

ISSUE 124 • JANUARY 2024

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Trade News

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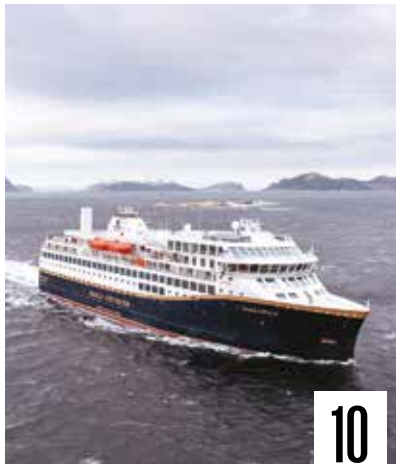
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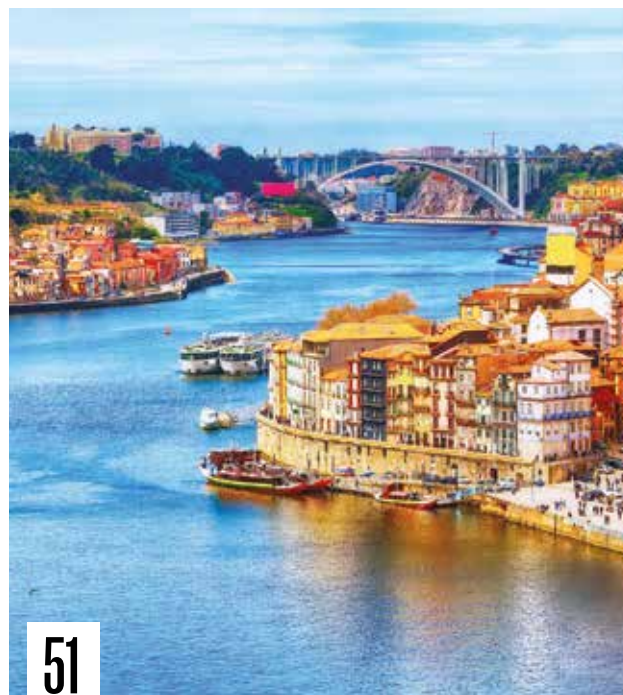
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WELCOME...

TO THE JANUARY ISSUE

Happy New Year, everyone! It brings me great pleasure to introduce you to our first issue of the year, and with it myself as the new editor of *Cruise Trade News*.

I'm enormously excited to work with you all and to find new ways to champion this incredible industry, both in the pages of this magazine and beyond.

We're just a few weeks into wave season and optimism is already running high, with reports of record-breaking sales days reflecting the fact that more and more travellers are looking to spend their holidays at sea. However, there was one story in particular that captured everyone's attention this month. I'm talking, of course, about the unveiling of Royal Caribbean's gargantuan *Icon of the Seas*.

I was lucky enough to be invited to the exclusive three-night preview cruise earlier this month, and while the ship's spectacular scale grabbed the headlines, seeing the industry showcase its ingenuity to the world left a far bigger impression. You can read all about *Icon* on page 32, which is this issue's Ocean Ship of the Month.

On the cover: Riviera Travel



ABOVE *Icon of the Seas* made headlines this month

Elsewhere, we kick off our CTN Investigates series by focusing on the issues surrounding accessibility, asking whether the industry is doing enough to make cruising open to all. That's on page 39, while over on page 58, we set course for the Rhine, discovering enchanting monasteries and medieval towns while aboard *Emerald Luna*.

Happy reading, folks. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible as the year unfolds.

Jack Carter
Editor

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Cruise Corner

PORTSMOUTH'S 'BUSIEST CRUISE SEASON EVER'

> Portsmouth International Port is gearing up for its busiest season to date, with 90 ships expected to visit the south coast hub in 2024.

Featuring ten inaugural calls and the return of several lines, this year will see the city welcome approximately 155,000 passengers.

Norwegian Cruise Line's (NCL) *Norwegian Star* will become the largest vessel ever to enter the harbour when the 294m ship arrives for the first time in May, after TUI's *Mein Schiff 3* broke the existing record in 2023.

The port will also see the return of Virgin Voyages, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises will make its debut in the city.



IN NUMBERS

90 Ships

2 new cruise lines

155K passengers



VIRGIN'S PELISSE JOINS CELESTYAL

Celestyal has appointed former Virgin Voyages marketing executive Seb Pelisse as its new trade marketing executive for the UK and Australia.

Pelisse will work with the trade to deliver events and raise awareness of Celestyal's brand, products, fleet, destinations, service and offers.

He joins from Virgin Voyages where he was a marketing executive with a remit for trade experiential activations and

events and has previously worked in customer service for easyJet and British Airways.

The appointment brings the line's trade team to 11, with further recruitment planned in the coming months. The team is headed up by vice president of business development UK, Europe and Australia Janet Parton.

"I am ecstatic to be joining Celestyal and look forward to contributing to its global brand development," Pelisse said.



ROYAL READY TO SUPPORT AGENTS

For the first time in three years, Royal Caribbean is “fully resourced” to support its trade partners in 2024. Vice president EMEA Ben Bouldin said the line’s trade team will visit “as many agents as possible” amid this month’s launch of *Icon of the Seas*. “We’ve got a new training manager who started last year, and he’s got a very comprehensive plan, so we’re really touching hearts and minds up and down the country,” Bouldin said. It comes after Royal Caribbean announced its partnership with the Eurovision Song Contest, which will see the line feature during the show alongside associated marketing ahead of the event in Malmö later this year. For the full story, visit cruisetradenews.com

“WE’RE REALLY TOUCHING HEARTS AND MINDS UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY IN 2024



PANACHE SENDS CHRISTMAS PACKAGES TO UKRAINIAN FAMILIES

The team at Panache Cruises sent more than 25 care packages to Ukraine in the build-up to Christmas. The initiative, which was led by the agency’s senior copywriter George Rowlands, saw the team collect essential items and gifts for people of all ages.

“We included necessary items such as toiletries and other useful items such as battery-powered torches, earplugs, and some Christmas gifts, like tea, biscuits and sweets, as well as toys and activities for children,” he said.



NJT SEES FIVEFOLD RISE IN CHRISTMAS CRUISE BOOKINGS

Not Just Travel has reported a fivefold year-on-year increase in cruise bookings made on Christmas Day. The agency said the first booking took place “early” on Christmas morning, with sales throughout December increasing by nearly 30 per cent compared with the same period last year.

Steve Witt, co-founder of Not Just Travel, said: “With the Boxing Day sales now in full swing and customers having lots of time on their hands as well as it being a payday weekend for many, we can expect clients to be celebrating the end of the year by bagging a bargain.”

Top destinations booked with the agency include Spain, the Balearics, Canaries, Greece and Florida, with customers seeking warmer climes as temperatures plunge in the UK. The firm also received bookings for Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the UK, Italy, Cyprus, Australia, Cape Verde and Lapland.

Not Just Travel also revealed cruise bookings had seen a healthy increase in December overall, with the sector making up 20 per cent of the agency’s business that month.

New year, new chances

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales
Geoff Ridgeon on how to start 2024 with a bang



With the bumper 2023 sales year already a distant memory, our sights are firmly set on the busiest booking season in the calendar. Across the cruise industry throughout January and February, there are incredible deals to be had and phenomenal promotions in the pipeline.

There will be a plethora of exciting sailings for your customers. Whether they're looking to delve into history, seek out natural wonders and wildlife, embrace local cultures or simply enjoy time at sea, there is certain to be something for everyone. And with many lines offering bumper savings, from fare reductions to deals for drinks packages, on-board spend and for solo travellers, it's too good an opportunity for your customers to miss out on.

LOCK IN PLANS NOW

With cruises offering the chance to sail to the majestic Norwegian fjords, history-rich Mediterranean and Adriatic coastlines, charming European cities and the wonders of Arctic Norway and Iceland, there really is the perfect holiday experience for all.

Elsewhere, there will be itineraries offering the opportunity to embark on extraordinary voyages to further afield destinations such as Canada and the Caribbean or a simply unforgettable around-the-world adventure.



ABOVE Those looking to explore Med coastlines should make the most of wave

“
With many cruise lines offering bumper savings, it's too good an opportunity for your customers to miss out on

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Pair your customers with the perfect sailing – whether it be a 100+ night world cruise or a short coastal itinerary.

2 Read up on cruise lines' future plans for new deployments and vessels.

3 Be sure to get ahead of the rest by booking early – make the most of deals available at the start of the year.

For example, at Fred Olsen Cruise Lines in 2025, we have A Voyage of Exploration Around the World, with highlights that include exploring the untouched landscapes of Robinson Crusoe Island, searching for the Big Five in Africa, and seeing the iconic Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

If 106 nights is too long, either the 22-night Scenic Gems of the Dalmatian Coast, taking in the Bay of Kotor, Dubrovnik and Split, or the 16-night Italy's Scenic Riviera with Charming Cinque Terre could fit the bill.

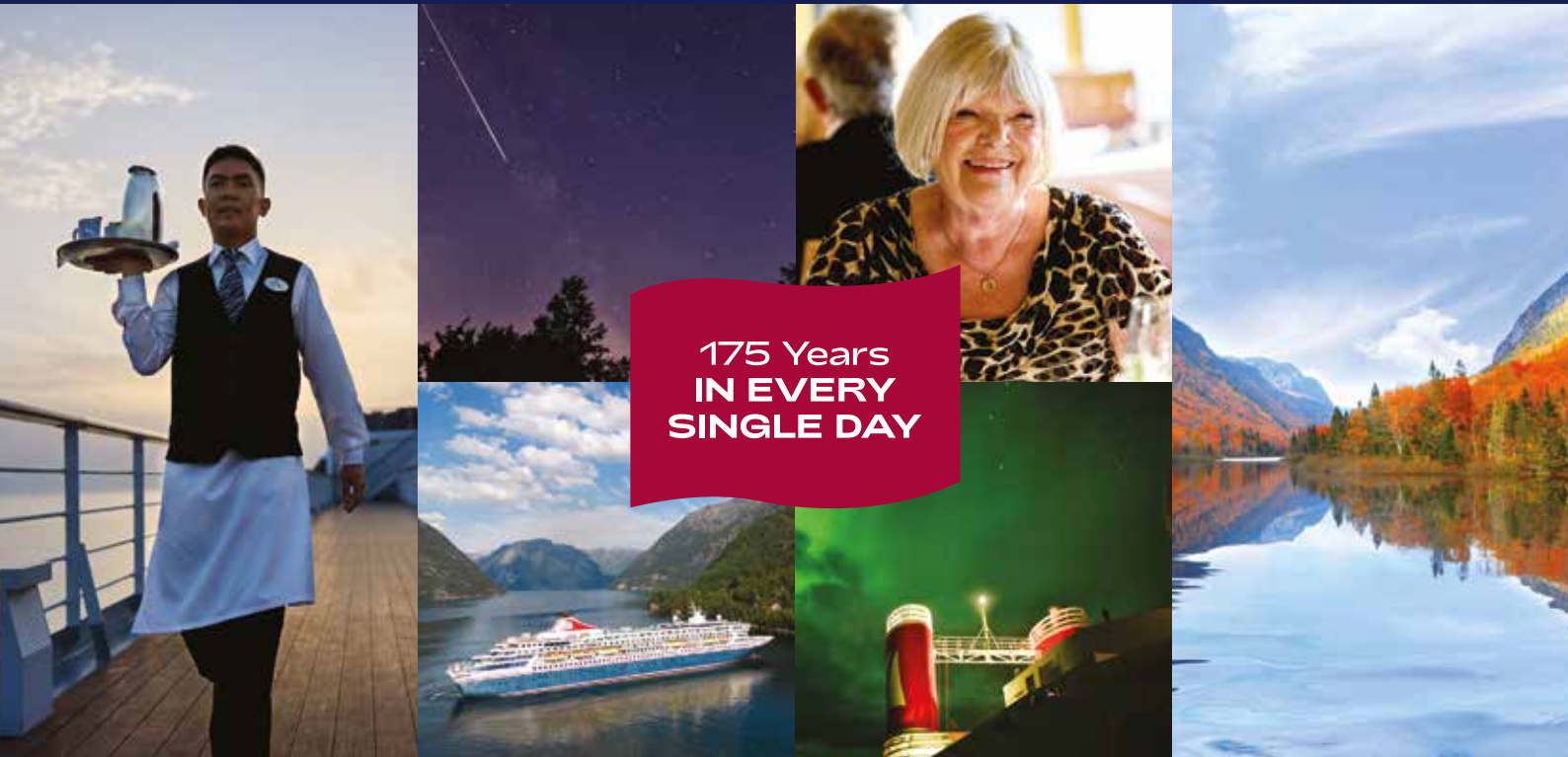
By helping your customers – both existing and new – lock in their holiday plans now, you're not only ensuring a spot on an incredible cruise but also giving them something truly special to look forward to. ●



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



WAVE OF WELLNESS

Cunard has teamed up with Harper's Bazaar UK to create a wellness programme exclusively for guests sailing on new ship Queen Anne when it launches on 3 May. Guests can add the exclusive package to their voyage, with options focused on detoxing, energising, or relaxing. The three-day programmes, which come with an additional £495 charge, will feature a selection of spa treatments, a range of Elemis products, and dining options from Queen Anne's The Pavilion Wellness Café.



CUNARD BRINGS BACK LE GAVROCHE

Luxury British cruise line Cunard will bring back an exclusive series of Le Gavroche residencies at sea this year.

Renowned two Michelin-starred chef Michel Roux Jr, who recently announced that his iconic Mayfair restaurant Le Gavroche would be closing this month, will oversee four Le Gavroche at sea sailings onboard *Queen Anne* and *Queen Mary 2*.

The former *MasterChef* judge will join cruises around the Norwegian fjords as part of a five-night residency, which begins with Le Gavroche at The Verandah on *Queen Mary 2* on 2 June.

The residency, which is in partnership with the Norwegian Seafood Council, will showcase a variety of Michel's signature specialties and culinary classics to 60 diners each evening.

Appointments



Paul Beale

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has promoted Paul Beale to regional vice president of sales UK.

Beale, who joined the luxury line from Seabourn in March 2012, was most recently senior director of sales UK for the brand after being promoted from head of UK sales in 2018.

It comes after Regent took delivery of its newest vessel, *Seven Seas Grandeur*, during a handover ceremony in Ancona, Italy.



SILVERSEA NAMES SILVER NOVA

Silversea officially named its newest vessel *Silver Nova* during a ceremony in Fort Lauderdale earlier this month.

The 728-guest ship, which Silversea claims is the "most environmentally conscious ultra-luxury ship ever built", strengthens Royal Caribbean Group's (RCG) commitment to sustainable travel.

Bagpipes — a customary tradition of RCG — were played through *Silver Nova's* theatre to mark the commencement of the ceremony, before guests enjoyed a special commemorative video to mark Silversea's 30th anniversary.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Shutterstock - AlexAnton

NILE ADVENTURE

Abercrombie & Kent has confirmed it's building a new Nile riverboat, its fifth in Egypt, which will launch in late 2025. The vessel will feature an indoor and outdoor restaurant, a spa, gym, social spaces, a swimming pool and sundeck, and 32 cabins with floor-to-ceiling windows and Juliet balconies overlooking the water.



AMERICAN QUEEN VOYAGES TO STRENGTHEN TRADE SUPPORT

The general sales agency (GSA) for American Queen Voyages (AQV) in the UK will look to enhance its trade support offering in 2024.

Light Blue Travel, which represents the American river cruise operator in the UK and Nicko Cruises, will further strengthen its ties with agents by adding more modules to its training programme and

producing new digital marketing assets.

"This will include video shorts for our popular itineraries that our partners can then use as part of their own marketing mix," said Michelle Daniels, Light Blue Travel commercial director UK and Europe. The commitment comes after the company published its 2025-focused trade-friendly brochure.

Appointments



Robin Griffiths

APT & Travelmarvel has promoted business development manager for central England Robin Griffiths to the newly created role of national account manager.

Griffiths will look after APT & Travelmarvel's current key accounts when he begins the new role on 1 March, and will be tasked with building volume with fledgling partners and identifying new relationships with wholesalers. At present, 70 per cent of the line's business comes through the trade.



RIVERSIDE TO LAUNCH THIRD SHIP IN MARCH

Riverside Luxury Cruises has confirmed its third ship will enter service in March 2024.

Riverside Debussy will depart on its inaugural cruise from Brussels to Amsterdam on 23 March. The six-day voyage will call at destinations in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

The ship will then depart on a series of Rhine sailings, offering five itineraries: Holland at the Heart of Tulip Blossom; the Romantic Rhine Southbound; the Romantic Rhine Northbound; Cruising Belgium and the Netherlands; and the Rhine and Main, Amsterdam to Nuremburg.

UK MD for Riverside Charlie Hewitt-Davies said: "Riverside's three elegant ships are floating, luxury boutique hotels."

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



GALÁPAGOS GIFT

HX is giving 100 travel agents the chance to join a fam trip to the Galápagos Islands as part of a new trade competition. Those who make a booking for any of the line's expedition voyages during wave 2024 will be entered into the competition to win a sailing on board Santa Cruz II to experience the tropical archipelago.



HURTIGRUTEN AND HX DETAIL NEXT PHASE OF BRAND REFRESH

HX and sister brand Hurtigruten have unveiled the next phase of their new brand identities following the initial announcement of the company split last year.

The brands have launched new visual profiles, websites, social channels, brochures, booking materials and advertisements to solidify their distinct identities.

"This marks a defining moment as HX and Hurtigruten embark on the next phase of their distinct journeys as leaders in global sustainable travel," said Daniel Skjeldam, group CEO at Hurtigruten Group. New visual identities will differentiate the two brands, with HX looking to cement itself as the leading sustainable expedition cruise company.



Seabourn latest to install SpaceX's Starlink wifi

Seabourn has become the latest line to install SpaceX's high-speed satellite wifi service, Starlink.

The new technology, provided by Elon Musk's company, aims to upgrade Seabourn's internet capabilities, offering guests faster connectivity and more reliable wifi wherever Starlink's services are available.

Starlink will be available on Seabourn's two new luxury expedition ships, *Seabourn Venture* and *Seabourn Pursuit*, as well as *Seabourn Sojourn*, *Seabourn Quest*, *Seabourn Encore* and *Seabourn Ovation*.



HAVILA VOYAGES UNVEILS NEW ASTRONOMY THEMED CRUISES

Havila Voyages has announced details of three new astronomy cruises for 2024, accompanied by lecturers from the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS).

The cruises, which have been designed to "deepen guests understanding of the universe", depart in February, March and October this year,

sailing for 11 nights round-trip from Bergen to Kirkenes.

Matthew Valentine, head of UK sales, Havila Voyages said: "These new astronomy cruises are ideal for customers who want to delve deeper into the world of astronomy, or those who are complete novices but who have a curious mind."

Changing destinations

The tide could be about to turn for cruise lines following a monumental ruling by the UK's advertising standards watchdog. **Will Payne** reports

In November, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) sanctioned Royal Caribbean International after it claimed its seven-night Italy, Greece & Croatia itinerary called in Venice (Ravenna). The complainant – who understood Ravenna was more than two hours away from Venice by car – challenged whether the claims relating to the location of the port were misleading.

Royal Caribbean argued that as cruise ships were banned from docking in Venice, they were required to use whatever alternative cruise port was available to provide “reasonable” access to Venice and other regional attractions.

The line said the use of qualifying place names was “common practice” in the travel industry and was “well understood” by the average consumer but proposed reversing the qualification to “Ravenna (Venice)”. However, the ASA considered the claim “leaving from Venice (Ravenna)” would be interpreted by consumers to mean the cruise would depart from a port in Venice.

The authority said consumers could be misled by the description, as in the same itinerary Royal used the term “Sicily (Messina)”. As Messina is, in fact, located on the island of Sicily, the ASA considered this further added to the impression that consumers would believe Ravenna was a location in Venice.

“Consumers would likely assume they could travel to Venice to join the cruise at its departure port,” the ASA said. “We noted there was an information page within the website that provided further information about Ravenna and within this the distance travel time of over two hours was detailed. However, we understood it was possible to reach the booking



process without accessing that information and we considered that was information that consumers needed to know before deciding to proceed.” As a result, Royal Caribbean has amended its itineraries, removing Venice entirely.

CHANGE COMING?

When asked for a comment on the decision, Royal Caribbean told *Cruise Trade News*: “We are aware of the ASA ruling and have made all necessary adjustments.”

The ASA’s decision suggests cruise lines in the coming months will be forced to update how they describe itineraries, including other commonly used qualifying statements such as ‘Rome (Civitavecchia)’. As per the advertising watchdog’s guidance, this descriptor is also likely to mislead consumers without a prior knowledge of the area, with

“
**THE COMPLAINANT
CHALLENGED WHETHER
THE LOCATION OF THE
PORT WAS MISLEADING**

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Cruise ships were banned from docking in Venice in 2021; Venice is more than two hours away from Ravenna by car





Civitavecchia being more than an hour-and-a-half drive from Rome.

And the issue isn't restricted to European sailings, either. Another destination cruise lines use qualifying descriptions for is Bangkok. The cruise port for the Thai capital is Laem Chabang, an hour-and-a-half away from the city centre. Elsewhere, when purchasing cruises to Ho Chi Minh, travellers may be unaware of the fact that ships dock an hour's drive away in Phu My.

It poses the question: could this impact how cruise itineraries are advertised? Earlier this year Amsterdam City Council proposed a ban on cruise

“ THE ASA'S DECISION COULD BE ANOTHER SPEED BUMP FOR CRUISE

ships docking in its main port, with many lines opting for Rotterdam instead. If the proposal goes through, the ASA ruling suggests lines will have to scrap using Amsterdam in itinerary descriptions, as it is more than an hour's drive from Rotterdam.

As the cruise industry looks ahead to a promising 2024, the ASA's ruling against Royal Caribbean could be seen as a speed bump on lines' paths to even greater fortunes.

Having to change Venice (Ravenna) to Ravenna (Venice) could also put some new-to-cruise customers off a holiday at sea, knowing their itinerary will not call at the iconic Italian city, especially if that stop was the primary reason for opting for a cruise over a traditional land-based break.

That being said, all customers appreciate transparency when it comes to booking a holiday, and while some in the industry may be concerned by the ASA's decision, it could pay dividends in consumer loyalty and repeat custom in the long run. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Cruises to Rome could also be impacted by the ASA ruling; guests must first travel from Ravenna to reach Venice



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Tech Talk

Bouncing back

Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant** shares her predictions for how technology will impact the industry in 2024

Well, what a year that was. The good news just kept coming, with growth in the industry dominating the headlines. But as we look back, what did the data tell us about the performance of UK cruise agents in 2023?

In the UK, the five largest cruise lines to process bookings through the Traveltek platform were, in order of performance, P&O, Princess, Royal Caribbean, MSC and Celebrity Cruises. Meanwhile, the average selling price in the UK was £2,750, rising to £3,567 in the summer. It will be interesting to see how selling prices shift in 2024. Could this be a sign of increased competition and discounting to fill cabins?

As we look to the year ahead, here are some of the technology trends to watch closely in 2024.

GREATER ADOPTION OF AI

As with many other industries, we expect cruise lines and cruise agents to look at ways they can embed AI into their day to day, whether this is utilising simple tools like zoom AI companion summary or using ChatGPT to help write destination guides and literature.

PAYMENT SIMPLIFICATION

Cruise lines will continue to develop this cumbersome and fragmented part of the industry. Changes will be made to aid payment and credit options and we expect to see new payment players entering the cruise sector in 2024.

ONLINE BOOKABILITY

During 2023 there was a growing trend for both new-to-cruise customers



“
There is a growing trend for customers wanting the freedom to book online

and returning customers wanting the freedom to book online. Why therefore not give customers the choice in 2024 to book online or phone the call centre?

MORE RELIANCE ON DATA

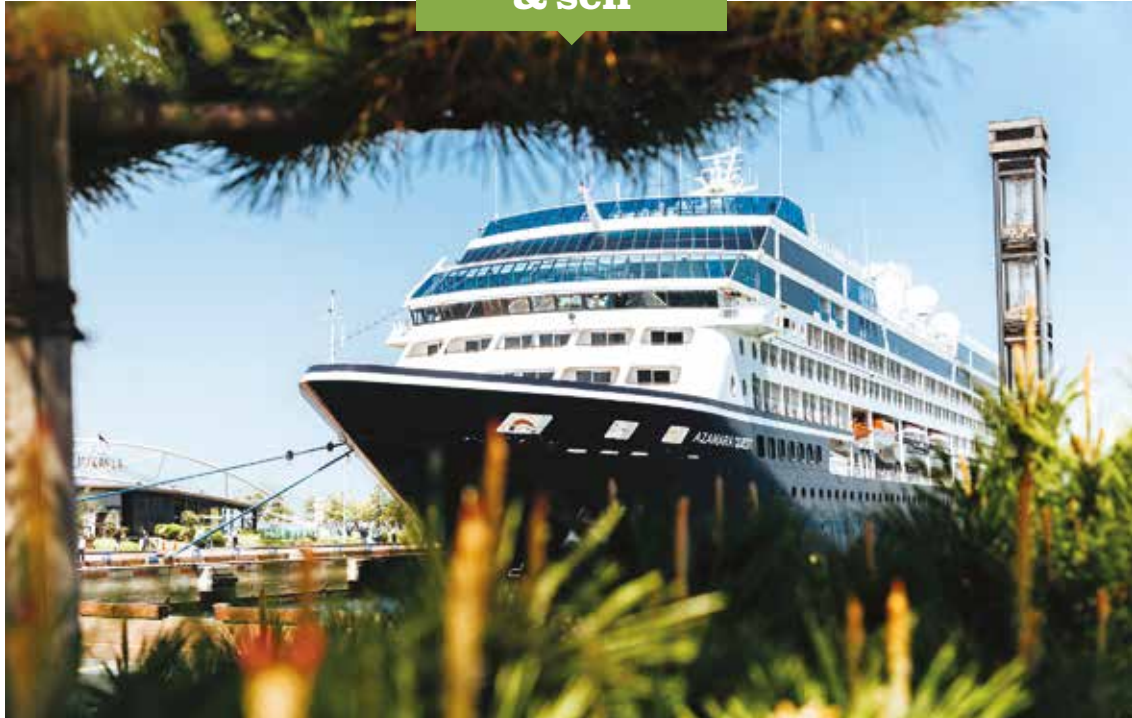
Lines and agents who can utilise data and analyse it to spot customer trends will have the edge on their competitors. This trend will continue to gain momentum, so embrace it.

INNOVATION IN MARKETING

Last year CLIA stated that four million new-to-cruise passengers needed to be attracted to the industry by 2025. This will encourage greater technological innovation to attract new business. ●

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant says the industry can benefit from the latest technology in many ways





Azamara

In this recurring feature, we reveal the essential need-to-know information to help make selling easier.
Next up, we're learning about Azamara

IN THE KNOW

Azamara is a small-ship cruise line and leader in destination immersion experiences. With a fleet of four sister ships, Azamara guests can travel to marquee ports around the world and visit smaller, hidden gem destinations that many larger cruise ships cannot reach. Going beyond the traditional cruise experience, Azamara also offers overnight stays and extended destination days, giving travellers 10 or more hours in port, allowing them more time to get to know the cultures and communities they visit, increasing the chance for a deeper and more meaningful experience.

SHIPS IN THE FLEET

Azamara has a fleet of four sister ships: *Azamara Journey*, *Azamara Quest*, *Azamara Pursuit* and *Azamara Onward*, each accommodating around 700 guests at double occupancy and 400 crew members. Guests have a variety of dining options to choose from while on board, including the main restaurant, Discoveries, and more casual venues, such as Windows Café, Mosaic Café and The Patio,



FROM TOP

Azamara has a fleet of four ships; guests have a variety of dining options on board

as well as two-specialty restaurants, Prime C, for steak and seafood, and Aqualina for Italian-inspired cuisine.

WHO'S WHO

The Azamara UK team is led by managing director UK, David Duff, who is responsible for driving growth for Azamara in the UK market and providing visible market leadership. The UK sales team is

managed by Lee Surman, head of partnerships and trading, and Stuart Pearce, head of trade sales.

Pearce oversees the trade sales strategy for the business in the UK, working closely with two business development managers, Moira Gregson and Adam Morris, as well as strategic account managers, Nicola Singleton (UK), Christina Hannon (Nordic and DACH), and sales manager for the EMEA IR network, Bruno Jansen. Lori Scannella provides support to this team in her role as sales support manager,



“ AZAMARA IS THE PERFECT FIT FOR CULTURALLY CURIOUS TRAVELLERS

alongside a sales support executive, Daniela Riley. Additionally, Richard Stanbridge is the line's trade and guest services manager, supporting trade partners and guests based in the UK.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

On 7 March, *Azamara Journey* will set sail on a 12-night Japan Intensive Voyage, taking guests to the major cities of Tokyo and Osaka, and visiting the lesser-known ports of Ishigaki and Kochi.

Sailing from Barcelona on 22 April, the six-night Mediterranean Rivas cruise on *Azamara Quest* visits Marseille, Monte Carlo and Santa Margherita.

In November, *Azamara Pursuit* will embark on a 17-night India and Sri Lanka cruise, beginning in Dubai and travelling through 13 ports in seven different countries.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Head of trade sales Stuart Pearce

Why is now the time for agents to start selling more Azamara cruises? The demand for culturally immersive travel experiences is stronger than



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Prime C offers the finest steak and seafood; Azamara is renowned for destination immersion; head of trade sales Stuart Pearce

ever. As the leaders in destination immersion cruising, Azamara is a perfect fit for culturally curious travellers who want to discover the world, without compromising on comfort and service.

Our new Work & Wander package has also given opportunities to new kinds of travellers. Remote workers and digital nomads on board can make use of high bandwidth wifi and computer accessories, allowing a new audience to sail with

Azamara while being able to carry on with

their professions. Secondly, as economic pressures continue to affect the UK, travellers are seeking value for money when booking a holiday. Guests sailing with Azamara have the comfort of knowing their food and drink, gratuities and more are included in the price.

What fam trips and ship visits do you have planned?

In the summer of 2024, we have our fam trip around the Mediterranean and we will be holding more ship visits than ever before, with dates and sign-ups yet to be released. Keep in touch with us via our Azamara UK & Ireland Facebook page to find out more. ●

TOP TIPS

1 Put the destination first. Azamara's small ships take guests to lesser-known ports around the world. While in port, extended destination days give guests the time (10 hours or more) to imbibe the local culture.

2 With Always Azamara, a variety of dining venues, plus room service, drinks (including alcohol all day and night), tips and gratuities, exclusive cultural events and unlimited self-service laundry are included in the fare, as standard.

3 Azamara's Country Intensive itineraries are ideal for travellers interested in discovering one specific country, or for seasoned travellers looking for a new experience in a country they've already visited.

INCENTIVES
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DISCOVER MORE OFFERS
AND INCENTIVES

What's in
it for you?



SEADREAM UNVEILS 2026 MED VOYAGES



SeaDream Yacht Club has unveiled its 2026 Mediterranean itineraries, introducing seven new ports of call, as well as its first 14-day slow travel voyages. Other highlights include overnight stays in popular destinations, transits of the Corinth Canal and docking in the city centre of Venice.

From May to September 2026, the line will offer a total of 27 week- to two-week Mediterranean sailings, covering 86 ports in

14 countries in the French and Italian Rivas, the Greek Isles and the Dalmatian Coast.

Meanwhile, two 14-night Grand Mediterranean & Adriatic Explorer itineraries mark the first ever two-week Mediterranean experiences for SeaDream. These voyages will offer extended opportunities to experience destinations such as St. Tropez, Corsica, Taormina, Valletta and Dubrovnik.

Sign up

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



CELEBRITY'S 'UNMISSABLE REWARDS'

Celebrity Cruises has announced the return of its Celebrity Moments wave campaign. From now until 29 February, the top 100 selling agents will receive £500 to spend how they like on their Celebrity Rewards Mastercard. All agents will receive a £50 bonus for every five new bookings they claim, while new-to-cruise agents will earn a £25 bonus for the first three Celebrity Cruises bookings they make.

Claire Stirrup, UK & Ireland senior sales director, said: "This year's campaign is tailored to our valued agents and what means most to them."

'PICK YOUR PERK' WITH WINDSTAR

Windstar Cruises has announced the return of its wave sale incentive, Pick Your Perk. For a limited time, travel agents can offer clients who book voyages with Windstar Cruises savings and customised experiences, and agents can earn their own perks, too.

From now until 29 February 2024, guests can choose from one free hotel night (which can be used pre- or post-cruise) or up to \$1,000 on-board credit. Premium suite guests can select an upgrade to the all-inclusive fare, which includes alcohol, wifi and all gratuities. The offer is applicable to all sailings through May 2026.

In addition, agents can earn a £100 Amazon gift card for each stateroom or suite booked by 29 February 2024 in any destination through to 2026.



EXPLORA BOOSTS AGENT SUPPORT

Explora Journeys has launched a new co-branded website to support its agent partners' sales and marketing efforts.

In partnership with content optimisation platform Approach Guides, the luxury line's new site will allow agents to engage with clients by sharing links to all sailings, destinations and experiences on the Explora Journeys website. As they browse, clients can access trip details and real-time pricing.

Chris Austin, chief sales officer, Explora Journeys, said: "Now advisors can use our website to share specific holiday options with clients and get indications of interest so they can immediately follow up."

James Howlett

Hurtigruten's UK & Ireland sales manager discusses the importance of focusing on sustainability when speaking to clients

Hurtigruten Group recently split its coastal and expedition product into two separate arms. What does this mean for travel agents? Essentially, it's going to mean a much more dedicated focus to the trade of our products. We know how unique and nuanced our product offering is and we also know the difference we provide compared to other sailing providers. With a separate marketing and sales function, we can provide tailored support to our agent partners that will give them the tools they need to informatively sell Hurtigruten to their customers.

What key Hurtigruten selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents? A lot of cruise lines, especially in summer, travel to the fjords, and they do a great job. But we often hear from our customers that they have booked with us because they didn't see enough of Norway last time. We sail the entirety of the Norwegian coast with a vast range of itineraries and our classic voyage covers 2,400 nautical miles, travelling all year



round, making us one of the most unique ways to see the destination.

How important is it to get out in front of agents? The UK trade is key to our development as a business. We already have a strong proportion of our business coming from the UK trade, but we want to increase that share even more. We have some fantastic partners in the UK, but there are huge amounts of agents where currently we're only scratching the surface.

A key selling point for Hurtigruten is its sustainability protocols. How can agents use these to increase their sales? Our approach to sustainability is

FROM TOP James Howlett is keen to emphasise Hurtigruten's unique selling points; the cruise line sails the entirety of the Norwegian coast

one of the cornerstones of our success and an ongoing focus for the future. We understand that it's a confusing landscape and the term sustainability can be overused, just like luxury can be. However, it's important that agents start to have these conversations with their customers, as we're finding that more and more are asking these kinds of questions and it's influencing their buying decisions.

How we interact with the environment and local communities is at the core of our approach. We source more than 80 per cent of our produce from local suppliers and we've invested nearly €100m (£85m) in upgrading our fleet with greener technology, one of the largest programmes of its kind in Europe.

What are the current challenges in agent training? Moving into 2024, we want to ensure we have a clear process to provide all the information required to agents in a succinct, fun and informative way. One of the first things we're working on is a detailed agent guide all about our ships, inclusions and product types. We're also planning a number of fam trips for the trade in 2024 so they can see and experience first-hand what we do and what we offer. ●



“
**WE'VE INVESTED £85M
IN UPGRADING OUR
FLEET WITH GREENER
TECHNOLOGY**



VOYAGES

12 days
34 ports



Setting sail for a more sustainable future along the Norwegian coast.

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WAVE SEASON WONDERS

As the cruise industry embarks on an exciting year ahead, Riviera Travel is ensuring its travel agent partners are well equipped to smash their targets

The escorted touring and river cruise operator reinforced its commitment to the trade in January with the appointment of Lloyd Morris and Chris McCloskey as key account managers, after reporting a 50% uptick in agent wave sales compared with the same time last year. In a further bid to bolster its trade business, Riviera is offering agents who make a booking in January or February the chance to win £40,000 worth of prizes.

A wide range of rewards are available to winners – who will be selected at random each week – including all-expense-paid escorted tours to Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India or the American deep south, as well as a selection of European river cruises. To enter the weekly draw, all agents need to do is make any Riviera booking over the course of the seven-day period.

Also available is one of three Riviera holiday voucher and merchandise packages, worth more than £3,000 each. There are also iPads with air pods, iPhones, large HD TVs, Dyson Airwraps and hairdryers, and Ninja air fryers up for grabs.

To immerse the trade even further, Riviera will host a record-breaking 100 agents onboard its vessels across several fam trips.

“

**“OUR AGENT PARTNERS
HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
BRILLIANT FOR US”**



This new wave of agent incentives comes as the river cruise and escorted tour specialist prepares for a host of departures in 2024 and 2025, including sailings to the Seine, Rhine, Rhone, Danube, Douro, Nile and Mekong.

Vicky Billing, head of trade and partnerships UK & Ireland for Riviera Travel, said: “Our agent partners have always been brilliant for us, and this year was no exception. We want to say a huge thanks to everyone for all their support.”

With plenty of itineraries to sell, thanks in part to the line’s newly launched 2025 river cruise programme, the potential for agents to win big is huge. More than 30 departures are available across eight themed cruises, which have been tailored to focus on guest interests, including food, art, history, music and horticulture.

The themed sailings will depart between April and October 2025 across several eight-day itineraries to destinations such as Portugal, Spain, France and Switzerland.





Prices include return flights with regional airport options available; Eurostar travel on select itineraries; full board; a Superior drinks package, which is now included on all river sailings; and all scheduled visits and tours. Sailings also include port talks, entertainment, authentic regional menus and the services of a Riviera cruise director and concierge throughout.

Will Sarson, head of product at Riviera Travel, said: “We believe in offering immersive holidays that go beyond traditional travel, and we’re confident our new themed programme of river departures will add an extra dimension to guests’ cruises.”

The cruise line is also offering more than 260 core product departures, sailing from April to October in 2024 and 2025, 15 of which are



Themed sailings

1 The eight-day Gastronomy of the Douro – from Portugal to Spain itinerary, round-trip from Porto, calls in Mateus Palace, Castelo Rodrigo, Salamanca, Quinta Avesada and Lamego and costs from £2,099pp.

2 The Gardens & Natural Beauty of the Rhône eight-day voyage, which sails from Lyon to Avignon, calls in at Beaune, Vienne and Tournon, Ardèche Gorges, Arles and Pont du Gard, comes in at £1,899pp.

3 The eight-day Music of the Blue Danube, sailing, round-trip Budapest, goes via Esztergom, Bratislava, Dürnstein, Melk, Linz and Salzburg and costs £1,899pp.

dedicated to solo travellers. The itineraries cover countries such as France, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the Netherlands.

An eight-day The Blue Danube itinerary features seven tours, including guided visits to Vienna, Salzburg or Linz, Dürnstein, Budapest and Bratislava, as well as, Esztergom Basilica and Melk Abbey, from £1,599pp.

Meanwhile, an eight-day The Douro, Porto and Salamanca itinerary offers eight guided tours, including lunch and a flamenco show, a guided tour of Porto with a port wine cellar visit, dinner at a typical Portuguese quinta, and visits to Castelo Rodrigo, Mateus Palace gardens and Lamego, with prices from £1,699pp.

There’s plenty more to come from Riviera, too, with a raft of new launches set to be revealed towards the end of February. And to celebrate its 40th birthday, Riviera is giving away a guaranteed gift with every booking to consumers. Adding up to more than £1 million, prizes include vouchers and all-expenses paid Riviera holidays. 🎁

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT George Eliot was built in 2018; Emily Bronte can carry 169 passengers; Jane Austen offers Seine cruises

We are celebrating 40 YEARS OF TRAVEL

In January and February we are giving away **£40,000 worth of prizes** to agents!

PLUS... Your clients will receive a guaranteed gift with every booking as part of our **£1 million giveaway***



RIVER CRUISE

UNBEATABLE VALUE *which always includes*

-  Direct flights & transfers
-  Five-star ships
-  Spacious cabins with windows
-  Daily excursions & visits
-  Full board dining
-  Superior drinks package
-  Riviera Cruise Director and Concierge
-  Evening entertainment
-  Free Wi-Fi
-  20kg+ luggage allowance

There's something for everyone with Riviera...



Medieval Germany

8 days from £2,049PP

May to September 2024 and 2025



The Blue Danube

Vienna, Budapest & Salzburg

8 days from £1,599PP

April to October 2024 and 2025



Rhine Cruise to Switzerland

8 days from £1,699PP

May to October 2024 and 2025



Burgundy, the River Rhône & Provence

8 days from £1,499PP

April to October 2024 and 2025



The Seine, Paris & Normandy

8 days from £1,614PP

April to October 2024 and 2025



Cruise the Heart of Europe

15 days from £3,154PP

April to September 2024 and 2025

Contact our dedicated Trade Sales Team
for all river cruise departures and pricing.

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Riviera Travel terms and conditions apply. Prices correct at time of print. For more information email agents@rivieratravel.co.uk
*Book by 29 February 2024. Visit rivieratravel.co.uk/giveaway for full terms and conditions on Riviera's birthday giveaway.

SHIP OF THE MONTH

ICON OF THE SEAS

Weighing in at a whopping 250,800 gross tonnes and with enough capacity to carry 7,600 passengers, Royal Caribbean's eagerly awaited *Icon of the Seas* turned heads when it sailed into PortMiami for the first time earlier this month. Featuring the largest pool at sea, 15 entertainment areas and 20 diverse restaurant options, the largest cruise ship on the planet offers a multitude of interactive experiences to keep everyone entertained. *Icon* also features the first at-sea waste-to-energy plant, making it Royal Caribbean's most sustainable ship to date.

Fast facts

2,805
staterooms

7
pools

2,350
crew members

6
waterslides

18
guest decks



1 The Waterpark

A standout area on-board *Icon* is its waterpark, which Royal Caribbean claims is the largest ever on a cruise ship. It features six record-breaking slides, including the Frightening Bolt – the tallest waterslide to sail – and the Pressure Drop, the first open freefall waterslide on a cruise.



2 Bubbles

Bubbles, the new walk-up champagne bar in the ship's Central Park neighbourhood, will offer mimosas, prosecco, Bellini and bubbly by the glass or bottle morning, noon and night, soundtracked by the soulful sounds of Jazz in the Park.



3 Empire Supper Club

Located near the Central Park neighbourhood, the Empire Supper Club is an extravagant eight-course dining experience offering a taste of old New York. Highlights of the menu include oysters Rockefeller and Wagyu New York strip, topped with freshly shaved truffle.



4 Duelling Pianos

A Royal Caribbean first, Duelling Pianos debuts in the Royal Promenade. The experience features two expert pianists going head to head, taking song requests and encouraging the audience to sing along with a cocktail in hand.



5 Surfside

The Surfside neighbourhood offers the ultimate 'stay-all-day' attraction for families. Guests can unwind at the Water's Edge infinity pool, take a whirl on the beach-themed carousel or delve into an array of restaurant and entertainment options.



6 Absolute Zero

In the reimagined Royal Promenade, guests will find Royal Caribbean's largest ice arena to date. Olympic-level ice skaters bring this unique entertainment venue to life, unleashing supersized spins alongside digitally enhanced backdrops.

SHIP OF THE MONTH

A-ROSA ALEA & A-ROSA CLEA

Sister ships *A-Rosa Alea* and *A-Rosa Clea* will join the A-Rosa River Cruises fleet in April 2024, sailing itineraries on the Rhine and Moselle. This duo of intimate, boutique-style ships offers guests a more personalised sailing experience, while their smaller size means they can sail right into the heart of city centres like Strasbourg and Trier. *A-Rosa Alea* will offer itineraries to Paris when it moves onto the Seine in 2025, and from 2026, *A-Rosa Clea* will head to Gironde/Garonne in the Bordeaux region.

Fast facts

4 TO 7
night itineraries

70
cabins (*A-Rosa Clea*)

140
guests (*A-Rosa Clea*)

4
suites (*A-Rosa Alea*)

2
lounges



1 Cabins

A-Rosa Alea can accommodate 138 guests, with *A-Rosa Clea* offering room for 140 guests. Passengers can choose from 14 to 15 square metre, air-conditioned cabins, with some rooms offering Juliet balconies on decks two and three, while a handful of 23 square metre suites are located on deck three.



2 Market Restaurant

Both ships will follow a similar culinary concept to that on *A-Rosa Alva* on the Douro. In the Market Restaurant, guests can help themselves to indulgent breakfast buffets, while starters and desserts are also enjoyed buffet-style for lunch and dinner, with main courses served at the table.



3 Lounges

Each cruise includes a wide choice of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Whether it's an early-morning coffee in the day lounge to start the day, a post-exploration beer in the Panorama Lounge or a nightcap under the stars, it's all included.



4 Sun Deck

There won't be any clambering for sun loungers on this ship, with the upper deck abundant with plush seating areas from which to enjoy the river views. Guests can watch it all unfurl from the whirlpool or while enjoying a game of chess on the giant chessboard.



5 On-board vibe

Both ships offer the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere that A-Rosa is well known for. Not only are there three on-board lounges to choose from, but there are no fixed table sizes or dress codes, and guests can dine whenever they please within the restaurant's opening hours.



6 Itineraries

These smaller ships are designed to dock in the very heart of the destinations they call at, leaving open the possibility to add new regions to their offering. In 2024 they will sail into Strasbourg and Trier, before further expanding its French itineraries in 2025.

Shining bright

Will Payne speaks to the winners of Cruise Stars 2023, following last month's jubilant ceremony at the Middle Eight Hotel in London

The tension was palpable as Cruise Challenge host Peter Smith took to the podium to get the first Cruise Stars award ceremony in four years underway. In partnership with Royal Caribbean International, Gail Kenny Executive Recruitment, Riviera Travel, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, Seabourn and AmaWaterways, the free-to-enter event celebrated individuals from across the cruise sector.

Awards included Cruise Line PR & Marketing Star, Cruise Line Sales Star and National Travel Agent Sales Star, as well as new prizes for the Above and Beyond Star and Trainer Star of the Year.

Cunard's business manager James Scott took home the Cruise

Line Sales Star accolade, while Jessica Tansey, trade support specialist at Scenic Group, was named Cruise Line Rising Star of the Year.

Trainer Star of the Year, meanwhile was handed to Leon Hand, EMEA training manager at Celebrity Cruise, with Riviera Travel's channels marketing manager Roxy Ilbury awarded Cruise Line PR & Marketing Star. The final award in the cruise line category, Cruise Line Management Star, went to Sarah Jane Walker, director of sales UK at Virgin Voyages.

A WONDERFUL FEELING

"I am absolutely elated, over the moon and overjoyed," Hand said, explaining how he already had a spot in mind for his trophy on his mother's



mantelpiece back in Liverpool. "To get this recognition in the industry is just a wonderful feeling, so I am very, very happy. These events are very important because everyone works so hard and we do a lot for the trade, it's not just about recognition, it's also about a celebration of success and it just motivates you to do more."

Daniel Hammond, cruise and travel specialist at GoCruise & Travel, scooped the Above and Beyond Star award, while Travel Agent Rising Star of the Year was awarded to IntelTravel's Danielle Falcus. It was a double haul for IntelTravel, with Geraldine Nolan picking up the Travel Agent Marketing Star accolade, while Bolsover Cruise



“These events are so important. It’s not just about recognition, it’s also about a celebration of success”

Club’s Jessica Armitage took home National Travel Agent Sales Star.

The Travel Agent Award category was rounded off with Paul Cranny of Paul Cranny Travel being named the Regional Travel Sales Star of the Year for the South of England and Wales. Hays Travel’s Michelle Higson took home the North of England and Scotland-based accolade, while Thorne Travel’s John Ferguson won the Travel Agent

Management Star award. “This win feels amazing,” said Hammond. “It’s been a hectic year, so it puts it all in to perspective and makes everything I and the team have done worth it.

“These awards are massive for the industry. Agents don’t get a lot of recognition. The cruise lines get more at times, which they should, but agents are the little people, so events like these make us more known in the industry.”

Riviera Travel’s head of product Will Sarson hailed travel agents for being a “really important part” of the river cruise operator’s business, saying Cruise Stars 2023 is “the perfect way to celebrate their successes”.

“So often we get busy with day-to-day work, so you have to take the time to really enjoy yourself and look back at what we have achieved as an industry and on an individual level,” he added. “Last year was fab, it’s what we all hoped for in terms of recovery and 2024 sales are doing so well for us, particularly through the trade. We’re really excited to keep on building that momentum as we move forward into the new year.” ●



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Inside Passage (With Glacier Bay National Park)

7 NIGHTS • 3 PORTS

DEPARTURE DATE
Royal Princess 15 Jul 2025

Vancouver ▶ Juneau ▶ Skagway ▶
Glacier Bay National Park (Scenic Cruising) ▶
Ketchikan ▶ Vancouver

CRUISE NO. A520

PRINCESS STANDARD FARE FROM PP

INTERIOR	£799
BALCONY	£1,349
MINI-SUITE	£1,749
SUITE	£2,199

Mediterranean with France & Italy

7 NIGHTS • 4 PORTS

DEPARTURE DATE
Sun Princess 13 Jul 2024

Barcelona ▶ Gibraltar ▶ Marseille (Provence) ▶ Genoa ▶ Florence/Pisa (La Spezia) ▶ Rome (Civitavecchia)

CRUISE NO. U427

PRINCESS STANDARD FARE FROM PP

INTERIOR	£799
DELUXE BALCONY	£1,299
MINI-SUITE	£1,499
SUITE	£2,499

Classic California Coast

7 NIGHTS • 4 PORTS

DEPARTURE DATE
Discovery Princess 12 Apr 2025

Los Angeles ▶ Monterey ▶ San Francisco ▶ San Diego ▶ Ensenada ▶ Los Angeles

CRUISE NO. X516

PRINCESS STANDARD FARE FROM PP

INTERIOR	£549
BALCONY	£799
MINI-SUITE	£1,049
SUITE	£2,699

Eastern Caribbean with Martinique

10 NIGHTS • 6 PORTS

DEPARTURE DATE
Enchanted Princess 26 Nov 2024

Fort Lauderdale ▶ Princess Cays ▶ St. Thomas ▶ Dominica ▶ St. Lucia ▶ Martinique ▶ Antigua ▶ Fort Lauderdale

CRUISE NO. N442

PRINCESS STANDARD FARE FROM PP

INTERIOR	£799
BALCONY	£1,199
MINI-SUITE	£1,599
SUITE	£3,479



BALBOA PARK, SAN DIEGO



BEACH, PRINCESS CAYS



SUGAR BEACH, ST. LUCIA



GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE, SAN FRANCISCO



CINQUE TERRE, GENOA



Sun Princess and Star Princess

Heralding a new era of travel, this season sees our largest ever ships join the Princess fleet. Making a grand entrance in February 2024 is Sun Princess, with Star Princess following in her wake in summer 2025. Here, more is more – with room for 4,300 guests across a series of dynamic, shape-shifting spaces. From the glass-wrapped, transforming dome and next-level piazza to the privately decked cabana staterooms, our celestial ships are ready to take you on a sparkling new adventure.

MORE TIME ASHORE See the sights during the day and experience the nightlife after dark with late night (9pm or later), or overnight calls.

Prices shown are subject to availability based upon 2 adults sharing the lowest available grade within the stateroom type specified. Prices and availability are correct at time of publishing and may go up or down. *Discount of up to 30% is applicable on selected 2025 departures when making a new booking by 4 March 2024. Offer is subject to cabin availability. Discount amount varies by cruise and stateroom type. Prices shown are subject to availability based upon 2 adults sharing the lowest available grade within the stateroom type specified. Prices and availability are correct at time of publishing and may go up or down. 30% Discount applies to, but is not limited to: R511, H508, H509, R502, R504, R506, R508, R509, B513, U502, U503, U504, A515, N513, G510. Higher prices were in effect from 3 July to 13 December 2024 on all included 2025 cruises. Please note the discount has already been applied to prices here and on our website. Applicable to the first two guests in a stateroom only. Offer is combinable with the £50 deposit. £50pp low deposit applies to all passengers. If cruise falls within 90 days before departure, then full balance would be required as per standard terms and conditions. We reserve the right to withdraw this offer in whole or on individual cruises at any time. Offer is available from 13 December 2023 - 4 March 2024, and applies to cruises in this campaign only.





IS CRUISE FIT FOR ALL?

Making ships more accessible is a major concern for the cruise industry, with numerous providers stepping up to the challenge.

Gillian Carmoodie looks at the work that's been done so far and explains why there is plenty still to do



Considerable efforts towards being fully accessible and, in turn, creating a more equal society are currently underway throughout the transport sector. At the helm of this progress is the cruise industry, which has received praise in recent years for its willingness to innovate in order to cater for passengers with disabilities.

In recent years, many older ships have undergone extensive refits to facilitate wider access, while upcoming ships now have disability requirements incorporated at the drawing board. In fact, many experts say the cruise industry is doing more to tackle the issue than other areas of the travel sector, yielding a reputation for being informed, welcoming and disability friendly.

“As someone with a physical disability, I personally think cruises are the most accessible way to travel,” says Chelsea Bear, a content creator who has cerebral palsy. Bear isn’t alone in her opinion. In the past five years, 12 per cent of disabled adults have embarked on a cruise, according to figures sourced from the Open Doors Organisation.

In the 2022 Department for Transport Accessibility Survey, 89 per cent of disabled maritime passengers said they were satisfied with assistance received while travelling. More recently, in the 2023 State of the Cruise Industry survey by CLIA, 82 per cent of cruise travellers who have limited mobility, or are travelling with someone who does, say that cruise is the only travel option for them.

“Cruise is making great strides in accessibility, which is why disabled travellers view it as a viable way of seeing the world”

A CLIA spokesperson explained: “Cruise is accessible to a broad range of travellers, including those who would otherwise be unable to travel due to physical, neuro, sensory or other challenges. A holiday at sea is considered an essential and key factor in many travellers’ lives, with cruise lines fulfilling the requirement of travellers with mobility challenges.”

The latest estimates from the Department for Work and Pensions’ Family Resources Survey indicate that 24 per cent of the UK population live with a disability of some kind. As the number of people seeking accessible options grows, it makes business sense for cruise lines to meet increasing requirements, in addition to demonstrating goodwill and inclusivity to disabled passengers.

Jon Fletcher, CEO, The Wheelie Good Travel Company, says: “Cruise is making great strides in accessibility and inclusivity, which is why more disabled travellers view it as a viable way of seeing the world. For cruise lines, being more accessible is not just ethical and inclusive – it can be commercially savvy, too.”

Indeed, a recent survey by GfK found that potential income from passengers with access needs currently equates to £149 billion.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The cruise industry has received praise in recent years for being informed about passengers’ disability issues; Royal Caribbean’s accessible staterooms range from 159 sqft to 298 sqft

EVOLUTION OF ACCESSIBILITY

Since the cruise industry began its mission to make ships more accessible, initial efforts have mostly focused on catering for mobility issues and improving ease of passage. As well as offering assistance at boarding and widening doorways, many cruise lines now provide more spacious cabins, adapted wet rooms and lowered sinks, as well as reserved seating within restaurants, theatres and cinemas.

Royal Caribbean, for example, stipulates that all doorways must be at least 32 inches wide to allow wheelchairs through, while staterooms must possess a minimum 5-foot turning radius within. “Cruise ships have evolved into architectural marvels with increasing accessibility,” says Ron Pettit, director of disability inclusion & ADA compliance at Royal Caribbean Group.

“There are more accessible stateroom options, including unique accessible stateroom accommodations that you won’t find anywhere else, and a two-storey urban loft suite on our Oasis-class ships like *Wonder of the Seas*. This class also features the only carousels at sea, and they are accessible to wheelchair users.”

The pandemic also brought the welcome addition of touch-free access via automatic doors, which was well received by the mobility community. Some lines, including Holland America Line, Marella Cruises and P&O Cruises, go further still, assigning a member of staff to each disabled passenger on board. And on most lines, bringing a mobility device and/or an assistance dog aboard is usually possible.

In addition to mobility provision, the blind or visually impaired can usually request an



“Disabled guests, like everyone, want to explore the ports of call. Too often this can be difficult and prohibitively expensive”

orientation tour of their chosen ship, while it is common to now find braille signage situated alongside doors and lifts and inside restaurant menus. Elsewhere, a ship library will usually proudly stock an audio-book collection.

Meanwhile, passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing can make use of hearing loops and assistive hearing systems, which are fitted throughout most ships, as well as portable room kits, cabin teletypewriters and visual-tactile systems. Captions are frequently provided on televisions and in safety videos while sign language interpretation – usually via ASL – is increasingly common. More recently, as the definition of inclusivity expands, lines have also tried to ensure they are just as suitable for those with non-visible disabilities, too. Now, those with autism and diabetes can cruise without the concerns they may have had in previous years.

Busy check-in points can sometimes be challenging for autistic individuals. One solution is offering priority check-in at quieter muster points during safety drills, as well as low volume entertainment, dietary modifications, respite sessions and private activities. Autistic children can play with special, tailor-made toys while guided tours of the ship serve special interests and boost camaraderie among families affected by autism.





“There is increasing focus on guests with non-apparent disabilities such as autism and other intellectual disabilities,” says Pettit. “Almost ten years ago, and in collaboration with Autism on the Seas, we introduced the first-ever Autism Friendly programme on board our Royal Caribbean Group ships, which addresses the needs of individuals with autism, Down’s Syndrome and other disabilities during a cruise vacation experience.”

Passengers with diabetes, meanwhile, can also tap into the accessibility efforts thanks to healthier catering, early access to menus, insulin refrigeration, access to on-board medical teams and even a spare sharps bin if required. “The whole travel industry is increasingly aware of less visible disabilities,” says Fletcher. “It has to be remembered that no two disabled guests are the same and each may have very individual needs.”

STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Despite the clear progress, numerous problems remain. This is especially relevant to more niche parts of the industry such as river cruising, where smaller dimensions limit accessibility potential. Meanwhile, expedition cruises are primarily marketed at those capable of being more active. Currently, the largest and newest cruise ships are closest to being fit for all but not every base has yet been covered. Having widened doors and alternative dining options are steps in the right direction but, even now, it seems that a ship’s accessibility is limited by factors beyond the physical vessel itself.

For example, it is not unheard of for passengers with mobility issues to find themselves stranded onboard their cruise ship at certain locations. This may be because a particular port is not

adequately prepared for meeting accessibility needs or a tender, needed for disembarking, cannot offer a ramp.

Granted, in these scenarios, cruise lines often go above and beyond to offer their disabled passengers special alternatives. This may include a spa treatment at a heavily discounted rate or being able to enjoy a quiet lunch in an opulent on-board restaurant. Even when passengers with a disability are able to go ashore, another difficulty can be a lack of ship-sponsored excursions that are wheelchair-accessible or that take into consideration less obvious issues. A bustling tour may be stressful for someone with autism while a whistle-stop lunch may prove too rushed for a diabetic.

Fletcher explains: “We have to recognise that disabled guests, like everyone else, want to explore the ports of call. All too often this can be made both difficult and prohibitively expensive on the rare occasion an accessible excursion is available. Cruise lines and port agents should consider working with excursion providers that are accessible and affordable. Virgin Voyages and Celebrity Cruises use new technology to make it easier for disabled guests to go ashore. In addition, Virgin Voyages has an adjustable gang plank while Celebrity Cruise Line uses a wheelchair accessible tender on their newest class of ship.”

What disabled cruisers can take heart from, however, is the knowledge that the industry is aware of these existing issues. Speaking at the 2023 MedCruise General Assembly in Corfu last year, Michele Bosco, product and operations manager for Princess Cruises, said: “I think there’s more to improve from the shoreside point of view at the moment, rather than on board.”

Until cruise lines take more steps to improve accessibility beyond the ships themselves, can the industry truly claim it is fit for all? ●

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Sign language is increasingly common; some staterooms now include ample turning room for wheelchairs; Royal Caribbean’s carousels at sea are accessible to wheelchair users, too



In
conversation
with...



SCAN TO DISCOVER
MORE INTERVIEWS

Janet Parton

Celestyal's vice-president of business development UK, Europe and Australia speaks to **Will Payne** about her first few months in the role and the line's ambitious plans for 2024

“I don't think my feet have touched the ground,” Parton says, summarising her first three months at the helm of Celestyal's business development operation in the UK, Europe and Australia. “It has been a fantastic whirlwind. We're sort of treating the business as a start-up, so there's lots and lots to do, specifically in the UK, but it is a really exciting project to be involved with.”

Parton says she is adopting a “no holds barred” approach to her ambitions with the line, having already plotted out a three-year growth plan despite having only “scratched the surface” of the company so far.

TRADE IMPORTANCE

Parton's main target is to increase engagement with the UK trade, which was demonstrated in November 2023 with the announcement that Celestyal plans to double its sales team, overhaul its online trade hub and introduce a dedicated agent training scheme. These targets underpin Parton's overall strategy to build “established, deep and



mutually beneficial” relationships with agents in 2024 through ship visits, wave-focused incentives and training days.

“Agents are a pivotal part of our journey, they are going to be our success,” Parton says. “We really value our trade relationships, many of which were forged before I joined, and we now want to enhance those we already have while building new ones.”

For Celestyal, 2023 was about laying new foundations, Parton explains, which involved a major overhaul of the company's internal processes. It also meant increasing the line's staffing budget and reshaping its long-term strategy. Having established these building blocks, Celestyal is now prepared to roll out several new initiatives in 2024,

“AGENTS ARE PIVOTAL TO US. WE WANT TO ENHANCE OUR EXISTING TRADE RELATIONSHIPS WHILE BUILDING NEW ONES



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Janet Parton joined Celestyal last summer from Globus Group; Celestyal Journey is the line's latest ship; Parton wants to make agents' jobs easier

including a consumer-focused wave campaign underpinned by a trade incentive competition.

Having launched on 18 December and lasting until the end of February this year, the company's peaks initiative offers discounts from sailings of up to 75 per cent and single supplements of 30 per cent. The trade incentive is available on the line's new-look online trade portal, which is part of Celestyal's refocused "digital-first" mentality, Parton explains. "We want to make it really easy for travel agents to do business with us," she says, "so having this one-stop-shop portal will help them find everything they need to help sell us."

Agents will be able to download marketing templates, window cards and email assets directly from the hub. There will also be a wave calendar mapping out the line's peak season campaign as well as a meet the team section and, in a further bid to bolster trade ties, Celestyal will implement

“ HAVING THIS ONE-STOP-SHOP PORTAL WILL HELP AGENTS FIND EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO HELP SELL CELESTYAL CRUISES

a dedicated telephone number for agents which will act as a direct helpline.

Although a robust digital framework will underpin much of Celestyal's engagement with the trade in 2024, the importance of in-person events, fam trips and ship visits is not lost on Parton. "It is slightly more difficult for us as we don't have a ship in the UK as we homeport out of Athens, but we absolutely intend to get travel agents on board next year

through a series of fam trips," she says.

"I don't have exact numbers at this stage, but we're looking to invite travel agents in the hundreds."

These trips will be available throughout Celestyal's product range, including its three- and four-night port-intensive cruises which run over several weekends throughout the year.

And when it comes to attracting new-to-cruise business to Celestyal, Parton urges agents to focus on one thing: the destination. "You're not going on [a Celestyal three- or four-night cruise] to see the ship," she says. "You're going on that cruise to experience the incredible destinations." ●



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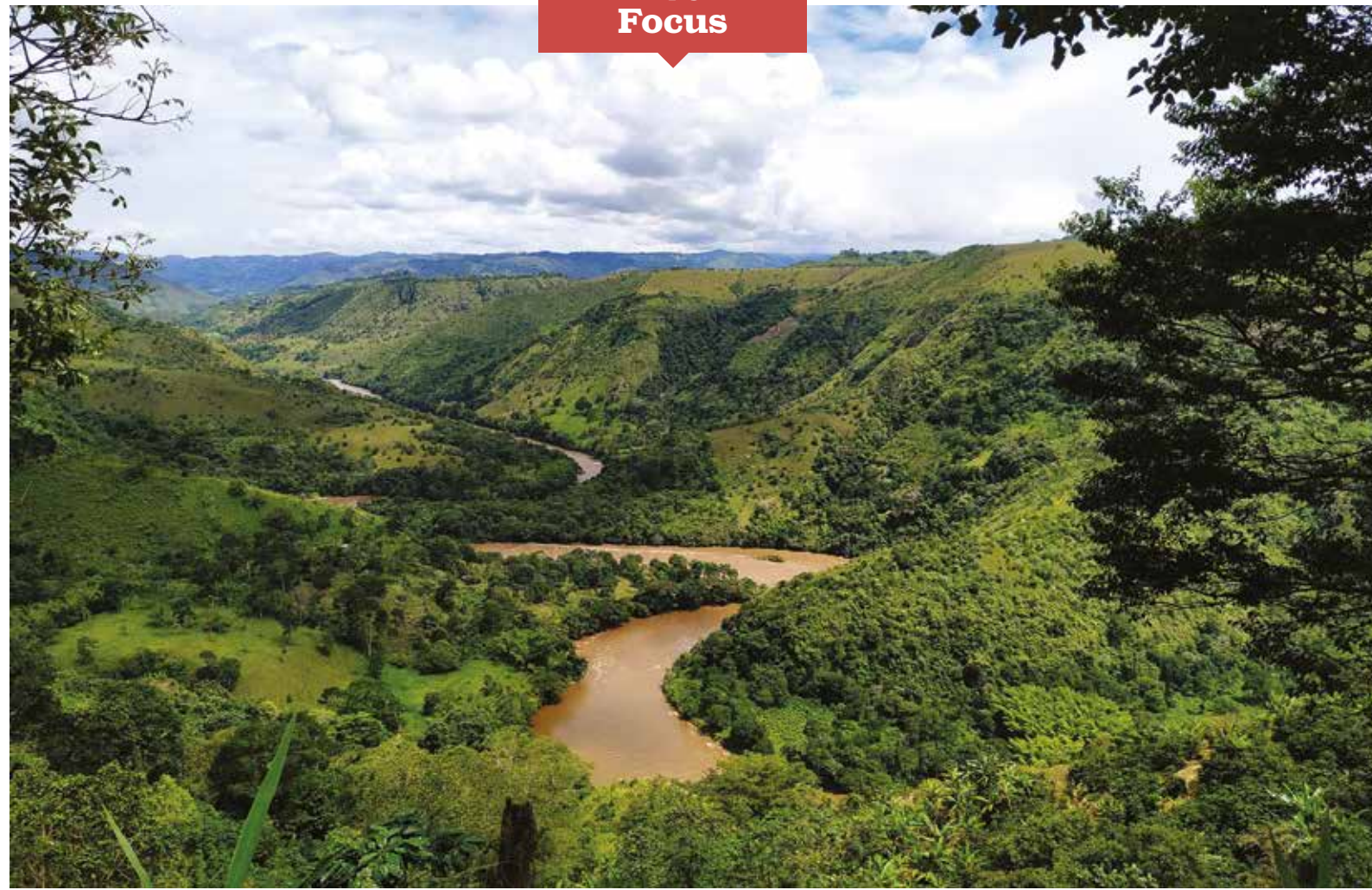
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The majestic Magdalena

Besides snowy mountains, tropical beaches and a rich musical tradition, Colombia is endowed with a natural beauty which captivates all who visit, writes **Gilly Pickup**

Celebrated novelist Gabriel García Márquez described the Magdalena as the 'River of Life' and at almost 1,000 miles long, this mighty waterway plays a vital role in connecting various regions of the country. It encompasses a diverse range of landscapes, from deep valleys, expansive plains, grasslands and

mountain habitats to dense forests of Andean oak and Spanish cedar. It's inspired so many famous works of art, music and literature that it has become a symbol of the nation's identity.

This majestic river has seen the rise and fall of various indigenous civilisations over the centuries, leaving behind ancient settlements and archaeological treasures. Today, the

river basin is home to around 80 per cent of Colombia's population, a melting pot of people of Indigenous, European and African ancestry.

The area hosts an enormous amount of wildlife, too, from river turtles, iguanas, crocodiles and pelicans to species endemic to the region: for instance, the Amazon River dolphin, Andean woolly monkey, howler monkey



SCAN THE CODE TO
DISCOVER MORE RIVER
CRUISE DESTINATIONS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

The traditional way of life is on display in Cartagena; the UNESCO-listed Santa Cruz de Mompox is well worth a visit; revel in a Carnaval celebration in Barranquilla; Cartagena's famous walled city was built to keep pirates at bay

“It’s the perfect option for those who have sailed other exotic rivers and are looking for their next adventure”

and spectacled bear – so-called because of the white patches often surrounding their eyes. Also found here are around 1,800 bird species – that’s more than in North America and Europe combined – which include the world’s largest flying bird, the majestic Andean condor. Colombia is also home to some of the most diverse and colourful butterfly populations in the world. No wonder AmaWaterways co-founders Rudi Schreiner and Kristin Karst fell in love with this country and became determined to share it with their guests.

SHOWCASING THE MAGDALENA

The line will soon have two ships dedicated to this majestic waterway: the 60-passenger *AmaMagdalena* and 64-passenger *AmaMelodia*. These floating boutique hotels are designed to maximise the picturesque views along the Magdalena River, with both on track to start cruising in November 2024 and June 2025 respectively, making AmaWaterways the first major river cruise line to do so.

Both ships will offer spacious signature twin balcony design staterooms, while guests will be able to relax and unwind in the ship’s sun deck pool, have a massage in the spa or workout in the fitness room. Except for four weeks in September and October, the vessels will sail year-round between Cartagena and Barranquilla.

“We expect this unique programme to be hugely popular, appealing to those who want to immerse themselves in the destination without compromising on luxury,” says Alex Loizou, director of sales & marketing, Mundy Cruising. “It’s the perfect option for those who have sailed other exotic rivers, perhaps the Mekong or Nile and are looking for

their next adventure, as well as those who have previously cruised European rivers and are looking for something more unusual or simply those fascinated by Colombia, who want to explore in comfort and safety.”

Clients have a choice between two seven-night itineraries, the Magic of Colombia and Wonders of Colombia, both of which will operate between Cartagena and Barranquilla, the main difference being that each starts and ends in reverse ports. Itineraries will offer a raft of curated experiences, for instance, a carnival celebration in Barranquilla with live musical performances reserved exclusively for AmaWaterways passengers.

Selling tips

1 Highlight the fact that Colombia is an emerging destination, enjoying stability and economic prosperity after decades of conflict.

2 Emphasise too that some of Colombia’s most remote areas are difficult to reach by land but much more easily explored via the river. An AmaWaterways river cruise is ideal for those who want to explore this region in comfort and safety.

3 For wildlife-loving clients, highlight the sheer number of animals and bird species that can be seen here and that they are unlikely to spot elsewhere.





EXPERT VIEW

“Rivers around the world are always some of the most popular holiday experiences. When we learned about AmaWaterways going to Colombia we were thrilled and couldn’t wait to share the news. As soon as the first email was received by our clients the phone started ringing, so we are expecting demand to be high and are excited to sell this wonderful new destination.”

Clare Dudley, managing director,
Ponders Travel

History lovers can sign up for walking tours in the likes of Palenque, named the first ‘free city’ in the Americas, where guests can dance along to live indigenous music during a Drum Rhythms and Freedom Historical Tour. Then there’s the UNESCO-listed former river port Santa Cruz de Mompox. Back in the day, the town was considered so safe from pirate attacks that it was chosen by many to safely stash their gold. Today it is renowned for its fine filigree jewellery.

SOMETHING NEW

Dan Roche, founder of Crui.se, an online travel agent specialising in river cruises, believes the new itineraries will be a hit. “People have an innate sense of adventure and as new waterways open up, the Magdalena will become a well-travelled route for people of all ages.



“Much of South America remains untravellered by UK and European audiences; however, as it becomes more accessible and travellers share their experiences, we expect demand to grow. We’re confident that the quality that Ama brings to river cruising will lead more customers to explore waters unknown.”

While in Colombia, travellers can extend their AmaWaterways adventure with optional pre-cruise land packages in Medellín and Cartagena or a post-cruise land package in Panama City. In Medellín, the country’s second largest city, guests can opt for a three-night stay and witness the incredible transformation the destination has undergone over the years. Medellín is now firmly on the tourist map after going through a period of regeneration, which can be witnessed via storytelling tours led by friendly guides and residents from diverse backgrounds.

Travellers seeking a three-night post-cruise land package can venture to the isthmus where North and South America meet in Panama City, giving guests the chance to visit a tropical rainforest and learn more about the indigenous Emberá people.

“There is so much more to Colombia than its dramatic beauty,” says AmaWaterways UK & sales director Andrea Stafford. “Whether you want to explore colourful cities brimming with music, hike through lush rainforests or go bird watching in one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet, a trip

on the Magdalena will leave you with lasting memories.

“The geography of the region means that some more remote areas are hard to reach by land but more easily explored from the river,” Stafford continues.

“For that reason, a cruise here is a great option for both established river cruisers looking for an exciting new destination as well as non-cruisers wanting to explore South America in a hassle-free way.”

The seven-night Magic of Colombia cruise sailing from Barranquilla to Cartagena on AmaMagdalena is priced from £5,115pp on full board basis, and includes return economy flights and group transfers. Guests can combine this with a three-night pre-cruise package in Medellín from £6,130pp in a Category C cabin based on double occupancy. There’s also the option to remove flights and transfers, reducing the price to £3,105pp. ●

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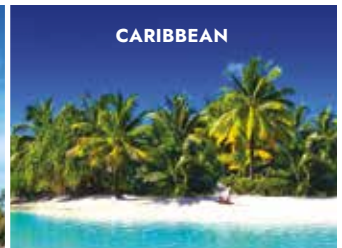
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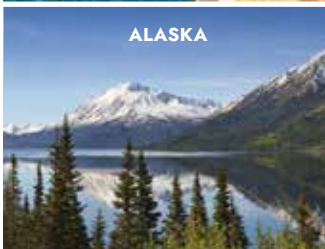
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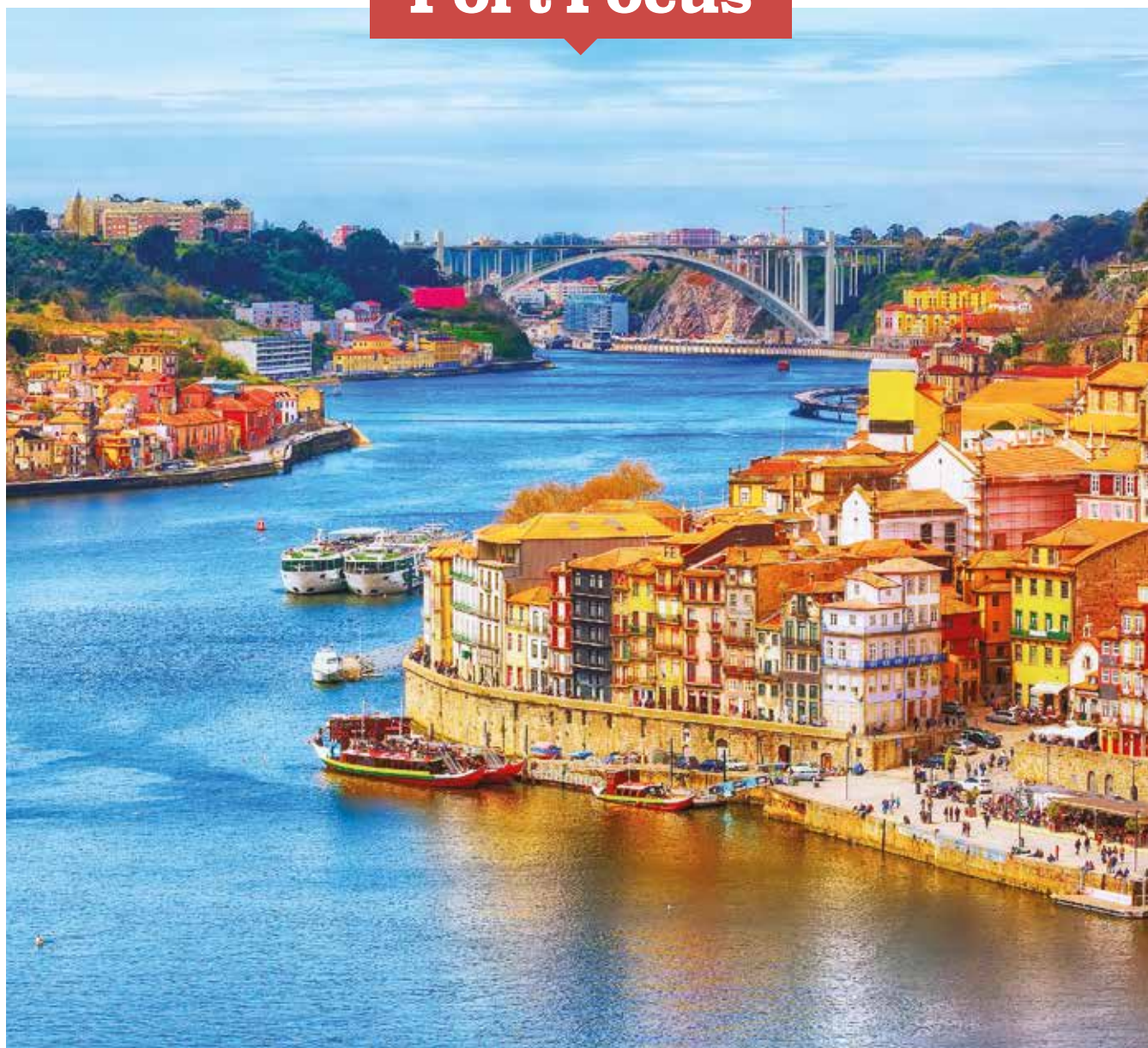
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Port Focus



EXPLORING PORTO

Positioned at the mouth of the Douro, the Portuguese city has been mesmerising cruisers for years with its baroque churches, cobblestone streets and attractive plazas

Porto may be Portugal's second city in name, but it's certainly not second best. Visitors can lose themselves in the labyrinthine streets of Ribeira, the UNESCO-listed old town, stopping off for salt cod fritters or a signature Francesinha sandwich – a heart attack-inducing concoction of ham, beef and sausage topped with a beer and cheese sauce, and served with a fried egg and a side of fries. Once refuelled, they can cross the Eiffel-inspired Dom Luis I bridge to Gaia and admire the city's blue azulejo tiles while sipping the world's best port.



Highlights

SÃO BENTO STATION

São Bento's front hall is decorated with dramatic Jorge Colaço-designed azulejos (hand-painted tiles). The 22,000-plus azulejos depict historic events, such as the battle of Valdevez (1140); the arrival of King João I and Philippa of Lancaster in Porto (1387); and Henry the Navigator's conquest of Ceuta (1415), which took around 10 years to paint.

LIVRARIA LELLO

Built in 1906, this neo-Gothic bookstore is renowned for its stained-glass skylight. Its twisting staircase is said to have provided JK Rowling, who lived and worked as an English teacher in Porto

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

São Bento's exquisitely decorated front hall; sample wine from the well-stocked barrels in Vila Nova de Gaia; take a tour of the Palácio da Bolsa; the striking interior of Livraria Lello attracts Harry Potter fans

between 1991-93, with the inspiration for the Harry Potter series. As such, Livraria Lello is invariably packed with Potter fans all trying to snap a selfie on the famous stairs.

PALÁCIO DA BOLSA

The city's stunning neoclassical former stock exchange pays tribute to Porto's past and present money merchants. Half-hour guided tours set off every 30 minutes and take in the glass-domed Pátio das Nações (Hall of Nations) and Salão Árabe (Arabian Hall) with its sensational stucco walls.

GAIA

In Vila Nova de Gaia, port houses and wine cellars line the picturesque waterfront. All offer guided tours that reveal the port's fascinating history, with insight into the ageing process and the different styles that are still produced today – and, of course, the chance to sample white, tawny and ruby versions.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The Yeatman's rooftop terrace offers a five-star view of the city; Porto's well-run public transport system makes it simple to get around

Food & drink

MANTEIGARIA

Pastéis de nata (flaky custard tarts dusted with cinnamon) can be found in bakeries throughout the city (Manteigaria gets our vote) and are best served piping hot. Feeling famished? Porto's famous Francesinha sandwich will fill the hole. Try it at Café Santiago near the Mercado do Bolhão.

YEATMAN

For something a little more upmarket, there is The Yeatman's two-Michelin-star restaurant, where talented chef Ricardo Costa's creative tasting menu showcases Portugal's huge range of fish and other fresh produce.

“**LIVRARIA LELLO'S STAIRCASE IS SAID TO HAVE INSPIRED THE HARRY POTTER SERIES**”



Shopping & transport

Port – the city's signature dessert wine, of course – isn't the region's only export. Portugal is the largest producer of cork, which is made into all manner of fashionable products, including wallets and handbags. Brightly coloured cans of sardines also make a fun souvenir, as do hand-crafted azulejos.

Getting around

Porto is well served by public transport – think metro, bus, trams and a funicular – but walking is the best way to move about: everywhere has something of interest. Just don't forget to pack a pair of flat shoes for the cobblestone streets and hills.

Best Local Tips



“The upmarket seaside neighbourhood of Foz is well worth a visit. This is where the Douro meets the Atlantic and it's home to some great cafés and independent shops.”

MATILDE GOMEZ
Optician



“If you love art, head to Rua de Miguel Bombarda, home of Porto's most important art galleries. Here, you'll see the work of some great new artists from around the world.”

JOAO DE SILVA
Art student

Itineraries

Celebrity Cruises

Celebrity's 13-night Western Europe Transatlantic voyage, departing 19 October 2025, visits Porto on day four of the cruise. Prices start from £855pp.

celebritycruises.com

Emerald Cruises

Luxury line Emerald has a Secrets of the Douro cruise, roundtrip from Porto, with multiple departure dates in 2024. Prices for the 29 June departure start from £2,614pp.

emeraldcrucises.co.uk

No place like home

Cruise passengers searching for their hearts' desires needn't look further than their own back yards, writes Sarah Holt



SCAN THE CODE
TO DISCOVER MORE
CRUISE DESTINATIONS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

South Stack, Anglesey offers an unparalleled seascape; there are many puffin nesting sites dotted around the coast of the British Isles

The UK's cruise industry has blossomed in recent years. Today's itineraries give passengers the opportunity to explore everywhere from the Isles of Scilly, 28 miles off the south coast of the England, to the Shetland Islands, more than 100 miles from the tip of the Scottish mainland. And now, lines are reporting that interest in the British Isles is showing no sign of stopping, forcing operators to become ever more imaginative with their itineraries while adding new ports of call to keep up with demand.

"The future looks bright for cruising around the British Isles," says Martin Lister, head of itinerary planning and destination experience at Fred Olsen Cruise Lines. "Post pandemic, British Isles cruises saw a rise in popularity, becoming a way of staying closer to home, but still getting the excitement of discovering new places and the comfort and ease that comes with it."

Phil Gardner, chief commercial officer for Ambassador Cruise Line, meanwhile, adds: "With so much of the world to discover, Ambassador's range of British Isles itineraries remain incredibly popular with our guests. The UK is rich in diverse cultures, customs and traditions, and demand for experiences that showcase all that the country has to offer – from remote, far-flung islands to iconic, vibrant cities and charming coastal towns – isn't showing any sign of decreasing."

BRITISH BUZZ

This May will see one of Celebrity's Edge-class ships homeport in the UK for the first time. *Celebrity Apex*, with its trademark Magic Carpet viewing platform and rooftop garden, will homeport in Southampton and sail itineraries to the Norwegian fjords, Spain and Portugal, Bruges, Amsterdam, Iceland and Ireland, calling at ports around the British Isles, such as Kirkwall, Glasgow and Cork, along the way.

Following the introduction of *Ambience* to its fleet, Ambassador Cruise Line will offer sailings from seven destinations outside of its homeport of Tilbury in 2024 and into 2025. Cruises will depart from Newcastle, Dundee, Edinburgh Leith, Liverpool, Belfast, Bristol and Falmouth to give guests the chance to cruise from ports that are closer to their homes.

Among all the cruise ports around the UK, it's Holyhead that seems to be attracting the most buzz. Several ships will add the north Wales coastal town to their summer itineraries for the first time this year. Windstar's *Star Pride* will visit Holyhead as part of its 11-day The Emerald Isle & Scottish Highlands itinerary, departing 30 May, while *Star Legend* will call in during its 11-day Atlantic Archipelago Adventures itinerary, departing 16 June.

There are more than 600 castles in Wales and Holyhead is the gateway to some of the best of them. From port, visitors can reach both Caernarfon and Conwy Castle in less than 40 minutes. Built during Medieval times, they're part of the Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd UNESCO world heritage site along with Beaumaris and Harlech.

The spotlight will also be on Portrush in Northern Ireland this year, as Windstar becomes the only cruise line to feature the port on its itineraries, giving it that extra air of exclusivity. Located on the Causeway Coast, the town is just a 20-minute drive from The Giant's Causeway, with its 60 million-year-old, climbable basalt columns, rope bridges and lattice of walking trails. Other highlights include beach walks, RIB rides and visits to the cliff-top Dunluce Castle, 10 minutes from the town centre.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Explore the rugged beauty of Glen Coe in the Scottish Highlands; Cobh harbour in Ireland has a fascinating history



EXPERT VIEW

“An increasing number of UK and Irish guests are choosing to cruise around the British Isles with Princess. Guests can experience the UK and Irish coastline from a whole new perspective, spot coastal wildlife such as Minke whales and bottlenose dolphins, and learn about thousands of years’ worth of history.”

Eithne Williamson, vice president UK & Europe, Princess Cruises

FOREVER POPULAR

While cruise lines continue to innovate, a few places remain perennially popular and will always be a selling point, especially for first-time cruisers. For example, Cork, the second largest city in Ireland, offers plenty with which to fill a day ashore, such as visiting Blarney Castle. This 600-year-old castle, with its toothy ramparts and turrets, is home to the world-famous Blarney Stone, which legend says will grant the gift of eloquence to anyone who kisses it.

Shore excursions around the British Isles are becoming increasingly hands-on. Recently launched is Fred Olsen’s Barony Mill tour from Kirkwall in Orkney, which gives passengers the chance to visit the only bere-grinding mill in the UK. Bere is an ancient form of barley that has been grown and milled in Orkney for more than 300 years and this excursion gives guests the chance to meet the current bere miller and discover their long-held secrets.

Princess Cruises’ Queen Mother’s Castle of Mey excursion, meanwhile,

Selling tips

1 Emphasise how effortless a British Isles cruise is by mentioning the breadth of departure ports, from Edinburgh to Portsmouth.

2 Hook in nature lovers by selling cruises that give them the opportunity to see the seals of Orkney, which make up 15 per cent of the world’s seal population.

3 Tell clients how cruising makes exploring the British Isles easy. For example, the alternative way to get to Kirkwall from the Scottish mainland is to make a six-hour ferry journey.

takes visitors through the doors of the Castle of Mey, which was once the Queen Mother’s summer residence. A guided tour will give passengers a peek at the Queen Mother’s former bedroom, library and castle gardens.

And with 6 June marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, Ambassador Cruise Line has planned a bespoke itinerary to commemorate the occasion. Sailing from London Tilbury on 4 June, the cruise will call in at Anglesey, the Isles of Scilly, Orkney, Honfleur and Cobh in Ireland and include a day at anchor off the Normandy coast on 6 June. ●

Itineraries

Norwegian Cruise Line

A 10-day British Isles: Ireland and England cruise, sailing roundtrip from Portsmouth on *Norwegian Star* is priced from £1,138pp, departing 8 May 2024.
ncl.com

Fred Olsen Cruises

Seven-night Wildlife and Culture of the Scenic Scottish Isles cruise, sailing round trip from Southampton on *Borealis* is priced from £899pp, departing 7 May 2024.
fredolsencruises.com

Ambassador Cruise Line

The line’s 13-night Round Britain D-Day 80th Anniversary Voyage, sailing round-trip from London Tilbury on *Ambience* is priced from £999pp, departing 4 June 2024.
ambassadorcruiseline.com



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CRUISE
Trade News

2024 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.



2024 DATES

Liverpool	March 21st	Belfast.....	June 6th
Leeds.....	April 11th	Edinburgh	June 26th
Maidstone	May 9th	Glasgow	June 27th



"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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LEFT Mariano Pinton's statue of the mythical siren Lorelei overlooks the breathtaking Rhine Valley

Fairytale voyage

From picture-book castles to storied medieval towns, **Dave Monk** embarks on a magical history tour on *Emerald Luna*

Early-morning mists are rising on the Moselle as I walk alone around the sun deck, taking a moment to watch the vineyards and villages glide slowly past. Standing on top of a river ship is one of the best places to greet a new day, with a rising sun and the soft chirrup of birdsong framing the verdant landscape.

I'm sailing through this painterly corner of Europe aboard *Emerald Luna* – the latest Star Ship in the Emerald Cruises fleet – where I'll be embarking on a journey of castles, monasteries and medieval towns. Beside all this is a rolling backdrop of steeples, patchwork fields and children waving from waterside camping sites. Starting in Frankfurt, we have the joy of sailing along the most beautiful part of the Rhine, between Rüdesheim and Koblenz, seeing ruined fortresses high on hillsides and hearing legends such as the maiden whose irresistible singing lured sailors to their doom at the Lorelei rock.

Our first visit is to Eberbach Abbey, a former Cistercian monastery where *The Name Of The Rose*, the middle-ages



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Eberbach Abbey, where *The Name of the Rose* was filmed; Emerald's cruises along the Moselle feature a range of excursions; enjoy the picturesque town of Bernkastel-Kues; cabins offer stunning river views and a modern interior

murder mystery starring Sean Connery, was filmed. From the 12th century, this was a major wine production centre, and one hall is still filled with ancient barrels and huge grape presses.

Back on board, we take a sharp turn at Koblenz to join the Moselle and stop at Bernkastel-Kues for a walk around the picturesque town, overlooked by the castle after which it was named. Our farthest point on the journey, Trier, is the oldest city in Germany, dating from the Roman era – visitors can still see the impressive black gate, baths and amphitheatre, which was the scene of bloody duels.

FULL OF TEMPTATION

Turning back along the Moselle, we arrive in charming Cochem, where the road to the church is lined with temptation in the form of ice cream

parlours, patisseries and wine shops. Later, we have a private visit to the town's castle, dating back to the year 1000. After seeing dining rooms and an old gambling den, we are entertained by a lute player singing traditional tunes while we taste the local wine.

At Koblenz, there is the chance to visit Marksburg castle – the only one to survive the purge of the German bastions by the French Sun King Louis XIV – though I opt to test some of the ship's onboard amenities instead. I swim in the pool on deck three, which is rather large for a river ship (at nights it is covered and transformed into a cinema), before taking one of the Emerald electric bikes out for a spin, cycling along the very same part of the Rhine that I used to enjoy as a teenager.

Our last full day is in Wiesbaden, home to grand avenues, villas and a casino, before sailing to our final port of Mainz, where we stay overnight before catching our flight home. I am tempted to visit the Gutenberg printing museum in the city but instead use some leftover ship credit on an 'inner calm' massage by wellness coach Jelena, who's also been overseeing the fitness classes.

SURPRISE PACKAGE

Marrying together the Rhine's historic German towns and bucolic countryside with the stylish, ultra-

Fast facts

180
guest capacity

47
crew

1
restaurant

1
pool





“Turning back along the Moselle, we arrive in Cochem, where the road is lined with temptation in the form of ice cream parlours and patisseries”

modern *Emerald Luna*, the ninth and latest in the Emerald Star-Ship fleet, is an interesting proposition for cruise travellers. The vessel, introduced in August 2022, is like a floating upmarket hotel. Glass doors swish open as you approach and the interior, adorned with mirrors, and floor-to-ceiling windows, breathes in the daylight.

My premium balcony cabin offered stunning river views and the modern interior – complete with an eye-catching pink chair and footstool – offered a relaxing base to retire to each evening. What’s more, the Horizon Bar had two suspended, open-sided shelves filled with spirits and bottles

of wine – unthinkable on an ocean ship that could sail into bad weather.

Passengers tap on and off the vessel using cards with QR codes and tune their personal audio devices to specific tour guides by pointing a scanner at a coloured card. Instead of printed paper, the following day’s schedule is displayed on large screens, with guests expected to take a photo on their phone for reference.

Those on board are mainly Brits with some Americans, Canadians and Australians on board, too, and the reduced numbers means it’s not long before we’re all acquainted. On most days there is the option of an Emerald Active excursion, such as hiking or

cycling, as well as Emerald Plus trips like the private visit to Cochem Castle. There was only one Discover More experience on our voyage – wine tasting at Schloss Johannisberg – which costs extra, but the complimentary trips are arguably just as good.

Regular river cruisers will know the joys of mooring right in the middle of towns, often late into the evening (or overnight), meaning you can stroll to bars, shops and restaurants and enjoy a drink or meal on shore the next morning. This voyage on *Emerald Luna* provides the opportunity to enjoy solo trips as well as escorted excursions, which is the perfect mix for a cruise holiday. 🍷

Selling tips

1 This itinerary is packed with cultural visits, so push to clients who want to broaden their horizons on their cruise holiday.

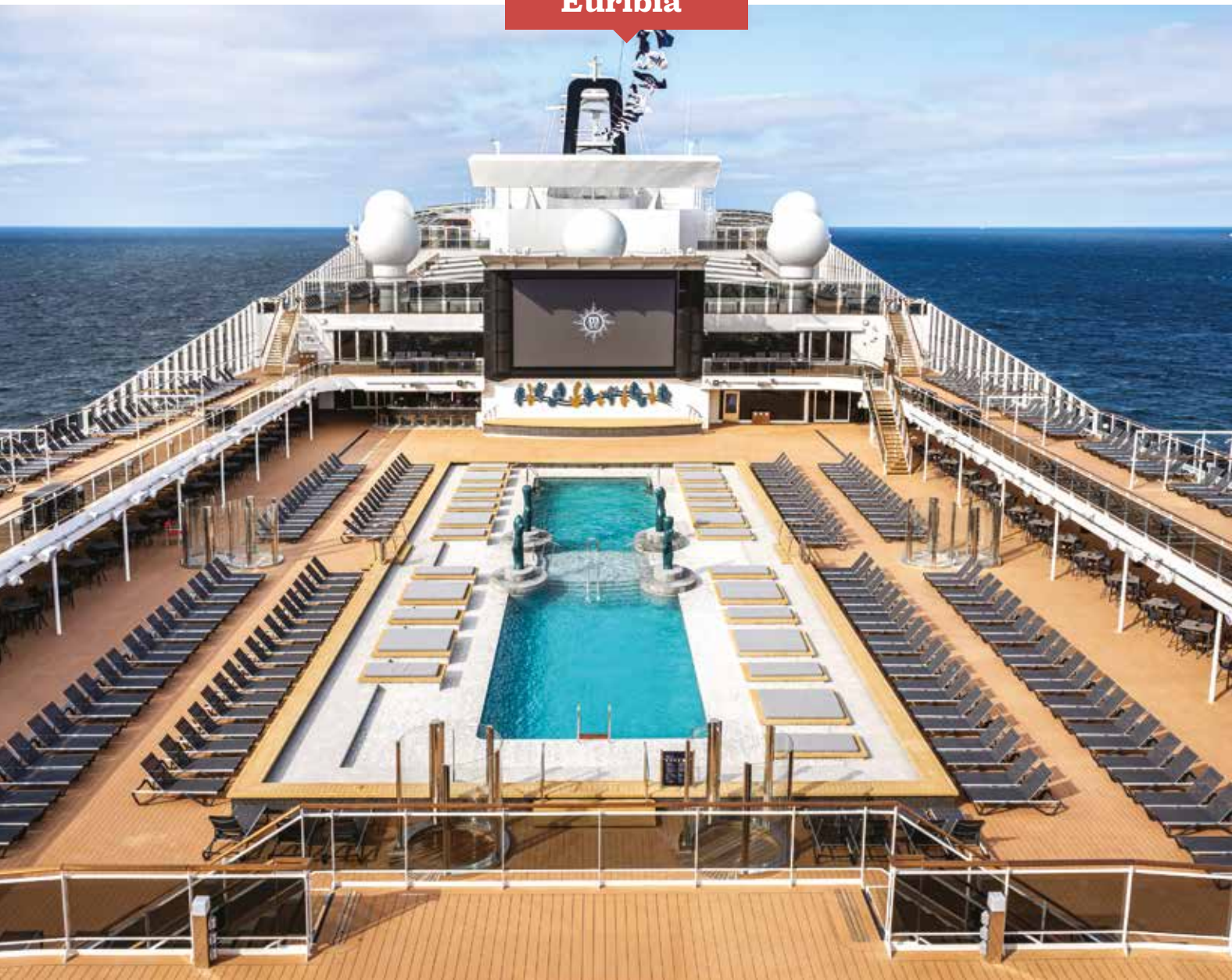
2 Emerald offers a range of excursions for all tastes, allowing guests to truly tailor their experience to their preferences.

3 *Emerald Luna* features a generously sized pool and other mod cons – highlight this to ocean cruisers who are considering a river but are perhaps yet to be fully convinced.

Details

The 11-day Rhine Castles & Moselle Vineyards cruise, visiting the likes of Utrecht, Koblenz, Cochem and more, departs 9 August 2024, with prices from £2,338pp.

**MSC
Euribia**



Epic Euribia

Kaye Holland reveals what's on offer for families and couples sailing on *MSC Euribia*, the 22nd vessel in MSC Cruises' growing fleet



“The vibe on *Euribia*, which can accommodate 6,327 passengers at full capacity, is very much Vegas-at-sea”

Named after the Greek goddess who harnessed the winds, weather and constellations, *MSC Euribia* is the latest addition to the MSC Cruises collection. Noticeable for its uniquely decorated hull, *Euribia* is the line's most environmentally advanced ship to date, thanks in part to a complex onboard wastewater treatment system. It's also the second MSC Cruises vessel to run on liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Sister ship to *Grandiosa* and *Virtuosa* in MSC's Meraviglia-Plus class category, *Euribia* was christened in Copenhagen by screen goddess Sophia Loren, before making its maiden call in Southampton ahead of its winter sailings around Northern Europe.

STYLE AND CHARACTER

The vibe on board *Euribia*, which can accommodate 6,327 passengers at full capacity, is very much Vegas-at-sea. The line's signature Swarovski-studded crystal staircase is present and correct, as is the two-storey Mediterranean-style promenade with its shiny, 80m LED dome – the longest at sea – that's used for spectacular hourly music and light shows. Restaurants and swimming pools, of which there are five, are spread strategically across the ship, making it easier for guests to move around.



Guests will find 2,491 rooms spanning four categories: interior, ocean view, balcony and suite. The latter is found in the MSC Yacht Club, a special tier of accommodation that certainly lives up to the luxury billing. Each suite features separate living areas and dining rooms, walk-in wardrobes and a balcony boasting a private whirlpool bath. The remaining categories aren't to be sniffed at, either, offering well appointed rooms with spacious wardrobes, TVs and minibars, and plenty of charging points.

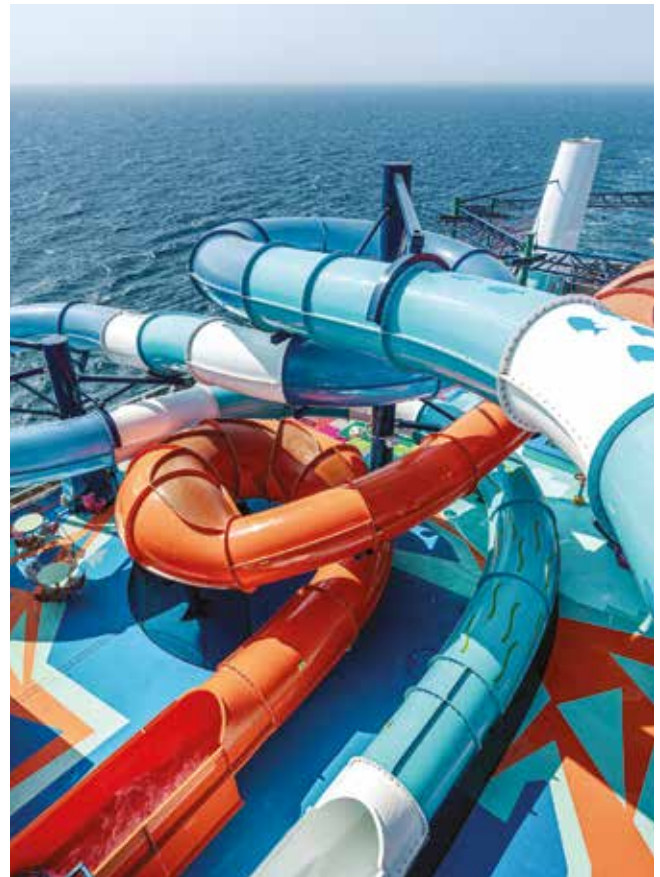
There's nothing to dislike about the subtle décor, which is punctuated by shades of ecru and espresso. Bathrooms are compact but can accommodate a toilet, small sink and shower replete with a glass door, as well as a vanity area equipped with a hairdryer.

DINE AND LEARN

Euribia is home to no fewer than 10 restaurants, five of which are classed as specialty venues and incur an extra charge. Room service is also available for a small fee. Repeat passengers will be familiar with venues such as HOLA!, a Mediterranean-inspired tapas offering from twice Michelin-starred Chef Ramón Freixa, the Jean-Philippe Maury chocolaterie, and the up-market Kaito Teppanyaki & Sushi Bar.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT *Euribia*'s top deck; *Euribia* is MSC's most environmentally advanced ship; *Euribia* will feature an 80m LED walkway; there are 2,491 staterooms to choose from







CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT *Euribia's* spa boasts a thermal area and a hair salon; the ship features several swashbuckling water slides; the perfect spot for sunset sipping; the ship offers Broadway-style shows; one of five on-board pools

Fast facts

6,327
passengers

1,711
crew

2,491
cabins

21
bars

Kids of all ages are well catered for, too, with seven carefully designed zones sure to keep everyone happy

New to *Euribia* is Le Grill – an elegant brasserie-style restaurant with a menu featuring moules frites, seafood platters, dry-aged beef and desserts like mille-feuille with mascarpone. There are also options for a pre- or post-dinner drink at the British-style pub Masters of the Sea, the champagne bar or – another first for *Euribia* – the digital-first Helios Wine Maker. Here, passengers can learn about whichever of the venue's 96 wines they have in their hand from their multi-touch table.

UNWIND AND RELAX

With five different swimming pools (four outdoor and one indoor), one of the largest waterparks at sea, a vast fitness area, a Sportsplex for court games and an interactive arcade area, there's never a dull moment on board *Euribia*. Although guests looking to unwind needn't worry, either. The ship's Aurea Spa offers 20 private treatment rooms, as well as steam rooms, saunas and aromatherapy areas, in addition to a salt room, walk-through shower and thalassotherapy pools.

Selling tips

1 There is entertainment galore on *MSC Euribia*, so highlight this to clients who want a wide range of activities throughout the day and during the evenings.

2 Much has been made of *MSC Euribia's* sustainability features – a potentially important selling point for clients who are conscious of keeping the oceans clean.

3 *MSC Euribia* features new restaurants and bars, including the unique Helios Wine Bar – keep this in mind for those who have sailed with the line before.

Kids of all ages are exceedingly well catered for, too. Seven zones have been carefully designed to keep little – and not-so-little – ones entertained. Baby Club Chicco Eco features a designated play area for under threes; meanwhile older children will love the new MSC Foundation Lab, where they can engage in sustainability-focused activities. The activities allow youngsters to get creative while addressing topics such as climate change and marine conservation.

When evening arrives, guests can enjoy Broadway-style shows in the Delphi Theatre before dancing their socks off in the reimagined Carousel Lounge, where a 15-piece band plays a wide selection of floor-fillers every night until the early hours. And it wouldn't be 'Vegas-at-sea' without the on-board casino and stylish Attic Club nightclub. ●

Details

A seven-night Northern Europe voyage on *MSC Euribia*, departing Copenhagen on 25 August 2024, is priced from £1,299pp.

Be brave in wave

Following 2023's *Cruise Trade News & CLIA Cruise Summit*, News UK's **Georgie Lamden** expands on the trends all agents should be looking out for in 2024

What were your key takeaways from the CTN/CLIA Cruise summit? Be brave in wave, as coined by CLIA UK & Ireland MD Andy Harmer. Despite the cost of living crisis, holidays have remained a priority for people in the UK this year. The number of passengers that set sail in 2023 far surpassed 2019 levels and predictions for 2024 remain positive, with further demand for cruise holidays expected.

How important are events such as these for the industry? Hugely. These types of events not only provide attendees with insight and knowledge about the current market but are also tailored to help businesses thrive – be that by enhancing product knowledge or sharing tools to increase sales. Plus, it's a great opportunity to network with both present and future clients.

At the event, you spoke about travel trends – what should agents be aware of over the next 12 months?

First of all, travelling off the beaten path. This is a trend that has been



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

News UK's cruise partnerships manager Georgie Lamden speaking at last year's *Cruise Trade News & CLIA Cruise Summit* in London

be visiting. Finally, restorative trips are on the rise, as travellers prioritise self-care, mental health and physical wellbeing. This is coupled with a desire for healthier eating options on ships, too.

increasing yearly, as travellers seek more authentic and local experiences. Travellers are looking to discover lesser-known destinations as well as those they've never visited before.

Younger travellers in particular are flocking to the places that have captivated them onscreen, with travel inspiration found anywhere from their smartphones to binge-worthy TV series. What's more, gastronomy plays an important part in the planning process for many travellers – from top restaurants to local favourites and cooking classes. This trend presents a great opportunity for cruise, with endless world-class dining experiences on board, as well as in the destination guests might

What are your predictions for the year ahead? With economic factors playing a role in purchasing decisions, it's likely that UK customers are going to appreciate the value-for-money element of a cruise holiday. The ability to tick off multiple destinations in one hit will also really give cruise holidays the edge on land-based alternatives.

For those travellers with more time on their hands, we expect there to be a rise in demand for longer trips. This demand has already been reflected in some of the itineraries being promoted in 2024 and beyond. When it comes to luxury, travellers will be looking for out of the ordinary destinations and unique experiences. This could range from small ship expedition cruises to travelling to parts of the world few people have ever been. ●



“**RESTORATIVE TRIPS ARE ON THE RISE, AS TRAVELLERS PRIORITISE MENTAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING**”

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