

Your comprehensive guide to selling cruise holidays

cruisetradenews.com

ISSUE 117 | MARCH 2023

cruise

TRADE NEWS

GRAND ADVENTURES

**How Fred Olsen's
longer voyages just got
bigger and better**

In association with



Fred.Olsen Cruise Lines

CTN INVESTIGATES

Is brand loyalty a
thing of the past?

WAVE AWARDS

A special roundtable
with the 2022 winners

EASTER SPECIAL

How to play and win in our
new Easter competition



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PER STATEROOM ON 2024 CRUISES*

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Cruise Trade News

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Editor's Letter

WELCOME TO THE MARCH ISSUE

With what seems to be unrelenting speed, we are fast approaching Easter and yet another milestone in the year.

We wanted to mark this time with something extra special and, as with our annual Christmas cruise advent calendar, something that will provide a little added cheer to your day-to-day jobs. So, with plenty of fanfare, we are launching our first *Cruise Trade News* Easter egg hunt, in collaboration with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines.

I won't give it all away here, so see inside for the full details on how you can get involved and what you need to do to get your hands on a fun treat.

Our investigation this issue sees us tackle the topic of brand loyalty and how important this is to clients when booking their next cruise. This stems from recent research showing that the destination and ports of call on an itinerary are inching their way up the decision-making table. We also take a closer look at what's on board P&O Cruises' new ship, *Arvia*, and outline the top tips for selling mini cruises to convince new-to-cruise customers to take the plunge.

Elsewhere, AmaWaterways managing director Jamie Loizou discusses the river line's focus on trade partnerships, as well as how it is



Above: Sailing on A-Rosa Sena

innovating and expanding its itineraries. We also stay on the rivers for this month's Cruise Review, sailing on A-Rosa River Cruises' hybrid-powered ship *A-Rosa Sena*.

Last but not least, you'll find a roundtable interview with a selection of winners from the Wave Awards 2022, who explain what winning meant to them and what trends they are seeing for this year and beyond.

Enjoy the issue.

Gary Peters

Editor, *Cruise Trade News*

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Cruise Trade News

The Briefing

THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR CRUISE NEWS

IN BRIEF

A-Rosa brochure launch

● A-Rosa River Cruises has launched its first dedicated brochure for the UK market. Covering cruises in 2023 and 2024, it “aims to showcase the brand’s flexible approach to river cruising”. The line added that the brochure will be “an important tool” for travel agents.

Allura to join Oceania fleet

● Oceania Cruises has officially named its second Allura-class ship. The 1,200-guest *Allura* is the eighth vessel for the line and a sister ship to *Vista*, which sets sail in May 2023. *Allura* is currently under construction in Italy and will sail its maiden voyage in spring 2025.

APPOINTMENTS



● Azamara has announced the appointment of **Adam Morris** as UK business development manager. Morris will “invest time with existing agent partners, encouraging deeper involvement with Azamara”, the line said.



● Ambassador Cruise Line has brought in **Karen Cameron** as divisional sales manager, covering the north of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Cameron will develop existing commercial relationships to maximise sales opportunities and build new agent and trade partnerships.



Ships like P&O's *Ventura* are attracting a new level of interest from holidaymakers

TRENDS

Cruise ‘more popular than ever’

More people than ever are looking to book a cruise, with research showing a 10 per cent increase in the number of holidaymakers in the market for a getaway at sea.

That’s according to a new survey, carried out by Cruise.co.uk and completed by almost 8,000 respondents. The cruise specialist agency asked those who took part how likely they were to book a sailing during the next 12 months.

The results revealed that over half (51 per cent) were certain or very likely to book a cruise starting in a UK port, a nine per cent increase compared to

2022. Similarly, 41 per cent of people said they were certain or very likely to book a fly-cruise departing from overseas, up by 11 per cent year-on-year.

Cruise.co.uk deputy managing director Tony Andrews said: “We’re delighted to see demand for cruise continue to increase, not least because we’re confident a holiday at sea can’t be beaten on value for money. The best part is, there really is a cruise to suit everyone – from thrill-seeking families, to adventurous solo travellers, to couples looking for a relaxing getaway – they’ll all find an escape they love.”

THE NEWS YOU NEED

Subscribe to the *Cruise Trade News* newsletter for all the latest cruise news, features, destination guides, interviews and more.

SIGN UP NOW AT cruisetradenews.com



Explora I will showcase lesser-known ports with a wide range of onshore activities

EXCURSIONS

Explora unveils shore excursions

Explora Journeys has revealed details of its inaugural set of shore excursions for *Explora I*, the first of up to six ships to join its fleet.

The luxury cruise line will offer eight individual sailings as part of its Northern European programme, “showcasing a balanced blend of well-known destinations and lesser-known, rarely visited ports”, a statement said, such as Copenhagen, Edinburgh and Ísafjörður in Iceland.

Excursions will be tailored to small, intimate groups, from two to 25 guests, with an “emphasis on exclusive, off-the-beaten-path encounters and focused on a slower pace of travel”, Explora said. In Norway, guests will be able to

join a guided Nordic walking tour and board a Viking ship for a journey to an 18th-century fishing village.

Meanwhile, in Denmark the cruise line will offer a kayaking tour of Copenhagen, while in the Faroe Islands experiences such as open-air yoga sessions or a hike to the floating lake in Leitisvatn will be available. Elsewhere, a helicopter flight will take guests over volcanic craters in Reykjavik.

Other experiences will also be available in the Netherlands, as well as in the UK, including VIP access to the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. *Explora I* will be named on 8 July 2023 in Civitavecchia, before heading to Southampton to depart for its maiden cruise on 17 July.

LUXURY

Crystal ‘reborn’ with new vision

Crystal Cruises has officially relaunched under a new name and vision. The luxury cruise line will now be known as Crystal – Exceptional at Sea, starting a “new era” for the brand, A&K Travel Group said in a statement.

Crystal Serenity and *Crystal Symphony* have been refurbished with larger suites and now include “artisanal finishes, cutting-edge on-board wellness and world-class dining and entertainment”, the line added. A&K Travel Group purchased the ships last summer.

The first sailings on offer will be a Mediterranean cruise on *Crystal Serenity*, departing 31 July from Marseille, followed by *Crystal Symphony*, scheduled to depart on 1 September from Athens.



Crystal has relaunched with newly renovated ships for guests

Crystal president Jack Anderson said: “I am delighted to announce that Crystal is reborn, with *Crystal Serenity* and *Crystal Symphony* reimagined and enhancements made to every part of our guests’ journey.”



Bringing people together

Cruise Trade News’

David Broad reveals some of the cruise line partners who are supporting the Cruise Challenge in 2023, and why you should sign up

The start of the year has seen a great surge in cruise bookings and let’s hope that continues. As I carry on working with cruise lines to finalise the 2023 Cruise Challenge events, it’s becoming apparent that training is creeping up the importance agenda. Returning to travel, or indeed selling travel for the first time, can be a very daunting thing, but by asking the right questions, the process becomes that much simpler.

You can also boost your knowledge by joining us at the Cruise Challenge. Our next event is on 22 March in Colchester, at the Wivenhoe House Hotel, followed by Liverpool on 20 April. So, come along, meet cruise lines and learn more about the current trends in the sector.

For 2023, we are working with the likes of Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, Silversea, Riviera Travel and Oceania Cruises. We’ll also hear from Ponant, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Tauck, Windstar Cruises and Princess Cruises. You can see a full list of Cruise Challenge dates and locations at cruisechallenge.evessicloud.com.

There are other ways to learn, including on our Knowledge Hub on the *Cruise Trade News* website. Don’t forget, you can also join my exclusive trade-only Facebook page, Agents Club by Cruise Trade News.

What's in it for you?

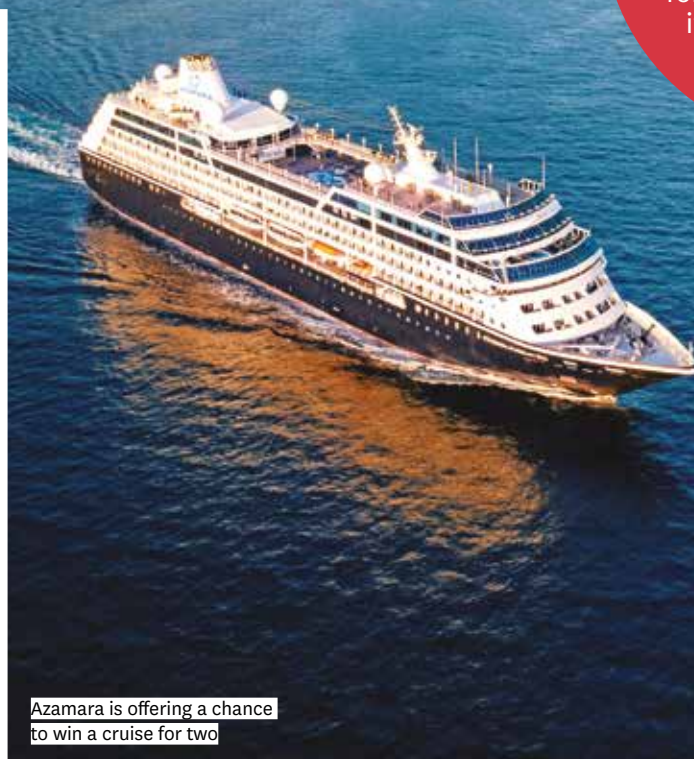
INCENTIVES • ITINERARIES • SPECIAL OFFERS

Win a cruise with Azamara

Azamara is giving travel agents a chance to win a cruise for two. To be in with a chance of winning, agents must make a booking of at least one stateroom or suite on any Azamara voyage. The incentive is valid up until 31 March 2023.

The cruise line said the incentive "is one of the many opportunities for Azamara to give back to their valued travel partners and continue building strong relationships with agents".

Winners will win a free cruise in a Club Oceanview stateroom, based on two people sharing on double occupancy, on one of the following voyages: the seven-night Amalfi & Dalmatian Coasts voyage on the latest addition to Azamara's fleet, *Azamara Onward*; *Azamara Journey's* nine-night Gems of the Western Mediterranean itinerary, or the nine-night Israel Intensive cruise on *Azamara Pursuit*.



Azamara is offering a chance to win a cruise for two

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



Sign up for the chance to tour an Ambassador ship

Ambassador ship visit plans

Ambassador Cruise Line has opened registrations for its UK-wide ship visit programme. Travel agents will be able to get on board either *Ambience* – which is currently in service – or *Ambition*, which launches this May.

From 12 May, Ambassador Cruise Line will sail from seven UK ports and, as part of the ship visit initiative, trade partners could join one of the ships in London Tilbury, Newcastle, Dundee, Liverpool, Belfast, Bristol, or Falmouth.

To register for a place, agents need to complete an online form via the trade partners area on the line's website. Meanwhile, to register for a group visit, travel agents should email groupsales@ambassadorcruiseline.com for a registration form.

The line's head of distribution Nicola Harper said: "We know there is nothing like seeing and experiencing a product, and the whole Ambassador team is extremely proud to showcase our premium-value product to our valued trade partners."



Royal Caribbean will use webinars to boost agents' knowledge about its offers

Learn with Royal

Royal Caribbean International has launched a new monthly webinar series to provide “in-depth and customised support for its trade partners in the UK and Ireland”.

The Learn LIVE webinars will take place at least three times per month, focusing on key knowledge areas, with the potential for a bonus session based on agent feedback, the line said. The first was held in February.

Topics include information about Royal Caribbean's booking system and how best

to use it, as well as an overview of current offers and activities, including campaigns, deals, savings and more.

Agents can also learn who Royal Caribbean is and its signature holiday experiences, designed for agents who are new to selling cruise. The line will also speak about Club Royal, its learning and rewards platform.

To find out more details about accessing the webinars, agents should contact their sales representative or visit the Club Royal website.



Cunard has doubled its fam trip programme

EXPERIENCE CUNARD

Cunard will welcome up to 160 travel agents on board its fleet this year.

The luxury cruise line has doubled its fam trip programme and will be hosting agents on eight separate voyages, up from the four that it ran in 2022.

Some of the itineraries on offer include a seven-night voyage to the Norwegian fjords on *Queen Mary 2*, a three-night fly-cruise from Barcelona to Rome on *Queen Victoria*, and a seven-night voyage to Alaska on board *Queen Elizabeth*.

Agents can view the full list of fam trips, and register for a place, via the Shine Rewards Club. The Alaska trip will be by invitation only. Cunard will cover flights and hotel and dining service charges, and will provide shore excursions as well as “special on-board experiences”.



Guests can visit Taormina to sample small ship cruising on *Seabourn Pursuit*

New sailings for Pursuit

Seabourn's second purpose-built expedition vessel, *Seabourn Pursuit*, will operate a series of seven new pre-inaugural sailings to the Mediterranean, Transatlantic and Caribbean.

Starting in mid-August, *Seabourn Pursuit* will sail on five voyages through the Mediterranean and the French and Italian Rivières. On 12 August, the ship will depart on the Tyrrhenian Isles and France itinerary, visiting the likes of Taormina, Lipari, and Amalfi, Italy.

The ship will also offer two cruises across the Atlantic and through the Caribbean. In October, it will arrive in Barbados, from where it will operate its previously scheduled expedition itineraries to South America, the Amazon and Antarctica.

Seabourn president Josh Leibowitz said: “*Seabourn Pursuit* will invite guests to enjoy small ship cruising as only Seabourn delivers it, with an intimate atmosphere that encourages guests to make meaningful connections.”



Easter **Extravaganza**

This Easter, we are running a special
promotion with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines.
Discover how to play and win



Enter for your chance to win prizes

The Easter period is fast approaching, giving us the opportunity to bring you another fun-filled, educational concept that involves prizes and cruise line learning.

Our first Easter egg extravaganza, in partnership with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, is sure to give you another reason to boost your cruise knowledge and potentially win some delicious chocolate treats in time for the Easter celebrations.

How it works

As with our annual Christmas advent calendar competition and Cruise Challenge events, we want learning and education to be fun. So, how does it work?

On *cruisetradenews.com*, the Easter bunny will appear with a code on specific web pages. You will need to enter this code on the game page and correctly answer a question about Fred Olsen Cruise Lines to be in with a chance of winning.

The answer to the question will be within the specific articles relating to Fred Olsen Cruise Lines. It will be up to you to read the information to discover the answer – delivering a new spin on the much-loved Easter egg hunt concept. The competition will run from 20-31 March, weekdays only.

Go to this link to register: cruisetradenews.com/register-fred-olsen-easter/

To play the game from 20 March onwards, go to this page: cruisetradenews.com/fred-olsen-easter/

Of course, as it's Easter, we have Fred Olsen branded chocolate eggs up for grabs, as well as a special prize – a cruise of your choice in a suite, subject to availability, departing in 2023/early 2024, of up to seven nights in duration. The winner will receive a voucher from Fred Olsen to use.

Cruise Trade News editor Gary Peters said: "We've had great success with our advent calendar concept in the last

few years, so we thought it was time to celebrate another important milestone in the year.

"This Easter egg competition is a little bit of fun mixed in with educational elements. We are delighted to be working with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, giving you the opportunity to learn more about the brand in the process."

Fred Olsen head of sales Geoff Ridgeon added: "It's been an incredible start to the year, and we wanted to say a big thank you to the many agents who have been working so hard to bring in bookings as we celebrate a buoyant market once again.

"Teaming up with *Cruise Trade News* for this Easter egg hunt is a great way for us to do that, rewarding lucky agents while having some fun at the same time – and who doesn't love a bit of chocolate. Thanks to each and every one of you who has supported us and the wider industry. Here's to an 'eggcellent' rest of the year."

Go to ***cruisetradenews.com*** to play. Once registered, you will receive daily emails directing you to the relevant content pages on which the answers to the questions can be found.

**Boost your cruise knowledge
and win some delicious
chocolate treats in time for
the Easter celebrations**

Adversity is inevitable but our passion pushes us forward.

RISE TO THE OCCASION.



GO LONG

Now is the time to sell world cruises and grand voyages, says Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon**

Well, what a crazy start to the year that was. It's great to see so much energy back in the industry again and everyone starting the year as we mean to go on.

It's coming to that time of the year when cruise lines unveil new and exciting sailings, so I thought it would be a suitable moment to look at those longer adventures, and how to recommend and sell them to your customers.

With the market as it is, there has never been a better time to talk about world cruises and grand voyages. We have all seen a phenomenal start to the year, not just in comparison to the months we lost to the pandemic but when comparing apples with apples in pre-Covid times. At Fred Olsen, for example, we had our best ever January and I know as an industry we have all seen a rise in people getting their travel plans back in action.

The demand for longer sailings is most definitely there. We have just waved *Borealis* off on one of our best-ever sold world cruises as she follows in the footsteps of fictional explorer Phileas Fogg.

People are investing more time and money into their travels, with many keen to get those big, once-in-a-lifetime trips booked now that they feel more comfortable in exploring the world again.



“Many people are keen to get those big, once-in-a-lifetime trips booked now”

GEOFF RIDGEON

HEAD OF SALES

FRED OLSEN CRUISE LINES

A grand alternative

That said, we don't all have the luxury of being able to up sticks and set about sailing around the world for months at a time – we can all dream though, right? A great alternative could be a grand voyage – longer cruises, typically between one and three months, that focus on exploring one particular part of the world.

So, how do you sell them? Look for customers who are frequently booking longer breaks with you. They could be cruisers, but also those who are spending lots of time away on land-based breaks. Alternatively, you may have customers who are spending money on high-end breaks and may value the opportunity

to experience more of the world in one trip, or someone who is celebrating a special milestone.

We have launched two particularly exciting cruises – our 106-night Voyage of Exploration Around the World and our 82-night Discovering Asia with the Holi Festival Grand Voyage – ahead of our main itineraries launch for 2024/25.

Every cruise line will have their own way of making their world cruises and grand voyages unique to them and, while I know I say it every time, it really is key to match your customer to the best cruise line for them. This is arguably more important for these longer duration cruises than for any other.

And it's not just about the destinations, but also the on-board experience. At Fred Olsen, we use our new Signature Experiences to delve deeper into the culture, nature and history of destinations, while celebrating the form of cruise as a journey.

World cruises and grand voyages see people away from home for long periods of time and will include several sea days. It's likely many will be happy to consider a higher grade of cabin, or perhaps added benefits that often come with suites.

What you must not forget is how special these cruises are – both in terms of value and experience. So, whether you have a customer who is booking a world cruise or grand voyage for the first or fifth time, it is so important to make it feel special every time. 📍

TECH TALK

Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant** discusses what makes the ideal blend of people and technology

How do you blend people and technology? I asked this question to ChatGPT – a generative pre-trained transformer. This is a natural language processing tool, driven by artificial intelligence, that allows you to have human-like conversations that far exceed those possible with a chatbot.

So, a few seconds after asking, this is what it typed back to me: “Blending people and technology typically involves designing technology and systems with the user in mind and involving users in the design process. This can be done by conducting user research, usability testing, and gathering feedback from users to ensure that the technology meets their needs and is easy to use.

“Additionally, training and support for the technology can be provided to ensure that users are comfortable and proficient in using it. Ultimately, successful blending of people and technology requires a user-centred approach that prioritises the needs and experiences of the users.”

Pretty impressive, right? I’ve talked in previous articles about how travel agents should embrace technology to make their lives easier. In the future, technology like ChatGPT could be trained to answer all the mundane questions with a slightly more personal touch than a standard chatbot.

The need for people

Consider how useful it could be to type in marketing ideas and destination content for your social media and have that help



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Don’t be scared to try new technology – sign up for ChatGPT for free and give it a go
- Read articles on how people are using this technology and educate yourself on these topics
- Try implementing one piece of new technology into your business to help with admin or ease a process. Also, focus on the biggest pain point first
- Be brave and ask for help. Embracing new technology and ways of working can seem daunting, but the benefits are worth their weight in gold

to articulate this content into usable written articles in a fraction of the time.

However, it’s important to note that a blend of people and technology will be needed, as you want to keep your brand and personality on all content

and customer service. This is hard for a robot to achieve without knowing your style. Also, it certainly won’t totally replace the need for people.

Not all of your customers will be technologically savvy, so the personal touch is still key. Some people still prefer to have their tickets printed and not rely on mobile options. Others like to book online with limited interactions, while first-time cruisers and high-end travellers may want to interact with people more than technology.

Giving customers the choice and the blend of people and technology will be the key to creating a customer-centric, profitable and forward-thinking business. 📌



CRESSIDA SERGEANT
CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER
TRAVELTEK

ILLUSTRATION: PHIL COUZENS



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Guests can immerse themselves in an unparalleled wilderness this summer in Alaska, or spend springtime among European botanical gardens. With so many options to choose from, now is the time to Have It All.



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Cruise only
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Oosterdam: 22 May 2023

LISBON TO BARCELONA

VISITS: Cadiz (Seville); Casablanca; Malaga; Alicante; Palma De Mallorca; Valencia.

INCLUDES 'Have it All'



7-Day Alaskan Inside Passage

Cruise only
fares from **£1,229** per person

Koningsdam: 17 Jun 2023

ROUNDTRIP VANCOUVER

VISITS: Scenic Cruising The Inside Passage; Tracy Arm; Juneau; Skagway; Glacier Bay; Ketchikan; Scenic Cruising The Inside Passage.

INCLUDES 'Have it All'



14-Day South America Passage

Cruise only
fares from **£1,989** per person

Oosterdam: 20 Feb 2024

SANTIAGO TO BUENOS AIRES

VISITS: Puerto Montt; Puerto Chacabuco; Scenic Cruising Chilean Fjords; Scenic Cruising Sarmiento Channel; Punta Arenas; Ushuaia; Scenic Cruising Cape Horn; Stanley (Falkland Islands); Montevideo.

INCLUDES 'Have it All'

• Overnight stay in Buenos Aires

WAYS TO BOOK: Visit POLAR Online via GoHal.co.uk, call our reservation team on 0344 338 8609 or visit hollandamerica.com

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Prices displayed are based on cruise only. Prices are correct at time of print but are subject to change. Unless otherwise noted, all elements of the Wave Offer are available only on Summer 2023 – Winter/Spring 2024 cruises/Cruisetours and exclude Grand Voyages and any voyage lasting 5 days or less booked between 14 December 2022 and 31 March 2023. Stateroom upgrades are available in select stateroom categories and ships and are subject to the availability of the staterooms in the next highest category. Entire Wave Offer has no cash value, is subject to availability, is capacity controlled, may be modified or withdrawn at any time, is available for new bookings only, is not combinable with any other discounts, and is neither transferable nor refundable. Guests who make an eligible booking through this Offer will receive up to 25% off their cruise fare. Up to 25% off discount is based on Have It All launch fare. The percentage off discount will not apply to Taxes, Fees & Port Expenses. Kids Cruise Free: Guests ages 17 and under ("children") are eligible to travel free (Taxes, Fees & Port Expenses are additional) when booked as a 3rd and/or 4th guest on select 2023 and 2024 cruises. Limit up to two free children per eligible booking. Kids Cruise Free rates are available only when booked with promotion code Z3* with a 1st/2nd guest booking with promotion code VV*. Guests booking with Z3* are ineligible for Have It All (01). Reduced Deposit is a reduced per-person booking deposit available only for 1st/2nd guests in a stateroom on new bookings on select cruises and Cruisetours booked outside of the final payment date. Balance is due on final payment of the booking. Offer is available only on select cruises and Cruisetours unless sold out or otherwise withdrawn. Standard refund and cancellation conditions apply. Onboard Credit Kicker through this offer is available in the following amounts: US\$100 per person (US\$200 per stateroom) for guests booked on a 6- to 9-day cruise; US\$150 per person (US\$300 per stateroom) for guests booked on an Alaska Cruisetour or 10- to 20-day cruise; US\$200 per person (US\$400 per stateroom) for guests booked on a 21+ day cruise. Limit: One (1) Onboard Credit per guest. Onboard Credit is in USD, is neither refundable nor transferable, and has no cash value. Onboard Credit expires at the end of the Eligible Cruise and may not be used in the casino or on any other specified fees or items. Onboard Credit Kicker offer ends 31 March 2023. Ships' Registry: The Netherlands.



SOCIAL SUCCESS

Royal Caribbean trade marketing manager
Megan Smith, who spoke at the CTN and CLIA
Supercharging your Digital Marketing workshop,
explains how to succeed on social media platforms

How important are digital solutions for the future of cruise marketing?

It's imperative that our trade partners explore new digital routes to reach new audiences, as this is where a large portion of customers consume their information. It is especially important when it comes to a dynamic product like cruise, because digital solutions offer a unique way to bring cruising to life.

What are your top tips for agents to enable them to succeed with digital marketing?

When it comes to digital marketing, embrace trial and error. Closely monitor what is working for you and plan your future digital marketing activity based on where you have been finding success. I'd also advise not to spread yourself too thin, especially when it comes to social media. Select one or two platforms that are appropriate for your target customers and focus on being consistent on those platforms.

How can agents take the first steps to using social media and other digital platforms?

It's all about just getting started. Focus on putting content that is relevant to your core customer base on a social platform that they use and that makes sense for the type of content you are sharing. Share content on a consistent basis to build up trust between your business and your audience, and don't forget to be your authentic self and offer a dose of inspiration.

What would you say to those who are wary about using social?

Try completing a short course that provides an introduction to social media, like the one we offer on our Club Royal Learn platform. Don't let a lack of knowledge stop you from getting started. You will learn as you go so try to embrace this new way of reaching your current and future customers.

“Don't let a lack of knowledge stop you. You will learn as you go so try and embrace this new way of reaching your customers”

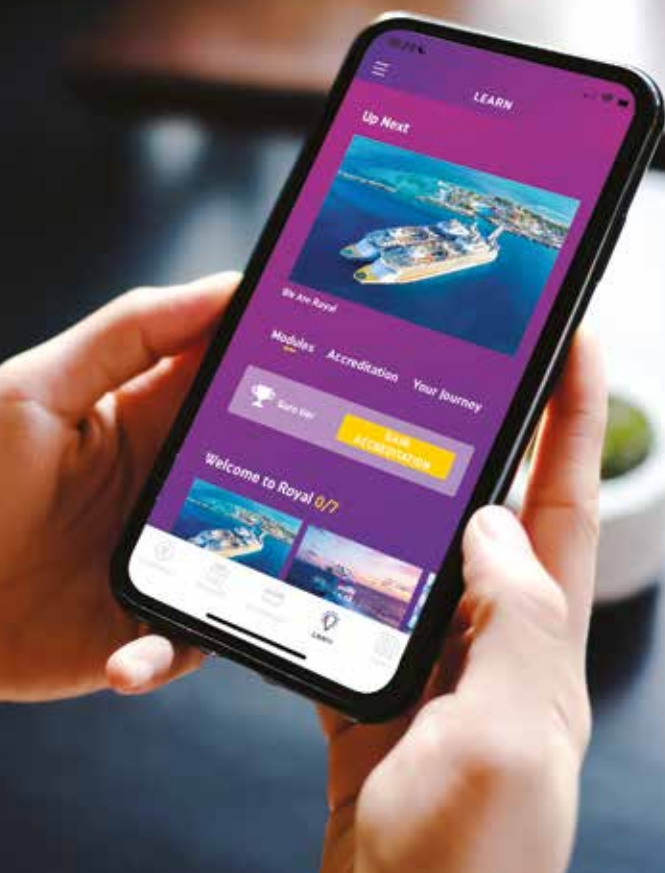
A large portion of customers now consume their information on mobile devices and social platforms



Megan Smith says digital marketing must be a priority

What are the challenges involved when using social channels?

We know that our trade partners are incredibly busy and it can be a challenge to make time for social media but it really is worth prioritising. One of my key takeaways from the Supercharging your Digital Marketing event was how many resources there are for our trade partners to take advantage of.



“It is key to track your performance and progress in digital marketing and reflect on that data to make informed decisions going forward”

What support does Royal Caribbean have to help agents when using social channels?

On our Club Royal platform, agents can access our Learn programme where we have a selection of modules specifically on social media. These are a great starting point for anyone who's taking the first step on their social media journey. We also provide our agents with social media content that they can share on their own channels. Agents can find this through the toolbox section on Club Royal, where there is a selection of videos and assets, suitable for Facebook, Instagram or TikTok. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for our agents to promote cruise on social media.

How useful was the CTN & CLIA Supercharging your Digital Marketing event to you professionally?

I thoroughly enjoyed my day at the event – the audience was really engaged, which was wonderful. It was great to meet some of our trade partners and discuss what their challenges and successes have been in digital marketing. We've taken this feedback and are looking at how we can support our agents more in the future.

What were your key takeaways from the day?

Having a glimpse at current holiday research trends from Google was a real highlight of the day for me. Another key takeaway was the importance of data, which came through in all the sessions. It is key to track your performance and progress in digital marketing and reflect on that data to make informed decisions going forward. 📊

Club Royal provides a wide range of training modules for agents



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Win at **Selling** **Mini cruises**

There are many unique, globe-trotting itineraries, but how can you sell shorter voyages to those looking to try cruising for the first time?

Avalon's mini cruises are perfect for exploring cities such as Bratislava



While experienced cruisers will be well-versed in long, far-reaching itineraries, it's fair to say that for those who have never set foot aboard a cruise ship, the idea of a week or more on a holiday type they have hitherto not tried could be a step too far.

So, enter mini cruises. According to Princess Cruises UK & Europe sales director Nick Hughes, "shorter voyages are perfect for cruise-curious clients to dip their toe in the water".

Hughes continues: "With recent industry data stating 91 per cent of cruisers intend to take another holiday at sea, and 72 per cent of non-cruisers are open to trying, what better way to tempt them onto the water than a mini cruise and all the advantages that come with it?"

"We often dock in the centre of the cities. On a mini cruise, this is a great USP"

"In 2021, Princess offered a full season of three, four and six-night seacations from Southampton. It was apparent very quickly there was a huge appetite for shorter cruises from loyal guests, as well as new-to-brand customers who wanted to experience the Princess difference."

A similar point of view is advanced by Avalon Waterways sales and marketing director Janet Parton, who says the river cruise line has introduced more shorter cruises "over the years as popularity has increased".

"Our mini cruises were designed for the UK market," she continues. "We have Europe on the doorstep and regional flying from the UK to the key river destinations in Europe. Mini cruises are perfect for customers who haven't been on a river cruise and want to sample the experience before going onto a longer cruise."

The full experience

Even though a shorter itinerary means less time on board, both Princess Cruises and Avalon Waterways say that does not diminish from the overall experience.

Hughes explains: "Mini cruises are port-intensive, which makes them appealing to those who have never sailed before."

"Importantly, these cruises will also typically include a day to explore the ship. We don't want guests to miss out on the on-board experience and your clients can rest assured that our favourite activities and entertainment are the same as on any longer voyage. This includes West End-style shows in the Princess theatre, gym access and full dining options at any of the restaurants."

Parton says that for Avalon, "no two days will be the same", adding: "Every day guests can choose which excursion (included in the fare) they would like to go on. There are a range of Classic, Active or Discovery options, whether that be classical concert in Vienna, learning to paint like Van Gogh or wine tasting in a private vineyard." 📌

SELLING TIPS

- "Destination is important," says Parton. "We often dock in the centre of the cities. On a mini cruise, this is a great USP."
- Hughes explains: "Shorter sailings are fantastic at attracting budget-savvy guests, as they offer such great value compared to a UK break or resort stay abroad."
- "A mini cruise appeals to a wide range of people – new to cruise, city-break lovers, people that like boutique hotel stays, ocean cruisers and Christmas market fans," adds Parton.

Spotlight On

P&O's Arvia

Kaye Holland explores P&O Cruises' new sunshine ship. Here's her verdict

Arvia, the new 5,200-passenger ship from P&O Cruises, is the line's second ship to be powered by liquefied natural gas and the second largest ship ever built for UK cruisers.

P&O Cruises president Paul Ludlow said: "Arvia embodies the newest trends in travel, dining and entertainment, and is the epitome of a sunshine resort sailing year-round to the warmest climates. It takes its sister ship *Iona*'s design aesthetic and general arrangement but provides new and exciting outside and inside spaces that make the most of Arvia's deployment to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean."

So, what does that mean in practice? P&O Cruises bills itself as being proudly British and this is evident on board Arvia – from the giant Union Flag on its bow to Brodies, the traditional pub found on the Parade deck, the kettles and PG Tips tea bags in the cabins, and £2 million collection of contemporary British art.

But while the Britishness is important, and P&O has unashamedly focused on the fact that it is a British cruise line, the heart of the ship is the Grand Atrium. Expect a dramatic white marble central staircase, framed by metal champagne-coloured ribbons.

Cabins are bright and breezy – think sand and stone-hued walls punctuated with ocean blue furnishings – and more than half of the 2,659 cabins have a private balcony. The conservatory mini-suites, best described as halfway between a balcony cabin and a suite, which debuted on *Iona*, are also on Arvia.

"Guests could spend their entire voyage at sea and still not manage to do or sample everything"



The latest addition to the P&O fleet, Arvia promises the newest trends in travel, dining and entertainment

Pleasingly, there is also a good mix of single-occupancy cabins for solo travellers and accessible cabins for passengers with disabilities.

Fun all the way

There are 30 venues in which to eat and drink. New speciality offerings, for which guests must pay extra, are Green & Co featuring Mizuhana – where the emphasis is on a plant-led menu – and 6th Street Diner. The latter, as the name suggests, is all about American indulgence. Think buffalo wings, club sandwiches and Mississippi mud pies. Boredom is not an option on board Arvia – guests could easily spend their entire voyage at sea and still not manage to do or sample everything on offer. For example, there's a large spa featuring a cold room and a salt sauna, an impressive gym with sea views and four swimming pools including an infinity pool.

Elsewhere there is Mission Control, an immersive experience that combines an escape game with multimedia simulation

and a live-action story to create a thrilling underwater challenge. There's also the first-ever high-ropes experience at sea, Altitude Skywalk, as well as an array of kids' clubs that are split into suitable age groups.

When it comes to entertainment, Arvia really comes into its own. The vessel features P&O Cruises' first-ever zone with a retractable roof, SkyDome. It's a daytime pool environment that transforms into a dining and entertainment space where passengers can enjoy jaw-dropping aerial performances, theatre productions and blockbuster movies.

There is also entertainment in the Grand Atrium, Amber Lounge and Sunset Bar, although the standout remains the 710 Club, which was introduced on *Iona* and is overseen by pop superstar Gary Barlow. This intimate club is the place to catch not only the Take That singer, who will perform on several cruises, but up-and-coming musical talent. 🎵

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GRAND ADVENTURES

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has unveiled two longer journeys ahead of its 2024/25 programme launch later this month. We caught up with the line's field sales manager **Mathew Foxcroft** to find out more



Soon, guests will be able to experience the 106-night Voyage of Exploration Around the World, aboard *Bolette*, and *Balmoral's* 82-night Discovering Asia with the Holi Festival Grand Voyage (see page 13). Here, Mathew Foxcroft explains the inner workings of these itineraries, what makes Fred Olsen's longer cruises unique, and reveals his top selling tips for agents.

How do your world cruises and grand voyages differ from others?

Our itineraries tell a story. We don't simply sail from one place to the next – we have a team of dedicated Journey Planners who specially craft each cruise from scratch so that it offers something extra special for our guests.



Singapore is featured on *Balmoral's* new 82-night voyage

Balmoral's grand voyage, for example, has been timed specifically to allow our guests to experience the Hindu Holi Festival – a real spectacle of colour and celebration – while they are in Mumbai.

Bolette's world cruise, meanwhile, has been inspired by the famous 16th-century Magellan-Elcano expedition, the first circumnavigation of the globe, and will feature calls to the remote islands of Robinson Crusoe and Alejandro Selkirk, where guests can learn more on the history of the sailor that inspired the *Robinson Crusoe* novel.

On all our cruises, we will always sail the most scenic route, celebrating views best seen from the water as we navigate between our destinations.

What are the itinerary highlights on these new sailings?

With itineraries as vast as these, it can be tricky to pick out the highlights, but each cruise presents fantastic opportunities when it comes to history, culture and wildlife. The new world cruise offers chances to uncover the history of Uruguayan gauchos and see Magellanic penguins in Argentina, to seek out the 'Big Five' and learn about the influence of Nelson Mandela in South Africa, or explore destinations such as Easter Island (as shown on the front cover).

Balmoral's itinerary calls into Myanmar and Cambodia, known for their ancient civilisations and rich histories. Guests can explore the ruins of Angkor from Siem Reap, the largest religious monument in the world, in Cambodia, and Myanmar's ancient city of Bagan.



Serene and lush views await, not least in Bora Bora, on Fred Olsen's world cruise

What is the on-board experience like on these longer sailings?

For us, the on-board experience is key. By their very nature, these itineraries have more time sailing and sea days than shorter cruises do. Our new Signature Experiences marry our on-board experience with the destinations we visit.

Through Treats of the Region, for example, guests will be able to sample famous dishes and local delicacies of the places they visit and learn to make them at home, while Itinerary Insights will allow them to learn more about the culture, history and traditions of each destination. All of the Signature Experiences are delivered by specialist guides who are experts in their field.

We help our guests to experience the real destinations through our shore excursions, too. Rather than simply



“We give our guests the chance to really immerse themselves in the way of life in each port of call”

ticking off the typical tourist hotspots, we give our guests the chance to really immerse themselves in the way of life in each port of call. In Mumbai, for example, guests will have the chance to spend time with a dabbawalla and help them to deliver lunches to workers across the city, or in Argentina guests can learn the tango in the place where it originated.

What are your top selling tips for agents?

When it comes to longer cruises like these, there are two main types of guests: those who regularly take world cruises, and those who are taking them for a special

reason. Whichever it is, these cruises are a big investment both in terms of time and money, so it's important to make sure every booking feels special, whether it is their first, fifth or fifteenth.

There is a real opportunity to recommend these longer sailings for those who are looking for something special. Perhaps there is a customer who is celebrating a big milestone, such as a retirement, or has saved for an extra special trip and has more money to spend than usual. Rather than splash out on one or two shorter breaks, a world cruise or grand voyage could be just the ticket.



Bolette's world cruise is inspired by the 16th-century Magellan-Elcano expedition

Are there any launch offers available on these new cruises?

Those who book either of the cruises can enjoy free door-to-door transfers, covering up to 250 mainland miles to the port, as well as up to £600pp on-board spending credit for *Bolette's* 106-night Voyage of Exploration Around the World itinerary, or up to £500pp for *Balmoral's* Discovering Asia with the Holi Festival cruise. ❶



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

PROUDLY ANNOUNCING TWO EXCITING NEW CRUISES FOR 2025

A VOYAGE OF EXPLORATION AROUND THE WORLD

6th Jan 2025 | Sail from Southampton
Bolette | 106 nights | Cruise code T2502

Sail from **£11,499pp**, plus up to £600pp FREE
On Board Spend and FREE Door-to-Door transfers

This unmissable journey has been planned by our team to piece together destinations and voyages of discovery linked to famous explorers.

Your customers can take in remarkable geological wonders and scenic landscapes as *Bolette* sails in the wake of the first recorded circumnavigation of the globe – the 16th-century Magellan-Elcano expedition – and enjoy an exploration of the south coast of Australia, inspired by the historic route taken by British navigator Matthew Flinders.



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Ahead of the launch of our exciting 2024/2025 programme, we are delighted to share all the details of two brand new cruises we think your customers will love.

These imaginative itineraries have been hand-crafted for your customers; and aboard our elegant, smaller ships *Bolette* and *Balmoral*, they'll experience our warm and friendly atmosphere, and see why we can proudly say that we have more returning guests than any other cruise line.

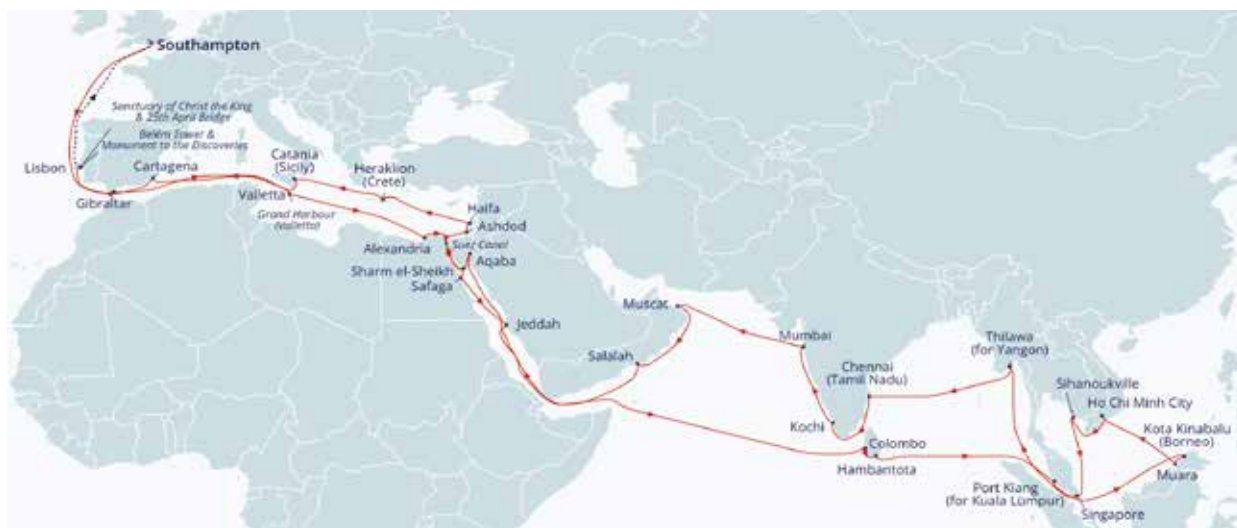
DISCOVERING ASIA WITH THE HOLI FESTIVAL

18th Jan 2025 | Sail from Southampton
Balmoral | 81 nights | Cruise code L2502

Sail from **£8,999pp**, plus up to £500pp FREE
On Board Spend and FREE Door-to-Door transfers

This extensive, in-depth exploration of Asia presents countless opportunities to experience fascinating culture and nature, from delving into ancient civilisations to seeking out endemic wildlife.

What's more, our Journey Planners have timed *Balmoral's* call into Mumbai to coincide with the Holi Festival, a colourful Hindu celebration that sees India transform into a real-life canvas



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T&Cs apply: Free spend amount varies per cabin category, from £250 per person based on an interior cabin, up to £600 per person based on booking a Suite on cruise code T2502. Free spend amount varies per cabin category, from £200 per person based on an interior cabin, up to £500 per person based on booking a Suite on cruise code L2502. Full terms and conditions available at www.fredolsencruise.com/agent

ABTA
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Sylvia Earle

i

Fast Facts

AE Expeditions' latest purpose-built ship, *Sylvia Earle*, was launched in late 2022 with the latest design and technology, including the revolutionary Ulstein X-BOW design of an inverted bow. The bow cuts through the swell, minimising vibrations and enabling faster transits through sea passages and therefore reducing fuel consumption. The ship is named after acclaimed marine biologist, oceanographer, explorer and conservationist Dr Sylvia Earle, the first woman to become chief scientist of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It is the perfect base camp for adventure and a warm and welcoming place to return to after an experience ashore.

132

(AVERAGE) PASSENGERS

71

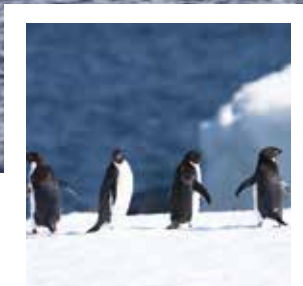
STATEROOMS

104M

LENGTH

8

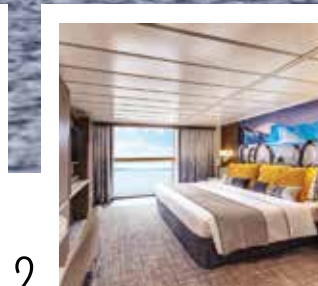
DECKS



1

Wildlife

On all *Sylvia Earle* expeditions, spotting wildlife is a key part of the experience. Itineraries are flexible to allow for multiple daily excursions to see an array of animals. AE Expeditions only travels to these remote destinations at peak time for the ideal exploration and wildlife adventure.



2

Accommodation

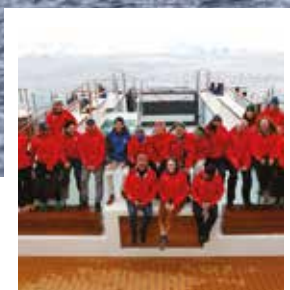
Staterooms offer spacious rooms in natural colours with sleep-inducing beds. All staterooms have an ocean view, ideal for expedition cruising, and a majority have balconies. For polar destinations, there are the much-loved heated bathroom floors to take away the chill.



3

Sustainability

AE Expeditions has a deep commitment to sustainability and *Sylvia Earle* guests can participate in citizen science programmes to help protect the environment. Special guests also join dedicated sailings to offer their expertise in a range of fields, such as photography, exploration, health and wildlife.



4

The E-team

Education and enrichment are at the heart of every sailing on *Sylvia Earle*. Many of the on-board expedition team are world leaders in their fields and share their knowledge with guests, ensuring that every moment travellers spend on board during their cruise is interesting and educational.



5

Activities

In addition to guided hikes and zodiac cruises, guests sailing with AE Expeditions can participate in a plethora of additional activities like kayaking, polar diving and climbing. The line also offers ice camping, while a photographer can help with tips for capturing spectacular images.



CTN *investigates*

Long live LOYALTY?

With the market buoyant and new ships and new lines entering the playing field, is loyalty in the cruise industry a thing of the past? **Dave Monk** reports



With a few keystrokes, cruise clients can call up articles, videos, information and pricing about dozens of cruise lines. What's more, travel agents, magazines such as *Cruise Trade News*, journalists and bloggers offer a whole range of tempting options.

And with new operators such as hotel chains also entering the market, the idea of people booking the same line year after year sounds outdated, even with schemes designed to keep them coming back. While cruise companies try to build loyalty with discounts, perks, marketing and rewards, it can take only one disappointing trip – or a desire to try

a different brand, itinerary or experience – that will lead customers to jump ship.

A survey by Cruise.co.uk released in January found that the key factor in almost 1,000 bookings was destination (44 per cent), followed by the price (25 per cent). Only a fifth said the brand was most important. The poll also found that more than half of respondents had travelled on three or more cruise lines.

Even so, Tony Andrews, deputy managing director of Cruise.co.uk, doesn't believe brand loyalty is a thing of the past. He says: "In my experience, a customer will stay loyal 80 per cent of the time and stray to another brand if it has something specific they want. This could be an amazing deal or a port they wanted to visit which their usual brand isn't offering. Generally, they come back.

"One of the big initiatives [from cruise lines] has been to offer an all-inclusive option to guests, which is what attracts land holiday customers. Freestyle dining was a strange concept 20 years ago, now it's strange if you don't have it as an option. Also including tips/gratuities in pricing helps, which P&O Cruises and MSC Cruises have done for UK guests."

'Keep surprising guests'

Mundy Cruising managing director Edwina Lonsdale agrees there is still "a huge level" of brand loyalty. She explains: "Given the whole aim of the luxury sector is to surprise and delight, it is a challenge for them to continue to do this when clients come back again and again, but this is something on which they focus closely, surprising their most loyal guests



Virgin Voyages has reimagined the whole cruise experience to ensure good value and excellent service

with all sorts of treats and special events. The aim of these is to be highly personal, in addition to the standard recognition programme, which can include discounts, added value, free cruises and – surprisingly motivating – free laundry.”

She continues: “High-end clients booking lengthy cruises in higher grades of accommodation tend to book early to get exactly what they want – up to two years out and more. Historically, there were also those who would wait for the late deals and offers but, at present, we are not seeing that so much.”

Attracting new-to-brand guests is the ‘holy grail’ for cruise lines. Lonsdale says: “The way to do it is either to steal market share from other lines or to find a new pond to fish in. The hotel yachts – Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Aman and more – are fishing in new ponds. Cruise lines can use different products to find new source markets, by introducing expedition cruising, for example, or river. Stealing from other lines can be done in partnership with agents (upgrading from premium, for example), or with one-off price incentives, sampler cruises, or unusual itineraries.”



P&O Cruises’ Paul Ludlow says the line constantly introduces new innovations



Attractions such as Norwegian Cruise Line’s race tracks are a major draw for families

“In the post-pandemic world, assurance and customer service are the clear factors influencing bookings”

Lonsdale also believes that “many high spenders stay loyal because they are well looked after when they come back on board”. She continues: “Others have a roster of cruise lines with which they are happy, and hop from one to another for particular itineraries or price. The advantage for the new hotel entrants to the market is that they can build loyalty with incentives at their global portfolio of hotels. But the levels of recognition from a cruise brand tend to be far more personalised.”

The allure of a new line

James Cole, managing director of Panache Cruises, says he often has conversations with people who’ll say “we’re very much Silversea people”, or “we only cruise with Regent Seven Seas”. He adds: “In the post-pandemic world, assurance and customer service are the clear factors influencing bookings. People have become much more crowd-conscious and many have moved away

from mass-market style holidays. In the cruise sector, this is driving more interest in small-ship cruising.

“Also, because of the pandemic, people are trying to make up for lost time. They will stray from their preferred brands to visit the destinations they haven’t been able to get to over the past two years. So, there’s a real opportunity to lure people away from their favoured lines.”

With global cruise passengers set to reach 35 million by 2027 – including a million in the luxury sector – Cole expects the number of small ships to double. “Even very small segments of the cruise industry, like expedition cruises, have grown by more than 400 per cent over the past 10 years,” he explains. “To meet this demand, I predict that the cruise industry will become increasingly fragmented. Families will be attracted to increasingly more elaborate attractions on lines like Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line, Carnival Cruise Line and Disney. There will be more adult-only



P&O is hoping to attract new cruisers with the addition of *Iona* to its fleet

“I don’t think brand loyalty is a thing of the past, but I do believe that it has become less habitual”

ships for the 30 to 40-something market. Virgin’s new ships are already exploiting that niche very well.

“Cruise lines will cater for very specific needs, whether those be families, foodies, explorers or people with a focus on wellness. Younger travellers, too, will be attracted to brands that are committed to reducing their environmental impact.”

Ian Buckeridge, The Cruise Line director, tells *Cruise Trade News* he has seen “tremendous brand loyalty” through the pandemic and beyond. In the ultra-luxury sector “customers expect certain standards in terms of accommodation,

facilities, even little things like toiletries and soap”, he adds: “Often, it’s the bundle of little things that make the whole thing special, it’s the way things are done that people like. They’re going to new places with a brand they know.”

Our survey says...

A Twitter survey conducted for this article found that 57 per cent of respondents use different lines, against 43 per cent who stay loyal to one. This backs up the sentiment from Clare Weeden, a principal lecturer in tourism and marketing at the University of Brighton business school, who says brand loyalty has declined in the past 40 years for many products.

“Switching to other cruise lines becomes more challenging to passengers as they lose brand attributes,” Weeden claims. “There’s also the fear they might dislike the other line, so the perceived risk might put them off. Travel agents are critical here because they can advise passengers on what else is out there.”

One company that’s had plenty of chances to build up loyal customers is P&O Cruises, still going strong after more than 180 years. But with new ships *Iona* and *Arvia* joining the fleet, it is also looking to attract new cruisers. The line’s president Paul Ludlow says: “Repeat



Mundy Cruising’s Edwina Lonsdale says there’s still a huge level of brand loyalty

guests continue to make up a significant and critical part of our business. However, we are seeing an increasing number of new-to-cruise guests recognising the incredible value for money a P&O Cruises holiday offers. Choice is certainly a key influence for both repeat guests and newcomers. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all holiday, so we are constantly introducing new and exciting innovations for guests to try.”

Asked if *Iona* and *Arvia* are designed to attract new customers, Ludlow adds: “We wanted to offer the same exceptional quality and service guests expect from a P&O Cruises holiday, but also tangible firsts and surprising moments that would appeal to those guests who have never cruised with us before.”

One of the newest competitors in the market, Virgin Voyages, will soon have four 2,700-passenger ships to fill. So how does Shane Riley, the line’s sales vice-president, aim to turn new cruisers into loyal customers?

He explains: “I don’t think brand loyalty is a thing of the past but I do believe that it has become less habitual as customers move their business to brands they trust. The pandemic may have made customers reflect on the brands they choose based on the way they were treated.”

Virgin’s Sailing Club and Rewards programme, launched last year, is attracting new customers while benefiting those who were sailing with them from the start, Riley says. “We understand that now, more than ever, people are looking for good value in their experience, second only to superior customer service. At Virgin Voyages, we’ve reimagined the cruise experience from the hull up so that brilliant service becomes the norm. This is what will attract new guests and keep them coming back.” 📌



Virgin Voyages’ Shane Riley believes superior customer service is key

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VOYAGES

Jamie Loizou

AmaWaterways is looking to the future with confidence, not least because of its innovative itineraries, as the line's MD Jamie Loizou explains to Gary Peters



Jamie Loizou is celebrating consecutive record bookings

There have been times during recent interviews when the overall message and outlook is so positive that, for a fleeting second, it's as if the pandemic wasn't an all-encompassing, destructive disease that tore through the travel sector with unrelenting ferocity, in turn causing so much heartache and pain.

Sitting down with AmaWaterways managing director Jamie Loizou in late February, what really strikes home is how well the cruise industry – and in this case, the river sector – has built its way back to the extent that sales records have tumbled with astonishing regularity.

For example, in late December last year, AmaWaterways celebrated a record booking month, and since then Loizou says the momentum has continued. “December for us from the UK was a record December, which was fantastic. January this year was also a record

booking month – up 80 per cent compared to January 2019, which is where we benchmark ourselves against.”

He continues: “From our perspective, as 100 per cent trade focused, our success really is the success of our trade partners. It's about those partnerships that we have with agents and the tools that we give them. There's lots that we've been doing to drive the business. For example, we were on TV just before Christmas, on the *Christmas Cruising With Susan Calman* show, where she sailed on *AmaMagna*. That was very successful for us.

“We've seen the Mekong coming back very strongly and Egypt has been exceptional, so much so that we're introducing a new ship for 2024, *AmaLilia*, which will start cruising on the Nile in March next year.”

Trade expansion

Agents, and agent relationships, underpin the majority of Loizou's thoughts and the company has recently added to its trade team. At the end of 2022, the luxury river line appointed Jayne Lambert as business development manager for the southeast region, and before that Mark Schmitt joined as head of sales UK and Ireland.

Loizou explains: “A total of 90 per cent of our business in the UK comes from our agent partners, so expanding the team gives us the opportunity to offer even more support, provide more training, spend more time with our partners and attend more events.

“Video calls have made a huge difference and they've replaced a lot of the phone calls for our regular training meetings. I think that is great, as it's easier to build relationships and



AmaWaterways will add a new ship to the Nile in 2024 to meet high demand

“The Seven River Journeys are perfect for the world cruiser who has a mindset of wanting to explore”

Presenter Susan Calman showcased the delights of *AmaMagna* on her Christmas television special

strengthen relationships. However, I do feel that you cannot replace face-to-face and that's become even more important.”

This need for in-person collaboration will also be reflected in AmaWaterways' plans to get agents on board its ships, with Loizou confirming that opportunities will be available. “As a luxury brand, there's so much that's delivered on board that people really need to experience it to understand it,” he says.

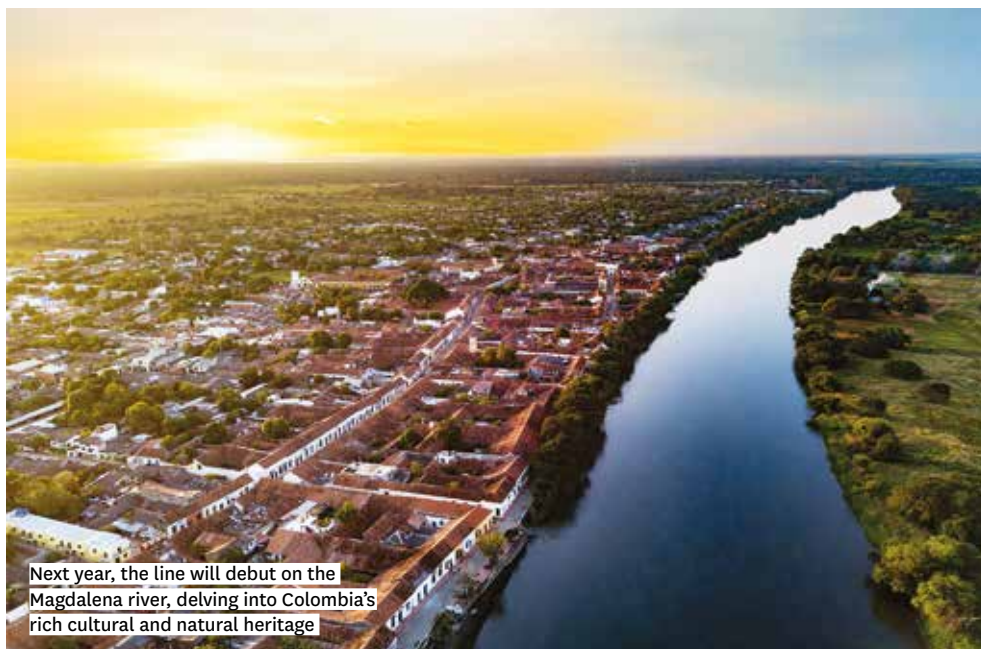
“Showcasing the product is critical – it's the way that travel agents can fully understand and immerse themselves in AmaWaterways and work out who from their database could be a perfect fit for AmaWaterways.”

The line is also adding to its trade support platforms on its agent portal. Loizou says: “We have our regular webinars and the AmaAcademy, which is our online training portal and will shortly be launching new modules – one about the Rhine and the other for groups.”

Itinerary magic

This desire to grow the trade team and training materials is replicated in AmaWaterways' development of its itineraries, with the line creating what it believes to be some of the most innovative and game-changing in the business.

First, there is its Seven River Journey series of voyages. These long, epic cruises are full of discovery, promising guests an adventure of a lifetime. “People are always looking for something new and unique and I think that's why the Seven River Journeys have been so popular,” Loizou says. “Guests are holidaying for



Next year, the line will debut on the Magdalena river, delving into Colombia's rich cultural and natural heritage

longer and making the most of being in a destination. We have three Seven River Journeys for 2023 and two planned for next year [49 nights in length]. The interesting thing about those in 2024 is that they're on the same ship, which I think will appeal to a lot of people.”

As for the type of guests that agents should recommend these itineraries to, Loizou explains: “They are perfect for the world cruiser. It's kind of like a summer world cruise from Europe. We know that agents have had success in targeting world cruisers for Seven River Journeys, because they've got that mindset of wanting to explore. My advice for agents is to speak to those clients who go on

grand voyages and world cruises, as this will definitely pique their interest.”

AmaWaterways will also be making its debut on the Magdalena river in Colombia – marking another first for a luxury river cruise line. Itineraries will start in 2024, exploring the river and delving into Colombia's cultural and natural heritage, with more information coming very soon.

“It's another AmaWaterways first and I think it will be incredibly popular,” Loizou says. “It's a destination that people are intrigued by and one where guests want a curated experience from a trusted cruise line. It encapsulates everything that AmaWaterways is about.”



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- ◆ 24 late evening departures including Ketchikan, Icy Strait Point, Fremantle, and Napier
 - ◆ Christmas and New Year's Eve in New Zealand



QUEEN ANNE

- ◆ Queen Anne's maiden 107-night World Voyage, taking in destinations including Honolulu and Penang, in January 2025
 - ◆ Transits through both Panama and Suez Canals
- ◆ 9 overnight stays including San Francisco, Sydney, Dubai, and Singapore
- ◆ Late evening departures from Safaga, Colombo, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai



QUEEN VICTORIA

- ◆ A 78-night adventure in South America in January 2025
- ◆ Overnight stays in Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and Callao
 - ◆ Late evening departures from Amsterdam, Malaga, Lisbon, Hamburg, Rotterdam, and Vigo
 - ◆ Christmas in the Canary Islands
- ◆ Celebrate New Year's Eve 2024 in Amsterdam



QUEEN MARY 2

- ◆ Long 29-night and 35-night voyages to the Caribbean in early 2025
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QUEEN ELIZABETH

QUEEN ANNE

RIDE THE WAVE

Winners at the Wave Awards 2022 highlight what their respective victories mean to them and explain what's to come this year and beyond

What did winning a Wave Award mean to you and your brand?

Royal Caribbean head of UK sales Torey Kings-Hodkin

We have won several Wave Awards in the past, but it never stops meaning as much as it does. The excitement when your name is read out never goes away. It gives you renewed energy and makes you realise that what you do is important.

Princess Cruises UK & Europe sales director Nick Hughes

It is testament to the team and all the hard work that goes into our business, and keeps you going to try to win more next time.

Riviera Travel channel director Stuart Milan

For the Riviera Travel team as a whole, we put so much effort into our product, so it's more validation for that. In my eyes, the more validation points we can give to customers leads to an increase in bookings.

Uniworld UK & Europe MD Chris Townson

We often get amazing feedback, but to get something like a Wave Award from an expert judging panel is fantastic. It is the Oscars of the cruise industry and it cements our place in the sector.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises senior sales director Paul Beale

To be recognised for what we do and the effort and dedication that goes into our product is just fantastic.

Virgin Voyages vice-president of sales Shane Riley

It was incredible to pick up two awards, for Best for Cuisine and Best New Ship Launch. It is a well established process to select the winners, [so it's great] having the validation for the team. We are eager to win more in the future.

What trends are you seeing at your respective brands?

Torey Kings-Hodkin

We saw something build in 2022, which is that suites are selling fast, with more people taking balconies and



Nick Hughes of Princess Cruises says interest in Japan is on the up

suites than pre-pandemic. Guests tend to be spending more, such as on spa experiences, dining and so on. It's good to see people are eager to get back but also to make the most of their experience.

The big news for us is *Icon of the Seas* coming next year. It will be the largest cruise ship in the world, but so much more than a big ship. It will feature the new Crown's Edge, which is part skywalk, part ropes course. Then there's *Utopia of the Seas* (also in 2024).

Nick Hughes

We are seeing that interest in Japan has really gathered pace, with bucket-list areas hitting the spot. We're in a really good position for 2023 and want to follow this through for 2024.

We have our 16th ship coming next year and we are still pushing ahead with the MedallionClass, delivering more improvements. We also have the new 360 concept, a fully immersive experience bringing different destinations to life with smells and visuals.

Stuart Milan

Everyone is booking top down. For us, the Danube is still the main new-to-river cruise destination, while the Douro is for the more experienced cruiser. Festive cruises are also big for us. This year's December cruises show a much younger audience than our usual demographic – 10-15 years younger. For us, [our innovation is focused on] 10-day itineraries. Clients want flexibility where they can add pre or post stays, so there's plenty of focus on destination.

Chris Townson

There has been a continuation of strong sales. [Our guests] want to travel in style, so we're selling top cabins first and booking multiple cruises. Consumers are saying 'we want to do this properly'. Upselling is coming through, as is long haul and a combination of tours. [Moving forward] we continue to develop our Generations programmes and multi-gen is an expanding opportunity.

Paul Beale

Long haul has been great for us and we're excited to be going back to Japan this month (March). As for the Caribbean, we've sold a huge amount, and the eastern Mediterranean always sells the best for us. It's about getting back to sea again, enjoying travelling, seeing a country fully with unrivalled shore excursions. Our new ship *Seven Seas Grandeur* is coming in November this year, and excitingly we have a collaboration with Fabergé, for a Fabergé egg to be a permanent exhibition on the ship.



Uniworld say guests are opting for top cabins and multiple cruises

Shane Riley

People are spending more on their holidays, booking back-to-back. Our average age is getting lower and lower, so we're attracting younger demographic. Also, the new-to-cruise audience is expanding because people don't consider us a cruise product – it's a voyage product.

We have two new ships coming, however for us it is less about the ships themselves and more about software. We have an enhanced entertainment programme and will be taking dining to the next level and raising the bar again.

How can agents be successful this year?

Torey Kings-Hodkin

Use the resources that are out there. We are doubling the amount of ship visits for 2023, as we think it is really important for the trade to experience the product. Be bold with knowledge and go out there and provide incredible service.

Nick Hughes

It's also about training new agents who do not have the knowledge [of all the products]. Our ship visits will commence from May to October, and we hope to get approximately 300 agents on board. When you have experienced something yourself, you can speak about it with much more confidence.

Stuart Milan

Every line has great, accessible trade sales teams, so it shouldn't be a one-way street – agents can come to us at all times and we will help.



Royal Caribbean has renewed energy after its award win

Chris Townson

We really try to make agents' jobs as easy as possible. If a travel agent is uneasy, just ring us and we will help and provide an immediate response. We are there to support our partners.

Paul Beale

Add value rather than discount. We want agents to retain money and they can do that by keeping that price. We are proud to be in the top price bracket. If they can add value through upgrades, that is fabulous.

Shane Riley

You win on price, you lose on price. Retain the margin and add value to your service and to your clients. Be that concierge service for them. As an industry expert, you are giving them a reason to come back to you. 📌

Wave Awards 2023

Stay tuned for more information about the 2023 event. Visit thewaveawards.com for advice on how to enter.

The great Ganges

Nicole Carmichael discovers the wonders of the magnificent Ganges, India's iconic river



India's fascinating history and sacred traditions are in evidence all along the banks of the Ganges

Described as the Amazon of the East and in Sanskrit as the “best of rivers, born of all the sacred waters”, for Indians the Ganges is more than just a river, it's the mother of the whole country. Hindus worship the Ganges as a personification of the goddess Ganga, pilgrims bathe in it to cleanse and purify body and mind and many cremations are held on its banks and ashes are cast into the river, as it's believed to offer redemption to those who have passed away.

Flowing more than 2,500km from the Western Himalayas through northern India and draining into the Bay of Bengal, the largest river delta in the world, the Ganges is a lifeline to more than 400 million people who live on its banks and tributaries. It's a vital source of water and life for more than 40 per cent of India's billion-plus population, and home to hundreds of species of fish and mammals, including the once elusive Ganges river dolphin.

In the past 20 years, the area has become a popular destination for cruise

clients with wanderlust, an open mind and a healthy budget.

How it all began

Although there have always been boats on the Ganges, river cruising is a relatively new pursuit. In the days of the Raj, paddle steamers plied the length of the Ganges on a regular basis, but with the advent of the railways river navigation was abandoned.

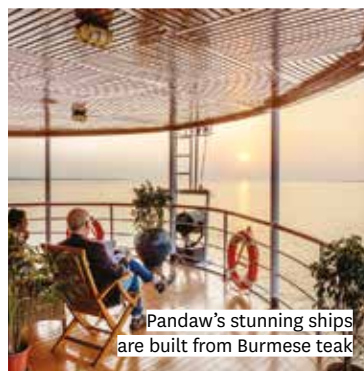
In 2003, Assam Bengal Navigation was the original cruise operator on the Ganges, converting an old junk into a luxury ship and offering India's first long-distance cruise. “Before that, the only river companies that existed were house boats on the Keralan canals,” says Assam Bengal Navigation operations director Nirmalya Choudhury. “Our company was inspired by the old mail boats which used to ply the Brahmaputra between Calcutta and Upper Assam as there was a long history of navigation in these rivers from the East India company.”

Initially tourists came to the area from the UK and Germany, but quickly the demand increased to other parts of the world. Cruise companies saw the

potential for holidays on the Ganges and other big names got on board. Now Avalon Waterways, Uniworld and Pandaw are the main river cruise lines that regularly sail the Ganges, with travel hub companies such as Jules Verne, Abercrombie & Kent, Audley Travel and Rainforest Cruises offering tailor-made and charter holidays.

“Experiencing India and the holy river of Hinduism, the Ganges, on a river cruise is the perfect way to be truly immersed in the country and its culture,” says Avalon Waterways sales and marketing director Janet Parton. “On our cruises, we share a glimpse of life away from India's big cities and allow guests to immerse themselves in the sacred and timeless traditions on the Ganges.”

Uniworld MD Chris Townson says that the luxury's line India cruise is a “bucket-list trip”, adding: “It offers guests the perfect, most luxurious way to experience the colour, cuisine, culture, history and traditions of this country like no other. The quality of the experience on board the stunning *Ganges Voyager II* is matched by the land experience on offer in Delhi and the Golden Triangle,



Pandaw's stunning ships are built from Burmese teak

Assam Bengal Navigation is the pioneer of river cruising on the Ganges



The prestigious Ganga Vilas boasts 18 state-of-the-art luxury suites

“Experiencing India and the Ganges on a river cruise is the perfect way to be truly immersed in the country and its culture”

staying in Oberoi hotels, among India's most luxurious hotels and resort, along the way.

“Unlike most operators, we offer our guests two opportunities to see the Taj Mahal, one at sunset and one at sunrise, and the Oberoi Amarvilas hotel, where we stay in Agra, also has an amazing view of it, so guests can really savour their time at this most iconic of buildings.”

Meanwhile, Pandaw sales and reservations manager James Talbot describes the line's vessels as “not the typical ‘floating hotel’ style”, stating: “They're built from Burmese teak, finished with brass, and retain a classical timeless look and feel that guests truly connect with. We currently operate three ships – the *Kalaw* and the *Kindat*, both 18-cabin vessels, built together in 2011 by our shipbuilders in Yangon, Myanmar; and the *Katha*, which is a smaller 14-cabin vessel, built in Saigon in 2011. All three were moved over to India in 2019 across the Indian ocean.”

The very latest cruise vessel to tour the Ganges is the prestigious *Ganga Vilas*, which will travel 4,000km along 27 river systems in India. Passengers will travel

across 50 significant tourist destinations, including Hindu temple prayer ceremonies and protected national parks. The three decked *Ganga Vilas* has 18 state-of-the-art luxury suites and the full backing of the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi who heralded the new ship as a “landmark moment” for tourism in India.

“This pioneering cruise across the Indian subcontinent offers guests an immersive journey through the art, cuisine, wildlife, culture and spirituality of the region,” says Jeremy Clubb, founder and director of Rainforest Cruises. “We're particularly excited by the chance to witness the powerful Ganga Aarti ritual, a devotional offering to the Ganges river's goddess, Maa Ganga, a visit to the archaeological site of Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first sermon after reaching enlightenment.”

What to see

Because of the monsoon season from June to September, parts of the Ganges are completely inaccessible during the rains. Therefore, while it's possible to cruise the Lower Ganges (the Hooghly river) all year round, cruises in the main

EXPERT VIEW

“ It's a great responsibility for people operating on the rivers to see that the authenticity of the experience remains the same for time to come. Spreading money around is easy; doing it constructively so that it benefits the right people is harder and that systematic approach needs to be done by everyone if we are to continue selling cruises. What people remember after going back home is not the great archaeological sights and what they have seen, it's the people and the river.”

NIRMALYA CHOUDHURY
Assam Bengal Navigation
operations director

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With the Ganges covering such a vast area, there are hidden treasures to explore at every stop along the way



The Ganges Voyager lounge features colonial era decor and large windows for a perfect view

section of the Ganges only operate in the winter months.

As the Ganges covers such a vast area, it's impossible to list every incredible sight from start to finish but the major cities located on the river are Lucknow, Allahabad, Patna, Kanpur, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and Varanasi, with almost countless locations of cultural significance along the way.

The river epitomises life; everywhere guests look there's something to see,

from local people on the many ghats (steps that lead down to the river) carrying out their daily rituals such as praying, bathing and practising yoga, to adventure seekers taking on the rapids where the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers meet.

The Ganges also links to some of the most important tourist hotspots, including the stunning Taj Mahal in Agra, Buddhist monuments in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the Bara Imambara in Lucknow and the holy city of Varanasi, considered to be India's spiritual capital.

"Our new expedition on the Brahmaputra has been gaining a lot of traction with adventurous travellers," says Pandaw's Talbot. "We decided to combine this with our 14-night Upper Ganges sailing between Varanasi and Kolkata. The resulting 21-night All India combination cruise has been a huge hit."

A fine balance

It's a whole world away from cruising European rivers such as the Rhine and the Danube. Culturally, river cruising on the Ganges sees two worlds collide – the day-to-day living of the villagers along the banks of the Ganges and the wealthy westerners who visit.

"On an Assam Bengal cruise, on the very first day we do a proper briefing to tell guests about the people they will encounter," says Choudhury. "Visitors might want to help and give money or school equipment to children they meet, but there are proper ways of doing it. We have launched a foundation and we are working with schools to help present a new opening in their future careers."

For many years, water pollution and drought have contributed to poor water quality, but a number of eco initiatives are working on improving, rejuvenating

ITINERARIES

Avalon Waterways

- The seven-day Spirit of the Ganges onboard the *Ganges Voyager* includes excursions to see gold and silver making and muslin weaving. Departing 5 November 2023, with prices from £3,432pp.

▶ avalonwaterways.co.uk

Uniworld

- Uniworld's 13-day Golden Triangle and the Sacred Ganges itinerary in India leads in at £5,599pp sharing, meanwhile its 16-day India cruise and rail itinerary includes six nights on board the Maharaja's Express.

▶ uniworld.com

Pandaw

- The line's Lower Ganges and Brahmaputra River is an epic 14-night combo cruise aboard the *Kalaw Pandaw* and the *Kindat Pandaw*, from £5,270pp.

▶ pandaw.com

SELLING TIPS

- Cruising the Ganges is totally unlike European river cruising and may not be suitable for the less adventurous client. Target experienced cruise clients and those who might have visited India before and have a passion for the country

- There really is something for everyone in this region. Clients can choose to visit some of India's most luxurious hotels, resorts and palaces, see India's extraordinary wildlife on safari, or take on extreme sports such as river rafting

- Changing river conditions mean that certain itinerary points on a Ganges cruise may need to be amended and replaced, so stress that clients should have a flexible mindset about the itinerary they choose

and conserving the river for communities to continue to thrive along its waterways.

"Sailing through multiple local authorities, each with their own rules and requirements, can be challenging," says Talbot. "However, these authorities appreciate the fact that we are attracting new tourists to these areas and are sharing tourism revenue beyond the traditional Golden Triangle area."

With a wealth of wonders to see, the spirit of the Ganges promises to deliver the holiday of a lifetime.🌟

THE CALL OF QATAR

The FIFA World Cup really put Qatar on the map, but what do cruises in and around the country offer passengers? **Sarah Holt** finds out



In late 2022, the eyes of the world fell on Qatar as the country hosted the FIFA World Cup. It wasn't just the sporting action that fell under the spotlight, though. For every football-focused headline that was written, another was seemingly penned about the region's cruise industry.

Stories like the *Daily Mail's* 'Inside luxury £1billion cruise liner that England WAGs will live on during the World Cup in Qatar' and *The Sun's* 'Meet England's World Cup Wags, who are staying on a £1bn cruise liner in Qatar', revealed how both the wives and girlfriends of players and football fans alike were staying on cruise ships in the port of Doha for the duration of the tournament. According to the Qatar tourist board, this attention has caused interest in Qatar-centred cruises to skyrocket.

"The FIFA World Cup 2022 provided a fantastic showcase of Qatar's cruise offering to the world," Qatar Tourism vice-president of international markets Philip Dickinson tells *Cruise Trade News*.

"Just before the tournament kicked off, we hosted the official naming ceremony for MSC Cruises' *World Europa*, which then remained in port during the World Cup. More than 1,000 travel agents attended the spectacular naming event and visited the sights of Doha.

"As well as *MSC World Europa*, we also had two other cruise ships in port during the tournament to host fans – *MSC Opera* and *MSC Poesia*. Thousands of football fans stayed on the cruise ships, many of who had never set foot on a cruise ship before, so this was an ideal starting point.

"In addition, more than 25,000 tourists and residents visited the cruise ships on day passes – again, including those who'd not been on a ship before. So, these three cruise ships helped to raise awareness of cruising in Qatar, both to fans from abroad and locals in Doha."

So, what exactly can clients expect from a cruise in and around Qatar?

The main players

In 2023, Doha is expecting to welcome more than 200,000 cruise visitors, brought in by lines such as MSC Cruises, Costa, Ponant, Oceania Cruises and Silversea.

Windstar Cruises has also launched a new collection of Arabia sailings for 2023 that call in Qatar. The 10-day Sparkling Sands & Cities of the Persian Gulf itinerary sails from Dubai to Muscat and vice versa, and includes an overnight stay



in Doha, as well as stops in Abu Dhabi and quieter spots such as Fujairah and Khasab.

MSC Cruises UK and Ireland managing director Antonio Paradiso says: "Qatar plays a very important part in our winter sailings in the Arabian Sea and its capital city Doha hosted the official naming ceremony of our largest ship *MSC World Europa* as recently as November 2022. The Gulf region is very popular with our British guests and we have expanded our offering there in recent years.

"The weather is fabulous, and our guests also get to experience the incredible contrast of culture and traditions that date back thousands of years with the futuristic metropolis of Doha. Qatar offers something for everyone, whatever their age and interests, from dhow cruises, museums and mosques, to theme parks, shopping, desert safaris and beach visits."

Itinerary introductions

Qatar cruises can usually be found in cruise lines' Middle East and Arabian Gulf collections and some of the most popular seven-night itineraries sail round-trip from Dubai or Abu Dhabi. As an example, Silversea's aptly named Dubai to Dubai cruise on *Silver Spirit* sails round-trip from Dubai, calling in at Doha, Al Manamah, Dammam, Abu Dhabi, Ras Al Khaimah and Khasab en route.

Some longer itineraries also sail in from Dubai or Abu Dhabi on their way to the likes of Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong. For example, Oceania's 45-day Ancient Asia and Arabia cruise from the line's 2024 Voyage Collection sails from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok,



EXPERT VIEW

“ There is a lot of interest in cruising to and from Qatar. This calendar year we have 95 calls planned. We expect a buoyant 2023/2024 season and beyond. We anticipate a wider variety of cruise lines calling into Qatar, including small luxury ships such as Windstar Cruises and Oceania Cruises. As a result, we expect cruise visitor figures to increase accordingly.”

PHILIP DICKINSON

Qatar Tourism VP of international markets

SELLING TIPS

- Hook in football fans by explaining how some stayed on Doha-based cruise ships during the 2022 FIFA World Cup
- Explain to clients with families how Qatar is a family-friendly destination, offering excursions to places like Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park, one of the biggest theme parks in the Middle East
- Appeal to the adventurous side of clients by telling them how desert safaris, dune buggy trips and visits to natural UNESCO sites are all part of a cruise to Qatar



A dhow cruise can offer a refreshing perspective of Doha's skyline

calling in at places like Muscat, Colombo and Kuala Lumpur, as well as Doha, en route. The recently opened Grand Cruise Terminal in Doha, with its classical Arabian architecture, art gallery and aquarium-enveloped escalators welcomes cruise passengers to Doha. From here, exploring the city is easy. Many of the main sights are within walking distance of each other, or visitors can get around on bikes.

A free shuttle takes passengers from the Grand Cruise Terminal to the Mina District, with its Crayola-coloured buildings, cafes, restaurants and shops that sell everything from cashmere clothing to the Middle Eastern fragrance oud.

Meanwhile, the Museum of Islamic Art is home to one of the most comprehensive collections of Islamic art in the world. There are four floors to explore, featuring works in all sorts of media from photography to pottery. Then there's the National Museum of Qatar – inspired by the other worldy-looking desert rose that grows in Qatar's most arid places. The architecture of this building is enough to merit a visit. Inside, visitors can explore more than 8,000 exhibits



The 2022 FIFA World Cup has led to a new wave of interest in Qatar



Guests can browse the shops and cafes of the Mina District, or just enjoy its distinctive colours



With its iconic marina, and luxury boutiques, Pearl Island has been dubbed 'the Arabian Riviera'

“The UNESCO-listed Al Ahsa Oasis has more than three million palm trees, 150 natural springs and a cave complex”

to learn about the history of Qatar, from its natural history and Bedouin culture to the establishment of the Qatari state.

Although the current Souq Waqif structures received a facelift in 2016, the history of this marketplace stretches back more than a century. Visitors to this spice-scented bazaar can haggle for everything from rugs to lanterns. Tell clients to keep an eye out for the giant gold thumb sculpture, which was designed to commemorate the achievements of the Qatari football team.

Elsewhere, restored former pearl boats crisscross their way around the Bay of Doha and taking a cruise on one is one of the best ways to appreciate the city's striking skyline. Passengers can take an afternoon dhow cruise to enjoy a barbecue as they sail over to Al Safliya Island, or sail at dusk to take in sunset over the city's skyscrapers.



The visually striking National Museum of Qatar holds more than 8,000 exhibits

Located half an hour's drive north of Doha port, Katara village was designed to be a cultural hub for Qatar. Visitors to the area can relax on cashew-coloured sand, browse a collection of art galleries, learn more about the role of astronomy in Qatar's traditions at the Al Thuraya Planetarium and sit down to meals at dozens of different restaurants.

Beyond the capital

Beyond Doha city, there's a long list of experiences for passengers to try. Clients who want to see the unadulterated side of the country should head out into the desert. Excursions take visitors into the big dipper dunes of southeast Qatar so they can see the Inland Sea, a sprawling lagoon recognised by UNESCO for its exceptional undeveloped natural beauty.

For clients who want to mix and match adventure with a little luxury, some cruise lines offer excursions that combine a 4x4 safari to the Inland Sea with some R&R time on the dove-white sands of Sealine Beach.

For those passengers travelling with their families, highlight the Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park. Just over an hour and a half's drive from Doha city centre, it's one of the largest theme parks in the Middle East. There are 56 rides for visitors to get stuck into, ranging from lazy rivers and wave pools to canyoning experiences.

Looking further afield, while Qatar-based cruises give passengers the

opportunity to see world-famous destinations like Doha, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, they also introduce clients to some of the globe's lesser-known places.

Take Dammam, for example. This Saudi Arabian city is the gateway to the UNESCO-listed Al Ahsa Oasis. One of the largest of its kind in the world, it's home to more than three million palm trees, 150 natural springs, and a cave complex, which cruise passengers can enter on excursions. These trips also often give travellers the opportunity to taste traditional Hasawi cuisine.

Located in the Persian Gulf, Sir Bani Yas is the largest natural island in the United Arab Emirates. Its main draw is its beaches with their Barbie-blond sands. Cruise passengers can also take horse riding, mountain biking and mangrove kayaking tours. 🐾

ITINERARIES

Windstar Cruises

- The nine-night Sparkling Sands & Cities of the Persian Gulf, from Dubai to Muscat, is priced from £2,481pp, departing 13 December 2023.

📍 windstarcruises.com

Oceania Cruises

- A 10-night Middle East Meandering sailing from Dubai to Abu Dhabi including airfare and wifi on *Riviera*, is priced from £2,629pp, departing 19 December 2023.

📍 oceaniacruises.com

MSC Cruises

- MSC has a six-night Dubai, Abu Dhabi & Qatar itinerary, sailing from Doha on *MSC Virtuosa*. This is priced from £549pp, departing on 1 December 2023.

📍 msccruises.co.uk

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Evening at Ephesus, Kusadasi, Turkey



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One of the largest ships on the Rhine, *A-Rosa Sena* is also one of the cleanest and greenest

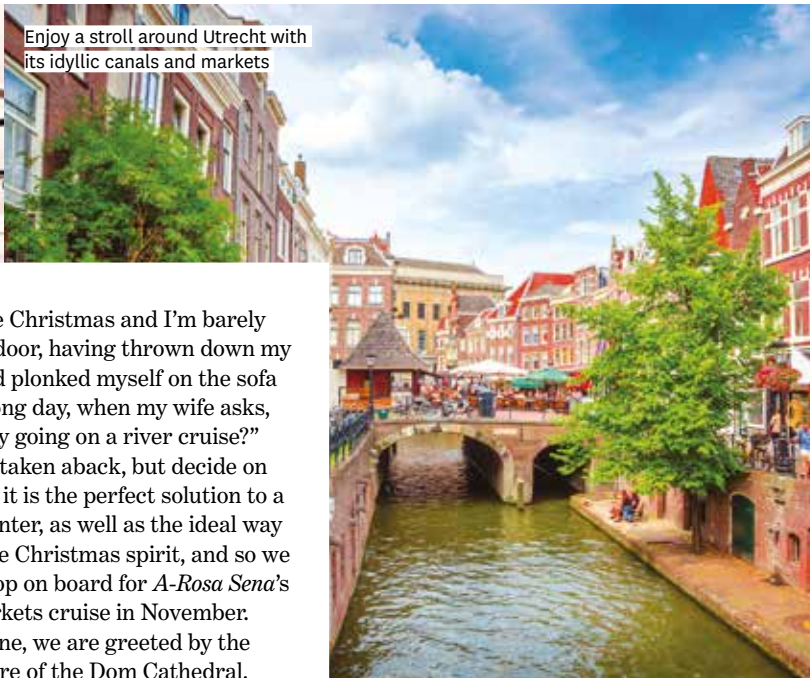


AN EVOLUTIONARY SPARK

James Gambling joins A-Rosa River Cruises
for a charming sailing on the line's new
hybrid-powered ship



Diners can enjoy stunning views from The Pavilion's panoramic glass front



Enjoy a stroll around Utrecht with its idyllic canals and markets

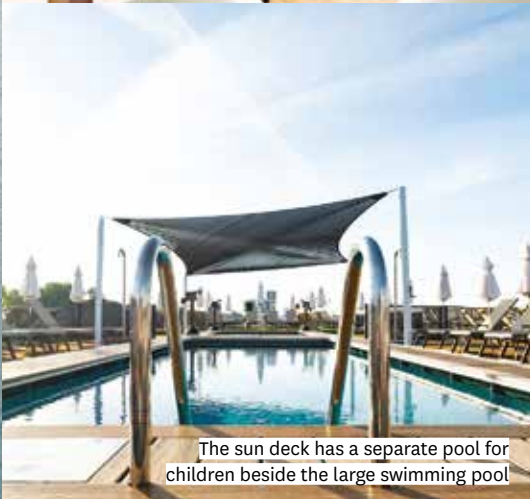
It's just before Christmas and I'm barely through the door, having thrown down my work bag and plonked myself on the sofa following a long day, when my wife asks, "Do you fancy going on a river cruise?" I am slightly taken aback, but decide on the spot that it is the perfect solution to a cold, dark winter, as well as the ideal way to get into the Christmas spirit, and so we are soon ready to hop on board for *A-Rosa Sena's* first Christmas Markets cruise in November.

Arriving in Cologne, we are greeted by the magnificent structure of the Dom Cathedral. Delving deeper into the city, we are delighted to find not one, but two Christmas markets. From festive treats of glühwein, sweet pastries and traditional savoury snacks to trinkets and other gifts, we could happily spend a few hours just milling around. However, my wife and I don't have that much time as we excitedly prepare to board *A-Rosa Sena*, our home for the next five nights.

Green and clean

Launched in summer 2022, *A-Rosa Sena* can carry up to 280 guests at full capacity, with a team of 85 super-helpful crew on board. It is one of the largest ships on the Rhine. However, what is equally impressive is the fact that the ship is one of the cleanest and greenest vessels in the river cruise industry.

So, what makes it so sustainable? The fundamental difference with *A-Rosa Sena* is that it features an E-Motion concept. In practice, this means that it combines a diesel engine with an electric motor, powered by batteries, allowing extra energy generated by the diesel engine to be stored and used when necessary.



The sun deck has a separate pool for children beside the large swimming pool



Spacious family cabins can accommodate up to five people



Rotterdam's Markthal is the place to go to sample the very best of local food



Steak and seafood fans will enjoy the menu on offer at The Sena Grill



There's entertainment for every age group, including the Kids' Club

“A-Rosa Sena is excellent when travelling with children, with a plethora of activities, films, games and entertainment”

That means the ship can switch to battery power when arriving and departing from ports. It can also connect to shore power while in port. We also notice that A-Rosa goes out of its way to reduce plastic use and waste throughout the ship and in passenger facilities.

A hive of activity

As for the all-important cabins, we are located on deck three. Our home for the cruise measures 21 square metres and has all that we could possibly want.

Our en-suite shower room is stocked with A-Rosa's toiletries and the rest of the cabin features a comfortable sofa, dressing table with large mirror, a sumptuous bed and, of course, a balcony. Spacious family cabins are also available, as is a brilliant spa and gym, not to mention the Kids' Club. As such, A-Rosa Sena can be recommended as an excellent choice when travelling with children, with a plethora of activities, films, games and entertainment aimed at different age groups.

As evening rolls around, we head to the speciality restaurant, Sena Grill, which serves up steak and seafood. We stock up on the freely poured speciality wines and enjoy sushi, steak tartare, fillet steak and teriyaki salmon, leaving just enough room for a dessert of crème brûlée and cheesecake. At €39 per person, we certainly get our money's worth, but we also very much enjoy the buffet that we



The iconic Cube Houses of Rotterdam have to be seen to be believed

SELLING TIPS

- The spacious family cabins and other amenities for kids make A-Rosa Sena a great recommendation for families
- A-Rosa Sena is one of the greenest vessels in the industry, so use that knowledge when discussing with clients who are worried about emissions and other environmental factors
- High-quality cuisine is a hallmark of the A-Rosa experience, from the speciality restaurants to the buffet

indulge in the next night – with the same quality of food and wine.

We are quick to learn that life on board A-Rosa Sena is anything but dull. There are classes during the day, including a wine and chocolate matching held in The Winery, as well as masterclasses from the on-board culinary team. In warmer climes, I can imagine the expansive sun deck, with its two swimming pools, being a great place to savour the river cruise experience.

What strikes my wife and I during our time on board is the warm and friendly atmosphere. There is an international mix of guests from the UK, Germany, France and United States, and I think I speak for most of them when I say that we all enjoy each other's company.

The delights of the Rhine

We also revel in the itinerary for our cruise, which after Cologne takes us to



“A-Rosa Sena is a ship with a difference and a potential game-changer for the river cruise market”



The extra-large Spa-Rosa will help guests to unwind

Rotterdam. Here, we are welcomed by an eclectic mix of buildings, such as the Cube Houses, one of Rotterdam's most iconic attractions, which are, as the name suggests, cubes tilted by 45 degrees.

However, my wife and I are focused on visiting Rotterdam's Markthal, which is a residential and office building with a generous food market within. There's so much on offer, but we opt for the freshly made stroopwafels – thin slices of cookie held together with a caramel filling. Sure, these can be found in local supermarkets in the UK, but nothing beats having them made fresh.

The next day we sail to Amsterdam, where a wide range of excursions



There's plenty of room to relax on the expansive sun deck

are available. After walking from the ship into town, we head to the De Pijp district. Originally constructed in the 19th century, it's now a thriving community and has the biggest street market in the Netherlands.

Utrecht is also another highlight, with a charm of its own. We admire the locals arranging their gifts for Sinterklaas, a Dutch festival that happens on St Nicholas' Eve (5 December) where gifts are exchanged with loved ones. We love this city so much that we make a mental note to return to soak up some quieter canal-city life.

Unfortunately, soon it's back to Cologne to disembark and say goodbye to *A-Rosa Sena*. It's a ship with a difference a potential game-changer for the river cruise market. 📍

DETAILS

● This cruise was booked through Newmarket Holidays. Seven-night Rhine Discovery Amsterdam & Rotterdam voyage is priced from approximately £1,411pp. Departing 4 November 2023.

The last **word**

Travel Counsellor **Matthew Morgan** looks back on a busy wave period, with the signs pointing to a greater appreciation for the expertise and value of agents



Travel agents' knowledge has proved essential with new-to-cruise clients and an extremely busy wave period

ILLUSTRATION: ANTON VIERETIN

For me, this wave period has not only been my busiest ever, but I've noticed clients are truly valuing my service and advice. When we're busy and time poor, conversations can be more direct and I've been able to talk upfront with new clients at the beginning of the enquiry to let them know how much experience I have, what that means for them and their holiday and how I'll look after them before and during their trip.

Several existing clients who have never cruised before are starting to ask me if I think it's right for them, how it all works and if cruising is as good as everyone says – that's great news for the industry as a whole.

“The small details count... my ‘top tips for cruisers’ information gets great feedback from clients”

It's the small details that count and my 'top tips for cruisers' information gets great feedback from clients, especially those who have never set foot on board a ship. Often a WhatsApp message is sent by them to say thanks while they are enjoying their cruise, and that really does make all the hard work worth it.

A selling journey

When I'm speaking to clients, I often advise them to check in online to get on the ship more quickly. It's about helping clients understand how they can do this and ensuring their first impression of

their ship and therefore their cruise experience is a positive one.

These days, a cruise line app is a must to book restaurants, see the daily planners and so on, so I always take time to sit down and go through the ins and out of how to make technology work for clients.

When it comes to speaking to new-to-cruise clients, I also remind them that it's not a requirement to get off the ship at every port, as they can make equally great holiday memories on board the ship. However, with excursions, I usually go through the itinerary with clients and help them decide what ports are suitable to get off and do their own thing and where they would be best to get an excursion – especially for first timers, as they don't understand the process, or where the ships dock and so on.

Some of this may seem obvious, but as travel agents we must always strive to provide that expertise and give people a reason to come back and book again and again. This also helps with word-of-mouth recommendations and bringing in new clients to the sector. 📌



MATTHEW MORGAN
TRAVEL COUNSELLOR



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