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WELCOME...

TO THE JANUARY ISSUE

January is often considered the worst month of the year. It's dark, cold, the festivities are over and the chocolates have either run out or are delaying you from starting your new year health kick.

But for me, the turn of the year is the perfect time to reflect on the successes of the previous 12 months while looking ahead to the next. For example, this time last year we were putting the final touches on our first ever Industry Report, which we launched at an intimate event in London at the start of February (watch this space, with volume two on its way soon).

This was followed up with the launch of our new podcast series, Cruise Corner, which has so far featured the likes of Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Ambassador Cruise Line and Princess Cruises. We can't wait to show you what we have in store for 2026.

Then, in September, we welcomed nearly 150 agents, cruise line executives and industry suppliers for our fourth annual Cruise Summit at News UK's Central London HQ and, as is tradition for *Cruise Trade News*, we ended the year with two glittering award ceremonies, the Wave Awards (p. 6) and Cruise Stars (p. 46).

On the cover: Shutterstock



ABOVE New Year is the ideal time to ponder past wins and future prospects

It's been a blockbuster year for the cruise industry too, and inside this issue you'll find the latest from the river, expedition and luxury sectors (p. 15), an in-depth look at the impact new pricing legislation could have on how you sell holidays (p. 41) and why Ambassador Cruise Line's first Caribbean fly-cruise vessel should be on your radar (p. 55).

So, here's to another successful 12 months and no matter what happens, *Cruise Trade News* will be primed and ready to capture every moment. Happy reading!

Will Payne
Editor

cruisetradenews.com

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AND THE WINNER IS...

Will Payne catches up with the winners of the Wave Awards 2025, who were crowned during a glittering ceremony at the Dorchester in November

Dubbed the ‘Oscars of Cruising’, the 11th iteration of the Wave Awards certainly lived up to the billing, with cruise industry professionals, travel agents and content creators descending on London’s Park Lane on 26 November for an evening of glitz, glamour and glory.

Welcome drinks sponsored by Regent Seven Seas Cruises kicked off proceedings before headline partner Virgin Voyages welcomed attendees to the gala dinner with a show-stopping performance by singer and West End star Fleur East.

During the ceremony, hosted by comedian and television presenter Sally Phillips, awards and prizes were handed out while Cunard offered a glimpse inside its onboard entertainment with a snippet from interactive murder mystery show, *Noir*.

Riviera Travel was the biggest winner on the night, picking up the coveted Grand Prix Award after triumphing in three categories, including Best Initiative for Attracting New to Cruise, Best Trade Sales Team and Best for Solo Travellers.

Two special gongs – The Peter Grant Award and a Special Recognition Award, which celebrate two individual cruise pioneers who’ve driven innovation and positive change throughout the sector – were won by Mundy Cruising’s Edwina Lonsdale and Steve Williams, respectively.

Seven consumer awards, which were voted for by readers of *Cruise Trade News*’ sister publication *World of Cruising*, saw Qatar win Favourite Cruise Destination. Meanwhile, Jenni Fielding (AKA Cruise Mummy) won Favourite Cruise Travel Influencer for the fourth year running.

A special thank you to our Wave Awards 2025 sponsors, which included Virgin Voyages (headline sponsor), Cunard (entertainment sponsor) Princess



Cruises (after party sponsor), The Independent (media partner) and Regent Seven Seas Cruises (welcome drink sponsor), as well as Marella Cruises, Riviera Travel, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, Travelzoo, Celestyal, Royal Caribbean International and Chewton Glen.

Throughout the night, we caught up with the winners to find out what it means to be named amongst the very best in the cruise industry.

“
Winning awards and getting that recognition from the trade is just incredible



Edwina Lonsdale, owner, Mundy Cruising

“It feels amazing and so wonderful to win this award. I’ve loved working with different groups of students, bringing them in and immersing them in the sector. It really re-energises people within the cruise industry, too. We’re setting up our programme for 2026, so watch this space – the support from the cruise lines has been fantastic.”

WINNER of the Peter Grant Award

Steve Williams

“It’s really humbling to receive this award. I’ve been in cruise for more than 20 years and in travel for nearly 40 years now. I love the industry, I love the people, and I love the cruise lines I’ve worked for. It means the world, especially this year. I miss everyone very, very much and I really hope that it won’t be too long before I get on my road to recovery and come back. Keep selling cruise!”

WINNER of the Special Recognition Award

Stuart Milan, president – North America, Riviera Travel

“It’s absolutely amazing to win these awards. It just shows how great a job the team has done. And to come away as the winners of the winners is just incredible – the best feeling ever. These awards are a testament to the work we’ve done over the last few years. We wouldn’t be here without our incredible trade partners and the work they put in. These events are so important.”

WINNER of Best Initiative for Attracting New to Cruise, Best Trade Sales Team, Best for Solo Travellers and the Grand Prix Award

Robbie O’Grady, The Cruise Room

“We are elated. It’s been a really tough year. And we’ve felt a bit of pressure having won last year, but we are so happy and so thankful. This award is huge; you cannot overestimate how important this is for us. We need to celebrate and shout about all the good things we’re doing and support each other to make this industry grow. We really need to get together and shout about these things. This is one of the most well-recognised awards, so it’s really good accreditation for what we do.”

WINNER of Best Independent/Solo Agent

Paul Beale, Regent Seven Seas Cruises

“We feel absolutely fabulous, over the moon! Representing ultra luxury as we do, to win these awards is absolutely incredible. Winning awards and getting that recognition from the trade is just incredible. To have this accolade in the venue we’re in is really top notch. It means so much to all of us at the company. We are absolutely stoked and couldn’t be happier.”

WINNER of Favourite Ultra Luxury Cruise Line and Best Accommodation Design

Jenni Fielding (AKA Cruise Mummy)

“This is amazing. I love the Wave Awards, it’s such a fantastic event and it’s such an honour, especially because it’s voted for by the public, it’s so nice to be recognised for all the work I do. I’m so happy. There aren’t any other awards like this, the Wave Awards stands out when it comes to recognising all the hard work we do.”

WINNER of Favourite Cruise Travel Influencer



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New year, new opportunities

► Despite ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as concerns around the United States' involvement in Venezuela, hundreds of travel professionals have tipped the cruise sector to reach new heights once again in 2026.

At the close of last year, travel agents and industry executives came together at the De Vere Beaumont Estate Hotel near Windsor for the CLIA Forum and Winter Ball,

where 97 per cent of respondents to a live Slido survey said they were optimistic about their cruise business in 2026. The survey also revealed that 39 per cent believe the biggest sales opportunity will come from the luxury sector, 27 per cent said the expedition sector and 21 per cent highlighted the river sector.

Prior to the flash poll, CLIA UK and Ireland managing director Andy Harmer OBE revealed that 2.4 million Brits took a cruise in 2024, representing a 41 per cent hike since 2013. This increase in demand has tracked with some of the UK's biggest travel agencies, including Hays Travel.



Continued overleaf



Speaker Dame Irene Hays praised the cruise sector after sales jumped 12 per cent in the last five years but urged operators to have a better understanding of the different trade distribution channels to support more agents and propel cruise even further.

"Coming out of Covid, Hays Travel was dominated by the short-term market, and cruise was only 17 per cent of our overall travel business, which was small," she told delegates.

Dame Irene said the biggest area of growth within the cruise sector during the most recent financial year was river. She further praised the

expedition and luxury sectors for performing "better and better".

However, Dame Irene raised concern over inconsistencies in commission payments from different distribution channels. "Cruise lines should be more understanding of the roles the different channels play," she said. "It's hard if the commission level varies. There's a real opportunity there. Our homeworking division has just exploded and our Independence Group is growing, so there should be a level playing field."

A panel featuring leaders from across the ocean, river, luxury and expedition sectors responded to the queries.

“Operators need to better understand the different trade distribution channels

Managing director UK and Europe for APT Luxury River Cruises, Paul Melinis, said the line works with "different partners in different ways", and it wasn't a "one size fits all" approach when it comes to commission payments.

VP of sales UK and Ireland for Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Paul Beale, explained how the line pays a margin of commission on everything purchased during a cruise.

P&O Cruises associate vice president of sales and distribution Ruth Venn said Carnival's UK brands paid more than £100 million in commission to agents this year, while Celebrity Cruises' UK and EMEA managing director Claire Stirrup said the line "works within a framework" for commission payments.

Nathaniel Sherborne, HX Expeditions' senior VP and managing director, EMEA, ANZ and global sales enablement, confirmed the line does pay agents the same level of commission, regardless of channel.

IN NUMBERS

97%
of CLIA Forum attendees
are optimistic about
cruise in 2026

39%
of agents believe the
biggest sales opportunity
will be in luxury

27%
of delegates predict
growth will come from the
expedition sector

Data from: CLIA



ADVANTAGE EYES OFF-PEAK CRUISE SURGE

➤ The Advantage Travel Partnership is anticipating its cruise sales to "outperform" in the off-peak seasons in 2026.

According to a recent insight study, the firm saw demand for sailings accelerate, despite cruise holidays only representing around 3 per cent of global leisure travel by total passenger numbers.

"With new ships and sustained marketing investment, cruise is undoubtedly one of the standout growth segments for the next 12 months," the company said. In 2025, cruise bookings rose by 5 per cent, with winter sun increasing by 10 per cent.

Advantage further reported a 12 per cent

rise in overall bookings compared to 2024 for travel over Christmas, with festive trips to Lapland in particular proving extremely popular with bookings up 30 per cent on last year, whilst city breaks to destinations with popular Christmas markets such as Prague, Krakow and Berlin have taken 13 per cent of overall bookings.



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SPOTLIGHT

Panache Cruises



Luxury cruise retailer Panache Cruises has announced plans to expand into Canada and Australia after agreeing a £2.75m refinancing package.

The company intends to open the new offices in the first half of 2026 as well as strengthen its head office team in Chorley, Lancashire. Founder and CEO James Cole said: "We're absolutely delighted to have agreed the £2.75m refinance deal with HSBC UK.

"Although we've been approached by a lot of private equity houses, investors and banks over the last three years, we just clicked with HSBC UK right way. We were immediately impressed by the way they understood Panache Cruises and their willingness to work in partnership with us.

"It was more than just a transaction. They wanted to find ways of how they could benefit us and establish a long-term relationship. The £2.75m provides enough cash padding to take us through the next few years."

“We're delighted to have agreed a £2.75m refinance deal with HSBC UK

FINAL FRONTIER

➤ MSC Cruises has signed a deal with Meyer Werft shipyard for six new ships, marking the launch of a new class of vessel, New Frontier.

The deal, which includes four ships and two options, was announced at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy in Berlin by federal minister for economic affairs Katherina Reiche and energy minister-president Lower Saxony, Olaf Lies.

The ships will each carry up to 5,400 passengers with a gross tonnage of around 180,000. The vessels will be delivered to the line annually starting in 2030. The order will help secure thousands of jobs in Germany, particularly in Lower Saxony and Papenburg. Meyer Werft employs more than 3,200 people directly, with more than 20,000 further roles linked to its supplier network.

“The six new ships mark the launch of a new class of vessel, New Frontier



SHORESIDE SOIRÉE

➤ Cruise specialist cruise.co.uk has partnered with Not Just Travel to sell its cruise and stay packages through the UK travel trade for the first time.

The expansion comes in response to growing consumer demand. The new distribution channel will initially run exclusively through homeworking network Not Just Travel before opening to the wider trade at a later stage.

Tony Andrews, managing director of cruise.co.uk, said: "We've spent years refining these packages, which are designed to offer flexibility, incredible value and unforgettable itineraries, and working with Not Just Travel gives us the perfect platform to bring them to an even wider audience."

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UNIWORLD MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises will host a minimum of 500 UK travel agents on board its Super Ships in 2026 to mark its 50th anniversary year.

The programme comes ahead of the launch of *SS Emilie*, which will set sail for the first time in March on the Rhine before transferring to the Danube later in the spring to sail on two new itineraries, Capital Cities of the

Danube and Vineyards and Palaces of the Danube.

Chris Townson, UK and Europe managing director of Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, said: "2026 is a big year for Uniworld as we celebrate 50 years of operating. We are entering a bold new era of ownership and investment, with a brand-new ship launching in 2026 and four more on the way for 2027."

SPOTLIGHT

Matt Luscombe



Riviera Travel has appointed Matt Luscombe as its new CEO after Phil Hullah confirmed that he will be stepping down.

Hullah will continue to support Luscombe during the first part of 2026 and will thereafter remain a "significant" shareholder in the business.

Previously, Luscombe was CEO at Cycas Hospitality and also spent 10 years with InterContinental Hotels Group, most recently as chief commercial officer for Europe and North Africa.



HF HOLIDAYS PARTNERS WITH AMADEUS

HF Holidays has launched a brand-new River & Coastal Cruise Collection for 2026.

The new itineraries will be available on Amadeus' fleet along the Rhine, Seine and Danube, while the Dalmatian Coast sailings will be exclusively chartered for HF aboard premium small coastal ships.

Chris Simmonds, CEO of HF Holidays, said: "We are excited to launch this new collection. We know many of our guests and members already enjoy cruising and now we can offer them the opportunity to combine small-ship cruising with walking to see Europe from a whole new perspective."



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POLAR POPULARITY

The polar regions are continuing to dominate the expedition cruise market, with Antarctica leading the way as the most visited, fastest-growing and highest-demand destination, according to The Expedition Cruise Network's (ECN) 2025/26 Insights Report.

Antarctica is closely followed by the Arctic, particularly Greenland, Svalbard and the Canadian High Arctic, with strong activity also reported across the Galápagos, South America,

Patagonia, the Amazon, Alaska and the western coasts of North America, alongside the Kimberley region and wider areas of Australia and the South Pacific. Africa is also beginning to emerge as an increasingly attractive expedition destination.

The report further revealed that 100 per cent of the ECN's expedition cruise operator members and 62 per cent of travel trade professionals reported growth in expedition cruise sales in 2025.

SPOTLIGHT

Danielle Radford



Hurtigruten has appointed Danielle Radford as its new UK account manager.

Radford joins from Celestyal, where she most recently served as key account and tour operator manager, overseeing a portfolio of trade partners and driving UK revenue performance. In her new role, she will work closely with Hurtigruten's UK sales team to grow its key accounts, enhance trade engagement, and develop new partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators.



RECORD BREAKERS

HX Expeditions will mark its 130th anniversary by hosting what it claims will be the largest fam trip in expedition-travel history.

From 5-7 May, 400 agents across the UK and Europe will join a two-night training voyage from Hamburg to Heligoland on a programme featuring shore

landings and wildlife encounters. The voyage will sail on *MS Fridtjof Nansen*, which features a Science Centre and launch zones.

"Our 130th birthday year felt like the perfect moment to thank our agents for their ongoing support," said Mark Walter, sales director, Northern Europe.



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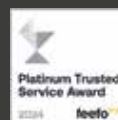
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POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Following strong demand for their debut combined river and ocean voyages, Seabourn and Uniworld have announced a spate of new itineraries for 2027.

The ultra-luxury cruise lines launched their first combined river and ocean cruise earlier this year, selling out in just six weeks. In response, the companies have introduced new packages for 2027 with bookings

open from 27 December 2025. These will feature longer itineraries, higher accommodation categories and itineraries on *Seabourn Ovation*, an all-veranda suite ship.

Chris Townson, UK and Europe managing director at Uniworld, said: "The partnership continues to strengthen and is positive for our agent partners as we bring new products to market."

SPOTLIGHT

Audley Travel



More consumers are booking cruise and stay holidays as demand for "richer, more comprehensive" experiences continues to rise, according to Audley Travel.

Research by the agency found a 36 per cent increase in the number of travellers requesting a trip with "two clear parts" – a cruise itinerary and a hotel stay, for example – which represented a five per cent increase on the previous year.

There was also an increase in travellers seeing "true luxury" as having access to something others do not.



EMERALD MARKS DOUBLE MILESTONE

Emerald Cruises & Tours has marked two milestones in the expansion of its luxury fleet. The company held a float-out ceremony for *Emerald Kaia* at the end of 2025 as the ship touched water for the first time in Halong Bay, Vietnam, while simultaneously laying the keel for *Emerald Raiya*, also in Vietnam.

Kaia will make its debut in April, with an inaugural voyage through Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, before spending its summer season on the coastlines from Italy to Montenegro, Albania and Croatia, the Greek Islands and the Corinth Canal. It will then reposition to the Seychelles from December.



PEAK SEASON: SUPERCHARGED

Virgin Voyages is helping agents crank their Wave season sales to the next level with a fresh array of exciting trade activations, including the trip of a lifetime to the Bahamas

Picture this: the soft white sand of Bimini Beach cushions your feet as you watch the sea stretch to the horizon in shades of azure, while a gentle breeze carries the scent of salt and zesty fresh fruit. Well, that dream could soon become a reality with Virgin Voyages' Wave season incentive programme.

The Bring on Bimini prize gives one lucky agent return Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow to Miami, a pre-cruise overnight stay, transfers and a seven-night voyage in a Sea Terrace cabin aboard *Resilient Lady* on the Western Caribbean and Bimini Beach Club itinerary from 11-18 April 2026.

“The hum of waves against the hull sets the scene for a perfect day on the island of Bimini

Agents must log every confirmed booking on firstmateloot.co.uk to enter, with each booking counting as one entry. In addition, agents can earn six times the usual First Mate Loot on all bookings through to 26 February, with the chance to earn £30 per booking instead of the usual £5.

If that wasn't enough, the new activations are combinable with the

line's current consumer-facing Wave season offer of up to 80 per cent off a second Sailor, as well as up to \$400 in free drinks.

BELIEVE IN BIMINI

The rhythm of calypso drifting under languid palm trees and the hum of waves against the hull sets the scene for a perfect day on the island of Bimini.

The prize itinerary calls in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, as well as the private Beach Club at Bimini, where the lucky winner can expect high-energy parties which last through the night. In Ocho Rios, excursions offer the chance to explore the surrounding rainforest, with lush tropical foliage, cascading waterfalls,

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Bimini Beach beckons one lucky agent; *Resilient Lady* is the perfect home-away-from-home; delectable delights await onboard; Razzle Dazzle by night is a perfect spot for a bite



an homage to the 1980s and the ever-popular We Fancy invites guests to dress up and travel the world through music and performance.

Wellness is woven throughout the voyage, too, with yoga sessions to realign the body, high-energy bungee classes, and a fully equipped gym, all followed by fresh cold-pressed juices. As day turns to night, Sip, the ship's Champagne Lounge, sets the tone for elegant evenings, while the Aquatic Club brings DJ-led energy under the Caribbean sky. 🍷

Virgin VOYAGES

How to Enter

To qualify for the Bring on Bimini competition, agents must book Virgin Voyages itineraries between 26 December 2025 and 26 February 2026. All bookings made during the eligibility window count, whether short Caribbean getaways or longer bucket-list itineraries.



winding rivers and diverse birds like the black billed Amazon parrot.

Bimini, meanwhile, is known for its serene beaches and crystal-clear waters, creating an ideal setting for swimming, snorkelling and a relaxed day ashore. A private Beach Club offers a resort-style atmosphere with cabanas, loungers and hosted pool parties that balance relaxation with a lively edge.

Guided excursions showcase natural pools and native wildlife, giving travellers the chance to connect with the environment and enjoy a truly memorable day ashore. Indulgent duty-free shopping in George Town, the capital of the Cayman Islands, is also on offer for fans of retail therapy.

This can only be followed by a leisurely stroll along the famous crescent of white coral sand at Seven Mile Beach, where visitors can spot vibrant aquatic

life through the crystal clear water. For adventure seekers, guided underwater safaris visit Triangle Rock, where nurse and reef sharks can be seen in a controlled environment. The Wreck of Spona is Bimini's most famous dive and snorkelling site, having run aground during the Great Hurricane of 1926.

ALL ABOARD

After a day of intrepid exploration or serene relaxation, the adults-only *Resilient Lady* awaits, delivering a cruise experience that balances playfulness with luxurious polish. Dining is a highlight, with hands-on Korean barbecue at Gunbae encouraging sociable, high-energy evenings, while the ultra-veggie-friendly Razzle Dazzle offers bold flavours in a relaxed, design-led setting. By night, it turns into a kaleidoscopic venue with glowing neon lights and menus offering the likes of fried green tomatoes and smoked short rib pastrami. You'll be hard pressed to go to sleep wanting more on a Virgin Voyages cruise.

Social spaces are equally distinctive. The Athletic Club blends sea views with fun, featuring adult-sized seesaws and casual lounging by day, while the Redemption Spa offers guests a complete reset. Sailors can move from zest to zen in minutes, choosing from a menu of rejuvenating treatments like the ever-popular quartz bed at sea.

Entertainment goes far beyond traditional cruise shows. Modern interpretations of Greek theatre,





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A heartfelt THANK YOU

We are absolutely thrilled to have won 'Best Escorted & Specialist Tour Operator' at the Wave Awards.

We have made some big improvements this year to help support you, our wonderful agent partners - and we have even more coming your way in 2026.

To every agent that has worked with us over the last 12 months, we are truly thankful.

This is a brilliant milestone for Travelsphere and Just You and guess what? We are just getting started!

Rachel



PLANETERRA

Divided demand

A resurgence in last-minute demand and growing interest in sailings further ahead are to dilute appetite for spring and summer voyages, writes **Raphael Giacardi**

Our previous column analysing the behaviour of thousands of cruisers using the *World of Cruising* search tool highlighted the dominance of spring and summer sailings. Back in November, more than half of users (52 per cent) were looking to travel between April and September.

Fast-forward to early 2026, and that interest has softened slightly. Spring and summer still lead the way, but together they now account for a lower 46 per cent of searches. Spring demand has proved more resilient, slipping just two points from 30 to 28 per cent. Summer, by contrast, has seen a sharper fall, dropping from 22 to 18 per cent.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

So where has that demand gone? The six-point decline has been split evenly between two very different segments.

“A fragmented market presents the trade with both a challenge and an opportunity



Last-minute departures between now and March have climbed from 25 to 28 per cent, while interest in voyages in 2027 and beyond has risen from eight to 11 per cent. Autumn 2026 sailings (October-December) have remained steady, holding at 14 per cent.

The result is a market that is increasingly fragmented, with meaningful demand both in the near term and several years out. For the trade, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity: deciding where to place emphasis when consumer interest is pulling in multiple directions.

CHANGING SEASONS

As expected, the Caribbean continues to lead the late and winter-sun market, but its dominance is less pronounced than in previous months. For February and March departures, combined demand for European and Mediterranean sailings now almost matches that of the Caribbean, at 44 per cent compared with 48 per cent.

Later in the year, however, the picture changes decisively. Late spring and summer firmly belong to the Mediterranean, which accounts for just over six in every 10 searches for departures between May and September.



IN NUMBERS

60%

of searches for 2026 departures are for European destinations

48%

of WoC visitors are looking for Caribbean cruises for February or March

46%

of searches are for spring or summer departures

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM

Mediterranean destinations such as Spain and Greece are proving popular for late spring and summer travellers

In our November column, we highlighted early signs that Europe could be in for a strong year. Our latest data confirms this trend. European sailings, including the Med, now represent just over 60 per cent of all searches across all 2026 departures.

For cruise lines and agents alike, success will lie in balancing short-term tactics with long-term planning, aligning capacity and campaigns to a market that is increasingly split – but highly engaged. ●

‘What’s the best way to sell inside cabins?’

With household budgets under pressure, Travel Counsellor Liz Hemingway ponders whether inside cabins could be the key to tempting budget-conscious travellers. **Rashmi Narayan** reports

One of the best things about cruising is the sweeping sea view. Waking up with a coffee and watching the sun slice through the horizon is a remarkable experience. But not all cabins allow for this. Inside cabins – also known as interior cabins – can often be overlooked by clients for this very reason.

However, savvy travel agents are acutely aware that the accommodation option can be a strategic selling tool. With lower price points, these cabins make cruising accessible to budget-conscious travellers or first-timers keen to experience a cruise while keeping an eye on costs.

Interior options are typically compact, measuring up to around 185 sq ft on average. However, there are some that have been designed with families in mind, particularly on lines such as Royal Caribbean, MSC Cruises and Disney Cruise Line, which offer inside options that can sleep up to four people.

But with most travellers wary of the idea of spending a week or longer sleeping in a room with no windows, Travel Counsellor Liz Hemingway, who has more than 20 years of experience in the cruise industry, asks the question: “How can agents tempt travellers and sell more inside cabins?”

‘I PREFER INSIDE CABINS’

Cruise fares typically include a wide range of amenities, such as meals, Wi-Fi, entertainment and activities, meaning guests spend relatively little time

in their cabins as they make the most of the onboard offerings. This makes inside rooms a practical choice for itineraries rich in port calls and ships that offer top-notch common spaces to relax in.

“We talk through cabin types with every guest to ensure they’re making the right choices for them. For us, there are many reasons to book an interior cabin,” says Robbie O’Grady, founder of The Cruise Room.

“I would rather sit anywhere across the ship soaking up the atmosphere or people-watch rather than be in my room. I would also prefer spending my funds on adding experiences that I will remember forever, making memories. Others find that they sleep better in interior rooms as there is no natural light to wake them, some really don’t want to see the sea, some worry about having young children on balconies, and others simply want to save money.”

“

Some interiors have been designed with families in mind, with options that can sleep up to four people





PROOF IN THE PUDDING

Selling inside cabins can also benefit an agent's bottom line. Competitive pricing can help close bookings faster, while upselling dining packages, excursions or drinks can boost commission earnings.

Positioning these cabins as a cost-effective option appeals to value-driven travellers and those keen to maximise their time exploring the ship and destinations, particularly during peak periods such as Christmas, summer and Carnival sailings. Even on popular itineraries like Alaska, where clients may be tempted by balcony staterooms, choosing an inside cabin can free up budget for premium shore excursions.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Clever lighting and decor make inside cabins cosy and inviting; guests are likely to spend most of their time enjoying life outside of their cabin; Travel Counsellor Liz Hemingway

"For many clients, an inside cabin is a more affordable option for taking a cruise holiday; in reality, most cruises are chosen for their itinerary, and you don't actually spend a whole lot of time in your cabin," says Travel Counsellor Kerry Cansdale.

According to CLIA's 2025 State of the Industry report, 25 per cent of repeat cruise travellers sail two or more times per year. "If you compare prices of different cabins, sometimes taking an inside cabin is such good value that it could mean your client has more funds for another cruise later in the year," Cansdale suggests. Echoing O'Grady's point on sleep quality, Cansdale notes that several clients have reported sleeping better in inside cabins.

"Lots of cruise lines now offer 'bid for upgrades' closer to the sailing date. By booking an inside to start with, you could end up with a fabulous deal on a balcony cabin later," she adds. "The TV in your cabin has a channel with a ship camera, which is great way to see what's going on outside and to check the weather before you leave the cabin to dress accordingly."



LEFT Inside cabins are designed as spaces to relax in

“ Modern inside cabins have smart layouts, clever storage, premium bedding and digital entertainment

Cansdale adds that inside cabins need not feel claustrophobic, as some cruise lines offer floor-to-ceiling screens projecting real-time views, or permanently closed curtains to give the illusion of a window. “These give you the feeling that you have a balcony, but beware – after a few cruise cocktails, it really does look like the real thing.”

When selling inside cabins, agents should highlight advantages beyond cost, helping clients understand that not all interior options are the same. Modern inside cabins feature smart layouts, clever storage, premium bedding and digital entertainment systems. While most do not have windows, it rarely feels claustrophobic, thanks to ample space, smart features and virtual balconies that often change every day on some cruise ships.

The central location of an inside cabin can be a benefit, too. It makes navigation easier and even reduces lift wait times, which may seem a moot point for some but can be make or break for others. By framing inside cabins as both practical and comfortable, agents can turn them into a compelling choice for a wide range of travellers. ●

‘What’s the best way to sell inside cabins?’



Antonio Paradiso, VP of international sales, MSC Cruises

“For travel agents, inside cabins are a great way to help guests prioritise experiences, like adding shore excursions, upgrading to a drinks or speciality dining package, or choosing a longer premium itinerary.”



Robbie O’Grady, founder, The Cruise Room

“I am ‘team inside’ as I don’t spend enough time in my room to justify spending significant money on it. I use my stateroom to sleep, shower, change and then I’m out enjoying – which will be the same for most guests.”



Nicola McNeish, director of sales UK & Ireland, Celebrity Cruises

“Inside staterooms are an excellent option for guests who plan on exploring destinations and enjoying everything the ship has to offer. For agents, they’re a compelling way to open up cruising to new audiences.”

‘Wave season is no longer about discounts – it’s about building trust’

Virgin Voyages’ UK sales director **SJ Walker** on how the Wave season has evolved beyond ‘can’t miss deals’ and ‘never-before-seen’ discounts

For years, Wave season has been synonymous with deep discounts and time-sensitive deals. It’s the moment when the industry shouts the loudest, and travellers scramble to secure what they believe to be the best bargain. But the truth is, the way people book holidays, and what they value most, has evolved. At Virgin Voyages, we’ve seen that success during Wave isn’t just about slashing prices; it’s about redefining value and leading with experience.

Today’s travellers are looking for more than a discount. They want holidays that feel effortless, inclusive and designed around them. They expect dining that rivals their favourite restaurants on land, entertainment that feels bold and original, and spaces that allow them to unwind in style. Our approach to Wave season reflects that shift.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Yes, our current offer, 80 per cent off a second guest plus up to \$400 in free drinks, delivers outstanding value, but it’s underpinned by a promise: once guests step on board, everything is taken care of. Wi-Fi, fitness classes, shows and



“
The way people book holidays, and what they value, has evolved

entertainment, and dining at over 20 eateries are always included, creating a sense of luxury without hidden extras.

This is where the future of Wave lies; not in shouting the biggest discount, but in building the strongest brand connection. Agents play a key role in this evolution by helping clients understand true value. It’s about showcasing the complete experience and the emotional return that comes with it.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT SJ Walker believes in the power of brand connection; today’s travellers want holidays that are designed around them

At Virgin Voyages, we’re proud to be part of this shift. We’re moving beyond the old model of Wave as a one-dimensional sales period and turning it into a moment to inspire, excite and elevate the conversation about cruising. Because for us, Wave season isn’t just about filling cabins. It’s about redefining expectations. ●



IN NUMBERS

35%

of Brits book summer holidays in January, according to ABTA

64%

of UK adults cite cost as the main reason to book early, according to YouGov

34.6

million global ocean-going cruisers in 2024, according to CLIA



CRUISING MADE EFFORTLESS

Marella Cruises is well poised to remove the uncertainty from cruising in 2026, delivering an All Inclusive, end-to-end experience that guarantees travellers unforgettable holidays

For customers who have never cruised before, the thought of sailing into unknown territory can be quite daunting. Even for regular cruisers, trying a new cruise line for the first time comes with perceived risks. For agents, sending customers on their first cruise – or on a cruise with an unfamiliar brand – comes with a slight concern that it might not be for them.

But for cruise breaks that are truly effortless, Marella Cruises leads the way. From the first enquiry to the moment your guests return having had one of the most memorable experiences of their lives, Marella's straightforward, efficient

and relaxing end-to-end service ensures that both its travel agent partners and customers can relax.

It's simple. For agents, all they need to do is make the booking, and Marella takes care of the rest. Being a part of TUI Group – one of the world's most trusted and well-known travel brands – means Marella looks after flights, transfers and luggage. What's more, the 24/7 TUI Guest Experience Centre, as well as onboard reps and crew, ensures guests are supported every step of the way.

The line offers domestic flight options through TUI and partner airlines from more than 20 UK airports, including Gatwick, Glasgow, Manchester,

Birmingham, Newcastle and Cardiff to destinations such as the Caribbean, Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. All options include overseas transfers, meaning from the moment departure day arrives, guests are on holiday knowing everything is taken care of.

ONE FOR ALL

More inclusions can be found onboard, too. On all of Marella's vessels – *Marella Voyager*, *Marella Explorer*, adults-only *Marella Explorer 2*, *Marella Discovery* (adults-only for summer 2026) and *Marella Discovery 2* (adults-only for winter 2026/27) – guests can enjoy All Inclusive meals and drinks as standard.



“ From departure day, your guests can relax knowing everything is taken care of

Tips and service charges are covered, too. The line's All Inclusive package comes equipped with selected draught beers and ciders, plus selected bottles and cans; selected wines by the glass; standard spirits and aperitifs; a range of cocktails, from Mai Tais to Long Island Iced Teas; and selected soft drinks by the glass, including mocktails and juices.

Customers can also opt to upgrade to the Premium All Inclusive package, to receive canned soft drinks like Coca Cola and Red Bull, premium

Lavazza coffee; upgraded cocktails such as mudslides and mojitos; premium spirits like Bombay Sapphire and Jack Daniel's; and wines, beers and ciders.

Once the drinks are sorted, it's imperative guests try one – or several – of Marella's dining options. The main restaurant on *Marella Explorer*, *Marella Explorer 2* and *Marella Voyager* is Latitude 53. On *Marella Discovery* and *Marella Discovery 2*, it's called 47°. Here, guests can tuck into a smoked fish platter, followed by roast cod fillet with saffron potatoes and orange hollandaise or a hearty beef wellington.

For lighter bites around the pool, travellers should head to Snack Shack for grab-and-go curried chicken salads, Greek falafel wraps and sweet chilli chicken wings.

INTREPID EXPLORATIONS

Once guests have had their fair share of decadent delights, Marella Cruises' range of shoreside excursions is primed to get travellers closer to a destination while working up an appetite for the next feast.

In the Mediterranean, passengers can swap the ship for a kayak on a City Walls Kayaking experience, which shows off the hard-to-reach spots in Croatia's most famous city. They start by paddling to the fortress of Bokar, a former prison, before wading to Lovrijenac, a cliff-top stronghold which some claim dates back to the 11th century and showcases Shakespearean plays during Dubrovnik's summer festival.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT A helping hand is always available; *Marella Voyager* is suited for all ages; West End-style shows beckon onboard; hearty Italian dishes can be enjoyed across the fleet



Meanwhile, in Tuscany, sprawling vineyards beckon as guests are transported from their ship to a wine cellar tucked into the rolling hills of Italy's wine country. Visitors can learn how the wine is made and the traditional methods used to bottle it, before sampling the results, of course, alongside fresh olives and salami.

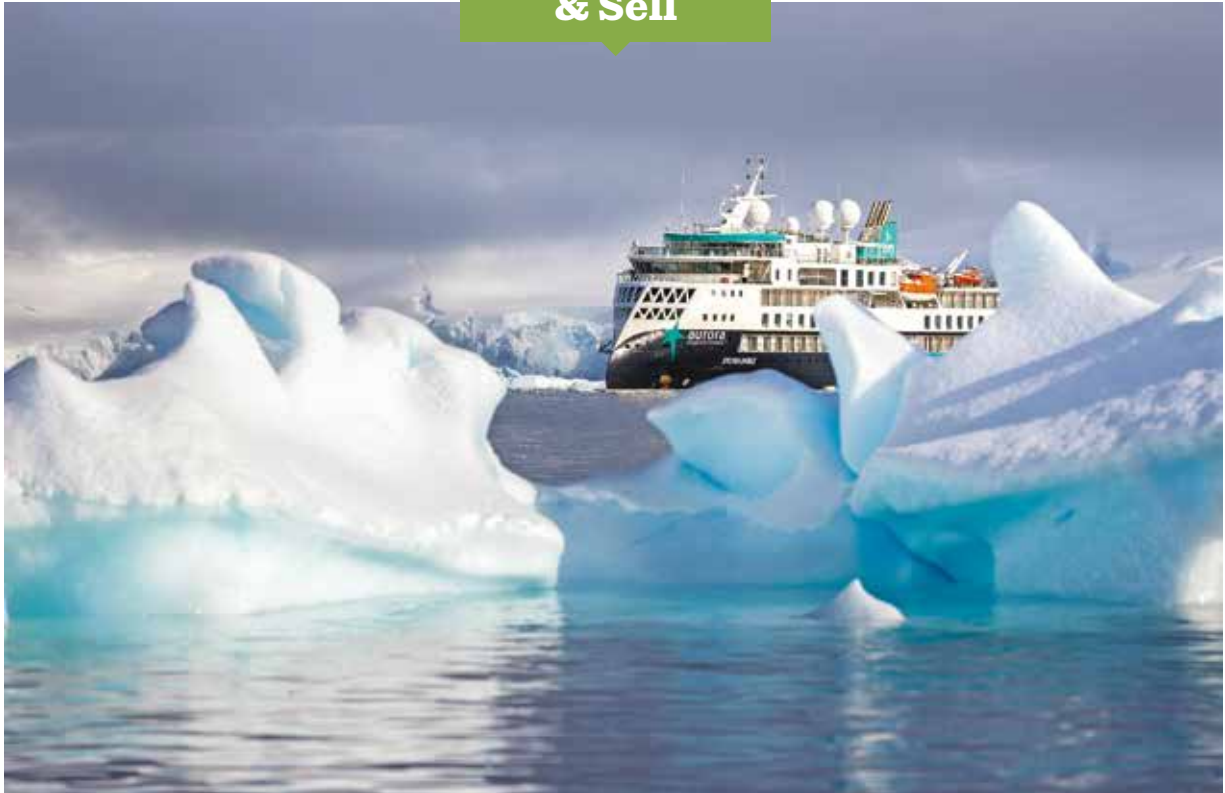
Cruising can be a daunting experience for anyone, whether seasoned or entirely new to cruising. To ensure guests enjoy a seamless holiday with all the trimmings, let Marella Cruises look after them from the moment they book until they touch down back in the UK. ●



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To find out more, visit
tui.co.uk/cruise





AE Expeditions

As adventure itineraries continue to turn the heads of eager explorers, this Australian-owned expedition travel company is at the forefront of innovative trips to the ends of the earth

IN THE KNOW

Established in 1991 by Australian explorers Greg and Margaret Mortimer, Aurora Expeditions – known as AE Expeditions – is an experiential travel company that operates cruises, expeditions and tours across the globe, with a key focus and speciality in polar expeditions to the Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, the Falkland Islands, Svalbard and Greenland.

The line sailed its first cruise to Antarctica in 1992, before heading to the Arctic for the first time five years later. In 2019, the company took delivery of its first ship, *Greg Mortimer*, named after the firm's founder, and that was joined by second vessel *Sylvia Earle* in 2022, which sailed its inaugural cruise from Ushuaia, Argentina.

Earlier this year the line launched its 2025 Impact Report outlining several sustainability initiatives including the



Ocean Regeneration Programme (a scheme to replace traditional carbon offsetting); becoming the first expedition company to trail CounterCurrent's AI ship routing; and to install microplastic filters. It also gave more than 74,000 children across 195 countries access to free environmental courses.

THE FLEET

AE Expeditions' fleet is spearheaded by *Greg Mortimer*, an Infinity class vessel built by SunStone ships in 2019. With capacity for 130 passengers in 76 cabins, the vessel is one of the first passenger ships to feature an X-BOW, which allows it to cross choppy waters more comfortably and efficiently. Onboard guests will find lecture rooms, a library, a shop and observation lounge, a gym, a sauna and Jacuzzis.

The 130-guest *Sylvia Earle*, meanwhile, was named after the namesake marine biologist, oceanographer and explorer, and features a fully equipped Citizen Science Centre and a programme designed to enrich guests' knowledge about the destinations they visit.

The line's third vessel, *Douglas Mawson*, debuted in 2025 and is named after the Australian geologist and explorer. The ship offers 14-day Ireland



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Director of sales EMEA, Andrew Turner, on how agents can make the most of the expedition market

What's selling well?

We've seen an increase in demand for Arctic 2026 and Antarctica 2026/2027 voyages, with strong interest in both activity-focused options and flexible fly-sail or sail-fly itineraries. Costa Rica also continues to perform well.

Why should agents bolster their expedition cruise sales?

It's simple – they offer lucrative commission opportunities while providing something truly different for customers. Expedition-style travel remains popular with travellers, so having them allows agents to retain those bookings.

Who would suit an AE itinerary?

AE Expeditions is ideal for travellers wanting a deeper, more immersive experience rather than a traditional cruise. Our unique offering allows guests to spend extended time off ship, guided by some of the best experts in the industry.

“AE Expeditions is for people wanting a more immersive experience

& Scotland: Saints, Saviours and Secrets cruises, as well as an 11-day Across the Antarctic Circle: Fly the Drake itinerary. Emma McEwin, great-granddaughter of Douglas Mawson, said: “*Douglas Mawson* carries forward his legacy of courage, science and wonder, exploring the world with the same respect for nature and curiosity that defined his life.”

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

In 2027, AE Expeditions will sail 34 voyages in Antarctica across its three

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Sylvia Earle features a fully equipped Citizen Science Centre; the cruises have some of the best experts in the industry; more time off ship leads to breathtaking encounters; the itineraries on offer appeal to adventurous clients

ships, featuring calls in the Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, the Falkland Islands, the Weddell Sea, the Antarctic Circle, and Patagonia. The programme features a diverse mix of classic expeditions, 10 Special Edition voyages, and four new or revived itineraries, all designed to take expeditioners further, safely and with a lighter footprint.

WHO'S WHO?

AE Expeditions is led by CEO Michael Heath, while Andrew Turner heads up sales operations across the UK and Europe as director of sales EMEA. Katie Harber is senior business development manager and Bethany Brown is business development sales support. In October, former Cunard regional sales manager (south) James Atherton joined the line as business development manager.

SELLING TIPS

1 AE Expeditions offers a range of citizen science programmes to help guests get closer to the action, making the line the perfect choice for customers who like to give back to the places they visit.

2 Whilst the line offers a robust portfolio of polar expedition cruises, it also sails to the Mediterranean, southeast Asia and the British Isles, making it a great choice for fans of warmer weather and closer to home holidays.

3 Despite the longer durations, an expedition cruise can be the perfect way to entice new-to-cruise customers. Expeditions can tempt customers who may have taken a land-based adventure before, such as a safari.



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TO GET INVOLVED

Lynsey Roberts

P&O Cruises' business manager, partnerships and regional development, on how the line ensures agents' valuable time is well spent when it comes to training and engagement

What selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

When we're out on the road meeting our travel agent partners, my team's number one priority is articulating the unique value of a P&O Cruises holiday. From the incredible breadth of destinations we sail to around the world to the live performances and incredible food that guests can enjoy on board, there really is a P&O Cruises holiday for every guest and every budget. Our goal is simple: to be the easiest and most rewarding cruise line to work with.

How important is it to visit the trade?

It's absolutely fundamental. Nothing replaces being in the room, listening to what agents are experiencing day to day. Face-to-face conversations allow us to collaborate on ideas, understand local market nuance and build authentic relationships. That trust translates into sales. We believe that the best partnerships are built on dialogue.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

P&O aims to be the easiest, most rewarding cruise line to work with; Lynsey Roberts hopes to offer agents more ship visits during 2026

sessions are built to be high-impact and relevant. We focus on delivering practical knowledge, sales tools and product updates in a format that's engaging and energising. When agents leave a session feeling inspired and equipped, they are more confident in recommending our holidays and that is a win for everyone.

We also know that first-hand experience is one of the most powerful tools an agent can have – but of course availability for ship visits and onboard experiences are limited. We're hoping to open even more of these opportunities in 2026.

Agent feedback isn't just welcomed – it is essential. Whether it's through Shine Rewards Club, ship visits, training events or direct conversations, we are constantly gathering insights from our trade partners and using that input to shape our strategy.

What are some of the challenges when it comes to agent training?

Firstly, knowledge builds confidence and confident agents deliver exceptional service. That's why we have invested in creating training and engagement experiences that are not only informative but also genuinely enjoyable. But time is the biggest barrier. We know that agents are busy professionals, so our conferences and training

What have agents got to look forward to from P&O in 2026?

More access, more insight and more recognition. As we look to the future our focus is firmly on long-term, sustainable growth – not just in terms of marketing and brand strategy, but in the relationships that underpin all that we do. The trade is absolutely central to that journey. We are investing in deeper collaboration, smarter tools and more personalised support to ensure partners feel empowered to grow with us. ●



We know agents are busy professionals, so our conferences and training sessions are built to be high-impact and relevant

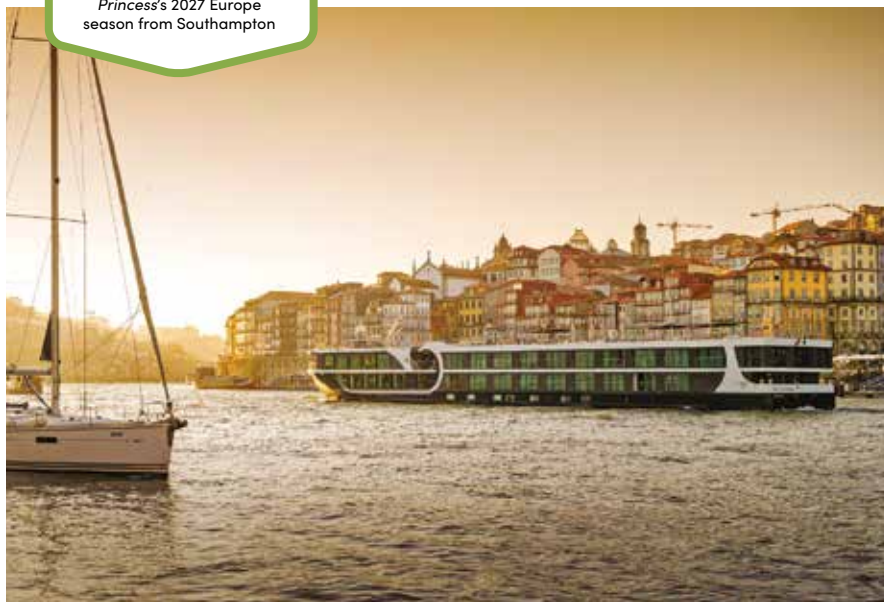
INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
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What's in It For You?



SCAN

to learn more about Regal Princess's 2027 Europe season from Southampton



AROUND THE WORLD

> UK travel agents have been given the chance to win one of six holidays for two, with flights included, as part of Globus's new The World Within Reach agent incentive programme.

With a prize pot worth more than £20,000, the incentive runs from 1 January–31 March 2026, and rewards agents who make bookings across the Avalon Waterways and Cosmos Tours brands during the promotional period.

Every eligible booking registered increases the agent's chances of winning, with prizes available in 2026 or 2027. The itineraries up for grabs are Ontario and French Canada; Rhythms of the Road; Rome, Florence and Venice; Danube Dreams; and Romantic Rhine, as well as the top prize Classic Japan, valued at £8,000.

Winners will be selected at random following the close of the incentive on 31 March.



ONE FOR ALL

> Holland America Line and Seabourn have joined the OneSource travel agent platform to streamline trade engagement and foster sales growth.

The platform, which is currently used by Holland America Line and Seabourn's sister brands, P&O Cruises, Cunard and Princess Cruises, offers sales tools and

resources to help agents amplify their business.

It includes access to POLAR Online, FlightEase and Plain Sailing booking tools, as well as destination guides, product planners and marketing toolkits. There's also the chance to unlock upcoming training opportunities and the latest offers.

PROMOTION



Magic Med

Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours is giving agents the chance to win an eight-day Mediterranean cruise.

The incentive has been introduced to coincide with the airing of the first episode of the new six-part *Jane McDonald: From Pole to Pole* television series.

To be in with a chance of winning, travel agents need to make a new Scenic Ocean or Emerald Yacht Cruises booking before 16 February. The winner, who will be selected at random after the closing date, will join the eight-day 'Enchanting Provence, Tuscany and the French Riviera' cruise, departing from Nice on 25 April 2026. Ports include Portofino, Livorno, Monte Carlo, Marseille and Mahon.

‘We’ve got our core – now it’s time to enhance’

After a standout year marking ROL Cruise’s 30th anniversary, the agency’s leadership team have set their sights on reaching the next level in 2026.

Will Payne catches up with CEO Rosie Cairns and CCO Sarah Wikevand to find out more

Companies don’t win Best Technology Innovation at the Wave Awards for resting on their laurels. The gong is set aside for businesses at the forefront of growth, implementing new technologies to reach more customers, secure sales and boost engagement.

The winner of this year’s accolade, ROL Cruise, embodies just that. Having sat down with CEO Rosie Cairns and CCO Sarah Wikevand earlier this year at the company’s head office in Colchester, it was clear to me that ROL’s 30th year wasn’t just an opportunity to throw a party and update a logo.



“We’ve now got 150 business owners and the energy has never been higher

This year the agency has launched a new app – the reason behind its Wave Awards success – welcomed Olympic gold medallist Sally Gunnel as a Cruise Miles ambassador and ironed out a robust game plan for 2026.

PEOPLE POWER

As I sit down with Cairns and Wikevand, there’s one thing that has remained consistent since our first conversation earlier this year: the importance of people to the company. “We’ve now got 150 business owners in the company, and the energy has never been higher,” Cairns says. “The fact that more than 80 per cent of our staff with six months’ service have had a promotion goes to show how important people are to us.”

She continues: “Our core value has always been quality, and that comes from the investment we’ve made in our people. It’s their level of service, their loyalty, their passion and pride that allows us to deliver that quality time and time again.”

ROL’s 30th year has coincided with its first anniversary of becoming employee-owned, a move the brand made to give more power to its 130-strong workforce. “We’ve built this business on people who genuinely care,” Wikevand adds.



“You can teach product, you can teach process, but you can’t teach passion. That’s what sets ROL apart.”

LOOKING AHEAD

In the next 12 to 18 months, Cairns hopes to cement ROL’s established customer base and company ethos by introducing tweaks and enhancements on the programmes it already has in place. “We plan to make improvements within our database and customer journey to make sure we’re delivering the right product to the right customer,” she says.

For Wikevand, enhancing the level of service she and Cairns provide across all touchpoints is crucial. “What’s really important to us is the quality we provide, to our customers, our business partners and our co-owners. That’s our key objective across the board,” she says. “Our priority now is sustainable growth. Not just growing bigger, but growing better. The market is evolving, and we’re making sure we evolve with it, without losing what makes us special.”

Did you know?

ROL Cruise – founded as Reader Offers Ltd – began with a team of just four in 1995



Speaking ahead of the 2026 wave season, Wikevand encourages agents to research before making decisions. “Wave promotions are lasting longer than in the past,” she says. “Some are going three months, which makes it difficult – how do you make a campaign exciting for that long? We’ll continue to focus with our key partners. We don’t want to go head-to-head with everyone else.”

“There are still lots of questions around cruise. It’s important that first-

“ You can teach product and process, but you can’t teach passion. That sets ROL apart

time cruisers get on the right ship; if they don’t, they’ll never cruise again.”

‘THE CONFIDENCE SPEAKS VOLUMES’

Keeping one eye on the future, Cairns further reports an increase in further-out bookings, which she puts down to a boost in confidence amongst travellers. “We’re seeing incredibly strong demand, with bookings stretching further out than we’ve seen in years,” she explains. “That confidence speaks volumes about where the industry is heading.”

“The repeat business we’re seeing tells us something important: when you deliver consistency, people come back and they bring their friends. Cruise

customers today are more informed, more curious and more discerning. They want experiences that feel personal and meaningful, and the industry must keep up with that.”

It’s clear from our conversation that ROL Cruise is well prepared to storm into its 31st year on the coattails of consistent positive booking momentum, having laid the groundwork for another successful 12 months.

Pair this with an empowered workforce of co-owners, a razor-sharp focus on quality and customer satisfaction and a clear plan for sustainable growth, and it’s clear that Cairns and Wikevand are primed to lead ROL Cruise into its next chapter. And if 2025 was anything to go by, 2026 could be its best yet. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Sarah Wikevand has had lots to celebrate; ROL’s 30th anniversary celebration marked key moments in its history; Cruise Miles ambassador and Olympic gold medallist Sally Gunnel; the company headquarters at Lexden House, Colchester







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CRUISE IN THE CROSS HAIRS

As regulators clamp down on hotels and OTAs using drip pricing, hidden fees and time-sensitive deals, is the cruise industry next in the firing line?
Will Payne investigates

If you've booked a holiday before, you will likely have seen phrases such as "Your offer runs out in five minutes!!" and "Escapes from £1,000". While these 'once-in-a-lifetime' deals may seem enticing at first, as you navigate through the booking process, so often an extra £50 is tacked on here and there for administration fees, taxes, mandatory upgrades and the rest.

But in 2024, the UK government moved to increase protection for consumers when it comes to online price transparency by introducing the Digital

Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA) to give regulators like the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) more power to clamp down on pricing tactics used by online traders.

At the time, consumer protection platform Which? said the bill would modernise the UK's competition and consumer laws, with the potential to "create a world-leading regulatory framework".

"The bill is timely as the ongoing cost of living crisis has heightened the need to address the rip-offs, scams and rogue traders that cause consumers misery," the firm continued. "It is estimated by ►



the government that up to a third of people experience at least one problem with a product or service every year, and consumers suffer harm worth £54 billion a year.”

Then, in November 2025, the CMA opened its first enforcement cases under the act after new guidance was issued, which introduced a new wave of implications for the travel industry. The body targeted eight businesses, including ticketing firms StubHub and Viagogo, and issued warnings to a further 100 companies – 25 of which were firms in the travel and hotel industry.

In response, Sue Davies, Which? head of consumer protection policy, slammed hotels for misleading consumers with “too-good-to-be-true sales, where they reel in consumers with the promise of a great deal, only for it to be almost impossible to book at the bargain rate.”

She continued: “Which? reported several hotel groups to the ASA after we caught them using sneaky bait-pricing tactics, so it’s good to see the regulator taking action. This should send a message to other businesses that they must display prices accurately and ensure they aren’t misleading customers.”

The CMA said it is focusing on combatting hidden or late-stage mandatory fees;

pre-selected or automatically bundled optional services; and misleading countdown clocks and other urgency messaging. Alongside its investigations, the CMA reminded companies that under the DMCCA, prices must not be misleading and all mandatory charges, like booking fees, tourist taxes, resort fees and cleaning fees (i.e included gratuities) must be included at the outset.

The act also highlights that drip-pricing – showing consumers an initial headline cost of a product before adding charges later in the booking process, which is often used by cruise lines – is strictly prohibited.

At the same time, the UK’s advertising watchdog, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), published rulings against four hotel room providers for promoting low room rates using unqualified “from £X” claims – another common pricing tactic in the travel sector.

While the cruise industry is yet to fall into the firing line of the regulations, these rulings set a damning precedent which could have lasting ramifications for how cruise holidays are advertised and sold. According to the *Cruise Trade News 2025 Annual Report*, perception around the cost of a cruise is still holding back

CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP LEFT Consumers booking tickets need to know the price they see is the price they’ll pay; revealing the full cost of a cruise upfront could be a deterrent to budget-conscious customers; resort fees, tourist charges and any other overseas costs must be displayed when cruises are promoted



SCAN

to learn more about the
burgeoning cruise and
stay market

new customers. Therefore, if lines are forced to display the total cost of a sailing at the onset, it could dissuade even more potential clients from a holiday at sea.

IN THE DOCK

So, what could these rulings mean for the cruise industry? Marta Garcia, partner at specialist transportation and trade law firm Stephenson Harwood, encourages cruise lines and travel agencies to act now to ensure that their pricing structures, customer journeys and disclosures meet the legal requirements.

“Conduct a rapid audit of all online pricing practices and review the entire customer journey – whether on the web, app or mobile – to identify where fees, charges or conditions are first presented,” she advises.

“Check for drip pricing, misleading partitioned pricing, hidden charges, hidden conditions and time-limited offers that may not end when advertised, and check that the user experience aligns with the CMA’s new guidance.”

The total price of a cruise, including all compulsory fees like port taxes and gratuities, must now be displayed clearly and prominently at the earliest stage of the purchase price, Garcia advises.

“Cruise lines and travel agencies need to ensure their pricing structures and disclosures meet the legal requirements



“Cruise lines also need to verify that sales and countdown deals end when advertised, and that internal systems update prices automatically and on time.”

For example, for a campaign titled “Mediterranean 2026 now on sale”, the lead-in fare must be available on a significant proportion of sailings within that programme, not just on one or two dates. Even more crucially, if a campaign is cruise-specific – “seven-night Barcelona sailing from £699”, for example – the “from” price must be available across a substantial proportion of cabins for that cruise, not just a single inside cabin that has already sold out.

“To account for limited cabins and shoulder-season sailings, cruise lines and/or travel operators need to ensure that their ads contain appropriate qualifications or date restrictions to the price claims made in the ad, so that customers are not misled,” Garcia continues.

“The ASA indicated that although its assessment will be carried out on a case-by-case basis, the rule of thumb is that 10 per cent of the products advertised should usually be available at the ‘from’ or ‘up to’ price.”

BUILDING TRUST

Most large agencies will utilise direct API connections to cruise lines, or third-party aggregators, which means prices will flow from the cruise lines into booking engines and update in real time. Therefore, the onus is placed back on the cruise lines and away from the agents.

However, Paula MacFarlane, senior solicitor for ABTA, encourages agents to not take these systems for granted. She advises the trade to be ►





CLOCKWISE FROM

LEFT Companies can no longer reel customers in with 'too good to be true' deals that are impossible for them to actually purchase; greater transparency and less confusion is needed to build travellers' trust

confident that the prices they are quoting are in line with the guidance.

"Following the CMA guidance that resort fees, tourist taxes or any other obligatory charges which will be payable by customers overseas must be included in the headline price, responsibility remains primarily with the supplier rather than the agent," she tells *Cruise Trade News*. "However, agents should still be satisfied that the prices they are quoting on behalf of their suppliers are compliant with the CMA guidance."

For Panache Cruises, these changes are a positive step towards greater transparency and should help attract new customers by building faith and confidence in the wider travel agent community. "I must say that we view these changes as very positive news for consumers," says founder and CEO James Cole. "The movement towards greater transparency in pricing can only serve to build trust and confidence among travellers."

“Pricing practices that rely on ambiguity, artificial urgency or incomplete information are no longer tolerated



"Being transparent from a consumer pricing perspective is crucial, and these new rules will help ensure that customers are presented with clear, accurate and upfront prices. This is essential for maintaining their trust and ensuring they have a positive experience when booking their cruises. We are fully supportive of these initiatives."

When approached by *Cruise Trade News*, CLIA, Celestyal and MSC Cruises declined to comment, while P&O Cruises claimed these new regulations will not impact its pricing strategy. Iglu Cruise and SixStarCruises/Cruise118 also declined to issue a statement.

NEXT STEPS

Ultimately, the message from regulators is clear: pricing practices that rely on ambiguity, artificial urgency or incomplete information are no longer tolerated. The DMCCA gives the CMA sharpened teeth to enforce long-standing consumer law principles, while the ASA's recent rulings reinforce that headline pricing claims must be meaningful, substantiated and widely available. Together, they mark a decisive shift from guidance to action, with the entire travel sector firmly under the microscope.

While cruise lines have so far avoided direct enforcement, the regulatory direction of travel is unmistakable. For operators, these new rulings mean a fundamental rethink of how holidays are priced, presented and promoted. Unavoidable costs such as port charges and gratuities must be shown upfront, not revealed gradually through the booking journey. Scarcity messaging, countdown clocks and eye-catching "from" fares will need robust evidence behind them, or clear qualifications alongside them. It's crucial that those operating outside the parameters get in line quickly, because non-compliance now carries far greater legal and reputational risk than ever before.

On the other side of the coin, the message for travel agents is around vigilance. Even where prices are fed directly from suppliers, agents remain a visible part of the sales chain and must be confident that what they are quoting meets CMA and ASA standards.

The prize for greater transparency around pricing, however, is significant. As the industry grapples with trust, value and attracting first-time cruisers, clearer and fairer costs could become a competitive advantage rather than a regulatory burden. ●



SHOOT FOR THE MOON

Cruise lines and travel agents came together for a jubilant Cruise Stars 2025 ceremony in December to celebrate the very best from across the industry

Recognising the people behind the cruise industry's ongoing success, Cruise Stars 2025 pulled out all the stops as representatives from the likes of Ambassador Cruise Line, Marella Cruises, Hays Travel and GoCruise & Travel join a packed-out room at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms hotel in Central London.

Riviera Travel, Princess Cruises and Iglu were among the biggest winners on the day after judges poured through the highest number of entries in the awards' history.

A total of 20 gongs, including the new Cruise Line Editor's Choice Award and Agent Editor's Choice Award, recognised the accomplishments of sales, PR and marketing staff, as well as senior management and rising stars from across the cruise line and travel agent sectors.

The ceremony began with a welcome drinks reception, before *Cruise Trade News* (CTN) and *World of Cruising* group editor, cruise Jack Carter and Real Response Media chief operating officer Lina Slater looked back on the publications' achievements over the last 12 months, including the launch of CTN's first industry report.

This year, the National Literacy Trust (NLT) was named as the event's charity sponsor, with £10 from every ticket sale – with the total amount being matched by Real Response Media – going towards the charity's incredible work in empowering people with the literacy skills they need to succeed in life.

Thanks to the partnership, delegates heard from award-winning author Anthony Horowitz CBE, who discussed his career and encouraged up and coming industry executives to "believe in yourself".

"The life of a writer is very solitary, and we can never be sure that our next book will succeed.



Many of us suffer from 'imposter' syndrome, when we believe we're somehow going to be found out. Self-confidence and a refusal to give in to doubts are, I think, crucial to future success," he added.

A special thank you to our Cruise Stars 2025 sponsors, including Marella Cruises (headline sponsor), Ambassador Cruise Line (motivational speaker sponsor), Princess Cruises (360° video booth sponsor), Crystal Cruises, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, Riviera Travel and Virgin Voyages.

On the night, we caught up with some of the winners to find out what it means to be recognised among the brightest talent in cruise.

“
Self-confidence and a refusal to give in to doubts are crucial to future success



Vicky Billing, director of trade and partnerships, UK and Ireland, Riviera Travel

“I’m delighted. I just feel very humble, it wouldn’t be possible without the support of the trade and the team – you can’t win these awards without the support of these amazing individuals and all their efforts. Also, a massive congratulations to Roxy [Glendon] for winning Cruise Line Marketing Star of the Year, she is an absolute superstar and so well deserved!”
WINNER of Cruise Line Management Star of the Year

Daniel Hammond, director, GoCruise & Travel

“I am shocked. It’s amazing, it’s always better when you don’t know you’re going to win something. I am so proud of myself. These events

are so important for the industry. There’s usually a lot of emphasis on the cruise lines and suppliers, and the trade can sometimes take a bit of a back seat. These moments shine on the people that do a lot of the work in the cruise industry. The cruise lines have the ships, but we’re the ones who put people on them.”

WINNER of Editor’s Choice Award – Agent

Emma Sanger-Horwell, director of cruise, Travelpack

“I am really shocked, and really humbled, it’s so surprising. These events are so important in recognising all of the hard work that not just myself, but everyone puts in. We have passion in our industry, and the cruise industry isn’t like any other industry in the world – we all come together to celebrate each other. I love it.”

WINNER of Above and Beyond Star of the Year

Danielle Weller, regional sales manager, MSC Cruises

“I am honestly buzzing; I was up against such amazing people in the industry and the fact I’ve won is incredible. I’m really chuffed. We all do a great job, we’re all passionate about the brands we work for, and for us it’s all about the relationships we build with our agent partners. You’re nothing without your team, but it’s nice to be recognised for the hard work you do and the hard work you put in.”

WINNER of Cruise Line Sales Star of the Year



In
conversation
with...



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to listen to the latest
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Corner Podcast

Claire Stirrup

Nearly a year on from her promotion to managing director UK & EMEA for Celebrity Cruises, Claire Stirrup reflects on the line's growth strategy, brand evolution, and the launch of *Celebrity Xcel* with **Rashmi Narayan**

When Celebrity Cruises launched its Edge series in 2018, it ushered in a new era of innovation with technological marvels like the Magic Carpet and Infinite Veranda staterooms.

Fast forward seven years and I'm onboard the line's fifth entry into the series, *Celebrity Xcel*, in Miami for its inaugural sailing. Wandering through the new Bazaar, a transformational space which highlights the destinations *Xcel* visits, I'm stunned by the vast array of local curios, before getting the chance to paint my own beach sign and fold my own tropical origami hummingbird.

I'm en route to a coffee shop near Mosaic, which offers cooking classes on local delicacies, to meet with Celebrity Cruises UK & EMEA managing director Claire Stirrup. Having been a key part of the Edge series revolution, she's keen to discuss how the ship has been designed around destination-led experiences and what this means for the trade.

Over coffee, Stirrup outlines her plans for the ship, how she will work with travel agents, and why guest-led design has become central to Celebrity Cruises' growth.

CURATING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

Key to the ongoing success of the vessel class and the wider cruise line are sister brands Royal Caribbean and Silversea, under the Royal Caribbean Group umbrella. Stirrup explains how the group's focus is less about its individual brands and more about retaining guests throughout different life stages.



The Bazaar brings places to life through themes, food and cocktails inspired by where guests have been



"We want to keep consumers in the ecosystem across the group," she explains. "Guests might start with Royal Caribbean when their children are young, move to Celebrity for a break as a couple, and later sail with Silversea. We're seeing a lot of multi-generational families across all three, so it's about keeping the customer with us."

Stirrup says destination remains one of the strongest drivers when guests choose a cruise itinerary, with experiences increasingly expected to extend beyond time spent ashore.

"With The Bazaar, they don't need to worry about leaving the destination behind. We bring those places to life onboard through themes, food and cocktails inspired by where they've been. It's about delivering what guests want from their holiday," she says.

That guest-led thinking is also shaping *Celebrity Xcel* through the line's Dream Makers programme,

What my career has taught me

Take chances

"Growth often comes from stepping into the unknown. Some of my best opportunities started with a leap of faith."

Look for opportunities

"Big or small, every opportunity can teach you something valuable. Keep learning, stay curious, and be open minded. It makes all the difference."

Get comfortable being uncomfortable

"Change and challenge can feel daunting, but that's where real progress happens. Embracing discomfort has helped me evolve both personally and professionally."

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Managing director Claire Stirrup; *Celebrity Xcel* has been shaped by guest feedback; life onboard is full of unique experiences

"There are gorgeous itineraries, including Madeira overnight and visits to Santorini, and we're excited to see what happens with the Bazaar and the new festivals on board. No two days are the same. Clients have something exciting to look forward to every day, and many come just to take photos of the spaces."

Celebrity Cruises' expansion into the river market has broadened the company's ambition. The first two vessels are set to launch in 2027, with the remaining eight delivered over subsequent years. Itineraries include sailings on the Danube and the Rhine, with potential for further deployment once the brand establishes itself.

LOOKING AHEAD

Stirrup explains: "Where we put our ships is driven by customer demand and booking trends. We're already planning 2028 and 2029 deployments. Wherever consumers want to go, we'll deliver, creating memories for a lifetime. We watch customer sentiment closely, and it guides our strategy."

"Guests tell us they want experiences – chef's tables, cooking classes, arts and crafts, the Attic club. Some want everything, some want very little. It's about choice and enhancing the holiday. This is how we keep evolving, making each sailing special, while remaining true to our brand and our customers." ●

which invites past passengers, travel agents and holiday enthusiasts to help co-create and shape experiences on the ship.

"We use Dream Makers to co-create experiences," Stirrup explains. "They vote on everything from festival names and colour schemes to menu choices. That feedback feeds directly into ship design and onboard offerings, including The Bazaar."

NEW SHIPS, NEW HORIZONS

Xcel will have a winter season in the Caribbean and then sail Europe this summer. Stirrup says: "We've got *Celebrity Xcel* in Europe as well as *Celebrity Ascent*, and *Celebrity Apex* out of Southampton. This shows our commitment to the UK, Middle East and Africa. This is what our customers want."

SHIP OF THE MONTH

DISNEY DESTINY

A hit among children and adults alike, Disney Cruise Line's newest ship and sister to *Disney Wish* and *Disney Treasure* takes its cues from the company's most cinematic tales to bring a new design theme to the high seas. Heroes and Villains celebrate the larger-than-life characters from Disney, Pixar, Marvel and Disney Parks through new dining experiences, such as *Pride Lands: Feast of The Lion King*, and the highly anticipated *Hercules* stage show. For the first time in Disney Cruise Line history, a Marvel superhero anchors the stern. *Disney Destiny's* inaugural season is currently underway, sailing four- and five-night cruises to The Bahamas and Western Caribbean, including visits to one or both of Disney Cruise Line's island destinations, Disney Castaway Cay and Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point.

Fast facts

4,000
passengers

1,256
staterooms

1,555
crew

10
pools and water areas



1 Dining

Guests should come prepared for *Destiny's* new family dining concept, *Pride Lands: Feast of The Lion King*, where they are transported to the savannah through animated artworks and African-inspired dishes. Meanwhile, ebullient entertainers perform classics from the film.



2 Entertainment

The Walt Disney Theatre's *Hercules* steals the spotlight with a soaring score and a five-headed Hydra that engulfs the stage. It's a lively centerpiece as part of a line-up that also has favourites such as *Frozen* and *Disney Seas the Adventure*.



3 Kids Club

This is a Disney ship, so you know little cruisers are in for an action-packed treat. At the Imagineering Lab, children can design their own rollercoaster, while the futuristic Incredibles sports arena features a mini basketball court, shuffleboard and Mario Kart.



4 Adult Spaces

There's plenty of fun for adults, too, such as the rainforest-themed Senses Spa or The Sanctum, with its spellbinding cocktails. Relax with live music at the new De Vil's Piano Lounge or enjoy a refreshing rum punch at the Pirates of the Caribbean pub.



5 Grand Hall

This gathering space is far from ordinary. This ever-changing, three-storey atrium offers 360-degree lighting and sound effects, filling the room with life and colour and taking on the signature aura of some of Disney's biggest personalities.

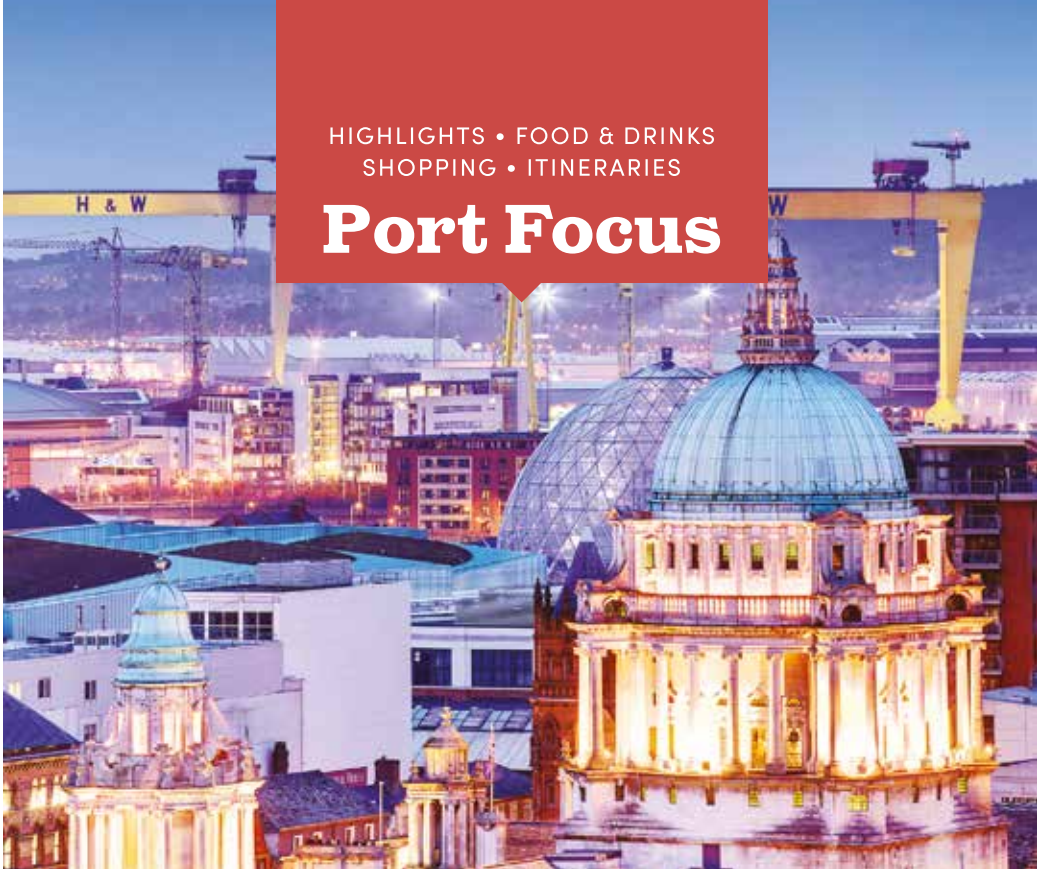


6 Pool

Disney is famous for its rides and slides with incredible ocean views. On the upper decks of *Destiny*, guests will find pools and play areas inspired by Mickey Mouse and his pals. Children will love the Toy Story Splash Zone, featuring colossal rubber bath toys.

HIGHLIGHTS • FOOD & DRINKS
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Port Focus



Belfast

A city with a troubled past, Belfast is in the throes of a cultural renaissance, making it one of the UK's most thrilling port stops, writes **Rashmi Narayan**

“Here in Belfast, we all have a shared past but not a shared memory,” says Frank Higgins, former British army officer and founder of Belfastlad Tours.

From launching the world's most famous ship to enduring decades of political violence during 'The Troubles' of the late-20th century, Belfast is a city with a story to tell. Today, it has emerged as a welcoming hub alive with infectious conviviality, where a contemporary harbourside and world-famous nightlife are evidence of the city's resurgence.

Compact and easily navigable, many of the destination's most popular sights are all within walking distance, making it a cruise-friendly stop-off. Guests can begin an action-packed shore day by tracing Belfast's industrial might at the Titanic Museum, where galleries cover the booming Victorian workforce and the ship's final hours.



Later, they can embark on a Black Taxi tour, where guides narrate their lived experiences from the city's darker times. And if they're in town for the evening, guests can have some 'craic' with the gregarious locals and enjoy traditional folk music at one of the historic pubs in the renowned Cathedral Quarter. Come rain or shine, this storied port city is ripe for exploring.

Three unmissable things to do

TITANIC MUSEUM

Looming over Belfast's revitalised docklands, the museum's hull-shaped façade is impossible to miss. Inside, it charts the tale of the Titanic while highlighting Belfast's industrial prowess as a shipbuilding and manufacturing hub. Highlights include a ride through a recreated shipyard, model cabins showing life in first, second and steerage class, and tales of heroic crew. Artefacts such as bandleader Wallace Hartley's violin and passengers' pocket watches frozen at the moment the ship sank are on display. Before leaving, visitors can pose like *Titanic* movie characters Jack and Rose on a makeshift bow.

CATHEDRAL QUARTER

The Cathedral Quarter is Belfast's beating heart. Guests can wander its cobbled streets, passing boutique shops,



art galleries and lively music venues. On Commercial Court, traditional pubs like The Duke of York and The Dirty Onion sit alongside neon-lit cafés and bars, while the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) showcases an eclectic range of Irish and international artists. A calendar of events, such as Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, celebrating traditional Irish music, and Féile an Phobail, the island's largest community arts festival, transform the quarter's cobblestone streets into stages and galleries.

TROUBLES TOUR

Nearly three decades since the Good Friday Agreement ended the conflict, The Troubles continue to shape the visitor experience. Many companies offer Black Taxi tours, but with Belfastlad, stories are packed with heart and grit. Visitors will pass houses pockmarked with bullet holes, wired fences and streets that once burned with turmoil, while murals form a powerful

“ On Belfastlad tours, stories are packed with heart and grit

open-air gallery, depicting figures like Bobby Sands, global solidarity and community celebration. Beyond the Troubles, guests can opt for tailored tours to abandoned castles, vanishing lakes and eerie local sites.

Three places to eat

BUDGET

Visitors can fill their boots on a four-hour foodie adventure with Taste & Tour, sampling the city's best steak, soda bread, cocktails and local beer. For casual dining, recommend St George's Market, one of Ireland's oldest markets dating back to 1604, brimming with local produce. Guests can expect Armagh apple tarts, Irish breakfast baps, Spanish paella, Mexican burritos and Sicilian cannoli.

MID-RANGE

Set in a historic building near grand City Hall, Home Restaurant champions local produce with hearty dishes such as slow-braised beef, caramelised root vegetables and an extensive gluten-free and vegan menu. Mourne Seafood Bar in the Cathedral Quarter, meanwhile, serves fresh oysters, mussels and fish directly from local day-boats. Though the menu changes frequently, their

seafood chowder served with Irish soda bread is a crowd favourite and one that shouldn't be missed.

PREMIUM

OX is one of two Michelin-starred restaurants in Belfast, serving seasonal tasting menus that celebrate local produce, from scallops in a lemongrass bisque to celeriac with black trumpet mushrooms. After dinner, head to The Merchant Hotel's award-winning bar for cocktails, where mixologists serve classic and contemporary drinks and rare whiskies beneath glittering chandeliers, rounding off an unforgettable evening.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM FAR LEFT

The unmissable Titanic museum; the famous Harland & Wolff cranes; street art is a major attraction around the city; the Cathedral Quarter offers lots to see and do; enjoy a drink under the Merchant Hotel's glittering chandeliers

Get on board

Princess's 12-day British Isles with France & Belfast cruise aboard *Majestic Princess*, return from Southampton via Cornwall, Cork, Dublin, Liverpool, Belfast, Glasgow, Invergordon and Edinburgh, departs on 7 April 2027, from £1,119pp. princess.com



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Renaissance



A classic **REBORN**

Ambassador Cruise Line hit the headlines last year when it announced the launch of its first-ever Caribbean fly-cruise season.

Will Payne steps onboard the vessel spearheading this new chapter to find out what's on offer



The Renaissance era is defined as a “cultural and intellectual movement that marked the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, through a flourishing of arts, literature, science and philosophy”.

Therefore, relaunching a ship named after this cultural rebirth conjures lofty expectations for something new and exciting. For Ambassador Cruise Line, its first-ever fly-cruise Caribbean vessel lives up to the billing.

As I step onboard *Renaissance* for the first time in Tilbury, the line’s UK base of operations, a palpable buzz of excitement emanates as hands frantically prepare for the ship’s first transatlantic crossing to Barbados, where it will sail 14-night itineraries through to March 2026.

The addition of the vessel comes after Ambassador last year merged with French operator Compagnie Française de Croisières (CFC) to form the Ambassador Group. The 1,100-guest ship was renovated in 2023, and upgraded with the latest environmental technologies in January 2025 in line with Ambassador’s sustainability protocols.

“
**As I step onboard
Renaissance, a
palpable buzz of
excitement emanates**

Fast facts

55,575
Gross tonnage

1,100
Passengers

629
Cabins

9
Guest decks

Christian Verhounig, Ambassador Cruise Line CEO, believes the new Caribbean season “really showcases what makes us special”, with each itinerary designed to utilise *Renaissance*’s smaller size.

Here, we take a closer look at what to expect from Ambassador’s first foray into the fly-cruise market.

SEA OF DREAMS

All cabins are spacious – even the interior options – and offer ample room for storage and relaxation, making the accommodation feel more like a home rather than just a room.

Options range from Inside Cabins to Suites, with the former offering a compact yet stylish feel with modern amenities and the latter featuring the same but with an elevated experience with premium furnishings and additional living spaces. A private bathroom, flat screen TV, mini bar, safe, hairdryer and pool towels can be found in every cabin.

Curtains on inside cabins are a nice touch, helping to alleviate the lack of a window. The ship has 18 wheelchair-accessible cabins, 100 single cabins and 102 interconnecting cabins, making it an ideal option for solo travellers, families and those with accessibility requirements.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Ambassador has launched its first ever Caribbean fly-cruise season; *Renaissance* embodies its era-defining name; all cabins are spacious and relaxing; the stylish Ocean Bar is a great place to enjoy a cocktail



Bars include the Panoramic Lounge, located at the front of the ship on the highest deck offering 180° views; and the Ocean Bar overlooking the Foyer, which is a great place for guests to enjoy a cocktail, wine or beer from a specially crafted drinks menu.

SENSATIONAL SEAS

For a near 34-year-old ship, *Renaissance* is home to the state-of-the-art Green Sea Spa, offering a choice of treatments like hot stone massages, seaweed wraps and traditional Balinese massage that uses acupressure, aromatherapy and long strokes to promote deep relaxation.

Elsewhere, The Lido Pool features two whirlpools, a swimming pool, plenty of sun loungers and a retractable roof. There's also a well-equipped gym with free weights, cardio machines and aerobic area to work up an appetite.

Ambassador Cruise Line's newest vessel is not only named after an era-defining moment but embodied by it. After all, the line itself was borne from the ashes of Cruise and Maritime Voyages in 2021 after the company went into administration, so the addition of *Renaissance* feels like the next step in the right direction for a cruise line which continues to excite and surprise. ●

CURTAIN CALL

Renaissance will host a range of activities and entertainment options to keep guests engaged day and night, including West End style shows, variety acts and more playing twice daily in the Theatre. The World of Wonder is one experience guests shouldn't miss. Starting with a vibrant 20-minute vignette that invites travellers to step into a world alive with rhythm, colour and culture, the show is guided by charismatic actor-hosts.

It's a whirlwind tour across continents, a visual and musical celebration filled with rich soundscapes, dazzling movement, and a confetti-filled finale

“ A range of activities and entertainment options will keep guests engaged day and night

that leaves the spirit lifted and the heart inspired. Guests will also find a range of quizzes and gameshows, and the line's Gala Night has been transformed with new pop-up performances from Theatre@Sea.

THE LAST SUPPER

Dining options are aplenty onboard, including the Vatel Restaurant, set across two decks with a ceiling illuminated by a thousand lights offering sweeping sea views; the Belle Vue buffet restaurant for a more casual dining experience; and several speciality dining venues including La Table Du Chef.

In the Grand Restaurant, the ship's main dining room, guests will find Caribbean-inspired menus featuring sharing platters with oyster Bienville, Jamaican beef patties and conch fritters, as well as grilled beef tenderloin and a fragrant malai kofta korma for the main course.





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LIVING ON THE EDGE

With some of the world's most powerful tides surging through a landscape of immense cliffs, Australia's remote Kimberley region is an adventurer's paradise, writes **Nori Jemil**

Few places on the Australian continent are as fabled as the remote northwest.

I'm fortunate to have travelled here before, camping by the rust-red cliffs and ochre sands of the Dampier Peninsula.

A scenic flight showed me the wonders of the Buccaneer Archipelago, so named because of the multitude of 'sailors' (read pirates) who came here in search of land and treasure.

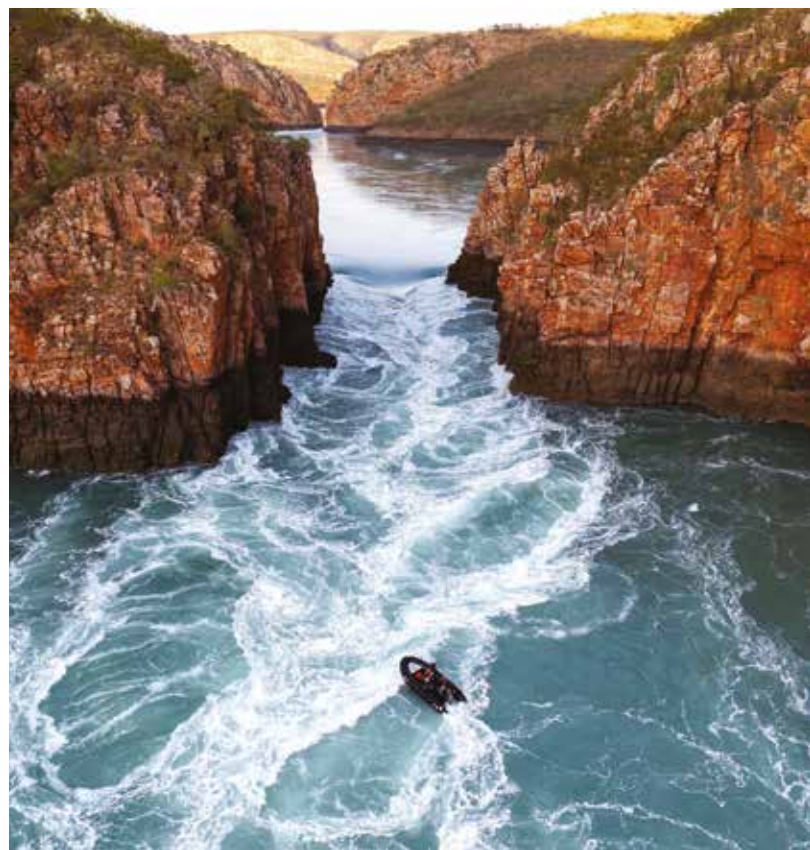
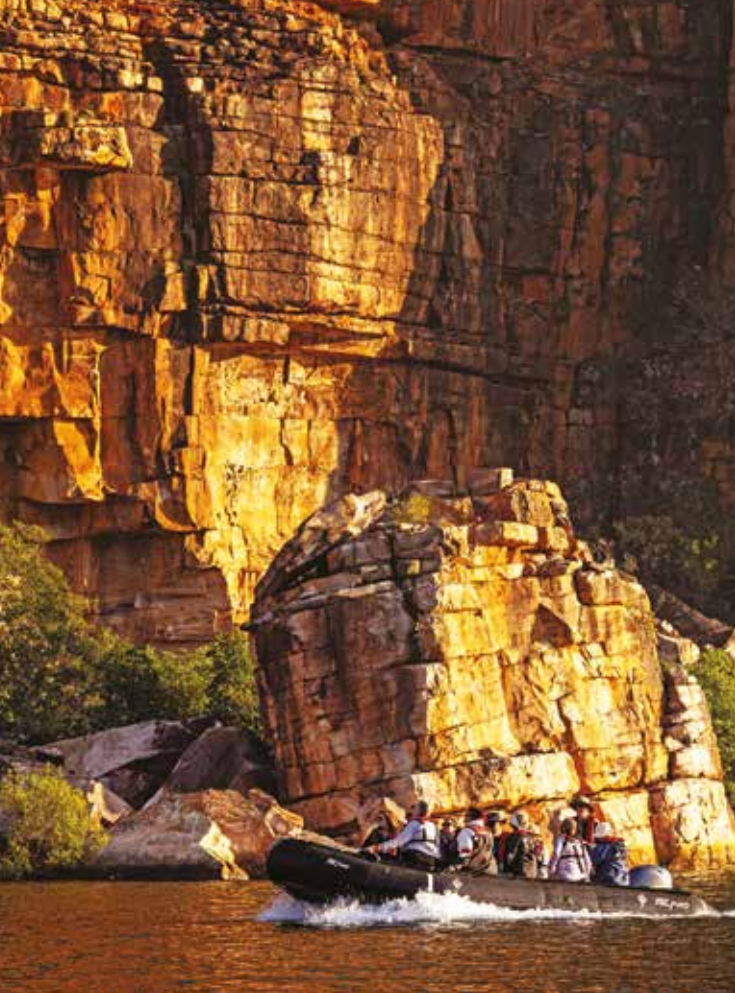
I've ridden the legendary Gibb River Road, too, but never before have I had an oceanside view of this immense coastline. As the 140-guest

expedition ship *Heritage Adventurer* pulls out of port, the evening's burnt orange skies and rolling seas offer a hint of the natural wonders yet to come.

I'm here on Heritage Expeditions' 11-day trip to Darwin, which operates in July and August. Our jumping-off point is Broome, an old pearling settlement where outback meets ocean. The town has retained a frontier feel, with a multicultural population, mostly descended from the pioneers who raised it from the red dirt in the heady days of the late 19th century, when a single lustrous pearl could make a man's fortune – or so the story goes.

Yet Broome is just a small dot on the edge of a region that's roughly twice the size of the UK but with a population of just 40,000. And the coastline is astonishing. At our first briefing, expedition leader Steve Todd tells us that if we went into "every nook and cranny", the distance to Darwin would be just short of 13,000 kilometres. We'll have time for only a fraction of that, with weather and tides playing a big part in our choice of route.

Our first deviation comes almost immediately, taking us towards the Henrietta Islands – a first for Heritage Expeditions and a reminder that, as our captain puts it, "tides run the show here." ►



CROC WATCH

The first morning's Zodiac excursion, through a mangrove habitat, is a venture into the wild – and the realm of the terrifying saltwater crocodile. “We are in croc country every day,” Steve warns. Not that it puts us off; after ten minutes of slight trepidation and remembering to be ‘croc-wise’, we all become impatient for a sighting. At first, gliding through Kimberley’s vast mangrove forests on our twice-daily excursions, we see red-collared lorikeets flit from tree to tree – a flash of colour amid the green. Later, stark white snowy and plumed egrets shroud themselves in the shadows of the mangrove roots, occasionally spooked by the buzz of an approaching engine, their majesty better appreciated as they take to the air.

Our guide, zoology professor Dr Murray Potter, explains the importance of this unique ecosystem. Not only do these salt-tolerant plants create biodiversity, providing habitats for a multitude of wildlife, they’re also crucial for our changing world. In order to protect any coastline, says Murray,

“Appreciation for wildlife and its habitats runs in Heritage Expeditions’ blood

“It’s wise not to treat mangroves as disposable. As sea levels rise, we need them more than ever.”

Blue-spotted mudskippers and flame-backed fiddler crabs make the most of the intertidal mudflats, and we idle for a while, watching them scud and scuttle. Suddenly we come upon our first basking ‘saltie’ and the atmosphere changes. Our guide watches, confident that the croc’s back leg is relaxed enough to indicate that he’s not going anywhere in a hurry. I relax too. Surrounded by seasoned experts, from marine biologist Dr Jessica Strickland to ornithologist Mathieu Poot, we could not be in safer hands.

Appreciation for wildlife and its increasingly vulnerable habitats runs in Heritage Expeditions’ blood. Founded

by New Zealand conservationists Rodney and Shirley Russ in 1984, the line is now run by their sons, Nathan and Aaron, making it Australasia’s only family-owned and operated expedition cruise company. As the trip progresses it becomes clear that most of the guides and speakers know Rodney Russ personally, many having followed a similar career path via the New Zealand Wildlife Service. Heritage guests also get plenty of opportunities to learn about their work during citizen science activities.

ROCK STARS

Our first proper landing is at Edeline Island, where – as with several of the shore excursions – it’s the geology that’s most remarkable. Siltstone rock formations, weathered to beautiful sculptures by wind and water, dominate the landscape.

On other days we’ll get slightly lost in the labyrinth of ‘Hathaway’s Hideaway’, a series of smoothly curved sandstone chambers, while cruising the iron-rich gorges, cliffs and chasms at King George River and the Mitchell Plateau.



From here I take a helicopter ride to the immense waterfalls where billions of years of geological formations are on display. Geologist Hamish Campbell tells me these are among the oldest exposed rocks on the planet, some dating back nearly two thousand million years (we humans, by comparison, have been around for a puny seven million). It's mind-blowing to look on these chiselled monoliths and try to comprehend how long they have stood here.

TIME AND TIDE

Next day there's a rush of excitement as we depart for our 6.30am "adrenaline run" to the mouth of the Horizontal Falls – Garaanngaddim, to use their aboriginal name – at Talbot Bay. Here, powerful tides push enormous volumes of water through two narrow gaps, creating the world's only lateral waterfall.

Our Zodiac zooms around today's impressive tidal eddies and across the face of the entrance. But we don't enter the gap, out of respect for the land's aboriginal custodians, whose creation story tells how the channel was formed by a snake.

TRUE CUSTODIANS

At Freshwater Cove, Gideon Mowaljarlai performs a welcome ceremony before we walk through boulder-strewn terrain to see an example of the region's rock art. It is a privilege to be guided by indigenous Australians, whose culture stretches back to the 5,000-year-old Wandjara rock paintings and even to the Gwion Gwion examples, some of which were made by their ancestors 40,000 years ago.

Though the ruby-red gorges and monster crocodiles might be the Kimberley's most attention-grabbing stars, for me it's the human stories, inscribed on cave walls and spoken in gentle tones, that make the biggest impression. The Dambeemangarddee people of the Lalang-gaddam Marine Park have conserved this country for tens of thousands of years and will continue to do so in collaboration with the Western Australian government. After all, nobody knows this land better than they do. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT King George River's iron-rich gorges; Horizontal Falls, the world's only lateral waterfall; Montgomery Reef, part of Lalang-gaddam Marine Park; reefs offer sanctuary for birds and other marine wildlife; Kimberley is the realm of the saltwater crocodile



EXPERT VERDICT

Joanna Jacovides, trade and marketing executive, Tourism Western Australia

"A Kimberley cruise is perfect for clients seeking immersive, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. One of the last true wilderness regions on Earth, the Kimberley appeals to well-travelled clients who may have experienced a polar cruise or safari. Travellers who enjoy nature and venturing off the beaten track will love this region. For agents, the key selling points are simple: it's a high value, bucket list experience delivering constant 'wow' moments, without guests needing to think about logistics. Clients return absolutely amazed and ready to share their experience."





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

Juli Hodson
Travel Counsellor



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Viking
Venus

EXPLORING
CRUISE REVIEW

SPIRIT & SPICE

On a culinary-themed voyage from Bangkok to Hong Kong aboard *Viking Venus*, Chris Caldicott discovers an exciting combination of sizzling street food and cool spiritual calm



Among the historical figures and cuisines that infuse Southeast Asia's cultural broth, there are two constants: Buddhas and chillies. Both are imports – Buddhism from India over two millennia ago, and chillies from the Americas, which arrived 500 years ago on the ships of spice merchants.

It's a fact that becomes evident almost immediately during my cruise between Bangkok and Hong Kong with Viking, which kicks off with a comfortable pre-cruise stay at the elegant Shangri-La hotel on the Thai capital's riverfront. Having taken five to acclimatise to the new time zone and climate, my itinerary kicks off with a visit to Wat Pho to see Thailand's largest collection of antique Buddha images, reachable from my hotel via a pleasant 35-minute boat ride along Bangkok's Chao Phraya river. After marvelling at the giant shimmering Buddha stretching out in 150 foot of relaxed golden splendour, one of many wonderful discoveries strewn across the eight-hectare sight, it's time for the continent's other beloved import.

The chillis arrive like a tsunami back in the Shangri-La restaurant, where my taste buds are ignited by dishes of

“Excursions to cooking schools are a highlight of many itineraries in this part of the world

Fast facts

930
guests

465
cabins

465
crew

6
restaurants

deep-fried tofu in a spicy sauce, a hot and sour seafood soup with lemongrass and fresh herbs and wok-fried kale with shiitake mushrooms. I thoroughly enjoy every mouthful.

For a palate-cooling nightcap I head to the picturesque Bamboo Bar at the Mandarin Oriental to try its new signature 'White Lotus' cocktail, created to mark the venue's role in the latest series of the hit HBO television series. I give it a swirl, letting the liquid coat the large square ice cube filling the circular glass. It's citrusy and refreshing, and sweetened with a fruit I had never tasted before called salak.

KHMER LANDS IN THE GULF OF THAILAND

Excursions to cooking schools are a highlight of many cruise itineraries in this part of the world, so I'm excited to arrive at Don Bosco in the port of Sihanoukville for a crash course in Cambodian cuisine. After an introduction to the ingredients on display in the local market, the class begins with a classic Khmer spice paste called *kroeung*. Under strict instructions from Chef Dara, we pound the exact quantities of galangal, garlic, lemongrass, lime leaves, chillis



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

The Mandarin Oriental offers stunning views; Ho Chi Minh City's bustling markets are a feast for the senses; marvel at Wat Pho's Buddha statues; Viking's culinary-themed trip is the perfect way to explore Southeast Asia and Hong Kong

The Lin Ung Pagoda at our next stop, Da Nang, boasts a modern statue of a giant female Buddha, which we admire while enjoying spicy seaside snacks in a cool lounge bar on My Khe Beach, once a favourite surfing spot for GIs. Inevitably, it evokes memories of scenes from the film *Apocalypse Now*.

EAST MEETS WEST

The culinary discoveries continue back onboard, courtesy of Viking's five-course 'La Route Des Indes' menu and Indonesian dishes served in The Chef's Table. Meanwhile, pop-up food events in the World Cafe are complemented by outdoor stalls on deck serving authentic Asian street food like Pho Noodle Soup.

On my last sea day, I book a deep tissue massage and haircut in the Liv Nordic Spa before taking an Italian cooking class at the ship's Kitchen Table Cooking School, a chance to get reacquainted with western flavours.

Viking Venus's maiden visit of Hong Kong is celebrated by a pilot tug with its firehose salute guiding us to our dock on Kowloon's Ocean Terminal. After a nostalgic city tour of the city that was once home, I take a ferry to Cheung Chau Island, past the giant Ngong Ping Buddha statue on Lantau, for a bowl of chilli prawn fried rice by the beach, ensuring the Buddha and chilli theme continues right to the end of my voyage.

Get on board

Viking's 14-night Southeast Asia & Hong Kong cruise on *Viking Orion*, from Bangkok to Laem Chabang (Hong Kong), via Sihanoukville, Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Long Bay, departs 30 October 2026, from £4,990pp, including flights.
viking.com

and turmeric to flavour a coconut milk broth, which we serve with a steamed white fish in homemade banana leaf bowls. It's a dish called Amok and it dates all the way back to the 9th century where it was a royal favourite. While the fish steams away we make crispy golden Banh Xeo rice flour pancakes stuffed with mushrooms and a spicy Toek Trey Chou sweet and sour sauce to dip them in.

After lunch, our city guide Thi Kim shares stories of how she survived the traumas of the Khmer Rouge era genocide as told in the film *Killing Fields*. "It was the darkest of times," she tells us, "but the future for my grandchildren is now bright." She takes us to Wat Krom, a hilltop Buddhist monastery resurrected after the iconoclastic vandalism of the Khmer Rouge. Today, it's a thriving community of orange-robed monks in a serene setting among tall trees and jungle foliage.

**“
There are lingering
legacies of the French
colonial era visible all
through Ho Chi Minh**

**SAILING THE
SOUTH CHINA SEA**

There are lingering legacies of the French colonial era throughout Ho Chi Minh, such as the elegant opera house, grand post office and whiffs of freshly baked baguettes that waft from the banh mi stalls.

Having sailed out of Sihanoukville with a deep understanding of Cambodian cuisine, it's only right that we pay the same respect to Vietnamese gastronomy with a second cooking class. This one begins in the city's old Saigon-era Ben Thanh Market with our guide Fun who struggles to keep our concentration on ingredient shopping rather than the temptations of other stalls. At the Hoa Tuc school we are assigned personal cooking stations.

Chef Mai's infectious sense of humour makes learning the art of creating contemporary versions of traditional Vietnamese dishes a lot of fun. Eating the resulting Cha Gio Sai Gon spicy spring rolls, a tom thit chilli and fresh herb infused prawn and papaya salad and a Pho Bo beef noodle soup for lunch was an indulgent reward for our efforts.



RIDING THE WAVE

CLIA UK and Ireland managing director **Andy Harmer** OBE explores how to make the most of the Wave period, with 2026's iteration presenting "more opportunity than ever"

Wave has always been a pivotal period for our sector, and this year presents an even greater opportunity for travel agents to shine. With demand at record levels, an incredible variety of ships at sea to choose from and an increasingly diverse customer base ready to book, now is the time to maximise momentum and make 2026 your strongest selling year yet.

One of the greatest strengths of our industry is the sheer breadth of choice now available to customers. From intimate expedition vessels exploring the polar regions to family-friendly resort ships packed with entertainment, ultra-luxury yachts and river ships offering immersive cultural journeys, and small-ship adventures taking guests to hidden gems – our members represent the widest range of holiday experiences anywhere in travel.

No other sector can take travellers from Antarctica to the Amazon, from the fjords to the Med, with food, entertainment, exploration and service



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM Wave is always a pivotal period; Andy Harmer says demand is at record levels

“
Wave is the perfect time to refresh your skills, explore new sectors of the market and unlock opportunities

levels to suit every budget and style of traveller.

For agents, this variety is a gift. It means there are almost endless options – for both repeat and new-to-cruise clients. And it also means staying informed, confident and ready to match customers with the perfect sailing. That's where CLIA is here to support you.

On the CLIA website, you'll find a comprehensive suite of free learning tools designed specifically to help you thrive during Wave. Our e-learning

modules cover everything from ship classes and deployment to sustainability and guest demographics. Our online New To guides cover all of the essentials on all major cruise sectors. And our unique Virtual Ship Tours allow you to explore a range of cruise ships across all sectors. Our online resources are updated constantly, ensuring you have the best information and insights at the right time for your clients.

We know that agents who invest in knowledge sell more confidently and convert more consistently. So, whether you're new to cruise or a long-standing expert, Wave is the perfect time to refresh your skills, explore new sectors of the market and unlock opportunities you may not have considered before – from themed sailings to shoulder-season adventures, from no-fly cruises to once-in-a-lifetime expeditions.

My message is simple: Wave is here, demand is strong and the tools are at your fingertips. Use them. Engage with us. Take advantage of the extraordinary choice the industry now offers. And together, let's make this the most successful Wave yet – for your customers, your business and the cruise community. Happy new year!



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