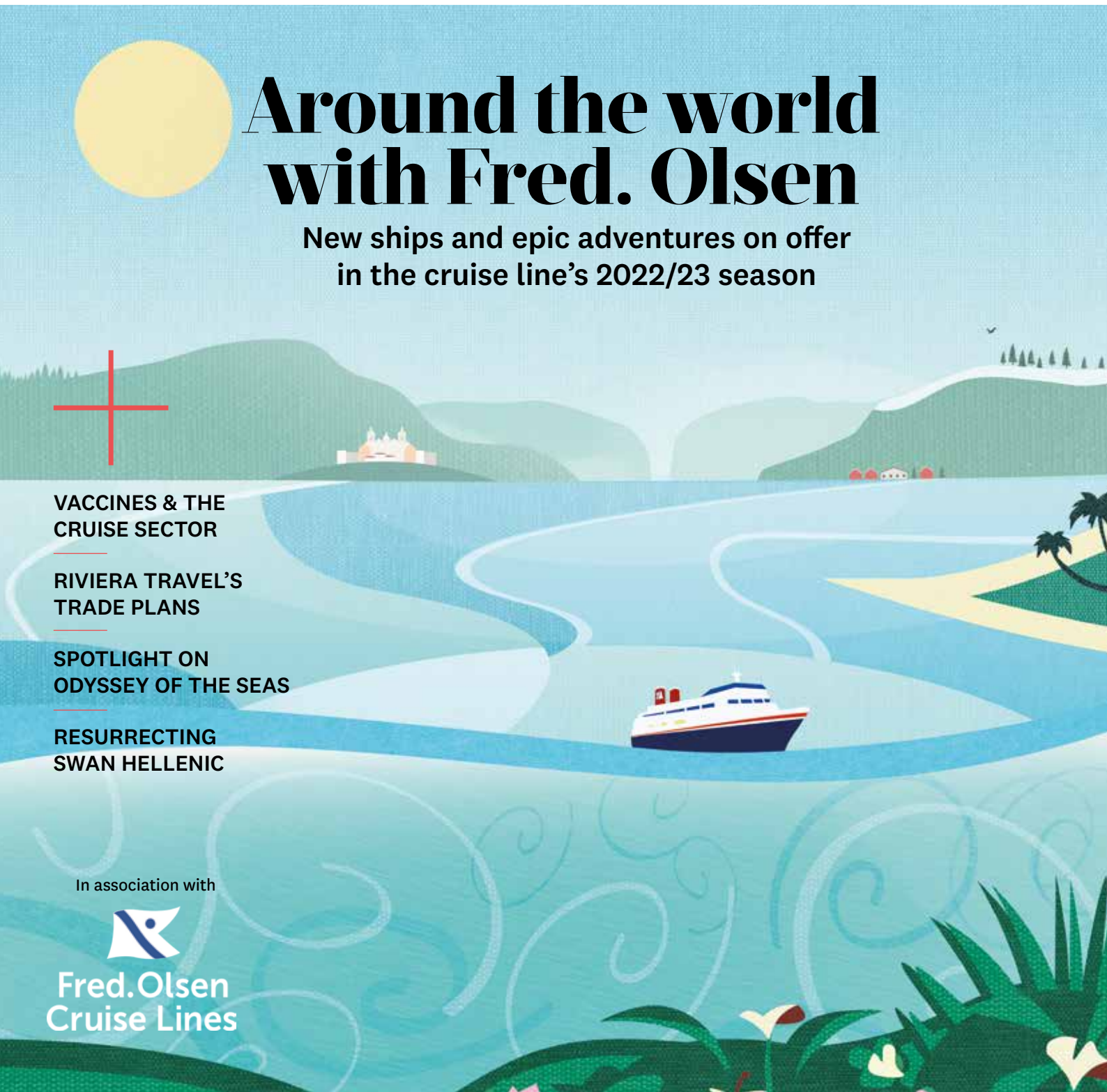


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CRUISE SECTOR

RIVIERA TRAVEL'S
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the March issue

Well, that was certainly a very different Christmas and new year season. I experienced a range of emotions when lockdown 3.0 was announced.

Despair, anger and very little positivity.

After a few days of struggling to come to terms with the situation, I sat down for a moment of reflection. How could I shake off the feelings of negativity and smile once again? The first step was realising that my family and I are all healthy, followed by a couple of days of switching off and focusing purely on the moment, not what might come.

However, I soon began to get the cruising itch, and so I decided to delve into my archives to reminisce about the many wonderful days I have had at sea. This inevitably led me to think about the time when I can put down the photos and experience it all again in full, high-definition reality.

Now, as I write this, there is genuine hope that the sector is emerging from the dark days of the pandemic, and the roadmap has given the entire country a very welcome dose of positivity.

The pathway to restarting operations is by no means simple, but we are doing what we can by writing about itineraries, new ships and destinations, including advice on how best to sell to clients – tips that I am sure will prove even more valuable as bookings surge over the coming weeks and months.



Above: River cruising in Russia is one thing we can look forward to

In this issue, we look at Fred Olsen's 2022/23 programme, speak to Riviera Travel about exciting plans to boost trade sales, and shine the spotlight on Royal Caribbean's new ship, *Odyssey of the Seas*.

We also hear from Swan Hellenic, run through the latest incentives and support from a range of lines, and investigate what impact Covid-19 vaccines will have on the sector.

I do hope you find your cruise inspiration on the following pages.

All the best.

Gary Peters
Editor, Cruise Trade News

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The Briefing

THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR CRUISE NEWS

In BRIEF

Oceania world cruise sells out

● Oceania Cruises' 2023 world cruise sold out within one day of opening for sale, the line has confirmed. President Bob Binder said the response to the 180-day cruise shows that "travellers are clearly bullish on the future".

Celebrity increases trade support

● Celebrity Cruises has launched the first in a series of digital tools to help agents improve their selling skills. The first guide, which is available on the Celebrity Central trade website, includes information on selling Celebrity's 2022/23 cruise programme. Additional tools will be revealed over the coming weeks.

Princess extends webchat hours

● Princess Cruises has extended the opening hours of its agent webchat function. The Ask Isaac tool, available at onesourcecruises.com, is now open from 9am-5pm from Monday to Saturday and 10am-4pm on Sunday.

THE NEWS YOU NEED

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OCEAN

Fred Olsen unveils 2022/23 programme

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has launched its 2022/23 cruise programme, the first full season to include new ships *Bolette* and *Borealis*, and featuring the British Isles and five-night breaks for "those wanting to dip their toe back into travelling".

The line also has longer sailings on offer, including the Around the World in 80 Days adventure in February 2023, with departures from Southampton or Liverpool on *Borealis*.

The cruise, timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the novel, will call at Mumbai, Hong Kong, Shanghai and San Francisco, among other destinations, and includes a range of excursions, such as a visit to the Taj Mahal and opportunities to see the cherry blossom in bloom in Japan.

Guests will also be able to take in America and Canada, with *Balmoral* scheduled to depart on a 34-night voyage in September 2023, or explore the Adriatic on a 27-night sailing on *Braemar*, departing October 2022.

Balmoral will depart for a 15-night journey to Spitsbergen in June 2022 to sail along Norway's west coast and into narrow fjords on a cruise timed to take in the Midnight Sun.



Mumbai is on the list for guests on the 80-day cruise

"The Around the World in 80 Days adventure sets sail in February 2023"

Borealis' Rugged and Rural Canada sailing in August 2022 will call into Louisbourg for the first time. Other maiden ports include Bandol in France, Neum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Progreso in Mexico, Liepaja in Latvia, and Kalvåg and Lyngdal in Norway.

Fred Olsen also has more regional departure ports than ever before, with the addition of Tilbury and Belfast, following on from the introduction of Portsmouth. Sailings will be available from eight UK ports, with

Newcastle, Liverpool, Rosyth, Southampton and Dover also on the cards.

Guests who book one of the new cruises can choose between a free all-inclusive drinks package or credit to spend on board. In addition, Fred Olsen has updated its Plain Sailing Guarantee programme to include the option to transfer any deposits paid to another cruise at any time before the final payment is made.



The line's new ships feature in the programme (artist impression)



Arvia is a sister ship to the 5,200-guest Iona

INDUSTRY

Steel cut for new P&O Cruises ship

The steel-cutting ceremony has been held for the second Excel-class ship in the P&O Cruises fleet. *Arvia*, a sister ship to *Iona*, is being built at the Meyer Werft shipyard in Papenburg, Germany, and is scheduled to join the fleet in December 2022. The name of the ship was unveiled through a video reveal made up of outlining the letters

in the name in various locations, all relating to the beach and the seashore. Additional details regarding its design and experiences on board will be released over the coming months.

“This marks an extraordinary milestone for P&O Cruises”

P&O Cruises president Paul Ludlow said: “The steel cutting marks an extraordinary milestone for the future of P&O Cruises. I would like to thank the team at Meyer Werft for their partnership and dedication.”

CONTENT

New podcast and video content

A host of industry bosses have spoken to *Cruise Trade News* as part of a new series of video interviews and podcasts analysing the cruise sector.

The content, which forms part of the Cruise Corner series, includes in-depth chats with sector leaders about current trends, restart preparations and how best to sell cruise holidays.

The podcasts have been developed by The Cruise Strategy Company, an independent business founded by industry experts Stuart Perl and Philip Ordever to help travel agents sell more cruise.

CTN editor Gary Peters said: “These new interviews and podcasts have really



Listen up for industry news, interviews, hints and tips

added another dimension to our coverage of the cruise industry. We hope that having both formats available will appeal to our readers.

“We are delighted to be working with The Cruise Strategy Company, as we seek to support as many travel agents as possible, now and in the future.”

● All interviews and podcasts are available at cruisetradenews.com

APPOINTMENTS



MSC Cruises executive chairman **Pierfrancesco Vago** has been appointed the global chairman of CLIA, succeeding Adam Goldstein. Vago will serve a two-year term. He was previously chairman of CLIA Europe in 2014, and MSC Cruises CEO from 2003 to 2013.



Carol Cabezas has been named the new president of Azamara, following news that Sycamore Partners has agreed a deal to purchase the brand from Royal Caribbean Group. The deal is expected to close in the first quarter of 2021.



Steve Williams has been named the new chair of CLIA's trade engagement working group. The MSC Cruises UK and Ireland sales director (see interview, page 29) will replace Avalon Waterways sales director Janet Parton after her two-year term.



OCEAN

MSC reveals ex-UK sailings for 2022

MSC Cruises will offer 21 itineraries from Southampton in summer 2022 to provide “travel agents with cruises they want to sell”, the line’s UK & Ireland MD, Antonio Paradiso, said.

MSC Magnifica will homeport at a new dedicated cruise terminal at the port, for what will be the ship’s third full ex-UK season. Itineraries, to run from April to October, range from two to 14 nights, visiting a selection of destinations including the Canary Islands, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

The line has developed two 14-night western Mediterranean cruises in July

and August with families in mind, following guest and travel agent feedback.

Paradiso added: “Throughout this difficult period we have been delighted at the continued feedback from agents and guests, who are eager to sail with MSC Cruises from Southampton to new destinations.

“We are committed to providing UK holidaymakers with the holidays they want and travel agents with cruises they want to sell. We hope that *MSC Magnifica*’s third full summer season in Southampton... demonstrates to both our guests and the trade our continued commitment to growing the UK market.”

OCEAN

Riviera unveils British Isles cruises

Riviera Travel has announced plans for British Isles cruises in July this year.

The eight-day itineraries mark the first time that the operator has offered Britain and Ireland-based voyages. Four sailings are on offer, two to Scotland and two around Ireland, on the 158-guest *Seaventure*.

The Cruising Scotland’s Highlands & Islands itinerary will depart from Edinburgh and take in Aberdeen and Balmoral Castle, before heading to Inverness, Orkney, Oban, the Outer Hebrides and County Donegal in Ireland.

The Cruising the Emerald Isle voyage will depart from Greenock and call at Belfast, Dublin, and Kilkenny, among other destinations.

Cruises can be booked back-to-back for an extended 15-day voyage.

Riviera Travel head of product cruise & worldwide Katja Hildebrandt said: “We’re thrilled to be able to offer British Isles cruises for the first time ever, and to give guests the chance to enjoy the best of Ireland or Scotland by sea. Passengers can explore ports inaccessible to larger ships for a much more authentic experience.”





RIVER

Viking expands Egypt fleet

Viking has announced plans for a new ship to sail the Nile, joining *Viking Osiris* and *Viking Ra*.

The 82-guest *Viking Aton* is under construction and is scheduled to debut in September 2022 with the 12-day Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary.

Viking chairman Torstein Hagen said: "Egypt remains a top destination for

"The addition of *Viking Aton* is a reflection of our investment in Egypt"

many of our guests, who are inspired to discover the rich history and beauty of the region.

"We will always maintain our commitment to creating meaningful experiences that are focused on the destination. The addition of *Viking Aton* is a reflection of our continued investment in Egypt. We look forward to introducing the country's cultural treasures to even more Viking guests in the future."

Viking Osiris is set to launch this year, while *Viking Ra* has been in operation since 2018.

INDUSTRY

Sector to engage with taskforce

Cruise industry association CLIA has stated that the sector stands ready to work with the government as part of the new travel taskforce announced by Boris Johnson.

The prime minister said that the successor to the previous global travel taskforce will report back by 12 April.

The government is then expected to make a decision on removing restrictions on international travel, but not before 17 May at the earliest.

In a joint statement, CLIA and the UK Chamber of Shipping said: "The announcement of next steps leading to a restart of domestic and international travel is welcome. We will engage with



government as part of the new Global Travel Taskforce on achieving a safe restart for cruise at home and abroad in the coming months.

"The health and safety of passengers will remain our priority and the cruise industry has over the past year been working with government on a detailed set of protocols to allow cruising to resume in a safe way."

Marketing GURU



Mark Lewsey, head of marketing at Accord Marketing, outlines how to plan ahead during uncertain times

One of the best lessons any marketer can learn is to "know that you don't know", and this has been heightened during the pandemic.

The contrast between navigating the reality while simultaneously planning for a future rebound perfectly articulates the conundrum faced by many. However, what we can do is watch, listen and act.

Particularly in times of crisis, a customer's interaction with a company can trigger an immediate effect on their sense of trust and loyalty. At a time when conditions are changing on a regular basis, keeping a real-time view on consumer behaviours and sentiment is key.

The good news is that many cruise companies have started to plan for the long term by investing in real-time data dashboards, overhauling brand strategies and slashing internal red tape.

The key questions: "How do we focus on finding solutions for the short term while forging a path forward for the long term?", and, "How do we determine what new trends are here to stay and those that are just a flash in the pan?"

Now is definitely the time to pivot, to innovate, to inspire and to offer viable solutions to the pressing problems that we're all encountering.

● Go to accordmarketing.com for more information and tips.

Sales *Inspiration*

INCENTIVES • ITINERARIES • SPECIAL OFFERS

Premium drinks on offer from MSC Cruises

MSC Cruises is including a free premium drinks package on all bookings made on its Fantastica Experience.

The promotion is available until midnight on 30 April 2021 and includes summer 2021 and winter 2021/2022 itineraries.

Children under the age of 17 can also cruise for free on *MSC Magnifica* on Bella Experience bookings, while the line's stress-free cruise programme allows guests to change their sailing up to 15 days before departure.

Guests can enjoy a free drinks package when booking with MSC Cruises

VISIT
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for more on cruise line
restart plans, agent
training, itineraries
and incentives



The hub will help homeworkers sell cruises on ships such as *Anthem of the Seas*

Royal support for homeworkers

A homeworkers' hub has been created by Royal Caribbean to "support independent travel agents who run their business from their home".

Described as a "one-stop shop", the hub includes the latest brand news, sales campaigns and promotions, and enables agents to access real-time, personalised sales support via the Live Chat function or request a virtual visit from a Royal Caribbean team member. Exclusive Royal Caribbean benefits

and rewards are also available, including a concept called Pitch for Pounds, giving homeworkers the chance to win marketing spend with Royal.

Royal Caribbean International head of sales Torey Kings-Hodkin said: "Homeworking travel agents are responsible for a significant amount of our business. It's vital they understand their value and that we see them as an extension of our sales team."

Please visit myclubroyal.co.uk.



On-board activities are outlined on the new Virgin platform

VIRGIN VOYAGES LAUNCHES AGENT PLATFORM

Virgin Voyages' new E-Learning platform is a "one-stop-shop and resource tool" for the line's travel agent partners, known to Virgin as First Mates.

Labelled the 'Seacademy', the hub features four levels, designed to help agents learn about different areas of the

brand, ranging from destinations to on-board activities.

Every level comes with its own reward, such as bonus commission vouchers, to encourage agents to complete each tier at their own pace. The first tier – Violet – is available at *firstmates.com*.

SAVINGS WITH SEABOURN

Seabourn has relaunched its early bonus savings promotion, offering guests the chance to save and travel agents an opportunity to earn commission.

Guests who pay for their booking in full by 31 March 2021 will receive an additional 10 per cent off the base cruise fare. The line's Book with Confidence promotion can be combined with other campaigns, including group rates and the signature savings event.



Referrals by past guests will mean savings on future cruises



AmaWaterways unveils referral savings offer

A new offer from AmaWaterways means that past guests, by directing friends and family members to book their first AmaWaterways cruise with a travel agent using a referral code, can earn themselves up to £500 in savings on their next river cruise.

The campaign, which is valid until 31 March 2021, also includes a £100 saving on the first river cruise for the friend/family member using the code.

Upon receiving the code, past guests can refer an unlimited number of friends and family, accruing stateroom savings for future holidays with AmaWaterways.

AmaWaterways co-founder Kristin Karst said: "We believe the time is right to reignite the travel spark and we hope that this show of appreciation inspires our guests."

Riviera Travel extends offers

Riviera Travel has extended two of its current offers to provide additional flexibility.

Both offers were originally scheduled to end on 28 February but will now run to 31 March 2021. The first, a fully flexible booking promise, allows guests to change a booking for free up to 45 days before travel on 2021 holidays, and until 30 June for 2022 holidays.

In addition, Riviera is offering up to €400 on-board credit on select European river cruises, available

on sailings in 2021 and 2022.

Riviera has 27 Europe and worldwide river cruises, plus eight European solo traveller river cruises, currently on sale.

Riviera Travel chief commercial officer Jim Forward said: "We've had a particularly positive response from the trade to these offers so we're pleased to be able to extend their availability. Now is the time for agents to encourage their customers to start planning their holiday on a risk-free basis."



Riviera's offers are now available to the end of March



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

THREE REASONS TO RECOMMEND

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' newly launched 2022-23 sailings

We're famous for our itineraries, each handcrafted from scratch by our expert journey planners. For 2022-23 we're launching a selection of sailings we're truly proud of, from five-night explorations of the Devon and Cornwall peninsula to our headline first – Around the World in 80 Days! Of course, there are many reasons to recommend us to your customers – we have the most loyal guests of any cruise line, after all* - but here are just three:

1

SMALLER SHIPS

Our smaller ships present several benefits, and our new ships have been bought specifically with this in mind. Smaller ships allow access to places that the bigger ships cannot reach. They also mean less guests, allowing us to offer a more personal and friendly service. We always design everything on board with safety and comfort in mind.



*Source: YouGov Survey 2019

2

UK DEPARTURE PORTS

To make things nice and easy, we have planned more sailings from smaller, local ports. New ports introduced this year include Portsmouth, Belfast and London Tilbury. We are pleased to say, we now sail from more UK ports than any other cruise line.



Kirkwall



CRUISES CLOSER TO HOME

3

As well as longer voyages and a range of worldwide destinations, our new itineraries offer more possibilities for cruising around the British Isles or a little closer to home. For those looking to dip a toe back into the water, there are also plenty of shorter cruises on offer, with all the usual ingredients of a Fred. Olsen Cruise, including a sea day, scenic cruising and interesting ports of call.

NEW ITINERARIES

Our 2022-23 cruises are now on sale, with many including free drinks or on board spend.

Plus, for each sale you register on our Travel Agent Centre, you're in with the chance of winning a free 2022 cruise. Visit fredolsencruises.com/agent for more details.





CTN *investigates*



SHOT IN THE ARM

Covid-19 vaccines have been heralded as the moment when the fightback really begins. But, is this truly the beginning of the end?

Gary Peters investigates



On 8 December, the then 90-year-old Margaret Keenan became the first person in the world to be given the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 jab

as part of a mass vaccination programme.

Keenan, who turned 91 just a week later, called it the “best early birthday present”, and across the nation the joy was palpable. Scientists were rightly hailed for their expertise and sheer hard work in reaching such a point in a very short timeframe. Regulators were praised for their speed at formally approving the vaccine for use among the general public.

Then, on 4 January, 82-year-old Brian Pinker became the first person to receive the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, as the government began the roll-out of the second type.

Across the travel sector, the response has been one of relief more than anything else. There has been no huge celebration, no jumping for joy. A slight fist-clench and exclamation of ‘come on’, perhaps.

Optimism and realism

The overall feeling is one of realistic optimism – yes, the vaccines are hugely significant, but restrictions are still in place for now.

Nonetheless, “the vaccination programme is giving everyone the chance to dream and start thinking about their travel plans for later this year and beyond”, says A-Rosa UK & Ireland MD Lucia Rowe.

Philip Ordever and Stuart Perl, co-founders of The Cruise Strategy Company, an independent business designed to help agents sell more cruise holidays, back this view: “It is

“The vaccine is giving everyone the chance to dream about travel”

undoubtedly a huge step forward in the global battle against Covid-19 that vaccines have been approved, and we can be cautiously optimistic about the positive impact this will have on consumers’ confidence to book holidays,” they say.

For Travel Counsellors’ head of cruise, Janet Whittingham, the positivity has been demonstrated in customer surveys (albeit the results of the following were taken before the third lockdown announcement).

She says: “In a recent survey, 70 per cent said they were keen to cruise again in the next 12 months. Over 60 per cent also said that news of a vaccine boosted their confidence in being able to set sail again sooner.

“Many customers are telling their Travel Counsellor how they’ve missed their cruising holiday so much and

want to make their next trip as special as possible.

“The experience for many customers has proved the value of being able to rely on an experienced travel professional,

particularly those with expertise in cruise, to help travellers to navigate the latest developments as restrictions continue across the globe.”

Advantage Travel Partnership leisure director Kelly Cookes comments: “Feedback has been very positive, particularly from seasoned cruisers. They are keen to cruise again and are making bookings.”

Recent findings from Saga paint a positive picture in terms of consumer sentiment about travel in general, with the company reporting an increase in the number of over-50s booking once-in-a-lifetime holidays.

Another survey, this one by Mundy Cruising from late last year, found that 47 per cent of respondents said they would only cruise once they had been vaccinated and the majority of the population had been vaccinated.



“By late March, we could see a real surge in demand for the second half of this year among over-50s”

Mundy Cruising managing director Edwina Lonsdale said at the time that the results provided a “lot of food for thought but the overriding sentiment is one of cautious optimism regarding the resumption of cruising”.

The UK Travel Intelligence Report, compiled by communications firm Lotus, shows that “of the UK population who prefer to cruise, 26 per cent of those looking to cruise in Europe, and 32 per cent of those aiming beyond the continent, are waiting to be vaccinated”, Lotus CEO Jules Ugo tells *CTN*.

“Meanwhile, 14 per cent of those looking to cruise in Europe within the next six months, and seven per cent of those looking outside Europe, are eager to cruise regardless of the vaccine,” she adds.

Rowe adds that by late March, with more and more over-50s vaccinated, “we could see a real surge in demand for the second half of this year and into 2022... for many, their suitcases are ready and waiting to be packed”.

Testing is vital

What is accepted across the industry is that vaccines do not reduce the need for comprehensive testing, at least in the short term. Globally, CLIA cruise line

members have agreed to 100 per cent testing of passengers and crew on all ships with a capacity to carry 250 or more passengers. This signifies the common approach that has been prevalent since the very first days of the pandemic.

Cruise lines that have run reduced sailings in recent months have also demonstrated this with testing prior to embarkation and during sailings.

CLIA UK & Ireland director Andy Harmer says: “There is still so much unknown about the virus and the scientific and medical understanding is constantly changing, but we are an

innovative industry taking innovative approaches that continue to put people first.

“Our members are working together to consider new and enhanced health protocols, technologies and sanitation solutions informed by some of the world’s leading experts in coordination with public health officials, governments and ports.”

Testing is also highlighted by Lonsdale, who explains to *CTN*: “I think the whole premise on ship-board testing, which is to mitigate risk by layering all of the things that are going to protect people, will work really well. I imagine that certainly in the early days [it] will combine vaccinations with testing.”

Travel expert and chairman of Rock Insurance Steve Endacott says that “vaccines are vital in creating a light at the end of the tunnel”, but that testing “is vital for convincing customers pre-vaccination that relatively Covid-19-free environments can be created on board”.

“Testing is a crucial stepping stone. I believe cruising will be one of the first sectors to return from summer 2021 onwards because it is more capable of creating safer environments via testing.”

Ordever and Perl add: “The vaccines [are] the major factor in boosting recovery but all of the other elements involved to ensure a safe return to cruising must be in place and proven before there is a sustained return to pre-pandemic booking volumes.”

Jab to cruise?

With the rapid development of vaccines and the continued roll-out across the country and indeed globally, attention has now turned to the question of health passports and the need to demonstrate evidence of a vaccination to travel.

In mid-January, Saga revealed that it will require all passengers to have been vaccinated against Covid-19 at least 14 days before departure. The operator has confirmed all guests should be fully inoculated, meaning both doses of the vaccine, adding that



JULES UGO
CEO
LOTUS

“Vaccines must be part of a wider approach... that includes passes for cross-border travel”

guests will be required to show their vaccination document and/or evidence at the time of boarding.

If guests have not had the vaccine at least 14 days before departure they will not be permitted to board and will be given a different date or a full refund, Saga confirmed. The line has suspended cruise operations until 27 June.

In a statement, Saga said: “Our customers want the reassurance of the vaccine and to know others travelling with them will be vaccinated too. The inaugural cruise of *Spirit of Adventure* has been moved to 26 July. We have contacted all our guests who have been impacted by these changes and are discussing their options with them.”

On 2 February, American Queen Steamboat Company (AQSC) and its sister company Victory Cruise Lines also announced they will require passengers to provide proof of a vaccination to sail. Starting on 1 July 2021, the move is “the most

prudent next step to ensure that we are providing the safest cruising experience possible”, said AQSC CEO John Waggoner.

Guests travelling with Crystal Cruises will also need a vaccine at least 14 days prior

to their cruise, and must have received both doses, if recommended by the manufacturer. The line’s interim president, Jack Anderson, said the requirement “is simply the best way to ensure the safest possible Crystal experience for all on board”.

Meanwhile, ABTA chief executive Mark Tanzer has stated that a programme in which a voluntary certificate is used to show that a traveller has been vaccinated could be a “real incentive to get people travelling again”.

He added: “Having the option to obtain some sort of vaccine certificate will be important because this evidence, alongside testing, is likely to be part of the way to re-open travel.”

The possibility of a certificate was boosted when vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi told *BBC Breakfast*: “If other countries will require a vaccine certificate then I think it’s right that we facilitate it.”

Also, following a meeting organised by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the Global Tourism Crisis Committee called for the coordination of a standardised system, as well as harmonised testing protocols.

UNWTO secretary-general Zurab Pololikashvili said: “Vaccines must be part of a wider, coordinated approach that includes certificates and passes for safe cross-border travel.”

In late February, after a virtual meeting of EU leaders, German chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters: “Everyone agreed that we need a digital vaccination certificate.” She added that the EU Commission would need three months to develop the technical framework required.



EDWINA LONSDALE
MANAGING DIRECTOR
MUNDY CRUISING

Lonsdale says she does not foresee any major resistance from guests, as “I would say it is similar to when guests are going to a destination that needs a yellow fever certificate”.

Meanwhile, Travel Risk & Incident Prevention Group chairman Lloyd Figgins believes that, while it might seem ideal to encourage all passengers to get a vaccine, “the reality is likely to be that some passengers will be vaccinated, while others won’t”.

WTTC president & CEO Gloria Guevara also said: “It will take a significant time to vaccinate the global population... the common-sense approach is to allow the free movement of people who can prove a negative test result.”

There is plenty of uncertainty, but absolutely no disputing that Covid-19 vaccines mark the beginning of the fightback against this rotten disease. ①



LLOYD FIGGINS
CEO & CHAIRMAN
TRIP GROUP





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and Sydney

Transits the Suez Canal

Late evening departures from:
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Port Elizabeth, Safaga
and Sydney

18 UNESCO World Heritage
site calls

Welcomes 2023 with
celebrations at sea

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Kong, New York, San Francisco,
Sydney and Singapore

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and Dubai

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”
In conversation with...

Riviera Travel

Gary Peters speaks to **Stuart Milan** to learn more about Riviera Travel’s commitment to travel agents and how the line intends to grow trade sales

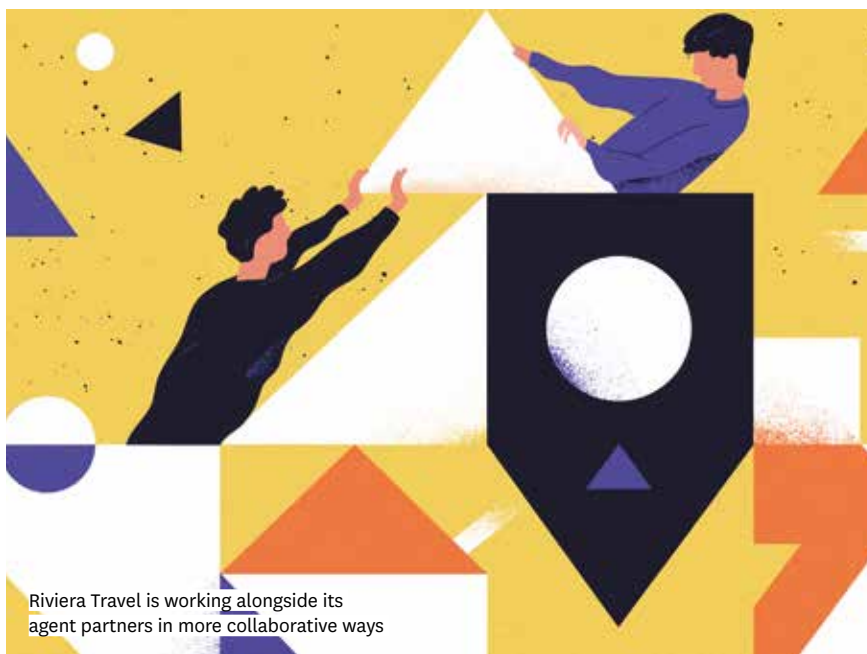
The cruise industry rightly shouts about the support out there for trade partners and how critical agents are to the overall success – and crucially, the rebound – of the sector.

However, not many companies shout as loudly as Riviera Travel. The operator was one of the first to get back out on the road after the end of the first lockdown last year and has high hopes of driving more bookings through the trade, as channel director Stuart Milan explains.

Different, but still enjoyable

Milan joined Riviera on a permanent basis last February, just a few weeks before the initial lockdown was introduced. “I can’t say it’s been what I expected it to be, that’s for sure,” he says via video call.

“I started and then [it was] straight into the mire that was growing in March. However, this time has allowed me to get to know the wider business. It’s not been



Riviera Travel is working alongside its agent partners in more collaborative ways

a traditional start, but it has still been enjoyable nonetheless.”

Milan has worked in recent months to put in place the foundations of the operator’s plans to work with the trade during this year and beyond – plans that have been boosted by having a majority of the trade sales team working, albeit with some of them operating on reduced hours.

Milan explains: “We thought it was really important to support the trade where we could, and just to make sure that we maintained our voice and presence among our partners. We see the trade as being a massive part of the rebound [of the cruise sector].”

Post the first lockdown, Riviera was quick to get its team back out on the road meeting agents, all within Covid-19 safety protocols. This was a “key move”, says

Milan, not least for supporting the mental health of the team.

“It also let the trade know that we were still out and about – we didn’t go silent, we didn’t disappear,” he adds. “We want to grow our trade presence and trade bookings over the next 12 to 18 months.”

Ambitious plans

On that point of growing the team and sales through the trade, last year Riviera moved Ashley Walker into the trade team to provide additional support – “I think it’s a truly positive sign to the trade that we really are open to working with them and want to do more of that in the future,” says Milan. Riviera has also set a target of growing trade sales to around a third of overall sales. But how will it achieve this?

Milan chuckles, and then says: “A lot of it is about identifying who our key





River cruising is likely to be at the forefront of the industry rebound

partners are and who they're going to be. We've very much changed how we're working. Just a couple of months ago we were working on a regional basis, so each of the sales managers had a certain region to look after – now we've changed that to an account management basis.

“Essentially, an agency will now have a single point of contact within our sales team, so it makes the communication that much easier and it also allows us to ensure that the plans are that much more concrete.

“There's a lot more accountability from our side and from the travel agent side. We can identify where the opportunity is and really get behind the trade, putting the right marketing plans in place and so on. It helps us to ensure we have the team set up correctly, with the right ways of working in place, motivating agents,

“An agency will now have a single point of contact in our team”

incentivising them and really getting behind them.”

The hard work is paying off. On 8 February, the operator praised agent partners following its best day of trade bookings for nearly a year. River cruise accounted for the bulk of agent bookings, with mainland Europe proving the most popular destination.

Riviera Travel has also revealed it is working on a comprehensive programme of incentives and fam trip opportunities – although of course these plans depend on travel restrictions – as well as an agent

award scheme, hopefully launching sometime this year. On the topic of this year, Riviera did see a slight uptick in bookings post the news and approval of a Covid-19 vaccine, although the real benefit will come once it has been fully rolled out among the traditional river cruise demographic and once severe travel restrictions have been lifted.

“There will be those who book for 2022 more than for 2021,” Milan says. “We've just got to prepare to make sure we can take advantage of as many sales as we can.

“I think [river cruising] has the opportunity [to be at the forefront of the rebound]. There's a chance for agents who haven't necessarily sold river in the past to get clued up. It's going to be a natural move for a lot of customers to use a travel agent.” ❶

Fast Facts

Windstar Cruises' *Star Breeze* has undergone a complete renovation as part of the cruise line's \$250 million Star Plus Initiative. Carrying just 312 guests in spacious surroundings, the ship has expanded public areas, a re-imagined spa, infinity pool and fitness area, as well as refitted bathrooms in every suite and an all-new Star suite category. What makes *Star Breeze* so special – and more desirable in the current climate – is her ability to sail into small ports that large ships can't reach, offering a more intimate sailing without the crowds.

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6

PASSENGER DECKS

156

CABINS

1

POOL

3

DELUXE SUITES

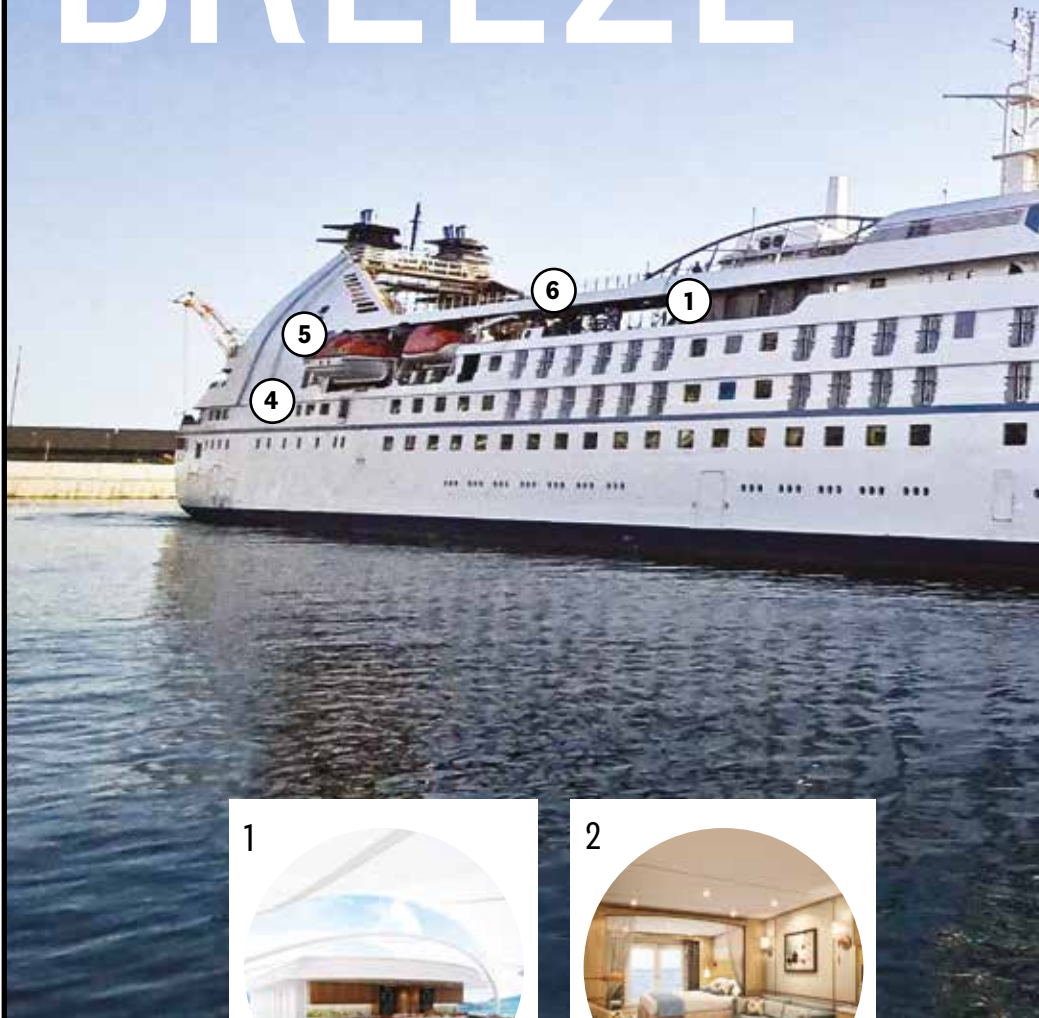
312

PASSENGERS

190

CREW

STAR BREEZE



1



Bars

Star Breeze has a selection of lounges and bars where passengers can relax and enjoy a casual cocktail or elegant nightcap. On the ship's top deck, the Star Bar is the place for al fresco cocktails and watching the world go by, while the Compass Rose is great for entertainment after dinner.

2



Cabins

An extensive refurbishment meant refreshed cabins for *Star Breeze*, with upgraded bathrooms in every suite and a new Star suite category. All 156 cabins are elegant suites, from the entry-level balcony and ocean-view suites to the grand owner's suite. All have tasteful and modern interiors.



3



Spa/gym

Star Breeze features a new spa – the World Spa by Windstar. Beauticians and therapists provide destination-themed treatments, such as the Northern Lights manicure and pedicure. The fitness centre has also been upgraded to include the latest equipment and amenities.

4



Entertainment

Windstar Cruises isn't a line that champions entertainment, but *Star Breeze* still offers guests a handful of entertainment options. Sultry bar Compass Rose hosts acoustic musicians after dinner, and the lounge also plays host to performances. Cruises include a deck barbecue with music, and a watersports platform.

5



Restaurants

For just 312 passengers, *Star Breeze* has an impressive array of dining options. In addition to the Amphora Restaurant, and casual Yacht Club and Veranda/Candles (which has been expanded), the ship now has Star Grill by Steven Raichlen, a modern eatery, and Spanish Cuadro 44, by Anthony Sasso.

6



Pool

Star Breeze has an infinity pool on the aft of the seventh deck, which offers unrivalled views of the ocean. There are also two whirlpools on the ship, one next to the infinity pool and the other at the front of the ship, giving guests ample opportunity to relax in the sun in glamorous surroundings.

Spotlight *on...*

Royal's new ship

Ben Bouldin, vice-president EMEA

Royal Caribbean International, shares his excitement about the line's new ship, *Odyssey of the Seas*

Welcoming *Odyssey of the Seas* to the Middle East is such an exhilarating prospect. When she sets sail from Haifa,

Israel, in May, she will not only be the newest ship in the Royal Caribbean fleet, but also one of the most innovative and technologically advanced ships in the world. The second ship of her class – after the launch of *Spectrum of the Seas* in Shanghai in 2019 – she will be the first Quantum Ultra-class ship to sail in Europe and the Middle East. Following her maiden season in Israel, she will sail from her homeport of Rome from spring 2022, visiting some of the most stunning destinations in Greece, Italy and Turkey.

It goes without saying how amazing those coastline views will be, especially from 300 feet above sea level in the iconic North Star glass capsule, affording 360-degree views. We're also hopeful that we'll be able to invite the trade on board to see the ship for themselves in 2022.

Entertainment for all

Odyssey of the Seas boasts all the Quantum-class Royal Caribbean favourites, and then some. For instance, Seaplex – the largest indoor activity space at sea – features a sports court, bumper cars, laser tag and an interactive arcade with augmented reality walls and floors. This two-level playground is also



“The ship will offer a holiday worth waiting for, that’s for sure”

home to Playmakers Sports Bar & Arcade, where sports fans will find TVs at every angle as well as delicious treats.

Up on the top deck there is the signature FlowRider surf simulator and skydiving simulator, Ripcord by iFly, as well as a 40-foot rock wall and Sky Pad, the bungee trampoline experience that transports guests to another time, place or planet using a VR headset.

For guests who want to unwind, *Odyssey of the Seas* has a vibrant, two-level pool deck with two open-air, resort-style pools and four whirlpools. Nearby, The Lime & Coconut serves up

prime pool-front views and cocktails. Guests can also enjoy grab-and-go authentic Mexican fare at El Loco Fresh.

For the little ones there's Splashaway Bay, an aqua park that includes colourful waterslides, fountains, water cannons and more.

Meanwhile, adults can retreat to the Solarium, an exclusive

space located on the top deck, including swimming pools and whirlpools, a full-service bar and daybeds.

Across the ship, entertainment is punctuated by high-tech signature productions in the Royal Theatre and Two70. Fusing art and technology, Two70 has 270-degree panoramic windows with sweeping ocean views from an expansive living room, which is transformed in plain sight into a 135-foot-wide and 22-foot-tall screen, captivating onlookers.

As day turns into night, the iconic venue at the aft of the ship becomes a multidimensional theatre, where a troupe of six agile Roboscreens come to life in sync with music, special effects and live performers and aerialists.

Guests looking to hit up the dance floor can then head to Music Hall for a set list of live performances.

As for the dining options on *Odyssey of the Seas*, there is so much choice, including Teppanyaki. Also joining the line-up is Giovanni's Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar, Royal Caribbean's new take on its signature Italian trattoria.

Odyssey of the Seas will offer a holiday worth waiting for, that's for sure. 🌟

Odyssey of the Seas will be one of the most technologically advanced ships in the world



Work continues on the new vessel to ready her for her debut later this year

Win at *selling*

A different experience

MSC Cruises UK & Ireland sales director
Steve Williams talks through some key aspects
of selling new on-board measures

Guests rely on travel agents because of the excellent service they provide – this includes everything from sharing crucial information and keeping them up to date with developments and changes, to recommendations about what to book on board. Now more than ever, this dialogue is very important. Guests need to feel informed, reassured and confident in what they are booking.

This could mean sharing details with clients on extensive health and safety protocols – including those at MSC Cruises that allowed us to set sail in August following the global shutdown of operations for all lines – or letting clients know about stress-free booking policies that offer maximum flexibility.

MSC Cruises continues to lead the way with its comprehensive and robust protocols. These are built around a nine-pillar strategy that includes universal testing of all guests, at least twice per voyage, and crew who are tested at least three times before embarkation and weekly on board. In addition, it includes protected shore excursions organised as ‘social bubbles’



A robust strategy on board is central to MSC's operations



“Many of our guests have said they feel safer on board than ashore”

and specially designed ventilation for the ships, as well as the measures ashore, such as social distancing aided by reduced capacity on board and the wearing of masks when this isn't possible.

Hold their hands

Since resuming some sailings in August, many of our guests have stated they feel safer on board than ashore. All elements of the guest experience have been carefully considered so we can deliver the high standards our guests expect.

There have, of course, been some changes to the on-board experience. It's important for agents to focus on guiding clients through the protocols that have been introduced, including pre-booking activities to help keep group numbers low, a table-only service at dinner to reduce contact during peak dining times and the use of face masks in public spaces to ensure every passenger feels comfortable and safe during their cruise.

These simple measures not only maintain the high standard of the cruise experience, but they also allow guests

to feel more in control of their own holiday expectations and plans.

It's also imperative for agents to highlight that the majority of facilities and programmes on board are still available for use and that, where restrictions have been put in place, they have been strategically implemented to cause minimum disruption.

It's important to remember that these protocols can be dialled up and dialled down to reflect the changing nature of the situation ashore. The cruise experience may be slightly different, but it will still be the amazing holiday that guests have come to expect and love. 📌

Selling TIPS

Open lines of communication with clients. Due to the fluid nature of the situation, there will be more changes than usual so it's super important to be aware of these and provide clients with timely updates

• Understand the health and safety protocols and the stress-free booking policies. This will help reassure clients of their safety on board and give them the confidence to book, knowing that their terms are flexible

• Know the ships and the products – for example, MSC has exciting new itineraries on *MSC Magnifica* from Southampton, as well as two new ships – *MSC Virtuosa*, launching in April 2021, and *MSC Seashore*, later this summer

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Saga's holidays and cruises are exclusively for the over 50s, but a travel companion can be 40+. Fare shown is per person based on two people sharing the lowest Standard Balcony cabin available at the time of booking. From 1st June 2021 cruises private chauffeur service is extended to 250 miles by road each way. \$All Saga cruises include optional travel insurance with up to £5m coronavirus emergency medical cover, underwritten by AXA. *Please call or visit saga.co.uk/loveit for details. NTA-SC4907

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by Great Lakes Insurance SE, UK Branch, or a price reduction if not required. Cover is subject to medical screening. #All inclusive includes a choice of wines with lunch and dinner, house-branded spirits and

SPEAKING UP FOR CRUISE

Industry experts provide their
thoughts on the current state of play
in the cruise sector



As a business we are 100 per cent dedicated to the trade, and working with our travel agent partners is part of our DNA. It's been an incredibly challenging time to be a travel agent, but I firmly believe that, now more than ever, a good travel agent is worth their weight in gold.

With travel advice changing and agents dealing with multiple partners with varying policies, agents should not be afraid to underline their value. I think the future is bright for selling on service, not on price.

To support our agents, we have changed our business. As in-person meetings and events were not feasible, we went digital.

At the last count, since March 2020 we have conducted in excess of 2,500 virtual cruise events and it has been a vital part of how we have supported our travel



**Jamie
Loizou**

UK MD
AMAWATERWAYS

partners, educated their guests and introduced river cruising to thousands of new people.

We recently launched the latest module of our AmaAcademy online training platform, which focuses on one of our key rivers, the Danube.

There are a lot of new enquiries as agents look to diversify their product offering and benefit from

excellent commission. Clients are attracted to river cruising due to the smaller numbers on board and the ability to explore destinations independently. This is a key driver behind us adding the Danube, as this is a real new-to-cruise river.

We have always innovated as a business, from introducing bicycles and wellness hosts to building the double-width *AmaMagna*, which offers a choice of four restaurants and the largest suites on the rivers, and 2020 was no different.

We were the only luxury river line to cruise last season, sailing for four months from July to November on the Rhine. This valuable time operating allowed us to perfect our health and safety protocols, and we received excellent guest feedback.

Wearing masks while moving around on the ship did not diminish the guest experience, with 97 per cent saying they would recommend AmaWaterways to a friend. We also went on sale with our new Egypt programme and are looking forward as 2021 sees the launch of the *AmaDahlia* on the Nile and *AmaLucia* and *AmaSiena* on the Rhine.

People are definitely prioritising safety and flexibility when it comes to planning their future holidays, and they are also looking to spend more time travelling, so we can benefit from pent-up demand.

**“We have always
innovated as a
business and 2020
was no different”**



We know from speaking to our loyal guests and travel partners that within the luxury sector there is considerable pent-up demand to cruise again. We are seeing a growth in confidence among these consumers to commit to having an incredible, exotic holiday to look forward to, whether that is in 2021, 2022, or even 2023.

January's news regarding the vaccine has brought with it a healthy increase in business for later this year and for 2022, especially. With this in mind, Seabourn is launching new products even earlier, alongside strong campaigns and booking incentives. For example, our travel partners can now reserve their clients their choice of suite on our 2023 Grand Voyages.

Both our Grand World and Grand South America & Antarctica cruises depart from Miami on 6 January 2023 and come with very attractive early booking options.

We have also launched 2022 Europe, Alaska and Canada cruises to offer guests the chance to book now and benefit from our View & Verandah campaign offers.

We fully understand and appreciate the role our travel



Lynn Narraway

UK & IRELAND MD
SEABOURN

partners play in the success of our industry. To that end, we have been committed to supporting partners throughout recent times by protecting 100 per cent commission on paid bookings.

We've also continued to offer partners the tools to help them grow their luxury business, via our Insider newsletter, personal video calls with our business development team and our Seabourn Academy online learning. We have encouraged agents to opt into our Groups

Programme, where they can hold a minimum of just five double-occupancy suites per voyage for their clients to enjoy extra on-board spend (and, for the agent partner, enhanced commission).

It is our intention to launch Seabourn's annual Partner Appreciation event later this year, which is likely to include an enhanced Groups offer among many other helpful learning and business tools.

Also, travellers are thinking more about the environmental impact of their holidays. When our purpose-built PC6 ultra-luxury expedition ship, *Seabourn Venture*, arrives in December 2021, she will definitely tick many of these boxes.

The ship will run on marine gas oil, which is the most preferred clean fuel used on ships, for 365 days a year. She will also be equipped with a dynamic positioning system, so will never need to drop anchor.

Seabourn is also moving to e-documents for all cruises, which agent partners or their clients may download directly from the (password protected) booked guests' area of the website.

While CLIA Global is still working very diligently on our behalf to return to cruise again, all our brands are taking this opportunity to prepare our ships. Carnival Corporation has always adhered to the highest and strictest health and safety protocols within travel, and we know that when our guests are ready to join us for the most fantastic cruise experiences, then we will be ready to welcome them.

“We’ve continued to offer partners the tools to help them grow luxury business”

It feels like a lifetime ago that we were ready to launch TUI River Cruises back in March, which ended up being the start of the first lockdown. We're optimistic, though, about the future.

We're looking forward to launching our ships and we are excited about sailing on Europe's best waterways.

As such, we've taken extra measures to ensure safe and enjoyable cruises, introducing new protocols on board, from deep-cleaning our ships to ensuring our crew have been given full Covid-19 training.

And because we know we are living in uncertain times and that people may feel anxious about travelling, we're being super flexible and ensuring we have everything covered to give people maximum peace of mind.

We have free amends on all new bookings for summer 2021 and customers can change their holiday for free up to 21 days before departure. Plus, guests can book with confidence thanks to our TUI River Cruises travel promise, guaranteeing TUI standards and flexibility if the cruise can't go



CHRIS HACKNEY

MD OF CRUISE
TUI UK & IRELAND

ahead. There is also our Covid-19 cover, a package of benefits including free changes if customers get Covid-19 before they travel, and overseas medical assistance as part of our Holiday to Home insurance policy.

We're always looking at ways we can offer our customers more choice and flexibility, and that's why we are offering shorter durations of three or four nights to provide the perfect option for those looking for a mini getaway.

In addition, we have more cabins available for solo customers, with a

current no-single-supplement offer. What's more, *TUI Maya* will become all-inclusive for summer 2022, providing even more variation.

Travel agents are hugely important to us and so we provide the same price to all our customers and agent partners, regardless of the channel they use to book. We've also set up a specialist river cruise contact centre team to answer any queries from our customers and agents.

The CLIA community has been so important to us since our inception and we've been able to become really involved, hosting regular training and webinars for our agents. We're committed to strengthening our relationships with travel agent partners and we're keen to work with new agents, so I encourage those who are interested to get in touch. 📞

“We’re ensuring we have everything covered for maximum peace of mind”





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6

OF THE BEST

Music CRUISES

Ships were made for music, and thankfully there are a host of special itineraries designed to showcase some of the best sounds, as **Isabella Sullivan** discovers

1 Kiss of life

Possibly the most legendary music cruise of all, the KISS Cruise (AKA the KISS Kruise) is back for a 10th edition in 2021. The sailing is a total must for lovers of the iconic band, where NCL's *Norwegian Jewel* plays host to several original band members.

Highlights include performances and autograph sessions, and each passenger is guaranteed at least one show with an original performer. The six-day sailing, scheduled to depart on 29 October 2021, will sail round-trip from Miami via Harvest Caye, Belize and Roatan. Clients should join the waiting list as soon as possible.

2 All that jazz

The Jazz Cruise has been a staple of the cruise calendar for more than 20 years, offering guests an immersive jazz experience with nearly 100 musicians from around the world. Guests gather on board to see some of the best musicians on stage, with 225 hours of music, including performing groups, jam sessions, jazz duels and big bang shows. This unique festival is scheduled to take place from 17-24 January 2022. Prices for the trip start at £1,350pp. This one, too, is selling quickly.

All itineraries are subject to change due to current travel restrictions

3 Country cruising

The Outlaw Country Cruise is currently scheduled to sail from Miami on 25 February 2022.

Playing host to a selection of legendary country music artists, the six-night voyage, on board *Norwegian Pearl*, promises a one-of-a-kind experience, with theme nights a particular highlight, as guests do their best to emulate their heroes with country-inspired outfits. Prices for the cruise start from £933pp and this includes multiple live performances and all meals while on board.



4 Pure rock

Due to travel uncertainty, the 2021 spectacular that is the Rock and Romance cruise has been pushed back to 2022. This is a cruise that lovers of music from the 70s won't want to miss, steeped in nostalgia and a mix of performances by celebs and musicians – with added activities like a trivia contest and Q&As with the performers. So far, the lineup (which is subject to change) features Foreigner, Air Supply, 10cc, and others. The seven-night voyage will sail from Miami on 19 February 2022, with prices from approximately £1,628pp for the week.



2

5 Classical Cunard

On 12 September 2021, Cunard is planning to run its special transatlantic sailing featuring the UK's National Symphony Orchestra, offering wonderful recitals on board *Queen Mary 2*. During the week-long sailing, passengers will be treated to two performances from the orchestra. Renowned conductor Anthony Inglis will lead the orchestra, and also take part in a Q&A session. Prices start from £1,199pp.

6 The boat that rocks

With a name like The Rock Boat, it's not hard to imagine what this cruise will be about. Current plans say that this voyage will return to the seas on 7 November 2021, sailing a five-day itinerary to the Caribbean and the Bahamas. The voyage sees some incredible rock bands take to the stage. This year's ship is *Norwegian Jewel* and prices start from approximately £677pp. ①



6



5



The **RICHES** *of* **RUSSIA**

Post travel restrictions, clients should explore the magnificent cities and rural heartland of the world's largest country on a river cruise, writes **Jeannine Williamson**





Moscow's underground system was built by Stalin as a 'palace for the people' and is an impressive attraction

From *Anna Karenina* to *War and Peace*, the sweeping history, culture and romance of Russia have been captured in novels, films and TV dramas, but nothing can prepare clients for the incredible reality of a trip to the world's biggest country by land mass.

Take Moscow, for example, where even the underground system, built by Stalin as a 'palace for the people', is a jaw-dropping tourist attraction, with stations adorned with imposing statues, vast murals and glittering chandeliers.

Classic cities

There are multiple advantages to exploring Russia by water. First, its two greatest cities are only 400 miles apart as the crow flies and are linked by the Volga River, lakes and smaller waterways.

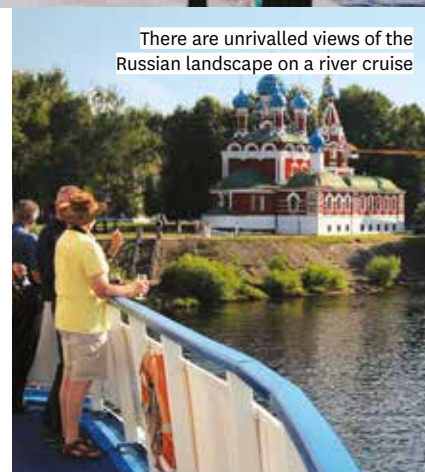
Cruises with both cities on the itinerary are bookended by overnight stays, either on the vessels or in hotels, and excursions take in all the main sights. In Moscow, clients will visit Red Square, dominated by the landmark onion-domed St Basil's Cathedral, and the grounds of the Kremlin, the fortified complex that is the seat of the Russian government.

At the other end of the tour, beautiful St Petersburg, founded in 1703 by Peter the Great, is criss-crossed by canals and often described as the 'Venice of the north'.

Sightseeing highlights include a trip to the Hermitage, the former winter palace of Russian tsars. It is now one of the world's largest museums and houses works by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Van Gogh. Itineraries also include an excursion to the UNESCO-listed Peterhof



Vodohod's *Mustai Karim* is the new five-star vessel that will take clients along the Volga



There are unrivalled views of the Russian landscape on a river cruise

ITINERARIES

Vodohod

● The 11-day Real Russia cruise on *Nizhny Novgorod* is priced from approximately £1,170pp, departing 2 October 2021.

🔗 vodohod.co.uk

Scenic

● 14-night Imperial Russia itinerary from Moscow to Stalingrad (Volgograd) on *Scenic Tsar* is priced from £4,145pp, departing 25 September 2022, including flights.

🔗 scenic.co.uk

Viking River Cruises

● 12-night Waterways of the Tsars sailing from Moscow to St Petersburg on *Viking Akun* includes a private visit to the Hermitage and is priced from £3,395pp, departing 18 May 2022, with flights.

🔗 vikingrivercruises.co.uk



The Peterhof Palace is one of Russia's most enticing attractions

“Vodohod hopes that by partnering with CLIA we can educate the industry about the benefits of cruising in this region”

Palace, with its ornate golden rooms and fountain-filled gardens.

In addition to the fact that river cruises provide a relaxing and fully escorted experience in a country where language barriers can be an issue and it's tiring to cover long distances by road, there's a noteworthy difference between river cruises in Russia and in mainland Europe: the size of the vessels.

It's worth pointing out to both repeaters and new-to-cruise clients that in this region ships are not limited in size by locks or low bridges and so have larger public areas and more facilities, such as lecture theatres. Viking River Cruises, which operated its first river

cruise programme in Russia in 1997, owns its own vessels, and other lines feature cruises on chartered ships, which reflect the standards and price points of their core river product. Lines can also help their customers with any red tape

they encounter, such as visa applications and issuing visa support letters.

Demystifying Russia

Last year long-established Russian river cruise tour operator Vodohod Russian River Cruises partnered with CLIA to build brand awareness across Europe.

The affiliation brings Vodohod into CLIA Europe's wider community of cruise lines, travel agents and executive partners. The inclusion of Vodohod, said CLIA UK & Ireland director Andy Harmer, is also a sign of long-term consumer confidence and resilience in the cruise industry. Vodohod marketing director

Mario Bounas adds: “The immense Russia waterways and Vodohod as a brand largely remain a secret to the international river cruise traveller, but we hope that by partnering with CLIA we can demystify Russia as a destination and help to educate the industry about the benefits of Russian river cruising with Vodohod.

“Vodohod delivered in excess of 400 cruise departures to more than 35,000 domestic Russian guests between May and November last year. With a hotly anticipated international market on the horizon, things at Vodohod are looking pretty good.”

As the largest Russian river cruise company, Vodohod has eight four and five-star vessels dedicated to the British and international market, including the new *Mustai Karim*, the first brand-new five-star vessel to sail on the Volga, plus the refurbished *Maxim Gorky*, which is offering unique itineraries on the Yenisei River in Siberia.



Bars like those on Emerald Waterways' ships specialise in vodka cocktails

Scenic has launched 14-night trips for 2022

Vodohod is also the only line with sailings along the Yenisei – the largest river to flow into the Arctic Ocean – and this pioneering voyage will tick all the boxes for adventurous clients looking to sail through the rugged landscapes of this part of the world in comfort.

Sample the vodka

On every cruise clients can expect memorable sights and experiences, such as on-board vodka tastings, regional dishes, and Matryoshka doll-painting classes. Elsewhere, there are opportunities to visit locals in their homes, attend a Russian ballet and – on Volga sailings – to see exceptional landmarks such as Kizhi Island, which is home to relocated historic buildings.

Viking River Cruises head of sales Neil Barclay reports a healthy demand for the line's Waterways of the Tsars cruise tour and as a result bookings have been opened for 2023. He says: "Bookings have proved particularly popular

with travellers who are eager to experience the celebrated midnight sun, due to Russia's close location to the Arctic Circle.

"Viking has extensive experience navigating Russian waters and offers travellers the opportunity to experience the real Russia with a trusted brand.

"We have forged strong relationships allowing guests rare insight into some of Russia's most precious cultural treasures, such as a visit to the world-famous Fabergé Museum and access to the Hermitage.

For clients in search of a longer break, Scenic has launched its 2022 programme, which includes the 14-night Jewels of Russia and Imperial Russia itineraries with departures from May to September, and September to October, respectively.

Meanwhile, sister brand Emerald Waterways is chartering the newly refurbished *MS Nizhny Novgorod*, which is scheduled to sail the 10-night Imperial Charms of Russia itinerary. ●

Selling TIPS

Explain to repeaters and new-to-cruise clients that Russian ships are often larger than European vessels and can therefore offer more facilities and amenities for guests

• Expert on-board lectures and activities provide an in-depth insight into Russian history and culture – expertise that can be hard to find elsewhere

• Volga cruises allow ample time to discover Moscow and St Petersburg, while a majority of Russian river itineraries explore remote destinations that are hard to reach on land tours

• Cruise lines can help clients through any red tape with visa applications and visa support letters

A majestic SAILING

Last autumn, **Dave Monk** joined
The Majestic Line's *Glen Shiel* to explore
the beautiful Scottish landscape

Checking in for our cruise is, to say the least, informal. "You'll be David and Amanda," the captain says as he ticks off our names on a clipboard before holding up a plastic gun to check our temperatures.

That's it – no passport checks, security scans, keycards, documents, queues or even a terminal. We simply give our luggage to the crew and walk along the pontoon at Oban, Scotland, to our ship, *Glen Shiel*.

After climbing the four steps on board we are greeted by Majestic's managing director, Ken Grant, who by great

Over the next six nights, we bond closer while staying physically apart

good fortune also happens to be an epidemiologist of 25 years' experience.

As the engines fire up and Oban drifts into the distance, the circular folly perched on its hill like a stone crown, we and the seven other passengers begin to acclimatise to cruising in the world changed by Covid-19.

Keeping a safe distance

Over the next six nights, we bond closer together while staying physically apart. The nearest we get to each other is sitting around the large table for meals but, with the three couples naturally huddled in pairs, the six of us and the three single travellers on board are able to maintain an invisible barrier between each household.

Elsewhere on the ship, we sit in carefully arranged chairs in the lounge, walk around deck or relax in our cabins. The only time that we and the four crew are required to wear face masks is when taking the tender ashore – the maximum number of guests on each transfer is six – and when entering shops on land.

We wash our hands and use the sanitiser even more than on a normal

cruise. Our temperatures are checked daily. As a group of 60-somethings, we have all been careful during lockdown and feel confident that we are all doing what is right on this trip to protect ourselves and others.

Our voyage is titled Mull and her Islands and Inlets. There is no itinerary as such, just a map dotted with places where we might go, in any order, depending on the fickle Scottish weather. It is left to our captain, Neil White, to decide where to travel and how long to stay, with the single proviso that he gets us back to Oban by the Friday.

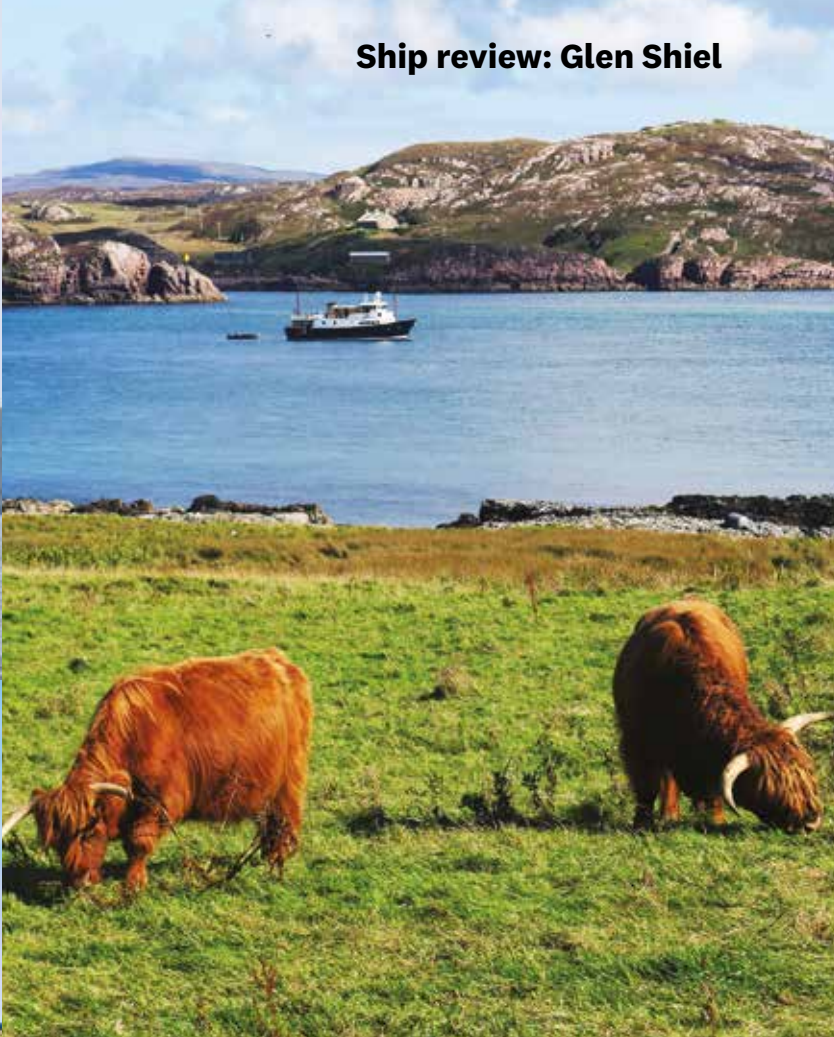
On the way to Iona, with its abbey, nunnery and white-sand beaches, we are joined by a playful pod of at least five dolphins, which race right alongside the starboard bow, occasionally leaping from the water as if to show us the way.

The tiny island is home to only 120 people but welcomes 130,000 visitors every year. The islanders survived several Viking attacks before a community of Benedictine monks was founded on the site in around 1200. Today, the abbey site is a peaceful haven reached by a track leading through one of the best-preserved medieval nunneries in Britain.

With the fine weather holding, we decide to tick off another highlight and head to Staffa to sail the tender into Fingal's Cave, where Jane McDonald

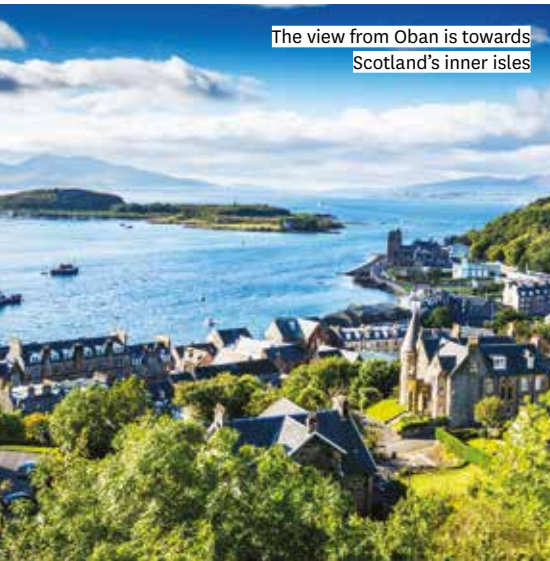


Ship review: Glen Shiel



Clockwise from top left: Glen Shiel and one of her sister ships, Glen Etive; the glorious scenery of Scotland is The Majestic Line's speciality; Fingal's Cave, famous for its connections with Jane McDonald; MD Ken Grant, co-founder of The Majestic Line; Neil White is proud to be the ship's captain; a quiet welcome awaits visitors to the island of Iona





The view from Oban is towards Scotland's inner isles

Selling TIPS

The Majestic Line does things a little differently from many other cruise line operators. The intimate atmosphere and touches of personal service provide a great holiday option for those who are planning to celebrate a special occasion

This is a line that is suited to guests who are happy to leave behind the mod cons and fast pace of modern life for something a little slower and more serene. It is certainly not for those looking for multiple entertainment options or on-board rollercoasters

The Majestic Line visits some of the most beautiful and secluded parts of the west coast of Scotland and the Hebrides – perfect for a private cruise charter with friends and family



Tobermory is a much-loved port of call for cruise passengers to Mull

broke into song on another Majestic Line vessel for her *Channel 5* cruise series.

Our stay is briefer and rougher, as the waves begin to get choppier, but it is still long enough to marvel at the hexagonal basalt columns – similar to the ones on the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland – that create the atmosphere and acoustics of a natural cathedral. Bobbing around in our small vessel, we are more concerned about not crashing into the rocks, but the skilled seamanship of our engineer, Dave, steers us safely out of the cave and back towards our waiting ship.

The ship with a difference

When the waves begin to ease a little, I venture up the single flight of stairs to the top deck of the ship, almost expecting to find a figure in a sou'wester desperately fighting with a huge wheel

and drenched in spray. Instead, Neil is sitting calmly in the wheelhouse, hands by his sides, occasionally nudging the autopilot to adjust its course.

Majestic is the 30th cruise line I've sailed on and it's different from every other one. For a start, guests are allowed to refer to its vessels as boats without sharp intakes of breath and indignant shakes of the head from experienced cruisers.

There is no casino, spa, pool, theatre on board – actually no entertainment of any kind. The cabins have no keys – there's not even a lock – and no television. In fact, the generator is turned off at around 9.30 at night (lights and other vital functions run on batteries) and isn't switched on again until 7.30 in the morning, ready for the kettle to go on and guests to prepare for breakfast. So, phones and anything



Some aspects of this cruise may differ from what is described due to current travel restrictions

else that needs charging have to be plugged in during the day.

Our cabin is on the main deck, just a matter of three steps from the lounge at one end and 10 from the dining room at the other. The other guests' rooms are on the deck below.

Ken Grant, whom we met when we boarded, and Andy Thoms set up the company in 2004, naming it after a fictional line in the Scottish TV series *Para Handy*, where a sacked engineer boasts to his former captain about being offered a new job by the imaginary Majestic Line 'with its funnels made of gold'. Hence, the gold-painted funnels on Majestic Line ships.

Unique experiences

Guests never go hungry on *Glen Shiel*. After breakfast we are offered elevenses

– tea and a biscuit – before lunch, which is something like a jacket potato or gnocchi. There is tea and cake in the afternoon, then nibbles and dinner, at around 7.30pm – a wonderfully presented and delicious dish of seafood or meat followed by a dessert or cheese.

The ship tends to anchor for meals but in between it sails into lochs, round headlands and to islands, offering guests the chance to tender ashore in an open metal boat with a landing craft-style bow for beach landings, if necessary. However, weather being as it is, there is plenty of time to simply relax with a good book in the lounge, make new friends or try one of the many malts or gins on display in the small bar.

Cabins are comfortable but basic, with bedside cabinets, a tall though narrow wardrobe and room for three cases under

the bed. Each room is en-suite and I am reassured to find a powerful shower.

When I sailed on the biggest cruise ship in 2009 – at that time *Oasis of the Seas* – I praised its many features but said it wasn't for everyone. Nor, of course, at the other end of the scale, is *Glen Shiel*. That's the beauty of cruising – there's a ship and a trip to suit just about everyone.

If guests enjoy personal service, the intimacy of a small group, beautiful scenery and quiet time and space, The Majestic Line is for them. 📞

Details

● **Six-night** Mull and her Inlets and Islands cruise aboard *Glen Tarsan*, departing 4 June 2022, is priced at £2,310pp.
📞 themajesticline.co.uk

The last word

Swan Hellenic VP of marketing **Mario Bounas** explains the plans behind resurrecting the brand and the new ships launching this year

There's no doubt that if I had a pound for every time the question about the wisdom of launching a new cruise brand during a pandemic has been posed, I would not be short of a bob or two.

However, contrary to popular opinion, we think there's never been a better time.

We've been fortunate, compared with most of the industry, in that we haven't had to suspend operations and lay up ships. I have watched in admiration as our fellow cruise companies have worked tirelessly to rebook, refund their clients and set up new protocols and procedures to ensure guests' safety.

For the Swan Hellenic team, it's been a very different time, focused on our vision for the future – to become leaders in expedition cultural cruising.

What's more, we haven't launched a new entity, rather we've breathed new life into a brand that already had its own rich heritage and a hugely loyal fanbase.



“I have admired the way our fellow cruise companies have worked to rebook, refund and begin setting up new protocols”

This is a brand that perfectly embodies pioneering trips to lesser-known locations and a shore excursion programme that will provide extraordinary in-destination experiences, all backed up by world-class lectures and speakers.

a long history of building polar vessels that can showcase all aspects of these incredible regions. One of the jewels in our crown will almost certainly be exploring the Russian Far East, where our innovative and exciting itineraries will allow us to access one of the world's last great – and largely unexplored – wildernesses.

The first two ships will be built to Polar Code 5 standard, incorporating the latest technology. Battery packs will ensure noiseless and emission-free sailing to protect natural habitats. The ships will embrace the very latest health and safety standards, including a higher level of filtration for the heating, ventilating and air conditioning system, underlining our commitment to guest health.

We're a resilient bunch in the industry, with a lengthy history of being able to deal with crises, adapting and creating safety protocols and solutions that allow the sector to emerge stronger and more resolute.

Covid-19 may seem to be an all-encompassing situation but I am optimistic that the processes advocated by CLIA, alongside the tech that companies are embracing, will result in even more incredible cruise experiences in the future.

What the market is demonstrating makes for a positive future, with a move towards smaller, more exclusive ships and trips – whether it's due to the fact that anniversaries and celebrations were missed, trips were postponed, or just a desire to seize the day. Let's face it, everyone is suffering a little from video-call fatigue. 🎧

Swan Hellenic's first ship, *Minerva*, is due to launch at the end of the year



Jewels in the crown

In November 2021, the first of our three ships, the 152-guest *Minerva*, will dock in London, prior to her maiden voyage in Antarctica later that month. Within a year, two additional ships will be deployed, giving discerning guests with curious minds the chance to experience and see what others don't.

Our ships are being built at the Helsinki shipyard, which has



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6th July – Glasgow

7th July (STC) – Edinburgh

7th September – Birmingham

14th September – Northampton

21st September – Cardiff

5th October – Chester

19th October – Exeter

20th October – Bournemouth

9th November – Southampton

16th November – Newcastle Upon Tyne

30th November – Ipswich

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9th December – Leeds



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Contact: Paul.Olvhoj@orkney.gov.uk