

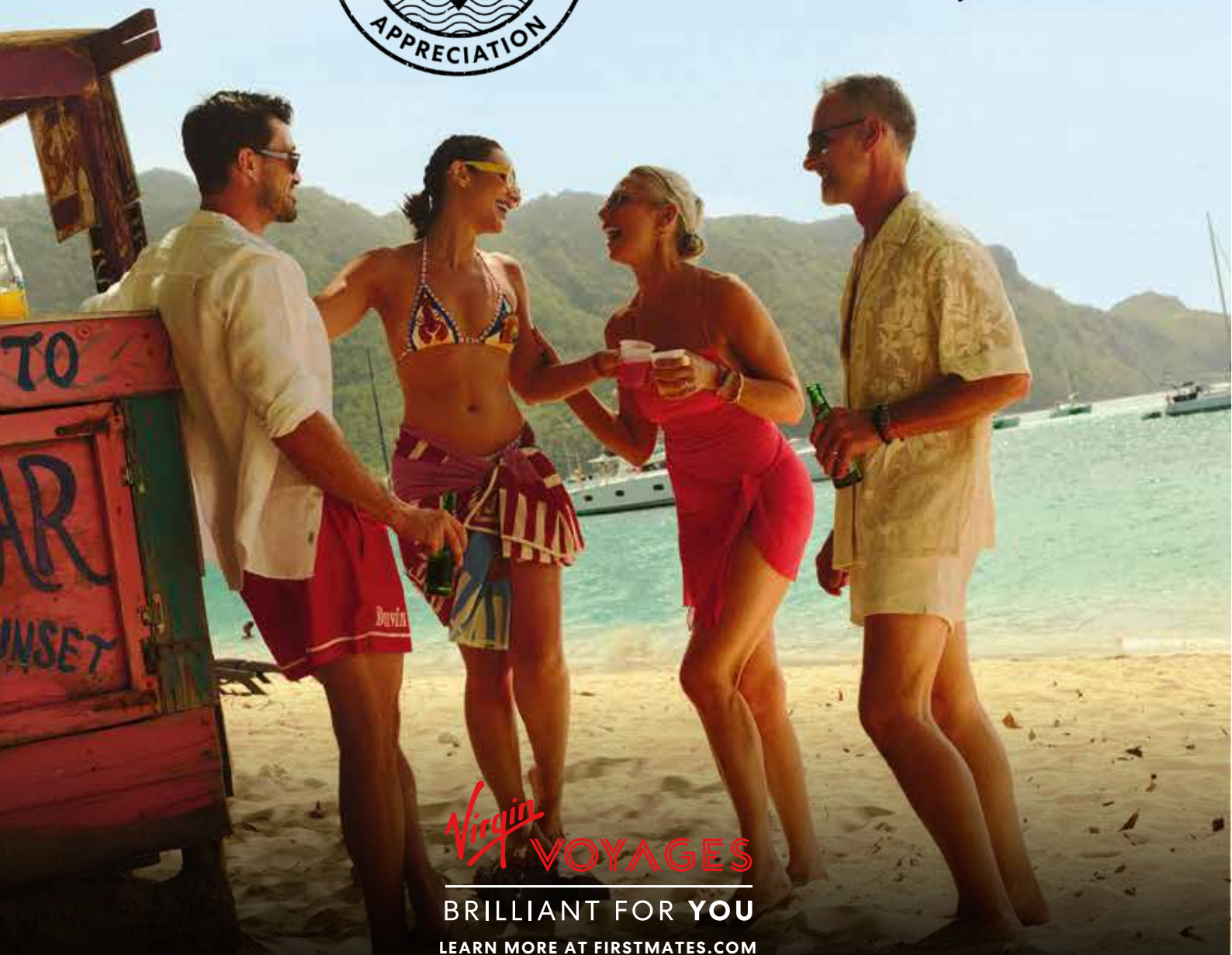
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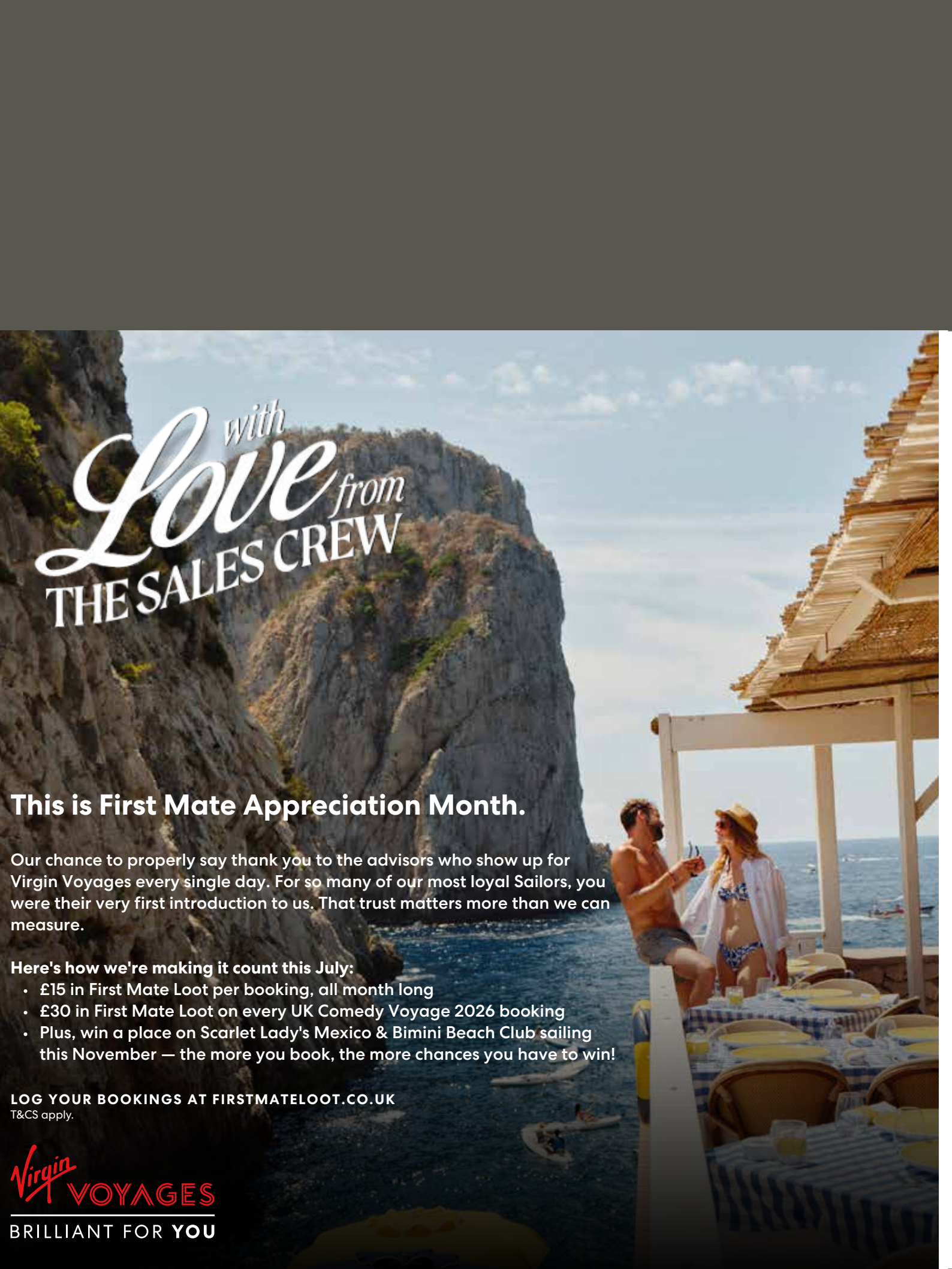
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ISSUE 144 • JULY/AUGUST 2026

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CRUISE

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PLUS:

CTN INVESTIGATES ARE PRIVATE ISLANDS TAKING CRUISE IN THE WRONG DIRECTION? P35
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WELCOME... TO THE JULY/AUGUST ISSUE

Summer has a habit of making the travel industry look effortless. Airports are busy, ships are full and holidaymakers are finally embarking on the trips they've been planning all year. But behind every seamless journey is an industry that never stands still, adapting to political uncertainty, economic volatility and shifting consumer demands while finding new ways to inspire travellers.

That spirit of resilience is what we've aimed to capture throughout this issue. On page 7, we hear from two businesses feeling the impact of the revolving door at Number 10 Downing Street, while on page 14, the CEO of Oceanwide Expeditions reflects on the lessons learned three months after the hantavirus outbreak on board *MV Hondius*. Then, turn to page 29 for a sneak peek at this year's upcoming Cruise Summit.

Elsewhere, Emily Eastman explores whether the rise of private island destinations is creating a cruise tourism bubble (p.35), while Kayleigh Rattle shares her guide to spending the perfect day in Lisbon, whether you have guests travelling as a couple, with family or flying solo (p.62).



ABOVE Dream destinations become a reality as summer reaches its peak

Keep an eye out for CTN September, where we've partnered with Princess Cruises to create a special issue designed to help you inspire customers, secure more sales and take your cruise and travel business to the next level.

Until then, I wish you a successful peak season. Whatever the months ahead bring, *Cruise Trade News* will be here to keep you one step ahead.

Happy reading!

Will Payne
Editor

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Political headwinds

► The UK public has become accustomed to government instability. Since 2016, the country has had six prime ministers: Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, Rishi Sunak, Sir Keir Starmer and Andy Burnham. Each one inherited a country grappling with a different set of challenges, from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic to soaring inflation, industrial

actions and an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape. For travel businesses, the Downing Street revolving door has created an environment where long-term planning is increasingly difficult. Policy direction shifts, fiscal priorities change and confidence ebbs and flows with every political announcement. For consumers, the result has been a growing sense of caution over spending, particularly on discretionary purchases like holidays.

Yet despite persistent uncertainty, Britain's appetite for travel has remained resilient, but



Continued overleaf



agents say customers are waiting until closer to departure before booking as they monitor world events, prices and advice.

Hannah Vincent, owner of Select World Travel, says some customers have become hesitant to commit funds months in advance, preferring to keep money in their own bank accounts amid concerns over financial security and potential disruption. "Certain clients are now not confident in travelling and are cancelling travel plans because of

potential risks. The seasonal booking expectations have been different this year with booking numbers dipping alongside the Middle Eastern crisis. However, as clients get more confident, we are seeing more future planning taking place."

Vincent has urged the government to provide a time frame of when information or decisions are likely to be made to give businesses a forecast to help manage their own policies and client expectations. David Moon, customer success director at

Booking behaviour has shifted towards the late market

Advantage Travel Partnership, says demand for travel remains strong, but booking behaviour has shifted dramatically towards the late market, with almost half of the organisation's holidays now departing within 12 weeks of booking.

"At present, members feel they have to grow but for no more return. This then hits confidence, which impacts future investments. Bureaucracy is also challenging for small businesses, who often do not have the time to look for government schemes or grants."

For an industry that thrives on helping customers look forward, constant political upheaval has made planning harder than ever. The UK's travel sector has shown time and again that it can adapt. But after years of shifting leadership, many in the trade are asking for something increasingly rare: consistency.

IN NUMBERS

6

UK prime ministers since 2016



50%

of Advantage bookings departing within 12 weeks



-23

is the UK's latest GfK consumer confidence score



ROYAL BOSS BACKS EUROPE

> Europe is a "travel playground" for Royal Caribbean Group, the company's chief executive has hailed, as he confirmed the region has seen "absolutely exceptional" demand. Speaking on the launch of Royal Caribbean International's newest Icon class ship, *Legend of the Seas*, Jason Liberty emphasised the importance of Europe to the brand, which is why the latest vessel is sailing in the region, he added.

Legend will operate seven-night Western Mediterranean itineraries in

summer 2026 and 2027 to capitalise on the "thirst" the line is seeing for sailings in Europe, Liberty said.

"Europe is a travel playground and people thirst to come here and immerse themselves in the incredible culture in the countries.

"Now we have more than two Icon class ships, we can bring one here which generates a huge amount of interest and demand and allows us to live our mission: match every guest with that vacation experience they are looking for."



SCAN
to read more about MSC
Cruises' new-look trade
support team

SPOTLIGHT

Lee Haslett



Lee Haslett has announced plans to leave Celestyal after three years as chief commercial officer. He will remain with Celestyal until October to ensure a smooth transition before taking on a senior commercial leadership role within "one of the world's leading sports organisations", the line said.

The recruitment process for his successor is currently underway, the company added. Chris Theophilides, chief executive officer of Celestyal, praised Haslett's contribution to the brand, which included leading the company's global strategy across revenue management, sales, marketing, UK trade partnerships and distribution.

Haslett said: "It has been an incredible privilege to be part of Celestyal's journey over the past three and a half years. I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together and grateful to Chris [Theophilides], the leadership team and all of my colleagues for their support and ambition."

SOLAR SAILINGS

➤ Nearly half of cruise travellers say they would be interested in watching a solar eclipse while at sea, according to new data from cruise.co.uk.

The online specialist surveyed more than 1,000 customers and found 48 per cent would like to see the sight while cruising.

The Mediterranean was the destination with the most appeal for an eclipse cruise, at 19 per cent, followed by Norway on 18 per cent and Iceland on 15 per cent, while 11 per cent favoured the Caribbean.

Cruise.co.uk found the biggest attraction of an eclipse cruise is the opportunity to witness a rare natural phenomenon, at 45 per cent, ahead of the shared atmosphere on board, at nine per cent, or photography opportunities, at eight per cent.

**“
48% of customers
would like to
experience a solar
eclipse on a cruise**



STEP BY STEP

➤ More than 1,000 agents have collectively raised £15,000 for charity after they walked more than 92,000 miles as part of Norwegian Cruise Line's (NCL) Walk for Wellness challenge.

The initiative, now in its third year, encourages the UK travel agent community to lace up their trainers and step away from their desks to improve mental health and physical fitness, with NCL donating money for each milestone reached.

Agents could swap stories, spur each other on, and interact with images taken on their walks with NCL's Wellbeing+ app. The money raised will be split between ABTA Lifeline and ITTA Benevolent Fund.

**“
I am immensely
proud of what
we have achieved
together at Celestyal**

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INSTANT IMPACT

A travel agent has secured two bookings with HX Expeditions worth almost £50,000 (€66,000) just days after visiting the line's *MS Fram* as part of the CLIA Expedition Cruise Summit. Danni Martin, cruise expert from CruiseKings, converted the event into two 23-night In-depth Antarctica, South Georgia and Falklands itinerary bookings after the visit gave her a new insight into the cruise offering.

She said: "Experiencing *MS Fram* in Dover, meeting the expedition team,

seeing the cabins first-hand and getting a real sense of life on board completely changed my understanding of the product. Hearing from the onboard historian and spending time with the team brought everything together in a way no training or webinar ever could."

It comes after HX Expeditions took part in the 2026 CLIA Expedition Cruise Summit. The programme brought together expedition cruise partners and agents for two days of networking, learning and collaboration.

SPOTLIGHT

Chris Barker



Hurtigruten has appointed Chris Barker as key account manager, "strengthening the company's commitment to its UK and emerging market travel trade partners", the line said.

Barker has previously held sales roles at Celebrity Cruises, Riviera Travel and Designer Travel. In his new position, he has been tasked with working with the Hurtigruten sales teams to support trade partners, grow key accounts, enhance agent engagement and develop new opportunities across both the UK and emerging market regions.



EXPERT-LED INSIGHT

The Expedition Cruise Network (ECN) has announced the keynote speakers for its 2026 conference. Maritime archaeologist Mensun Bound (pictured near right) will deliver the keynote on day one of the event, which will take place on 29-30 September at Glaziers Hall, London.

Bound was the director of exploration on the 2022 team that discovered *Endurance*, the lost ship

of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-17, in the Weddell Sea.

Antonia Ward (pictured far left) will speak on day two. Ward is the chief futurist at Stylus, a trends intelligence consultancy, and she will explore how people might research and experience travel in the years ahead to help businesses prepare for evolving consumer expectations.

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Head to this issue's
special supplement
for the latest from the
luxury cruise sector



RECORD BREAKERS

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises has reported "record demand" from UK travellers with bookings nearly a third higher than this time last year. The line said bookings for 2026 are up 32 per cent year on year while 2027 bookings are 63 per cent ahead of the same point last year.

The line attributed much of its success to the launch of new ships and itineraries for 2026 and 2027. *SS Emilie* joined the fleet earlier this year while *SS Audrey*, *SS Marlene* and *SS São Rafael* will all

enter service next year. Plus, after a sell-out 2026 launch season, Uniworld is expanding its 2027 partnership with Seabourn, offering three new river and ocean cruise sailings.

"With record demand, a new generation of Super Ships and an expanded portfolio that now spans river cruises, luxury touring and immersive journeys across the globe, Uniworld is redefining what a boutique river cruise company can offer," a spokesperson said.

SPOTLIGHT

Amanda Docherty



Riviera Travel head of trade UK and Ireland, Amanda Docherty, has hailed the line's agent partners after the brand reported a "record-breaking" start to 2026. Year-to-date results show 27 per cent growth in UK trade sales compared to last year. "These results are a reflection of the strength of our partnerships and we're grateful for the ongoing support from our agent community," Docherty said. "Seeing such strong growth across both passenger numbers and revenue is hugely encouraging."



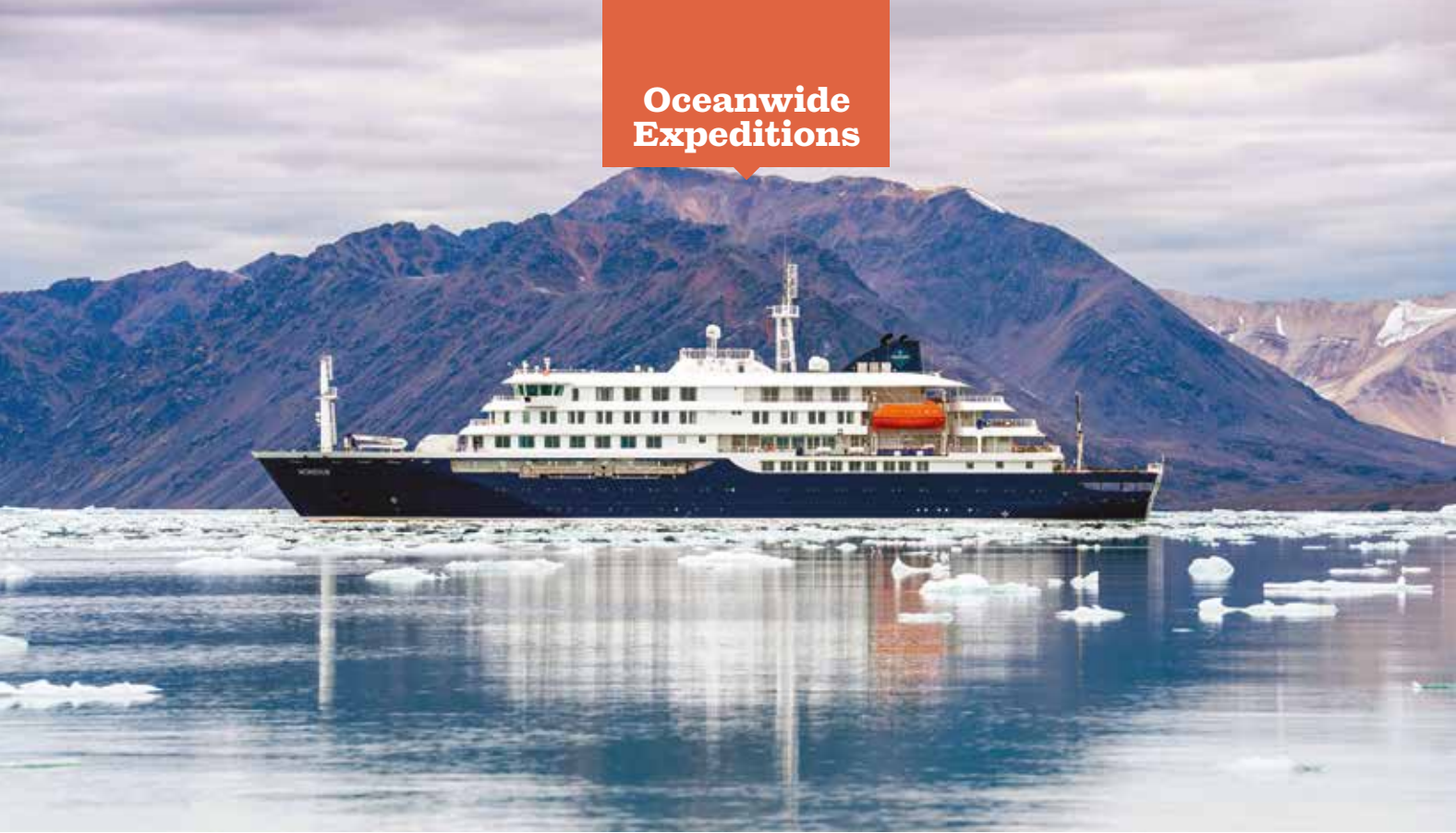
KNOWLEDGE BOOSTER

VIVA Cruises has introduced a video-led training programme to its agent portal with a trade incentive. The initiative comprises five modules covering an introduction to the operator, its fleet of ships, the onboard experience, shore excursions and destinations.

Each includes a quiz, with more modules to be added in due course. Agents who complete the course will

become a 'VIVA Cruises specialist' and are automatically entered into a prize draw to win a cruise for two. Winners will be selected at the end of every quarter.

Michelle Daniels, country manager UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand at VIVA Cruises, said: "We've developed our training programme to make learning about VIVA Cruises easier and more accessible."



‘It felt like the movie *Alien*... there was a monster onboard’

The CEO of hantavirus-hit Oceanwide Expeditions, Remi Bouysset, tells **Josie Klein** how the tragic events unfolded and what it means for the future of cruise

The spread of hantavirus on *MV Hondius* became global news very quickly and drew comparisons to the Covid-19 pandemic. What was the timeline of events?

First and foremost, this entire situation was a tragedy. Three people lost their lives, there are people still in quarantine and it has had a huge impact on all the passengers and crew who were on board. At the initial virus breakout, it felt like the movie *Alien*: there was a monster on board that no one could see, and it was killing people. Once crew had discovered it was hantavirus – which no one seemed to have heard of – we operated in three phases: crisis management to try and help the critically ill passengers by ensuring we could disembark in Cape

Verde; moving to Las Palmas to build a coalition of various governments, medical authorities, embassies and the World Health Organisation to repatriate their onboard nationals; and, as we are a Dutch carrier, we needed to bring the ship back to the Netherlands to disinfect it, which has now been done.

What was the reaction from the onboard passengers and crew?

We had around 100 passengers and 50 crew on board at the time and they were all amazing. We had good, kind people on board who understood the gravity of the situation and were calm and respectful, and there was very strong leadership from the captain and crew who kept the passengers updated with information as circumstances

developed. The crew went above and beyond to support the passengers and the company – this certainly wasn’t in any of their job descriptions, and I was immensely proud of how they handled it.

What learnings will you take forward?

We will review the questionnaire we send to passengers before they embark to see if they have been travelling in South America prior to boarding, as that is where hantavirus is most endemic, and we will act accordingly. We need to formalise our crisis management protocols so the crisis management team is clear on what it needs to do in a situation like this, and we can also think about evacuation processes and build on the work we did during this crisis.

IN BRIEF

In April, Oceanwide Expeditions' *MV Hondius* made global news headlines when reports emerged of an outbreak of viral disease hantavirus, which tragically killed three people. The ship departed Ushuaia, Argentina on a 27-night transatlantic voyage on 1 April, but five days in, a Dutch passenger developed symptoms and died five days later. His body was taken ashore on 24 April in Saint Helena where 30 passengers disembarked, including his wife, who then died in a Johannesburg hospital. Two days after that, a German passenger died on board. The ship docked in Cape Verde and then sailed to Tenerife where all passengers disembarked and were repatriated and quarantined in their home countries. A skeleton crew took *MV Hondius* to Rotterdam where everyone disembarked and the ship was deep-cleaned.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

MV Hondius' virus outbreak hit the headlines; the co-operation of local authorities in Ushuaia is a key part of future plans; Remi Bouysset believes the line's cleaning and safety procedures will allay customer fears

is a medical facility capable of handling a viral outbreak.

What message do you want to share in the wake of this tragedy?

This is a human tragedy and a hugely unfortunate event. I take solace in the fact we managed the crisis reasonably well and I would now share a message of optimism that Oceanwide Expeditions is still solid, we have learned lessons and we are now about to begin our Arctic season where we will take 4,000 passengers to some amazing places. The future looks bright. ●



“We need a campaign so passengers know it is safe to come to South America

What has the impact been on the business?

The business was not our main focus during the outbreak as we were focused on saving people, so we've taken a hit for sure. We had to cancel three departures, and we changed the entire *MV Hondius* crew so they could all go into quarantine. Unsurprisingly, we got a lot of concerned calls from customers scheduled to sail this summer, but once we explained the cleaning and safety procedures we

have taken – we undoubtedly have the cleanest ship in service now – we didn't have any cancellations.

Commercially, the month of May was slow in terms of new bookings, which isn't a surprise given how much attention we have drawn in the press. However, although the travel industry is sensitive in the short term as customers react quickly to global crises, the industry is resilient in the long term so I'm not overly concerned about the future of the brand. We have been around for 35 years and we're not going anywhere.

What impact will this have on the wider industry?

I am worried about the impact on future Antarctica cruises departing from South America. The next Antarctic season is coming, and cruise lines are scheduled to bring 80,000 passengers to the region so we need to work out how to do that safely and efficiently. I am fearful people will view hantavirus as an extreme risk in South America and they will be wary of taking an Antarctica cruise because of it.

The key thing we need is an education and awareness campaign, so passengers know it is safe to come to the region and that there are procedures in place in case something like this were to happen again. We also need to involve local authorities in Ushuaia to ensure there





SCAN

to learn more about World of Cruising TV and watch the latest episodes

Tune in

World of Cruising has taken to the silver screen with a new programme dedicated specifically to new-to-cruise customers. Here's everything you need to know

Cruise Trade News' sister publication *World of Cruising* has partnered with Cruise118 to launch a new television series promoting exclusive cruise holidays.

The programme targets new-to-cruise customers with six itineraries created by Cruise118, featuring two sailings from each of Celebrity Cruises, MSC Cruises and Princess Cruises. Examples include a Golden Triangle with Vietnam & Thailand cruise on *Celebrity Solstice*, a Caribbean Voyage with Orlando Stay on *MSC Grandiosa*, and a Classic California with San Francisco, Lake Tahoe & Yosemite cruise on *Ruby Princess*.

Each episode runs for 60 minutes and details one of the flagship itineraries as well as offering destination-focused content and ship tours to give consumers a flavour of a holiday they may not have considered before.

The programme is hosted by Dean Wilson, who also hosts lifestyle broadcast *World of Cruising TV*, as well as travel expert Lisa Minot, and is shown across Virgin, Freeview and Sky, airing on channels including ITV Quiz and 4Seven. Episodes are also available on the *World of Cruising* YouTube channel.



“Television is a powerful medium for bringing the magic of modern cruise to life

To ensure a seamless customer journey, Cruise118 has a dedicated specialist team ready to handle all enquiries and bookings generated by the broadcast. The campaign will run until 31 August.

EXPERT HOSTS

Chris Pitchford, chief executive of *World of Cruising*, said: “Since launching *World of Cruising TV* in 2024, we've built a loyal audience of passionate cruisers who want to see the world's best ships and cruise lines brought to life on screen.

“After four series, we felt the time was right to expand by adding something alongside it. Our new format is a companion to the original. Created in partnership with Cruise118, it's dedicated entirely to exclusive deals that can only be booked through *World of Cruising*. ”

“Dean Wilson returns to present and we're delighted to welcome respected

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Presenter Dean Wilson and travel expert Lisa Minot will be promoting exclusive cruise holidays; the itineraries on offer include a Golden Triangle with Vietnam & Thailand cruise

travel expert Lisa Minot alongside him. She brings her expertise to each offer and helps viewers understand exactly what makes them worth booking. And for those who love the original programme, we haven't forgotten you; we'll be back very soon with a brand new series.”

‘THE PERFECT PLATFORM’

Lisa McAuley, Cruise118 managing director, hailed the venture, saying: “We are pleased to be partnering with *World of Cruising* to promote some of the incredible itineraries that we offer.

“Television is an incredibly powerful medium for bringing the magic, scale and diversity of modern cruise holidays to life and this series gives us the perfect platform to reach both seasoned travellers and those looking to book their very first cruise. Our team has put together six exclusive itineraries that offer exceptional value and unforgettable experiences. ●



Cautious optimism

Consumer browsing behaviour is returning to normal, but a continued appetite for last-minute bookings shows old habits are hard to shake, writes **Raphael Giacardi**

Following months in which the news agenda seemed to drive consumer interest and behaviour, we may look back at June 2026 as the month normality started to return to the market. The most-read articles on *World of Cruising* were indicators of an audience going back into holiday planning mode: destination guides, cruise line advice and tips.

The only hint of worry about world events was the continued popularity of our coverage of the European Union's Entry/Exit System (EES). But the article's popularity has waned, dropping from its spot as third most-read on the site to just outside the top ten.

Finally seeing consumers focus on researching their next sailing, rather than reading about the impact of regional conflicts on international travel, is heartening.

LINGERING CAUTION

However, while our audience's reading behaviour is reverting to its mean – seeking information and advice about cruise lines and destinations – its search habits still differ from previous years.

Yes, the lates market is always important to visitors to our site. But this year, that pattern is even more pronounced. Just over half (52 per cent) of exact-month searches on the *World*



of Cruising website were for departures within the next 16 weeks. That's up from 45 per cent in the same period last year.

So even if things are looking more settled and consumers are feeling more positive about the state of the world, months of upheaval have left a mark.

NEAR WINS

So where should you put your money? Near home seems to be the answer. If we look at June 2026 demand and compare it to last year, we see far-flung destinations suffer – and short-haul options shine.

Even the Caribbean – an established destination, which had withstood the shock of the military action in Venezuela remarkably well earlier this year – suffered in June, with its share of searches dropping by roughly 27 per cent compared to last year.

Mediterranean searches were up about 44 per cent, reaching nearly half of total searches (against 33 per cent last year). And while non-Mediterranean European destinations didn't increase their share of searches year on year, they remained roughly level at around 30 per cent. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The usually popular Caribbean has suffered a drop in searches year on year; European destination searches have stayed steady

IN NUMBERS



52%

share of exact-month searches on *World of Cruising* for departures within 16 weeks



44%

increase in Mediterranean searches year on year, with the destination now accounting for nearly half of all searches



27%

drop in Caribbean demand compared to the same period last year

TOP TIP

Success seems likely to come from focusing on summer and autumn 2026 short-haul departures. But the destination swings seen this year should serve as a reminder that markets can shift quickly without warning

“How do I maximise the value of a cruise booking?”

Ashdown Travel consultant Jane Chappell asks how she can elevate her cruise sales using one of the industry's most lucrative selling points – value. **Josie Klein** reports

For most, there's no escaping the cost-of-living crisis. Wallets are lighter, prices are more scrutinised and the morning coffee purchase has become more of a luxury and less of a habit.

However, the cruise sector continues to defy trends as consumers prioritise spending on getting away from it all. *Cruise Trade News'* second Annual Report found that over the past two years, the number of people happy to spend more than £2,000 on a seven-night voyage has increased. According to the data, 31 per cent of those surveyed were willing to spend between £2,000 and £4,000 in 2025 – up from 19 per cent the previous year. On top of that, passenger numbers have once again hit record levels, as nearly 35 million people sailed in 2024 – up 9 per cent on 2023, according to CLIA's 2025 State of the Cruise Industry report. The appetite for cruise is clearly there, and customers are willing to spend. So, how can an agent maximise the value of a booking?

Jane Chappell, a travel consultant for Ashdown Travel, is keen to sell more cruise holidays, but does not feel confident in suggesting additional packages for a customer when times are tough. “I have booked a few cruises, and I do get enquiries coming in, but they are mainly from regular customers who know exactly what they want, so I don't always find opportunities to add value by suggesting extras for their trip”, she says. “There are so many different cruise lines, it's tough knowing what is best for a client.”

“

Successful agents ask lots of questions about what guests expect from the journey itself

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

Danielle Bates, head of UK sales for National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions, says adding value all starts with asking questions right at the beginning of a customer's booking journey to really understand what they are looking for out of their holiday and to suggest add-ons accordingly.

“Travel agents can maximise the value of a cruise booking by taking the time to really understand what their clients want from the experience,” she says. “The most successful agents ask lots of questions, not only about where the guests want to go, but





SCAN
to read more about a travel
agent's £33k bookings haul
with Star Clippers



what they expect from the journey itself. That insight helps agents match travellers with the right cruise line, itinerary and cabin category, ultimately driving higher satisfaction, repeat business and stronger loyalty to both the agent and the cruise brand.”

She adds: “Agents should not overlook the opportunity that group travel presents. Many expedition travellers have friends or family members who share similar interests and aspirations. Simply asking the question can open up valuable opportunities.”

Similarly, Nicola McNeish, director of sales UK and Ireland at Celebrity Cruises, encourages agents to ask questions as well as secure a booking as early as possible so customers can get exactly what they want from their sailing. “Encouraging customers to book as soon as possible is key as this gives them the widest choice of staterooms and sailings before availability becomes more limited,” she says.

“It’s also important to think beyond the cruise fare. Pre-booking elements such as drinks packages, shore

“Consider enhancing the guest experience with pre- or post-cruise land programmes

excursions and speciality dining ahead of sailings can offer better value than purchasing on board while also ensuring clients get exactly what they want, when they want it.” She adds: “By combining early booking, pre-planning and strong product knowledge, agents will be in a great position to help clients get the most out of their holiday.”

ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

Andrea Stafford, sales director for AmaWaterways, urges agents to look beyond packages or cabin upgrades and to think about land-based stays before or after a customers’ cruise. “To maximise the value of a cruise booking, look beyond cabin upgrades or

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Pre-booking drinks packages can offer better value; lining up shore excursions in advance can help clients get the most out of their trip; group travel options are an important consideration



ABOVE Agents can use customers' upcoming celebrations to increase the spend on their sailing

combining itineraries, such as sailing both the lower and upper Danube," she says. "Consider enhancing the guest experience with pre- or post-cruise land programmes."

Dave Mills, chief commercial officer at Iglu Cruise, suggests agents should encourage their customers to rebook a sailing while they are on board as lines often add value into their onboard deals to entice holidaymakers. He emphasises agents will still see the benefit of the sale as most lines ensure commission is given to the original booking agent, so you can make money without having to lift a finger. "We always suggest cruisers rebook while on board," he says. "Cruise lines and agents collaborate to ensure this is mutually beneficial, quick and easy and have a stack of extra benefits. Use the onboard teams,

including the shore excursion desk, to find and secure the perfect next cruise. It's a great way to counter the end-of-holiday blues by having the next one booked!"

Meanwhile, Jack Atherton, UK sales manager for Virgin Voyages, encourages agents to use a customers' upcoming celebration to increase the spend on their sailing. "Clients who travel for a reason tend to become the most loyal repeat sailors," he says. "The best cruise booking isn't just a transaction; it's a curated experience that keeps sailors coming back."

It is an agent's job to secure a holiday for their client, but by asking questions, booking early and suggesting add-ons, you can boost the value of a trip, which is a win-win for both you and your customer. ●

"How do I maximise the value of a cruise?"



Danielle Bates, National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions

"The most successful agents ask lots of questions, not only about where the guests want to go, but what they expect from the journey. That insight helps match travellers with the right cruise line, itinerary and cabin category."



Andrea Stafford, AmaWaterways

"To maximise the value of a cruise booking, look beyond cabin upgrades or combining itineraries, such as sailing both the lower and upper Danube. Consider enhancing the guest experience with pre- or post-cruise land programmes."



Dave Mills, Iglu Cruise

"We always suggest cruisers rebook while on board. Cruise lines and agents collaborate to ensure this is mutually beneficial, quick and easy and have a stack of extra benefits. It's a great way to counter the end-of-holiday blues by having the next one booked."

The people behind every voyage

The personal touch of a dedicated travel agent will never be replaced by rapidly evolving technology, says Virgin Voyages' UK sales director **SJ Walker**

July is First Mate Appreciation Month and, honestly, it's one of my favourite moments in the calendar. It gives us the chance to stop and properly recognise the travel advisors who show up for Virgin Voyages every single day.

There's a conversation that comes up regularly in our industry about the role of the travel advisor in a world where everything can be booked online in minutes. I've never bought into it. Cruise isn't a commodity purchase. It's a considered, often significant decision. For many people, the first time they seriously consider it, they have questions that a website simply can't answer. What's it really like onboard? Is



“A great advisor doesn't just close a booking... they build confidence

it right for me? How is this different from every other cruise I've heard about?

That's where a great advisor changes everything. They don't just close a booking; they build the confidence that gets someone onboard in the first place. And in a category as experiential and personal as cruise, that human expertise isn't just valuable, it's irreplaceable. No algorithm has ever talked someone off the fence the way a trusted advisor can.

BRIDGING THE GAP

For Virgin Voyages specifically, First Mates are often the bridge between curiosity and commitment. We're a

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Travel advisors play a key role in attracting new-to-cruise customers; SJ Walker is celebrating First Mate Appreciation Month with a swathe of agent rewards

brand that actively challenges what people think they know about cruising. Our no-formal-nights, adults-only experience with no buffets in sight is genuinely different, which means the advisor's role in explaining and championing what we do is even more critical than in most categories. When a First Mate gets it, their clients get it too.

For so many of our most loyal Sailors, a First Mate was their very first introduction to us. That recommendation, that moment of trust, it matters more than we can measure.

So, throughout July, we're celebrating with some tangible thank yous. Every booking logged through First Mate Loot earns £15, and that's just the start!

We're also sending five lucky winners on our UK Caribbean Fam Trip aboard *Scarlet Lady's* Mexico & Bimini Beach Club sailing, departing 28 November. The more bookings you log through First Mate Loot this month, the more chances you have to win.

But the real point of the month is simpler than that. To every advisor who has recommended us and helped a hesitant traveller take the leap, I thank you. We couldn't do this without you. ●



IN NUMBERS

79%

of cruisers say agents have an impact on their decisions

35%

of past cruisers turn to online agents for travel inspiration

£15

for every booking logged through First Mate Loot



DESTINATION: UNLOCKED

Princess Cruises is ripping up the rule book on educational trips. Will Payne joins a two-night fam to Marseille to see how the line is using destination experiences to boost trade knowledge

Most people working in cruise have experienced a fam trip before: ship tours, hosted lunches and expert-led insight designed to showcase a cruise line in a short space of time. They're an invaluable part of the industry, but Princess Cruises believes there's another way to educate agents. As more people look to combine time ashore with a cruise, the line is aiming to give agents something just as valuable as ship knowledge: destination expertise.

The shift reflects changing booking habits. More customers are looking to extend their cruise with a hotel stay or spend longer exploring ports before or after sailing. For agents, selling these holidays requires confidence not only in the ship, but in the destinations themselves, making first-hand experience increasingly valuable.

“
Unlike a traditional educational tour, the ship visit isn't the main event

One cruise line helping the trade to capitalise on this emerging market is Princess Cruises. This year, the company launched its first series of Destination Experience fam trips, which sees agents first spend time onboard a vessel in destination before experiencing a selection of the line's excursions.

So far, the brand has hosted 30 agents across programmes in Marseille and La Spezia, which included visits onboard *Sun Princess*, and Naples, where attendees took a tour of *Enchanted Princess*.

We joined the cruise line in Marseille to see how the brand is reshaping the future of educational trips.

ALL ABOARD

The adventure began with 10 travel agents across the UK heading onboard *Sun Princess* to get a taste for life on one the line's first Sphere class vessels. Attendees took a tour of the ship's facilities, including the Lotus Spa and Fitness Centre, the Princess Arena, the Casino and the Atrium.

“The ship is incredible,” Abbey Travel's Michelle Hannigan tells me as we wander through the top deck. “I've cruised with Princess myself, but I haven't seen *Sun Princess* yet.” A personal highlight of Hannigan's is the Sanctuary Club, the ship's adults-only retreat, where the delegates enjoyed a cocktail reception and demonstration in the 32°C Marseille sun. “It's perfect for people who don't

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Ports such as Marseille are often just as influential in a customer's booking decision; the agents got to experience an excursion to a lavender distillery; *Sun Princess* is one of the line's first Sphere class vessels

lavender fields, it's a great way to conclude an authentic afternoon in the south of France.

Over dinner on the banks of Marseille harbour, I catch up with Pierre Liggett, team manager for Cruise Nation, who says: "The experience has been brilliant. I've been onboard before but there were some parts of the ship I didn't get to see, so it's been really good to see those."

"The destination is so important when it comes to selling cruises. A lot of the time the customers ask about the ports, we already know a lot about the cruise line and the ships, but destination knowledge can take a bit more time to get to grips with unless you've been there. So, the more chance you get to go and experience the destination, the easier it is to sell."

It's this combination of ship familiarity and destination confidence that Princess Cruises hopes will redefine the modern fam trip. As the programme continues to grow, educational visits may soon be judged as much by what happens ashore as what happens onboard. ●

Get on board

Princess Cruises' 14-day Mediterranean with Greece, Italy & Turkey cruise on board *Sun Princess*, from Barcelona to Athens via Mallorca, Marseille, Corsica, Genoa, La Spezia, Civitavecchia for Rome, Naples, Sicily, Crete, Kusadasi and Mykonos, departs 26 March 2028, from £1,360pp. princess.com



To find out more about future trips with Princess, sign up to the line's newsletter via onesourcecruises.com

want to have kids around and be with like-minded passengers," she tells me.

After drinks the group heads to Love by Britto, one of the ship's eight specialty dining restaurants. The immersive dining experience inspired by artist Romero Britto combines vibrant art, creative cuisine and storytelling in a colourful setting.

Hannigan says: "The restaurants are excellent – Love by Britto wasn't just a meal, it was a genuine experience. From the love heart-shaped bread to the romance-inspired cocktails, it was incredible."

But unlike a traditional educational trip, the ship tour isn't the main event. Princess has designed its Destination Experiences to give agents equal insight into life ashore, recognising that the ports themselves are often just as influential in a customer's booking decision.

“Princess's Destination Experiences give agents equal insight into life ashore

WHEN IN MARSEILLE

Having seen what the ship has to offer, we disembark *Sun Princess* and spend an evening strolling Marseille harbour. On day two, we join a Princess Cruises excursion to Les Agnells Lavender Distillery near Lourmarin in Provence for a demonstration and tour of the facilities.

Sara Jackson, a personal travel consultant from Hays Travel, says: "I found the distilling of the lavender really interesting, from the picking of the lavender to the distillation process, we were given a lovely example by experts. It's been really incredible."

"Having the chance to see both the ship and the destination is so important. I can now package this up and say to my customers 'these are the things you can do'. I can post on social media, and my clients can see exactly how to spend a day in Marseille with Princess Cruises."

The excursion also includes a few hours in Lourmarin. Perched among the rolling hills of Provence, the town is a peaceful countryside retreat where heritage intertwines with the timeless charm of the Luberon. Surrounded by vineyards, olive groves and fragrant

EXPERT INSIGHT
PRODUCT UPDATES
GLOBAL NEWS

Trade Toolkit



HOLIDAY DREAMING

Riviera Travel has launched a new trade incentive, giving agents the chance to win their own holiday with the company for two worth up to £10,000.

The 'Book It. Win It. Take It' campaign is open to agents who book any Riviera Travel holiday between 1-31 July 2026. Each booking counts as an entry into the draw, with the more bookings agents make, the greater their chances of winning. As an added incentive, any bookings made for 2026 river cruises will receive double entry points.

Agents can enter by registering their bookings via The Riviera Vault on Riviera Explorer. All prizes include return flights from the UK, excursions and visits with local guides and meals.

Vicky Billing, director of trade, partnerships and loyalty UK & Ireland, said: "Our agent partners are at the heart of everything we do, so we wanted to create something really exciting to say thank you for their continued support. With The Riviera Vault on Riviera Explorer, it's never been easier for agents to get involved, earn rewards and make the most of our campaigns."



BORDER SHIFT

Travel agents are being encouraged to prepare holidaymakers for longer wait times at border checkpoints as the European Union's new Entry/Exit System (EES) is rolled out.

The digital system has started to replace manual passport stamping for non-EU nationals, including UK travellers, instead recording fingerprints, facial images and entry and exit details on their first visit to the Schengen Area.

While the move is intended to strengthen border security and speed up future crossings, longer queues are

expected during the initial roll-out as passengers complete registration.

Greece has become one of the first countries to temporarily relax elements of the system for Brits during the peak summer season, amid concerns the new biometric checks could lead to lengthy queues at busy airports and ports.

The introduction of EES is expected to have particular relevance for cruise passengers visiting multiple European destinations, making proactive customer communication key as the system is rolled out.

STAR PRODUCT

Nomadix Original Towel

The Nomadix Towel is a must for your sea-loving customers. The sand-resistant fabric means beach days end clean and with its ability to absorb four times its weight in moisture, post-swim dry-offs are effortless. It even has UPF 50+ sun protection. **Nomadix Original Towel, £39.95, wildbounds.com**



EXPERT VIEW

'AI is reshaping travel'

Nico Beukes, CEO, Insider One



AI is reshaping travel faster than most brands are reorganising around it. From discovery and booking to loyalty, travellers now expect relevant, real-time experiences across every touchpoint, not disconnected campaigns and delayed follow-up. The cost of inaction is growing – wasted remarketing spend, missed ancillary revenue and loyalty programmes that fail to feel personal.

Leading travel brands are moving in the opposite direction. They're using AI to unify data, predict booking readiness, personalise inspiration and activate journeys across channels. In travel, AI is no longer a future bet, it's becoming the baseline for profitable growth. The brands that wait risk losing both margin and mindshare to competitors that already treat every traveller interaction as a chance to learn, convert and build loyalty.



AI is becoming the baseline for profitable growth



Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

This luxury line offers more than just cruises as its touring and rail programmes continue to thrive. Here, we highlight everything you need to know

IN THE KNOW

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises was founded in 1976 and celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The luxury river cruise line, owned by The Travel Corporation and headquartered in Los Angeles, operates more than 500 river cruises annually, ranging from eight to 55 days, with itineraries in over 20 countries. In 2021, the line launched its cruise and rail programme; last year, it introduced a range of ultra-luxury river and Mediterranean ocean cruises in partnership with Seabourn.

THE FLEET

Uniworld has 18 'Super Ships' in service, operating itineraries in Europe, India, Peru, Egypt, Indonesia and Vietnam.

“
Suite guests benefit from the use of a private butler



The largest vessel, *SS Catherine*, caters for 158 guests on sailings on the Rhone and Saône, while its smallest, *Mekong Jewel*, can accommodate just 68 passengers for cruises in Vietnam and Cambodia. Every ship is all inclusive so drinks, meals, excursions, onboard entertainment, fitness classes, room service, Wi-Fi and gratuities come as standard. Suite guests also benefit from the use of a private butler, daily in-room treats and a fully stocked minibar.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

In 2027, Uniworld will welcome a further four ships to its fleet: *SS Marlene* and *SS Audrey*, which both cater for 154 guests; 94-passenger *SS São Rafael*; and *Aqua Blu*, which, at capacity for

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Chris Townson, MD of Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, on the line's key selling points and most popular itineraries



What are the most popular itineraries at the moment?

The whole programme is doing fantastically well this year. Europe will always be core to our business and we find that the itineraries featuring newest vessels are always the most popular that year. The biggest recent success story, though, has been our long-haul Spectacular Journeys of the World programme as guests seek more immersive experiences.

What are Uniworld's key USPs?

We are so much more than a river cruise company; we do touring and rail at the very top level and partner with the likes of Golden Eagle Danube Express in Europe, the Maharajas Express in India and Four Seasons in Cairo. No one else can offer the absolute pinnacle of river cruising alongside luxurious land, rail and sea options in one seamless holiday.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Uniworld offers the pinnacle of river cruising; ship interiors are elegant and eye-catching; French balcony suites offer unrivalled views of the scenery; Uniworld partners with luxury brands such as Danube Express to make trips truly unforgettable

itineraries and its partnership with Seabourn, offering three new river and ocean cruise departures.

WHO'S WHO

The UK team is headed by managing director Chris Townson who also oversees the Europe and South Africa markets. He is supported by a trade sales, marketing and reservations team of nine, including director of sales Angela Sloan, national account managers Lee Evanson, Dawn Quinn and David Broad, and sales and events executive Kendal Cruise, all of whom are regularly out on the road visiting agents.

The marketing team of three supports the needs of the sales managers and their trade partners, plus there are 16 people in the Guernsey-based reservations team headed by Emma Le Sauvage. ●



We are the leaders in multi-faceted luxury holidays

30 guests, will become the smallest ship in the fleet. *SS Marlene* and *SS Audrey* will operate sailings in Central Europe, with the former cruising on the Danube and the latter on the Rhine, Main and Moselle, while *SS São Rafael* will sail on the Douro. Meanwhile, *Aqua Blu* will sail in the Banda Sea.

Next year, the line will, for the first time, launch some land-only journeys in Japan, South Africa and Eastern Canada, as well as expand its family-friendly programme, its cruise and tour

CHRIS TOWNSON'S TOP TIPS

1 We are leading the way in terms of sustainability on Europe's rivers and use AI technology to reduce food waste, with 90 per cent of remaining food waste producing vegetable oil which we use to power our ships.

2 There is an opportunity for agents to grow their businesses by embracing the ongoing trend of combining landmarks like Machu Picchu and the Taj Mahal with more remote villages and community-based experiences.

3 We are the leaders in multi-faceted luxury holidays. No one else can offer the range of luxurious river, land and rail options we do. We are the perfect pick for customers on the lookout for a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

Lewis Quigley

Scenic and Emerald Cruises' key account manager shares his tips for converting non-cruisers, and how a feathered friend made a lasting impression during a recent presentation

Which sales tip do you find yourself sharing most often with agents?

Without doubt, start thinking about 2027 options for clients now. We are exceptionally well sold for 2026 and bookings are already coming in strongly for 2027 departures, showing clear demand for forward planning. This is the ideal time to begin discussing future itineraries with clients, so they have the best possible choice of departure dates, suite categories and preferred itineraries.

What are the key messages you're sharing when speaking with the trade?

For us, we are reaffirming our 'Book with Confidence' message, which gives guests that added reassurance. It includes – among other things – the option of a full refund or suitable alternative should official travel advice change before departure, and complete price certainty, with no unexpected increases or fuel surcharges once a holiday has been paid in full.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

The experience of luxury cruising turns guests into customers for life; Lewis Quigley says now is the time to start thinking about 2027 options

What's your advice to a travel agent at the start of their career?

The travel industry is full of brilliant, knowledgeable people with a range of experiences, and one of its greatest strengths is how willing people are to support and help each other succeed.

There are also fantastic training platforms, supplier resources and educational opportunities available, so take full advantage of everything at your disposal. Don't be afraid to ask questions, seek advice or learn from those around you.

What's your fondest – or funniest – memory from your time on the road?

I recently held a client-facing presentation while another unrelated event was taking place in a room next door. Suddenly there were loud screams coming from this room which continued for a short while. I was starting to get a bit worried and could tell people listening to my presentation were too.

I went to find out what was going on and a pigeon had flown in through the window, straight into the presenter. Everyone was hiding under the tables. That was certainly a first for me. 🐦

How can agents convince a non-cruiser to try a sailing for the first time?

It's about reinforcing that luxury cruising is a different experience from the traditional large-ship cruising some clients may associate with the sector. Our smaller, more intimate vessels deliver a more personalised and immersive style of travel, often appealing to guests who may never have previously considered cruising. This type of luxury, all-inclusive experience also provides transparency and ease, with no hidden costs or unexpected extras. Combined with exceptional staff-to-guest ratios, it creates an exclusive, refined and luxury experience from start to finish that will live in a guest's memory for a long time, making them a customer for life.



“
Our smaller, more intimate vessels often appeal to guests who may never have previously considered cruising

Reshaping the future

The Cruise Summit, presented by *Cruise Trade News*, will return this autumn in a new location to examine how the sector can turn the turbulent waters of 2026 into new opportunities



SCAN
to request to attend this year's
Cruise Summit and find out
more about the event

The cruise and travel industry is navigating a period of unprecedented change. From geopolitical uncertainty and shifting consumer behaviours to advances in AI and digital marketing, disruption is reshaping how cruise brands interact with customers.

This year's Cruise Summit, taking place at 30 Euston Square in London on 14 September, brings together innovators and senior industry experts to explore how cruise companies can thrive in this ever-changing landscape. Across a day of insightful presentations, expert panels and thought-provoking discussions, attendees will examine the trends shaping the future of cruise.

Key themes include the impact of AI and technology on customer acquisition and retention; emerging growth opportunities in river, luxury and expedition; and the importance of creating seamless experiences. New for this year includes an 'Ask the Expert' hot seat session, as well as the return of the consumer panel segment, where we ask travellers what they really think about holidays-at-sea.



“
The event will tackle some of the industry's biggest strategic questions

EXPERT-LED

Speakers include Nico Beukes, UK, Ireland and Nordics CEO of technology platform Insider One; Hayley Moore, vice president of sales and marketing for UK and emerging markets for Hurtigruten; Amanda Docherty, head of trade UK and Ireland for Riviera Travel; Sam Conway, head of business development for Travelzoo; and Nick Cooper, head of market for HolidayPirates Group.

Cruise Trade News would like to extend a special thanks to the sponsors of this year's event: Riviera Travel; Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines; Travelzoo; Crystal Cruises; HX Expeditions; Insider One; HolidayPirates; and Hurtigruten. More details of the event and a full agenda will be unveiled in due course.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

The event is tailored to senior executives and marketers; expert panels are a key part of the conversation; TikTok's Ola Quadrio gave her insights last year

The Cruise Summit has been designed for senior executives and marketers within the cruise and travel industry. Due to limited capacity and the focused nature of the event, all registrations of interest to attend will be reviewed and attendance will be confirmed upon approval. ●



SHIP OF THE MONTH

LEGEND OF THE SEAS

The third ship in Royal Caribbean's Icon class, *Legend of the Seas* has joined the line's fleet as the joint-largest cruise ship in the world, with capacity for 7,600 passengers. Like sister ships *Icon of the Seas* and *Star of the Seas*, *Legend* is split into eight neighbourhoods. Each is designed to cater for different types of travellers, from high-energy rollercoasters in Thrill Island, to a more laid-back resort vibe in Chill Island. Surfside, meanwhile, has been designed for families. The vessel is the first Icon class ship to sail in the Mediterranean and will offer a selection of Western Mediterranean itineraries this summer before repositioning across the pond to Fort Lauderdale in November for a winter of Caribbean sailings.



1 Dining

Guests will be taken on a culinary journey along the ancient Silk Route at the Royal Railway, where dining meets theatre. Visitors will step inside a full-size rail car to enjoy a five-course meal featuring delicacies from China, India, Persia, Turkey and Italy.



Fast facts

7,600
passengers

2,350
crew

28
dining options

20
cabin types



2 Cabins

There are more than 20 cabin types available on board. Guests can relax in a spacious Interior Cabin, feel the breeze in a Balcony Cabin or go all out in the Ultimate Family Townhouse, which has an in-suite slide, balcony with whirlpool, movie theatre and an outdoor games area.



3 Crown's Edge

Adrenaline junkies can test their mettle with the Crown's Edge, a ropes course and zipline hybrid. Daredevils will be suspended 154ft above the ocean where they will shuffle along a skywalk before the floor drops away and they are whizzed back to safety.



4 Category 6

Category 6 is the largest waterpark at sea with six waterslides. Guests can take a solo plunge on the Frightening Bolt, race a friend on Storm Chasers or raft down the Hurricane Hunter, so whether they prefer chills or high-octane thrills, they'll be well catered for.



5 The Hideaway

Legend is great fun for all the family, but for those over 18s looking for an adults-only spot, The Hideaway delivers. Visitors can dip into the suspended infinity pool and recline on an in-water lounger before grabbing a speciality cocktail and listening to the resident DJ.



6 Entertainment

Guests can step into Willy Wonka's wacky world with Roald Dahl's moreish classic, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which is making its Broadway musical debut at sea on *Legend*. More than 30 performers will take to the stage with smash-hit songs.

SHIPS OF THE MONTH

APT SOLARA & APT OSTARA

There's a lot to love about APT Luxury's two new sister ships, not least the six dining venues that award-winning design studio Hecker Guthrie has cleverly accommodated inside each 135-metre-hull – a culinary offering way above the norm on river vessels. With capacity for 154 guests, space is put to good use throughout *Solara* and *Ostara*. The Owner's Suites come with large outdoor balconies, while the Gruner Bar & Dining venue straddles two decks, rising to the sun deck via hydraulic lift.

Departures for 2026 include a seven-night Highlights of the Rhine & Main itinerary and a 14-night Magnificent Europe cruise, which features a guided tour of the Rhineland's Nymphenburg Castle from German royalty.

Fast facts

154
guests

60
crew

6
restaurants

3
suite categories



1 Twin Window suites

Warm-toned furnishings infuse the ship's entry-level accommodation with a cosy aesthetic. Once checked in, guests can enjoy refreshments from the minibar and tea and coffee-making facilities or go hog-wild on the in-suite dining (butler service is included, after all).



2 Sun deck

Guests can order themselves a sundowner and join fellow travellers at the firepit as chefs fire up the barbecue, or enjoy the 360-degree views from the comfort of their lounger. The ship's all-season rooftop space is the perfect spot to watch the world drift peacefully by.



3 Owner's Cellar, 1927

The ship's 16-guest private dining venue is named after APT Luxury's foundation year. A five-course tasting menu featuring dry-aged ribeye and Bavarian chocolate mousse is paired with fine wines sourced from nearby vineyards.





4 Gruner Bar & Dining

Serving wine, cocktails and small plates, this new all-day venue truly raises the bar. Gruner starts the day as an alfresco walk-up before being lowered down to deck 3 where it becomes a chic low-lit wine bar for the evening.



5 Salon

The ship's convivial main dining lounge serves an array of healthy dishes and barista-style coffees during breakfast and lunch before undergoing its own transition, when it morphs into a vibrant evening venue, offering live entertainment and dancing.



6 Enticing inclusions

Not only are drinks, dining and daily excursions included – think cheese-tasting in Amsterdam and castle exploration in Nuremberg – so too are Wi-Fi, airport transfers, gratuities and e-bike rental. We think that's well worth raising a glass to.



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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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'Fly-cruise demand is showing no sign of slowing'

As desire grows for immersive, time-efficient holidays, head of sales at Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines **Geoff Ridgeon** outlines why the fly-cruise market should be firmly on agents' radar



“

By flying straight to meet their ship, guests can begin exploring sooner, with fewer sea days and more time ashore

Fly-cruise continues to perform well this year and remains a popular choice with guests. By flying straight to the start of their cruise, travellers can begin exploring the destination from the very first day of their trip, making the most of their time ashore and enjoying a more immersive experience.

A fly-cruise with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is an effortless and rewarding way to explore, combining the convenience of flying into the heart of a destination with the intimacy of smaller-ship cruising.

Selected itineraries feature extended stays in port, allowing guests to explore at a relaxed pace, while on board *Balmoral*, our smaller ship, guests can visit characterful ports that larger ships often cannot reach. Scenic cruising along

coastlines and past landmarks adds to the sense of discovery along the way.

GENUINE FLEXIBILITY

Fly-cruise holidays with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines give agents genuine flexibility to create the right holiday for each guest. Our flight packages bring everything together in one seamless experience, including airport transfers, all port taxes, fees and charges, and ATOL protection, with dedicated representatives supporting guests throughout their journey and luggage delivered directly to their cabins.

Alongside this, agents can tailor flight arrangements to suit individual needs, with flexibility around flights and departure airports to ensure each holiday is the right fit.

We expect fly-cruise to continue growing as guests look to explore more places, including lesser-known and further-flung destinations, while balancing increasingly busy lives.

GROWTH FOCUS

Fly-cruise also reflects a wider shift towards more immersive travel. With less time spent travelling and more time in destination, guests can explore at a gentler pace and connect more deeply with local culture, which is a trend we're tracking closely.

As the market continues to grow in demand, it will remain an important part of our programme moving forward. While ex-UK sailings continue to play a key role, there are clear plans to maintain and further develop our fly-cruise offering as part of a balanced and varied itinerary portfolio. The aim is to offer guests a thoughtful mix of travel options, giving them the flexibility to choose how they begin their holiday, while ensuring fly-cruise sits comfortably alongside traditional sailings. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

With less time at sea, fly-cruise itineraries offer more guests greater opportunity to unlock a destination; Geoff Ridgeon is Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' head of sales





Adventure awaits

Maiden calls, culture-rich ports and itineraries designed to tempt first-time cruisers are among the standout features of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' autumn-winter 2027 deployment

Thoughtfully curated by a team of expert journey planners, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' autumn-winter

2027 programme features 20 sailings which span everything from winter sun escapes in Spain, Portugal and Morocco to unforgettable Northern Lights adventures in northern Europe. Guests can explore iconic landmarks including Rome's Colosseum and Barcelona's Sagrada Família, discover lesser-visited gems and enjoy more immersive experiences while ashore.

Shorter voyages, including a six-night Mystery Cruise, are the perfect pick for those new to cruising, while an extended Caribbean escape over Christmas and New Year promises the chance to swap grey skies for tropical shores for those more suited to a holiday at sea.

The programme's fly-cruise offering, meanwhile, opens up even more possibilities, whisking guests directly to the Mediterranean's cultural hotspots, from the French and Italian Rivas to the Greek Islands. Here, we highlight



five of the standout itineraries from Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' autumn-winter 2027 deployment to help you boost your sales with the brand.

EUROPEAN DISCOVERY

This sailing offers a welcome escape from cooler UK days, inviting guests to enjoy autumn warmth while exploring the contrasting cultures of Europe and North Africa. The itinerary includes a stop in La Coruña, where elegant seafront architecture, historic streets and the

chance to sample traditional Galician dishes – from fresh seafood to regional specialities – add local flavour to the guest experience.

Morocco reveals its colour and character in Casablanca and Tangier, from the striking Hassan II Mosque to winding Kasbah lanes, whitewashed streets and tiled courtyards, while Melilla and Gibraltar bring further contrast with relaxed promenades, Art Deco architecture and the must-visit Rock of Gibraltar, home to its famous Barbary macaques.

Get on board

A 15-night Spain, Morocco & Portugal Discovery cruise onboard *Bolette*, return from Newcastle via La Coruña, Tangier, Melilla, Gibraltar, Casablanca, Matosinhos and Honfleur, departs 2 October 2027, from £1,799pp.

MEDITERRANEAN DREAMS

This varied 10-night journey brings together an impressive six islands across five countries, blending culture, coastline



and contrast at a thoughtfully relaxed pace. Scenic cruising is a highlight, with unforgettable views along the Amalfi Coast and past the dramatic volcanic slopes of Stromboli, best enjoyed from the comfort of smaller ship *Balmoral*.

The itinerary also includes time in Propriano, accessible only to smaller ships, where a quieter side of Corsica reveals itself through palm-lined boulevards, relaxed beachfront cafés and an unhurried atmosphere. Then a maiden call to Milazzo offers the opportunity to discover Sicily's northern coast and explore Mount Etna.

Get on board

A 10-night Islands of the Mediterranean cruise onboard *Balmoral*, from Alicante to Piraeus via Ibiza, Propriano, Golfo Aranci, Milazzo, Valletta and Souda Bay, departs 16 October 2027, from £1,399pp.

A SKY FULL OF STARS

For adventure seekers, this itinerary invites guests to go in search of the

“ Travellers can embrace Caribbean warmth on a relaxed festive voyage

Aurora Borealis on a shorter-than-usual journey into the Arctic Circle. With experts from Go Stargazing on board, guests can enjoy helpful guidance and tips on spotting and photographing this remarkable natural phenomenon. Scenic cruising is a highlight throughout the cruise, with striking landscapes unfolding along the way – including Torghatten, with its distinctive hole through the mountain, and the dramatic Seven Sisters mountain range.

Get on board

An 11-night In Search of the Northern Lights cruise onboard *Bolette*, return from Southampton via Ålesund, Sortland, Harstad and Molde, departs 7 November 2027, from £1,199pp.

BEST-KEPT SECRET

This winter escape brings a sense of adventure just before the festive season begins. Scenic coastlines, hidden harbours and unexpected destinations unfold along the way, with each port of call kept a closely guarded secret until the last possible moment – building shared anticipation as guests discover where they are heading together.

Get on board

A six-night Europe Mystery Cruise onboard *Borealis*, return from Southampton, departs 27 November 2027, from £749pp.

FESTIVE FEELING

Guests can embrace Caribbean warmth on this relaxed festive voyage, celebrating Christmas Day at sea before welcoming the New Year with Funchal's famous fireworks display – a spectacular way to see the year out. Spanning nine islands, each port brings its own distinctive character, from Barbados' white-sand beaches to Bequia's laidback, unspoilt island life. Along the way, lush rainforests, cascading waterfalls and dramatic volcanic landscapes add to the sense of discovery, from St Lucia's striking Pitons to Dominica's rich and verdant interior.

Get on board

A 33-night Caribbean Christmas Island Hopping cruise onboard *Bolette*, return from Southampton via La Coruña, Tenerife, Castries, Bridgetown, Bequia, Fort-de-France, Roseau, Tortola, Philipsburg, Charlestown, St. John's, Funchal, Lisbon and Matosinhos, departs 4 December 2027, from £4,099pp. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

The Northern Lights in Norway; adventure awaits in the Caribbean; La Coruña, Spain; *Borealis* in Iceland; sightseeing tours are available in Propriano



Martin Lister

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' head of product innovation offers an insight into the work that goes into planning itineraries from the white sands of the Caribbean to the imposing fjords of Norway

What was the inspiration behind the new 2027 season?

The autumn-winter 2027 programme has been shaped by listening closely to our guests and responding to how people want to travel today. We've answered growing demand for winter sun with a strong collection of sailings to warmer regions, including Spain, Portugal, Morocco and the Caribbean. Alongside this, our Mediterranean fly-cruises take guests straight to the heart of the destination, reducing sea days and maximising time ashore – ideal for those looking to enjoy a rewarding holiday within a shorter time frame.

How can agents make the most of the new deployment?

The breadth of the programme makes it easy for agents to promote, with a strong mix of regional UK departures and convenient fly-cruise options to suit different client needs. Travelling outside peak seasons also allows guests to experience many well-known destinations at a quieter, more relaxed



time, with fewer crowds and stronger overall value – a compelling selling point for a wide range of customers.

What sort of customer should the trade focus on when promoting the season?

The season is particularly well suited to guests who are new to Fred. Olsen, with an expanded choice of shorter cruises offering an accessible introduction and the flexibility to enjoy a winter escape around busy lifestyles.

The programme will also appeal strongly to guests seeking a more relaxed pace of travel. Scenic cruising, longer stays and quieter ports of call create an unhurried experience.

How will Fred. Olsen support agents in selling more cruises?

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines will continue to support agents through its dedicated training academy, alongside

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines offers a series of shorter Northern Lights sailings; Martin Lister has worked for the cruise company for nearly 25 years

a programme of training events and in-person presentations – strengthening product knowledge and building confidence at the point of sale.

Agents will also have opportunities to experience the product first-hand through ship visits and agent fam trips, supported by targeted incentives designed to reward advocacy, encourage engagement and drive sales.

Which destination/itinerary stands out the most for you?

The maiden call to Milazzo is a real highlight, offering a fresh way to explore Sicily. As a gateway to the Aeolian Islands and close to Mount Etna and Taormina, it allows guests to discover a lesser-visited part of the Mediterranean rich in culture and scenery.

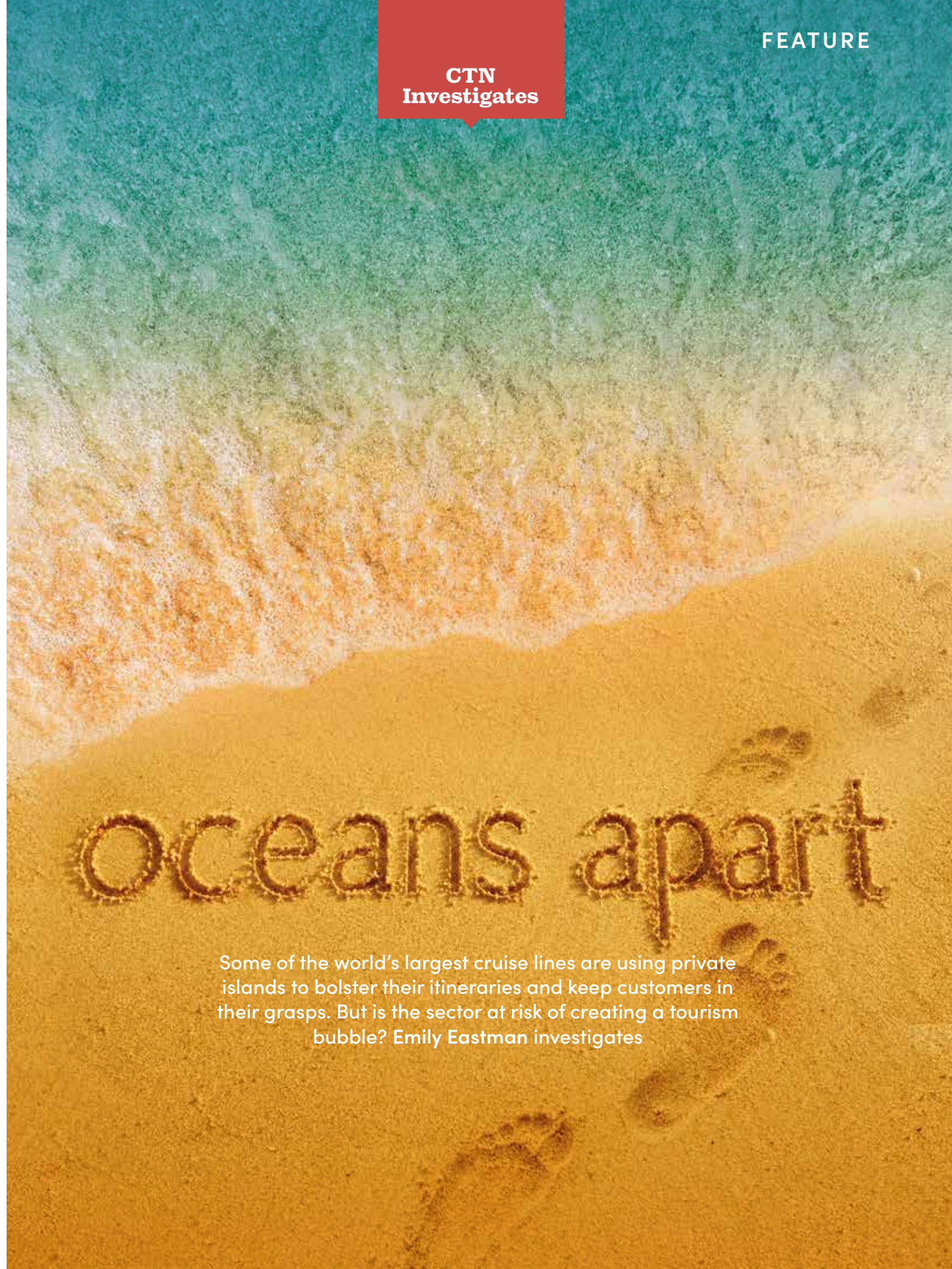
The shorter Northern Lights sailing from Southampton also stands out, providing an accessible way for guests to experience this remarkable event without committing to a longer voyage.

Alongside this, new itineraries that combine iconic experiences – such as visiting the Pyramids and sailing through the Dardanelles – bring together world-famous sights and distinctive cruising routes into truly memorable journeys. ●



We've answered growing demand for winter sun with a strong collection of sailings to warmer regions





oceans apart

Some of the world's largest cruise lines are using private islands to bolster their itineraries and keep customers in their grasps. But is the sector at risk of creating a tourism bubble? Emily Eastman investigates



The cruise sector has long promoted its authentic local immersion opportunities. However, in recent years the industry has seen a sharp rise in private resorts, with land-based portfolios providing exclusive use for guests, leading to reshaped itineraries, spend and shore experiences. The result? Private destinations are becoming as marketable as the ships themselves.

This rapid rise in cruise-owned private islands and beach clubs is rooted in offsetting rising fuel costs; circumnavigating port restrictions; and easing bottlenecks caused by destinations such as the Arabian Gulf, Holy Land, Red Sea and St Petersburg currently being off limits; plus the pursuit of greater economic returns (some operators are targeting more than 70 per cent of retained onboard revenue spend within their owned destination ecosystems). But demand fuels growth, and there's no denying guests' appetite for these secluded ports of call. As cruise drifts between authentic local immersion and exclusive destinations, the

question posed is whether private destinations are easing overtourism, or simply creating "bubble tourism", where the benefits aren't felt by local communities.

A WAVE OF NEW RESORTS

The rate of change has been fast. Back in 1977, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) pioneered the trend with its development of Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas. Others followed, and today these private destinations present a copy-paste offering: self-contained, safe, controlled and hassle-free environments providing well-maintained beaches and facilities, with seamless access to shipboard perks ashore and a variety of activities to suit every holidaymaker.

There's no denying the appeal. "We are definitely seeing increased interest, particularly from families and newer-to-cruise customers," says Sam Ballard, managing director of Club Voyages. "In many cases, clients may not ask specifically for a private island by name, but once they understand what's included, it quickly becomes a strong selling point."

Travel Counsellors' Andreea Spasova agrees, but adds that for most of her clients, "a private island is the cherry on top rather than the main reason for booking."

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Self-contained environments take the stress out of travel; Great Stirrup Cay's Bacardi Bar; premium lounging options allow visitors to fully unwind



SCAN
to read more about Royal
Caribbean International's
new Discovery class

Much of this, says Ballard, comes down to simplicity and consistency. “Traditionally, beach days in the Caribbean could sometimes feel logistically difficult – crowded ports, expensive taxis, uncertainty over facilities or concerns around safety and cleanliness. Cruise-owned destinations remove much of that friction. Guests know the food, drinks, standards and overall experience will align with the ship itself.”

Social media has also played a huge role. “Destinations like [Royal Caribbean’s] Perfect Day at CocoCay or [MSC Cruises’] Ocean Cay have become highly visual products in their own right, with beach clubs, waterparks and premium cabanas marketed almost like standalone resorts,” Ballard says.

Travel consultant Karen Tribe notes that it is generally Royal Caribbean customers who want the private island experience. “Royal Caribbean was one of the first to move into private destinations, and so there’s greater awareness of CocoCay. But other brands will want a piece of this. Destination cruises are always looking for new islands,” she says.

“Private destinations offer self-contained, safe, controlled and hassle-free environments with a variety of activities



KEEPING IT GREEN

Amid the growth, cruise lines are still conscious of their environmental impact. MSC Cruises’ Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve puts emphasis on its marine conservation work, having transformed Ocean Cay from a sand excavation site into a flourishing ecosystem. Independent marine experts have helped to create a biodiverse environment, and the island houses a base for marine biologists to conduct research on coral restoration. Ocean Cay is home to the MSC Foundation’s Super Coral Programme, which is dedicated to restoring coral reefs in The Bahamas, and non-profit Mission Blue has designated the reserve a ‘Hope Spot’, underscoring the island’s role in ensuring ocean health.

But there’s a balance to strike, and some authorities are pushing back. Mexico’s environmental agency recently blocked Royal Caribbean’s planned Perfect Day Mexico project in Mahahual, citing damage the 230-acre waterpark could cause to surrounding mangroves and reefs. Royal Caribbean has stated that it is “optimistic in the potential to advance our investment responsibly”.

Then there are the economic issues. Although private cruise destinations provide some tax revenues and local employment, they keep spend within their own ecosystem – meaning local communities and independent operators lose out.

But it’s not necessarily a case of either/or – Ballard argues that there’s room for both. Many clients appreciate the duality of traditional port ▶





calls, with exploration, culture and sightseeing, punctuated by the “easy holiday days” of private destinations, which are more comparable to a premium resort experience.

Spasova agrees, noting how the demand for private destinations reflects how cruising as a whole is evolving. “Today’s travellers want flexibility, the chance to relax, explore and be entertained, all within one holiday they can shape around themselves,” she says.

And the lines are responding. Royal Caribbean recently opened Royal Beach Club Santorini, the line’s first private beach club in Europe. “Expanding our Royal Beach Club Collection to include Santorini – one of the world’s most popular and beautiful locations – is a bold step forward in growing our vacation portfolio,” said Jason Liberty, president and CEO of Royal Caribbean Group, when the line announced its Ultimate Santorini Day excursion. Undeterred by the situation in Mexico, it’s one of several new developments from the line, with others scheduled to open across the Bahamas, Europe and the South Pacific.

“What cruise lines have done very successfully is remove some of the stress traditionally associated with Caribbean port days,” says Ballard. “There’s less concern around transport logistics, local currency, security or whether facilities will meet expectations. For families in particular, that reassurance is incredibly valuable.”

“ What cruise lines have done very successfully is remove some of the stress associated with Caribbean port days

THE BOTTOM LINE

For all the arguments of tradition versus innovation when it comes to cruise destinations, it comes down to this: what do customers actually want?

According to Arrivia’s Mark Wilson, senior vice president of product strategy and operations, Cruise and Tour, 55 per cent of travellers said a private-island stop influences whether they book a specific cruise, and 25 per cent would switch from their preferred brand for it. Seventy per cent of families with children called them a “deciding or somewhat important” factor.

For Daniel Henry James, a personal travel concierge with Travel Counsellors, this variation in demand cements the agent’s role. “More than ever, the cruise knowledge of the booking agent is invaluable to manage the clients’ expectations and match them to the right product and itinerary,” he says.

The lines with the best offerings are seeing their revenues grow faster. For example, according to Reuters, Royal Caribbean spent \$250 million to renovate CocoCay, and

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Resorts such as Great Stirrup Cay are popular with families; demand for secluded ports of call is on the rise; Royal Caribbean’s Perfect Day offers multi-generational activities and entertainment

“

For some destinations, infrastructure investment is a welcome alternative to congested ports and overtourism

from its opening in 2019 to 2024, the company's third-quarter expenses including commissions increased 41 per cent, and ticket revenues were up 48 per cent.

It's no surprise that other lines are scrambling to recreate the success. It forms part of a wider trend representing where the cruise industry is heading commercially: towards greater control over the guest experience.

Whether this is bubble tourism in action depends on perspective. For luxury and expedition cruise clients, meaningful local experiences remain king. For some destinations, infrastructure investment is a welcome alternative to congested ports and overtourism.

"Most customers still want a balance," says Ballard. "A private island works best as part of a broader itinerary rather than replacing traditional ports entirely. The strongest itineraries still combine convenience with genuine destination discovery."

Despite simultaneously solving and creating tourism challenges, private islands are here to stay. Whether the future of cruising can balance commercial control with meaningful destination engagement is a question likely to play out in the coming years – and the industry may ultimately need to prove that convenience and authenticity are not mutually exclusive. ●

KEY QUOTES



"Clients may not ask specifically for a private island by name, but once they understand what's included, it quickly becomes a strong selling point"

Sam Ballard, Club Voyage



"[Private islands] are attractive for customers, but they're seen more as the cherry on top rather than the main reason for booking"

Andreea Spasova, Travel Counsellors



"Although private cruise destinations provide some tax revenues and local employment, they keep spend within their own ecosystem – meaning local communities and independent operators lose out"

Emily Eastman, travel writer



"Royal Caribbean was one of the first to move into private destinations, and so there's greater awareness of CocoCay. But other brands will want a piece of this. Destination cruises are always looking for new islands"

Karen Tribe, Hays Travel



In
conversation
with...



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Corner Podcast

Bernie Carter

Atlas Ocean Voyages' international sales director reflects on his time in the Arctic, and how he intends to make the cruise line a household name in the UK – with the help of the trade. **Will Payne** reports

“The polar bear had a red muzzle as he looked at us, having finished his meal, just a few hundred feet away from the ship. It was absolutely incredible,”

Bernie Carter tells me with a palpable passion as he recalls his most recent experience onboard Atlas Ocean Voyages' *World Navigator* in the Arctic Circle.

It's passion like this that has inspired the line's international sales director to drive the business from a somewhat unknown entity in the UK to a challenger brand now firmly on the radar of British travellers. But there is still work to be done, Carter admits.

“We're very busy in trying to bring people in to focus on our other global markets, so that I can just look after the UK and Europe,” he says. “A large part of that would be the UK, because I personally, and the company, recognise the UK is a key market for us, and the trade in particular is very responsive to what we provide. We recognise their ability; I just need to find those partners to help push the Atlas brand to the next level.”

Carter reaffirms the line's commitment to remaining 100 per cent sold through the trade in the UK. “We have no plans to put direct customer business in the UK, so the trade remains integral to our ability to develop the brand and grow our business,” he continues.

‘WE NEED YOU’

For agents looking to grow their expedition cruise business, Carter recommends targeting “inquisitive” travellers in their databases. “These are curious people who want to travel the world in different ways,” he explains.

“For [Atlas], that's the key thing. Age is less relevant, we have everything from 30-year-old couples,



multi-generational families, children as young as the age of one and passengers over 80. We need agencies that can deliver those guests.”

To help support agents in securing these customers, Carter has implemented a robust marketing and engagement plan during his near three-year tenure with the cruise line. “Our goal has been to provide agents with relevant information through a series of face-to-face activations, online training and webinars,” he continues. “In-person visits on our ships are also crucial. We tend to keep these smaller, so each agent has the opportunity to engage with me and the team and have effective conversations relevant to them and their agency.”

SUSTAINABLE FOOTPRINTS

In 2028, Atlas will launch the first luxury expedition sailing yacht in the world, and the first entry in its new Atlas class, *Atlas Adventurer*. The new vessel will feature a hybrid propulsion system and solid sails, as

“**In 2028, Atlas will launch the first luxury expedition sailing yacht in the world, *Atlas Adventurer***”

What my career has taught me

Trust your instinct

"Learn to trust your sixth sense – if you feel something is good it generally is. You might not hit a home run every time, but if you try you will always have a chance."

Keep learning

"If something works, take the basis and repeat. If it doesn't, don't waste time, effort and money repeating. It is surprising how often this rule is ignored."

Ask questions

"Don't be afraid to ask questions. The best teams take intellectual and artistic talent from everyone around them – we all have something to offer."

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR

LEFT Bernie Carter; Atlas offers luxurious expeditions to breathtaking destinations; balcony suites allow travellers to relax while taking in the view



well as advanced marine systems and three carbon masts. When conditions both at sea and with the wind permit, *Atlas Adventurer* will be able to cruise with zero emissions.

The inspiration behind the next-generation ship, Carter says, is driven by the owner of Atlas Ocean Voyages' parent company, Mystic Cruises, based on his commitment to the environment. "For Mario [Ferreira], it's about going above and beyond – even further than the AECO and AETO regulations," Carter says.

"*Atlas Adventurer* will have carbon masts that can rotate 30 degrees with solid solar panel sales, so between the two of those, and using artificial intelligence, we will actually be able to harness the maximum amount of energy from the wind and sun to charge a nine-megawatt battery to help the ship run without using any kind of carbon fuel for extended periods of time. We want the only footprint we leave on these destinations to be that of our guests in the snow."

The vessel will include seven dining venues, featuring specialty restaurants and a new culinary studio for hands-on learning and destination-inspired programming. It will also have five lounges and cocktail bar social spaces, along with two outdoor bars.

MAKING MEMORIES

For Carter, the emotional connection forged during an expedition is what sets Atlas apart, and why he believes the line has significant potential in the UK.

Reflecting on his recent Arctic voyage, he says: "It's hard to put into words how it makes you feel when you see nature in its raw element. It humbles you and makes you realise how lucky you are to be there."

Those moments, he believes, are exactly what today's "curious travellers" are seeking – and why agents have such an important role to play in Atlas' next chapter. "People are seeing the brand more and more and they're now saying to us, 'We have customers who we think might like Atlas.' That's the key thing for me," he says.

With no plans to sell direct in the UK, Carter's mission is clear: build awareness, equip agents with the knowledge they need and, together, make Atlas a household name among Britain's expedition cruise customers. ●

Keep an eye on cruisetradenews.com for your chance to win a range of prizes with Hurtigruten

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Hurtigruten takes guests closer to Norway's dramatic landscapes; the chance to see the Northern Lights is a major draw for customers

BEYOND THE FJORDS

Will Payne highlights five reasons why Hurtigruten should be your first choice when it comes to booking your customers' Norwegian escapes

1 YOU'RE SELLING THE ORIGINAL

When clients book with Hurtigruten, they're travelling with the company that has been sailing the Norwegian coastline since 1893. With more than 130 years of experience, Hurtigruten offers something that can't be replicated: genuine local knowledge and deep-rooted connections with the communities it visits. Rather than just

“ Itineraries are designed around authentic encounters and cultural immersion

showcasing Norway, the company helps guests to experience it like a local, with itineraries designed around authentic encounters and cultural immersion.

2 THE TRADE TOOLS DO THE HARD WORK

Selling becomes easier when everything you need is in one place. The Hurtigruten Agent Portal provides access to marketing assets, training materials, product information, sales resources and the latest brand updates, helping you stay informed and confident when discussing the product with clients. The portal has been designed to help you save time when it matters most. Take your pick of ready-made brochures, itinerary highlights and training materials to help you boost your knowledge and sell more cruises.

3 EVERY BOOKING CAN EARN REWARDS

And the benefits don't stop once the booking is made. Through Hurtigruten Rewards, agents can collect points on eligible bookings and convert them into lifestyle vouchers. You can earn up to 300 points for a tour booking, up to 200 points for a Signature voyage booking, such as The North Cape Line or The Svalbard Line, and up to 100 points for an Original Coastal Express booking. Every 100 points is worth a £10 voucher.

4 AUTHENTICITY SELLS ITSELF

Today's travellers increasingly want experiences that feel genuine rather than manufactured, and that's where Hurtigruten excels. Guests can enjoy Norway's Coastal Kitchen, an award-winning dining concept featuring ingredients sourced from suppliers along the coastline.

5 SMALL SHIPS, UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

In an era where travellers are looking to escape the crowds, Hurtigruten's small ships are a major selling point. They can access ports that larger vessels simply can't, taking guests closer to Norway's dramatic landscapes and coastal communities. For agents, it's an easy way to differentiate the product from mainstream cruising and appeal to clients seeking a more immersive style of travel. ●



To log your Hurtigruten bookings and secure a range of rewards, visit hurtigrutenrewards.co.uk

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Image: © Stian Klo.

Travel with Confidence



MAKING A SPLASH

As touring giant Trafalgar celebrates the launch of its first river ships, **Jack Carter** hops aboard to find out whether the newcomer can stand out from the crowd

Bathed in the sunshine of a spring afternoon in Amsterdam, Cassandra Estrella-Roca makes her way to the stage. Reaching inside her pocket, she pulls out a folded sheet of paper, steadies herself in front of the microphone and prepares to address the audience at an occasion that's been many months in the planning.

"In a city of water, where stories drift through canals and every bridge

carries a memory, we gather," she says, glowing with pride. "Not just to name a ship, but to send her forward with purpose. Verity."

Most cruise lines are drawn to star power when it comes to christening a ship, relying on the presence of royalty, athletes or Hollywood A-listers to add a dash of sparkle. But tour operator Trafalgar decided to go down a different route. When choosing a godparent for its inaugural river ship, it turned instead to those it believes

reflect its values better than any celebrity ever could: its guests.

Enter Cassandra (aka Cassie), a US Marine Corps training specialist from California with more than ten Trafalgar tours under her belt. And from the first words of her opening address – a poem commissioned specially for today – it's clear that she's the right person for the job.

"When they told me they wanted me to be *Verity's* godmother, I was gobsmacked," she tells me. "I just

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT New *Trafalgar Verity* on the Rhine; the ship's main lounge; tulip time in Amsterdam; royal blue is the colour theme throughout the ship



couldn't understand why me – maybe it's my authenticity and fun vibe."

Trafalgar launched its first coach tours in 1947, shortly after the Second World War, with the bulk of its customers being British ex-servicemen who wanted to show their families where they'd fought. More than five million guests later, and with a footprint in six continents, the award-winning tour company has grown into one of the leading operators in the business. Now its sights are set on river cruising.

A STAR IS REBORN

The idea to launch a fleet of river ships was hatched in January last year, when sister company Uniworld announced plans to upgrade its fleet and it became clear that several of its older vessels would be surplus to requirements.

“Most cruise lines are drawn to star power when it comes to christening a ship, but Trafalgar decided to go down a different route

“We saw an opportunity to make a low-risk entry to market which allowed us to see whether river cruising was the right opportunity for us,” explains Melissa DaSilva, deputy CEO of the line's parent company, TTC Tour Brands. “In our gut we believed it would be, so we decided to seize it quickly.”

With nearly 1.5 million holidaymakers cruising on European rivers in 2024 alone, Trafalgar's timing appears to





be shrewd. However, with Celebrity Cruises and National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions also preparing river operations of their own – coupled with ongoing fleet expansions by established players including Viking and AmaWaterways – it’s not going to be easy for a newcomer to stand out from the crowd.

Trafalgar’s first two vessels, *Verity* and *Reverie* – 128-guest sister ships that previously served as Uniworld’s *River*

“ Few in the river sector will be able to compete with our live music, entertainment and activity programme

Queen and *River Princess* – both set sail in April, offering seven and nine-day itineraries on the Rhine and Danube respectively. A third ex-Uniworld ship, *Harmonie*, will join the fleet next spring, sailing an eight-day Best of the Seine itinerary from Paris.

A “light refurbishment” to the tune of roughly \$1m has seen new carpets, reupholstered furnishings and a striking royal blue motif breathe new life into *Verity*’s guest spaces, with *Reverie* getting a similar makeover. However, according to the head of Trafalgar’s river operation, Damien O’Connor, the line’s true brand identity won’t be fully realised until three new-build ships are unveiled in 2028. “One of Uniworld’s

USPs is that no two ships are the same,” he says. “It works well for them, so we want to go down that route too.”

O’Connor intends Trafalgar’s ships – which could total more than 10 by 2030 – to be less formal than Uniworld’s, with the onboard experience appealing to a younger, more casual clientele. I tell him I’ve been impressed by the quality of service so far, and that despite this being their first time on board, the crew already exude the assured, friendly persona he’s describing.

“We’re not an ultra-luxury brand with in-suite butlers,” he replies. “But we will place a big focus on our dining offering and service, while few in the river sector will be able to compete with our live music, entertainment and activity programme.”

LOCAL HEROES

After a short sail north, we arrive for lunch at the Pauw family’s dairy farm in the next village over from Edam, the birthplace of the Netherlands’ delicious holey cheese. I carry my plate of smoked chicken sausage,





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Guests can explore Amsterdam pre and post-cruise; boutique-style onboard decor; a cheese shop in Edam; French Balcony Cabins offer bedside views



meatballs and curly kale with buttery mash to the farm's dining room where the farm's owner and matriarch, Claudia, comes to sit beside us – the clip-clop of her traditional wooden clogs on the stone floor echoing around the room. She begins regaling us with stories about the farm's history, with one particular tale involving a Trafalgar guest in his nineties who, after a walking tour, realised he'd

fought in these very same fields during the Second World War.

The Pauws have been working with Trafalgar on an exclusive basis since 2013 as part of the company's Be My Guest scheme, where visitors are invited to step inside the homes of local artisans to break bread and learn about their everyday lives.

After enjoying a dessert of apple pie and ice cream (while a live stream of a cow being milked by mechanical tentacles plays on a TV above us), we're invited to see the rest of the animals. Adorable newborn lambs pogo energetically in the hay while the family dogs – a chocolate Labrador, a German pointer and two Shih Tzus – tussle and chase each other around the courtyard.

Back on board *Verity*, I ask Melissa DaSilva whether the ship itself will be Trafalgar's point of difference. "We do want to ensure our guests are getting a fantastic experience on board," she says, "but I don't think that's where we're going to win. Where we will shine is on land with our Be My Guest experiences and our guided pre and post-cruise extensions."

There is a time-honoured order of things when it comes to launching a new cruise line, whereby major decisions begin with the vessel. How many restaurants should there be? How many connecting cabins do we need? What colour curtains and carpets should we have? Once all those points are resolved, only then do cruise lines turn their attention to the shore experiences. Very rarely do things happen in reverse, but perhaps that's what's so exciting about this new venture.

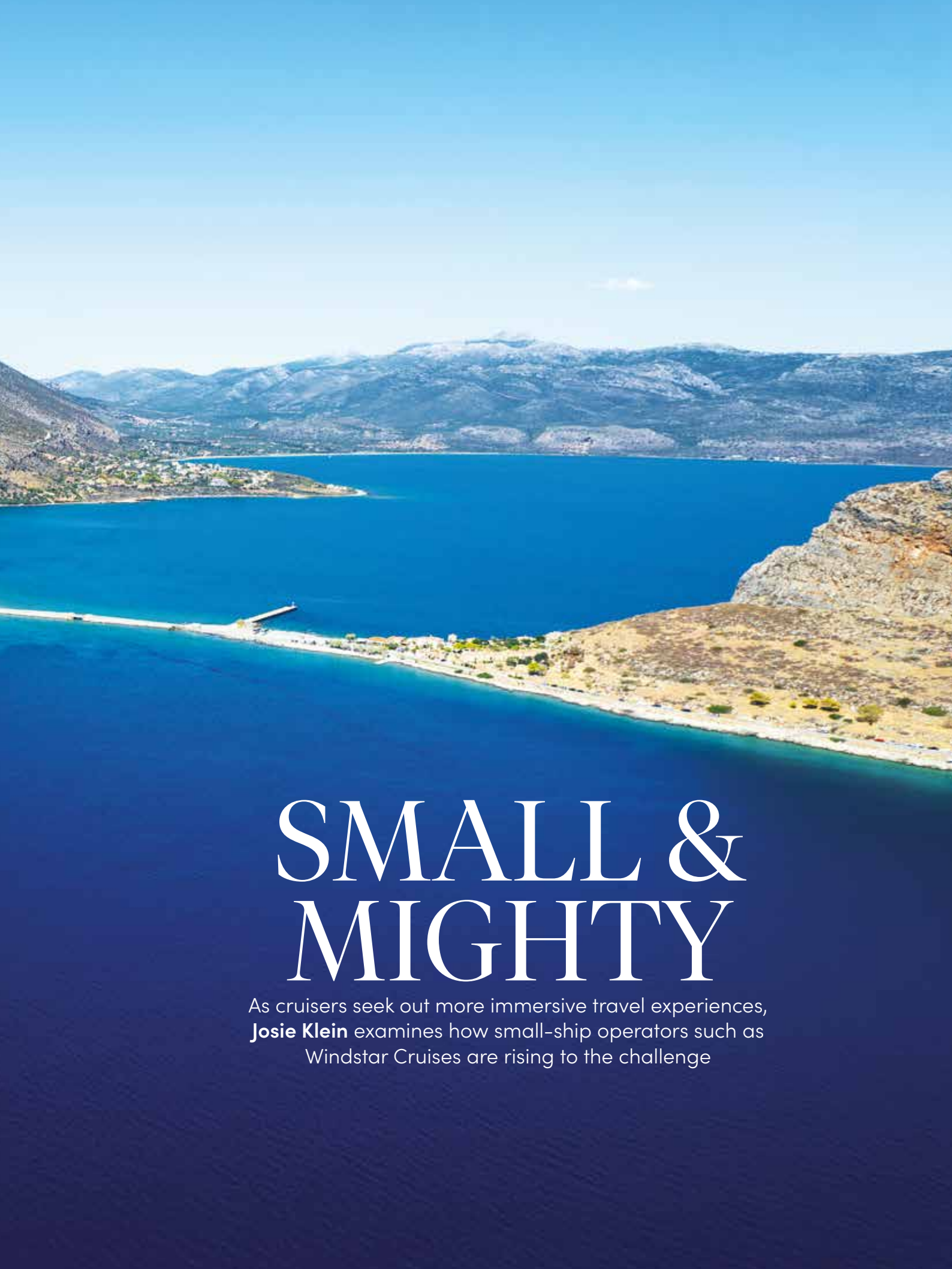
Now, with two ships in the water and more to follow, an abundance of unique local experiences are ready and waiting for Trafalgar's first river guests. Who knows, maybe the next godparent is on one of those ships right now. ●

Get on board

Trafalgar's nine-night Best of the Rhine and Amsterdam cruise aboard *Trafalgar Verity*, from Amsterdam to Basel via Cologne, Koblenz, Speyer and Strasbourg, departs 30 August 2026, from £3,649pp. [trafalgar.com](https://www.trafalgar.com)







SMALL & MIGHTY

As cruisers seek out more immersive travel experiences,
Josie Klein examines how small-ship operators such as
Windstar Cruises are rising to the challenge



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT Small ships can take guests to Barcelona or Vatican City; Windstar offers spacious pool decks; *Star Breeze* in the South Seas; Windstar's Amphora restaurant



When it comes to choosing which cruise line to sail with, “big is beautiful” seems to be the idea that guides many travellers’ choices. Yet, while the major lines and their mega-ships can certainly offer some amazing facilities, there is another way to cruise. Small-ship operators such as Windstar Cruises, Ponant and HX Expeditions, whose vessels carry fewer than 600 passengers, are attracting seasoned sailors and land-lubbers alike with the promise of more intimate onboard experiences, a higher space-to-guest ratio and authentic, truly immersive destination experiences.

This trend has been good news for Unforgettable Croatia co-founder

“Incorporating wellbeing into a cruise helps guests to reset and return to daily life with a renewed sense of purpose

Graham Carter, who tells *Cruise Trade News* that 68 per cent of his bookings for this summer are from first-time cruisers seeking a more luxurious experience at sea. “We are seeing a shift,” he says, “with people who typically book boutique properties on land now coming to us because they see our ships as being more like floating luxury hotels.”

BOUTIQUE ENTERTAINMENT

Some cruisers assume that because a ship is small, there won’t be much to do on board. But that again is a misconception. While compact vessels may lack the space for ziplines, waterslides and rollercoasters, there is never any reason for guests to feel bored.

“Have you ever had those moments when you’re in a beautiful location, it’s warm and sunny, you’re surrounded by all this incredible water and you think, ‘I wish I could just jump in right now?’” asks Tanya Roberts, entertainment and engagement manager on Windstar’s *Star Legend*. “The structure of Windstar’s vessels means the back of the ship opens out, so you can do exactly that. We also set up an inflatable cabana, plus we have kayaks and snorkel gear.”



Despite all the time they spend at sea, most cruisers never get the chance to dip a toe in the water. But on a small ship that is always a possibility, and there's nothing like it for giving a sense of intimacy with your destination.

Tanya Roberts also praises the onboard entertainment, which is totally different from the West End-style productions created for larger cruise lines. "Everything that goes into our shows is created by the crew," she says. "They conceive, build, rehearse and perform it, which is wonderful

“ Incorporating wellbeing into a cruise helps guests to reset and return to daily life with a renewed sense of purpose

because the guests then see the crew members in a totally new light, and that creates a bond.”

DELICIOUS DINING

Food is undoubtedly one of the most important parts of a cruise holiday. In fact, *Cruise Trade News*' second Annual Report recently revealed that food and drink are the best aspect of a holiday at sea for 60 per cent of sailors. Windstar has embraced this trend by building its menus around locally sourced ingredients and developing a 'Shopping with the Chef' programme, whereby guests are taken to food markets while in port to shop for ingredients, which are then used to make that evening's meal. "When planning our Shopping with the Chef

experiences we're careful to pick towns with the best local markets, such as Livorno or Nice," says Artur Pacholski, Windstar's food and beverages manager. "On our seven, eight or nine-night voyages, our chef has a budget of around €1,000 when he goes with the guests to buy fresh ingredients for the ship. They choose the local stuff – the cheeses, olives and cold cuts – and if guests feel like having some fish, the chef will purchase and prepare it for them as an extra dish on the menu.

"Normally we take around 20 guests each time, but sometimes interest has been so high that we've had to organise two shopping trips."

SERENE WELLNESS

Another increasingly important travel trend is self-improvement, and last year Windstar responded by introducing a series of wellness-themed cruises. Life coach, author and healer Debbie Dixon joined the sailings, which featured daily meditation, breathwork and yoga sessions, as well as talks on mental, physical and spiritual health.

"Wellness is an essential part of a holiday as it helps travellers reset





and escape from daily schedules and habits,” says the line’s head of sales, Augustus Lonsdale. “Incorporating wellbeing into a cruise helps combat modern burnout by lowering cortisol levels, repairing sleep cycles and helping guests to return to daily life with a renewed sense of purpose.”

Can the wellness offering of a small ship really compete with those of larger operators, which often have the luxury of extensive spa areas and more wide-ranging fitness packages? “Our yachts carry between 148 and 342 guests, which means they are able to provide a more personalised, immersive and tranquil experience,” adds Lonsdale.

“Without the crowds and the vast array of facilities of larger ships, the overall environment is quieter and more conducive to mental relaxation, plus our saunas and pools are rarely overcrowded so guests won’t need to wake up early to grab a sunbed or a spot in a yoga class.”

And that hints at the true joy of small-ship cruising. While huge vessels with their endless activities, diverse dining options and large entertainment teams do have their appeal, nothing beats the sense of freedom that comes with strolling around a ship as though it were your own.

When you add personalised service and enriching destination experiences into the mix, it becomes a wholly different holiday proposition altogether. ♦

Get on board

Windstar Cruises’ seven-night Moroccan Markets & Iberian Icons cruise aboard *Star Explorer*, from Barcelona to Lisbon via Valencia, Cartagena, Marbella, Tangier and Seville, departs 5 May 2027, from £3,037pp. [windstarcruises.com](https://www.windstarcruises.com)

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Small ships can visit exclusive ports such as Monte Carlo, as well as classic cruise calls like Rome; Windstar’s fleet includes traditional tall ships and modern superyachts; your table awaits; Windstar’s marina facilities open out from the back of the ship

...AND RELAX

Windstar Cruises’ head of sales, **Augustus Lonsdale**, on how the line’s wellness offering helps guests unwind

Which wellness activity is most popular on board your ships?

While not an obvious wellness service, paddleboarding directly from our marina is very popular with guests because it improves core stability and balance. It also focuses the mind as you move slowly through the water, taking time to appreciate the peace and tranquillity around you.

What new wellness services are you offering?

We have expanded our wellness offering on *Star Seeker* and *Star Explorer* – which joins the fleet in December – to include spacious two-storey spas with private massage rooms, a full-service salon for hair and beauty treatments, a soothing relaxation area and a dry sauna.

What makes Windstar’s wellness services stand out from the competition?

Wellness and relaxation are both important pillars for Windstar, and what sets us apart from other lines are our culturally immersive treatments and our comprehensive whole-body approach to wellbeing that blends fitness, mindfulness and healthy dining.





**The
Rhône**

RIPPLE IN TIME

Magnificent Roman ruins, vine-clad hills and unique culinary traditions make the cities of the Lower Rhône a celebration of the finer things in life, writes Neil Geraghty

FROM FAR LEFT Arles' traditional Camargue festival; Van Gogh found a great deal of inspiration during his residence in the French city; the Golden Virgin looks down from the Basilica Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon



As civilizations ebb and flow, it's often the great rivers that retain their clearest traces. To cruise along the Rhône is to follow in the wake of ancient Greek merchants and Roman legionaries who left a dazzling wealth of archaeological treasures. In more recent times, artists of the 19th-century avant garde flocked to the river, and their vivid evocations of sun-soaked hills and sleepy villages have since inspired generations of travellers to discover the timeless beauty of this ancient land.

Guarding the mouth of the Rhône, Arles was among the Roman Empire's most important ports. In 2004, archaeologists made one of the greatest discoveries of the age – a fully laden Roman trading barge, perfectly

“To cruise along the Rhône is to follow in the wake of ancient Greek merchants and Roman legionaries who left a wealth of archaeological treasures

preserved in the silty riverbed. Prosaically named 'Arles-Rhône 3', this now takes pride of place in the city's archaeological museum, its exquisite joinery revealing all the brilliance of Roman craftsmanship.

The boat's hard-working crew would surely have been regulars at the city's vast arena, modelled on the

Colosseum in Rome and still staging entertainments today. In summer you can get an inkling of gladiatorial combat from the rowdy *courses Camarguaises*, in which contestants risk life and limb to snatch ribbons from the horns of rampaging bulls.

If the show stokes your appetite, you'll soon find you're in foodie heaven. From *fougasse* (anchovy-stuffed flatbread) to *tellines* (clams doused in garlic and parsley sauce), the flavours of antiquity still dominate Arles' rustic cuisine. Traditional restaurants cluster in the medieval lanes surrounding the arena, and also in La Roquette, the bohemian neighbourhood that inspired some of Vincent van Gogh's most famous masterpieces.

One gift from the Greeks that France eternally enjoys is wine. The



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Luma Arles Cultural Center boasts Frank Gehry architecture; inside Lyon's Basilica Notre-Dame de Fourvière; Arles' arena is modelled on the Colosseum in Rome; the terraces around Vienne produce fine vintages



ancient terraces around Vienne produce some of the country's finest vintages, and oenophiles should make a beeline for historic estates such as E Guigal to savour silky syrahs and peach-scented viogniers.

Wherever you find fine wine, fabulous food is sure to follow, and Vienne is home to the second largest food market in France, especially eye-catching in autumn when a kaleidoscope of mushrooms overflows from heavily laden stalls.

In the 1950s, the revered inventor of nouvelle cuisine, Paul Bocuse, worked at nearby La Pyramide, which at the time was the most famous restaurant in France. This picturesque blue-shuttered eaterie still wows visitors with its artistic creations today, and two Michelin stars tell you it's well worth booking in advance.

Music completes the ensemble in Vienne. Each June, the Roman theatre and the Temple of Augustus provide spectacular backdrops for one of Europe's biggest jazz festivals, and fans can find their groove among 250 concerts featuring 1,000 musicians playing everything from hip-swinging Afro-Cuban to toe-tapping bebop.

Straddling two hills at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône, Lyon has for millennia been a prosperous trading port, and today the whole of

“ The whole of Lyon's historic city centre is a Unesco World Heritage Site, and it's also the gourmet capital of the world

its historic city centre is a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Never a city to shy away from accolades, Lyon also flaunts its reputation as the gourmet capital of the world. On warm summer evenings, crowds of diners spill on to cobbled streets beneath honey-coloured Renaissance facades. But what's on the menu may surprise you. Traditional Lyonnais food – typified by the soft dumplings known as *quenelles*, usually made with pike – is firmly rooted in working-class heritage and is best enjoyed in the Old City's *bouchons*, cosy no-frills restaurants where the waiters are famed for their wisecracking humour.

Second only to food, the city's cinematic heritage is a great source of local pride. In 1895, the Lumière brothers invented the *cinématographe* here, and today their home and studio – a palatial Art Nouveau villa –

is open to the public as the Lumière Institute. Film buffs should also make time for the city's Musée Cinema & Miniature, an Aladdin's cave of original props and costumes that range from Charlie Chaplin's walking stick to models of aliens from *Men in Black*. ●

Get on board

Riviera Travel's seven-night Burgundy, the River Rhone and Provence river cruise, from Lyon to Avignon via Chalon, Vienne, Tain l'Hermitage and Arles, departs 19 October 2026, from £1,899pp including flights. rivieratravel.co.uk





MS
Spitsbergen

Hebridean Heaven

Surrounded by subtropical flowers one day and shrouded in fog on a remote archipelago the next, **Raphael Giacardi** delights in the diversity of the Scottish Isles



Soft rays of sunshine pierce the canopy of beech trees as the last of this morning's rain evaporates. It's a bright spring day and the sun is approaching its zenith: hot enough to make me remove my cap and wipe a few beads of sweat from my forehead. The air is heavy with the scent of camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons, while the chirps of robins and other small birds float through the air.

I'd been told before embarking on this 10-night Scottish isles and Hebrides sailing with HX Expeditions that the diversity of landscapes would fascinate me, but nothing could have prepared me for the tiny Isle of Gigha. Had I been teleported here with no prior knowledge of my destination, guessing my whereabouts would have been quite impossible.

The multicoloured floral displays feel subtropical, suggesting the

“There's a white-sand beach with a few small boats bobbing in the tide. It could be the Mediterranean – until I dip my toes in the water

exotic gardens of Madeira, but the tall trees framing the skyline seem more rooted in continental Europe. A delightful 15-minute walk away, there's a white-sand beach with a few small boats bobbing in the tide. It could be the Mediterranean – until I dip my toes in the 11°C water.

Warmed by the Gulf Stream, the most southerly of the Inner Hebrides has a microclimate of its own, milder and sunnier than you'd ever associate with Scotland. Achamore Gardens –

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT A Soay sheep; Goat Fell looms over spring flowers on Arran; the basalt columns of Fingal's Cave

the place that's dazzling me right now – was created in the 1940s by a newcomer to the island, Colonel Sir James Horlick, who set about harnessing the local conditions to create a place where exotic plants could thrive. More than 80 years later, the fruits of his labours still amaze.

WILD WORLD

Two days later I'm standing on the deck of HX Expeditions' *MS Spitsbergen* at 8am, warming my hands with a mug of black coffee as the drizzle slides down my rain jacket. Ahead of me, thick fog blankets the hills of Hirta, the largest island in the remote Scottish archipelago of St Kilda, some 40 miles from the nearest speck of land.



There is nothing Mediterranean about this dot in the Atlantic Ocean; it's a wild, isolated, almost alien landscape of craggy cliffs, towering sea stacks and hills wrapped in maritime grassland.

Today the UK's largest colonies of gannets and Atlantic puffins have Hirta more or less to themselves, but as I join my fellow guests on a mist-shrouded walking tour, our guide tells us that this barren spot was inhabited for 4,000 years. "The local community lived almost exclusively off a diet of birds and their eggs," she explains.



“ The cruise calls almost exclusively at locations so tiny or remote that only small sailing vessels or motor boats can moor

In 1930, the last 36 residents gave up the struggle and abandoned their island home. They left behind houses, 1,400 small drystone structures called *cleits* and a flock of Soay sheep – a primitive breed whose descendants still roam the archipelago today. Hirta is now deserted but for a few scientists and employees of the MoD, and the abandoned buildings give the place a ghostly feel.

PARALLEL UNIVERSES

Gigha and St Kilda are two different worlds in a journey that includes many more. And that's exactly how HX Expeditions wanted this itinerary to feel. As expedition leader Andrea Strand explains: "There is such a huge variety and beauty that comes to life on this cruise. What we aim to do is show this diversity of locations; places that are so close together but so different, not just in their wildlife,

but also in the geology, the scenery and the people."

Nowhere are these differences more apparent than on the Isle of Arran, which is divided almost perfectly in half by the Highland Boundary Fault. This is the line where the tectonic plates of the rugged Highlands meet the softer hills and valleys of Scotland's Central Belt.

I start my day on Arran with a coastal hike to Brodick Castle, a former seat of the Dukes of Hamilton. Behind the castle, a line of imposing peaks – including the 874m Goat Fell – stands proud. This is northern Arran: mountainous and craggy, a perfect picture of Highland scenery.

A few hours later, I'm zipping along the country lanes of southern Arran on a forest safari with local company Mogabout. The jagged peaks have given way to gentler hills and rolling pastures: one island split in two by the slow, implacable movement of the Earth's crust.

ROCK STAR

Geology is a recurrent feature on this trip. With the ship anchored off the Isle of Staffa, I board a Zodiac boat, one of the high-spec inflatable dinghies that tender guests to shore most days. Today, however, we're not aiming for land. Instead we're cruising to the world famous Fingal's Cave, an awe-

inspiring sight that can only be fully grasped when you see it from the water.

At first, your mind can't make sense of what your eyes are telling it. This gaping, cliff-side mouth faces the ocean, framed by mighty basalt columns whose perfect hexagonal symmetry must surely be man-made. But of course it isn't. When lava cools slowly and evenly, it contracts as it solidifies, creating internal stresses. To relieve these, the rock fractures, creating a perfect hexagonal grid. Gripping on to the rope running the length of the Zodiac, I can only marvel at this extraordinary accident of geology and physics.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

MS Spitsbergen takes me to a grand total of 11 islands on this voyage, yet none feels like a filler. Each adds something new, from history in Iona – the birthplace of Scottish Christianity – to world-class whisky in Islay. On Colonsay we discover some of the most beautiful and most deserted white-sand beaches I've ever seen.

The cruise calls almost exclusively at locations so tiny or remote that only small sailing vessels or motor boats can moor. My days follow the rhythm of our Zodiac trips, landing at jetties

or piers, or cruising to sights that only such craft can reach.

Wildlife is a constant backdrop. On Islay I spot a roe deer splashing about in shallow coastal waters. On the Isle of Mull, it's seals resting on the rocky shores of Tobermory Bay. On Arran I spot a buzzard and a hare in the forest. I snap a few shaky shots of puffins and wrens on St Kilda as dolphins and a minke whale also make an appearance.

The hardest thing to comprehend on this trip is the scale. Cruises can sometimes be guilty of ramming as many countries as possible into one trip. Here, most islands are only a few hours' sailing from each other, maximising time ashore and giving each place the space to tell its story.

This voyage takes a tiny speck of the British Isles and puts it under a microscope. In doing so, it reveals more of Scotland than most travellers will ever see. ●

Get on board

HX Expeditions' 10-night The Scottish Isles – Island Hopping in the Hebrides cruise aboard *MS Spitsbergen* return from Glasgow (Fairlie) via Arran, Islay, Gigha, Mull, Lewis, Skye, the Small Isles, Iona and Colonsay, departs 6 April 2027, from £5,254 travelhx.com

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Expedition briefing on board a Zodiac; Loch Scavaig on the Isle of Skye; beachcombing on Iona; Brodick Castle on Arran

SCOTTISH ISLES CRUISING ESSENTIALS



Waterproof jacket and trousers

HX Expeditions provides a waterproof jacket, but other lines may not. Waterproof trousers are often overlooked but are a must in the rain and on Zodiacs.



Hiking boots

The terrain on most islands is rugged, so proper, ankle-protecting footwear is non-negotiable. Bonus points if your boots are waterproof.



Gloves and a beanie

Even in the spring, it's easy to get cold on a rainy, windy day, especially on a Zodiac. You'll be pleased to keep your head and hands warm.



Binoculars

Puffins are smaller than you think, and whales may surface in the distance. A good pair of binos makes a great companion.



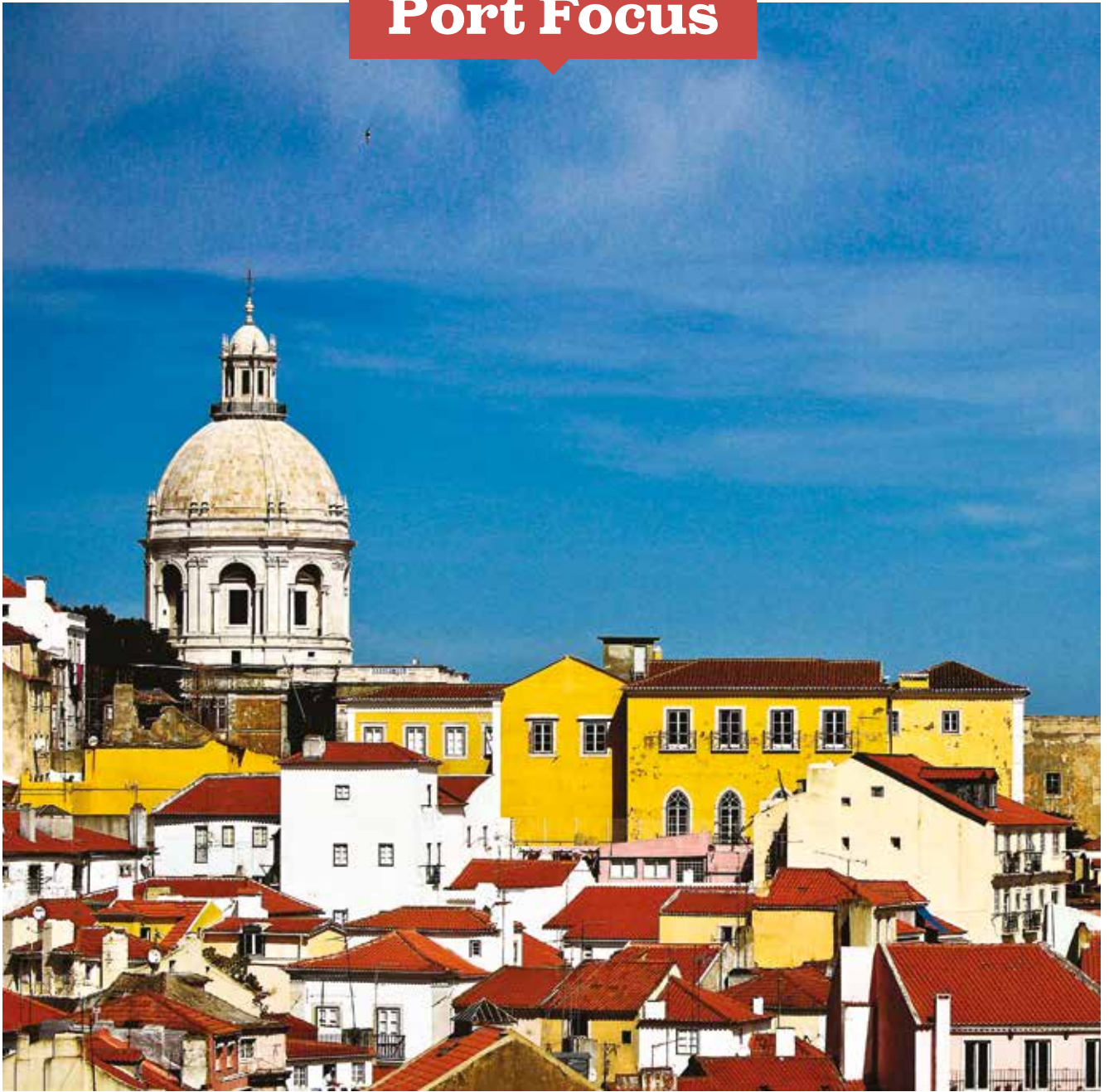
Waterproof bags

You might find yourself on a multi-hour hike in persistent rain, and spray can get into a Zodiac, so make sure your belongings stay nice and dry.



HIGHLIGHTS • FOOD & DRINKS
SHOPPING • ITINERARIES

Port Focus



Lisbon

With its stunning riverside setting, terracotta rooftops and beautiful tiled facades, Portugal's capital gives guests every reason to disembark, says regular visitor **Kayleigh Rattle**



Food



Drink



Walk



Museums, galleries and landmarks



Adventure



Sightseeing



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The city boasts stunning terracotta rooftops; sample local snacks at the Time Out street food market; the 16th-century Torre de Belem; Lisbon's delicious *pastel de nata* tarts



Built on seven hills and flanked by the Tagus River, Lisbon is a sight to behold – and explore. As the home of Fado music, custard-filled *pastel de nata* tarts and those famous yellow trams, Portugal's capital offers something for every visitor, whether travelling with family, in a couple or solo.

From the historic cobbled streets of the Alfama district to the trendy LX Factory creative hub in Alcantara,

Lisbon is a beguiling mix of old and new. Its many distinct neighbourhoods feel like a collection of villages rolled into one, and with trams, tuk-tuks, funiculars and boats to connect them, visitors will find it's easy to get around. Here, we've created a selection of itineraries for families, solos and couples to help you inspire your customers' visit to the vibrant port city.

FOR FAMILIES



9am Kickstart your day with pastry perfection in the form of a *pastel de nata*. Grab the 15E tram from Cais do Sodré (a quick taxi ride from the cruise terminal). Hop off at Belem, where these irresistibly flaky, cinnamon-topped custard tarts have been crafted since the 18th century. Junior travellers will be fascinated to watch them being prepared on large trays at the iconic Pasteis de Belem patisserie.



10.30am If you're planning on spending the day at the beach, hop on a train to Estoril or Cascais

from Belem station. But if you're staying put, take an hour to explore the 16th-century fort known as the Torre de Belem. There are winding staircases and old prison cells to entertain the kids, plus great river views of incoming boats from the top of the tower.



12pm Take tram 15E back to Cais do Sodré and head to one of the many cafes or bakeries, or grab a traditional *bifana* pork sandwich from the Time Out street food market. Look out for *pasteis de bacalhau* (codfish cakes) and other Portuguese pastries like the *bola de Berlim* doughnut.



2pm Take the metro to Oriente before walking the short, stroller-friendly route along the waterfront to the Pavilhao do Conhecimento science museum. Here the exhibits invite curious minds to learn why rainbows form and how optical illusions play tricks on our brain, while a flying bike suspended six metres above the ground offers a daring demonstration of how gravity works.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The New Museum Of Art, Architecture and Technology; the LX Factory hub; Campo de Ourique's market

 **4pm** Stop off at an ice cream parlour along the Parque das Nações for some *gelado* and let the kids cool off with a splash in the fountains before enjoying a walk along the waterfront promenade. Wood-fired pizza beckons at Pizza ZeroZero, followed by a tuk-tuk or taxi back to the ship to give tired legs a rest.

FOR SOLOS

 **8am** Beat the crowds and start your sightseeing tour early. Hop off the ship and walk or taxi to Praça Luis de Camões, the start of Tram 28. Take this iconic 7km route for an hour or so through some of

“ The iconic Tram 28 travels 7km through some of Lisbon's most historic neighbourhoods

Lisbon's most historic neighbourhoods for a nifty (and rattly!) introduction to the city that offers fantastic photo opportunities along the way.

 **9.45am** Hop off at Campo de Ourique, a charmingly peaceful neighbourhood in the west of the city, and grab a coffee and a pastry at the neighbourhood's famous covered market. Put your morbid preconceptions to one side and visit the hauntingly beautiful Prazeres Cemetery, where the white marble vaults date back centuries.

 **11.30am** Circle back to Tram 28 and take it to Calvario, home of the LX Factory. This former industrial complex is now a thriving creative hub, filled with independent bookshops, restaurants, street art and boutiques selling Portuguese ceramics and jewellery. It's a great example of Lisbon's creative side, and a fab spot for lunch after you've had a wander.

Head first to Ler Devagar, which the *Financial Times* calls one of the most beautiful bookshops in the world, and browse English titles stacked on floor-to-ceiling shelves. Afterwards, grab a slice from buzzy Sophia Pizzoteca and enjoy it in the shady courtyard.

 **3.30pm** Grab a quick pick-me-up from cozy coffee shop The Folks, which specialises in milky *galao*, the locals' latte-like favourite. Then stroll downhill through Baixa, lingering in some of its grand plazas, before continuing on to the stunning Praça do Comércio square on the waterfront. Get a better vantage point by climbing the steps of the ornate Arco da Rua Augusta monument, which overlooks the sparkling Tagus River.

 **5.30pm** Lisbon's world-famous rooftop bars are the perfect way to conclude your rewarding jaunt around the Portuguese capital. BAHN & Terrace does a delicious line in seafood small plates (think grilled octopus and eel croissant with smoked pork).

FOR COUPLES

 **9am** Disembark at leisure and ascend via cobbled alleys and stone passages to the 11th-century Castelo Sao Jorge. Predating the Roman





FROM TOP Praça do Comércio square; the iconic Tram 28 is ideal for exploring

legions, this hillside fortification fell to Portugal's first king, Afonso Henriques, in 1147. Spend the morning roaming its grounds, where Afonso's statue guards the main gate, before climbing one of the castle's 11 towers for citywide views.

 **11.30am** Descend from the castle and explore the historic Alfama neighbourhood – one of the oldest in Portugal – on your way back into town. Amid this spider's web of hilly lanes, bakeries sell custard tarts and *bolos* by the tray-load, while musicians pluck their guitars and fill the air with mournful *fado* ballads.

 **12.30pm** Reward your morning efforts with a long lunch at nearby Chapitô à Mesa. The entrance is somewhat deceptive, as the restaurant sits beneath a jewellery shop, but

“Enjoy a spectacular panoramic sunset view from Miradouro da Senhora do Monte

after descending the steps you'll be surprised by sublime views over Lisbon's terracotta roofscape. With delicious food served in a circus-style big top, it's popular with visitors and locals alike.

 **2pm** Get a different perspective on Lisbon's hilly topography with a relaxing sightseeing cruise along the Tagus River with FRS Portugal. Board at the pier, just a ten-minute walk from the restaurant, and grab a seat on the sun deck as you sail beneath the 25th April Bridge and past the Unesco-listed Belem lighthouse and the imposing Sanctuary of Christ statue.

 **4pm** Spend the rest of your afternoon enjoying one or two of Lisbon's spectacular *miradouros*, or city viewpoints. Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara is great for taking in views of the Castelo São Jorge, while Miradouro da Senhora do Monte – Lisbon's highest perch – is best for sunset panoramic views. ●

LOCAL INSIGHT



“Start your morning with a *pastel de nata* at Café de Belem, just steps from the Torre de Belem, then end your day at Topo Martim Moniz or Secret Garden for sunset views only the locals know.”

BRENDA HEIMARSDOTTIR
Travel executive



“Munch your way around the delicious foodie haven known as Mercado de Campo de Ourique, then wander around the picturesque neighbourhood that surrounds it.”

KATIE WRIGHT
Travel journalist

Get on board

P&O Cruises' 10-night Spain and Portugal cruise aboard *Ventura*, return from Southampton via La Coruna, Vigo, Lisbon, Porto and St Peter Port (Guernsey), departs 25 August 2027, from £949pp. [pocruises.com](https://www.pocruises.com)

Seabourn's eight-night Jewels of Andalusia & The Balearic Islands aboard *Seabourn Quest* from Civitavecchia (Rome) to Lisbon via Corsica, Menorca, Ibiza and Cartagena, departs 1 November 2026, from £4,759pp. [seabourn.com](https://www.seabourn.com)

‘Why our government relations matter now more than ever’

CLIA UK and Ireland managing director **Andy Harmer OBE**
on the ever-growing importance of the industry’s relationship
with central and local governments

Over many years, the UK has established itself as one of the world’s leading cruise markets, attracting ships from across the globe and creating a thriving ecosystem that supports ports, destinations, suppliers, travel agents and local communities.

As government develops new policies on issues ranging from tourism and infrastructure to maritime decarbonisation, it is essential that cruise remains part of those conversations. The decisions made today will influence where ships are deployed tomorrow and where future growth takes place. This is where CLIA and the cruise community plays an important role.

ECONOMIC VALUE

Cruise already delivers significant economic value to the UK, supporting more than 69,000 jobs and generating



billions of pounds for the economy. Government recognised the industry’s importance through the publication of its Cruise Growth Plan last year – and continued engagement and long-term thinking will be essential if the UK is to maintain its position as one of the most attractive markets in the world. For travel agents, this matters directly.

Supportive policy and a stable operating environment encourage cruise lines to bring ships to the UK, creating more choice for consumers and more sales opportunities for the trade. The UK already welcomes more than a third of the global cruise fleet each year, giving agents access to an exceptional range of itineraries, brands and holiday experiences to sell.

In addition, ships visiting the UK create opportunities

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

It’s essential that government policies reflect the crucial role cruise plays in the UK economy; Andy Harmer says CLIA regularly engages with decision-makers on behalf of all aspects of the cruise industry

throughout the distribution chain, benefiting ports, destinations and suppliers.

THE NEXT PHASE

Last month, our UK Cruise Tourism Summit brought together leaders and policymakers to discuss how we can unlock the next phase of growth.

Encouragingly, the UK’s tourism minister described cruise as playing an “integral” role in the nation’s tourism success. Those words matter, and we look forward to seeing policies that recognise cruise as a strategic part of the UK’s visitor economy. The cruise industry has shown remarkable resilience and growth in recent years.

However, future success cannot be taken for granted. That is why CLIA continues to engage with government on behalf of the industry, ensuring policymakers understand both the economic contribution cruise already makes and the opportunities it can present in the years ahead. For agents, a thriving and competitive UK cruise market means more ships, more itineraries, more customer choice and ultimately more opportunities to grow business. ●



“

Cruise delivers significant economic value to the UK, supporting more than 69,000 jobs and generating billions of pounds



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