

ISSUE 126 • MARCH/APRIL 2024

THE VOICE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

Trade News

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Zambezi to the Brahmaputra



INSIDE: INTERVIEW REGENT SEVEN SEAS' STEVE ODELL • **CTN INVESTIGATES** IS DISCOUNTING DIMINISHING THE VALUE OF CRUISING? • **COLUMN** CLIA'S ANDY HARMER ON RIVER'S BRIGHT FUTURE



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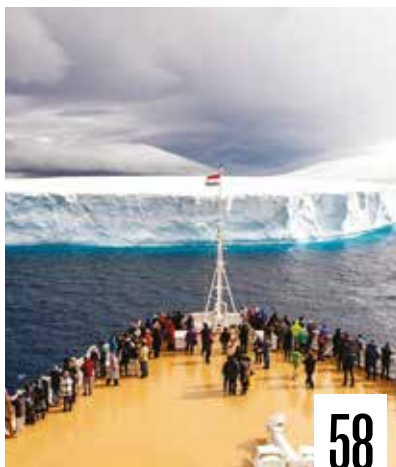
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time to boost your river cruise business





New Voyages

Sailing September 2025 to January 2027

Available to book now

10%
Introductory
saving
*T&Cs apply

Cunard World Club members and new guests can enjoy a 10% introductory saving on new voyages when booked by 3 June 2024, applicable to Cunard Fare and Early Saver Fare bookings.

Terms and conditions apply.

QUEEN ANNE

From French vineyards to Norwegian Fjords, African plains to Asian islands. A 109-night World Voyage with calls to Dubai, Hong Kong and Singapore sailing on Queen Anne's new voyages.

QUEEN MARY 2

Luscious French Polynesian landscapes, Iceland's showstopping geysers. 108-night World Voyage and a maiden Panama Canal transit, sailing on Queen Mary 2's new voyages.

QUEEN VICTORIA

In 2026 Queen Victoria will be offering a Fly-Mediterranean season where guests can start their holiday in Barcelona, Istanbul, Rome or Trieste. Flights from £99 on selected Mediterranean Fly-Cruises of 12 nights or more.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Introducing Queen Elizabeth's new Fly-Caribbean season sailing from Miami with voyages from 9, 12 and 21 nights. Visiting Jamaica, Mexico, Belize and more.



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You will earn Shine points for every Cunard Fare booking you make and play. Shine points can then be spent to purchase vouchers for well known retailers, or your own Cunard voyage.

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QUEEN MARY 2

QUEEN VICTORIA

QUEEN ELIZABETH

QUEEN ANNE



WELCOME...

TO THE MARCH/APRIL ISSUE

And just like that, wave season is (almost) over. If there's one thing to take away as the first quarter of the year comes to a close, it's that travellers are continuing to put their confidence in cruising. You only need to look at the number of lines and agents who have posted record-breaking sales numbers – including Celestyal, who reported a week's worth of deals in a single day in February – to see that post-pandemic travel has taken a gear shift.

However, with more than 20 new ships launching this year, cruise lines are under more pressure than ever to fill their cabins, and if post-wave sales begin to tail off, the prospect of slashing prices might be too tempting to turn down. That's why for this issue's CTN Investigates on page 37, we've decided to address the discounting dilemma by asking whether the industry will hold firm or continue to cut fares and put cruise's value at risk.

Meanwhile, on page 16, we assess what the ongoing conflict in the Red Sea means for the industry. This follows the news that Virgin Voyages, MSC Cruises, Holland America Line and more have decided to cancel or re-route their round-the-world trips to



ABOVE Cruise Lines have cancelled their Red Sea sailings

avoid the region, causing one agent to lose a booking worth £30k.

And finally, our new guest columnist, CLIA's UK and Ireland managing director Andy Harmer, reveals why now is the perfect time for agents to boost their river business. You can find Andy's piece on our back page.

There's all that, plus a stellar line-up of inspiring travel features to get your customers dreaming of their next holiday.

Happy reading!

Jack Carter
Editor

On the cover: Kindat Pandaw, Brahmoputra

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Cruise Corner



FRED OLSEN RAISES £50,000 FOR THE RNLI

> Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has raised £50,000 for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) – surpassing its 2023 target by a whopping £10,000. The line is the lifeboat service's longest-standing corporate partner and for more than 60 years has been working with guests to fundraise towards saving lives at sea.

Since 2000, Fred Olsen and its passengers have raised more than £1.4 million which has funded five inshore lifeboats,

“
**WE'RE PROUD
TO BE THE RNLI'S
LONGEST STANDING
CORPORATE
PARTNER**

three mobile training units, three seminar rooms at the RNLI College in Poole, the development and funding of three lifeboat-launching trolleys, crew member training and crew equipment.

The line has raised the cash through a variety of fundraising events, with guests on board *Borealis'* world cruise being challenged to walk, run, cycle and swim 34,849 miles – the equivalent distance of its Around the World in 80 Days cruise.

Dr Kate Bunyan, director of health services at Fred Olsen and RNLI volunteer, said: “We’re incredibly proud to be the RNLI’s longest-standing corporate partner, with a relationship that has spanned more than 60 years.”

IN NUMBERS

£50K

raised in
2023

34,849

total miles
travelled

£1.4

million collected
since 2000

Exclusive



SCAN TO DISCOVER
MORE CRUISE NEWS
AND FEATURES

LIMITLESS TRAVEL TO DOUBLE CRUISE BUSINESS IN 2024

➤ Cruise holidays are becoming “hugely popular” with disabled travellers as more lines review and update their accessibility policies. This was the message from chief executive of Limitless Travel Angus Drummond, who told *Cruise Trade News* the operator is set to double the number of cruise customers on its books in 2024.

Sailings were first added to the accessible travel specialist’s product line at the start of 2022; and in 2023, the company saw bookings for cruises go from strength to strength.

“Now more cruise operators have reviewed their accessibility policies and are making more accessible accommodation available, it’s proving to be hugely popular with our customers,” Drummond said.

“**CRUISE IS PROVING
TO BE HUGE
POPULAR WITH
OUR CUSTOMERS**”



AE EXPEDITIONS HOSTS AGENTS IN ANTARCTICA

➤ A group of UK agents has recently returned from a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Antarctica with AE Expeditions. Agents from Distinctive Americas, Polar Routes, Travelwise, Arcturus, Cruise Select and Aqua-Firma experienced the Explorer Express itinerary from 10-18 February on-board *Sylvia Earle*.

The nine-day voyage offered time in the Antarctic Peninsula, filled with wildlife encounters including penguin, whale and seal sightings, and Zodiac excursions.

It comes after the small-ship expedition operator experienced 53 per cent growth out of the UK and Ireland last year.



ON THE HORIZON

By Eithne Williamson

At Princess, when we say ‘here comes the sun’, we really mean it (and not just because spring is around the corner). That’s because we’re getting ready to welcome *Sun Princess*.

We are incredibly excited that guests and agents are now experiencing our most impressive, luxurious and stunning Love Boat ever. We recently hosted more than 200 agents on board *Sun Princess*, providing them with an awesome opportunity to be some of the first to experience our new class of ship, setting them up for success when selling to their customers.

With 11 new cruise ships launching in 2024, it’s essential that travel agents feel equipped with the knowledge to confidently secure the right cruise to the right customer.

This year, we’re looking forward to welcoming more agents than ever before on board a Princess vessel, whether that is through fam trips, ship visits or our Graduation cruises. We’ll soon be announcing dates for our 2024 ship visit programme, so be sure to follow our agent pages across social media to stay up to date.

Maintaining momentum

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' Geoff Ridgeon updates agents on its 2025/26 itineraries



There's nothing like another successful wave season, resulting in a mad rush of bookings from your customers wanting to explore the world by ship. We say it every year, but a strong wave season really does set the foundation for the year ahead, so now is the time to start thinking about how to capitalise and keep that momentum going.

And there's no time to rest on your laurels in this industry as it's straight on to the next milestone, which for many cruise lines will be the launch of their new itineraries for 2025/26. It's always an exciting time for operators as they release a variety of new adventures to far-flung destinations, such as Australia, Africa and Asia, or those slightly closer to home, including the Norwegian fjords, the Mediterranean and the Dalmatian coast. There is sure to be an itinerary to suit your customers' every want and need.

Fred. Olsen's itineraries launched on 5 March, with a brochure brimming with opportunities to traverse the globe, including the chance to explore South America and Antarctica on a grand voyage in January 2026. Who wouldn't want to have the opportunity to cruise through the Antarctic Peninsula or witness the electrifying spectacle of the Rio Carnival?



ABOVE Norway is an ideal 'closer to home' destination for customers

“
Who wouldn't want the opportunity to cruise through the Antarctic Peninsula or witness the electrifying Rio Carnival?

TOP TIPS

1 Guests are eager to cruise at optimal times to make the most of key events and festivals like Rio Carnival

2 Fred. Olsen's new itineraries invite guests to see the world in a wholly different way

3 Let clients know how lines can help them in the booking process

Other highlights include cruising to destinations at optimal times to witness events such as the French Riviera's blooming fields of lavender and sunflowers, the Midnight Sun in Norway or Europe's largest Sea Shanty Festival in Falmouth. And not forgetting the launch of shorter fly-cruise explorations of the Mediterranean.

Now is the time to really familiarise yourself with what makes each cruise line special, what they offer and what they are doing to support guests both as part of the booking process and once on board.

Every single one of your customers' holiday journeys starts with a dream, so help them make it a reality.

Until next time... 



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines



PROUDLY ANNOUNCING NEW ITINERARIES FOR 2025/26

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines are thrilled to share their imaginative and unusual itineraries for 2025 and 2026.

Plus, book now enjoy Free On Board Spend or Door-to-Door Transfers on selected 2025/26 cruises.

Enter to win one of our new 25/26 itineraries

To be in with the chance of winning a cabin on one of our exciting new itineraries, simply visit our Trade Facebook Group and comment which is your favourite itinerary and why.

Five lucky Trade Partners will have the chance to win!

Find out more at fredolsencruises.com/agent



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to find out more

Terms and Conditions apply. Free On Board Spend or Door-to-Door Transfers: Applicable to new bookings made from 05/03/24 onwards on selected cruises of 14 to 28 nights departing from the UK in 2025 & 2026. For cruises of five to 13 nights, On Board Spend is applicable only. Exclusions apply. Win a cruise competition valid for Facebook posts made using chosen best itinerary and why from our Main 2025/26 Cruise Brochure between 05/03/2024 and 31/03/2024 inclusive. Entrants must be 21 or over. For more information visit fredolsencruises.com/travel-agent-centre. E&OE.



NEED TO KNOW



RECORD BREAKERS

Unforgettable Croatia has reported a “record-breaking” wave period, with the luxury operator’s sales revenue up 20 per cent compared to 2023. The firm reported a 124 per cent uplift in trade sales compared to last year, while overall enquiries across January and February increased by 28 per cent year on year, with website visitors up 22 per cent. Graham Carter, chief commercial officer at Unforgettable Croatia, said: “Following the introduction of our dedicated trade team last year, agents have had a record-breaking wave. We want to thank them for their continued support of our brand; 2024 will see us further expand our agent-facing team, tools and resources.”



SEADREAM ADDS MORE GREECE CRUISES

SeaDream Yacht Club has added more voyages to its 2025 Greek Isles collection.

This includes a 14-night sailing which combines two new Yachting the Greek Isles itineraries, exploring 13 different Greek ports on board *SeaDream I*.

The itinerary includes visits to iconic Greek attractions, UNESCO world heritage sites and yachting harbours.

"We have been exploring the Greek Isles for more than 20 years, and it strikes us how there is always somewhere new to discover and someone new to meet," said SeaDream Yacht Club's Andreas Brynestad. The decision to expand the line's presence in the Greek Isles comes as a direct response to consumer demand, the line said.

Appointments



Wendy Lahmich leaves Seabourn

Wendy Lahmich will step down from her role as director of sales for Seabourn and leave the travel industry after 30 years.

She joined CCL in 1996 as a sales executive and rose over the years to become director of sales for Holland America Line and Seabourn.

"I feel it is now time for me to start the next chapter in my life, to focus on family, possibly move back to the North and spend more precious time with my mum in the Lake District," Lahmich said.



CUNARD TO MAKE MIAMI DEBUT

Cunard will make its maiden call in Miami as part of its 2025-2027 programme of voyages.

It comes after the luxury cruise line revealed a range of new voyages from September 2025 to January 2027 across its fleet.

With more than 300 new sailings, *Queen Mary 2*, its newest vessel *Queen Anne*,

Queen Victoria and *Queen Elizabeth* will call at 184 destinations across 70 countries.

The new programme also includes 37 overnight calls and 66 late departures. There will be five maiden calls for the fleet in Kona, Hawaii; Roatan, Honduras; Dakar, Senegal; Miami, Florida; and Molde, Norway.

NEED TO KNOW



SETTING SAIL

APT has announced plans to deploy two new vessels, *APT Solara* and *APT Ostara*, in Europe during its 2025 season. Designed in Australia, the sister ships will sail along the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers carrying 154 guests and 60 crew. Each ship will feature six all-inclusive dining options, including a main restaurant and a wine cellar, as well as a conservatory, a casual dining option, and rooftop dining, plus the additional option of in-suite dining. On the sun deck, meanwhile, guests will find a heated pool and a lounge area. A choice of three suite options includes Twin Window Suites, Balcony Suites, and Owner's Suites.



AMERICAN QUEEN VOYAGES BLAMES COVID FOR CLOSURE

United States river cruise operator American Queen Voyages (AQV) ceased trading in February due to the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It is most unfortunate that, despite great efforts by our team, crew and partners, AQV has been unable to fully rebound from the effects of the pandemic," said Adam Peakes, president

of AQV owner Hornblower Group. Peakes said the financial impact has "proven unsustainable" and if the line cannot be sold, its operations will be wound down.

Light Blue Travel, the brand's GSA in the UK, will either source a similar cruise through another supplier or offer impacted guests a full refund.

Appointments



Tom Morgan takes on new role

Riviera Travel head of international sales Tom Morgan has joined G Touring as trade sales director.

Morgan, who joined the river cruise and touring specialist in 2014 as key account manager, worked his way up to head of international sales in 2023.

"Joining such a respected travel brand is an honour, and I am excited to contribute to their plans for growth and success," Morgan said.



RIVIERA TO LAUNCH TWO NEW SHIPS

Riviera Travel will launch two new ships in 2025. The 178-guest *Riviera Radiance* and 114-guest *Riviera Rose* will debut in March and April next year respectively and will feature a host of never-before-seen features for the line, including its largest ever suites.

Radiance will operate six different voyages on the Danube when it launches and will include three full decks and a trio of dining options. *Rose* will operate on the Douro with a Highlights of the Douro Valley and Salamanca cruise, while offering 57 cabins across three decks, including four Balcony Suites with outside seating.

NEED TO KNOW

SWAN HELLENIC DETAILS
NEW MED EXPEDITIONS

Swan Hellenic has announced details of its four 2024 expedition cruises in the heart of the Mediterranean. All will be aboard luxury ship *SH Diana*, following its 10-night Mysteries of Carthage and the Moors cruise from 10-20 August 2024.

The line will offer a Secrets of Sicily itinerary, sailing from 10-28 August round-trip out of Palermo calling at

Trapani, Valetta, Siracusa, Giardini Naxos near Taormina and Lipari, the largest Aeolian Island.

The From Magna Graecia to Greece voyage, meanwhile, will depart Palermo on 28 August to 5 September sailing to the volcanic islands of Lipari and Stromboli, then on to Giardini Naxos, Crotone, Otranto, Sarande, Preveza, Itea and Piraeus.

Appointments

All change at
Hurtigruten

Former Saga Travel Group trading director Iain Powell (above, left) has joined Hurtigruten as vice president of sales and marketing UK & EMEA after Anthony Daniels (above, right) stepped down.

Prior to Saga, Powell spent nearly four years with Carnival UK working across the P&O Cruises and Cunard brands.

"Hurtigruten is a company I have long admired, so to have the opportunity to lead the UK & EMEA teams at such an exciting time is fantastic," Powell said.

APT TO CHARTER SEABOURN
EXPEDITION SHIPS

APT and Seabourn have entered a multi-year partnership which will see the touring specialist charter two of the luxury cruise line's expedition vessels.

APT will operate *Seabourn Venture* and *Seabourn Pursuit* on sailings to the UK, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland,

the Kimberley and Antarctica in 2025. Chief executive of APT Travel Group David Cox said: "We are excited to embark on this journey with Seabourn, to create unforgettable travel experiences for our guests."

Cruises are on sale now for Northern Europe, the Arctic and the Kimberley in 2025.

Fresh perspective

Following the line's success at the 2023 Wave Awards, Cunard director of UK sales Tom Mahoney is confident the event will help propel the line to new heights amid the launch of *Queen Anne*



“
Our relations with the trade are so important; agents are critical to the success of *Queen Anne*

When asked about the 2023 Wave Awards, Cunard's Tom Mahoney says decisively: “It was an absolutely incredible evening.” The night at The Dorchester Hotel on London's Park Lane saw two award-winning performers bring the luxury cruise line's new entertainment concept to life.

To showcase *Queen Anne*'s Bright Lights Society, the Olivier Award-winning Matt Henry MBE and YolanDa Brown OBE DL treated

guests to a rendition of *Land of Lola* from hit musical *Kinky Boots* and a performance of *Can't Stop the Feeling* by Justin Timberlake.

“I think that's the first time many in the industry would have seen Cunard in that light, which actually opened up a lot of conversations for us,” Mahoney says. “We were looking at opportunities to start spreading the *Queen Anne* message and what Cunard entertainment is all about, as some people have their misconceptions of what our onboard experience is like.”

Mahoney says the Wave Awards was a great opportunity to demonstrate the “true Cunard experience” to the industry, with The Dorchester Hotel reflecting the aesthetic of a Cunard ship.

“I also think for the first time a lot of the industry saw what our sales team is all about, having gone through quite a big evolution over the last couple of years,” Mahoney adds.

FIT FOR A QUEEN

The importance of having a strong sales team with robust ties to the UK travel trade is not lost on Mahoney. “Our relations with the trade are incredibly important,” he says. “Agents are massively critical to the success of *Queen Anne*, and I think what the Wave Awards did was help our trade strategy of breaking down any misconceptions which may be held.”

THREE THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR ON QUEEN ANNE

1 Shining bright
In a first for Cunard, a new show bar, spotlighted by hundreds of unique light fittings, named the Bright Lights Society, will offer guests a range of entertainment options.

2 Calm waters
The Mareel Wellness & Beauty spa will offer a steam bath, sauna, cold room, Himalayan salt sauna, thermal pool and thermal loungers.

3 Delectable dining
Guests can choose from a range of authentic cuisines from destinations such as the Mediterranean, Japan and India.

LEFT Sensational saxophonist YolanDa Brown wowed the guests

Another challenge Mahoney and his sales team face is filling the extra capacity in 2024 and beyond created by the introduction of *Queen Anne*, which has now been on sale for almost two years.

“From a booking perspective, that capacity increase has almost relinquished and we're going to exit wave in a very strong booked position with *Queen Anne*,” he says. ●



Troubled waters

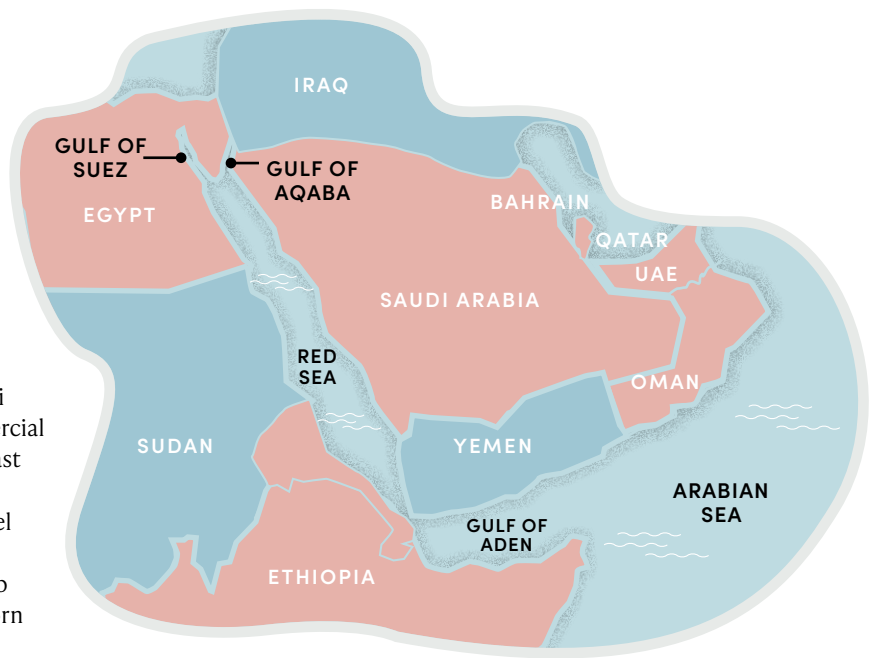
As cruise lines cancel and reroute popular voyages, **Jack Carter** examines how the conflict in the Red Sea could impact the future of the destination

When Yemen-based Houthi rebels attacked a commercial ship in the Red Sea late last year, it was a reminder of just how quickly the travel landscape can shift when conflict erupts.

It began on 19 November in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, when militia groups seized a cargo ship via helicopter. The situation intensified on 23 and 31 December, when two more commercial vessels were targeted by drone and missile attacks. Houthi rebels say the incidents are in response to Israel's bombardment of Palestine, a conflict that poses its own separate set of risks to cruises sailing in the eastern Mediterranean.

The response from cruise lines has been swift. Virgin Voyages announced last month that it has cancelled its 2024/25 season plans for *Resilient Lady* and withdrawn the vessel's late 2024 and early 2025 repositioning sailings between Europe and Australia. "On the heels of recent changes and based on the regional and government advice we have received, we remain very concerned about potential escalations in the Red Sea over the next 12 months," a Virgin Voyages statement read.

Meanwhile, MSC Cruises has already cancelled a variety of programmes, including a transit through the Suez Canal that was due to sail in January. Fred Olsen Cruise Line and Holland America Line are among others to reroute or cancel 2024 itineraries that were due to sail through the Red Sea.



"We have been working closely with cruise lines to address issues for customers booked to travel through the Suez Canal," says Dave Mills, chief commercial officer at Iglu Cruises. "This mostly affects those returning from round-the-world cruises, or on repositioning cruises. Our team is keeping the situation under close review on a daily basis."

HOW IS THIS IMPACTING TRAVEL AGENTS?

While cancellations cause upheaval for lines and cruise-goers, it's travel agents who are often left to pick up the pieces as they scramble to salvage bookings and, subsequently, their commissions.

“ONE AGENT LOST A BOOKING WORTH £30K AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE CONFLICT IN THE RED SEA



Linda Hill Miller, founder and managing director of LAH Travel, told *Cruise Trade News* that she lost a booking worth £30k as a direct result of the ongoing conflict in the Red Sea. What she found particularly frustrating was that rather than help save the booking by offering the customer an alternative cruise, the line stepped in and gave them a full refund instead without consulting her first.

“It’s a shame for us as we’ve done all the work to book the holiday and then all the work to cancel it, as well. While it’s not the cruise line’s fault that it’s not a safe area to travel to, once again it feels like a kick in the teeth for the travel agent.”



“ WHILE IT’S NOT THE LINE’S FAULT, IT’S A KICK IN THE TEETH FOR THE TRAVEL AGENT

Miller believes that when travel plans are disrupted, cruise lines should let agents deal with the consumer directly while there’s still hope of finding a solution everyone can be happy with. “I wish tour operators wouldn’t deal with customers at all. I pride myself on my customer service, so if there’s information to share with the client, I want to be the one to tell them,” she says. “I don’t want customers contacting me before I’ve had a chance to pick up the phone.”

IS THERE A WAY BACK FOR THE RED SEA?

It’s impossible to predict how the situation in the Red Sea will evolve. What’s clear, however, is that it’ll be a long time before cruise lines deem it safe enough to return to. “There needs to be some massive political changes and then a period of stability before cruising

FROM TOP Travellers may be wary about visiting previously popular destinations such as Aqaba in Jordan; the targetting of cargo ships by Houthi rebels has caused a great deal of unrest around the Red Sea

“ IT WILL TAKE A GOOD FEW YEARS FOR CONSUMER CONFIDENCE TO RETURN

starts again,” says river cruise specialist James Hill. “However, Egypt and the Nile show that ‘no-go’ areas can become popular again once clients can see a safe and reliable way to visit.”

Miller agrees, stating that while there’s plenty to entice British holidaymakers to the Red Sea region, she can’t see it being back on travellers’ wish lists any time soon. “Even if the Red Sea was deemed safe tomorrow, it would still take a good few years for consumer confidence to return,” she says.

Confidence is the key word here. As all travel agents know, even if unrest is occurring in one specific region, negative perception can quickly spread on a much larger scale. “Consumers get scared when they start seeing things like this on the news,” Miller concludes. “Whether it’s the Red Sea or not, [conflict] makes people think they don’t want to cruise. If it continues, it will impact travel overall, not just our industry.” ●

BELOW Holidaymakers may avoid Red Sea regions for several years as negative perceptions spread



How cruise lines have reacted to the situation in the Red Sea

VIRGIN VOYAGES

“With the safety of our passengers and crew as our number one priority, Virgin Voyages recently shared a change of course for our early 2024 repositioning voyage from Australia to the Med.

“This significant and ongoing conflict puts unacceptable risks for safe passage through the region for our Sailors [passengers], crew and vessel (*Resilient Lady*). As a result, we have been left with no choice but to cancel our 2024/25 voyage season plans for *Resilient Lady*, impacting the late 2024 and early 2025 repositioning voyages between Europe and Australia and a second sailing season in Australian waters.”

MSC CRUISES

“We have been closely monitoring the situation in the Red Sea and considering the continued risks of sailing in this region with the ongoing attacks on ships in this area we have been obliged to cancel various programmes.

“We put the safety and wellbeing of our passengers first and more importantly, we

want them to have certainty when it comes to their holiday. The cruise industry is in a unique position that ships can promptly be redeployed when there are geopolitical issues so that guests are still able to enjoy a cruise holiday with peace of mind.”

HOLLAND AMERICA LINE

“At Holland America Line, the safety and wellbeing of our guests and team members is our top priority. Given recent developments and in close consultation with global security experts and government authorities, we’ve made the difficult decision to reroute the 2024 Grand World Voyage on *Zuiderdam* to bypass the Red Sea.

“While we never want to disappoint our guests [all of whom have been notified], we believe these changes best support our commitment to the safety and security of all who sail with us and provide the opportunity for passengers to enjoy the service, cuisine and destination-rich cruising the Grand World Voyage is known for.”

2026
**AROUND THE
WORLD**
aboard VISTA

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Bouncing back

While this year's wave data paints a positive picture, a closer look reveals some intriguing findings, says Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant**

If you were looking for evidence that the cruise industry is back on track after a turbulent few years, you simply need to look at this year's wave booking data. Bookings made on Traveltek's platforms during January and February this year were up by a staggering 72.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2019, measuring in at roughly 62,500 bookings from UK cruisegoers.

While flight demand and hotel occupancy are yet to close in on pre-Covid levels, cruises have continued to increase in popularity. According to a Reuters report from December, travellers across all income and budget levels have been booking cruises for 2024 at greater volumes than even before the pandemic.

However, one surprising shift seen in the data is the trend to book cruises further in advance. Figures from 2019 showed that sail dates tended to tail off 15 months after the booking dates. However, we can now see sail dates continuing 24 months beyond the booking date, with consumers securing cruises as far forward as 2029. Many cruise lines such as Norwegian and Carnival also reported occupancy rates above 100 per cent in 2023, meaning there were third and fourth passengers in cabins, thus beyond the standard double occupancy minimums.

While a surge in demand would often be accompanied by increases in pricing, another interesting narrative within our wave booking data is beginning to emerge. The average price of a cruises booked in January and February 2024



“
One surprising shift in the data is the trend to book cruises further in advance

was £2,990, while during the same period in 2019 the average was £2,660.

Although this shows a 12 per cent increase, it doesn't align with inflation rates of the past five years. In fact, according to the Bank of England inflation calculator, one could expect what consumers originally spent in 2019 to now cost £3,240. As costs increase for households in every realm, could this suggest that travellers are turning to cruises because they're cheaper than land-based alternatives?

There is no doubt that this year's wave season will have massively boosted confidence within the industry, which has not only rebounded from the pandemic but is set to thrive in the years to come. ●

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant believes travellers are turning to cruises as they are cheaper than land-based options

IN NUMBERS

£2,990

Average price of cruises booked during 2024 wave period

62.5K

Number of bookings made between Jan-Feb 2024

36.3K

Number of bookings made between Jan-Feb 2019





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8*, 22[^] Dec 2024; 5 Jan, 2, 16 Feb, 7, 21[^] Dec 2025; 4, 18[^] Jan; 1, 15[^] Feb 2026

Singapore to Hong Kong (or reverse[^]) SEABOURN ENCORE

From £7,289pp | Inclusive Air

Visits: Laem Chabang (Bangkok); Ko Kood (Thailand);
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*Lead fare based on 8/12/24



10-Day Gems of the Lesser Antilles

30 Nov 2024

Roundtrip Barbados | SEABOURN OVATION

From £5,699pp | Inclusive Air

Visits: Port Elizabeth (Bequia); Roseau (Dominica);
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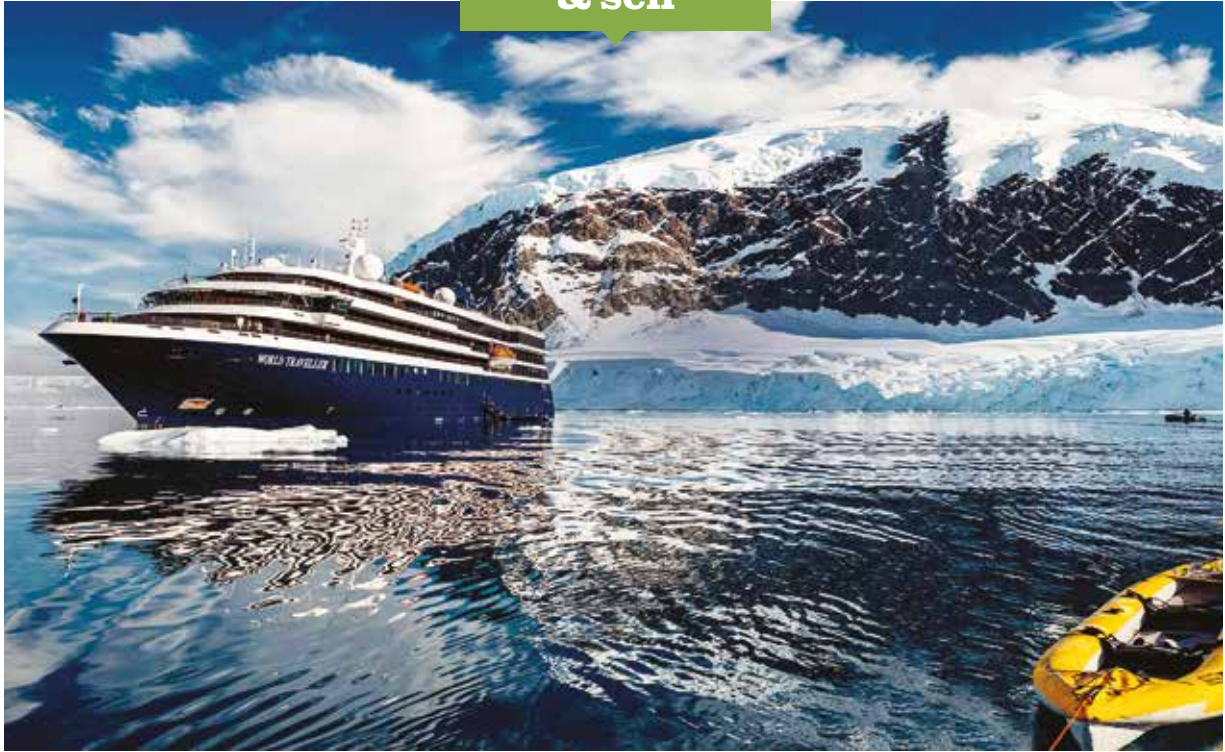
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Atlas Ocean Voyages

Ahead of its UK launch, we reveal what new products and features the luxury yacht-style expedition cruise line will be bringing to market

IN THE KNOW

After a successful launch in the US, luxury expedition cruise line Atlas Ocean Voyages is now looking to establish itself in the UK, with former Oceania Cruises managing director Bernard Carter at the helm of the domestic operation. The line is entering a fast-growing sector of the cruise industry, though Atlas' fleet of high-end yacht-style ships and all-inclusive features help differentiate it from other expedition brands. While on board, guests can enjoy the relaxed luxury akin to a yachting experience while its immersive, adventure-focused itineraries travel to some of the most sought-after destinations on the planet, including both polar regions.

THE FLEET

The Atlas fleet is made up of three identical yachts with another three "coming soon", according to the website. The vessels accommodate fewer than 200 guests, which means they can tuck into remote destinations, opening the door to more authentic, personalised experiences. *World Navigator*, *World Traveller* and *World Voyager*, the latest addition to



FROM TOP The Atlas fleet can tuck into remote destinations; *World Voyager's* modern suites are perfect for unwinding

the fleet, each offer suites and balcony rooms, as well as a main fine dining room inspired by Portuguese cuisine. A curation of special guest speakers and lecturers includes naturalists, photographers and scientists, while programmes of polar, epicurean and cultural-themed expeditions allow guests to imbibe the destinations they're sailing to on a deeper level.

WHO'S WHO?

Carter will be heading up the sales operation for the UK and European markets and will be supported by Paul Frost, head of commercial and product, and West Sussex-based luxury cruise specialist The Cruise Line. Commenting on the appointment, president and CEO of Atlas Ocean Voyages James Rodriguez said: "Sourcing guests from new markets is important to our expansion plan and we welcome Bernard's support in our international sales initiative."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT *World Voyager* guests will relish the private balcony spaces; *World Traveller* offers a truly immersive experience; Bernard Carter is keen to grow in the UK market



“**WITH FEWER THAN 200 GUESTS, ATLAS’ VESSELS GIVE A MORE AUTHENTIC, PERSONALISED EXPERIENCE**”

WHAT’S ON THE HORIZON?

In addition to three new yachts, Atlas has recently launched a new eight-day Barbados itinerary, departing 24 April 2024, offering the chance to discover the beaches and colonial architecture of the Caribbean’s smaller, more intimate islands. Prices start from £2,789pp for a veranda stateroom and includes direct return flights from the UK.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Bernard Carter tells *Cruise Trade News* how he plans to get UK trade on board

How are you planning on introducing Atlas Ocean Voyages to UK trade? We’re a small brand. We only have three ships, so that’s less than 600 guests a night. This means we have to grow in a measured fashion. We want to be able to service the whole industry while focusing on a few select partners who



have the infrastructure to go out and bring guests to us. Agents will be able to contact me directly and we also have The Cruise Line team who have been doing GSA-style operations for a number of lines for 30-plus years now.

What infrastructure is currently available to agents? Firstly, we’re building a portal which will have a dedicated training section. The website is currently using US dollar pricing, but local currency should be available by early April to coincide with our new online booking engine.

If we can deliver enough business, which I am confident we can do, we will see more people support the UK operation, hopefully in the not-too-distant future. 🍷

TOP TIPS

1 Reiterate to clients that as soon as they’re on board, everything is included, from gratuities, Wi-Fi and L’Occitane En Provence bath amenities to craft beer and premium wines, spirits and soft drinks.

2 Non-agent partners who are signed up to Widgety can use the platform to access brand-new Atlas Ocean Voyages content, which is packed with itinerary insights and ship details to help sell the product to potential guests.

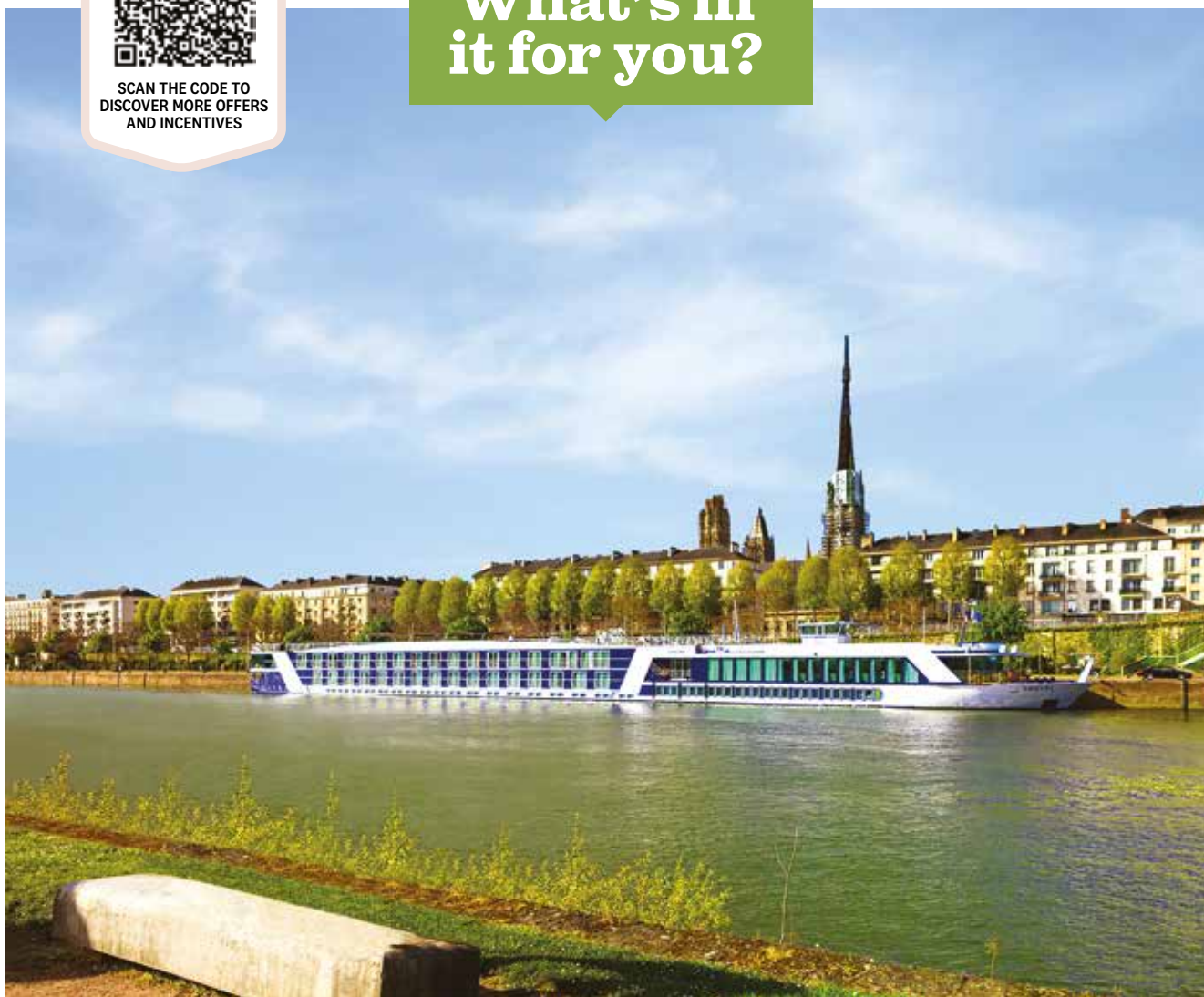
3 The line’s onshore excursions and enrichment programmes are also completely free and include everything from sightseeing tours on polar-class Zodiacs to cooking classes led by local chefs.



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DISCOVER MORE OFFERS
AND INCENTIVES

INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
ITINERARIES

What's in it for you?



WIN A FRENCH RIVER CRUISE WITH AMAWATERWAYS



In a bid to help agents make the most of an increased interest in France during this Olympic year, AmaWaterways is offering the trade the chance to win a French river cruise for them and a companion.

To be entered into the prize draw, agents must make a booking in March for any of AmaWaterways' French itineraries departing in 2024.

The winner will experience the line's new seven-night Flavours of Burgundy cruise in 2024, exploring some of France's most iconic vineyards and chateaux as they sail from Dijon along the Rhone and Soane rivers to Lyon.

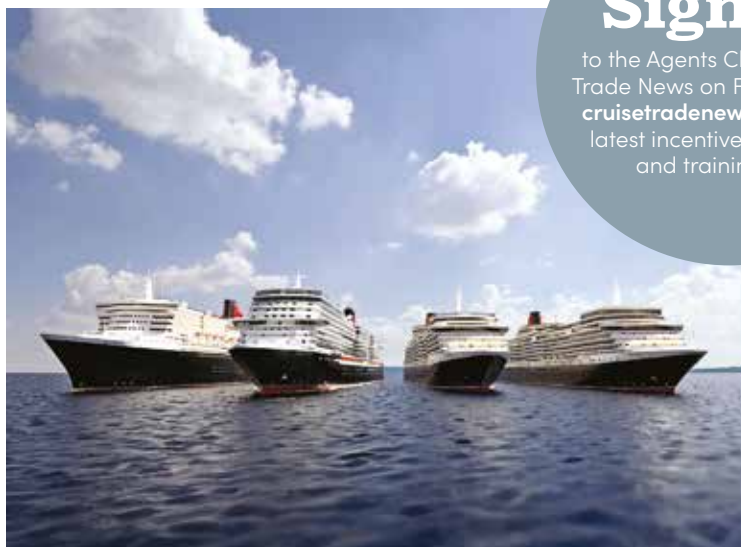
During the sailing, they will sample regional cuisine and gastronomical treats both onboard and while on several included tours.

All shore excursions, unlimited wine, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner, and daily "sip and sail" cocktails are included during the sailings, in addition to the line's Wellness Programme.

All agents making a qualifying booking from 1-31 March 2024 will automatically be entered into the prize draw with the winner picked at random on 2 April 2024. The more bookings agents make, the more chances they have to win.

Sign up

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



A-ROSA ROLLS OUT NEW INCENTIVE PROGRAMME

Agents who make a 2024 booking with A-Rosa River Cruises between 1 March and 30 April will be entered into a draw to win a seven-night cruise this summer.

The line is also giving away weekly summer themed prizes such as Ray Ban sunglasses, clothes vouchers, a luxury beach bag and a gym membership.

To be in with a chance of winning, agents must send their A-Rosa success stories, social media posts, window displays or sales events to hello@arosa-cruises.co.uk. Winners will be announced each Wednesday.

CUNARD TO HOST 'MORE AGENTS THAN EVER'

> Cunard is set to host more travel agents than ever before on board its fleet of soon-to-be four ships in 2024.

A new ship visit programme, combined with hosting the trade as part of the annual CLIA Conference and fam trips, will result in a record-breaking number of agents getting on board.

The line will host nine ship visit events in Greenock, Southampton and Liverpool, starting from 26 July and running to 5 December on *Queen Anne*, *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Victoria*.

Agents can register for a place via the Shine Rewards platform. Visits of *Queen Anne* will take place in Greenock on 26 July and in Southampton on 8 September and 15 October. In addition, 185 agents will explore the new ship during May's CLIA Conference in Southampton. Cunard will announce details of its 2024 fam trip programme in the coming weeks.



CARNIVAL INCREASES PACKAGE OPTIONS

> Carnival Cruise Line has partnered with USAirtours in a bid to enhance its trade-only booking office, Crew.

The partnership, which will give agents access to a wider array of package options, includes flights, pre- and post-cruise add ons, transfers and attractions.

Luke Smith, director UK and international sales at Carnival Cruise Line, said: "We are committed to delivering extraordinary experiences to our guests and agents. By joining forces with USAirtours, we are enhancing the capabilities of Crew, ensuring that agents have the tools and resources they need to create amazing cruise holidays for their customers."

Get ahead of the game

The Cruise Summit, presented by *Cruise Trade News*, returns this summer, promising an immersive exploration into the evolving travel landscape



The third instalment of the Cruise Summit will return to the News UK offices on the earlier date of Monday 17 June, with the 'Future of Cruise' set to go under the microscope. This year's event will deliver an immersive exploration into the ever-changing industry landscape, with a full day of keynotes, panel discussions and breakout sessions providing never-before-seen data and insightful takeaways.

"Last year's Travel Trends and Insights report from News UK was excellent," says Carly Perkins, marketing manager, Holland America Line & Seabourn. "The Cruise Summit is a must for cruise line employees and travel partners with excellent and useful knowledge shared." This year's agenda will include an in-depth look at the latest

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Last year's Cruise Summit included more than 15 panels and speaker sessions; CLIA UK & Ireland's Andy Harmer; the event will return to News UK's sky-rise office in London Bridge

booking data, presented by News UK and CLIA UK & Ireland, as well as predictions on how technology will impact the consumer landscape in 2024 and beyond.

Lina Slater, chief operating officer, Real Response Media, says: "This year's agenda, which is being assembled as we speak, will feature an incredible mix of industry experts and visionaries. We can't wait to reveal more in the coming months, so stay tuned!"

cruis Summit.co.uk

Two attendees from last year's Cruise Summit reveal what they learned and what they're looking forward to at this year's event

Anna-Marie Thornton

Manager, creative projects, international,
Regent Seven Seas Cruises

Utilising technology will be a key theme of this year's summit. Why is it important to keep up with tech trends? It's a reminder for us all to not become complacent in our strategies. These sessions offer a chance to challenge our own behaviours and be more innovative and creative.

Were there any sessions from last year's summit that stood out to you? The panel discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) really



THESE SESSIONS OFFER A CHANCE TO CHALLENGE OUR OWN BEHAVIOURS AND BE MORE CREATIVE

IN NUMBERS

20+

expert speakers
and brands

100+

attendees at the
Cruise Summit

15+

panels, keynotes and
breakout sessions



stood out. Understanding the pros and cons, breaking down the misconceptions around it and how it can be used in the travel industry sparked a really interesting debate.

Are there any themes you'd like to see covered at this year's cruise summit?

It would be great to see presentations and sessions

around branding and creative marketing. Often the conversations are around channels and marketing tools, but not the creative and storytelling techniques behind them. I'd love to hear from figures from beyond the travel sector on this, like photographers and filmmakers.

Carla Hines

Sales manager EMEA, Hurtigruten

What motivated you to attend last year's Cruise Summit? I liked that there was a good variety of speakers from the leading companies throughout the industry who were covering a range of topics.



“**REGARDLESS OF YOUR ROLE IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY, THIS EVENT IS RELEVANT FOR YOU**

Were there any panel sessions or seminars that stood out to you? I particularly liked the travel trends and insights session from News UK. It was great to learn more about wider industry consumer trends, what challenges have impacted the travel sector and how we have overcome them, and what is predicted for the year to come.

What takeaways from last year do you still find useful today? “Data, location and audience” are three things I keep at the forefront of my mind and use across multiple markets. I find this so relevant as it ensures I'm never applying a one-size-fits-all approach to my strategies.

What would you say to members of the industry who are thinking of attending this year's Cruise Summit? Regardless of your role in the travel industry this event is relevant for you. There will definitely be a few key takeaways that you can apply that will help you shape your own strategies moving forward.

Cruise Summit 2024

When: Monday, 17 June

Where: News UK, 1 London

Bridge St, London SE1 9GF

Time: Doors open at 9:30am for coffee and breakfast, with the summit running from 10:00-16:00. Registration is FREE and includes food and refreshments. Sign up today at cruis summit.co.uk



UNBRIDLED ADVENTURE

As more and more travellers turn to expedition cruising, Atlas Ocean Voyages is proof that the sector has a bright future ahead of it

Very few holidays have the potential to amaze and inspire quite like an expedition cruise. After all, where else can travellers stand shoulder to shoulder with marine biologists deep in the Arctic Circle one moment and watch the sun set from the balcony of a luxury suite with a cocktail in hand the next?

Research shows that more and more travellers are turning to expedition cruising as a way to experience the most remote and breathtaking parts of the world. According to the 2023/24 Expedition Cruise Network

Insights report, 70 per cent of lines who specialise in the sector saw their businesses expand in 2023. To meet this demand, a new cohort of expedition specialists is emerging, enabling curious travellers to immerse themselves in popular and off-the-beaten-path destinations, which brings us nicely to Atlas Ocean Voyages.

The cruise line's fleet of three all-inclusive yachts sail all over the world, from the Polar regions to South America, the Caribbean, Northern Europe and the Mediterranean. A host of opulent features include a Portuguese-inspired fine dining restaurant, suites outfitted with L'Occitane amenities and a spa.

Just as much attention has been paid to its expedition programme, which the line has divided into three categories – Polar, Epicurean and Cultural – to help guests discern what kind of at-sea adventure is right for them. For more information, agents can visit cruiseline.co.uk/cruise-lines/atlas-ocean-voyages. 

“**ATLAS OCEAN VOYAGE'S THREE ALL-INCLUSIVE YACHTS SAIL ALL OVER THE WORLD**”

POLAR EXPEDITIONS

For guests who wish to explore the farthest reaches of the globe, this'll be right up their street. The line's Polar Expeditions sail to the glacial landscapes of Antarctica, the wild frontiers of the Arctic and the soaring fjords of Greenland, where extraordinary wildlife and awe-inspiring national parks await.

EPICUREAN EXPEDITIONS

From perusing aromatic spices, fresh fruits and vegetables in Alicante's Central Market to sampling authentic grape brandy and wine in the Croatian countryside, there's nothing like an epicurean adventure to awaken the senses. Atlas' food-based tours are the perfect option for gourmands looking to sample the finest cuisine at source.

CULTURAL EXPEDITIONS

Whether it's discovering the facades of historic landmarks or experiencing a day in the life of a local, the line's cultural expeditions are all about getting under the skin of a new destination. A guest enrichment programme led by lecturers, historians, photographers and other experts will enhance guests' appreciation.



ATLAS
OCEAN VOYAGES®

For more information, visit
atlasoceanvoyages.com

On the
road with...

SJ Walker

The director of sales UK for Virgin Voyages provides an insight into life on the road as the brand bids to strengthen its relationships with agents across the UK

It's set to be a busy year for Virgin Voyages with the launch of *Brilliant Lady*. How important will UK agents be as you look to drive bookings?

Our First Mates [agents] continue to play a fundamental role in our success as they steer and support their customers to decide on the right cruise and destination. In the past 12 months alone, we've doubled bookings via our agents compared to 2022 and, with more product launching soon, we expect that to grow. There is no better way to understand a product than discovering it first hand, which is why a whopping 25 per cent of our registered agents enjoyed an onboard experience.

What Virgin Voyages selling points do you focus on when meeting agents?

Barcelona sailings are a key focus for sales in the UK market. Our Bring on Barcelona initiative, which ran until 29 February, introduced an exclusive agent rewards incentive. This meant that agents who sold a 2024 European voyage were in with a chance of winning a seven-night sailing



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT SJ Walker, Virgin Voyages director of sales UK; new *Resilient Lady* sailings will depart from Portsmouth later this year

offers, itineraries and ports and help them to sell Virgin Voyages more easily.

Where should agents who have never sold Virgin Voyages before start? They should head to firstmates.com or our Facebook group The Bridge to discover our tools, guides, training, onboard experiences and destinations.

What are the challenges in agent training? We work really hard as a sales team to bring the brand to life when it comes to our training. We have a full strategy which allows us to reach different partners in different ways. Having this flexibility allows us to tailor our approach to reach our agents in the most effective ways, including face to face, on board and online.

This month marks your five-year anniversary with Virgin Voyages. What have been your highlights so far? Launching a new brand along with three new ships, scooping so many trade awards and achieving a high repeat booking rate has been incredibly rewarding. We take nothing for granted and are truly grateful for the support we have had from agents along the way. ●

onboard *Scarlet Lady*. We will also be returning to our roots, with new *Resilient Lady* sailings departing from Portsmouth in August and September this year, which is an incredible opportunity for guests to get onboard without having to fly.

How important is it for you to get out in front of agents? It's incredibly important for us to build our relationships with agents and host them on board so they can become our best advocates. Later this year we will be hosting a range of ship visits in Portsmouth, inviting more than 1,000 agents to jump on board to enjoy a learning experience. By getting out in front of them, we can share updates on new



“
IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO BUILD OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH AGENTS, THEY'RE OUR BEST ADVOCATES



NEW HORIZONS

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines has launched its 2025/26 itinerary collection, enhancing its focus on destination immersion and unforgettable experiences

It's been a busy start to the year if you're a Fred. Olsen Cruise Line journey planner. The line's team has been hard at work crafting a new programme of international itineraries, with each one designed to help guests gain an even deeper understanding of some of the world's most seductive destinations.

Enhanced by its fleet of smaller ships which reach several lesser-known cruise hubs, Fred. Olsen's 2025/26 programme is geared up perfectly to thrill returning customers while attracting new-to-cruise guests, as well. Highlights

include the Norway's Arctic Islands & Mountainous Vistas sailing, which departs 17 June 2025 on board *Balmoral* from Rosyth. The 10-night cruise comes in at £1,599pp and calls in Lofoten and Vesterålen, and is timed to give guests the chance to witness the Midnight Sun.

Elsewhere, the 16-night Discovering the Colourful French Riviera itinerary on board *Bolette* departs Liverpool on 23 June 2025 and comes in at £2,599pp. Customers can discover the allure of Marseille, where lively markets like Cours Lafayette burst with colours and flavours. Meanwhile, the 14-night Canary Islands

Christmas & Funchal Fireworks voyage on board *Bolette* departs Liverpool on 22 December 2025. Guests will not only enjoy a host of festivities on board, they'll also see in the New Year by witnessing the spectacle of the Portuguese city's famous New Year's fireworks display.

IMMERSION SPECIALISTS

If the depth and breadth of these itineraries wasn't enough, guests will be further immersed into some of the world's most famous destinations through Fred. Olsen's industry-leading



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Fred. Olsen has enhanced its destination experiences; guests will be further immersed through the line's culinary offering; solo cruises are also available

culinary offering. Main restaurants vary per ship, with a-la-carte, afternoon tea and buffets available, while Colours & Tastes, which offers Asian fusion delicacies, and Indian restaurant Vasco harness locally sourced produce to provide a memorable dining experience.

The line also offers various signature experiences such as Scenic Discoveries, where onboard experts provide insightful commentary on sailed to regions, and Itinerary Insights, which features guest speakers who delve into local histories on shore. Treats of the Region, meanwhile, offers insights into each ships' on board gastronomy. Finally, Sky at Sea allows guests to spend an evening reclining on the top

deck under blankets while listening to astronomers bring the night sky to life.

To mark the launch of the new programme, Fred. Olsen is offering guests free on board spend or door-to-door transfers on selected 2025/26 cruises of 14-28 nights in duration.

For cruises of five to 13 nights, on board spend per person is applicable only. Solo traveller offers are also available on selected cabins on 2025/26 cruises.

There's also a chance for agents to experience the new itineraries, as well. They simply need to visit the line's Trade Facebook Group and comment which is their favourite sailing and why to win up to five places on board. ●

FRED. OLSEN'S 2025/26 ITINERARIES ARE GEARED UP PERFECTLY TO THRILL CUSTOMERS

New Med fly-cruise options

- The 10-night Bays, Mountains & Islands of the Dalmatian Coast itinerary on board *Balmoral* departs 7 October 2025 and prices starting from £1,799pp.
- An eight-night Greek Island Odyssey cruise on board *Balmoral* departs 17 October 2025 and has prices from £1,599pp.
- A 12-night Discovering Turkish Treasures sailing on board *Balmoral* departs 25 October 2025 and comes in at £1,999pp.
- A seven-night Mountain Landscapes of Spain, Portugal & Gibraltar voyage on board *Balmoral* departs 6 November 2025 and costs from £1,099pp.



**Fred. Olsen
Cruise Lines**

For more information, visit
fredolsencruises.com

SHIP OF THE MONTH

SUN PRINCESS

Having been delivered to Princess Cruises in February, *Sun Princess* is the line's first liquefied natural gas (LNG) powered ship and the debut addition in Princess' Sphere class. The vessel will feature new dining, entertainment and activity options, as well as a range of staterooms. It will also include the Dome, a multi-level entertainment venue inspired by Santorini and the three-storey Horizons Dining Room. The Piazza will be a popular space for guests come the evening, boasting impressive ocean views and a pizzeria-style restaurant.



1 Cabins

Sun Princess offers a range of accommodation options, from the Cabana stateroom, which comes with its own balcony, private cabana and extra-large private lounge space to the more affordable interior stateroom, which features two twin beds or a queen-size bed and amenities.



Fast facts

4,300
guests

2,150
cabins

1,600
crew

29
restaurants

21
decks



2 Dining

The ship's main Horizon Dining Room sprawls across three stories, offering an elegant design and a diverse à la carte menu, while Sabatini's Italian Trattoria and Kai Sushi serve up braised short rib over penne and mongo ika sashimi, respectively.



3 Entertainment

The Princess Arena is the line's most technologically advanced performance space yet, with the ability to shapeshift into different designs – even in the round – to suit a variety of productions. A line up of shows includes *Vallora*, *A Pirate Quest* and *Stage Struck*.



James Morgan, Getty Images for Princess Cruises



4 Park19

Sun Princess was designed with families and multi-generational travellers in mind from the outset. For example, Park19 on decks 19 to 21 offers nine activity areas, including Sea Breeze, a high-speed zipline, a kids' waterpark and a relaxation area for adults.



5 The Dome

A multifaceted structure, The Dome is a glass-enclosed multi-level arena that transforms throughout the day. A place to relax, read and enjoy a coffee in the sunshine, the venue transforms into a stage for exciting performances by starlight.



6 The Piazza

Not only does the Piazza make a great backdrop for a family photo thanks to its glass-domed ceiling, which offers ocean vistas in every direction, it's also the ideal evening hangout spot. The multi-storey venue houses Bellinis Cocktail Bar and Alfredo's Pizzeria.

SHIP OF THE MONTH

RIVERSIDE DEBUSSY

Named after the renowned French composer, this 106-guest ship from Riverside Luxury Cruises is the latest boutique-style vessel to be added to the line's fleet. Formerly part of the Crystal Cruises portfolio, having originally launched in 2018, *Riverside Debussy* includes 55 staterooms, each of which offer butler and 24-hour room service. Passengers will be able to set sail from next month, with a variety of itineraries taking in the very best of the Rhine's city, coastal and countryside highlights.

Fast facts

106
guests

80
crew

5
itineraries

6
suite categories

3
restaurants



1 Accommodation

Each of *Riverside Debussy's* cabins are located above the lower deck, meaning guests needn't worry about being restricted by fixed windows that sit at the waterline. Staterooms range from the 182 sq ft Melody Suite to the 743 sq ft Owner Suite, with the latter sleeping up to four guests.



2 Dining

Guests will be able to dine at three unique restaurants, with everything from bread and jam to the gourmet tasting menus prepared on board. Bistro is the place to go for relaxed buffet-style fare, while the elegant Waterside Restaurant serves fine dining from a varied à la carte menu.



Ian Schemper Photography



3 Itineraries

A choice of five- to seven-night itineraries will set sail between March and November, visiting the Netherlands during tulip blossom season, the dramatic Rhine gorge and its castle ruins, and the charming cities of Ghent and Flanders in northern Belgium.



4 Wellness

Guests can book into the spa for facials, peels and rejuvenating massages after a day's exploring. An indoor pool and a workout area with top-of-the-line Technogym equipment, Therabands and free weights are also on hand to keep guests in shipshape.



5 Service

As well as offering two crew for every four guests, passengers will also benefit from the ship's personal butler service. Guests can book a table at the restaurant for dinner, order around-the-clock room service or schedule a massage, all via WhatsApp.



6 Upper deck

The upper deck bar and barbecue provides a stylish hangout from which to enjoy the North Rhine's bucolic backdrops. Guests can enjoy delicious summer bites like freshly grilled scampi with a chilled glass of local Riesling or Champagne as the sun sets.

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SOCIAL
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The
**DISCOUNTING
DILEMMA**

For some agents, slashed fares can help attract a new strain of customer, but for others, they impact overheads and diminish cruise's value proposition. **Will Payne** speaks to the industry to determine whether price cuts remain the way forward





Pricing has long been a hot topic of debate across the cruise industry. In the short-term, cheaper rates can help get more passengers on board. However, in the long run, continued cuts can hinder growth. With more than 20 new ships set to come online this year, 2024 is tipped to be one of the busiest years for cruise since the pandemic, which means agents and lines are going to have to work even harder to sell their inventory.

Cutting prices is a tried-and-tested formula for attracting new-to-cruise guests. In a bid to encourage more travellers to book its European and Arabian Gulf cruises, Celestyal offered sailings for just £29pp per night as part of a one-day leap-year offer on 29 February, resulting in a 630 per cent uplift in overall sales. However, this comes at a risk. Decrease prices too much and too often and it can make it more challenging to book repeat guests further down the line when prices return to normal levels. It can also have an adverse impact on revenue and commissions.

Despite recent reductions, agents say that prices are remaining strong for 2024 compared to previous years. "Pricing for spring and summer departures are holding up well compared with prior years with almost all cruise lines," says Alison Earnshaw, managing director of World Travel Holdings. "Our average selling prices overall are higher than we have seen previously."

She explains how add-on packages have helped maintain price levels in recent months by enabling clients to customise their cruise and pre-purchase on board amenities. This in turn improves value

"Celestyal offered sailings for just £29pp per night in a one-day leap-year offer, resulting in a 630 per cent uplift in sales"

for money while supporting higher average selling rates. "In both the mainstream and luxury markets the message from cruise lines regarding 2024 is that they are better sold than ever," Earnshaw adds.

Current prices in the industry support these claims. However, Earnshaw admits that discounting is an ongoing challenge, saying that there will always be sailings which come in under the required rate of sale. "Overall, the market continues to be competitive, despite discount levels remaining high in January."

VALUE FOR MONEY

Earnshaw's optimism over strong prices is echoed by Lee Trowbridge, Not Just Travel homemaker and co-owner of Your Holiday. "Cruising is once again proving to be a great option for good value, especially for families," he says.

According to Trowbridge, the price of a European land-based holiday is coming in "significantly" higher than previous years, making cruise a popular alternative for his customers. For this reason, Trowbridge thinks discounts are good for the industry. "It has been an opportunity to attract new clients who have never cruised before and don't want to spend a fortune to try something they're not sure about," he says.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A-Rosa says river cruise prices are holding up; World Travel Holdings' Alison Earnshaw; Celebrity Cruises wants agents to focus on the value of a cruise holiday; customers often book in advance to secure their personal preferences

One line which has proven popular for Trowbridge is Royal Caribbean, which has rolled out several offers for its 2025 departures following the launch of the 7,600-guest *Icon of the Seas* earlier this year.

“Like everything currently, cruise prices have gone up, but it still represents great value,” he continues. “We booked a 14-night P&O Cruises sailing last month for a solo traveller – with flights included – to Bridgetown, Barbados from Southampton for just over £2,000. When you compare that to a land-based holiday, you’d be hard pushed to get anywhere near that, considering food is also included.”

AN AGENT’S WORTH

Craig Goodridge, owner of Craig Goodridge Travel, accepts that discounting in the cruise industry will always be prevalent. “I always think if someone has come to you for a quote or a booking, especially if they are a regular, and you’re there to support them pre, during and post booking, then I don’t see [discounts] as a hurdle,” he reasons.

Goodridge says customers have been booking further in advance despite prices increasing compared with last year, with lines making value for money a priority. “More lines are offering discounts or free drink upgrades, or other added extras. These can help with sales as they’re still showing that there’s a saving to be had. With 2025/26 and beyond now coming on sale, these seasons have been more appealing to my cruise regulars than picking up a last-minute deal.”

Goodridge argues that one of the reasons customers are booking further in advance is so they can secure their personal preferences, whether it’s a certain cabin, a spot on a favourite excursion or a slot on a dream itinerary, all of which are often unavailable in a last-minute deal.

VALUE FOCUS

Regardless of fares, Giles Hawke, vice president and managing director UK, Ireland and EMEA,



Celebrity Cruises believes agents should primarily focus on the value of a cruise holiday when talking to consumers. “While we need to remain cognisant of price, it’s vital to emphasise the wealth of inclusions to demonstrate value compared to land-based alternatives, regardless of the cost,” Hawke says.

The line’s prices for the summer are holding up “remarkably well,” he says, with Celebrity’s available passenger days (APD) increasing. “While lead-in prices may entice new-to-cruise guests, highlighting overall value is paramount,” Hawke adds. “Individual customer needs will always vary, depending on their priorities when booking a holiday.”

For P&O Cruises, value is key to attracting new-to-cruise guests and retaining existing ones. “We know that once guests experience a P&O Cruises holiday and realise the value that it offers, they will return, which in the long term will support our business, the sector and our travel agent partners,” says the line’s sales director Ruth Venn.

From a river cruise perspective, prices are holding up compared to this time last year, according to Lucia Rowe, managing director UK and Ireland for A-Rosa. “We should be focusing on the all-inclusive nature of river cruising rather than just low prices,” Rowe says.

“Agents can then demonstrate the great value for money that it offers to their customers. Once they understand what a river cruise experience entails and the value it offers, they will be sure to return time and time again.”

CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

The message remains clear with Ambassador Cruise Line chief commercial officer Phil Gardner, who says despite discounts being appealing, the line’s competitive advantage lies in promoting





onboard experiences to consumers, which is pivotal to attracting new-to-cruise clients.

“Price is always a key consideration in the booking process, but since launching last April, we have enjoyed a stronger early booking curve compared to the year prior, courtesy of a succession of campaigns focused on promoting our no-fly offering,” he explains.

“With our value-driven offering prioritised over mere price points, these proactive measures have positioned us ahead in numbers year-on-year, where robust pricing and a healthy balance between supply and demand means we have less capacity left to sell.”

A lengthening of the booking curve has also tracked with MSC Cruises. The line’s director of sales for UK and Ireland Steve Williams said he has seen a “notable increase” in early business in recent months. “Demand has been stronger than ever, with prices holding up incredibly well for summer 2024,” he says.

While attracting new guests with lower prices may be tempting, Williams explains that maintaining balance is a key cog in its sales strategy. “Our approach involves elevating our brand in the consumer area and showcasing exceptional value through our trade partners.”

For example, a recent TV campaign deliberately steered away from mentioning pricing, instead emphasising MSC’s on and offshore offerings. “While discounting may drive short-term demand, we prioritise the long-term sustainability of our offerings,” Williams adds.

Regardless of its merits and disadvantages, discounting will remain integral to the cruise industry due to its ability to attract new guests as lines continue to build bigger vessels capable of carrying more passengers than ever. Once potential first-timers are convinced by a holiday-at-sea, it’s then up to agents to demonstrate cruises’ unique value proposition to encourage them to book again once prices are stronger. 📌

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Ambassador Cruise Line has focused on promoting its no-fly option and onboard experiences; A-Rosa’s Lucia Rowe

HOW TO SELL WITHOUT CUTTING PRICES

1 FOCUS ON VALUE

Instead of basing your sales pitch on prices, wax lyrical about the value of a cruise compared to a land-based holiday, breaking down a sailing into helpful day-by-day costs.

2 PLAN AHEAD

Lines are encouraging agents to begin preparing for 2025 and even 2026 already. Secure better rates for consumers’ future holidays now to minimise the risk of higher prices closer to departure.

3 SELL THE DESTINATION

One of the best things about a holiday at sea is the vast array of destinations in one trip. Paint a picture of an itinerary before delving into prices and specific cruise lines.



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SCAN TO DISCOVER
MORE INTERVIEWS

Steve Odell

The new SVP and chief sales officer for Regent Seven Seas Cruises reveals how the line's enhanced trade team will work with agents following the launch of *Seven Seas Grandeur*

When asked to recall his first few weeks at the helm of Regent's global sales operation, Odell doesn't hesitate. "The energy is fantastic," he tells *Cruise Trade News*. He may still be finding his feet in a new role, but he is far from being the new kid on the block, having worked for the brand in Australia and Asia since 2015. After taking a year out, Odell has returned to the line to steer it towards a fruitful future, with agents set to play a critical role in his plans.

"Coming back from a year out, I can see that the business has become much more sophisticated in terms of what its offering to agents," he explains. "My job now is to be more strategic about how we do our business globally and how we separate ourselves from the crowd. How do we polish our team to be even better at what they do and how do we arm our sales force with the best tools to attract new agents?"

Odell is aware of the sharp increase in product in the luxury cruise market, which includes the introduction of The Ritz Carlton Yacht Collection, Four Seasons Yachts and MSC Group's luxury venture Explora Journeys.

"The market is going to be crowded with lots of messaging, so the most important thing for us is to get our message and branding out there as the leader amongst the ultra-luxury set," he says.

**“THE MOST IMPORTANT
THING IS TO GET OUR
BRANDING OUT THERE
AS THE LEADER AMONGST
THE ULTRA-LUXURY SET**



REGENT UPS TRADE FOCUS

In February, the line announced it was recruiting for a new team of business development managers. Reporting into Paul Beale, vice president of sales UK, the new crop of BDMs will be led by director of strategic accounts and business development UK and Middle East Ed Lang.

The line has also rolled out Regent Elevate, a new trade training and incentive hub designed to give both experienced Regent sellers and new-to-brand agents the tools they need to boost their ultra-luxury cruise business with the line.

"My background is from sales. I was a BDM, that's where I started and I haven't really changed the way I approach things even today," Odell explains. "We have got to be front facing in this market. You can use Zoom and all the other tools we have, but the best results come from walking into a store and meeting agents, so that's what we intend to do."



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Steve Odell is keen for Regent to work more closely with agents; the line has partnered with the Aston Martin Formula One team; Seven Seas Grandeur launched last year

Regent will up its presence at conferences and other trade focused events, too, to ensure the brand is front of mind amongst its agent partners.

FIRST OUT THE TRAPS

Odell is also keen for Regent to get ahead of the booking curve. “We’re already doing well on that for 2024 versus 2023. January has been super strong and February is shaping up to be equally good, if not better,” he says. “In a year’s time, I’d like to see us being ahead of where we are, making as much, and as many, gains as we can. I see the UK opportunity as huge, because it’s a very mature cruise market and we have very loyal agents.”

He praises agents for keeping their eye on short term business but urges them to look ahead to future cruise bookings. “We’ll be launching 2026/2027 in July,” he says. “We really need to encourage agents to plan forward because when we launch, we spend a lot

“**DURING COVID THE CRUISE INDUSTRY WAS ALMOST WRITTEN OFF, BUT 2023 WAS BIGGER THAN 2019**”

of money and create a lot of noise, so we need agents on the bandwagon with us, getting early business in because if you can deal with the early booking curve, you won’t have as many problems to come back to later.”

To boost forward bookings, Odell encourages agents to target customers who would usually opt for a luxury land-based holiday. “Sometimes in the cruise industry we get caught in our cruise bubble,” he admits. “We look at what cruise is doing and we target the cruise sector, but there is a big opportunity outside of cruise, particularly with luxury hotels.”

Odell says Regent is working hard to entice those Brits who are traditionally non-cruisers to consider a holiday-at-sea as a value-for-money option.

So far this year, the company has seen an increase in Alaska business, as well as flight upgrades to the Caribbean and bookings for its Rocky Mountaineer packages. “Business has certainly bounced back,” Odell says. “During Covid-19, the cruise industry was almost written off as something that would never recover, but 2023 was bigger than 2019. Cruising is a fraction of what the overall holiday market is and we’re just scratching the surface. The industry is resilient, and it will continue to prosper.”



CRUISING THE CONTINENT

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) is gearing up to launch its 2024/25 European itineraries as it bolsters the industry's value for money proposition with its impressive Free at Sea packages

With a fleet of 20 contemporary cruise ships open for sale, including the brand-new *Norwegian Viva* and *Norwegian*

Prima, global cruise innovators NCL will offer more than 250 port-rich itineraries in Europe in 2024 and 2025, giving customers the chance to explore a new iconic destination nearly every day with the convenience of only having to unpack once.

Guests can also upgrade from £249pp on nine to 11-day cruises and receive all applicable packages, including premium beverages, speciality dining, wi-fi and excursion discounts. Also, additional third and fourth guests travelling in the same stateroom will only pay taxes on applicable sailings, as part of the line's Free at Sea offering.

With more than 150 ports of call across Northern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Greek Isles, guests have more time to explore, with an average of 10 hours in any given destination, with many itineraries offering little or no sea days, not to mention an exciting range of shore excursions in each port. No fewer than 13 award-winning ships are on offer as part of the line's new European sailings, and once ashore, NCL's Go Local shore excursions offer a plethora of cultural experiences that will enable guests to connect with locals in a wholly authentic way.

GUESTS HAVE MORE TIME TO EXPLORE WITH 150 PORTS



A CRUISE FOR EVERY GUEST

Delving into the historic majesty of the Aegean Sea will be a highlight of NCL's nine-day Greek Isles itinerary, which includes a round-trip sailing from Athens (Piraeus) calling in Santorini, Rhodes and Istanbul on board *Norwegian Getaway*. Departures are available from July-September 2024. With an overnight stay in Istanbul, guests will have plenty of time to explore, from discovering the colourful Topkapi Palace to shopping at the Grand Bazaar.

Guests can also take a short ferry ride from Mykonos to the island of Delos – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – and visit ancient ruins, then stroll among Santorini's famed, blue-domed roofs before sampling delicious local Greek fare.

Elsewhere, customers can explore Northern Europe with an 11-day Iceland: Alta, Akureyri and Honningsvåg from Reykjavik to Tromsø sailing on board *Norwegian Star*, departing 30 May 2024 and 29 May 2025.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Customers can discover the gems of the Aegean; the line offers sailings all along the Italian coast; voyages give clients a 'truly immersive' journey across the continent

“CLIENTS WILL CRUISE INTO HISTORY, CULTURE AND LANDSCAPES

departures available on 3 July and 21 August 2024. Holidaymakers can take a walk on the historic side during this unforgettable cruise on *Norwegian Escape*, while Game of Thrones fans will enjoy a tour of Dubrovnik's Old Town where several historic sites were featured in the hit TV show.

From Civitavecchia, they can explore Rome's famous ancient ruins and works of art, from Michelangelo's awe-inspiring Sistine Chapel to the beautifully constructed Trevi Fountain.

A 10-day Greek Isles: Santorini, Athens and Florence round-trip Rome (Civitavecchia) voyage, meanwhile, has multiple departures available from April through September 2024 and May through October 2025. On this itinerary, clients will cruise into the history, culture and dramatic landscapes of the Mediterranean aboard *Norwegian Epic*. From Naples, travellers can step back in time while exploring the ruins of Pompeii and journey to Sorrento for lunch at a local family-owned farm.

From stylish studios for the solo traveller to oversized, luxury suites and the exclusive enclave that is The Haven by Norwegian, NCL has a ship and an itinerary for every client. ●



In Djúpivogur, passengers will have the chance to take in the breathtaking Berufjörður fjord by boat or kayak and see the famous Eggs of Merry Bay – 34 oversized granite eggs created to reflect the local bird species – while strolling along the harbour.

They can then visit the North Pole Expeditions Museum during an overnight stay in Longyearbyen – the world's northernmost settlement where the island's polar bear population exceeds its human population by almost 1,000 – and take advantage of the incredible midnight sun.

HISTORIC HIGHS

Alternatively, inquisitive travellers can visit some of Europe's most popular hotspots on an 11-day Mediterranean: Italy, France and Greece from Venice (Trieste) to Barcelona sailing, with

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LEFT It's important to know all the lingo to help guests get the most out of their cruise experience

THE A-Z OF CRUISING

Do you have new-to-cruise members in your team who need to get on top of the industry lingo? Our helpful guide to the need-to-know nautical terms will get them in ship shape in no time

A ALL-INCLUSIVE

A sure way to simplify onboard outgoings, all-inclusive packages quote a single price that covers your accommodation, meals, drinks, Wi-Fi and entertainment, as well as taxes, port fees and tips. While specifics vary between ships – some include alcoholic drinks, for example – going all-inclusive helps guests avoid complicated bills at check-out.

B BRIDGE

Occupying a lofty position towards the front of any vessel, the bridge is the ship's command centre. From here, the captain's senior team oversees all onboard operations, from navigation and speed to steering and communication.

C CAPTAIN'S TABLE

Enjoying dinner at the captain's table with them and their crew is among the most sought-after invites on any cruise. These enigmatic requests usually arrive in paper form, with invitees ranging from VIPs to first-time cruisers.

D DECK PLAN

Providing a detailed layout of the ship and its staterooms (cabins), facilities, stairwells and safety areas, this document is an essential tool for finding your way around. With each level marked, the deck plan will help you maximise your time on board.

E EMERGENCY DRILL

To ensure passengers are familiar with onboard safety procedures, mandatory briefings must be completed on the first day before the ship can legally set sail. While these vary, they'll often include the ship's alarm systems being sounded, with passengers assembling at their assigned muster station (see later entry), putting on a life jacket and responding to a roll call.

F FORMAL NIGHT

While dress codes have evolved over the years, many cruises host formal nights throughout the week, where passengers are encouraged to dress up – think evening gowns and cocktail dresses for women and tailored suits or tuxedos for men.



LOYALTY PROGRAMMES

Many cruise lines have a points-based scheme that rewards returning passengers. These points often translate into lower prices or onboard benefits such as complimentary drinks, VIP lounge access or specialty dining.

MUSTER STATION

These assembly points are places for passengers and crew to gather in the rare event of an emergency. Situated throughout the ship – usually on open decks and near lifeboats – they help to prevent overcrowding and confusion during a critical situation.

NAUTICAL MILE

This is the unit of length used at sea and is regarded as a more accurate measure for calculating distances on the Earth's surface than the mile we use on land, as it takes the Earth's curvature into account.

ONBOARD CREDIT

Whether included within your cruise deal, earned via credit card programmes or coming in the form of onboard casino winnings, this credit can be used on board to enhance your holiday. As well as paying for specialty dining or spa treatments, it can often be used for shore excursions.

PASSENGER/CREW RATIO

This one's simple: it's the number of passengers divided by the number of crew, which gives a figure used to measure the level of service you can expect on board.



CLOCKWISE FROM

ABOVE The passenger/crew ratio is a guide to the sort of service you can expect; small-ship cruises are emerging as a travel trend; many ships host formal nights where guests can dress up for the occasion; familiarising yourself with a deck plan means you can easily find the best places to be, such as *Icon of the Seas'* stunning Aquadome

GODMOTHER

Following a centuries-old maritime tradition, newly built vessels are anointed by a chosen 'godmother' at a glamorous naming ceremony. Here she bestows her blessings upon the ship by smashing a bottle of Champagne against the hull for good fortune. Famous godmothers include Dame Judi Dench (*Carnival Legend*) and Dame Helen Mirren (*Scenic Eclipse*).

HOME PORT

Every adventure has to start and end somewhere, and in the cruise world that tends to be at the home port. From here, passengers will join or leave their vessel as the crew restock and prepare for the next sailing.

INAUGURAL CRUISE

Usually the ship's maiden voyage, these special sailings are often

defined by a sense of celebration and one-off events, where witnessing history in the making creates a unique onboard atmosphere.

JOINING

Anticipation runs high during joining (embarkation), which marks the start of your journey. Armed with travel documents, passengers will check in at the cruise terminal and pass through security before boarding the ship and settling into their staterooms, where luggage should be waiting.

KNOT

A ship's speed is calculated in knots – a unit of speed equal to one nautical mile per hour. The average speed for most cruise ships is about 20 knots, ensuring better fuel efficiency and smoother sailing.





“Onboard themed nights range from the sophisticated attire of formal occasions to more flamboyant affairs, like P&O Cruises’ Gatsby Parties”

Q **QUEEN MARY 2**
Cunard’s flagship vessel, *Queen Mary 2*, is a maritime icon. A true ocean liner – the only one now sailing – she is built to withstand the rough conditions of her regular transatlantic service between Southampton and New York. Famed for her refined onboard service, reminiscent of the golden age of travel, *QM2* remains a benchmark in the world of luxury travel.

R **REPOSITIONING CRUISES**
Cruise ships are frequently ‘repositioned’ between locations, usually the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, depending on the season or demand. Often sailing at higher speeds – which can make them feel choppy – and with more days at sea, these one-

way journeys tend to offer passengers good value for money, as well as the chance to visit destinations that may not be added to regular itineraries.

S **SHORE POWER**
Some ships can now plug into the domestic electrical supply at cruise terminals, meaning they can cut their engines while in port, thus reducing emissions and noise.

T **THEMED NIGHTS**
Two words that embody the spirit of any given cruise, these onboard evening events offer an opportunity to dress up and meet other passengers. Themed nights range from the sophisticated attire of formal occasions to more flamboyant affairs, including P&O Cruises’ Gatsby Parties.

U **UNIFORM**
Throughout any cruise you’re likely to meet crew in a range of uniforms that denote their job on board. Officers tend to wear epaulettes with stripes to denote their rank – the highest ranked captain and chief engineer wear four stripes, while the first officer, first engineer, chief stewardess and chef all wear three.

V **VIRTUAL TOURS**
Many cruise lines offer 360° virtual tours of their ships, so guests can get a taste of them before they book.

W **WAVE AWARDS**
The annual Wave Awards, last held at The Dorchester hotel in November 2023, celebrate excellence across all aspects of the cruise sector, with categories spanning everything from overall performance to destinations, excursions, cuisine, entertainment, wellbeing and value for money.

X **EX-UK**
Guests who are unwilling to travel to another country to begin their cruise can spare themselves the hassle of air travel by searching instead for ex-UK cruises, defined as those that depart from a British port such as Southampton, Dover or Newcastle, and otherwise known as no-fly cruises.

Y **YACHT**
An emerging travel trend is the rise of small-ship cruises, on vessels that take their design cues from luxury yachts. These boutique ships – including new launches by Four Seasons, Aqua Expeditions and Ritz-Carlton – can access smaller ports and marinas, guaranteeing a more intimate cruising experience.

Z **ZODIACS**
These small, military-style inflatable boats, carried by many of the expedition ships that operate in the Arctic and Antarctic, allow passengers to take a closer look at the landscape and wildlife on excursions. While they do require a certain degree of agility and balance to hop on and off, Zodiacs offer a thrilling perspective from right down near the waterline. ●

WAVE AWARDS 2024



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Port Focus



AMSTERDAM

Unique in its blend of culture, cuisine and architecture, the vibrant Dutch capital is the perfect stop-off for any spring itinerary

With its storied waterways, colourful gabled houses and cosmopolitan café culture, Amsterdam is among Europe's most charismatic cities. A rich history as a maritime trading hub plays out across a picturesque urban patchwork that spans 90 islands connected by more than 1,500 bridges. Its Unesco-listed canal network, meanwhile – lined with houseboats and

17th-century merchant dwellings – earns it the nickname Venice of the North.

While navigating the cobbled streets of Amsterdam's compact centre is a pleasure in itself, the city also has a wealth of blockbuster cultural attractions. Travellers can find flower markets, a thriving food and drink scene and galleries populated by the era-defining paintings of the Dutch Masters while, further afield, the fast-evolving

districts of north and east Amsterdam have become creative communities. This mesmerising meeting point of tradition and modernity ensures the Dutch capital is effortlessly easy to fall in love with.

From first timers keen to experience the city's highlights to repeat visitors interested in its alternative side, our port guide to Amsterdam provides an overview of the Dutch capital's certified hits to help travellers maximise their stay.

Don't miss RIJKSMUSEUM

Located in architect Pierre Cuypers' striking Renaissance-meets-Gothic building, the Netherlands' national museum celebrates Dutch art and history, housing an 8,000-strong collection that charts the country's vivid past. Many make a beeline for paintings by the Dutch Masters, with Rembrandt's 'The Night Watch,' Vermeer's 'The Milkmaid' and Van Gogh's self portraits among the must-sees, but there's plenty more to discover, including an expansive Asian pavilion, the Great Hall's restored mosaic floor and vaulted ceiling, and the Michelin-starred restaurant, Rijks.

rijksmuseum.nl

DE NEGEN STRAATJES

The photogenic heart of Amsterdam's canal network, the so-called Nine Streets of the Jordaan neighbourhood typify the city's charm. Criss-crossing between beautiful waterways, this buzzy micro-district comprises nine interlinked streets lined with independent bars, boutiques and galleries. Easy to navigate on foot, its highlights include the 17th-century Westerkirk church, the tasting room at the Van Wees gin distillery and the Houseboat Museum – a floating exhibition dedicated to the city's alternative dwellings.

houseboatmuseum.nl



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

The Dutch royal family's palace is among Europe's most ornate residences; a range of international dishes is served in the Foodhallen; the city is famous for its variety of pancakes; the country's rich art history is on display in Rijksmuseum



ROYAL PALACE AMSTERDAM

While the Dutch royal family may lack the fame of other monarchies, their palace overlooking Dam Square is among Europe's most ornate. Built as a city hall in the 17th century to symbolise the Dutch Republic's splendour, its classical facade conceals a vast collection of sculptures and paintings. One of three royal residences, it's open to the public when the family are away. Each summer an exhibition illustrates the building's history, while the Royal Prize for Modern Painting exhibits work by the city's most promising artists in autumn.

paleisamsterdam.nl

Dine & drink

FOODHALLEN

Set in a cavernous former tram depot, Foodhallen is a vibey food market in the Oud-West district that embodies Amsterdam's fast-moving culinary





LEFT Molen Van Sloten is one of Amsterdam's last working windmills

scene. Among the 19 venues serving distinctive international cuisine, look out for Michelin-starred chef Peter Gast's bitterballen (fried meatballs) at De BallenBar, freshly landed oysters at Mer Du Nord and vegetarian street food at Padrón. An adjoining cinema and a programme of live events provide plenty more reasons to linger.

foodhallen.nl

RESTAURANT BOUGAINVILLE

Pairing seasonal produce with international influences, chef Tim Golsteijn scooped a Michelin star just a year after opening this sophisticated spot overlooking Dam Square in 2017. North Sea fish, local lobster and Dutch

lamb are among the regulars on Bougainville's five- or six-course tasting menus, designed to reflect the Netherlands' seafaring history. Golsteijn's intricately plated dishes establish Bougainville as a modern-day pioneer of Dutch gastronomy.

restaurantbougainville.com

Travel responsibly SLOTEN WINDMILL

Experience life inside one of the Netherlands' most enduring icons at Molen van Sloten – one of Amsterdam's last remaining working windmills, dating back to 1847. Nestled on the banks of the Ringvaart Canal and accessible by tram or bicycle, the mill has been beautifully restored and today operates as a not-for-profit organisation run by volunteers, with all funds raised helping to keep the historic structure's sails turning.

molenvansloten.nl

“**AMSTERDAM HAS IT ALL, FROM ART AND HISTORY TO A FAST-MOVING CULINARY SCENE**”

Local tips



“A canal cruise gives a unique perspective of the city, with highlights such as the centuries-old houses along the Herengracht Canal. By evening is particularly special, as the city lights up and bridges are illuminated.”

YOLANDA CASTELLON,
psychologist



“Rent a bike and explore the café culture and picturesque streets of the De Pijp neighbourhood. I love grabbing a coffee from Nook or Scandinavian Embassy and heading to Sarphatipark for a walk.”

GERT-JAN VEENENDAAL,
IT manager

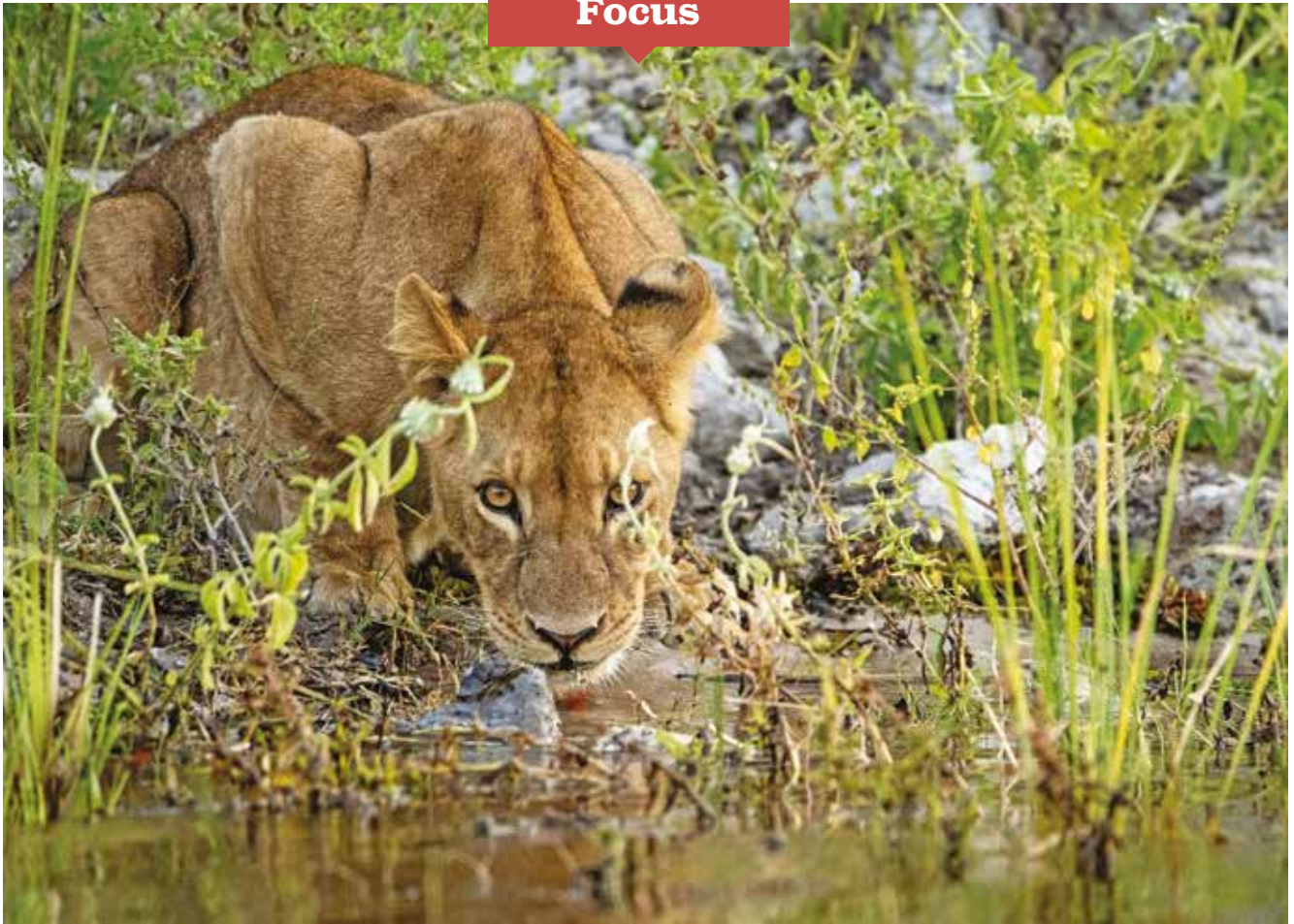
Itineraries

Viking

Tulips and Windmills itinerary is a nine-night river cruise from Amsterdam via Antwerp and Enkhuizen. Departures in March and April 2024, from £2,595.
vikingrivercruises.co.uk

P&O

The line offers a four-night itinerary aboard *Ventura*, round trip from Southampton with two nights in the Dutch capital. Departure 30 April 2024, from £429.
pocruses.com



Call of the wild

From spotting awe-inspiring wildlife on the Zambezi to soaking up kaleidoscopic culture on the Mekong, **Kayleigh Rattle** rounds up five beguiling river routes that promise to surprise and delight

From waking up to the whoops and howls of the rainforest to sailing past storied towns and villages far off the beaten track, when it comes to visiting hard-to-reach corners of the globe, there's nothing quite like a river cruise.

Not only is it a great way to intrepidly explore the world while in the lap of luxury, it's also a safe and hassle-free way to do so. Ships, meanwhile, are like floating boutique hotels, boasting all the requisite amenities you'd expect from a five-star bolthole. Knowing which destinations to pitch to your

clients, however, can sometimes be tricky, particularly as they often involve a long flight. To help, we've selected some often overlooked yet utterly beguiling river cruise destinations primed for a once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

ZAMBEZI, BOTSWANA

There's a reason this region of southern Africa remains top of every wildlife lover's wish list. When dry season descends between November and April, the banks of the Zambezi – Africa's fourth longest river – becomes a stomping ground for the continent's most spectacular animal species.

Offering a front-row seat to it all from its 14 spacious balcony suites is the 42-metre *Zambezi Queen*. The floating safari begins in north Botswana where the ship sails into Chobe National Park. Here, elephants trudge languorously between acacia trees, while crocs rest on the riverbank waiting for their next feed as hippos, zebra and buffalo sip cautiously nearby. The ship also has its own custom-designed photographic safari boats, equipped with swivel chairs and camera mounts, to help guests return home with the perfect shot.

zqcollection.com/zambezi-queen



SCAN THE CODE TO
DISCOVER MORE RIVER
CRUISE DESTINATIONS



AGENT VIEW

Edwina Lonsdale, managing director, Mundy Cruising outlines the benefits of going off the beaten track

What's to gain from venturing further afield? We are talking about areas where the tourism infrastructure is relatively underdeveloped, where poor roads make travelling from place to place slow and uncomfortable. What could be better than taking your own transport and hotel room with you as you go? You get to visit remote locations and sleep in a comfortable bed every night without the hassle of constantly packing and unpacking.

What are some of your favourite lesser-known river cruise destinations? I am a huge fan of India and I'm always looking for ways to explore further afield, so the Brahmaputra and the Ganges have both been fantastic for me. I am also very excited about Ama Waterway's forthcoming options on the Magdalena River in Colombia.

Do you have any selling tips for travel agents? These holidays are perfect for clients who like safaris or adventure holidays. It also appeals to those interested in cruising to off-the-beaten-track places that are virtually inaccessible by land.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A cruise along the Zambezi is like a floating safari; the *Zambezi Queen* offers extreme comfort with excellent views; the *Viking Saigon* allows guests to enjoy the majestic Mekong River's beautiful expanses

“Ships are like floating boutique hotels, boasting all the requisite amenities you'd expect from a five-star bolthole”

How to do it

Cruise line: Mantis

Duration: Two nights or three nights

Itinerary: Roundtrip from Kasane, calling at Chobe River

Nearest airport: Kasane International Airport, Botswana.

Price: From £621pp a night

MEKONG, SE ASIA

The majestic Mekong River traverses six countries in Southeast Asia, and Viking Cruises gives guests the chance to experience some of its most beautiful

expanses on a 15-day itinerary through Cambodia and Vietnam. Eight sailing days take in the region's historic fishing villages, rice paddies and floating markets, while hotel stays either end of the trip allow guests to delve into the cities of Hanoi, Siem Reap and Ho Chi Minh City.

While in Hanoi, guests can explore the old quarter via guided trishaw tours before stopping for lunch at one of the street food vendors, which serve up delicious lines of pho and Vietnamese meatballs. Siem Reap's UNESCO-listed Angkor Wat Buddhist temple, with its intricate stone-carved monuments and elegant spires, meanwhile, offers a unique glimpse into Cambodia's once-powerful Khmer Empire.

vikingrivercruises.co.uk

How to do it

Cruise line: Viking

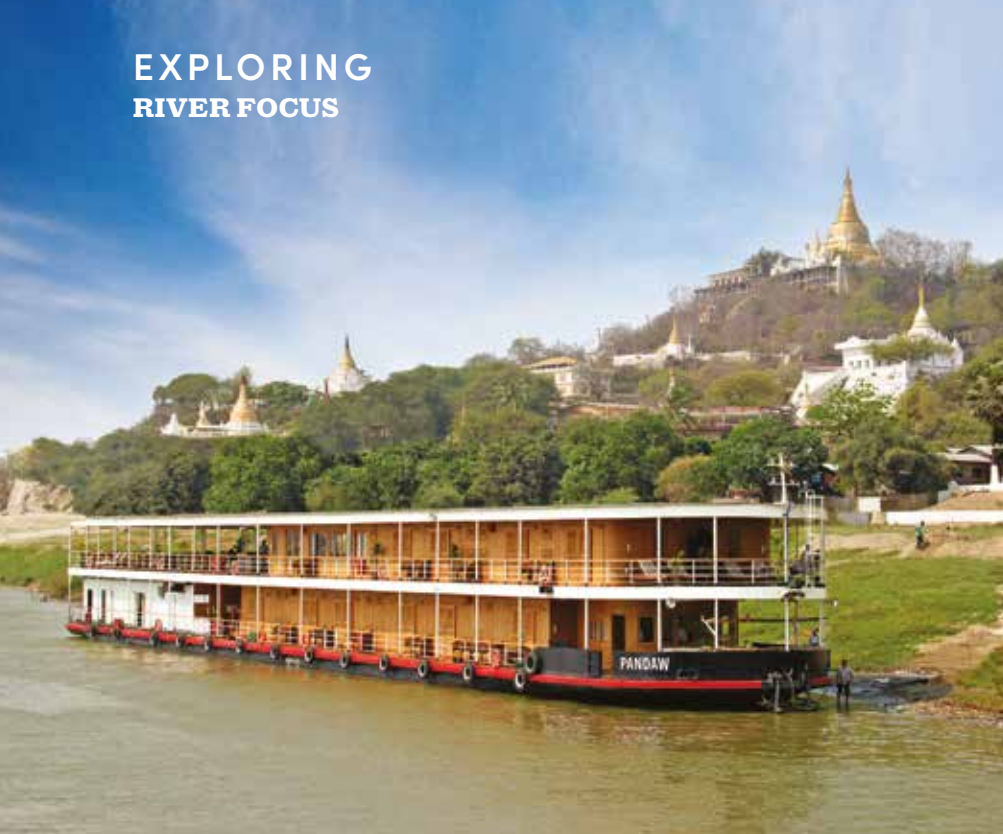
Duration: 15 days

Itinerary: Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City

Nearest airport: Hanoi International Airport (return flights from London and to selected regional airports included)

Price: From £6,195pp





“The Saguenay River is widely known as one of the best places to spot beluga whales anywhere in the world”

SAGUENAY RIVER, CANADA

The best thing about visiting Saguenay on a river cruise isn't the 80-mile-long fjords, which are some of the largest in the world, nor is it the spectacular Via Ferrata route in the Fjord du Saguenay National Park, where hikers can enjoy 200-metre-high views over the bay. It's the fact that the Saguenay River is a breeding ground for beluga whales, which crest so frequently from the waves that it's widely known as one of the best places to spot the Arctic mammals anywhere in the world.

Norwegian Cruise Line offers a week-long voyage starting in Boston, MA, sailing up the east coast to Maine's 47,000-acre Acadia National Park and Nova Scotia, before jutting inland to Saguenay's peaceful La Baie province. Here, guests can embark on whale watching excursions or spend a morning kayaking along the fjords, before sailing over night to Quebec City.

ncl.com

How to do it

Cruise line: Norwegian Cruise Line

Duration: 7 days

Itinerary: Boston, Massachusetts to Québec City, Canada

Nearest airport: Boston Logan International Airport (return flights from London Heathrow included)

Price: From £1,988pp

BRAHMAPUTRA, INDIA

Flowing through Tibet, northeast India and Bangladesh, the Brahmaputra River winds its way through a number of breathtaking landscapes, from the mountains of the Himalayas to the great plains of India. In this standout river cruise from Pandaw, operated by Fred Holidays, guests will get to spend seven nights sailing on this magnificent river, uncovering the breathtaking nature of Assam, where endangered species, including the one-horned rhinoceros and Asian elephants, roam in its vast national parks. The expedition, which starts and ends in Delhi, also includes

LEFT Pandaw's itinerary along the Brahmaputra covers everything from majestic temples and medieval palaces to endangered species, like the one-horned rhinoceros and Asian elephants

a rail journey on board the luxurious Palace on Wheels train, complete with deluxe cabins and personal butler service. While on board, guests will be able to discover Rajasthan's majestic temples, medieval forts and palaces, as the itinerary makes its way across northern India.

fredholidays.co.uk

How to do it

Cruise line: Pandaw (operated by Fred Holidays)

Duration: 22 days

Itinerary: Delhi roundtrip

Nearest airport: Delhi Airport (return flights from London included)

Price: From £10,295pp

ELBE, GERMANY & THE NETHERLANDS

For an exploration closer to home, this springtime escape takes in some of the many waterways of Europe, from the canal cities of the Netherlands to northern Germany's Alster Lakes. At the heart of this expedition is a journey along the River Elbe, where guests can uncover a labyrinth of canals and bridges in Hamburg before passing through verdant hills and picturesque towns and villages towards the North Sea Canal. Itinerary highlights include exploring the Netherlands' kaleidoscopic and tulip-filled Keukenhof Gardens, cycling tours through Amsterdam, and the dark, malty stouts and crisp lagers straight from Hamburg's breweries.

fredolsencruises.com

How to do it

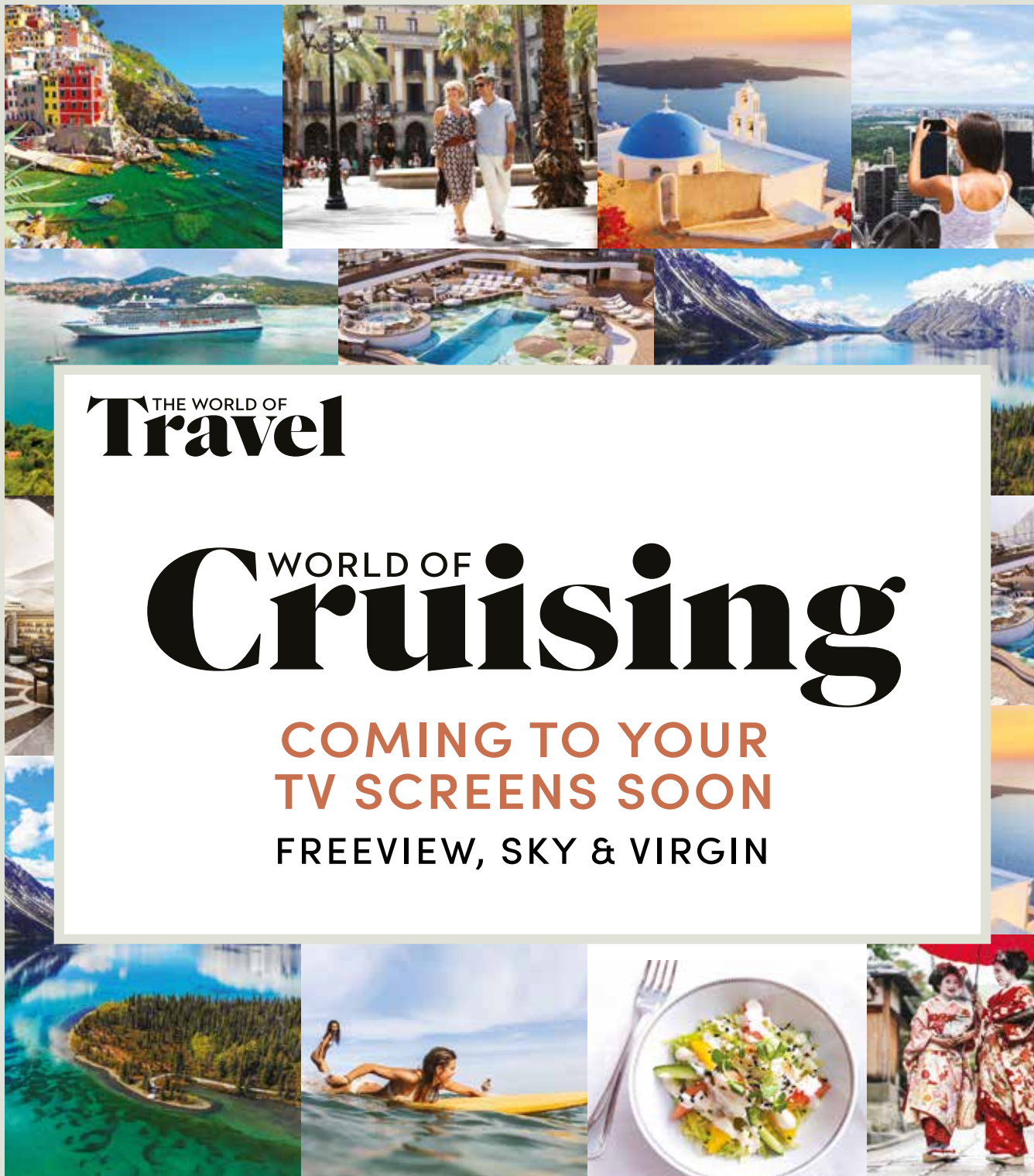
Cruise line: Fred Olsen Cruise Line

Duration: 7 nights

Itinerary: Southampton roundtrip

Name of the itinerary: Easter Escape to Germany and the Lowlands

Price: From £999pp



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Thrills & chills

A cruise to Antarctica is a transformative experience that transcends the ordinary. **Gilly Pickup** uncovers the awe-inspiring landscapes that invite not only adventure seekers but wildlife enthusiasts, history buffs and aspiring climate scientists, too





SCAN THE CODE
TO DISCOVER MORE
CRUISE DESTINATIONS



Ask anyone who's ventured to Antarctica, and they'll agree that a raw, natural beauty defines the White Continent. Visits to the world's last frontier have long topped the wish lists of nomadic travellers, but as holidaymakers' search for authentic experiences intensifies, the destination is beginning to appeal to a much broader crowd, and the cruise industry is at the heart of this shift.

There are plenty of adrenaline-pumping adventures to be had in Antarctica, but there are many other glories for travellers to immerse themselves in, too. That could mean delving into history and tracing the footsteps of storied explorers, spotting the wondrous wildlife or taking the opportunity to help contribute to climate science. An Antarctica cruise weaves together these elements into a wild and elemental once-in-a-lifetime experience.

While it won't be news to learn that Antarctica is the world's coldest continent, most will be surprised to learn that it's also the planet's largest desert, seeing only 25cm of rain a year. It even has its own mountain range – the Gamburtsev Mountains – which is buried under roughly 15,000 feet of ice, while Mount Erebus is the world's southernmost active volcano.

Dave Mills, chief commercial director for Iglu Cruise can understand why Antarctica is growing in popularity among regular travellers. "Record-breaking temperatures across the globe in recent years mean that many people feel uncomfortable when travelling in the heat," he says. "We've seen increasing demand for Antarctic cruises as well as cruise-and-stay itineraries, with bolt on stays in Santiago or Buenos Aires."

Antarctica's summer lasts from October to February, so experts recommend travelling between November and February when the days get longer until eventually the sun doesn't set at all, with temperatures ranging between 0°C and 18°C.

LEFT The deck of Holland America Line's *Oosterdam* is ideal for iceberg viewing



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Penguins are a particularly popular attraction in the region; an expedition cruise will get you closer to the scenery; legendary explorer Ernest Shackleton's hut has been carefully preserved

WONDERFUL WILDLIFE

Think of Antarctica and penguins probably spring to mind. Included in HX Expeditions' Citizen Science projects is Penguin Watch, set up in response to a global decline in populations to investigate the impact of climate change, fisheries, disease and pollution on the colonies. Of course, it's not only penguins. Antarctica is a sanctuary for a wide array of animals, from gigantic elephant seals, leopard seals and fur seals to dolphins, as well as an enormous variety of whales, such as humpback, killer, blue and sperm whales.

"Antarctica is a living museum of exploration and discovery, each step unveiling a chapter of human history"

HISTORY UNRAVELLED

Not simply a frozen wilderness, Antarctica is a living museum of exploration and discovery, with each step on the continent's soil unveiling a chapter of human history. One such specialist voyage operated by Heritage Expeditions retraces the path forged by famous explorers Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton where, depending on conditions, it can be possible to visit and compare their historic huts with a modern-day scientific research station. One thing

is for sure, nothing cements respect for these pioneering explorers more than witnessing first-hand the overwhelming icebound conditions that they would have endured.

"An Antarctica expedition cruise can be life changing," says Denise Walker, cruise & travel relationship manager at Inspiring Travel. "Seeing awe-inspiring icebergs and huge scenic landscapes, incredible wildlife and marine life in its natural habitat gives clients a whole new viewpoint on the world. It has to be seen to be believed."

Selling tips

1 Emphasise the value of an expedition cruise. Sometimes price can seem like a barrier, so break it down to a per-day rate and point out all that's included.

2 Familiarise yourself with ships and itineraries, find out exactly what kind of experience your client will have on board and make sure it suits them. After all, this is probably going to be a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

3 Understand the differences between an expedition cruise and a regular ocean cruise and explain in detail to clients. Some people do not understand how much they differ.

Did you know?

Antarctica is huge – around one-and-a-half times the size of the United States

the only commercial line in the world to do this. Meanwhile, those sailing with Polar Latitudes can help collect phytoplankton samples from fjord systems along the Antarctic Peninsula.

This helps scientists to monitor its abundance, composition and distribution.

Nathaniel Sherborne, VP sales and marketing UK and Nordics HX reveals that an increasing number of travellers want to visit remote destinations such as Antarctica. He thinks this is driven by a desire to learn about the destination's history and environment while wanting to travel in a more responsible way.

“For years at HX we have encouraged guests to participate in citizen science projects with our experts onboard, from collecting water samples to better understand climate change impact, counting penguins and monitoring whale migration,” he says. “We want guests exploring Antarctica to return as ambassadors for this incredible, remote part of the world, having learnt more about the wildlife and challenges of the region.”

It's clear that Antarctica is not simply a destination; it is somewhere to embark on a journey of discovery, fostering a deep appreciation for the wonders of our planet. It's true, the power of nature is humbling. ●

There are legions of seabirds too, not least the beautiful albatross with its gigantic wingspan and the prehistoric-looking giant petrel. Expert naturalists are on board most voyages to Antarctica, who provide insights into the unique adaptations of these creatures, fostering a deep connection between travellers and the region's astonishing biodiversity.



SCIENTIFIC STUDY

An Antarctica cruise offers an unparalleled opportunity for first-hand research. With ever-growing global awareness of climate change, Antarctica is a crucial focal point for scientists. Onboard lectures and workshops conducted by leading scientists offer passengers the chance to actively engage in the scientific process while surrounded by landscapes that underscore the urgency of environmental preservation.

“Citizen science empowers and educates participants,” says Alex Mudd, head of Swoop Antarctica. “We receive glowing reviews from contributors happy to add this enriching additional dimension to their Antarctic experience.”

Passengers on *Viking Polaris* and *Octantis* get the chance to actively participate in weather balloon launches, with Viking Cruises currently

Itineraries

Ponant

A 16-night Expedition to Southern Lands cruise sailing from Ushuaia to South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula on *Le Lyrial* is priced from £14,630pp. Four departures between November 2024 and March 2025.

uk.ponant.com

Heritage Expeditions

Sailing from New Zealand, this 27-night In the Wake of Scott and Shackleton: Ross Sea Antarctica voyage on *Heritage Adventurer* starts at £24,250pp. Departs 7 January and 2 February 2025

heritage-expeditions.com

Holland America

The 21-night South America & Antarctica cruise sailing from Buenos Aires on *Oosterdam* is priced from £4,499pp. Three departure dates available in December 2024 and January 2025.

hollandamerica.com

Eastern promise

Known for its historic cities and archaeological wonders, alluring Arabia has been a dream escape for itinerant travellers for centuries. **Sarah Riches** reveals why it's time cruisegoers followed in their footsteps

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi is a wonderful spot to take in the sunset; Muscat has a wealth of landscapes to explore and culture to soak up; the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat blends modern and traditional Islamic architecture

Women embellished with mehndi tattoos float into a cafe dressed in abayas. Next door, groups of men in floor-length dishdashas and thawbs share apple-scented shisha and a joke, as a mosque's call to prayer ricochets around the neighbourhood.

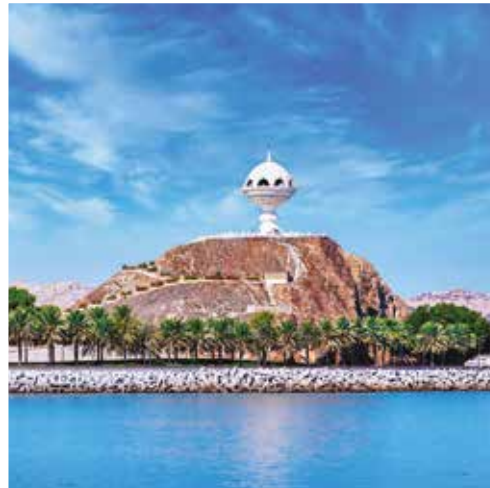
This is the real Arabia, where a peek behind Dubai's glitzy malls or Abu Dhabi's five-star hotels reveals a deeper insight into an extraordinary region. Here, we spotlight three countries that provide the perfect launchpad to an Arabian holiday, as well as the cruise ships that can ferry guests there in style.

OMAN

Archaeological evidence indicates that Oman was inhabited 100,000 years ago, and the three UNESCO World Heritage sites in northern Oman form the most complete collection of 3rd millennium BCE settlements and necropolises in the world. Today, much of its 4.6 million population lives in the capital, Muscat, which is embraced by a bay and cocooned by mountains, 20 minutes' drive west of Port Sultan Qaboos.

The National Museum and Bait Al Zubair, a heritage centre that is bursting with antique maps, weapons, jewellery and traditional dress, are both great ways to learn more about Oman's past.

The indoor market, Muttrah Souk, is the ideal spot for some mid-afternoon shade. Local resident Ali Marhubi, raised in Muscat, says the scent of black lime, saffron and frankincense – a symbol of Oman's rich heritage – is captivating. "You may be able to sample frankincense water, which aids digestion, or smell the aroma of oud," he says. "This time-honoured perfume, deeply rooted



**“VISITORS CAN
ESCAPE THE
HEAT ON A
TRADITIONAL
DHOW BOAT**

in Omani culture, evokes memories of dressing up in your finest attire and basking in the warmth of family gatherings during Eid.”

Visitors can also escape the heat on a traditional dhow boat, where they can listen to the haunting song of humpback whales and scan the horizon for spinner and bottlenose dolphins, or go diving in search of whale sharks, barracudas and turtles. Tour guide and OmanTripper blogger Ali Mohammadi recommends trying Omani coffee and halwa sweets from Al Diwaniya on the waterfront. “It’s a magical feeling as the sun sets to the sounds of seagulls, waves crashing on the beach and calls to prayer.”

How to do it

TUI Marella Discovery 2's 14-night Arabian Sunrise 1 itinerary departs from Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 10 April 2024, calling at India and Jordan, with an evening and a day in Muscat, Oman. From £2,170 including flights. tui.co.uk

Cunard Queen Anne's 22-night Dubai to Hamburg voyage departs on 7 April 2025 from Dubai, stopping for a day in Muscat as well as in Egypt, Malta and Spain. From £2,359. cunard.com



**THE UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES (UAE)**

The UAE may only have been founded in 1971 – the same year that Rod Stewart's single *Maggie May* reached number one in the UK – but it has been inhabited for millennia.

A 4,000-year-old stone tomb and Iron Age irrigation system – both UNESCO World Heritage sites in Al Ain – reveal that the region has been occupied continuously since Neolithic times, long before nomadic Bedouin tribes traversed the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter) desert.

In the capital, Abu Dhabi, photo opportunities with the country's famous local residents can be seized upon at the Al Ain Camel market, while guests can also kayak along the mangroves in the east of the city next to flamingos, turtles and sea snakes. Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the majestic place of worship, takes pride of place in the city, gleaming white like a tiered wedding cake, and is a wonderful spot to take in the sunset.

Local resident Paul Choufani suggests lingering until the lights come on to see it glittering in the inky waters that surround it, then head to the waterfront.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

The spectacular Al Rahma Mosque of Jeddah which appears to float on the water; Al Balad, Jeddah's historical centre, is famous for its coral houses and beautifully carved lattice windows

“THE BEST WAY TO UNDERSTAND SAUDI'S DEVELOPMENT IS WITH A VISIT TO JEDDAH

“To experience the UAE like a local, stroll along the Corniche,” he says, “enjoying the cool sea breeze and refreshments from the kiosks that line it.”

Dana Sleiman, a creative and cultural industries advisor, has lived in Dubai since 2013. “To see a different side of Dubai beyond the landmarks, stroll around Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood on foot,” she says. Here guests can visit Dubai Museum or share an Emirati meal at Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Centre for Cultural Understanding. “You can also experience Emirati hospitality at XVA Art Cafe and the Arabian Tea House,” adds Dana. “Or cross the creek in a traditional abra boat to gold and spice markets.”

How to do it

Princess Cruises' *Island Princess* sails from Dubai on 13 March 2025 for a 29-day segment of its world cruise, calling at Salalah in southern Oman, Petra in Jordan and Egypt, Greece and Turkey. From £4,299. princess.com

Royal Caribbean International's *Serenade of the Seas* departs from Singapore on 24 April 2024 on a 15-night Ultimate India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia cruise, calling at Abu Dhabi and Dubai. From £1,467. royalcaribbean.com

SAUDI ARABIA

Twenty thousand years ago, hunter-gatherers roamed the grasslands that swept across what is now Saudi Arabia. When the climate changed, the wadis (riverbeds) dried up, shrivelling like Bedouins after a lifetime in the sun. This compelled early inhabitants to settle, domesticate goats, horses and camels and cultivate crops.

Citizens traded dates, almonds and spices with their neighbours; this, along with the exchange of ideas from pilgrims drawn to Mecca after the seventh century, made them wealthy as the Islamic Empire began to blossom.

The best way to understand Saudi's development is with a visit to Jeddah. Nestled on the Red Sea, this has been a significant city for merchants and worshippers since the seventh century. Visitors eager to get up to speed quickly can lose themselves among the maze of cobblestone lanes in Al Balad district, a UNESCO World Heritage site, valued for its authentic, low-rise homes built from coral, which feature beautifully carved latticed windows known as mashrabiya.

“Arriving in Al Balad is like stepping back in time,” says local tour guide Abir Abusulayman. “To experience it, spend time chatting to locals. There's a lot to discover, as each historic house

has a story to tell. Its culinary scene is also really special; Al Harbi, Shawarma Al Arkan and Sobia Clay are some of my favourite places to eat.”

Former Saudi resident Scott recommends Souk Al Alawi, which runs through the heart of Al Balad. “The market is a sensory overload – the smell of incense, vibrant fabrics, the buzz of local life,” he recalls. Nasseef House is around the corner. “Once a palatial residence, it's now a museum offering a glimpse into Jeddah's merchant past,” he adds. “Its rooftop offers stunning views, especially at sunset when the city is bathed in golden light.”

At dusk, many locals also retreat to the Corniche, a leafy promenade that hugs the coast. From there, visitors can feel the spray of the King Fahd fountain – at 312m high, it's taller than The Shard in London – before turning north to gawp in awe at Al Rahma mosque, which appears to float on the water like a mirage in the desert.

How to do it

Windstar Cruises offers a nine-night Arabian Nights and Egyptian Days cruise aboard *Star Legend*, sailing from Jeddah on 9 March 2026 with calls at Yanbu (Saudi Arabia), Sharm el Sheikh (Egypt) and Aqaba (Jordan). From £4,314. windstarcruises.com

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' Balmoral departs on 18 January 2025 from Southampton for an epic 82-night Idyllic Islands and Captivating Cultures of Asia itinerary calling at Salalah and Muscat (Oman) and Jeddah. From £8,499. fredolsencruises.com

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INDULGE

Cruise Jamaica



The CLIA View

The association's UK and Ireland managing director **Andy Harmer OBE** reveals why now is the right time to boost your river business

This year's wave season proved a fantastic success, with sales numbers and all-round interest in cruise hitting new highs. Several lines reported record-breaking numbers, including river cruise operators, which also felt the benefit of the early year demand.

The positive start to the year for river came off the back of CLIA's global cruise SPI (sentiment, perception, intent) report, which, in December, found that 16 per cent of new-to-cruise passengers enjoyed their first sailing on a waterway.

The profile of the river sector has increased notably over the past few years, with more operators, ships and calls available than ever before. The beauty of this type of travel is the sheer number of benefits on offer, with ships able to sail into the heart of their destination, bringing with them a wealth of eye-catching onboard features and itineraries that offer the ideal mix of relaxation and exploration.

The rivers themselves are wonderfully picturesque, while also boasting a wealth of famous landmarks. We have the Seine, Rhone, Rhine, Danube and Douro among others that are a short flight away from the UK, with longer-haul options such as the Nile and Mekong offering eye-catching, far-flung alternatives. Every destination is complemented by an optional



shore excursion, with lines catering for everything from historic walks and wine tasting to sightseeing by bike. And don't overlook the cost-effectiveness of a river sailing. Flights, transfers, onboard dining, shore excursions and a host of extras are often included in the price, making them fantastic value for money.

Of course, getting first-hand product insight really helps with sales, so I'm pleased to say CLIA's annual RiverView conference, held earlier this month, was perfectly timed. Agents sampled 11 river

ships in our host city of Amsterdam. The range of onboard offerings and amenities were seriously impressive, and there's every reason for the trade to feel confident selling river cruises to their clients when they cater for such a wide range of tastes and budgets.

Whether you've been able to get access to a ship or not, keep in mind that CLIA's online training modules are designed to grow your knowledge and insight of all things river. We ensure we have tools to suit all learning preferences, so however you like to pick up your information, we're just a click away.

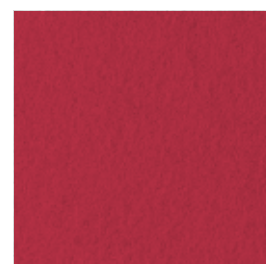
What's clear is that river cruise is a growing, dynamic sector, suited to experienced travellers and those yet-to-cruise alike. I'd urge agents to keep river in mind when customers are looking for their next holiday on the water, with the advantages they offer often meeting and exceeding expectations. 📍

FROM ABOVE Andy Harmer says river cruise is a growing, dynamic sector; trips along rivers such as the Danube are wonderfully picturesque

“

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Carol Smith
Personal Travel Advisor



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