEurope UK director of sales John Fair says: "The Dutch

and Belgian waterways are a road less travelled and offer relatively unknown yet beautiful ports of call such as Antwerp, Rotterdam, Lemmer, Hoorn and Gouda. Must-see sites include the iconic windmills of Kinderdijk, the Hague, the impressive flower auction in Aalsmeer, Keukenhof Gardens and the breathtaking city of Brussels, not forgetting the numerous opportunities to sample beer and chocolate."

Magical waterways

A magical network of waterways laces its way across the 3,700 miles of UNESCO-listed canals and Dutch waterways, opening up opportunities to visit destinations that can sometimes be overlooked in favour of the more popular tourist haunts. The main two cruising areas of the Netherlands are the Heart of Holland – the rivers and lakes in the triangle of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht – and the lakes region of Friesland in the north.

Amsterdam, the country's most visited city, is famous for its incredible art galleries, including the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum, the Anne Frank House, its picturesque canal network and its Dutch Baroque architecture. Less touristy, but still as exciting, Rotterdam is an emerging destination. As Europe's largest seaport, it's a city of contrasts – from the iconic gravity-defying Cube Houses designed by Dutch architect Piet Blom and the stunning steel Erasmus Bridge to the district of Delfshaven, home to the Pilgrim Fathers' Church.

Around 20 miles south-east of Amsterdam, Utrecht offers more insta-worthy sights including the Dom Tower, the 14th-century bell tower that sits opposite the Gothic cathedral of St Martin. It can be seen from any point in the car-free city, so there's no way guests can get lost here.

Scenic Group director of trade sales Andrea Stafford explains: "Emerald Cruises' 2024 brochure includes two



One of Amsterdam's most popular attractions is the Van Gogh Museum



Majestic windmills can be seen throughout much of the landscape in the Netherlands



Antwerp's fascinating architecture, historical buildings and museums make it well worth a visit

new ports of call in the Netherlands on the Rhine Castles & Moselle Vineyards itinerary. In Utrecht, guests can sail the city's canals, taking in the mesmerising architecture of old wharf cellars, bridges, statues and the famous Dom Tower. From there, guests sail to Nijmegen for a visit to the UNESCO-listed Kinderdijk Windmills."

Kinderdijk is listed again and again in itineraries to this area and for good reason, as it ticks all the boxes for the perfect day trip. It's the largest concentration of old windmills in the Netherlands, built in the mid-1700s to control flooding in the low-lying land (known as polders). Most of the 19 windmills are still inhabited, but guests can step inside the museum windmill and see the workings of one of the iconic Dutch landmarks.

Beautiful tulips

As the Netherlands is 26 per cent below sea level, windmills were originally made to prevent flooding, but were then used for sawing wood, grinding grain and converting wind into usable energy. As such a flat landmass, the Netherlands is almost constantly windy, hence the evidence of so many windmills and wind turbines.

The climate also creates the perfect growing condition for tulips, another of the region's emblems, and there's nowhere better to see them than the

Keukenhof Gardens, a green-fingered delight, with 79 acres of blooms in every colour as far as the eye can see. For this reason, Keukenhof is known as the Garden of Europe and around seven million flower bulbs are planted there annually.

For chocolate lovers, Belgium's Bruges will likely top the list with its chocolate-box pretty medieval buildings and fairytale cobbled streets. As well as the opportunity to buy limitless pralines, truffles, liqueurs and chocolate of every colour and flavour, there are workshops aplenty, plus chocolate museums and waffle-making workshops.

For history buffs, the 14th-century Stadhuis and the 12th-century Basilica of the Holy Blood should be recommended, along with the Groeningemuseum, full of Flemish masterpieces. Bruges has been dubbed one of the most photogenic cities in the world, while the university town of Ghent is known as Medieval Manhattan because of its three UNESCO sites and its large public squares and marketplaces.

As Belgium's capital city – and of course the capital of the European Union – Brussels has a lot to brag about. With incredible art collections, housing examples of Brueghel, Rubens and Belgium's own Magritte, wonderful churches and its most famous landmark, Manneken-Pis, there's plenty to see and do for new and returning visitors.



EXPERT VIEW

“The region has never been seen as a must-do cruise because it's so flat and the scenery is not as dramatic as other river cruises – no fairytale castles, gorges or spectacular bends or valleys – but the area is actually really pretty, and the towns and cities are very interesting. There are innumerable cheese makers and picturesque places such as Bruges and Dordrecht to visit en route. For this reason, the area is now seen as a year-round destination as it also includes the winter Christmas markets.”

JAMES HILL
Travel agent and river cruise specialist



Amadeus River Cruises offers a peaceful itinerary on the canals between Ghent and the IJsselmeer



Willemsbrug's striking red arches contrast with the architecture and a 14-century harbour in Rotterdam



Chocolate lovers will delight in the confectionery on offer in Bruges

ITINERARIES

CroisiEurope

• The five-day Springtime in Holland cruise from Antwerp to Amsterdam includes the scents and colours of Keukenhof Gardens, the authentic Dutch village of Volendam and Zaanse Schans with its windmills and traditional houses. There are 13 departures in April 2023, with prices from £626pp.

📞 croisieurope.co.uk

Riviera Travel

• The line has a four-night Amsterdam, Kinderdijk and the Dutch Bulbfields river cruise on board *Emily Bronte*, return trip to Amsterdam, departing 2 April 2024. Prices from £779pp.

📞 rivieratravel.co.uk

Avalon Waterways

• The Active & Discovery in Holland & Belgium is an eight-day trip from Amsterdam and includes a chocolate-making workshop in Brussels and an architectural bike tour through Rotterdam. Prices from £2,015pp, departing 20 August 2024

📞 avalonwaterways.co.uk

Choose wisely

If your clients are looking for a river cruise with a focus on spas and relaxation, Emerald and Scenic could be the choice for them. "Emerald Cruises' fleet of award-winning Star-Ships and Scenic's fleet of Star-Ships are luxurious, chic and innovative, with contemporary design and a wealth of amenities," says Stafford. "Each brand has features that distinguish them from the rest of the river cruise market. Emerald Cruises' Star-Ships have a three-tier atrium to the heated swimming pool that seamlessly transforms into a cinema, as well as a fleet of GoCycle e-bikes on board, free to guests on a first-come, first-serve basis, which are perfect for exploring."

For those who want a less active cruise, there are even more relaxing options, says Andy Hawke, sales & product manager – river, Fred. Holidays (Amadeus River Cruises' GSA in the UK). "For a completely stress-free travel experience, travel by rail and book Fred. River Cruises luggage concierge service, which collects the luggage from home and delivers it straight to the cabin. Our Dutch and Belgian waterways itinerary on the canals between Ghent and the IJsselmeer takes in peaceful fishing villages where traditional costumes are still worn, historic old windmills and captivating cities each with their own unique culture and architecture."

To maximise potential sales on the Dutch and Belgian waterways, CLIA UK & Ireland MD Andy Harmer says: "Take the time to learn about all the different product and offerings that are out there. River cruise isn't one size fits all and there are a range of lines, ships and itineraries to suit customers. It's vital to match your client to the right

SELLING TIPS

● Spring months are the obvious time to head to areas of the Dutch and Belgium waterways because of the tulip season, but there are plenty of fascinating tours at any time of year

● Dutch and Belgian waterways are perfect for the nervous traveller and for guests who are new to foreign travel. They're also a great choice for no-fly guests as ports in the Netherlands and Belgium are easily reached by rail, coach and car

● Although river cruising is seen as an ideal option for older guests, itineraries in the Dutch and Belgian waterways can involve a certain amount of walking and cobbled streets, so careful questioning is needed as to what river ships can offer a less mobile passenger

choice, whether they're looking to spend a week relaxing, exploring or somewhere in between.

"If you're selling a river cruise for the first time, think of it as a step up from the city breaks you offer to the likes of Amsterdam and Brussels. A river holiday is a fantastic option and more than a match for anything available on land. You're selling a destination as well as the ship, plus all the fantastic options that accompany it." 🗨️

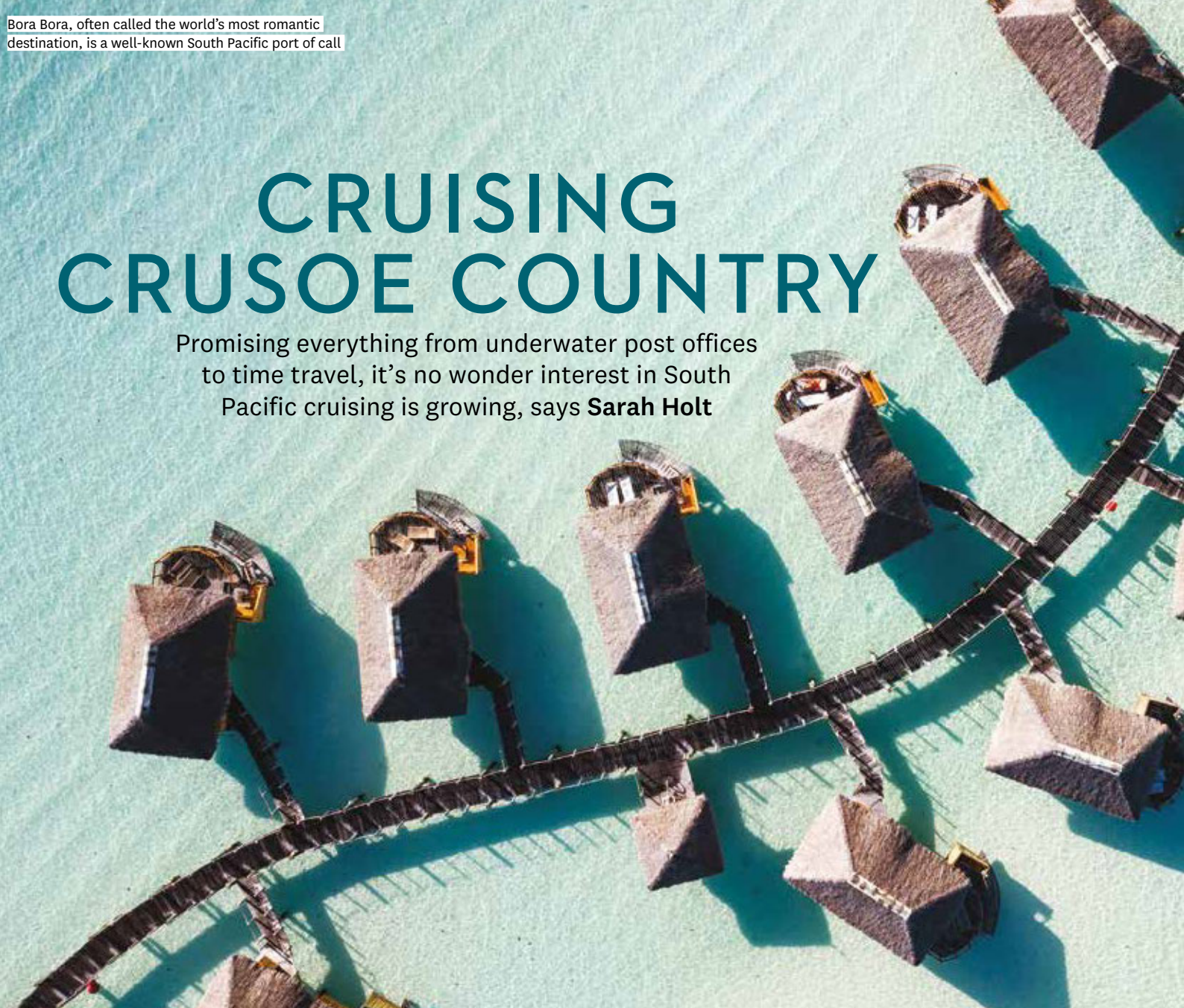
Adversity is inevitable but our passion pushes us forward.

RISE TO THE OCCASION.



CRUISING CRUSOE COUNTRY

Promising everything from underwater post offices to time travel, it's no wonder interest in South Pacific cruising is growing, says **Sarah Holt**



Covered in a confetti of more than 25,000 islands, the South Pacific ocean is best explored by ship. Cruises to this part of the world take passengers through a landscape of Robinson Crusoe-reminiscent beaches, blindingly blue waters and places where palm trees often outnumber people.

While there's no great explosion of new vessels or product launches on the horizon in this region, some cruise lines are reporting that South Pacific itineraries are becoming increasingly popular.

"Our guests are well travelled and curious," says Oceania Cruises senior vice-president and managing

director for EMEA Bernard Carter. "The South Pacific, having become increasingly popular, is firmly on their list for exploration."

Adventure calling

With as much as 1,200 miles of water between certain islands, the South Pacific is home to some of the world's most remote places and what Carter calls "corners of the globe nearly untouched by tourism".

It's this castaway quality, and the sense of adventure associated with it, that inspires people to travel here, cruise lines say. "The South Pacific boasts a unique landscape with a beautiful year-round climate, attracting travellers from across the globe," explains Royal

Caribbean director of sales UK, Ireland and Spain Stuart Byron. "With endless white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters, as well as tropical rainforests and soaring mountains, it's the perfect destination for explorers."

Regent Seven Seas Cruises UK managing director Graham Sadler (now retired) adds: "The romanticism of the South Pacific has always drawn the adventurous at heart, and with guests prioritising slower travel and authentic experiences, the region's popularity is set to remain. An unforgettable destination like the South Pacific is also the perfect setting for celebrating a special occasion and creating an unforgettable moment."

Featuring different names for island countries, island chains within these



island countries, and the islands themselves, the geography of the South Pacific can seem confusing at first. Broadly speaking, the region can be divided into three areas – Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia – and cruise itineraries tend to focus on the latter two – either exclusively, or mixing and matching stops in both.

Melanesian highlights

The Melanesian Island country of Vanuatu is a regular on cruise itineraries. Popular ports of call in this archipelago include the capital city Port Villa, on Efate island, where the to-do list is topped with a visit to the Cultural Centre and a mooch around the craft and food markets, and Mystery Island, an uninhabited island that's circled with phalanxes of palms and bridal white sands.

Many cruises also call into the French Overseas Territory of New Caledonia. There are more than 140 different islands in this archipelago, but common ports of call include the capital city Nouméa on Grande Terre island, and the Loyalty Islands, which encompass the three islands of Lifou, Maré and Ouvéa.

Sunbathing on cashmere-soft beaches, swimming with turtles and learning about the Kanak culture at the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre are all options for visitors to Nouméa. In the Loyalty Islands, meanwhile,



EXPERT VIEW

“Tahiti and South Pacific sailings are proving very popular and we've seen a big increase in enquiries and bookings. We've also noticed that customers are opting for more tailor-made, bespoke holidays such as road trip adventures in the USA followed by a few days relaxation in Papeete before embarking on a cruise. From Black pearl diving, beautiful beaches and warm seas, drift snorkelling and so much more, there is something for everyone.”

ANNA PERROTT
Windstar Cruises
UK & Ireland BDM

SELLING TIPS

- Secure sales by emphasising the scale of the South Pacific and explaining how cruising makes it easy to explore this region
- Tell clients about the one-of-a-kind experiences they can have here – like crossing the International Date Line
- Lock in bookings for events such as birthdays and anniversaries by expressing how the South Pacific is the perfect place to celebrate

guests get more of the South Pacific's trademark beaches, snorkelling opportunities in piercingly blue waters, and the opportunity to climb to the hilltop church of the Lady of Lourdes for entire-island views.

Finally, there's Fiji, an island country that's home to more than 330 islands and even more islets. The names that guests most frequently see on cruise itineraries are Suva and Lautoka – Fiji's two largest cities, which are both located on the island of Viti Levu.

From Suva, cruise passengers can go zip-lining, visit waterfalls and paddle down the Navua river. Shore excursions from Lautoka take visitors to mud pools, hot springs, orchid gardens and the walking trails of the Koroyanitu Mountain Range.

Popular Polynesia

In Polynesia, the French Overseas Territory of French Polynesia features heavily on cruise itineraries. There are more than 120 islands in this subregion, spread across five island groups. However, the main name passengers need to know is Tahiti.

Tahiti is the largest of all the French Polynesian islands, and its capital Papeete is one of the main embarkation ports for South Pacific cruises. This island is much more than a springboard to the rest of the South Pacific, though, and some cruise lines offer overnights in Papeete so passengers can spend time getting to know the island – snorkelling its reefs, exploring its fern grottos, visiting its waterfalls and discovering its sacred sites.

Other popular French Polynesia ports of call include Mo'orea – where Norwegian Cruise Line's senior director of sales UK and



Windstar's *Wind Spirit* is the perfect way to navigate the region



Tahiti's capital Papeete is a main embarkation point for cruises in the region



French Polynesia has a rich history to explore and colourful displays of traditional dance are a popular sight for visitors

“The South Pacific’s castaway quality, and sense of adventure associated with it, inspires people to visit”

Ireland Gary Anslow says guests can “view paradise from almost every angle” – and Bora Bora, which is often described as the most romantic destination in the world.

Beyond French Polynesia, some cruises also call into the Polynesian island countries of Tonga, Samoa and Hawaii, where Honolulu on the island of Oahu acts as an embarkation port.

From January, cruisers will be able to enjoy Windstar Cruises’ new 11-night Overwater Bungalow & Tahitian Paradieses Cruise Tour. The experience begins with an eight-night cruise from Papeete on the classic yacht *Wind Spirit*, calling in at Mo’orea, Raiatea, Motu Mahaea, Bora Bora and Huahine, followed by a three-night stay in an overwater bungalow at Hotel Manava Beach Resort on Mo’orea.

Silversea, meanwhile, has unveiled eight new Grand Voyages for 2024/25, with one homing in on the South Pacific. Taking place on expedition ship *Silver Cloud*, the 76-day voyage will take passengers from Fremantle in Australia to Valparaiso in Chile, calling at 60 destinations including Easter Island, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia.

Then there is Oceania’s 2024/2025 Tropics and Exotics Collection, which features an expanded South Pacific programme. Cruises range from short Papeete sojourns around French Polynesia to epic journeys like the 85-day Papeete to Cape Town sailing that barely

leaves a stone unturned in the South Pacific and also includes time in New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Madagascar and more.

Best kept secrets

While names like Tahiti, Fiji and Bora Bora are well known, there are plenty of places in the South Pacific that remain off the radar of many tourists.

For example, there’s a point in the North Pacific Ocean, over 2,700 miles from Cairns, where every calendar day begins. So, when it’s midnight on Sunday on the west side of the line, it’s midnight on Saturday on the east side. Some cruise itineraries cross this line, shooting guests into the future or past by 24 hours, like a modern-day Delorean.

Or take the Pitcairn Islands, with a combined land area of just 18 square miles and made up of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Island, which have a mighty history. In 1790, the biggest island, Pitcairn, was settled by nine of the mutineers from *HMS Bounty*, and cruise passengers can visit Bounty Bay where the infamous ship was eventually sunk. UNESCO-listed Henderson island, meanwhile, was the site of a whale-induced shipwreck that is said to have inspired Herman Melville to write *Moby Dick*.

More than 240 islets bead together around a lagoon at Rangiora, making it one of the largest atolls in the world. The waters that surround the atoll are filled

with sharks, dolphins, rays and whales, making for rich scuba diving pickings. On land, meanwhile, cruise passengers can visit black pearl farms and go wine tasting at the Vin de Tahiti winery, which makes whites and roses with names like Closed Reef and Coral White.

Hideaway island, which is accessed by water taxi from Port Villa in Vanuatu, is the home of the world’s only underwater post office. Located in three metres of water, 35 metres from the shore, it’s officially licensed by Vanuatu Post to accept waterproof postcards, which it can forward all around the world. 📧

ITINERARIES

Royal Caribbean

- Eight-night South Pacific cruise sailing from Brisbane on *Quantum of the Seas* is priced from £530pp, departing 20 November 2023.

📍 [royalcaribbean.com](https://www.royalcaribbean.com)

Oceania

- A 10-day Tahitian Legends sailing from Papeete on *Nautica*, including airfare, is priced at £4,979pp, departing 20 January 2024.

📍 [oceaniacruises.com](https://www.oceaniacruises.com)

Windstar Cruises

- The seven-night Dreams of Tahiti cruise from Papeete on *Wind Spirit* starts from £2,885pp, departing 5 October 2023.

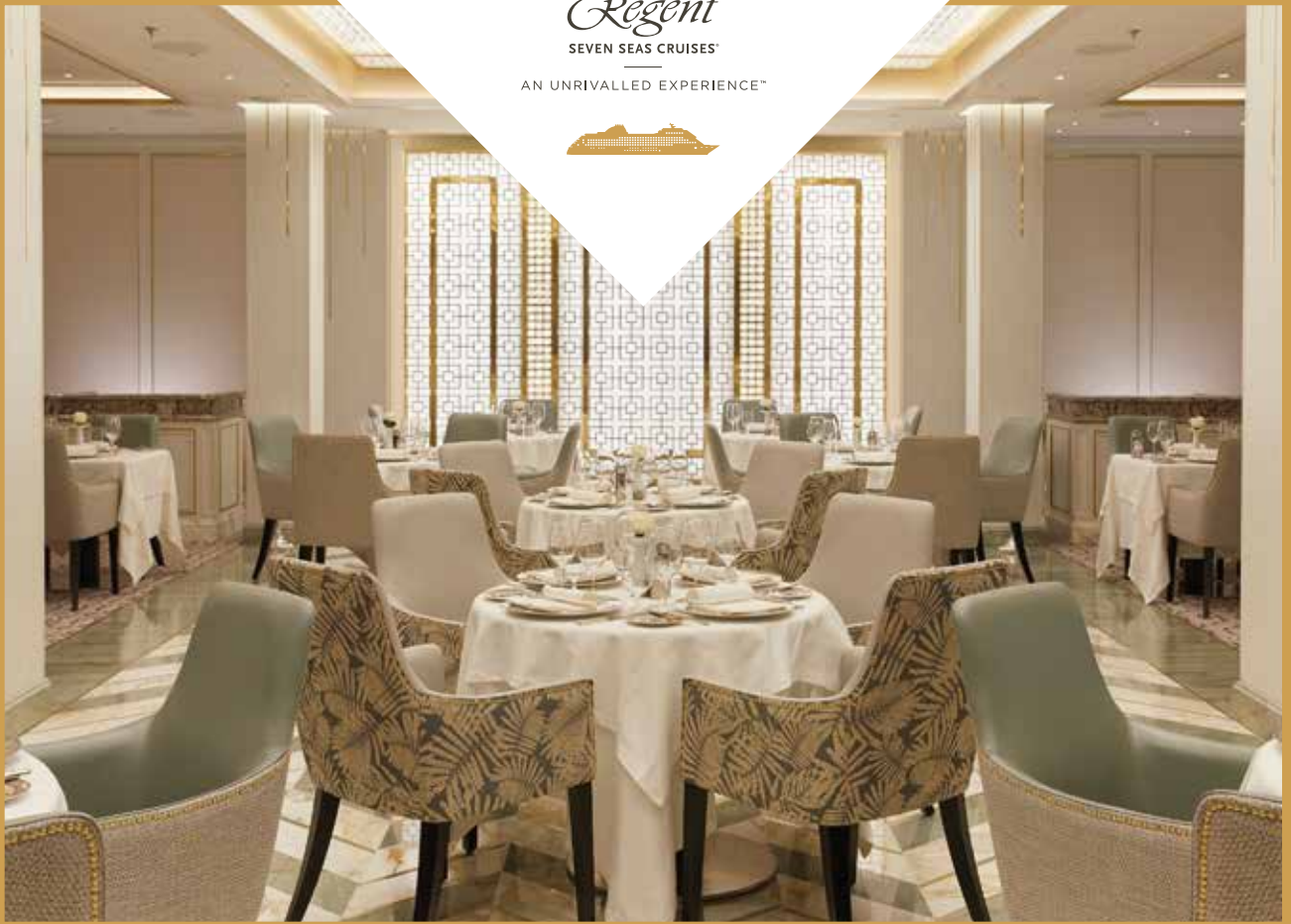
📍 [windstarcruises.com](https://www.windstarcruises.com)



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Passengers on *Ambience* can expect
a warm and friendly atmosphere



A family AFFAIR

A week-long cruise with Ambassador Cruise Line
to Norway's spectacular fjords is the perfect
break for **Vicky Mayer** and her mum

Sea & Grass offers an exemplary seven-course tasting menu with dishes from all over the world

Nightly entertainment is extremely varied, from musicals and plays to stand-up comedy

There are only 11 passenger decks on board *Ambience*, so surely it will be difficult to lose my mum – especially on a sea day. However, this is my predicament on the second day of our seven-night fjords cruise on Ambassador Cruise Line's popular ship. I try

the obvious spots – the Coffee

House and the library – but no luck.

Sensing my confusion, one of the super helpful crew members suggests I try the Observatory on deck 14 and bingo, I find her in an egg-shaped chair, enjoying a stunning view of the fjords with the sun on her face as she sips on a made-to-order flat white.

Both mum and I are mad about cruising, so a week-long holiday at sea is the perfect way for us to spend some quality time together and enjoy a trip to the world-famous fjords. London Tilbury is the homeport for Ambassador Cruise Line and avoiding the queues and hassle of flying is a real bonus when it's a relatively short cruise.

On board, the excitement is palpable and though the line usually offers adult-only sailings, on this special inter-gen cruise we see a few grandparents with their kids and grandkids in tow. There are also plenty of mums and daughters travelling together, so we know we've found the perfect cruise.

Since its launch in 2021, Ambassador Cruise Line has been a big hit with budget-conscious cruise travellers looking to enjoy a memorable holiday sea without breaking the bank. What this means in real terms is that guests will be sailing on a refurbished rather than a new ship, but this doesn't detract from the fantastic service on board.

Make the most of sea days with a cabin with a balcony

A cable car ride up one of the mountains surrounding Bergen offers the best city views

Take a stroll around picture-perfect Eidfjord

The Botanical Lounge Bar boasts comfy sofas and modern touches



Relax and unwind in the luxurious outdoor hot tubs on deck 11

While the big public areas such as the auditorium SW19, Buckingham Restaurant and the Raffles Bar and Botanical Lounge Bar feel fresh and new, the cabins aren't quite so polished. Nonetheless, they're scrupulously clean with comfy beds, hot showers and modern TVs. Our home for the next eight days is a cute double cabin on deck seven, very near the lift, which makes life easier when we want to pop back and forth in the day.

SELLING TIPS

- Ambassador Cruise Line offers fantastic value for money, so suggest to clients who want a memorable holiday without breaking the bank
- Cuisine is important on *Ambience*, and the Borough Market buffet bar on deck 12 is a revelation, offering some great lunch choices
- Recommend Ambassador to clients who are not keen on big-ship thrills and the 'bigger is better' message – the line is refreshingly traditional, and not afraid to shout about it

Sharing stories

Having settled in and unpacked our bags into the surprisingly roomy walk-in wardrobe, we head to the traditional welcome cocktail party hosted in the Palladium theatre by the captain and his staff. Every passenger is invited to have their photo taken with the captain before we all head into the theatre with a glass of fizz in hand and toast our forthcoming adventures during the voyage.

Any guest who is a foodie will love *Ambience*. Guests have the chance to eat at the beautifully decorated Buckingham Restaurant or, for something less formal, at Borough Market on deck 12. When we arrive, we are allocated a time for dinner – 6.15 or 8.15 – and a table for the trip. This is shared with other guests, so for those who are not keen on communal dining, the best thing to do is head for dinner at Borough Market.

Joining our fellow guests on the first night at the Buckingham Restaurant, we're soon chatting, swapping life and cruise stories. The menu is large and varied with three courses and plenty of choice for everyone, including vegans and vegetarians. Alcoholic drinks are not included in the price of the fare, so for those who might want a drink every day, it's worth buying a £29.95 per day Explorer drinks package. This can be used at all restaurants plus the six bars, including The Purple Turtle Pub, Raffles Bar and the Botanical Lounge Bar.

Breakfast and lunch can be enjoyed at both Borough Market and the Buckingham Restaurant. Guests who



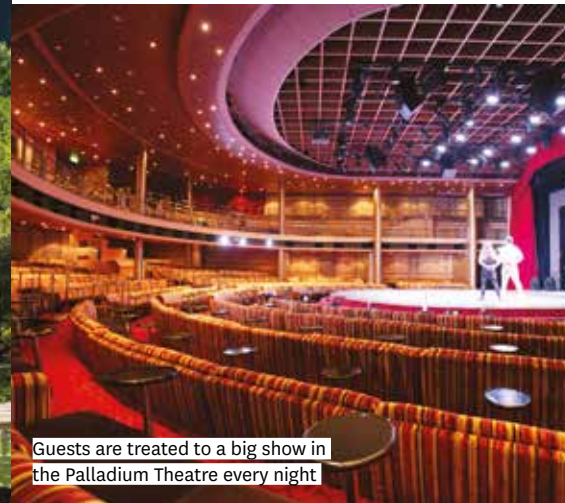
The world-famous Flam Railway offers spectacular views as it meanders its way up the mountain

want to treat themselves to a very special meal should book a night at either Indian restaurant Saffron, which offers a three-course Flavours of Goa menu for £14.95pp, or Sea & Grass, which offers an exemplary seven-course tasting menu with dishes from around the world for an amazing £24.95pp.

Barflies are also in for a treat. On our first night, we decide to try out the glitzy Botanical Lounge Bar, complete with comfy sofas, and the smart Raffles Bar. Both offer expertly mixed cocktails but it's Raffles Barm with its resident pianist, that wins our vote – but only by a whisker.

Enjoy the sea days

Sea days are an important part of life on *Ambience* and, as we sail towards our ports of call in Norway, I'm very impressed with what's on offer. Bookworms can chill and get lost in a book of their choice at Brontë's Library, while keen crafters should head to the Arts & Craft area on deck six to enjoy sewing and knitting lessons.



Guests are treated to a big show in the Palladium Theatre every night

“We get to visit some of the most beautiful destinations in Norway, but sea days are just as enjoyable”

There is also an inviting pool and a couple of hot tubs on deck 11, while free yoga classes are on offer at the Active Studio on deck 14. What's particularly welcome is the varied entertainment on board *Ambience*. Every night guests are treated to a big show in the Palladium Theatre and, while other lines rely on musicals every night, this ship offers everything from comedians to music-inspired shows and full-length plays. The latter are part of the line's popular Theatre at Sea programme, which features pop-up plays in the day plus longer dramas at night. Daily tea dances and late-night discos are also available in the Observatory.

My mum and I share a joint love of history and current affairs, so guest lecturer Jon Matlis' daily talks about the history of the fjords and a

fascinating look at iconic photos from 1900 to 2000, including the moon landing, are right up our street.

Fabulous fjords

The same can be said for the fjords. Not only do we get to visit some of the most beautiful destinations in Norway, but sea days, where we can sit quietly and enjoy incredible views, are just as enjoyable.

After getting a taste of what's on board, we're keen to see what's on shore. Our journey features three consecutive days of port stops – Eidfjord, Bergen and Flam. Stunningly pretty Eidfjord is an easy place to just step off the ship, grab a coffee and wander around the town's shops, which feature Norwegian trolls in all their glory. Winter wear here is top quality and also worth buying. As we dock in Bergen and I take a look at the

steep hills surrounding Norway's second-largest city, I'm pleased we've opted for a coach tour, which takes us all around the city, stopping off at the best points of view before depositing us back at the picturesque medieval Bryggen wharf, ready for shopping for souvenirs and a delicious fish lunch.

Our last port stop is the magical village of Flam in southwest Norway. We could easily spend a morning or afternoon just walking around this stunningly pretty spot, but we are super keen to take a return ride on the world-famous Flam Railway, which runs from Flam up to the high mountains at Myrdal station. Visitors are treated to a ride on a lovely vintage train where every time the train turns a corner, amazing mountain landscapes, gushing waterfalls and traditional Norwegian country houses come into view.

I can't remember the last time I spent quality time with my mum, so this week-long cruise proves to be a wonderful experience. But don't just take my word for it. This is what my mum Ena has to say: "I enjoyed every moment of the cruise – there was such a lovely warm and friendly atmosphere on board. I'd recommend *Ambience* to everyone." 🗣️

DETAILS

● A seven-night Summertime Fjordland cruise on *Ambience*, roundtrip from London Tilbury via Geiranger, Bergen and Eidfjord, departing 5 August 2023, is priced from £749pp.

The last word

Variety Cruises is ushering in a new era with an updated brand identity. CEO **Filippos Venetopoulos** explains what the future may hold

Since taking over as CEO of Variety Cruises in that long summer of 2020, when travel and especially the cruise industry had stopped due to the pandemic, the opening of new destinations and expanding programmes seemed so very far away.

However, fast-forward to now and I am glad to report that Variety Cruises has expanded its Greece itineraries, launching the Limited Collection Cruises for those travellers who are looking to discover the country through its history, culture, wine traditions and those destinations that larger ships cannot reach.

Looking ahead, the overall vision for the business is sustainable cruising. Variety Cruises was one of the first cruise companies that signed the Tourism Climate Emergency Initiative, actively promoting sustainability at sea. We have also joined Tourism Declares, an environmental organisation that brings together like-minded companies with sustainability at their core to work together to reduce carbon emissions and protect the planet.

A better world at sea

At the heart of our plans is the mission to create a better world at sea. This goal is also reflected in our new branding. We've opted to change our look, as there has



Variety Voyager boasts sleek lines and lots of deck space



Mega yacht Galileo will allow guests to visit parts of Greece larger ships cannot reach. Photo: Filip Kulisev

“Our mission to create a better world at sea is reflected in our new branding”

been a transformation in the way we think about travel and that's what we want to showcase via our experiences at sea – whether that be in our crew, itineraries, or our environmental and gender equality policies.

In addition, we are making booking a cruise with Variety Cruises as simple as possible for our customers. We are becoming more vocal, for example on our social media channels, talking about destinations and experiences available while on a Variety trip.

Something else we have added to our website is 360-degree virtual ship tours, to help guests visualise what they can expect on board. We have also created a 'travel style' feature, which means prospective guests can pick a cruise based on their interests such as wellness, adventure, sightseeing, or special interests like wildlife.

We have also merged Variety Cruises with Variety Cares, a non-profit foundation that works to support clean

oceans, gender equality and education for all. This will now come under one umbrella, known as Travel with Purpose. As part of the initiative, €5 from every booking made will go directly to the foundation, in addition to further internal investment. We've already raised close to \$50,000 and our target for the future is \$200,000.

Last but not least, we are excited to launch our new Tahiti programme. There will be two cruise options – one for eight days and the other for 11 days, complete with bespoke and inspirational experiences around Polynesia. 🌴



FILIPPOS VENETOPOULOS
CEO
VARIETY CRUISES



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TRADE NEWS

2023 is set to be a bumper year for ship launches and new itineraries, meaning there's never been a better time to join the Cruise Challenge.



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"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

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Remarkable itineraries will blend celebrated destinations with lesser-travelled ports for a memorable journey, allowing guests to reconnect with what matters most; themselves, their loved ones and the world around them. And, with 461 oceanfront suites, they'll enjoy sweeping sea views and a private terrace, as well as sophisticated, varied culinary experiences, four pools, private cabanas, spa and curated entertainment.*

All journeys include high speed unlimited Wi-Fi, access to sophisticated, varied experiences across 18 food and beverage venues including six restaurants, five lounges and in-suite dining, unlimited beverages, fine wines, premium spirits, a welcome bottle of champagne, access to the spa thermal area, on board gratuities and more.

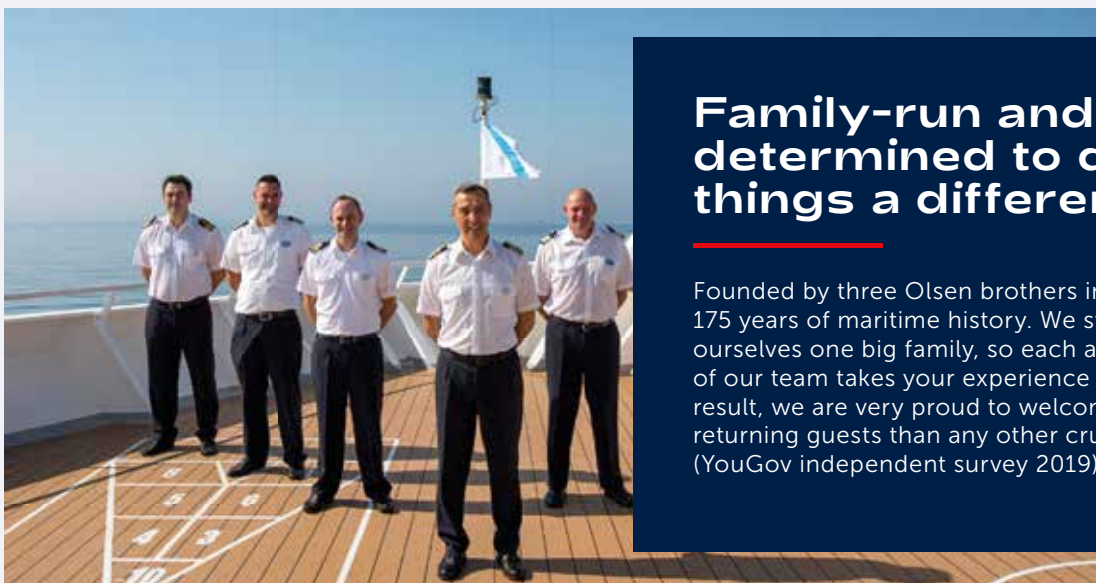
*Experience fee applies to two venues

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For full details of the campaign, and access to all assets, simply scan this code with your mobile device

One of our new Signature Experiences Scenic Discoveries taken in Alta, Northern Norway

The on board experience re-imagined

In 2022 we launched five new Signature Experiences on board our ships, this is another area where we differ from other cruise lines.

On every sailing, these experiences have been designed to ensure you get the most out of the culture and nature of the destinations we are visiting – from our Treats of the Region sessions where you can enjoy a taste of the destinations on your cruise to our Sky at Sea star-gazing sessions.



We know that trying a new cruise line can sometimes feel a little risky, especially if your customers have enjoyed sailing with others. We are so confident they will enjoy the way we cruise, that we make our guests a promise. If after a couple of days on board they find that it is not right for them, we will fly them home at our expense from the next available port and the cruise fare will be refunded in full.

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