

Your comprehensive guide to selling cruise holidays

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ISSUE 119 | JUNE/JULY 2023

cruise

TRADE NEWS

BEE LINE TO THE RHINE

How subtle itinerary changes are
attracting a new type of guest

CTN INVESTIGATES

The story behind Stornoway's
growth plans

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All efforts are made to ensure factual
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TRADE NEWS
Published by
Real.
RESPONSE MEDIA

Unit 4D, Cally Yard
445 Caledonian Road, London, N7 9BG
ISSN 2059-9986



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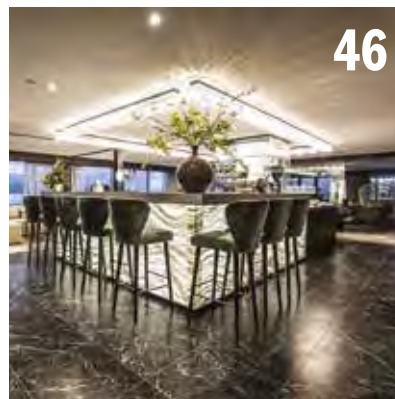
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Contents

JUNE/JULY 2023



Steve Dunlop Photograph



REGULARS

6 The briefing

The essential and latest cruise news

8 What's in it for you?

Training, incentives and support on offer

11 Cruise column

Fred Olsen's Geoff Ridgeon on the importance of cuisine

12 Tech talk

Innovative ways to boost cruise packaging

16 Supercharging marketing

How to infuse social media with personality

19 Tips of the trade

How to sell family river cruises

20 Insight

Spotlight on Nicko Cruises' UK growth

26 At a glance

The luxurious *Emerald Sakara*

50 Agent engagement

On the road with Cunard's Gemma Scarff

FEATURES

24 Partnership

The allure of *Celebrity Apex*

29 Analysis

How the development of a new deepwater port could change Stornoway

34 Interview

In conversation with Princess' Nick Hughes

COVER STORY

38 River cruising

How subtle changes to Rhine itineraries are paying dividends

42 Destination focus

What's new in the Mediterranean

46 Cruise review

Contemporary bliss on Travelmarvel's *Vega*



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Editor's Letter

WELCOME TO THE JUNE/JULY ISSUE

There's nothing quite like launching something new, or, in our case, relaunching an event. Yes, after a few years away, we are breathing new life into the Cruise Stars Awards.

As a reminder – the Cruise Stars, organised by *Cruise Trade News*, recognise success and innovation, shining a spotlight on the brightest and best talent in the cruise industry. Categories – designed to showcase individual achievements – include awards for Cruise Line PR & Marketing Star, Cruise Line Sales Star and National Travel Agent Sales Star, among others, including special awards for the industry's Rising Stars.

We are thrilled the event is making a long overdue comeback and are excited to make it bigger and better than ever before. See inside for how to get involved.

Elsewhere, Light Blue Travel commercial director Michelle Daniels explains how German cruise line Nicko Cruises is boosting its presence in the UK market, while we also speak to Cunard's Gemma Scarff about strengthening trade relationships.

Destination-wise, we explore how cruise lines are reinventing the Mediterranean with new experiences and itineraries.

For our analysis, we look at plans for a deepwater port in Stornoway, weighing up the benefits of a project due to be completed



in April next year. Stornoway Port Authority CEO Alex MacLeod says, "The opportunities are incredible." However, does everyone agree?

As for ships, in August, *Emerald Sakara* will make its debut, sailing the Mediterranean and Adriatic alongside sister yacht *Emerald Azzurra*. Go to the At a Glance section for detailed information about what *Sakara* will offer, including dining options, wellness activities and much more.

Above: The Mediterranean has lots of hidden gems to explore

Gary Peters

Editor, *Cruise Trade News*

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Cruise Trade News

The Briefing

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IN BRIEF

Growth for ECN

● The Expedition Cruise Network has announced that Oceanwide Expeditions and Polar Latitudes have joined the association. This brings the membership of cruise operators to 16, while 330 trade professionals have signed up to the trade membership portal.

Panache eyes growth

● Panache Cruises intends to grow its team by 30 per cent over the coming months. MD James Cole said the Chorley-based business has “grown significantly” since it launched in July 2020 and will be quadrupling the size of its office premises over to accommodate its growing team.

APPOINTMENTS



● Windstar Cruises has appointed **Augustus Lonsdale** to the newly expanded role of head of UK sales. He joins Windstar from AmaWaterways, where he spent seven years, most recently as head of commercial and marketing – UK & Europe.



● Celestyal has added to its commercial team. **Tobias Klitsch** joins as vice-president of global market development while Beth Hulett has been named global market development manager.



AWARDS

Are you a Cruise Star?

Cruise Trade News can proudly announce that The Cruise Stars Awards are making a comeback this year.

Last held at the end of 2019, The Cruise Stars recognise success and innovation, shining a spotlight on the brightest and best talent in the cruise industry. Categories – designed to showcase individual achievements – include awards for Cruise Line PR & Marketing Star, Cruise Line Sales Star and National Travel Agent Sales Star, among others, including special awards for the industry’s Rising Stars.

For example, someone could be a Cruise Line Digital Marketing Star for managing a project that has delivered significant growth on emerging channels, or a New to Cruise Champion for demonstrating how they have enticed

non-cruisers to try a holiday at sea for the first time.

Cruise Trade News editor Gary Peters said: “It’s wonderful news that the Cruise Stars Awards are returning to the cruise calendar. What makes this event extra special is the fact that we celebrate the hard work of individuals, showcasing the talent that makes the cruise industry what it is.

“We have introduced new categories for this year, giving more people than ever before the opportunity to enter or nominate a colleague. This is the time to shout about individual success and help us shine a spotlight on the brilliant people who work in the cruise industry.”

Stay tuned to cruisetradenews.com and our social media channels for more updates over the coming weeks.

THE NEWS YOU NEED

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MARKETING GURU



Accord Marketing chief client officer **Maria Payne** looks at the latest travel data on the cruise industry

Each year, market intelligence agency Mintel conducts research into the cruise industry, providing insight into what's happening in the market and how consumer behaviour is changing.

The great news is that confidence in booking cruise holidays is recovering fast. Here are the key takeaways of this year's just-released report:

- Cruise brands continue to benefit from the growing number of over-55s in the UK, particularly as they are looking to remain active for longer and want to stay engaged with travel
- No other holiday category has higher future interest than cruise. River has grown threefold vs 2022.
- More effort is required to encourage new to cruise.
- To maximise growth, the sector must show what it is doing to reduce its impact on the environment and local communities
- Itineraries and accommodation remain the most important motivators for the over-55s, with younger cruisers keen on on-board facilities
- Adult-only and cruise-and-stay are the most desired type
- With household consumption growth expected to stay modest in 2024, cruise lines will be challenged to convince consumers that their experience is worth paying for. However, the number of new ships coming to the market should help to place cruise lines in a robust position.

To find out more about our monthly travel reports and access industry-leading insights, please contact maria.payne@accordmarketing.com

TRENDS

Solo travellers 'opting for cruise'

New research has revealed that cruise is becoming a more popular choice of holiday for solo travellers.

The survey – organised by cruise specialist Cruise.co.uk and completed by 800 people – found that more than two thirds of those questioned (70 per cent) would choose a cruise over a land-based holiday for a solo trip.

Meanwhile, 40 per cent of those of employment age would consider taking

their job on board while remote working, providing a “unique and convenient way to combine work with solo travel”, according to a statement.

When it comes to destinations, sailing from the UK to Europe was the preferred choice for single cruisers, with more than half of the respondents selecting this option. The Caribbean came in second place, with 32 per cent opting for sunnier sailings.

TRAINING

CLIA 'supercharging engagement'

CLIA has revealed that it will run its biggest-ever trade engagement campaign over the next 12 months.

The “superhero-charged” opportunities include regional ships visits for agents across the UK and Ireland in August, as well as the annual CLIA Cruise Week, to be held from 18-24 September.

Specialist cruise webinars have been arranged covering Europe and worldwide river cruise, ultra-luxury, expedition, yacht and sail, while two expedition dinners will take place in London and Manchester on 16 and 18 October respectively.

In addition, a CLIA Destination Residential will be held in Porto in the autumn. Agents will be hosted on board *Norwegian Prima*, with additional ship visit options to include *Seabourn Ovation* and a number of river cruise ships.



Steve Dunlop Photograph

CLIA UK & Ireland MD Andy Harmer said: “We’re so excited to announce our superhero-charged programme of events, with the widest ever choice of ship visit openings, domestic and overseas events, and virtual training opportunities. This approach recognises people like to learn, engage and network in different ways.”

What's in it for you?

INCENTIVES • ITINERARIES • SPECIAL OFFERS

MSC boosts Japan programme

MSC Cruises will operate its first ever winter season in Japan for 2023/24, “setting the line on track to become the number one cruise line in the country”, according to a statement.

The programme commences on *MSC Bellissima* from November 2023 with an 11-night, nine-night and six-night cruise from Yokohama. From January to March 2024, *MSC Bellissima* will homeport in Naha/Okinawa.

Itineraries will visit destinations such as Ishigaki, Japan, known for its snorkelling, diving and surfing opportunities, and Keelung, Taiwan, which features a bustling night market. Guests will also be able to explore Miyako Island.



The idyllic Okinawa will be a homeport for *MSC Bellissima*

SIGN UP

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



A Nautilus Club for young people is part of Explora Journeys' family-friendly offering

Target families, says Explora

Explora Journeys says it will “extend a very special welcome to families” with the launch of a dedicated programme that caters for multi-generations travelling together.

With suites that interconnect, a Nautilus Club for young and teenagers and special destination experiences created to maximise enjoyment for all generations, families sailing with Explora “can expect an inspiring journey and wonderful memories”.

The line also highlighted the selling opportunities for agents and urged them to specifically target families.

Explora Journeys chief sales officer Chris Austin said: “Designing our Journey Together Gatherings programme has been a highly collaborative process with the travel advisor community. We are proud to launch this unique programme, providing a valuable opportunity to target gatherings of multi-generational families.”



AmaWaterways is giving agents the chance to win a river cruise

Cruise for free with AmaWaterways

AmaWaterways has relaunched its Sell Three, Sail Free incentive, giving travel agents the chance to win a river cruise in 2023.

To earn their free cruise, agents must make three new bookings on any 2023 sailing between now and the end of the year.

In return, they can claim a seven-night voyage for two people on a wide choice of European itineraries, or on the Mekong.

Furthermore, the luxury river cruise line has also launched dedicated agent rates for a wide range of sailings in 2023, with fares from £693pp for those agents who have completed the AmaAcademy online training course.

Agents can book their free cruise once all three reservations have travelled, or alternatively, book via the agent rate offers and they will be reimbursed once all three sailings have departed. Free cruises must be taken by the end of 2023.



Windstar will cover new Tahitian territory and the Canary Islands

WINDSTAR REVEALS 2025 PLANS

Windstar Cruises has released its sailing schedule through to summer 2025 with "several key deployment moves" for its fleet of six ships.

In the South Pacific, Windstar said it will go beyond its usual Tahitian cruise stops to the remote Marquesas Islands on the new 14-day Tahitian Treasures & Magnificent Marquesas voyage in 2024 and 2025, on the 312-guest *Star Breeze*.

The line will also operate itineraries in the Canary Islands on *Star Pride* from 2024. The eight-day Captivating Canary Islands from Lisbon to Las Palmas cruise will include time on Madeira, as well as overnights in Funchal and Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Voyages in the Mediterranean, Central and South America and the Middle East will also be available.



APT have a range of extremely tempting offers this summer

APT unveils 'value added' promotion

APT & Travelmarvel has launched a series of 'value added' offers for the trade to help them boost river cruise sales this summer. Travelmarvel's best available cabin upgrades offer is returning for another year, while £99 deposits will be available on all 'Luxury' and 'Essential' European river cruises throughout 2023.

The operator is waiving solo supplements on summer departures of Travelmarvel's European river cruises, sailing

aboard its Contemporary-class ships. The best cabin upgrade and solo supplement offers apply to new bookings made until 31 July.

APT and Travelmarvel head of sales and business development Brad Bennetts said: "By adding outstanding value via best available cabin upgrades, solo supplement waivers and up to 50 per cent savings, agents can tempt even the most hesitant clients to take a European river cruise this summer."



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Food, glorious food

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales
Geoff Ridgeon explains why cuisine is now such
an important part of the selling process

Food is such an important part of the holiday experience, whether it's the comfort in knowing that guests can still get their home favourites while sailing around the world, or the ability to try new things and be a little more extravagant than they may ordinarily be.

A cruise holiday is fabulous simply because of the variety of dining and menu options. The opening dining buffet might appear to be the least obvious of venues to appeal but let's not overlook the opportunity it brings to try new things. Yes, there is often a burger or a pizza, but many offer a wide variety of foods from around the world. Also, by the time guests get into the second week of a cruise, they are not always looking for a four-course dinner.

Local delicacies relevant to the destination accompany home favourites in an environment that can often be more relaxed than main dining alternatives. And, let's face it, sometimes people do just want a burger.

A spoonful of panache

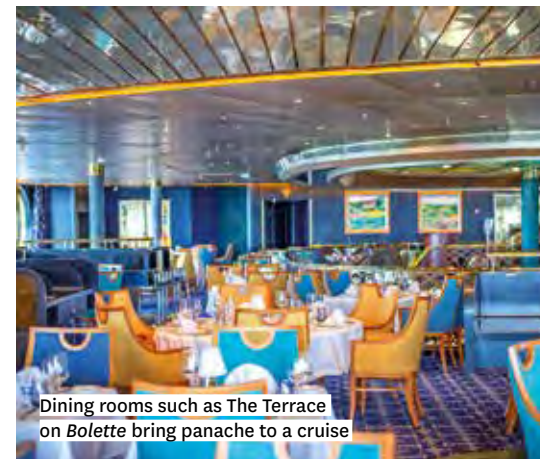
The main dining rooms bring that panache, especially when compared to an average Wednesday evening dinner at home. The key here is to identify if a customer is good with open dining



**"A cruise holiday is
fabulous simply because
of the variety of dining
and menu options"**

GEOFF RIDGEON
HEAD OF SALES
FRED OLSEN CRUISE LINES

or would prefer set dining times and, if so, what time suits them best. Some prefer early as it mirrors home life a little more and gives time to enjoy the evening entertainment options to their fullest. Others may prefer later dining as it gives more time to soak up the sun or removes any pressure to return back to the ship having been ashore. Bizarrely, in some ways, the dining times a guest has will have impact their enjoyment, so it's worth spending time to listen to their preferences.



Dining rooms such as The Terrace
on Bolette bring panache to a cruise

In addition, there are the speciality restaurants that feature on most cruise ships nowadays. The speciality options often include steak houses, Asian, Italian, French cuisines or, in our case, also Goan food cooked by our Goanese chefs. It's worth highlighting these options to guests as it can be a treat through the voyage.

There is nearly always a cover charge and these can range anywhere from £10 to £50pp. However, for that special night on a holiday, it can often be worth every penny. Whether a customer loves home comfort food or wants to push the boat out (sorry), dining on a cruise ship gives them all the choice they need. 🍴

TECH TALK

Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant** digs into the data and looks at the opportunities to grow cruise packaging

As I write this article, the CLIA Conference 2023 has come and gone, with cruise dominating much of the travel trade press. In short, life in this industry is good. When I shared data with *Cruise Trade News* readers in January this year, as we reflected on 2022, I was full of positivity, but the trends to date have exceeded my wildly optimistic views.

There is certainly no part of the travel market as exciting as cruise, with a significant amount of new product and innovation coming to the seas. It is a great time for traditional cruise sellers to attract the new-to-cruise market and for new agents or entrepreneurs to recognise the future growth in this segment of the market.

However, I'm always amazed at how few people take advantage of the ability to package cruise with flights, hotels and tours to tailor-make itineraries and really stand out from the crowd with original content. So far in 2023 for Q1, four per cent of our cruise bookings have been for one to three nights, ideal durations for weekend breaks or to package within a wider weekly holiday.

A winning formula

City break hotels make an ideal add-on to certain cruise ports. As agents, you can create bespoke tours for clients, giving them the itinerary ideas to travel within the Mediterranean using cruise with a pre- and post-hotel and flights. Why not offer a shorter Greek cruise option with an island-hopping tour?



Why not offer a bespoke short Greek cruise option coupled with an island-hopping tour?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Provide the best of both worlds – a tour with cultural delights, followed by the entertainment and relaxation or activities on board a ship
- Look for trade partners that can help you offer this combined package and create itineraries unique to you and or your agency
- Maximise your earnings through increased margin and make the logistics of booking simple by using technology

Utilising technology can mean creating a package in the system once and then selling this many times when you find the winning formula.

So far in 2023, the durations mirror the pattern for those in 2022, with five per cent of bookings for four to six night itineraries, 45 per cent for seven to nine nights, and 18 per cent for 10-13 nights. Cruise and tours has been a growing technology trend in the last few

years, with many systems available to manage elements separately. The ability to technically package both of these components together and create cruise itineraries in one system has clear benefits for agents.

Agents can then speak with accommodation suppliers for assistance, and many have cruise friendly hotels in their portfolio. Transfers for ports are now also readily available if required. River cruising is also an ideal product to bundle with other components, including rail, so it's important to get creative. 📌



“The ability to create cruise itineraries in one system has clear benefits for agents”

CRESSIDA SERGEANT
CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER
TRAVELTEK



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Photos of your window displays

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A WINNING PERSONALITY

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines social media marketing manager **Chloe Bullard**, who spoke at the *Cruise Trade News* and CLIA Supercharging Digital Marketing workshop, explains how to put personality into social media

How has social media marketing changed in recent times?

Since the pandemic, the shift in how people use social media has been huge. It doesn't feel all that long ago that stories were the new kid on the block and high-quality images were key. However, in just the blink of an eye, TikTok boomed and the whole market changed again. Now more than ever, the focus for social media content has shifted to vertical video, with the likes of TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube shorts dominating the market.

How do you use social media at Fred Olsen Cruise Lines to demonstrate your key values?

We do things The Olsen Way. We stand up for the smaller ship experience because we know that is what our guests would prefer. As part of our on-board experience, we celebrate the history,

nature and culture of the destinations we'll be visiting and showcase the beauty of the journey along the way. It's an experience that's elegant and relaxed, rather than busy and brash. We use our social media channels to bring our on-board experience to life through images, video and community, showcasing the very best of what we do across our core channels – Facebook and Instagram.

How can agents infuse their brands/ personalities into their social media activity?

The core of social media began with people – humans wanting to connect and stay in touch with others. Although brands have a huge role in social media today, it's important to never lose sight of the social in social media. As an agent, don't feel afraid to get in front of the camera or add an element

of your personality to your social media posts to build connections with your audience.

With such busy schedules, how can travel agents find success on social media without investing all of their time?

Quality over quantity is key. For me, the best thing that you can do is use social media to tell a story. It is important to remember that people use social media at leisure and are not there in a buying state of mind or wanting to be sold to. Try putting yourself in the customers shoes and thinking 'What would make me want to go on a cruise?'

Think inspirational videos of scenic cruising through fjords or canals, or a beautiful sunrise from a cruise ship balcony as you enjoy a morning brew. If you do not have the time or capacity to create your own content, take a look at what content you can re-post to your own pages. A good place to start is the cruise lines' owned pages, or even searching by hashtags or keywords to find guests who have been on board and shared their own experiences.

“Don't feel afraid to get in front of the camera or add an element of your personality to your social media posts”



“Try putting yourself in the customer’s shoes and thinking ‘What would make me want to go on a cruise?’”

How do you think the use of social media will evolve?

Social media is such a visual tool, which lends itself to travel perfectly. It’s hard to say what the next big social media platform will be, but I think as time goes on social media will only grow and become stronger.

How useful was the CLIA/Cruise Trade News supercharging digital marketing event to you professionally?

It was really refreshing to have lots of professionals from across the industry in the same room, sharing knowledge from

their relevant areas with travel agents. It was also a fantastic networking opportunity, which I am proud to have been a part of.

What were your key takeaways from the day?

I really enjoyed listening to Jay Chauhan from Google talk about identifying search trends. There are often patterns between search behaviour and social media activity, so it was interesting to hear what he had to say around how brands can utilise this data. Overall, it was a fantastic event with lots to be learnt.📌



Chloe Bullard believes that social media and travel go hand in hand

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Family river cruises

More and more families are opting for a cruise for their holidays, including river cruises, but how can you tempt those who are still unsure?



A-Rosa offers a host of special deals for families

Tomorrow's travellers

According to Rowe, the importance of bringing more families on board stems from the fact that “today’s families and children will be tomorrow’s river cruisers”. She continues: “Our sustainable approach as a business, especially as seen with all *A-Rosa Sena*’s unique eco-credentials, plays an important role in educating about how to holiday in a way that both considers the planet and allows families to explore the world with loved ones.”

Townson also pinpoints that on a Uniworld voyage, the experience will be “tailored by staff who know how to cater to every single guest, no matter their ages”, adding: “The kids are even invited into the Captain’s wheelhouse, to see how it all works.”

The latest customer sentiment data from CLIA showed that more than a quarter (27 per cent) of those who sailed for two or more nights in the past 12 months were in a party of three or more generations. Thus, it can be confidently suggested the allure of taking a cruise for a family holiday is a growing trend. To date, it is one mostly associated with ocean cruising, but what are river lines doing to attract the family market?

“We’ve been embracing the family and multi-generational market on our ships for some years now, as we recognised its potential and that fact that our pioneering relaxed and flexible approach was the perfect match for this,” explains A-Rosa UK & Ireland MD Lucia Rowe.

As Rowe highlights, the line has put a great deal of stock in attracting families. For example, it has ‘kids cruise free’ offers and kids’ clubs on board during selected school holiday dates. However, more was to come last year, with the launch of *A-Rosa Sena*. “Things stepped up a level with the launch of *A-Rosa Sena*,” says

“Kids are invited into the Captain’s wheelhouse to see how it all works”

Rowe. “She was designed from the outset with families and multi-generational groups in mind and boasts a roll call of never-seen-before family features. From the first dedicated kids’ club room to family cabins sleeping up to five and a separate children’s pool on the sundeck – she’s like nothing else on the rivers of Europe.”

For Uniworld’s UK MD Chris Townson, a river cruise offers “an intimate experience” for all ages. “Kids are treated as VIPs in the same way as the rest of our guests, with the team anticipating their needs, from providing extra entertainment and activities, to knowing what soda or pancakes they like for breakfast,” he adds.

“There is fantastic value to be had on our summer river cruises, with the lead-in price for a family of two adults and one child starting from £4,947 or £6,297 for a family of two adults and two children (up to the age of 16), and this includes absolutely everything.”

SELLING TIPS

- “Think outside the box – too many people think of river cruising as being for older couples or solos, but they are missing a trick,” says Townson.
- Rowe says: “Children are very aware of the sustainability angle – ensure you promote this.”
- “Always offer a river cruise as an option to discerning families, grandparents or other customers who are interested in giving their children the chance to explore and learn a little while away,” explains Rowe.

Spotlight On

Nicko Cruises

Light Blue Travel commercial director **Michelle Daniels** explains how German cruise line Nicko Cruises is boosting its presence in the UK market

In early 2019, cruise specialist Light Blue Travel was approached by Nicko Cruises to launch the product to the UK market. The line – with a fleet of river ships, sailing all the main European rivers – was already hugely successful in its home country, Germany, but unknown here in the UK.

Spotting the potential to market to a new audience, a deal was done and Light Blue Travel became Nicko Cruises' UK GSA. However, before work could commence, the pandemic struck and plans were put on hold.

I joined Light Blue in September 2021 as the situation was improving and immediately set to work on a growth plan and strategy. We needed to establish our USP, so we decided that we would sell Nicko from the UK as all inclusive, with



“We sell Nicko as all inclusive, with packages to include transport, gratuities, excursions, all meals and beverages”

MICHELLE DANIELS
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
LIGHT BLUE TRAVEL

packages to include transport, gratuities, excursions, all meals and beverages.

Agents could earn up to 15 per cent commission on the fully inclusive packages, all bonded under Light Blue's ATOL and ABTA licences. We also joined CLIA and since then we have taken part in promotional activities such as workshops, webinars and presentations.

A new selling guide

Having participated in the CLIA 2022 RiverView event in Budapest for the first time, it was clear that we needed to get a ship to the next big event.

We worked hard with the Nicko team in Stuttgart to make that happen and were delighted to showcase one of our newest ships, *Nicko Vision*, at this year's 2023 RiverView conference in Vienna, hosting a dinner for 120 agents and ship visits for 400 delegates. Meanwhile, we've also launched a travel agent selling guide, which is the start of a package of tools we are creating for our agent partners to help make selling Nicko Cruises as simple as possible.

This is available in print and digital and agents can download it from the Nicko UK website. The website also features a dedicated agent section full of images, videos, deck plans and logos for marketing and promotions. In addition, we offer social media digital assets to support marketing and can supply overbranded flyer artwork for easy download, customisation and print.

Next on the list is the launch of our river cruise training academy, which will provide bitesize online training modules. Agents will be able to set up an account to track and update their progress and they'll receive certificates upon completion of each module.

We've come a long way so far and we're looking forward to growing the Nicko brand in the UK with the help of our valued trade partners. 📌



Nicko Cruise's *Nicko Vision* has large glass surfaces and a modern design



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**THE BEST WAY TO EXPERIENCE
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MAGIC ON MOZART

Vicky Mayer indulges in ultra-luxury river cruising with a personal touch on board *Riverside Mozart*

There's a horizontal view from my bed on board *Riverside Mozart*. Through the Juliette balcony I can see the late afternoon sunshine sparkling on the Danube while the river laps loudly across the hull of the ship.

Lying stretched out while gazing at a moving riverscape has to be one of travel's greatest pleasures and new ultra-luxury line Riverside Luxury Cruises offers guests the chance to relax, unwind and enjoy some incredible journeys on four of Europe's most popular rivers – the Danube, Rhine, Rhone and Saone.

When Crystal Cruises' popular river ships were put into receivership following the covid crisis, German hotel company The Seaside Collection quickly snapped them up and, from April, the company's first ship *Riverside Mozart* has been sailing on the Danube.

As one of the first journalists to be invited on board the company's flagship, I am keen to see what's in store for river cruise fans who like the finer things in life.

Individual choice

The good news is the stylish and elegant interiors, private butler service and renowned cuisine have all been retained. What's new is an emphasis on individual choice with 24-hour room service and a no-set time dining policy for all guests. With four decks and at 77 feet wide, *Riverside Mozart* is one of the largest ships sailing on Europe's waterways.

While other river ships often feel poky and narrow, light floods in from both sides of the ship (which intriguingly has been crafted from two separate catamarans) and there are plenty of areas to sit and relax on every deck. I particularly love the wrap-around promenade deck which is perfect for an early morning or sunset stroll.



Every cabin on board is a river-facing suite

Riverside Mozart has been beautifully designed with a palette of muted tones mixed with bold blues and emerald greens, projecting the swish five-star hotel vibe. What's extra, of course, are the moving views and the chance to visit so many wonderful destinations in a short space of time.

From the entry level Symphony suites to the whopping 833 sq ft Owner's Suite that comes complete with two bathrooms, two bedrooms and a living room with its own fireplace, every cabin on board is a river-facing suite that boasts a comfy kingsize bed, TV, coffeemaker and, perhaps best of all, a private butler.

My Penthouse cabin is far more spacious than on any other river line I have sailed with, and comes complete with a bath and shower, fancy Japanese-style toilet, dressing room and desk. Add a floor-to-ceiling Juliette balcony, and it's a cabin of my dreams.

Modern luxury

Sailing on a mini Danube cruise that takes in some of the area's most historical destinations, I'm keen to see if Riverside Luxury Cruises can produce a five-star service both on and off the ship. But a

Fast Facts

158

guests

82

crew

4

restaurants

£2,184

average cost of a 7-night Danube cruise



Although there's a relaxed vibe on board, the service is exceptional



Riverside Mozart is one of the largest ships sailing on Europe's waterways

“This new line understands what modern luxury is about – being totally spoilt in a bespoke manner”



Melk's world-renowned Benedictine Abbey

cheeky pre-dinner cocktail beckons first and, as I join my fellow cruisers at the Cove Bar 3, there are smiles all round. After all, the night is young, the ship is shimmering and the hardest thing we'll have to do all night is find our way back to our cabins. Lucky then, that I've got a personal hotline to my lovely butler, Dilip.

Riverside Mozart gets top marks for its generous size and impressive wellness centre complete with mini pool, jacuzzi, roomy gym and sumptuous spa. Unlike other river ships, guests can also choose from four different dining areas – the Waterside Restaurant, Bistro, Blue Bar & Grill and private dining area, the beautifully decorated Vintage Room.

During my cruise, I enjoy some great meals at all four but the stand-out venues for me are the Waterside Restaurant with its daily changing menu, and the Bistro where, between excursions, I can't get enough of their freshly prepared teas, coffees and tempting pastries and ice creams.

I also love the relaxed feeling on board. There's no need to dress to the nines and this new line understands what modern luxury is really about – the chance to be totally spoilt in a bespoke manner, whether that's skipping breakfast, requesting something off-menu, enjoying a siesta or just getting stuck into the cocktail menu.

SELLING TIPS

- Riverside Luxury Cruises is firmly in the luxury space, but its relaxed vibe on board makes it a great recommendation for those who want to sample European waterways in fine surroundings without the 'stuff' extras

- The different shore excursion options provide something for everyone, so use this when highlighting activities ashore

- Riverside may be a new line but it is moving quickly, with new ships joining the fleet and a dedicated team for the UK to boost trade relationships

This modern approach to cruising applies offshore too, with the chance for travellers to enjoy at least three different complimentary excursions at every destination, from traditional first-time city walking tours to once-in-a-lifetime experiences including a helicopter ride along the wine-growing Wachau Valley or the chance to conduct an orchestra in Vienna.

On this cruise, I'm keen to see three of the Danube's most-celebrated port stops – Melk, Durnstein and Krems. Melk is famous around the world for its perfectly preserved Benedictine Abbey, painted in striking yellow. Equally intriguing is the ruined castle that overlooks Durnstein where, according to legend, Richard the Lionheart spent three long years in captivity in the 12th century. It's Krems, however, that steals my heart – a low-key cobbled waterside town packed with cool coffee shops and lifestyle boutiques, resplendent with some great baroque churches and statues.

Back on board, as the sun starts to set on the horizon, I realise how relaxed I feel, and it's all thanks to the magic of travelling on such a special ship. ①

DETAILS

- A seven-night Highlights of the Danube cruise on *Riverside Mozart*, departing 30 May 2024, is priced from approximately £2,610pp

Along with main meals, The Bistro dishes up pastries and ice creams throughout the day

The outdoor bar and grill is the perfect place to enjoy the view

ALLURING APEX

With Celebrity Cruises' *Celebrity Apex* set to become the line's ex-UK ship, it has never been easier for guests to get on board

As the busiest cruise port in the UK, Southampton is an avid cruisers gateway to the world. So, it comes as no surprise that the union of this popular port with revolutionary *Celebrity Apex* for a full season is exciting news.

Celebrity Apex will be sailing from May 2024 through to October 2024 from Southampton to destinations such as Northern Europe to the Mediterranean.

So, agents can emphasise that guests can tick off bucket-list destinations, such as the Norwegian Fjords, Arctic Circle and Reykjavik, without having to fly.

Celebrity Cruises also offers sailings of varying lengths, including four-night sailings. As a result, *Celebrity Apex*'s shorter sailings are a perfect option for any travellers that are new to cruise.

And for guests who aren't sure about embarking on their first cruise, the line's 'luxury resort at sea' standpoint gives the fleet a familiarity that would comfort a new cruiser.

Explore further from Southampton

The line aims to provide an 'exciting range of itineraries' which are diverse in their length, therefore giving guests the luxury of choice. So, travellers can hop onboard the 'Bruges & Amsterdam' itinerary for four nights, departing on 23 May 2024, to get a taste of what Celebrity Cruises has to offer.

Here it's worth emphasising to guests that there are three ports (Southampton, Zeebrugge and Amsterdam) spread across the four days – with the cruise line offering an abundance of cruise excursions in Amsterdam and Zeebrugge.

For example, for those who want to be shown around the city, the 'Amsterdam Walking Tour and Canal Cruise' is the perfect option; whereas for guests who want to explore by themselves, the city of Amsterdam is easily navigable by foot.

For bucket-list cruises, *Celebrity Apex* also sails to the Norwegian Fjords for seven nights across multiple dates – 8 June, 20 July and 16 August – giving guests even more flexibility with their cruise.

The line's 11-night 'Iceland & Ireland' itinerary is also a strong contender in *Celebrity Apex*'s Southampton sailings, visiting Cork, Reykjavik, Isafjörður, Akureyri and Kirkwall. Guests can

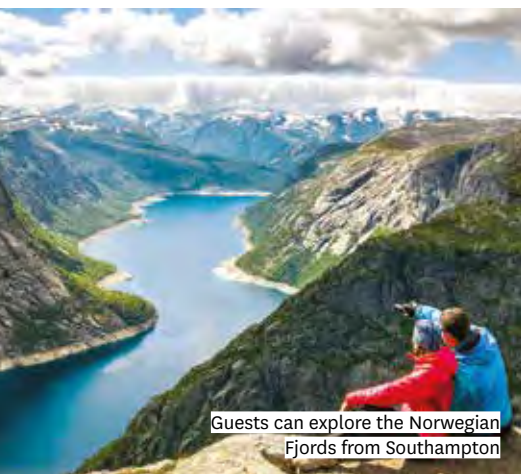
get onboard for either 27 June or 7 September 2024.

Another 11-night itinerary is the 'Canaries & Portugal' sailing, which impresses with seven ports of call – including culture-filled Lisbon and beach-haven Gran Canaria. Again, Celebrity Cruises has given guests multiple departure opportunities, with this itinerary departing on either 1 October or 12 October 2024.

Why Celebrity Apex?

As the second Edge Series ship in Celebrity Cruises fleet, *Celebrity Apex* entered service in 2021 and aims to 'revolutionise the way guests experience the world, all with the convenience of sailing directly from the UK'.

For guests who love spending as much time on deck as possible, agents should



Guests can explore the Norwegian Fjords from Southampton



Celebrity Apex will spend a full season sailing from Southampton

“Each room aims to ‘evoke the intimacy of an inviting, indulgent urban apartment that opens to the most beautiful scenery on earth’

be sure to mention the fusion of indoor and outdoor living onboard *Celebrity Apex*, with the likes of the Magic Carpet, a glass-roofed, panoramic outdoor platform that moves between decks, fusing the two spaces together further.

What's more, there are an impressive 29 restaurants, bars and lounges onboard – making the most difficult decision being where to eat that night.

Alternatively, for guests who want what the line describes as ‘the ultimate in luxury holiday experiences’, agents should highlight The Retreat onboard

Celebrity Apex. The Retreat encapsulates sumptuous suite accommodation, a restaurant, a lounge, a sundeck as well as a dedicated team of attendants, concierges and a personal butler.

Beyond this luxurious offering, there are plenty of spacious accommodations onboard for guests (and an extra bonus of king-sized beds in 99 per cent of the rooms), designed by interior designer Kelly Hoppen. Each room aims to ‘evoke the intimacy of an inviting, indulgent urban apartment that opens to the most beautiful scenery on earth’.



Dive into Iceland's Blue Lagoon

Celebrity Apex also has dedicated options for solo cruisers, with the single stateroom, as well as crafted spaces for families with 178 possible options of connecting staterooms that mean guests are just a knock away from family and friends.

If that wasn't enough to sell the ship, then guests will be happy to know that there are plenty of offers to take advantage of.

Highlight the 75 per cent discount for second guests, savings of up to £1000 per room plus an onboard spend of up to \$300 per room – as long as the cruisers make their booking before 6 July 2023 on selected sailings departing until 30 April 2025. 

**CELEBRITY APEX
FAST FACT**

2,910
Guest Capacity

1,319
Crew

16
Guest decks

1,467
Total staterooms



Fast Facts

In August 2023, *Emerald Sakara* will make her debut, sailing the Mediterranean and Adriatic alongside sister yacht *Emerald Azzurra*. The second ocean yacht from Emerald Cruises is the epitome of small ship luxury cruising. A total of 88 per cent of *Emerald Sakara's* 50 luxury suites boast balconies, allowing more space per guest than similar vessels of her size. The yacht also features a large infinity-style Aqua Pool, Elements Spa, well-equipped gym and marina platform. Its name comes from the Sanskrit for "Thoughts become feelings", and the yacht realises the vision of ship designer Karen Moroney, who was inspired by the superyachts docked in Monte Carlo's marina during a holiday trip.

100

GUESTS

6

DECKS

110m

LENGTH

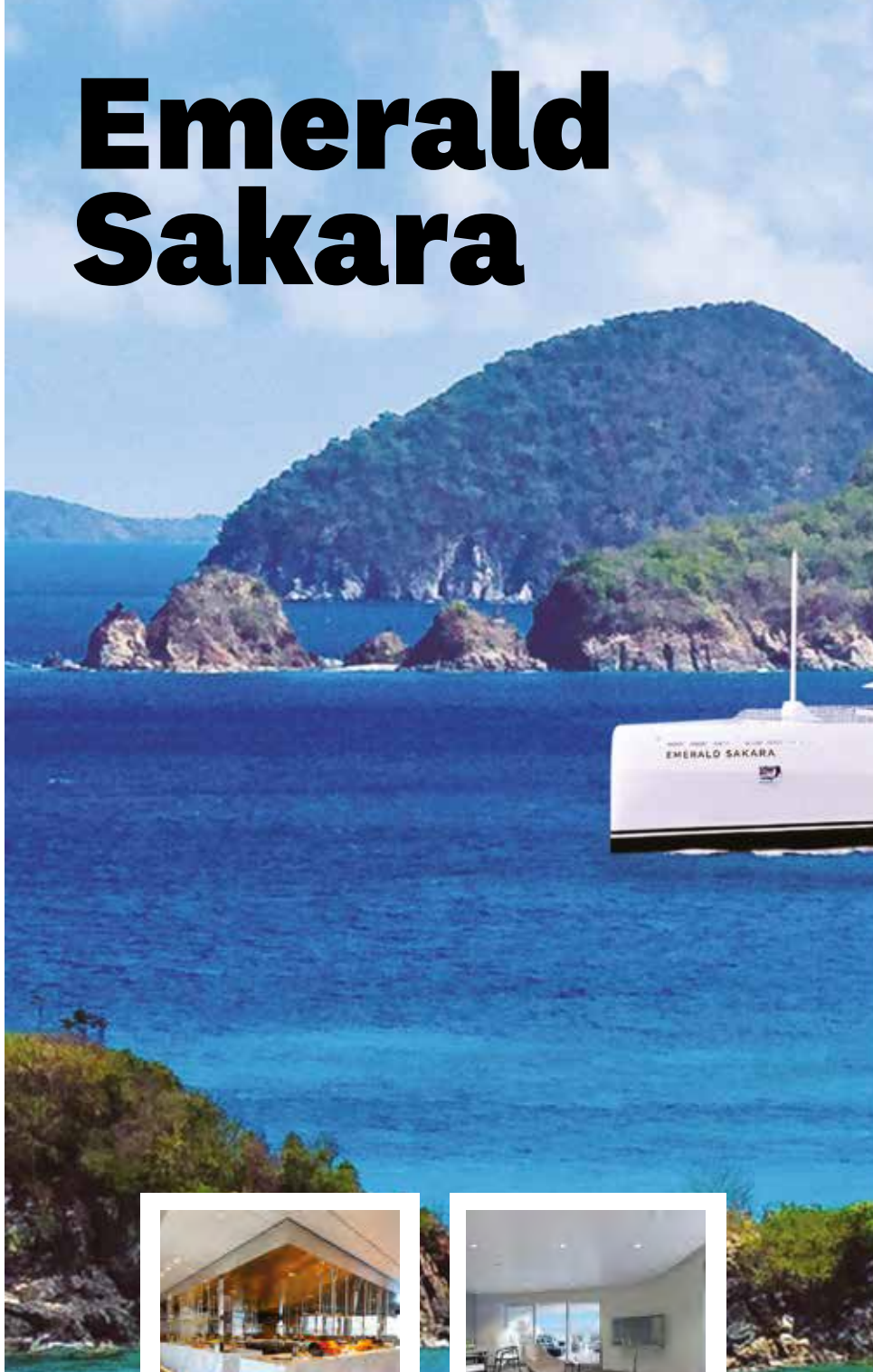
50

SUITES & STATEROOMS

4

RESTAURANTS

Emerald Sakara



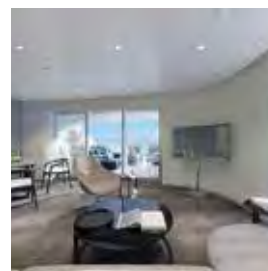
1



Dining

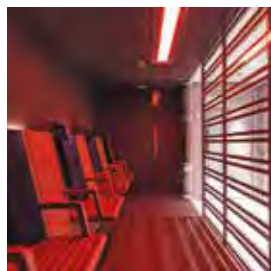
Director of food and beverage and TV chef Tom Goetter has created the menus for *Emerald Sakara's* premiere restaurant, La Cucina Dining, celebrating fresh, seasonal and local produce. The La Cucina Dining flows into an outdoor space, while The Terrace is a beautiful spot for an alfresco breakfast or lunch.

2



Luxury

Featuring designer furnishings throughout, the pool deck will boast Paola Lenti day loungers and Kettal lounge chairs Indoors, while the Observational Lounge includes a Dedon MBrace Wing Chair. All suites and staterooms also include queen-size or twin hotel-style beds.



3

Relaxation

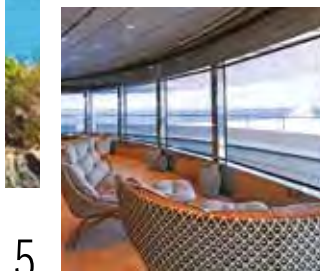
The Elements Spa and Wellness Centre will be hubs for solace and relaxation. Guests can indulge in various spa treatments, from immersive massages to results-focused facials, to truly unwind. *Emerald Sakara* also possesses a state-of-the-art infrared sauna and well-equipped gym.



4

Exploration

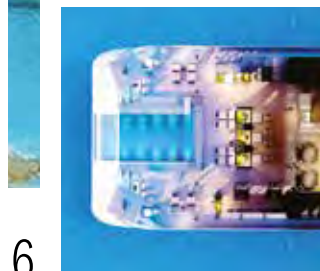
Emerald Sakara has electric bicycles, allowing guests to enjoy wonderful ports on two wheels during a smooth and comfortable ride. On selected days, the captain will drop anchor for a spectacular swim stop experience, where guests can take advantage of *Sakara*'s marina platform.



5

Discovery

Emerald Cruises' discovery guides will play a vital role in getting passengers to experience even more from their excursion when cruising on *Sakara*. Guides will provide access to hidden gems in the Mediterranean, Caribbean and Central America, such as exploring the city walls of Korcula's Old Town.



6

Sustainability

Emerald Sakara uses some of the latest sustainability technology. Engines meet IMO tier III emission regulations, including the removal of NOx and SOx from exhaust gases, while recycled energy is used to heat water. An advanced sewage treatment facility also complies with the latest regulations.

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CTN *investigates*

Historic sights such as Lews Castle make Stornoway a popular destination for tourists

THE STORNOWAY STORY

Stornoway has exclusively been a destination for smaller vessels, but that's set to change. A new deepwater port will open for 2024, however concern remains that the island won't cope with such an influx. **Calum Brown** investigates



Facing into Stornoway's trademark seaspray atop the cusp of a bracken-strewn viewpoint, grasses tumbling down to expose crashing waves over baron rocks, it's not hard to grasp the beauty of Scotland's Hebridean settlement.

There's more than atmospheric solace on offer, too. The Hebridean capital provides some of Scotland's finest culture and wildlife, not to mention national cuisine and awe-inspiring heritage. As a proud community that revels in celebrating patrimony and keeping pace with modern demands, Stornoway offers paradise on earth.

The cruise industry knows of Stornoway's pleasing mantra more than most; Cunard refers to the area as a "place of harmony and diversity", while P&O Cruises proudly calls Scotland's Outer Hebrides an "area renowned for its unspoilt natural beauty". Yet, there has been a big problem for cruise lines wishing to offer larger-scale voyages through the self-proclaimed 'gateway to Scotland'. As Alex MacLeod, CEO of Stornoway Port Authority, says: "[Cruise] ships pass by but cannot currently come in. They can only drop anchor off the coast."

The island's unique cuisine and bespoke attractions have long been unreachable for larger vessels that

breach the city's limited accommodation for shipping. That is until now, as there's a big change coming for the 2024 season.

Realising potential

The unprecedented requirement for a deepwater facility has enticed Stornoway Port Authority into action. After rounds of funding and planning, efforts have been underway to develop Scotland's only north west port capable of welcoming the big guns. The cost? A casual £49m.

According to documents from December 2020, the funding package promised £10m from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, £37.5m from the local council and £1.5m from the



Stornoway is a popular location for fishing trips



The main harbour is dotted with boats of all shapes and sizes

Stornoway Port Authority. The Scottish government also offered extra support if targets were met, although there are claims this help barely materialised. However, regardless of political strife behind the scenes, construction has ultimately pushed forward.

The new facility, which is due for completion in November, will be capable of accommodating cruise vessels up to 360 meters in length, with a water depth of 10 meters below chart datum to overrule the tidal basin during low tides. The deepwater port's impressive berthing potential will therefore facilitate the likes of Cunard's *QM2* and *Queen Victoria*. However, the greatest leviathans – such as Royal Caribbean's Oasis-class ships – remain too vast to dock.

Besides enabling the Hebridean islands to realise their full potential as basecamp, the new port will provide a portal for exploring areas previously exclusive to expedition ships and smaller groups of passengers.

"Without the deepwater terminal, we were never going to facilitate bigger numbers", MacLeod explains to *Cruise Trade News*. "There's been demand and

"Tens of thousands of visitors are due to venture forth into Stornoway, stepping from the deck into Hebridean paradise"

a long-held need for the cruise industry to have a west coast base. They can't do certain routes overnight without Stornoway. We are positioned in the right place for the cruise industry and we have a product to sell – the Hebrides."

He's not wrong. The Hebridean Islands are hugely popular with tourists and cruise enthusiasts. Visitor numbers to Scotland's west coast continue to increase following the rude interruption of the pandemic, with more than 100 vessels booked for the April-September 2023 season. Tens of thousands of visitors are due to venture forth into Stornoway, stepping from the deck into Hebridean paradise.

John Swinney, who was Scotland's deputy first minister until March this year, has previously described the project as a "game-changer" for the islands, with ambitions to grow further industries around Scotland's cruise sector – including clean energy generation and a new platform area for industrial use. Yet, arguably, the greatest impact of the new port undoubtedly falls on the local economy. The subsequent cruise seasons will bring a significant boost for many businesses in the islands as they continue to recover from the socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges faced in recent years.

A mammoth effort

The project has been a huge undertaking. While the terminal has claimed the media spotlight, there has been a herculean amount of work revolving around what lies beneath. In particular, there has been the epic task of salvaging two age-old shipwrecks that would otherwise pose a hazard to incoming cruises. The largest wreck, located near the port's navigation channel, was *SS Portugal*, a coal hulk which transcended from view following an escape from its mooring in 1953. The second culprit – cargo ship *SS Alabama* – ran aground after dragging her anchor during a storm in 1904.

Although *SS Portugal* appeared to be broken up when examined in 1976, the remains lurked within Stornoway's main access channel. Contractors McLaughlin & Harvey removed the coal hulk, whereas the wreck of *SS Alabama* was reduced in height. And that was only the starting point.

By the time of completion, almost 500,000 cubic meters of material will have been removed from the seabed, complemented by thousands of hours' worth of dredging, blasting and reclamation works. "People are excited. As construction progresses, people can visualise the new port,"

The new facility will accommodate a wider range of cruise vessels





Ships as large as Cunard's *Queen Victoria* will be able to dock at Stornoway's new port

a spokesperson for Stornoway Port Authority said. Such an attitude certainly captures the increasing sense of communal anticipation.

Speaking with local businesses, several hopes rest on the new port's success. A distributor of Harris Tweed says: "More tourists not only means more inventory and sales, but also a halo effect where the whole of Lewis and Harris benefits. The cruise industry will provide more than a side hustle for the island. It's a new safety net for businesses in the area."

Can Stornoway cope?

However, others feel differently. Voices have cut through the ether to challenge all this progress. Genuine concerns have emerged over the influx of visitors to Stornoway and the port city's ability to cope. Questions have also been raised over infrastructure, the swamping of local businesses and damage to the environment.

After all, Stornoway boasts of the finest and emptiest beaches. How long could those untouched outriggers last before human influence corrupts? According to claims from local businesses, if the proposed influx of people materialises, there's an apparent

"Questions have been raised over infrastructure, the swamping of local businesses and damage to the environment"

danger the city could become swamped beyond capacity and inflict damage upon the local infrastructure.

However, MacLeod counters this view. "We have told local residents and business owners that there is nothing to be afraid of. Not all those predicted numbers will be coming in a single day. We have been successful with large P&O Cruises [ships] in the past and coped with big numbers before. It's a chance to showcase the Gaelic heartland and visitors need to be able to experience the Hebridean charms on offer. Stornoway can cope. The opportunities are incredible."

The Stornoway Port Authority has also carried out a detailed assessment of the project's potential environmental impact. Working alongside local authorities and tourism bodies, it has addressed areas where adjustments have been required to facilitate visitor numbers. That includes working with Envirocentre to ensure minimal impact on the natural marine environment.

This sort of planning has been envisioned from the project's conception. Delving into the Environmental Impact Assessment Report of 2020, although a

number of significant landscape, visual and cumulative effects are predicted during the port's operational life, these are relatively localised in extent.

New roads, cycle routes and pathways have been installed to channel visitors towards the area's landmark attractions – Lews Castle, Museum nan Eilean and the historic fishing harbour – preventing clutter on the roads. Fresh bus routes will also be put into operation, helping to regulate the influx of visitors and prevent a mass stampede of culture-hungry crowds.

Stornoway's new port has already been inundated with booking requests from the likes of Princess Cruises, Celebrity Cruises and Ambassador Cruise Line for 2024. The opportunity to venture forth through Scotland's Hebridean Portal has turned heads and found scores of holidaymakers throwing their money at cruise providers.

The first arrival at the new port will be 1 April 2024. That may be April Fool's Day to most, but the date also rings in a new chapter for the Hebridean economy. The scene from the bracken-strewn viewpoint is going to look slightly different in the near future. 📍



The deepwater facility will give a boost to the local economy



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Carol Smith - Personal Travel Advisor

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Nick Hughes

Early next year, the first Sphere-class ship from Princess Cruises will set sail. **Nick Hughes**, the line’s sales director for UK and Europe, chats to Gary Peters about this and much more



Nick Hughes says ship visits for agents is a priority

“This is actually the third *Sun Princess* in our history,” he continues. “We’re very proud the ship will reflect our past by offering the outstanding service and dining Princess is synonymous with, while propelling us into the future thanks to being our first LNG ship and featuring many Princess firsts. Every stateroom will have an in-room sofa and *Sun Princess* will offer 1,500 balconies, the highest proportion across our fleet.”

Building on history

Hughes says that *Sun Princess* will “set the scene” for the second Sphere ship, *Star Princess*, which is scheduled to launch in August 2025. “We’re incredibly excited to be welcoming two groundbreaking ships to the fleet and opening up

even more opportunities for the trade and our guests to sail with Princess,” he adds.

These new vessels also come at a time when Princess has revamped its messaging, with a ‘come feel the love’ concept to run through everything it aims to achieve. So, what does this mean in practice? “The concept is a nod to our heritage with *The Love Boat* and we want it to highlight to the trade what makes Princess so popular,” Hughes explains.

“Everything we offer is geared around making it easier for our guests to fall in love with the Princess experience time and time again, and with our refreshed brand positioning we will be highlighting exactly how Princess does this to our trade partners through toolkits, training courses and our ship visit programme.”

Back in March, Princess Cruises held the float out ceremony for its next-generation ship, *Sun Princess*, at the Fincantieri Shipyard in Monfalcone, Italy. The 4,300-guest vessel – which launches in early 2024 – has been “designed to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions”, according to the cruise line.

It will be the first Princess ship to be powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG) and will feature new entertainment, dining and activity offerings, as well as the Dome, a transformational entertainment venue inspired by the terraces of Santorini, a “next-level” Piazza and the three-storey Horizons.

The arrival of not just a new ship but an entire new class “shows how we are evolving as a brand while also staying true to our heritage”, says Nick Hughes, who joined Princess as sales director for UK and Europe in October last year.



Next-generation ship *Sun Princess* will offer the very latest in entertainment, dining and activities



Taranto in Italy is packed full of fascinating historical buildings

“Everything we offer is geared around making it easier for our guests to fall in love with the Princess experience”

As for that agent engagement, the line now has a team of 15 across sales and operations, leading to “even more support for our strategic partners, thanks to the addition of two senior executives as well as a new sales operations position”, Hughes says. “An absolute priority is for as many agents as possible to experience the Princess difference – in fact this year alone we have more than 1,000 places for ship visits across the UK with 22 dates to choose from.”

‘Strong growth’

The push to boost trade engagement can also be seen in “renewed” interest in Princess’ UK & Ireland Facebook groups, says Hughes, with a focus on “pushing the benefits of selling Princess in an eye-catching way”, which has helped drive positive selling trends.

He continues: “We have experienced strong growth compared to 2019 and 2022. From a trade perspective, ex-UK, British Isles and fly-Europe are performing particularly well. Long-haul, Australia, Japan and Alaska are all proving to be in demand from a bucket-list perspective.”

Back in February, the line reported an 18 per cent increase in the number of all-inclusive packages booked, with the UK having one of the highest all-inclusive uptake rates per guest, compared to any other country.

“Our all-inclusive Plus and Premier packages have proved a real hit and I’m pleased to say their popularity has continued,” Hughes tells *Cruise Trade News*. “They offer great value, as they allow guests to budget in advance and give them the comfort to enjoy their

holiday before and during their sailing. Convenience is key – with the likes of unlimited wifi, premium drinks, speciality dining and crew appreciation all taken care of.”

Come 2025, Princess will also offer its longest voyage ever, with the 116-night world cruise, on *Island Princess*, traversing more than 33,500 nautical miles and visiting 51 destinations in 26 countries. The itinerary will feature Princess’ first visit to Bar, Montenegro, and Taranto, Italy, along with inaugural world cruise calls to the Greek Island of Patmos, and to Volos for the Monasteries of Meteora.

Take this, the new ships and brand messaging into account, and it all points to an exciting time for agents and Princess guests. Hughes says: “The cruise sector still has an incredible opportunity to further raise its profile, so the more we can support all agents and help them understand the advantages of Princess, the more we will all benefit.”



Bar in Montenegro is a town boasting a rich cultural past

VOYAGE TO A NEW ERA

Marella Cruises' new ship *Marella Voyager* is all set to take the brand to new heights, as two of the onboard team explain

Marella Voyager launches this month (June) so, in light of that, two of the ship's team explain what's in store for guests travelling on this exciting new vessel.

Jonny Ryley

CRUISE DIRECTOR

Why are you looking forward to working on *Marella Voyager*?

Being part of the launch of our latest ship really excites me. Marella guests are my kind of people – they love to travel but they are keen to have fun too.

What does your job involve?

I oversee all the entertainment onboard. I look after everyone from the shows' cast and musicians to the children's entertainers. I also supervise the people who make us all look and sound great – our technical team. I'm there to help the guests enjoy all the entertainment, from making announcements and letting them know what's happening that day.

Can you describe a typical day?

I get up and grab a coffee from The Coffee Port then I'm ready to start the day. I always check my emails first, as things can change in a heartbeat and you have to be ready for anything. I'll pop in and see the hotel director then take a walk around the ship and say hello to the guests. If it's a sea day I will check in on various activities and events, but if it's a port day I might see some of the guests off on tour before I get stuck into some paperwork or planning. In the afternoon, I'll go to see the team in rehearsals. As for the evening, well, guests will have to come and watch the entertainment and see for themselves.

Can you tell us what you enjoy the most about your job?

I still love performing my own cabaret. However, I also love watching the audience's reaction to our shows and entertainment offering, whether that's our



Jonny Ryley is
a Cruise Director

“Being part of the launch of our latest ship really excites me”

incredible show cast or guest artists, or walking into the Squid and Anchor on a wave of laughter from our guests watching one of our interactive gameshows.

What's surprising about your job?

It never fails to amaze me how many guests haven't experienced live entertainment before, so it's always a delight to share that discovery with them.

What do you like to do on the ship when you're not working?

I really enjoy exploring the destinations we go to, even ports I have visited before. There are always new places to discover.

Which destinations have you most enjoyed visiting?

I love the Mediterranean. It has everything – old towns and culture, or beaches and vibrant city life.





Marella Voyager is the latest addition to the fleet

Dean Starling

HEAD OF CULINARY

Why are you looking forward to working on Marella Voyager?

I'm looking forward to seeing our vision becoming a reality and seeing our guests' reaction to all the new culinary concepts.

What do you think will be your favourite restaurant and why?

I have to say two. A lot of work and thought has gone into Brit-inspired Silver Fork and I'm really excited about The Kitchens food hall, where we have created eight new concepts under one roof.

What does your job involve?

I oversee the whole gastronomic offering on the ship and all that entails, from daily operation and staffing to development of new menu ideas. I have a real mix of duties and every day brings new challenges.

Can you tell us what you enjoy the most about your job?

For me, it's being part of a great team that are all so passionate about Marella Cruises. Their enthusiasm is infectious.

How often do you meet guests when sailing?

I travel on our ships at least once a month and I always like to spend some of that time talking to and dining with guests. Live feedback from our cruises is so important.



Marella's Dean Starling

"I'm looking forward to seeing our vision becoming a reality"



Marella Voyager will take guests to stunning destinations such as Barcelona

What dishes are most popular with Marella guests?

Breakfast is really important to our guests and the full breakfast is our most popular individual dish. We work to balance home comforts that are seeing something of a revival at the moment with flavours from the places we visit. Vegan and vegetarian options are increasingly sought after, too, so we've been working hard on refreshing our offering in our main restaurants and, of course, for *Marella Voyager* as a whole.

Which destinations have you most enjoyed visiting?

I'll let you in on a secret. I've been travelling in the cruise industry for more than 24 years and these days my favourite destination is the ship itself. 📍

MARELLA CRUISES



BEELINE TO THE RHINE

Sarah Holt examines how subtle changes to Rhine itineraries are proving popular with the new-to-cruise market

The name of the Rhine is said to come from the Celtic word 'renos' meaning 'raging flow'. Yet despite its intimidating title, this 1,233-kilometre waterway is one of the most accessible rivers in the world and an ideal destination for new-to-cruise customers.

"The Rhine offers a good transitional journey for those that have not yet experienced a cruise," says Viking UK head of sales Neil Barclay. "Most of the cities and towns along the Rhine have the benefit of being able to be explored easily by foot or bicycle. As ships like Viking's can dock so centrally, guests are able to reach the heart of each destination and experience each place at their own pace.

"This means they have lots of freedom and flexibility to enjoy each port of call and really reap the benefits that a river cruise offers in terms of enjoying a

whole variety of destinations whilst just unpacking once and avoiding the need to drive or navigate public transport."

Meanwhile, CroisiEurope UK director of sales John Fair adds: "A Rhine cruise is the perfect introduction to the delights of a river cruise. It offers a great range of stopovers, excursions, culture and scenery and tributaries such as the Moselle add to its attraction."

Trend watch

With Rhine itineraries remaining some of the most popular river cruises on the market, it might be expected for cruise companies to take an 'if it's not broke, don't fix it' approach to their offerings. However, subtle shifts are taking place in the marketplace to account for emerging customer interests and taking note of these could help convince new-to-cruise clients to set sail.

Multiple cruise companies are reporting that they're experiencing an

increased demand for active itineraries and experiences. "We are definitely seeing a trend towards more active excursions," says Avalon Waterways business development manager David Croft. "Though, of course, the main demographic remains 50 plus, this doesn't mean that passengers are just looking for serene walks around cobbled streets and on-board lectures, though we of course have these in abundance.

"With the addition of an adventure host on board every single one of our cruises, we're seeing passengers looking to join guided hikes and e-bike tours, even kayaking and rail bike excursions, to name a few of many we have on offer."

Andrea Stafford, director of trade sales for Scenic Group, which includes Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours and Emerald Cruises, meanwhile, tells *Cruise Trade News*: "Our Rhine itineraries are some of the most popular for active guests. Our ships are equipped with state-of-



Although many Rhine cruises start or end in Basel, it's a destination worth taking time to explore

“Demand for experiences immersing visitors in the local culture and taking them away from the main tourist trail is on the rise”

SELLING TIPS

- Tell new-to-cruise clients how many Rhine ports allow ships to call right into the centre of the destination, making them easy to explore
- Sell shoulder season cruises by describing the colours of the Rhine Gorge in autumn and the Easter markets in spring
- Make clients feel like they are getting even more for their money by selling a multi-river cruise itinerary that includes the Moselle and/or Saar

the-art e-bikes, while our excursions integrate guided hikes, bike rides and canoeing experiences.”

Amadeus River Cruises has also noticed an increased uptake in the use of its on-board bikes and CroisiEurope has found that its cruise and walk programme, which features guided hikes, has become increasingly popular.

Local colour

Demand for experiences that immerse passengers in the local culture, introduce clients to local people and take visitors away from the main tourist trail is also on the rise, according to experts.

“Our guests are increasingly opting for our more experiential ‘discovery’ excursions,” explains Fair, “such as unique walking tours, visits to out-of-the-way sites and local food and wine tastings.”

Barclay adds that Viking has had an increase in demand for its Exclusive Access and Privileged Access experiences: “These are exclusive entry experiences to cultural treasures all around the world. Viking guests can visit seldom-seen collections with before- and after-hours access to world-class museums, be special guests at private homes and palaces not open to just anyone, or attend private performances of folklore, ballet and opera.”

According to Viking, one of the most popular Privileged Access excursions on the Rhine is Top of Cologne, in which a member of Cologne Cathedral’s excavation and restoration team takes passengers up to the roof of the landmark for a sneak peek at the cathedral’s restoration workshops. Another highlight is the Kinderdijk by Vintage Barge excursion, which takes passengers to the 17th-century Blokker Windmill where they meet the miller and family.



EXPERT VIEW

“The Rhine has so much to offer the first-time river cruiser, including culturally rich cities like Amsterdam, Heidelberg and Koln, picturesque villages like Bacharach and the incredibly scenic Middle Rhine, with amazing castles and vineyards around every bend. The Rhine provides a truly wonderful immersion into the many pleasures of river cruising.”

TOM DUMBRELL

Tauck UK & Ireland national sales manager

A-Rosa River Cruises has introduced Destination Scouts to Rhine itineraries for 2023. The line’s head of sales Stephen Joyner says: “As part of A-Rosa’s 2023 concept to make its European river cruises more authentic, more immersive and more inclusive, the line has enlisted passionate and knowledgeable local experts in key destinations to quickly allow guests to get the lowdown on insider tips and experiences to maximise their time ashore beyond the tourist trail.



The picturesque German village of Bacharach is sure to delight

River cruising

“Destination Scouts advise A-Rosa’s on-board excursion expert on all the latest local knowledge on their given city, so it can be shared with guests. In addition, on specific itineraries and dates, the Destination Scouts come on board and share tips directly with the guests. Guests can then explore the city with the exclusive eye of a local the following day.”

A great combination

Other trends on the radar include increased interest in shoulder season cruises. Stafford highlights: “Our bookings show a pickup in bookings in spring and autumn, the perfect time to see the Rhine Gorge and other sections of the Rhine. These areas are especially beautiful as the leaves turn vibrant shades of red, bronze and yellow in autumn.”

There is also growing demand for combo itineraries, as Viking’s Barclay explains: “For longer itineraries, we have combined some of our most popular river journeys. The new Lyon, Provence & the Rhineland itinerary has just launched and allows guests to discover the turreted fortresses, grand cathedrals, historic cities, medieval towns and spectacular scenery of the Middle Rhine alongside exploring Avignon’s Palace of the Popes and the culinary delights of Lyon.”

ITINERARIES

AmaWaterways

- Seven-night Captivating Rhine cruise sailing from Amsterdam to Basel on *AmaLucia* is priced from £2,023 per person, departing 16 November 2023.

▸ amawaterways.co.uk

Avalon Waterways

- Seven-night Rhine River cruise sailing from Amsterdam to Remich on board *Imagery II* is priced from £1,635pp, departing 27 August 2023.

▸ avalonwaterways.co.uk

CroisiEurope

- Seven-night Treasures of the Celebrated Rhine River on *MS Symphonie* between Amsterdam and Basel is priced from £1,434pp, departing 20 October 2023.

▸ croisieurope.co.uk



Tauck’s Rhine Connoisseur includes a chance to visit the Glacier 3000 lookout point

ANSWERS TO COMMON NEW-TO-CRUISE QUESTIONS

Rhine starting point: Switzerland

Rhine endpoint: The Netherlands

Common embarkation cities: Basel and Amsterdam

Countries passed through: Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Austria, France, Germany and the Netherlands

For luxury river line AmaWaterways, UK & Ireland head of sales Mark Schmitt pinpoints a desire for cruises that include extra time in Switzerland. “Our Rhine Castles itinerary was modified to allow our guests to spend more time in Switzerland,” he says. “Almost every Rhine cruise starts or ends there, but they don’t actually spend time there. So, we adapted our itinerary to ensure our guests can spend the day in Basel or go to Lucerne.”

More to come

There’s no doubt that 2022 was a statement year for new developments on the Rhine, as cruise lines hustled to capitalise on two once-in-a-decade events – the Floriade Expo and Oberammergau Passion Play.

While 2023 and next year are a little quieter, there’s still plenty to tell clients about. This month (June), Amadeus will launch *Amadeus Riva* on the Rhine. The new ship will feature 12 suites and

67 exterior cabins. Avalon Waterways, meanwhile, has expanded its range of Storyteller cruises – which are hosted by a celebrity author, actor, artist or musician – for 2023/24 and the collection includes a Rhine sailing with *House of the Dragons* star Graham McTavish.

Finally, there’s a clutch of new itineraries for clients to look forward to, including Emerald’s new Rhine Castles and Moselle Vineyards, which will set sail in summer 2024. The highlight of this sailing is a behind-the-scenes tour of the acclaimed Schloss Johannisberg vineyard – home to the world’s oldest Riesling winery.

Tauck also has two new sailings for 2024. These include the 11-day Rhine Connoisseur, which travels from Montreux to Brussels and in reverse. The trip begins with a three-night stay at the Fairmont Montreux Palace, with explorations of the Lavaux Vineyards and Glacier 3000 lookout point. ❶



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LOOK DEEPER

The Mediterranean is often considered an easy sell, but there are plenty of new experiences and destinations to discover, says **Nicole Carmichael**

The Mediterranean is close to home, has so much to offer and the choice of ships, itineraries, styles and budgets that sail there means it remains one of the top locations to cruise. However, once clients have already cruised to the likes of Barcelona, Athens, Rome and Dubrovnik, they may feel they know all the greatest hits. Plus, there's a chance they've enjoyed city breaks in various other Med destinations, so it's logical to think, 'Been there. Done that'.

"It's easy to visit the Mediterranean several times without repeating a port," Mundy Cruising MD Edwina Lonsdale says. "You can do the western Med, the Greek Islands, the Turkish coast, the Holy Lands and the Croatian coast, so loads of different alternatives. I've been

cruising in the Med for over 40 years; last year I went on a Greek Island cruise with SeaDream Yacht Club and there was only one port of call I'd visited before."

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of itinerary planning and destination experience Martin Lister is similarly enthused about the breadth of choice on offer. "We don't run 'cookie cutter' cruises where we simply repeat the same sailings over and over again," he explains. "We're known for our imaginative and unusual itineraries and are proud to venture away from the well-sailed route to visit more off-the-beaten-track destinations. Our guests experience the best of them while they are there too, with our immersive shore excursions programme and our Signature Experiences, helping our guests to learn more about the history, culture, art and local way of life."

Secret escapes

Naturally, it takes a certain amount of infrastructure in order for a port to be viable to some of the world's biggest cruise ships – that's where small ship cruise companies have the opportunity to open up more of the world to passengers. For example, by resisting having airports, smaller Greek islands (Sifnos, Milos, Skopelos, Patmos, Kia and Amorgos, to name just a few) have lower visitor numbers, so they get a very different perspective on each port. With fewer passengers, small ships have the option to go to more remote places and passengers can experience a deep dive into a destination.

"SeaDream is always looking out for hidden gems scattered around the Mediterranean," says the line's VP of itineraries and destinations



Emilio Freeman. “For example, Ikaria in Greece is a port that virtually no other cruise line visits due to the lack of tourism infrastructure most of them require. Ikaria is very laid-back and authentically off the beaten path. Another hidden island gem is Thasos in Greece, which is located directly south of Kavala.

“In addition, we are constantly reinventing our yachting land adventures in order to offer our guests the best experiences possible in each of the destinations we call on. We have recently aligned ourselves with NatGeo Day Tours in several of our Mediterranean ports of call, bringing key immersive experiences to SeaDream guests.”

Meanwhile, *Scenic Eclipse* visits unique small villages and local ports large ships can’t access, offering the opportunity to step ashore in ports such as St Tropez and



EXPERT VIEW

“ The Mediterranean remains the key destination. Cruisers are attracted by the breadth of eye-catching calls available, as well as the availability of port-intensive itineraries, long summers and its short distance from the UK. Cruise lines put guests at the heart of their programmes and this may mean developing new curated experiences in existing ports, or looking at new ports to offer guests.”

ANDY HARMER
CLIA UK & Ireland MD

SELLING TIPS

- Emerging ports are only likely to be served by cruise companies with smaller passenger numbers, so are potentially going to be more expensive
- Capture the imagination with some of the more unusual cruise options available, for example cruising one destination in depth
- Instead of selling the Med as one destination, use it as a gateway to expand to several different holiday options

Destination focus: Mediterranean



Meander through the medieval walls of Korcula Old Town in Croatia

Monaco, rather than being bussed in from commercial ports. Elsewhere in Southern France, Port-Vendres, near the Catalan-influenced fishing village of Collioure is also emerging as a useful stopping point. Collioure is known as the ‘Pearl of the Vermillion Coast’ with a rich artistic history. Matisse, Picasso and Derain and Dufy all lived and worked here.

Other ports that are not always on the radar, but well worth visiting, are Cagliari, the original capital of Sardinia with its stunning medieval walled quarter that overlooks the city, and Catania in Eastern Sicily, which is especially good for foodies as it is quite different from the cuisine in northern Italy. And in Turkey, while Istanbul is obviously the main port of call for visitors, the port town of Kusadasi is a stunning resort town in itself and a gateway to the UNESCO world heritage site ancient ruins at Ephesus, rivalling the archaeological site at Pompeii.

Fred Olsen is also adding new ports to its offering, as Lister explains: “Some particularly exciting ports that we’ll be visiting with our guests in 2024 include Algiers in Algeria, Ashdod and Haifa in



The charming Port-Vendres is renowned as a fishing port



Scenic Eclipse can access unique small villages and ports larger ships can't reach



Expert guides can steer guests to less frequented spots such as Krk in Croatia

“Livorno, which is the gateway to so many other areas of Italy, is a great city in itself with excellent museums and walks”

Israel, and Tarragona in Spain. We also have some exciting calls to Propriano on the French island of Corsica and Ceuta in Spanish Morocco, which are only accessible to smaller ships.”

Reinventing the Med

“Sometimes there’s a perception that a Med cruise won’t offer an in-depth perspective on a destination,” says Lonsdale, “that one day you’ll be in France, the next day Italy and so on, but now more cruise ships are including overnights at a port, so passengers can explore areas more fully, and travel

via train rather than coach for a more independent experience. Rather than seeing a port as just somewhere to disembark, there’s often lots to see. For example, somewhere like Livorno, which is the gateway to so many other areas of Italy, is a great city in itself with excellent museums and walks.”

Instead of thinking of a port as just a link to more famous places, such as Civitavecchia for Rome, it may be worthwhile eschewing the obvious tick list locations and concentrating on exploring the port town itself. Scenic Group director of trade sales Andrea Stafford says: “Scenic Group’s team of on-board guides play a vital role on board for getting passengers to experience even more from their excursions, especially to some of the lesser-known ports such as Krk in Croatia and the island outpost of Elba.

“Our guides are local experts who care about providing immersive and authentic experiences for our guests. Their knowledge allows guests to access hidden gems of the Mediterranean, such as exploring the city walls of Korcula’s Old Town. Our sailings are much less likely to adversely affect local communities as we are delivering small numbers of people at any one time. That is exactly the type of tourism that local people want.”



Visitors to Kusadasi in Turkey can explore the ancient ruins at Ephesus

In such a competitive market, cruise lines know they have to go the extra mile. “We too have an immersive programme of shore excursions,” says Fred Olsen’s Lister. “This allows our guests to experience the ‘real’ destination, away from the typical tourist attractions. In Cartagena, for example, rather than just visit the Roman amphitheatre, guests can tour with one of the local archaeologists who helped to unearth them, or in Cádiz, can spend time with a local bailaora to learn the flamenco, rather than simply watching a performance.” 📍

ITINERARIES

Fred Olsen

- Fred Olsen’s 17-night Colourful & Cosmopolitan Mediterranean with the Amalfi Coast cruise on *Bolette*, departing from Liverpool on 8 May 2024, with stops including Propiano, Olbia, Sorrento and Gibraltar. Prices from £2,699pp. fredolsencruises.com

Emerald Cruises

- Emerald Cruises has an eight-day Coastal Gems of Italy & Croatia cruise from Venice to Rome, including visits to fascinating ports Otranto and Crotone. Departing 22 June 2024, prices from £4,500pp. emeraldcruises.co.uk

SeaDream Yacht Club

- SeaDream’s 12-day In the Footsteps of Marco Polo cruise from Istanbul to Venice visits ancient capitals, UNESCO heritage sites and lesser-known seaside towns. Departs 30 June 2024, with prices from £9,692pp. seadream.com

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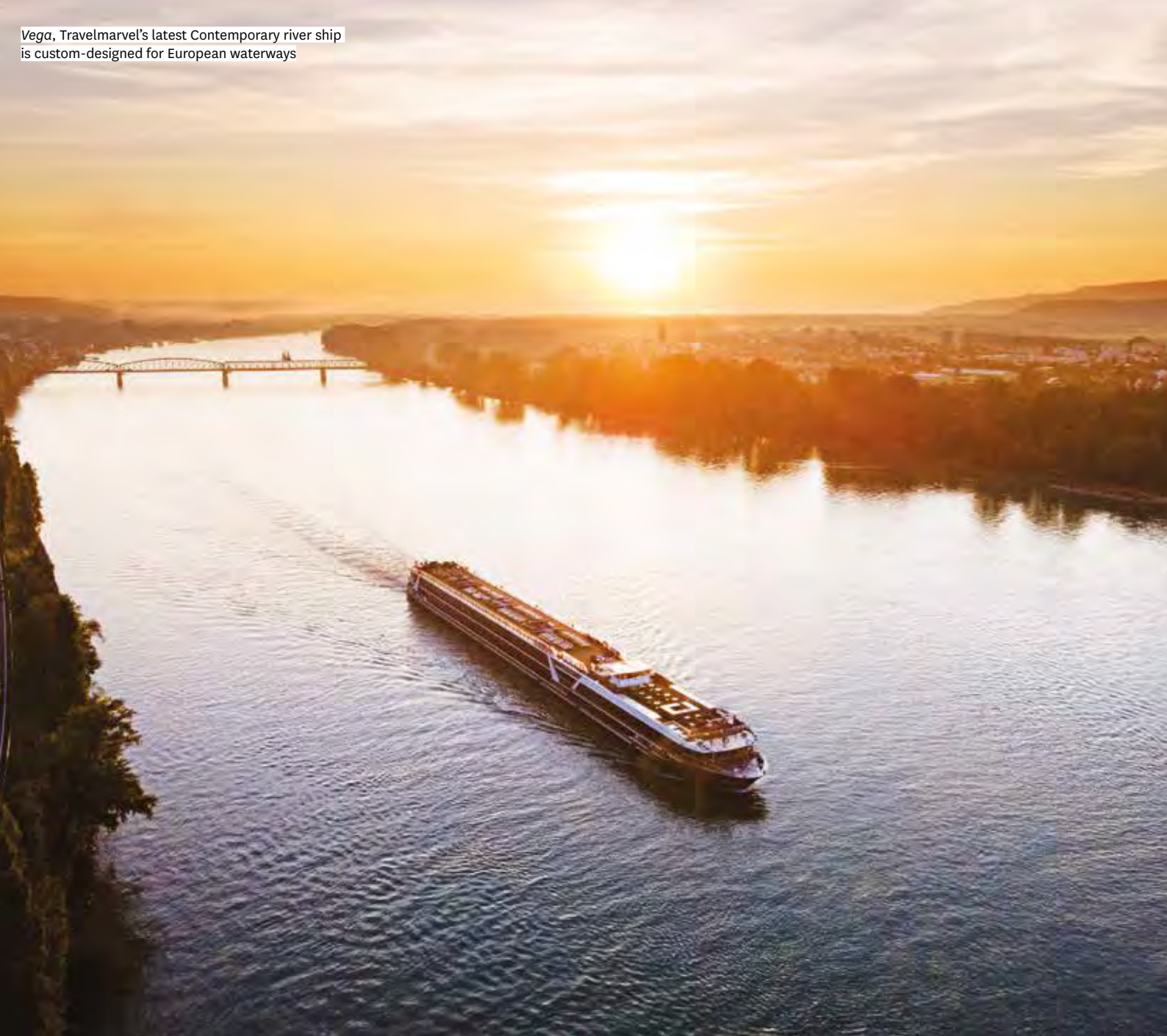
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Vega, Travelmarvel's latest Contemporary river ship
is custom-designed for European waterways



A MARVELLOUS EXPERIENCE

Travel Counsellor **Claire Bevan** recently won a cruise for two in the APT Travelmarvel Time to Escape agent incentive. She shares her story exclusively with *Cruise Trade News*

When I entered APT Travelmarvel's incentive, I never expected that I would win one of the two cruises that the line was offering aboard their new Contemporary river ship, *Travelmarvel Vega*. Despite a long and successful career as a travel agent and matching many of my customers with their dream cruises over the years, I have never been on a river cruise ship myself, so I was very intrigued to see what the experience was like.

What I didn't appreciate at the time of winning was how transformative this first-hand experience would be, both personally and professionally.

Elegant and tasteful

Taking my husband with me, we set off on an early December sailing of Travelmarvel's nine-day Delightful Danube itinerary from Nuremberg to Budapest. From the moment I step on board, I realise that the Travelmarvel brand offers so much more than its 'flexible, four-star' positioning might suggest.

I had expected the ship to be relatively simple, but instead she is elegant, tastefully modern and thoughtfully designed. Just like her two identical



The Irish-themed McGear's Bar serves up traditional pub grub

sister vessels, *Vega* has been created to give as much space and light as possible and to embrace indoor/outdoor living.

We have every possible amenity that we need – including a whirlpool on the top deck – and the cabins are extremely comfortable. While some ships can be a bit over the top, and others too basic, the balance that Travelmarvel has struck feels just right – the Goldilocks of vessels, if you will – and we know from the start that we have the perfect base for our European adventure.

Looking beyond the hardware, we find the people on board to be equally superlative. The Travelmarvel team are on the top of their game, with warm, relaxed but attentive service, and are eager to go the extra mile to make our trip as special as possible.

“Vega is elegant, tastefully modern and thoughtfully designed, created to give as much space and light as possible”

Fast Facts

182
guests

91
cabins

1
heated whirlpool

2.5
two-and-a-half
deck design

Enjoy the scenery from your room, courtesy of floor-to-ceiling windows. Photo: Rob Nijhuis





Making new friends

With APT & Travelmarvel being an Australian-owned company, the other guests on board hail from across the globe. We share our trip with an even mix of Brits, Aussies and New Zealanders – some travelling solo, while others are in couples, with family or holidaying with friends.

In true antipodean style, the mood is relaxed and there is no pressure to formally dress for dinner as some cruises mandate. With a choice of dining venues such as the multi-course offering of Constellations Restaurant, the lighter buffet options available in the True North Lounge, or the Irish pub-inspired McGeary's Bar (named after APT's founder), we also feel empowered to be ourselves and unwind.

This is, in essence, a holiday without the constraining formalities that can be common with other lines. The inclusive nature of the activities and the layout of the ship help us all to bond and we forge a tight group with our travelling

SELLING TIPS

- The Travelmarvel brand is working hard to boost awareness in the UK, so keep it in mind when speaking to clients looking for something a little different
- The experience on Travelmarvel, while rated as four star, will not fail to delight even the most demanding of clients
- Suggest clients try the brand's new Contemporary river ships, which have been custom-designed to sail on European waterways

companions over the course of the week – so much so that we still have an active WhatsApp group, and one lady who turned out to live fairly near me in the UK has become a good friend.

It is clear that Travelmarvel's itineraries have been created to orientate guests in each destination, showcase the unmissable highlights and then provide plenty of time to explore.

'Treated like VIPs'

For anyone who likes to strike out on their own, Travelmarvel offers the perfect blend. When needed, our cruise director is on hand to suggest things that we might enjoy but, having already explored each city with an expert local guide, we are familiar enough with the destinations to maximise our free time.

While showstopping cities like Budapest and Melk wow us, the town of Durnstein is an unexpected delight and travelling in the shoulder season means that we escape the crowds. In the height of summer, visitors normally



Vega is the perfect choice for travellers wanting to explore European cities



Claire Bevan made firm friends thanks to Vega's onboard activities and ship layout

“Some of my most exacting customers have been so impressed that they have rebooked with the brand”

share this German city with thousands of other tourists, but we have the place almost to ourselves.

We can leisurely peruse the shops, tasting the local schnapps and chocolates offered to us by relaxed and conversational staff who are clearly delighted in having plenty of time to chat with their customers at this time of year.

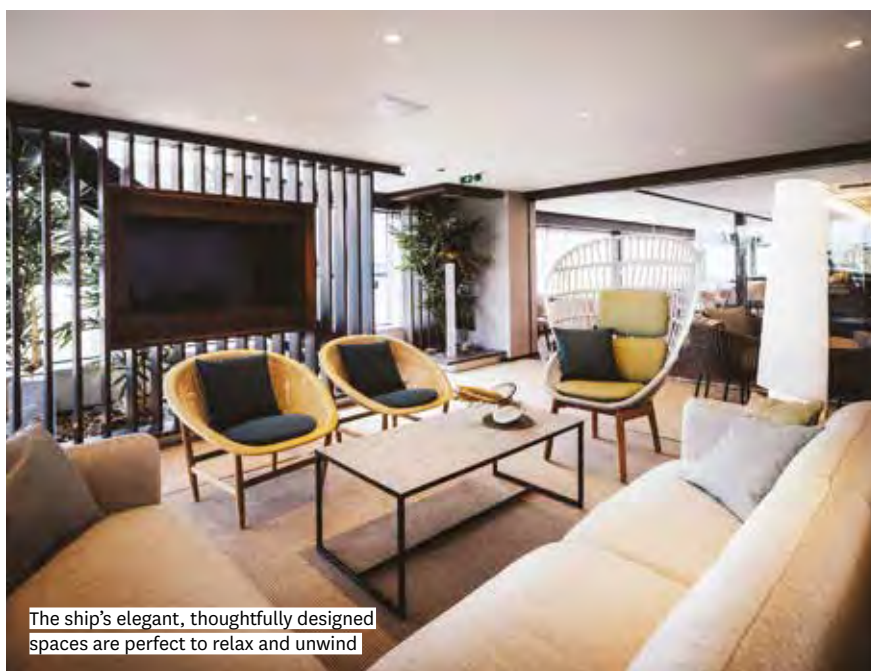
In addition, we loved the on-board entertainment, including a fantastic Bavarian evening, but the defining experience of our week is a concert that offered by Travelmarvel at the Vienna Opera House.

With front row access to a stunning eight-piece orchestral performance, a choir and dance recital, we are treated like VIPs. The intimacy of the event and the absorbing music is unexpectedly emotional. Even my husband, who is a seasoned regular at events like The Proms at The Royal Albert Hall, proclaims this is one of the best things he has ever seen.

A new player in the game

In the past, I have found APT to be the easier of the company's brands to sell because customers are better acquainted with the offering, and it is quite clearly defined as a luxury river cruising product for the discerning customer.

A newer player for UK guests, Travelmarvel may be easily pigeonholed as a value brand, but make that mistake at your peril. Having experienced it for myself, it is so much more.



The ship's elegant, thoughtfully designed spaces are perfect to relax and unwind

The value that Travelmarvel offers is clear, but I'm convinced that other river cruise lines will be hard pushed to rival the quality of this product at the same price point. In addition to a traditional four-star clientele, I would urge fellow agents to be confident recommending Travelmarvel to their luxury clients who are looking for a good deal without compromising on quality.

I have sold cruises on the Contemporary river ships in Europe to some of my most exacting customers, and they have been

so impressed that they have already rebooked with the brand. Personally, my Travelmarvel experience has inspired me to choose river cruising again for my next holiday, while professionally it has reinforced what a great sales opportunity the brand offers. 📌

DETAILS

● A nine-day Delightful Danube cruise, departing 1 September 2023, is priced from £1,795pp.

ON THE ROAD WITH...

Gemma Scarff

Gemma Scarff, Cunard's business manager for sales planning & direct partnership, explains how the line is strengthening its commitment to the trade

What's the best thing about your job?

I love the diversity of the role – no two days are the same and at any given time I will be balancing a variety of different priorities. One definite reward is the people we get to work with – the travel industry is home to some of the most passionate people I've met and that's apparent in almost every conversation we have with our agent partners. I couldn't envisage myself working in any other industry and that's probably why I've been in travel for more than 20 years.

Why is now the right time to expand your fam trip programme?

There are many new faces in the industry who have not had the opportunity to experience a Cunard holiday in a long time, so giving them the chance to enjoy our product is key to our future success. We had a great response to our 2022 fam trip programme, so we are delighted to have the opportunity to double the number of partners joining us on board.

Do you intend to hold more sales blitz events, following on from the one in March?

Absolutely – we received a great reception from being back out on the road in March and with a team that's growing this is something we will be doing more of, especially where we have exciting news to share. Agents so important to us and we want them to join the next chapter in Cunard's story.

How has being 'on the road' and meeting agents changed in recent times?

We have had to be resourceful and innovative in the way we work. We are reaching more agents on a daily basis by using technology and we are adapting to an ever-changing landscape. What's



Giving new faces in the industry the chance to enjoy a Cunard holiday is key to our future success

GEMMA SCARFF

CUNARD BUSINESS MANAGER

more, we are seeing more homeworkers than ever before, along with many who are new to travel, and this is reflected in how we communicate. Our dedicated partner engagement team continues to grow, which will increase our ability to meet with our agents, regardless of whether they are head office, home, contact centre or on the high street.

What key Cunard selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

We are a year away from welcoming *Queen Anne* into the Cunard family, so we have a regular drum beat of exciting news to share with our partners. As well as key campaign periods, there are also many news stories to share – from silent discos on board and Broadway shows on the stage to more flexible dining options. Cunard is a holiday with so many amazing selling points for our partners to talk about and we really have something to offer everyone. Shine Rewards Club continues to be our one-stop shop for agent training and rewards. For every booking a partner makes, they can earn points to spend on a great catalogue of different products, including Cunard Gin and even a Cunard voyage.

How do you anticipate agent engagement changing?

We really want to immerse our agents in the Cunard product, hence we will continue to evolve how we train and engage with agents. Our webinars are always popular and feedback from them is positive. 📞

Queen Anne will be Cunard's newest ship with a host of exciting features





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CUNARD

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