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With a dedicated team in London, a travel advisor portal that provides everything needed to generate more Crystal business, a useful webinar series featuring global executives and sales teams, an exclusive trade Facebook page – Crystal Agents UK & Ireland – and our soon-to-go-live online training platform, we remain fully committed to ensuring that Crystal is the most trade-friendly luxury cruise line in the industry and that our trade partners receive the support and recognition that they deserve.

– *Luke Smith, Vice President, Trade Sales UK & EMEA*

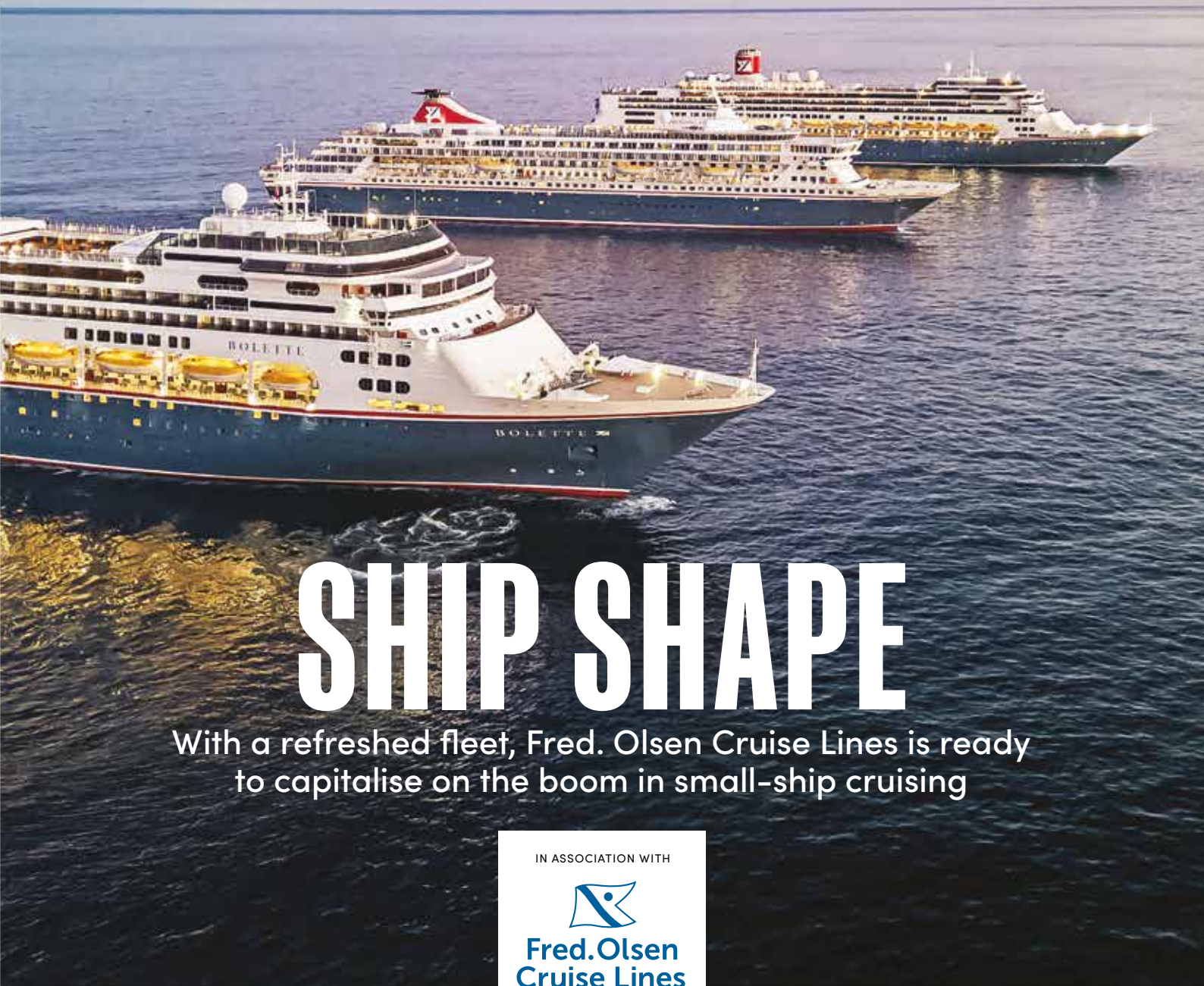


THE VOICE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

Trade News

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SHIP SHAPE

With a refreshed fleet, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is ready to capitalise on the boom in small-ship cruising

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Fred. Olsen
Cruise Lines

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WELCOME...

TO THE MARCH/APRIL ISSUE

As global conflicts once again unsettle travellers and test consumer confidence, the value of a trusted travel agent has never been clearer.

In moments like these, when travellers look for reassurance and a calming voice, it's the trade that steps up to interpret fast-moving advice, take late-night calls and guide people through disruption.

After navigating a global pandemic, airspace closures and inconsistent regulations in recent years, agents have become adept at steadying the ship amid choppy waters. Now, as tensions in the Middle East threaten to reshape consumer sentiment, we catch up with several experts for their take on the future of travel to the region (p. 7).

Yet it's just as important to consider the here and now as it is to look to the future. Our 2026 River Special, produced in partnership with VIVA Cruises, examines how the fast-growing challenger brand is reshaping the world of waterway holidays. You can hear directly from the line's CEO and co-founder on page 42 of your March/April issue.

On the cover: Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines



ABOVE New government legislation could impact cruise's net-zero mission

Elsewhere, you'll find your regular updates from the expedition and luxury sectors on pages 10 and 12 respectively, as well as an investigation into whether the UK government's drive towards reaching net-zero risks putting the cruise industry at a competitive disadvantage (p. 35).

Happy reading!

Will Payne
Editor

cruisetradenews.com

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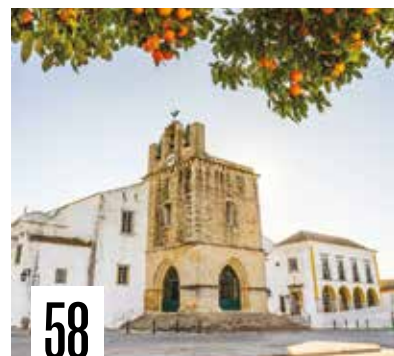
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Lasting impact

► Travel agents have warned of the knock-on effect the war in Iran will have on the future of travel, both to the Middle East and further afield. In February, the US and Israel launched military action in the country, killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in an air strike.

Iran responded by bombing US allies in the region with Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait all hit. Widespread travel disruption ensued, with thousands of passengers stranded after cruise lines and airlines were forced to cancel departures.

At the time, agents told *Cruise Trade News* they were working hard to support affected customers but were concerned the conflict will make travellers nervous and will have an



Continued overleaf



impact on where people will choose to visit in the future. According to the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), the number of Britons that visited the city rose to 1.47 million in 2025, an 11 per cent year-on-year increase and a record high.

Travel Counsellor Emma Otter said of the conflict: "I absolutely do think that this will impact future Middle East bookings. I have customers due to visit Dubai at Easter, they visit every year, and they are now more interested in cancelling in favour of Spain and Portugal."

Robbie O'Grady, founder of The Cruise Room, added: "[The conflict]

will lead to a reduction in interest in the region for a while, there is no doubt. Moments like this will impact all travel, especially anyone nervous about travelling."

The impact of the war has been felt beyond the Middle East, as Dubai and Abu Dhabi are central hubs for travel to eastern Asia and Oceania. Agents with customers planning to holiday further afield have been rerouting trips to ensure they can still travel.

Sam Ballard, managing director of Club Voyages, said: "Our main issue isn't necessarily travellers heading to the Middle East – although we do have quite a few of those in the

“

I absolutely think that this will impact future Middle East bookings

coming weeks – it's more people transiting through the major hubs like Dubai. For clients like that, whose destination is not Dubai or the Middle East, I do think that when presented with options they will look to avoid the Middle East."

Shona Thorne, managing director of Thorne Travel, is hopeful the impact of the conflict will be limited and confidence will resume once guidance becomes clearer for travellers.

"We have had many challenges in the travel industry and experience shows demand tends to recover once situations stabilise and advice becomes clearer," she said.

Otter, meanwhile, highlighted the value agents can bring in reassuring customers on their future travel plans, and emphasised the importance of booking through the trade. "As agents, we must remind customers about the protection and reassurance of booking a package instead of the DIYers," she said. "We don't want customers to have a knee-jerk reaction based on social media or press reporting and lose money as a result of making a premature decision about their summer plans."



SCAN

to read the full report and discover the trends shaping the cruise industry

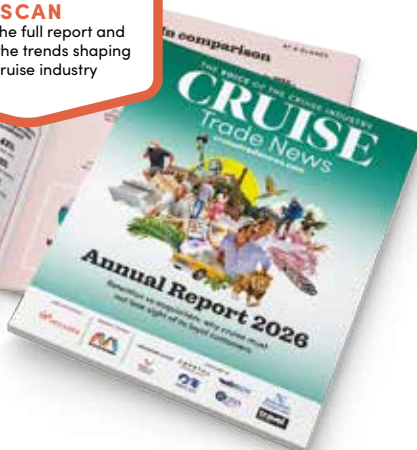
CTN ANNUAL REPORT 2026

> Available to download now, our second Annual Cruise Industry Report can reveal that some seasoned sailors are looking to different holiday types for their next trip abroad.

The white paper, which officially launched during an intimate event at London's Mayfair Townhouse in February, surveyed almost 800 new-to-cruise and experienced cruise customers to investigate their perceptions of holidays-at-sea in 2026 and beyond. The research and analysis carried out throughout

the special issue strives to help travel agents and cruise executives keep their fingers on the pulse of one of the travel industry's fastest-growing sectors.

Our exclusive study, produced in partnership with Mail Metro Media, reveals that of the respondents who are unlikely to cruise again in the next two years, a significant 42 per cent say it's because they've decided to try a different type of holiday, with nearly one in 10 saying they're no longer interested in cruise whatsoever.



SPOTLIGHT

Tine Murn

co-founder, New Deal Europe



“Southeast Europe is one of the fastest growing and most exciting regions in travel, with destinations like Dubrovnik and Athens sitting alongside developing countries such as Albania and Montenegro. But that’s not the whole story. From wine tourism in Moldova to cultural city breaks in Zagreb, Skopje and Ljubljana, the region offers an extraordinary diversity of experiences for travellers.

“We are proud to showcase this at the New Deal Europe Marketplace and Forum at the Hilton London Metropole on 24 March. Working alongside *Cruise Trade News* on the Forum’s educational programme, the event will give cruise specialists an invaluable insight into the region.

“From Adriatic island-hopping to Danube cruising, southeast Europe offers exceptional opportunities for ocean and river itineraries alike, alongside rewarding pre- and post-cruise stays that encourage travellers to explore deeper into one of Europe’s most dynamic and fascinating travel regions today.”

Southeast Europe offers exceptional opportunities for ocean and river alike

ROYAL HITS THE ROAD

➤ Royal Caribbean is bolstering its trade support with the launch of its ‘Royal on the Road’ programme. The initiative will see sales representatives from the cruise line travel to high street stores to deliver tailored support to agents with the aims of driving bookings and improving product knowledge.

Royal Caribbean staff will spend a day with agents to give them training and to meet with their clients, and can stay later into the evening to host in-store cruise events and customer showcases. Marketing materials and merchandise will also be provided.

The line said it plans to introduce a virtual reality element to enable agents and customers to immerse themselves onboard *Legend of the Seas*, the first Icon class ship to sail in Europe, launching this summer.

“Staff will spend a day with agents to give them training and to meet their clients

Exclusive

**ENGLAND CALLING**

➤ P&O Cruises will welcome England football royalty onboard *Britannia* this spring, with Sir Geoff Hurst set to sail on its flagship for a four-night ‘Audience with’ residency in the Limelight Club.

The last remaining member of England’s 1966 World Cup-winning team will be sailing on part of *Britannia*’s Caribbean Transatlantic cruise from Barbados to Southampton.

Sir Geoff said: “I’ve been fortunate to experience some extraordinary moments in football, and I’ve always enjoyed sharing those memories with fans. To do so on *Britannia*, with people who are relaxing on holiday, is something I’m really looking forward to.”



AGENT'S £100K PAYDAY

An agent has secured a £100,000 booking on a National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions sailing. Charlie Mason, polar specialist at Polar Routes, sold a 25-day Patagonia, Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica Odyssey sailing on *National Geographic Resolution* departing in February 2028. His booking has contributed to National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions' strong start to the year, with the line reporting it has achieved 63 per cent of its total 2025 sales in the first two months of this year alone. The line praised agents for their performance, saying bookings through the trade have doubled compared to the same period last year, totalling 40 per cent of UK sales.

Top-selling destinations were Antarctica, the Galápagos, Alaska and Canada.

Head to page 4 of
your River Special for
the latest updates from
the river sector

SPOTLIGHT

Danny Giles

Hapag-Lloyd Cruises has appointed Danny Giles as its new senior manager for the UK and Ireland. Giles boasts more than 30 years of experience in the travel industry, including roles at Ponant, Silversea Cruises, Hurtigruten, Balkan Holidays and Crystal Cruises.

He succeeds James Scott who last month took up the role of trade sales director UK&I at SeaDream Yacht Club. Giles said: "I'm incredibly proud to be part of a brand with such a rich heritage, renowned for delivering luxury experiences aboard beautifully designed small ships."

TRAVEL COUNSELLORS JOINS ECN

Travel Counsellors has joined the Expedition Cruise Network (ECN) as a corporate member in a bid to bolster its footing in the expedition cruise sector.

The homeworking network is the largest community to join the ECN to date. Through its corporate membership, Travel Counsellors will gain access to the organisation's Expedition Cruise Academy, alongside exclusive

insights, supplier engagement and priority access to events, ship visits and fam opportunities.

Janet Whittingham, head of cruise at Travel Counsellors, said expedition cruising is "one of the most exciting and fast-evolving" areas of premium travel, and joining the Expedition Cruise Network reflects the company's commitment to boosting its members' skill sets.

HERITAGE REVEALS NEW SHIP

Small-ship expedition cruise line Heritage Expeditions has expanded its fleet with a third ship. The New Zealand-based cruise line has introduced *Heritage Discoverer*, formerly Silversea's *Silver Explorer*. The 130-passenger vessel will begin sailing for the line from May 2027, with a selection of Arctic and Antarctic departures already chartered to Polar Latitudes Expeditions.

Discoverer, which was also formerly *Exploris One*, will have an expedition team of 15 on board and will "herald new opportunities" for the line, according to directors Aaron and Nathan Russ. "*Heritage Discoverer* combines decades of exploration, on expeditions from the Northwest Passage to remote tropical waters and south to Antarctica, with a 1A ice class rating and wrapped in luxurious, spacious surrounds" said Aaron.



ASIA ADVENTURE

The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection has revealed its summer 2027 Asia and Alaska itineraries aboard *Luminara*. Spanning April through October, the season features 21 voyages, including 15 cruises in Alaska, voyages across Asia and two transcontinental crossings. Following its inaugural season in Alaska this summer, *Luminara* will return to the region with an expanded slate of itineraries sailing between Vancouver, British Columbia and Whittier, with additional calls to Juneau.

The vessel will also sail a 10-night Tokyo round-trip cruise, visiting destinations such as Osaka, Hiroshima, Busan and Kagoshima. Launched in July 2025, *Luminara* is the third superyacht in The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection fleet. With 226 suites accommodating up to 452 guests, the ship offers The Ritz-Carlton Spa, pool areas and a range of dining options.



SEABOURN REVAMPS CULINARY OFFERING

Seabourn will implement a wave of culinary enhancements across its fleet to elevate the guest experience in Seabourn Square and The Colonnade. Seabourn Square has undergone a comprehensive refresh and guests can now enjoy an expanded selection of freshly prepared warm items, including breakfast sandwiches, savory quiche, and Roman-style pizza.

The new menu also includes a selection of toasted sandwiches, such as Monte Cristo and Croque Monsieur. These offerings complement the venue's existing menu of pastries, sandwiches and sweet treats.

"At Seabourn, culinary is one of the most meaningful ways we connect guests with the destinations they explore," said the line's president Mark Tamis.

SPOTLIGHT

Holly Glazer



Crystal has expanded its sales team with the appointment of Holly Glazer to the new role of business development specialist, UK & EMEA.

Glazer joins from Audley Travel where she was a senior trade sales executive, managing a portfolio of agents and supporting the trade sales and partnerships team.

She has also held positions at American Express and Four Seasons Whistler. Glazer said: "I am thrilled to be joining the team. It is such an exciting time to come onboard, and I look forward to playing my part in contributing to the ongoing growth of the business."



REGENT AND OCEANIA RESHAPE TEAM

Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises have revealed a new leadership structure designed to strengthen support for its agents across all markets and capitalise on the increasing appetite for luxury and ultra-luxury cruising.

Wesley D'Silva has been appointed president of Regent Seven Seas Cruises, reporting to Jason Montague, who continues to lead the long-term

strategic direction for both the ultra-luxury line and Oceania.

Steve Odell will transition into an ambassador role with the two lines. Odell, who was most recently senior VP international and consumer sales for the two Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) brands, was described by the company as one of its "most respected and longstanding" senior commercial leaders.



IN WITH THE NEW

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is entering 2026 with a spring in its step following the refurbishment of two of its vessels.

Will Payne takes a closer look at what's new

You don't manage stay in business for more than 175 years by resting on your laurels. Despite accumulating a strong pool of loyal customers over nearly two centuries, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is acutely aware that to stay relevant and front of mind, it has to adapt, develop and introduce something new to keep people coming back for more.

In the last five months, the line has relaunched two of its three vessels and partnered with RWS global to elevate its onboard entertainment offering.

BOREALIS

In November 2025, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines welcomed guests back onboard a newly improved *Borealis* following an extensive dry dock investment.

The 1,353-guest ship underwent a comprehensive rejuvenation of both its interiors and exteriors, with the dry-dock investment focusing on technical upgrades and guest-centric enhancements to elevate the overall onboard experience.

Public areas such as The Observatory and The View were refreshed, bringing a brighter and more inviting feel to these popular spaces. The onboard Atlantis Spa was also enhanced, with upgraded salon equipment, a new pedicure chair and a

new jacuzzi in the Thermal Suite, creating an even more soothing and relaxing environment for guests.

The Neptune Lounge, meanwhile, has been upgraded to support Fred. Olsen's new entertainment partnership with RWS Global, which will launch fully on *Borealis* from 30 April. Enhancements include changes to the stage technology, lighting and acoustics, along with the addition of new aerial silks.

One of the most notable transformations is in the speciality restaurant, Colours & Tastes. Refreshed premium interiors now beautifully showcase the restaurant's art collection, creating an elevated setting for dining. This year guests can also enjoy a new rotating themed menu featuring Gourmet Grill, Traditional Italian and the much-loved Asian-fusion cuisine,

“
Refreshed premium interiors now beautifully showcase Colours & Tastes' art

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Guests can enjoy an elevated dining experience onboard; new dishes will be on offer in a range of restaurants; entertainment options have also been refreshed

“ New shows span musical theatre, Latin, rock, pop, disco, country and more

By listening to guests' feedback, Fred. Olsen is evolving its entertainment programme to better reflect what guests want and expect. This partnership is a result of that commitment to putting guests first and ensuring their voices shape the onboard experience.

Since February, guests sailing aboard *Bolette*, *Borealis* and *Balmoral* will be among the first to experience a refreshed and dynamic daytime entertainment programme. From September 2026, meanwhile, the full programme will be live across the fleet, blending brand-new theatre productions with a wide variety of live experiences.

The new programme will feature a mix of production shows spanning musical theatre, Latin, rock, pop, disco, country and more, alongside an engaging line-up of themed events, game shows, light entertainment and food and beverage experiences. All are designed to bring fresh, memorable moments to life at sea, while retaining the warmth, intimacy and charm that Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is celebrated for. ●

offering more variety to travellers during their cruise.

Those sailing on *Borealis* this year, following its dry-dock, will be among the first to discover Fresco – a brand-new open-air lounging venue located on Deck 8, set to be introduced as part of the ship's enhancements.

BOLETTE

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines then welcomed guests back on board its flagship vessel, *Bolette*, following the completion of a 16-day dry dock programme at APCL A&P Falmouth in February.

During the dry dock, interior refurbishments were carried out across guest spaces, including refreshed finishes in The Observatory and The Ocean Bar, new carpeting in the main dining room, and revitalised guest corridors and stairwells. More than 50 guest cabin bathrooms were also renovated.

Bolette's speciality restaurant, Colours & Tastes, has undergone a complete interior transformation as part of the wider fleet refresh. The redesigned space now features refined textures and warm, neutral tones that highlight the restaurant's curated artwork collection, to create a more elevated and intimate dining setting.

Samantha Stimpson, CEO of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, said: “We are delighted to welcome guests back on board *Bolette* to enjoy her refreshed spaces and enhanced onboard experiences following a successful dry dock period.”

ENTERTAINMENT

The ship enhancements came following Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' partnership with global entertainment leaders RWS Global to elevate the onboard experience for guests even further.



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Safe harbours

The Middle East crisis revealed a striking divergence in cruise demand and signalled where travellers may be heading next, writes **Raphael Giacardi**

Search data from our sister publication, *World of Cruising*, shows interest in sailings to Africa, the Middle East, the Far East and Australasia falling sharply following the start of the conflict, while Northern Europe and Norwegian fjords searches surged by 46 per cent.

GLOBAL TENSIONS

On 28 February, the United States and Israel launched a series of strikes against Iran, reshaping the geopolitical landscape for travellers and operators. Retaliatory strikes by Iran on neighbouring countries followed, triggering the closure of regional airspace and the Strait of Hormuz. The response from the *World of Cruising* readership was immediate.

Within 48 hours of the first strikes, thousands of readers had turned to our coverage for information, making the story, by far, the most read on the site in March. Geopolitical events have become as important to our readers as guides and ship reviews.

THE DATA

Shifts in interest in certain destinations emerged quickly. In the week the strikes began, interest in Africa and Middle East cruises dropped by over 30 per cent. Sailings to the Far East and Australasia fell by a similar margin, likely a knock-on



effect of disrupted flight routes through the usual Middle Eastern hubs.

In the same week, interest in Northern Europe and the Norwegian fjords jumped by 46 per cent. Travellers, it appears, sought certainty.

NEW PATTERNS

This is different from what we observed following the Caribbean airspace closure earlier this year. In that case, Caribbean demand remained broadly stable: travellers seemed to treat the disruption as temporary and local and largely held their course.

The Middle East crisis, by contrast, appears to be registering as a longer-term concern. Overall search volume on the site has remained in line with expectations, which confirms that cruise demand itself has not evaporated.

Demand has proved resilient before, and it is proving resilient again, but not static. The question for operators over the coming weeks is whether the reallocation of interest toward safe-haven destinations continues – and whether the routes that run through Middle Eastern airspace will recover as quickly as the Caribbean did, or whether consumer concerns prove more lasting. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Geopolitical events are as important to readers as guides and reviews; destinations like Dubai are seeing a drop in interest

IN NUMBERS



#1

Coverage of the situation in the Middle East was the most read story on worldofcruising.co.uk



30%

drop in interest in Middle East, Africa, Far East and Australasia sailings following the start of the conflict



46%

rise in searches for Northern Europe and Norwegian fjords voyages in the same period

TOP TIP

If you have customers unsure about travelling to the Middle East and its neighbouring regions, recommend alternative destinations with similar appeal, like the Canary Islands



“Which destinations should I pitch in 2026, and why?”

Travel consultant apprentice for Ocean World Travel, Emily Babey asks which ports of call she should champion in 2026 to entice new customers. **Josie Klein** reports

The number of destinations cruise lines can reach is ever-expanding as the industry prepares to welcome 56 more ocean-going ships by 2036. But with more opportunities, come more

challenges. Agents will be tasked with becoming experts on all of these new destinations to ensure their customers aren't left empty-handed when asking for a recommendation.

Emily Babey, a travel consultant apprentice at Ocean World Travel, sells mainly Caribbean and Mediterranean sailings, which comes as no surprise considering they were the top two destinations passengers visited in 2024, with 43 per cent of all cruisers heading to the Caribbean and one in six sailors visiting the Med, according to CLIA's 2025 State of the Industry Report.

“We sell a lot of the same products here at Ocean World,” Babey says. “The Caribbean, the Med and the Norwegian Fjords are definitely my speciality as I sell them so much. Although I always love it when someone comes in and wants to go further afield or to a totally different destination, I don't always feel I know a lot about those places. It would be good to learn more about unusual destinations or places we don't sell a lot of, like Alaska or Japan.”

So, as cruise ships venture further afield, which destinations should Babey focus on selling this year, and how should she choose?

“**Experts are encouraging agents to push more far-flung, once-in-a-lifetime, bucket-list destinations**

ENTHRALLING EXPEDITIONS

One sector experiencing a huge growth in popularity is expedition cruising, with CLIA projecting 150 per cent growth in capacity for specialist ships from 2019 to 2029.

According to *Cruise Trade News*' second Annual Report, 88 per cent of under-45s say expedition cruising appeals to them, and 79 per cent of the age group believe an expedition cruise is “for people like me”. The rising popularity of expedition cruising is now a known trend, and experts are encouraging agents to latch onto the momentum and push more far-flung, once-in-a-lifetime, bucket-list destinations to their customers.





SCAN
to read more about
Ambassador Cruise Line's first
ex-Portsmouth season



As such, Mark Walter, director of sales for northern Europe for HX Expeditions, has thrown his weight behind Antarctica for 2026, saying this is the year agents should be championing the

destination. "For 2026, we are recommending agents actively pitch Antarctica, a destination that offers travellers the ultimate polar adventure with breathtaking landscapes, extraordinary wildlife and unforgettable experiences," he explains.

"October to December is a perfect time to visit; the Antarctic season officially begins in October, marking the start of spring when wildlife activity increases. This period offers milder temperatures, longer daylight hours and the chance to see penguin chicks, seals and migrating whales in action."

Echoing this proposition, Andrew Turner, AE Expeditions' sales director EMEA, urges agents to highlight Antarctica this year in a bid to reach those customers who are looking for a new type of trip to sink their teeth into.

“Demand for meaningful travel continues to surge, and nothing matches the impact of the white continent

"Antarctica should absolutely be on agents' recommendation list in 2026," he says. "It is ideal for customers who have been on a safari, activity holiday, multi-centre or simply looking for something different. Demand for wild, meaningful travel continues to surge, and nothing matches the impact of the white continent."

He adds: "Antarctica isn't just a destination, it's a life-changing journey. For 2026, it's one of the most powerful, profitable and purposeful destinations agents can sell." ►

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Seeing the wildlife of Antarctica often features on clients' bucket lists; a Mekong itinerary offers a unique experience, even for well-travelled cruisers; Ocean World Travel's Emily Babey



ABOVE The Mediterranean remains popular for bookings

WARMER WATERS

Sticking on the expedition cruise theme but migrating to warmer climes, Lewis Quigley, key account manager, north at Scenic, suggests the Mekong and Seychelles as two destinations worth spotlighting this year, as the appetite for remote destination sailings continues to grow.

“For river cruising in 2026, there’s nowhere better than the Mekong,” he adds. “It offers a unique experience, even for experienced cruisers, with ancient temples, natural delights and wonderful culture. For ocean, it’s the Seychelles, with fantastic year-round weather, iconic beaches and mesmerising wildlife. It’s the perfect place for a luxury yacht cruise.”

But while far-flung destinations are a key growth area for the cruise sector, director of cruise for the Advantage Travel Partnership Jonny Peat believes the

“
Piraeus, Greece perfectly blends culture, history and cuisine in one unforgettable port of call

Med reigns supreme. “There’s always a good time to see Europe,” he says. He also notes an increase in demand for shoulder season sailings as customers look for cooler temperatures and reduced costs, saying agents should consider this when pitching holidays to their clients.

“Ocean cruise is already showing very strong momentum for 2026, with bookings well ahead of where we were this time last year,” he adds. “The Mediterranean remains the clear frontrunner – particularly sailings from Rome and Athens to the Greek Islands, Italy and Croatia. We’re also seeing growing interest in shoulder season sailings, as travellers look to make their budgets go further without compromising on experience. My advice is to follow the data and introduce what’s trending to your customers.”

Amanda Love, trade relations manager for Marella Cruises, agrees with Peat, saying Piraeus, Greece, is a destination to support this year. “It offers easy access to iconic landmarks like the Acropolis and Parthenon alongside traditional tavernas serving authentic Greek flavours,” she says. “It’s a destination that perfectly blends culture, history and cuisine in one unforgettable port of call.”

While Europe remains ever-popular, agents should look to expedition cruising for adventurous clients, while river cruises in more exotic destinations provide a strong alternative for experienced sailors. ●

“Which destinations should I pitch in 2026, and why?”



Andrew Turner, AE Expeditions

“Antarctica should absolutely be on agents’ recommendation list in 2026. It’s ideal for customers who have been on an activity holiday or looking for something different. Demand for wild, meaningful travel continues to surge and nothing matches the impact of the white continent.”



Lewis Quigley, Scenic

“For river cruising in 2026, there’s nowhere better than the Mekong. It offers a unique experience, even for experienced cruisers, with ancient temples and wonderful culture. For ocean, it’s the Seychelles, with fantastic year-round weather, iconic beaches and mesmerising wildlife.”



Jonny Peat, Advantage Travel Partnership

“Europe is right on our doorstep and we’re seeing more enquiries than ever. Follow the data and introduce what’s trending. The Med remains the clear frontrunner, particularly sailings from Rome and Athens to the Greek Islands, Italy and Croatia.”



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

Setting the scene

Cruise Trade News' sister travel show, World of Cruising TV, has capped another successful season of exclusive insight, expert tips and holiday inspiration

World of Cruising TV has concluded its fourth season, which hit the screen for the first time in February. Recorded at Palma Picture Studios in Mallorca, the show generated 304 calls between 1 February and 18 March, representing a 32 per cent increase compared with the same period for season three. Since its debut, the show has attracted more than 1,000 calls from viewers.

The uptick comes, in part, to a roster of new guests for season four, including Celestyal Cruises, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines and Crystal, as well as returning favourites Virgin Voyages, Riviera Travel and Princess Cruises.

CLIA UK and Ireland managing director Andy Harmer OBE made his World of Cruising TV debut to discuss the benefits of a holiday at sea with host Dean Wilson, filmed outside the Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma.



He says: "You see ships now of all shapes and sizes with all different inclusions, targeting certain types of cruise passenger."

And for the first time, World of Cruising TV brought cruising to life with a visit onboard *Sun Princess*, giving viewers a closer look at what they could expect on a Princess Cruises sailing. To date, the show has worked with 13 pioneering cruise lines, filmed and produced 28 half-hour episodes, delivered more than 96,000 minutes of footage and achieved upwards of 250,000 views on YouTube.

Each episode sees host Dean Wilson chat to a cruise line representative about the brand and highlighted itineraries. Next, Michelin star chef Marc Fosh prepares dishes inspired by the line's menus in the studio kitchen before the guests join him for a tasting.

The second season of the show, which is designed to help guests open their

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Host Dean Wilson and CLIA's Andy Harmer; March Fosh prepares dishes in the studio; Princess Cruises' Josh Smith gets ready for his chat with Wilson

minds to cruise lines they may not have considered before, was nominated for Video Content of the Year – New at the 2025 PPA Awards.

Simon Calder, travel editor at The Independent, joins the show once again for the Ask the Expert segment, which sees him answer viewers' burning questions about cruising.

Discussing the series, he says: "There were plenty of highlights, but I particularly enjoyed getting the chance to hear from the top figures from each of the cruise lines. Frankly, I am still drooling at the wonderful memory of getting to taste some of the best food in the Mediterranean, all cooked up in the studio by a Michelin-starred chef." ●



IN NUMBERS | **253K** ▶ **96K** ▶ **1K+** ▶ **32%**
YouTube views minutes calls increase in viewer calls

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Hot off the press

Virgin Voyages' UK sales director **SJ Walker** offers a glimpse behind the scenes of the brand's exclusive takeover of *Cruise Trade News* in February

Looking back at February's *Cruise Trade News* takeover, it feels like a real milestone moment for Virgin Voyages, and one that allowed us to share our story in a way that truly reflected who we are. It gave us the perfect opportunity to present a fuller picture and the incredible people behind the brand.

Partnering with *Cruise Trade News* was never just about presence on the page, it was about connection. As a publication that plays such an important role in informing the cruise trade, *Cruise Trade News* gave us a platform to share more about our evolution as a brand and the momentum we're building as we continue to grow. Having that space to tell our story in detail felt both timely and important as we continue to strengthen our position in the market.



“The takeover showcased our team's passion for supporting the trade

Our takeover gave us room to highlight the incentives and supportive tools available to agents. Bringing everything together in one cohesive edition meant we could properly showcase how committed we are to helping First Mates succeed and strengthen those relationships even further. The feedback we received was incredibly encouraging.

TEAM POWER

What I'm most proud of is the team behind it. This wasn't a campaign created in isolation. Our sales team leaned in wholeheartedly, sharing

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The February takeover edition; SJ Walker; the Virgin Voyages UK sales director collaborating with *Cruise Trade News* editor Will Payne

insights gathered from conversations with agents across the UK and helping shape messaging that felt authentic.

At Virgin Voyages, culture matters. We believe in working cross-functionally and celebrating wins together. The takeover reflected that spirit by bringing our collaborative culture to life and showcasing the genuine passion our team has for supporting the trade.

Spending time with the *Cruise Trade News* team was the perfect full-circle moment. When it landed, it almost felt like a coffee table book that agents could read at leisure. It reminded me that when strong partnerships and strong teams come together, the results speak for themselves. 📌



SELLING TIPS

30K

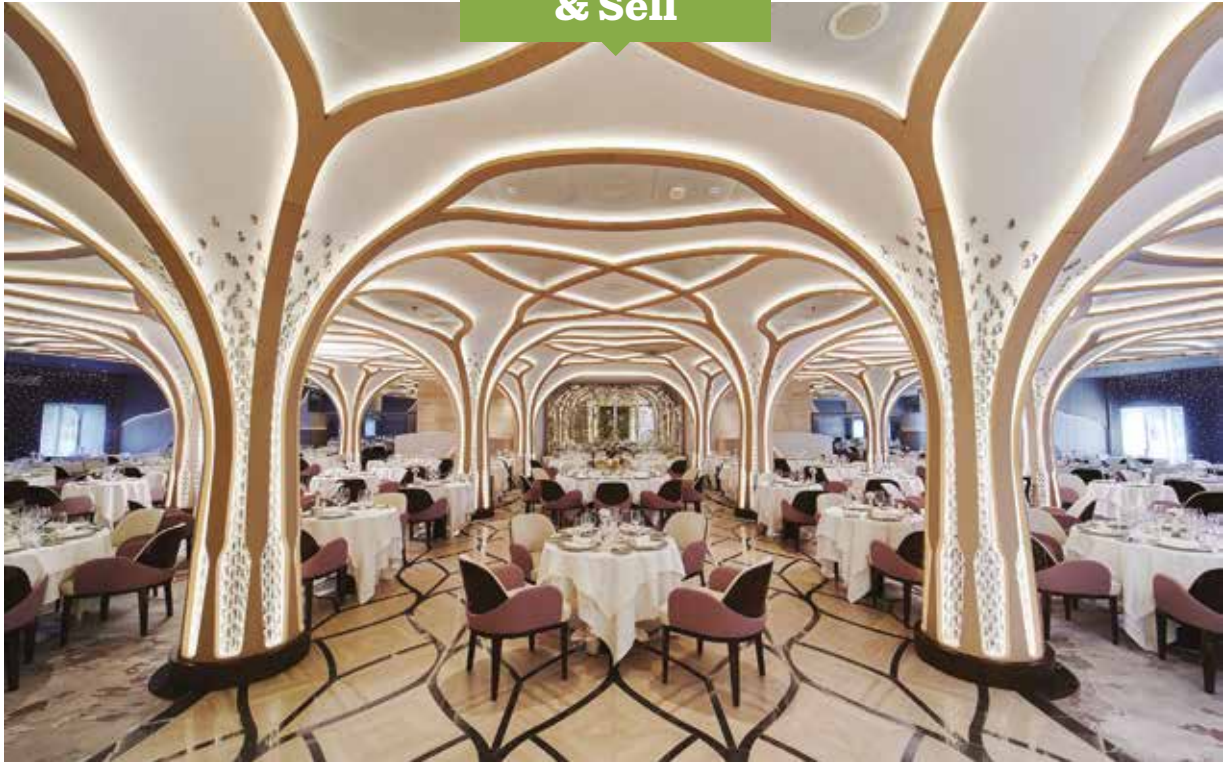
Cruise Trade News readers

25%

independent travel agent subscribers

8

editions a year



Regent Seven Seas Cruises

With a new ship class set to launch later this year, this ultra-luxury cruise brand is primed to help agents bolster their high-end sales and inspire their customers to splurge on a holiday of a lifetime

IN THE KNOW

Founded in 1992 from the merger of Seven Seas Cruises and Diamond Cruise, Regent Seven Seas Cruises initially operated sailings onboard *Song of Flower* and *Radisson Diamond* before welcoming *Paul Gauguin* to its fleet in 1997. Well known for its ultra-luxury proposition on its fleet of small to mid-sized, all-suite vessels, the line prides itself on its all-inclusive proposition which features dining, shore excursions, tips, Wi-Fi and drinks as standard.

In February, the line unveiled a new collection of nearly 50 multi-day land programmes available pre- and post-sailing in Africa and Arabia, Alaska, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, and North America.

THE FLEET

Regent operates a fleet of six ships, *Seven Seas Navigator*, *Mariner*, *Voyager*,



Explorer, *Splendor* and *Grandeur*. In December 2026, the line will welcome *Seven Seas Prestige* to its fleet, the first in a series of four new vessels currently planned as part of its new Prestige class. At 77,000 tons, the 822-guest vessel will boast one of the highest passenger-to-space ratios in the cruise industry, offering suites, restaurants, bars, lounges and public areas.

The vessel's inaugural season will feature 13 voyages to destinations across the Caribbean and Europe. Its maiden sailing departs 13 December 2026, on a 14-night transatlantic journey from Barcelona to Miami. The season culminates with sailings along the Iberian Peninsula and the coast of France, including overnight stays.

A second Prestige class ship is slated to launch in 2029, which will introduce new accommodation categories, including a reimagination of the palatial Regent Suite, plus new dining experiences. The third ship will join the fleet in 2033 and the fourth in 2036.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

As well as the launch of the Prestige class, Regent this year has introduced a new evening service at the Pool Grill to include a gourmet pizza menu. Available from 6pm-9pm, the eatery transforms into a self-service evening venue

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Paul Beale, vice president sales, Oceania Cruises & Regent Seven Seas Cruises, UK & Ireland



What's the secret to selling luxury cruise holidays?

"My secret to selling luxury cruises is to have a thorough understanding of the proposition and never sell through your own wallet. In luxury sales, it's important not to let your own perceptions of price limit what you recommend. What may feel like a major investment to you is likely a regular spend for your guest."

What's selling well with customers in 2026 and beyond?

"We're seeing unprecedented demand for ultra-luxury cruising. January 2026 marked our strongest booking month in history. Pacific and South America itineraries are performing well, while longer voyages of 15 days or more are attracting growing interest. We're also seeing more guests booking multiple cruises, a testament to our loyal Regent guests."



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The mesmerising design of *Grandeur's* signature restaurant, Compass Rose; spiral staircases flank the atrium of *Prestige*; dining is always a memorable experience onboard Regent Seven Seas cruises; *Explorer* spirits guests to Alaska

“We're seeing more guests booking multiple cruises

where guests can indulge in strip loin minute steak, rosemary roasted chicken, Provençal-marinated lamb chops and vegetable kebabs alongside.

Last year the line also confirmed plans to evolve its partnership with The Concierge Collection for the 2027-2028 season. Launched in 2024, the programme offers Regent's guests three-night pre-cruise stays at a selection of GHA properties, paired with an ultra-luxury voyage on board four of its ships. Following the success of the original portfolio which featured

properties in Europe, the collection has now been expanded to destinations in Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

WHO'S WHO?

Wesley D'Silva was recently appointed president of Regent Seven Seas Cruises, reporting to chief luxury officer of the line's parent company, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, Jason Montague. Steve Odell has transitioned from senior vice president international and consumer sales into an ambassador role, while Paul Beale leads the line's presence in the UK and Ireland as vice president of sales. Edward Lang is director of sales for the line in the UK and Ireland, with business development manager Harriet Smith and key account manager Georgia Lewis making up part of the company's on-the-road team in the UK. ●

SELLING TIPS

1 Regent will debut its first new ship class in 10 years this winter. This presents a great opportunity to entice first-timers to try the brand, as well as seasoned luxury travellers who want to try something new.

2 According to *Cruise Trade News's* 2026 Annual Report, seven per cent more people would spend between £2,000-£4,000 on their next cruise, which shows travellers are more open to heightened holiday experiences.

3 The line has also jumped on the growing trend of land and cruise holidays. Its new multi-day land programmes are a great tool to convince luxury travellers used to high-end hotel experiences to try a cruise for the first time.



LOOKING AHEAD

As cabins continue to fill up, Riviera Travel is opening bookings for its 2027 and 2028 seasons earlier than ever to give forward-thinking customers something to look forward to. **Josie Klein** reports

If you've had customers keen to book a 2026 getaway but their dream itinerary has already sold out, don't panic, because Riviera Travel has got them covered for the next two years with the launch of its Open for Discovery campaign. After a superbly successful Wave booking period, the operator has released its 2027 and 2028 sailings earlier than ever before to give travel agents and their customers the chance to secure their dream holiday up to two years in advance.

Nearly 40 in-demand destinations are featured in Riviera Travel's worldwide product listing, all of which include return flights and transfers, handpicked hotels, 24/7 support from UK-based staff and a balance of insightful excursions and visits with local guides and free time to explore

destinations. This makes them the ideal choice for early-planning customers seeking reassurance and value.

Thanks to the line's touring product, travellers can tick off one of the world's seven wonders with a visit to the Taj Mahal, strap on their hiking boots and trek in Australia's Blue Mountains or clink a glass of caipirinha on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro with some of the operator's most sought-after itineraries.

The company has expanded its European offering for the next two years

“Festive cheer will be inescapable on a range of Riviera's 2027 Christmas cruises

with more than 60 options, reflecting a continued demand for culturally rich, slower-paced itineraries with enhanced inclusions to suit every traveller's needs. All its existing European tours will return for 2027, plus there are six new itineraries which have been created in response to demand.

TANTALISING TRIPS

Guests can feel the heat of the sugar-white sands of Crete beneath their feet, or the warmth of the Cyprus sun beating down as they sip a glass of chilled rosé. These are just some of the highlights available on the brand-new, in-depth tours departing next year, each designed to thrill your guests' senses.

Festive cheer will be inescapable on a range of 2027 Christmas cruises, too, where the magic of the season will be spread across the Seine, Rhine and



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The Danube is a central feature of the line's upcoming seasons; there are plenty of dining options on *Riviera Reflection*; Paris is just one destination waiting to be explored; *Riviera Alba* sails on the Mekong



Danube. Guests won't see a Scrooge or hear a 'bah humbug' as they sail down some of Europe's most beloved rivers, stopping to swig warming mulled wine or listen to carols at markets across the continent. They can then ring in the new year in style with a gala dinner, live classical music and midnight drinks, kicking 2028 off with a bang.

And solo travellers are being cared for, as well, with a range of escorted tours and river cruises designed exclusively for those travelling by themselves. New for 2028 is a Vietnam, Cambodia and Mekong River cruise. Guests can marvel at the majesty of Angkor Wat and cower and crawl through the Cu Chi Tunnels as they are immersed in the 16-day itinerary. Riviera has also introduced a New Year on the Danube sailing dedicated to solo

“ Guests can ring in the new year with a gala dinner, live music and midnight drinks

travellers, giving passengers the chance to mix and mingle with new friends as they celebrate.

Plus, the line's newest ship, *Riviera Reflection*, which is scheduled to enter service in September 2027, will sail on all Danube itineraries, tempting travellers with additional offerings on the operator's third ship in its Radiance class. To make it even sweeter, Riviera is offering a 10 per cent discount across its entire 2027 and 2028 programme.

IN THE KNOW

The combination of the discount on all 2027 and 2028 holidays and a wave of brand-new product options, including destinations, refreshed favourites and expanded solo tours, can reassure both the trade and customers that Riviera has expertly curated its itineraries to ensure seamless holidays to awe-inspiring destinations.

Plus, the offer is trade-friendly and combinable with agent rates, designed to support travel agents with standout value. To qualify for the 10 per cent discount, bookings must be secured by 27 May this year. The offer is applied to the standard cost of the holidays only and excludes additional items, such as extra legroom seats, private transfers or optional excursions. ●



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River Cruises

The Blue Danube River Cruise for Solo Travellers

8 days from £2,699^{PP}

Departures March to November 2026 and March to October 2027

Rhine Cruise to Switzerland for Solo Travellers

8 days from £3,599^{PP}

Departures July to October 2026 and September to October 2027

Douro, Porto and Salamanca River Cruise for Solo Travellers

8 days from £3,699^{PP}

Departures October to November 2026 and July to August 2027

Cruise the Heart of Europe: Journey along the Rhine, Main and Danube for Solo Travellers

15 days from £6,249^{PP}

Departures August and October 2027

Escorted Tours

Classical Spain for Solo Travellers

7 days from £1,519^{PP}

Departures June to November 2026 and March to November 2027

Malta Uncovered for Solo Travellers

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Departures June to November 2026 and February to November 2027

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What's in It For You?



LIFE ON DECK

> Virgin Voyages will welcome more than 1,000 UK agents onboard this summer in its "largest ever" ship visit programme. Following a dry dock stint, *Valiant Lady* will host day visits in six UK cities: Dublin on 7 August, Glasgow on 8 August, Liverpool on 9 August, Belfast on

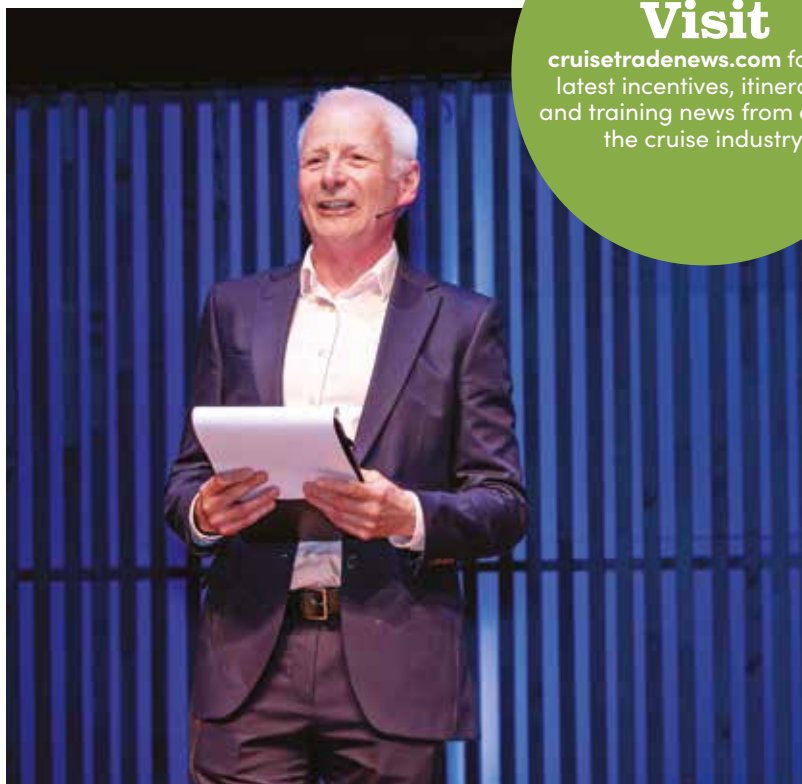
10 August, Edinburgh on 18 August and Portsmouth on 20 and 27 August.

During each visit, agents – dubbed by Virgin Voyages as 'First Mates' – will see the updates made to the ship, including new dining and entertainment offerings, and be hosted for a meal. Updates on how

agents can apply for a spot on a visit will be shared in coming weeks and months on the line's trade Facebook page, The Bridge UK. Virgin Voyages' UK sales director SJ Walker said: "We want to deepen our existing relationships with agents who confidently sell us and we want to reward them."

Visit

cruisetradenews.com for the latest incentives, itineraries and training news from across the cruise industry



RIVER OF OPPORTUNITY

> CLIA has unveiled a raft of new training programmes and trade engagement opportunities following its 2026 RiverView conference. The organisation confirmed the return of its one-day River Cruise Forum in Manchester this October, which will offer business sessions, networking and training.

CLIA also unveiled its 'Opportunity Docks' initiative, a new online

platform which features a range of videos, covering topics such as cruise brands and ships, destinations, itineraries and key sector stakeholders.

CLIA UK and Ireland manager director Andy Harmer said: "The events and initiatives we've announced are designed to further enhance the knowledge and insight of agents who are already selling or looking to sell river cruise."



Luxury experiences

Cunard will double the spaces available for travel agents to see its fleet of four vessels in 2026 as part of an expanded ship visit and fam trip programme. More than 900 of the line's trade partners will be invited onboard throughout the year, with an initial wave of four ship visits taking place between May and July in Southampton and Liverpool on *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Anne*. The line will also welcome more than 200 agents onboard during the 2026 CLIA Conference in June. The line's 2026 programme of fam trips, meanwhile, include three voyages from Southampton between May and November, comprising a mix of four, five and seven-night voyages.

SELL THREE, EXPEDITION FREE

> National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions is offering travel agents a complimentary cruise for two for booking three expeditions in the Arctic, Europe or Mediterranean before 30 April 2026.

Itineraries available for qualifying agents include a 10-day Southeast Greenland: Exploring at the Edge of the Ice Cap cruise on

National Geographic Endurance, and an 11-day Crossroads of the Ancient World: Exploring Greece and Turkey cruise on *National Geographic Orion*.

Danielle Bates, UK head of sales for the line, said: "We are providing [agents] with the best training possible, which will give them the confidence and knowledge to sell."



Sophie Nelson

HX Expeditions' trade partnerships manager on what the UK travel trade has to look forward to from the adventure brand in 2026 and beyond

What selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

Expedition cruising lacks agent knowledge and confidence within the industry, so we focus on educating agents on how to sell expedition. Many agents are less familiar with how to position expedition, so we help simplify it, often describing it as a safari at sea. This helps agents visualise and explain the immersive wildlife and nature-led experiences to their clients. We also provide clear guidance on target demographics and ideal client profiles to help them sell more effectively. Another major selling point is that HX Expeditions brings over 130 years of expertise in expedition travel.

Who would suit an expedition cruise?

Expedition cruising suits all fitness levels, and HX's beautiful ships are purposely built for expedition while remaining homely and comfortable, helping to



remove common misconceptions about what expedition travel involves. Clients want meaningful travel and to do something different, and expedition is perfect for that. We like to highlight that our product is all inclusive, which simplifies the sales process and adds strong value for an even wider range of clients.

What are some of the challenges when it comes to agent training?

The destinations we offer are places few people have ever visited, so it is important to train agents on both the destinations and the product itself. Agent rates help immensely, as they allow agents to experience the product and sell with much more confidence, while also having life changing experiences.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

HX Expeditions' destinations are places few people have visited; Sophie Nelson is keen to help agents visualise the immersive experiences on offer

How are you ensuring agents are up to speed on all things HX?

We maintain strong relationships with the trade and keep agents informed through our social media channels, newsletters, and regular calls and emails. We also run regular training sessions and workshops, both in person and online, to make sure agents understand any updates to our product, ships or itineraries.

What have agents got to look forward to from HX in 2026?

In 2026, HX Expeditions will celebrate its 130th birthday, so there will be plenty of celebrations to look forward to! Agents can look forward to our mega fam celebration in May, which will be the largest fam trip to take place, with 450 guests onboard our hybrid ship, *MS Nansen*. There will also be a ship visit on *MS Fram* with CLIA in Dover and Svalbard, along with other ship visits in Scotland. We're also hosting a Norway fam trip in March and an Antarctica fam trip later this year, giving agents another chance to experience the product first-hand and gain confidence in selling it. ●



Agents can look forward to our mega fam celebration in May, with 450 guests onboard our hybrid ship, *MS Nansen*

'Keep building each other up'

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' CEO **Samantha Stimpson** on the importance of International Women's Day to the cruise and wider travel industry



“

By celebrating and supporting one another, we ensure our industry's future is shaped by bold, curious and confident women

International Women's Day has been a valuable opportunity to pause and reflect – not just on how far we've come as an industry, but also on our own journeys and the role each of us plays in shaping what comes next. It's also the perfect moment to celebrate the incredible women across travel – colleagues, partners and friends – whose dedication, creativity and leadership inspire us every day.

At Fred. Olsen, we recently took time to shine a light on the women within our business whose hard work, creativity and leadership make a real difference. Recognising achievement, effort and inspiration is vital – not just for those being celebrated, but for the wider team too. It reminds us of the value of collaboration, of learning from one

another, and of the impact we can have when we lift each other up.

One thing my own career has taught me is that progress rarely happens inside your comfort zone. Some of the most rewarding opportunities I've had have come from the moments where I simply said “yes” – even when I wasn't entirely sure where the experience might lead.

Whether it's a new project, a step into leadership, or a move elsewhere in the industry, these moments are often when we grow the most. They challenge us to think differently, build confidence and discover skills we may not have realised we had.

BUILD A STRONG NETWORK

For those working in travel – particularly those early in their careers – my advice

would always be to stay curious and open-minded. You never know which opportunity might become a defining moment.

Building a strong network is also an important part of career development. The travel industry thrives on collaboration, and the most meaningful connections often come from engaging with others, sharing experiences and supporting one another. When we take the time to listen, learn and celebrate achievements – both big and small – we create a culture that fosters confidence, ambition and growth.

Following the reflections made this International Women's Day, I encourage everyone in our industry to embrace opportunities, lift others up and stay open to new experiences that help you grow. By celebrating and supporting one another, we not only strengthen our teams and businesses, but also help ensure the future of our industry is shaped by bold, curious and confident women ready to make their mark. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

CEO Samantha Stimpson says its important to step out of your comfort zone; Fred. Olsen marked International Women's Day with a spotlight on its female colleagues



Meet the team

An introduction to some of the experts driving Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines to new heights in 2026 and beyond



Geoff Ridgeon
Head of sales

Geoff has worked in various cruise industry roles since 1996 where his career started as a reservations consultant for Fred. Olsen. In the following years, Geoff fulfilled several roles for the cruise line including yield, international and group sales departments before making the move to work onboard ships. He was reception manager onboard the Olsen fleet and, on his return to the UK, he worked as a land tour operator and a cruise line account manager before settling back into office life in 2005 with Fred. Olsen Travel. In 2019, Geoff then returned to Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines where he has since been responsible for the cruise line's B2B relationships in the UK.



Mathew Foxcroft
Field sales manager

Mathew joined Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines in 2007 as a sales executive, progressing to account manager and now field sales manager. In his current role, he manages several key trade accounts while also leading a team of six account managers in the UK. With nearly 20 years' experience supporting trade partners, Mathew believes that the strong relationships he's built over the years have played an invaluable role in driving the company's growth.



Pam White
Account manager, east

Pam began her travel career in 2007 as cabin crew for Thomas Cook and later joined Newmarket Holidays. For the past three years, Pam has been a valuable part of the Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines sales team, where she enjoys the variety that each day brings. Her favourite aspects of her role are the opportunities to meet new people, as well as seeing the world from the unique vantage point of the ocean.



Allison Graham
Account manager, Scotland
and Northern Ireland

Since April 2014, Allison has built a successful career representing a product she genuinely believes in. Over the years, Allison has never tired of the spectacular worldwide experiences Fred. Olsen offers. Allison relishes the satisfaction from making dreams come true – helping guests set sail on unforgettable adventures is what makes it all worthwhile.



Jasmine Lilley
Account manager

Jasmine joined Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines as a trainee guest services advisor, quickly progressing to senior guest services advisor thanks to her passion for delivering exceptional service. She later moved into the sales team, starting in trade support before advancing into her current role as account manager. Jasmine loves building and nurturing strong relationships with trade partners, working together to ensure guests enjoy the very best experiences and truly magical moments.



Darcey Smith
Account manager, south

Darcey joined Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines as an account manager in July 2025. Her career in travel started in 2018 when she worked at Thomas Cook, moving on to Hays Travel in 2019 where she found her passion for the cruise industry. In her current role with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, Darcey brings a strong drive to raise awareness of the brand and to work with the trade to highlight why their customers should be sailing with the line.



Daniel Scott
Account manager,
north east/Midlands

Daniel joined Fred. Olsen in February 2024, having spent seven years working in football before moving into the travel industry where he spent six years with Thomas Cook and 18 months at Hays Travel. Daniel enjoys getting out and about visiting travel agents and helping to shift their perceptions of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines and what the company represents. He particularly loves finding new ways of getting in front of customers and bringing the product to the forefront of their minds.

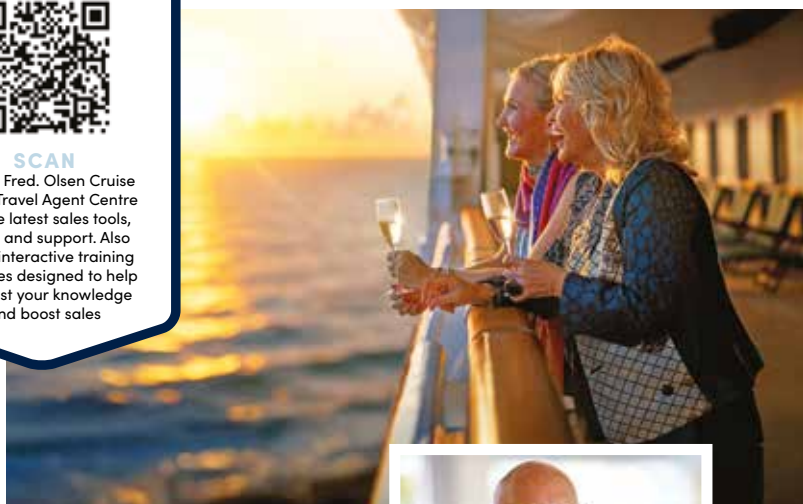
How to sell Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

With a fleet of refreshed vessels hitting the seas this year, head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon** unpicks everything you need to know to increase sales with this small-ship cruise line



SCAN

to visit Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' Travel Agent Centre for the latest sales tools, offers and support. Also try its interactive training modules designed to help you test your knowledge and boost sales



1 Smaller ships

In an industry with ever-increasing ship size, we offer something personal. Our three smaller ocean ships – *Bolette*, *Borealis* and *Balmoral* – each carry no more than 1,400 guests. This means plenty of space to unwind and enjoy thoughtful touches throughout. And as they're smaller, the service is always genuinely warm and personal, creating a memorable experience your customers will love.



2 Regional departure ports

With regional departure ports in Southampton, Liverpool, Newcastle and Rosyth, there's no need for your customers to travel long distances to start their holiday. Whether it's a short break or a longer voyage, our regional departures open the door to remarkable destinations.

3 Destinations and expertly curated itineraries

Our itineraries blend well-loved destinations with those quieter gems waiting to be discovered. Whether they're after famous sights or somewhere a little less visited, every sailing is thoughtfully curated to help guests explore the world in a more rewarding and considered way.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Smaller ocean ships like *Bolette* offer guests personal service and plenty of space to unwind; Fred. Olsen cruises curate a sociable environment on board; head of sales Geoff Ridgeon

4 Incentives and inclusive pricing

With our Freedom Fare Price Promise, guests enjoy selected drinks at lunch and dinner, a wealth of entertainment and enrichment, and gratuities already covered – all in one clear price with no hidden extras. We also make things straightforward for our trade partners with decent earnings, regular offers, year-round incentives and sales tools designed to help you sell more.

5 Onboard experience

Your customers will feel genuinely looked after by our friendly crew, who are experts at creating those 'wow' moments, alongside the thoughtful touches guests remember long after they've returned home. On board, we offer an engaging entertainment programme, including spectacular stage shows, daytime activities, wildlife spotting with ORCA, and a host of enrichment opportunities.

6 Solo travellers

Cruise is a fantastic choice for those travelling independently, combining the freedom to explore with a sociable environment to meet like-minded people. With a warm, welcoming atmosphere, we make it easy for solo guests to feel at ease from the moment they arrive. Hosted meet-ups, shared dining and plenty of opportunities to socialise mean your customers can enjoy as much independence – or companionship – as they choose. ●

THE PLUG IN PROBLEM



The UK government is placing stricter regulations on the emissions cruise ships produce while in port, but with limited shore power infrastructure in place, is the policy accelerating decarbonisation or undermining cruise's competitiveness? **Will Payne** investigates



From July 2026, the UK government will expand its carbon pricing system – the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) – to include the maritime sector. All ships over 5,000 gross tonnes will now fall under the programme, which puts charges on CO₂, methane and nitrous oxide emissions produced during “in-port” activity and on voyages between UK ports.

At face value, this comes across as a positive move for the industry’s environmental footprint and the UK’s mission to reduce its contribution to global warming. But without proper infrastructure for alternative fuels and plug-in options in the UK, is the expansion pushing the maritime industry further away from its net zero goals, rather than towards them?

In the UK, ships can currently only plug into onshore power supply (OPS) in Southampton, where although there are five terminals, only two have OPS capabilities, and only one can be utilised at any one time. Portsmouth will also have connectivity for cruise ships in the coming months, but no other ports in the UK – including major hubs such as Liverpool, Dover, Dublin, the

Port of Tyne and Tilbury – offer OPS for cruise, nor do they have the funding or grid capacity that would enable them to do so.

A shore power point can cost anywhere between £300,000 and £1 million per berth, with multi-berth projects possibly reaching more than £20 million depending on the size of the project.

According to a CLIA spokesperson, there are many more ports in Northern Europe which offer OPS connections than their counterparts in the UK. “Given that these ports directly compete against each other in terms of attracting cruise calls, this puts UK ports at a disadvantage in terms of attracting cruise tourism,” they say.

This disparity between UK and European ports is likely to become more pronounced in the coming years, given that the EU’s Fit for 55 decarbonisation regulations will require major ports in Europe to have shoreside power by 2030.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION OR SHORT-TERM FIX?

A spokesperson for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero tells *Cruise Trade News* that the expansion of the ETS comes alongside its work with Ofgem and network companies to reform the “outdated grid connections process” and speed up delivery of new infrastructure.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Southampton is currently the only UK port offering onshore power supply; the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is working to expand the UK Emissions Trading Scheme



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episodes of the Cruise
Corner Podcast

“Pricing emissions is a cost-effective way to cut carbon emissions and encourage greener travel. We are working closely with industry on implementation and consumers shouldn’t see any significant costs,” they add.

It’s clear that the solutions required to decarbonise will continue to require significant investment from the cruise sector. The ETS, the CLIA spokesperson says, risks diverting these funds, rather than encouraging investment, delivering little real emissions reduction, while slowing industry-led progress.

According to the Scottish government’s final assessment of the ETS expansion, the move is estimated to add thousands of pounds per ship onto cruise line’s yearly costs, with sector totals predicted to reach the high millions.

“Without the government reinvesting revenues into maritime decarbonisation, capital will be driven away from the journey to pursue net-zero operations by 2050, and harming UK competitiveness before essential infrastructure is in place,” they continue.

The government has already announced £448 million of funding for the UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions (UK SHORE) between 2026 and 2030, representing the



largest ever government investment in the country’s commercial maritime industry – yet this tranche is mainly earmarked for research and development and scaling over the next four years, not direct installation of alternative fuel supply in line with the ETS expansion.

“**The solutions required to decarbonise will continue to require significant investment from the cruise sector**

A CHALLENGING INVESTMENT

Megan Turner, environment and sustainability manager at the Port of Dover, admits that securing the necessary power supply from the limited spare capacity within the Grid is a challenge for the port, along with many others in the UK.

“However, we are working hard to resolve this and have some important projects in the pipeline,” she says. “From a financial perspective, the cost of installing the systems necessary to connect a cruise ship, combined with the very high cost of electricity in the UK, makes it a challenging investment for any port. No major power installation in Europe has been completed without some level of public funding.”

Turner echoes CLIA and highlights that the Fit for 55 regulations that the EU has implemented have fuelled an increased pace of roll out of OPS systems across major cruise ports in mainland Europe. “OPS is necessary for the transition to alternative fuels, and we are in regular discussion with our cruise lines to support them with the facilities and infrastructure that they may need to offer this. Every cruise line has different requirements, and with a dedicated in-house ►



Illustration by Phil Couzens



environment and sustainability team, we are well placed to offer expert advice,” Turner continues.

The port recently unveiled its 2050 masterplan, with the ambitious goal of becoming the UK’s most “seamless, sustainable and tech-enabled” port in the next 25 years. This plan, Carter says, recognises the importance of OPS to cruise vessels and is planned to be delivered by 2035 at the latest.

It’s clear that OPS is a vital part of the industry’s mission to decarbonise, but in the few UK ports where it is being utilised, connections are in high demand. Thea George, ABP Southampton’s project manager for cruise operations, says the port received more than 100 requests for connections last year. “That leadership is driven by our commitment to meeting the needs of our cruise partners who told us – and continue to tell us – that shore power is such an important part of their operations,” she adds.

However, George notes that constraints on achieving its ambitions to grow its OPS connections have been, to date, centred on issues regarding the availability of electricity network capacity outside of the port and costs of operation.

“That’s a situation we’ve been talking about a lot with network operators, government (at multiple levels) and other stakeholders,” she continues. “As we make progress on finding technical solutions – some pretty innovative –

“ Constraints on growing OPS connections have been centred on the availability of electricity network capacity and costs

for the physical infrastructure we’ll be stepping up even further our dialogue with cruise partners about implementation and delivery.”

Portsmouth port director Mike Sellers says the south coast hub has been “ahead of the curve” despite working in line with the UK government’s Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy. The port has lofty ambitions to become the first zero-emissions UK port, despite not yet having any operational plug-in options. “We were in an excellent position to apply for grant money from the government’s Zero Emissions Vessels and Infrastructure fund when applications went live, so that we could install the shore power system,” he explains.

However, the port’s Sea Change scheme – which included the installation of a £24 million plug-in power system – has not yet been rolled out and, according to Sellers, “could become a redundant asset”. The initiative was due to be available from this spring, but the National Grid connection has been delayed until April and Brittany Ferries said it will not use the charging

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A shore power point can cost up to £1 million per berth; the EU’s Fit for 55 regulations will target smaller vessels as well; Linden Coppell from MSC Cruises says higher electricity costs when utilising shore power is a concern; the UK government has announced record levels of funding for the country’s commercial maritime industry

“Without widespread shore power, there is a danger that operators are penalised before they are practically able to adapt

point while electricity prices remain high, a sentiment which could be shared by cruise lines in the future.

Linden Coppell, vice president of sustainability and ESG for MSC Cruises, praises the OPS options in Southampton for being “generally perceived well by local communities”, but admits the majority of its near-250 calls it was able to plug into last year came in Northern Europe and not the UK.

“We are aware that the UK is planning to proceed with the expansion of its UK ETS for the maritime sector. We continue to support an international approach to the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from ships rather than regional or national initiatives,” Coppell says.

“Southampton is our main port in the UK and the fact that it is already provided with shore power is very important at this stage as it will allow us to mitigate the impact of future regulations. Cruise lines must factor in the costs associated with utilising shore power and we are currently witnessing higher costs of 20-50 per cent in Europe for local electricity grids, even accounting for European Union ETS savings.”



When approached by *Cruise Trade News*, the Port of Liverpool, Princess Cruises, P&O Cruises and Cunard declined to comment.

FUTURE PROOF

Whether the expansion of the UK ETS proves to be a catalyst for decarbonisation or a drag on competitiveness will ultimately depend on delivery. Pricing carbon can influence behaviour, but only if the infrastructure exists to support change. Without widespread shore power, upgraded grid capacity and access to alternative fuels, there is a real danger that operators are penalised before they are practically able to adapt.

Considering the cruise industry contributes roughly £5.8 billion per year to the UK economy and supports around 60,000 jobs, the stakes extend far beyond environmental policy alone. Cruise lines are global businesses with flexible deployment models. If plugging in is simpler, cheaper and more widely available in Northern Europe – particularly as the EU accelerates its OPS rollout under Fit for 55 – future capacity decisions could increasingly favour continental homeports and turnaround hubs over UK gateways, further reducing the country’s global economic competitiveness.

The UK has signalled ambition through its Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy and the £448 million commitment to UK SHORE, but this ambition must translate into visible, usable infrastructure at pace. Ports are willing, operators are investing and demand for shore power is clear. Infrastructure is the bridge between ambition and action – without it, the UK risks asking the cruise sector to sail towards net zero without providing the power to get there. ●



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Marella Cruises is on a mission to make its holidays the easiest sell a travel agent can make in 2026. **Will Payne** takes a closer look at how they plan to do so

So far this year, the cruise industry has enjoyed strong momentum, a sharp uptick in bookings and more attention than ever before. This is thanks, in large part, to the legions of UK travel agents promoting the benefits of cruising to their loyal customers.

To continue to do so effectively, however, they need a robust programme of training opportunities and product experiences. Marella Cruises has set its sights on providing just that. After a positive start to the year, the line is sharpening its focus on giving agents the tools to sell more Marella cruises than ever before.

Marella's training delivery manager Sarah Whitehouse recently joined the

Cruise Corner Podcast to discuss the line's engagement plans for 2026. Last year it trained more than 26,000 agents, marking a 17 per cent increase on 2024. "We didn't have a dedicated Marella Cruises trade team prior to 2022, so the past three years have really been about building those foundations," Whitehouse said.

"There were agents we simply hadn't had the opportunity to reach out to before, and that was a challenge. But

“We’ve pivoted from ‘hello, we’re here’ to working much more strategically

we’re now at the point where we’ve pivoted from ‘hello, we’re here’ to working much more strategically and breaking down barriers that might have existed previously for our agents.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Marella Cruises already offers a robust programme of tools and experiences to support travel agents, all of which can be found in the TUI Trade Hub, the brand's online platform dedicated to all things trade related. The hub puts information at agents' fingertips and gives them greater insight into the Marella experience.

"The TUI Trade Hub was designed to make selling Marella cruises as easy as possible," Whitehouse added. "It's our first ever trade-dedicated microsite

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT There's always a helping hand available onboard; agents can look up bar menus on the TUI Trade Hub; *Marella Voyager* is ready to whisk your customers away on a holiday of a lifetime

separately versus what you get included in a Marella package.”

For agents especially, Whitehouse continued, the comparison tool has helped demonstrate the value of a Marella cruise against land-based holidays or other cruise lines to boost conversion rates.

MAKE IT ON MARELLA

Experiences and rewarding agents' hard work is just as important to Marella as equipping them with the tools to sell its cruises. The line's Make it on Marella scheme was introduced to reward agents who have done “amazing things for us” while giving them the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the product, Whitehouse explained.

“There is no better way to understand cruise than to go on a cruise. The first trip was such a huge success, and travel agents really love the competitiveness of the leaderboard.”

In 2026, the line will offer more opportunities for agents to get involved, have a bigger presence at industry events and continue to demonstrate its value offering as it looks to cement its position as the easiest line to understand, sell and get excited about. ●

and it's been nearly two years in the making. It's a one-stop shop for all things Marella, and it gives agents tools they simply haven't had access to before. If a customer asks what's on the bar menu, an agent can show them instantly. If they're considering a speciality restaurant, they can show the food menu. If they're looking at booking a Junior Suite, they can pull up a 360-degree cabin view.”

VALUE PROPOSITION

One of the barriers holding travellers back from booking a cruise for the first time is the lack of understanding around what's available onboard, how much things cost, and what's included. Acting swiftly on consumer feedback regarding

“
With the cost of living, people want total clarity on what a holiday really costs

these issues, Marella launched the cruise cost calculator to make the process easier to understand.

“In the cost-of-living environment we're in, people want total clarity on what a holiday really costs,” Whitehouse explained. “The calculator makes that comparison simple and transparent: you choose your destination, cruise length and travel date, and it shows what you'd typically spend booking everything



MARELLA
CRUISES



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Corner Podcast featuring
Marella Cruises

Andrea Kruse

VIVA Cruises' CEO and co-founder on why 2026 will be a "defining year" for the brand and the vital role the UK market will play in helping it reach more customers. **Will Payne** reports

According to CLIA's 2025 State of the Industry Report, river cruising is the second fastest growing travel sector, with a fifth of travel agents reporting the most growth from this industry.

One operator at the forefront of this expansion is VIVA Cruises. In the past year, the line brought in Michelle Daniels as its new country manager for the UK, announced plans to launch two additional river ships as part of a new boutique offering on the Seine, and worked with the likes of JTA and Travelpack to grow its awareness further.

The river cruise line's co-founder and CEO Andrea Kruse is acutely aware of how important the UK is to the Dusseldorf-based company's growth plans. "The UK is a market where we see a lot of opportunity, and we've set some optimistic targets for the coming years," she says.

"Our goal is to build strong, sustainable growth by working closely with the travel trade and increasing awareness of VIVA Cruises across the UK. We want to be known in the UK for our innovative approach to river cruising, especially our premium all-inclusive



concept, which offers excellent value and a very modern way to experience the rivers of Europe."

Kruse's comments come amid a strong start to the year for the brand. "Business from the UK has been very encouraging so far this year," she says. "We've seen great engagement from both the UK trade and our partners, and we're continuing to build strongly on our solo business. At the same time, group business has been particularly strong, which is a great sign of confidence in the product."

BOUTIQUE BEGINNINGS

VIVA Cruises' key focus for 2026 is the introduction of its new, "more intimate" product line, VIVA Boutique. The proposition will be spearheaded with the launch of *VIVA Beyond* in Paris this May.

"With this concept, we are bringing a more intimate, design-led and experience-focused approach to river cruising to the market, combining individuality, gourmet cuisine, exceptional comfort and our signature, premium, all-inclusive concept in a more exclusive setting," she continues.



What my career has taught me

Stay curious

"It's very important to keep learning and always stay curious about what's happening in the sector. The cruise industry evolves quickly, and those who grow with it will always have opportunities."

Build relationships

"Partnerships are central to growth. This industry is built on trust, collaboration and long-term relationships, so make sure to work closely and effectively with sector peers."

Don't be afraid

"Even if something feels like a challenge at first, the experiences which see you take on responsibility early in your career shape you and open doors faster than you expect."

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Wellness is a key feature on a VIVA cruise; Andrea Kruse has big plans for the UK; VIVA Enjoy is the line's newest ship; the main restaurant onboard is Riverside

“We are continuing to expand our portfolio with new itineraries and destinations

VIVA Beyond will be christened in Paris in May before sailing on the Seine through Normandy, a route resonating well with UK guests, Kruse adds. "With a unique boutique design, three restaurants, including a Michelin-inspired fine dining venue, and themed itineraries, this new concept offers even more individuality and lifestyle appeal, while staying true to our premium all-inclusive philosophy."

The new proposition will grow further in May 2027 with the addition of *VIVA Unique*, which will sail on Italy's Po River and the Venetian Lagoon. Onboard, like *VIVA Beyond*, guests will find three dining venues: the Italian-inspired fine dining restaurant Moments; Trattoria, which will offer Mediterranean dishes in a relaxed setting; and the main Riverside restaurant featuring international gourmet cuisine and regional specialities.

"With VIVA Boutique, the UK trade can look forward to a truly elevated river cruise product,"

Kruse explains. "More than 50 per cent of the cabins are suites, creating a much more spacious and premium onboard experience. Beyond this milestone, we are continuing to expand our portfolio with exciting new itineraries and destinations across Europe, offering our guests even more inspiring places to discover."

HEATING UP

The next 18 months will also see the introduction of Celebrity Cruises, Trafalgar and National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions on Europe's rivers for the first time. For Kruse, this move presents an opportunity to grow further. "It's a clear sign that river cruising is becoming even more attractive to a wider audience," she says.

"The entry of strong, recognisable brands will help raise overall visibility of the sector and bring new customers into the market. At the same time, it increases competition, which is positive, because it drives innovation and higher standards."

"For VIVA Cruises, it reinforces the importance of staying focused on our unique positioning: modern ships, a contemporary onboard concept, and strong value through premium all-inclusive." ●

SHIP OF THE MONTH

RIVIERA RADIANCE

Riviera Travel's new ship has been designed with one simple purpose in mind: to entice travellers to book their first river cruise. Sailing itineraries on the Danube since last June, the ship accommodates 178 guests across 89 well-appointed cabins. Its Grand Suites, located on the Diamond Deck, are Riviera's largest yet, offering separate living and sleeping areas, as well as full balconies. The ship offers a choice of three restaurants serving a buffet lunch and a four-course à la carte dinner menu, with wine selected by an onboard sommelier. As Will Sarson, Riviera's product director, puts it: "We could not be prouder that we're able to offer an experience of this calibre."



1 Mosaic

Travellers can enjoy a tapas-style tasting menu inspired by Europe's rivers at Mosaic on Emerald Deck. They can choose from a market menu for regional meat and fish dishes, or the garden menu for a vegetarian-friendly diet. Each course is paired with wines.



Fast facts

89

cabins

178

guests

44

crew

80%

of staterooms have
French balconies



2 Spa

The ship's luxurious onboard spa comprises spacious massage rooms, a sauna, hair salon, nail and barber services. Guests will also find a gym – ideal for working off those indulgent meals – and serene treatment spaces, perfect for relaxation after long days ashore.



3 Main Restaurant

By day it's a relaxed venue for buffet breakfast, lunch, snacks and a selection of drinks. But come the evening, *Radiance's* main restaurant is transformed into a high-end venue with a curated regional wine list and an extensive menu offering fine dining for all appetites.



4 Cabins

The crowning jewel of this new ship is undoubtedly its cabins which include Standard Cabins, Superior Suites and the crème de la crème – the opulent Grand Suites. Expect private balconies, king-size beds, rain showers and Nespresso coffee machines.



5 Sun Deck

Radiance has some gorgeous indoor spaces, but be sure to recommend time for the Sun Deck, which welcomes guests with hammocks, loungers and a plunge pool. It's the perfect spot to enjoy a cocktail and a good book while riverside towns drift by.



6 Excursions

Naturally guests will be able to visit the picturesque palaces, castles, abbeys and monasteries for which the Danube is justly famous. But for those who prefer to go off-piste, there are e-bikes at hand to create their own adventure.



SHOOTING STAR

Ahead of the launch of *Norwegian Luna*, we highlight five reasons why your guests should get onboard, from luxury hangouts to next-level spa treatments

Since launching its next-generation class of ships, Prima and Prima Plus, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has turned heads with its contemporary take on the onboard experience, emphasising spacious outdoor areas, stylish furnishings and destination immersion.

The line is set to expand on this vision once again, ahead of the highly anticipated debut of *Norwegian Luna*, with two more ships to follow in 2027 and 2028. With *Cruise Trade News* reporting live from the ship's exclusive preview sailing from Miami, here are five reasons why we can't wait to get on board. Make sure to pick up our May/June issue to read our verdict.

1 THE HAVEN

NCL set the benchmark for the luxury 'ship-within-a-ship' concept when it launched The Haven by Norwegian back in 2011. These ultra-premium, key card access-only enclaves are all the rage these days, but this latest iteration is a reminder of why NCL remains a pioneering force.

Those checked-in to The Haven aboard *Norwegian Luna* get to stay in

the ship's most spacious suites while enjoying access to a private restaurant, lounge, bar and sundeck, all with a 24-hour personal butler and concierge service. Think sleek boutique hotel meets world-class cruising.

2 THE MULTI-STOREY MANDARA SPA

The two-storey Mandara Spa is the ship's standout wellness retreat, inspired by some of the world's most sumptuous, land-based spas. The crown jewel is the Thermal Suite, where guests can enjoy 180-degree ocean views from the comfort of heated loungers.

Blending traditional relaxation and modern innovation; guests can detoxify and rejuvenate with a nine-step hot and

“
Guests can detoxify and rejuvenate with a nine-step hot and cold therapy journey

PICK UP

Cruise Trade News' May/June issue to read our review of *Norwegian Luna*



cold therapy journey, which includes charcoal and clay saunas, as well as an ice room. For those interested in trying one of the wellness sector's hottest treatment trends, an IV Drip Therapy experience is on hand to deliver hydration and vitamins, alongside Thalassotherapy Loungers to soothe tired muscles.

3 SOPHISTICATED OUTDOOR LIVING

Built around NCL's 'It's Different Out Here' philosophy, *Norwegian Luna* has been thoughtfully designed to maximise open-air spaces and bring guests closer to the horizon. What does this mean exactly? Well, it means wider, more expansive guest areas and seamless flow between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Take Ocean Boulevard, for example, the wraparound promenade that circles the ship, connecting drinking and dining

“Vibe Beach Club offers a premium aesthetic on *Norwegian Luna*'s upper decks

venues with infinity pools and daybed areas. Or spacious hangout spot Horizon Park, which combines panoramic ocean views, world-class service and fun lawn-style games.

4 THE ADULTS-ONLY VIBE BEACH CLUB

A refined, child-free retreat, Vibe Beach Club offers a premium beach club aesthetic on *Norwegian Luna*'s upper decks. With restricted access to ensure a relaxed atmosphere, you can expect plush loungers, private cabanas and a dedicated bar serving handcrafted

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT *Luna* is set to launch from Miami; Ocean Boulevard wraps around the ship; the Aqua Slidecoaster returns onboard; Cagney's is one of the ship's many dining options

cocktails. It's an excellent spot for sun-drenched relaxation and sophisticated socialising with fellow guests.

5 THE RECORD-BREAKING AQUA SLIDECOASTER

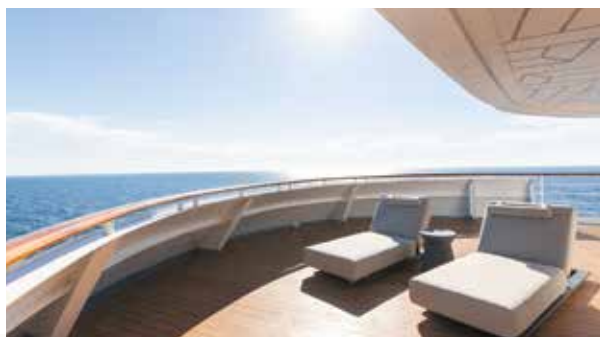
NCL wowed guests when it unveiled the world's first Aqua Slidecoaster aboard *Norwegian Aqua* last year. The hybrid waterslide/rollercoaster attraction returns, becoming the longest and fastest of its kind at sea.

Using magnetic propulsion to launch guests through exhilarating twists and turns, this full-throttle ride shoots passengers down a multi-coloured waterslide before coming to a stop at the bottom. That's one way for your newest ship to make a splash... 



It's Different Out Here™

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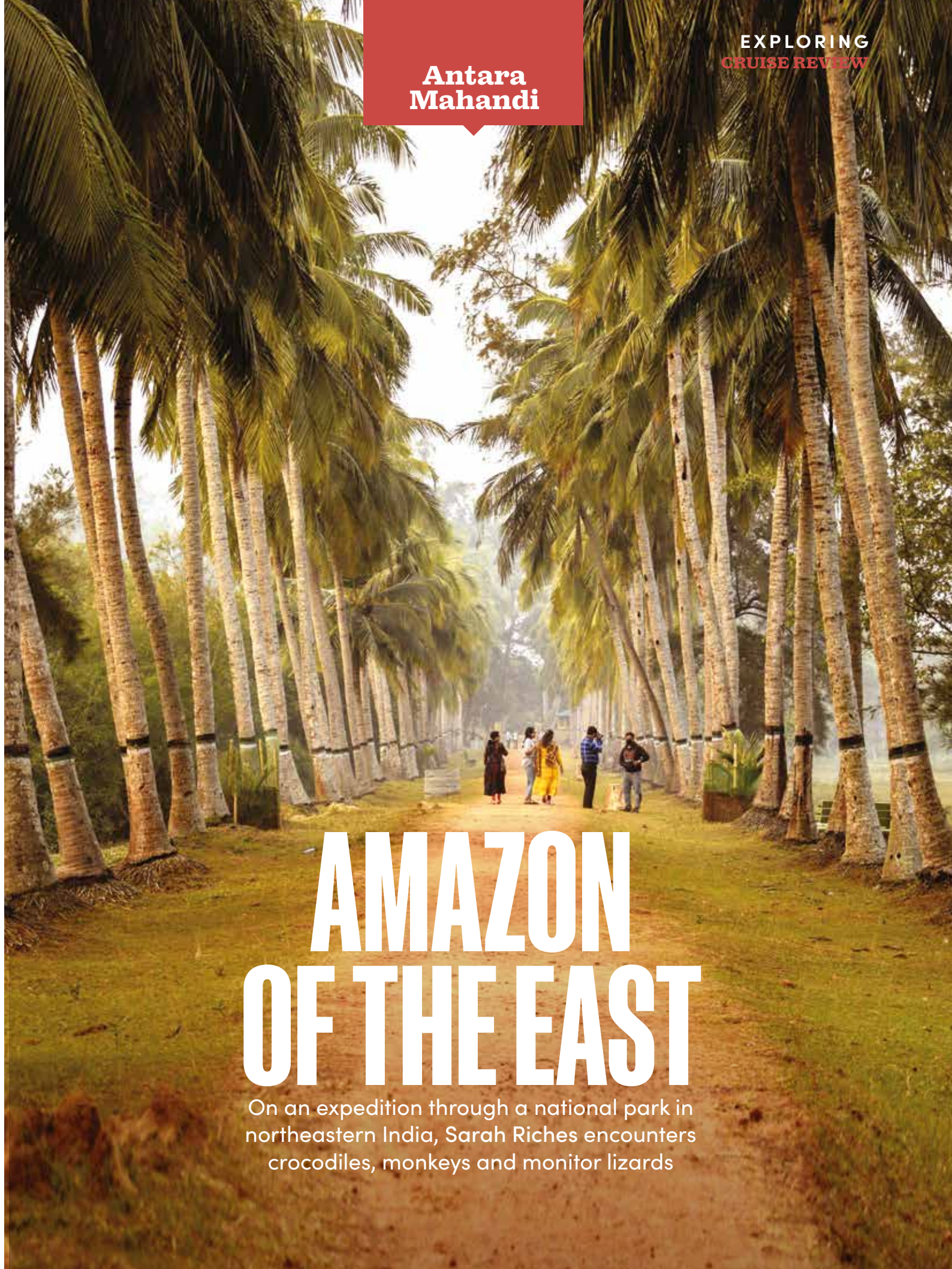
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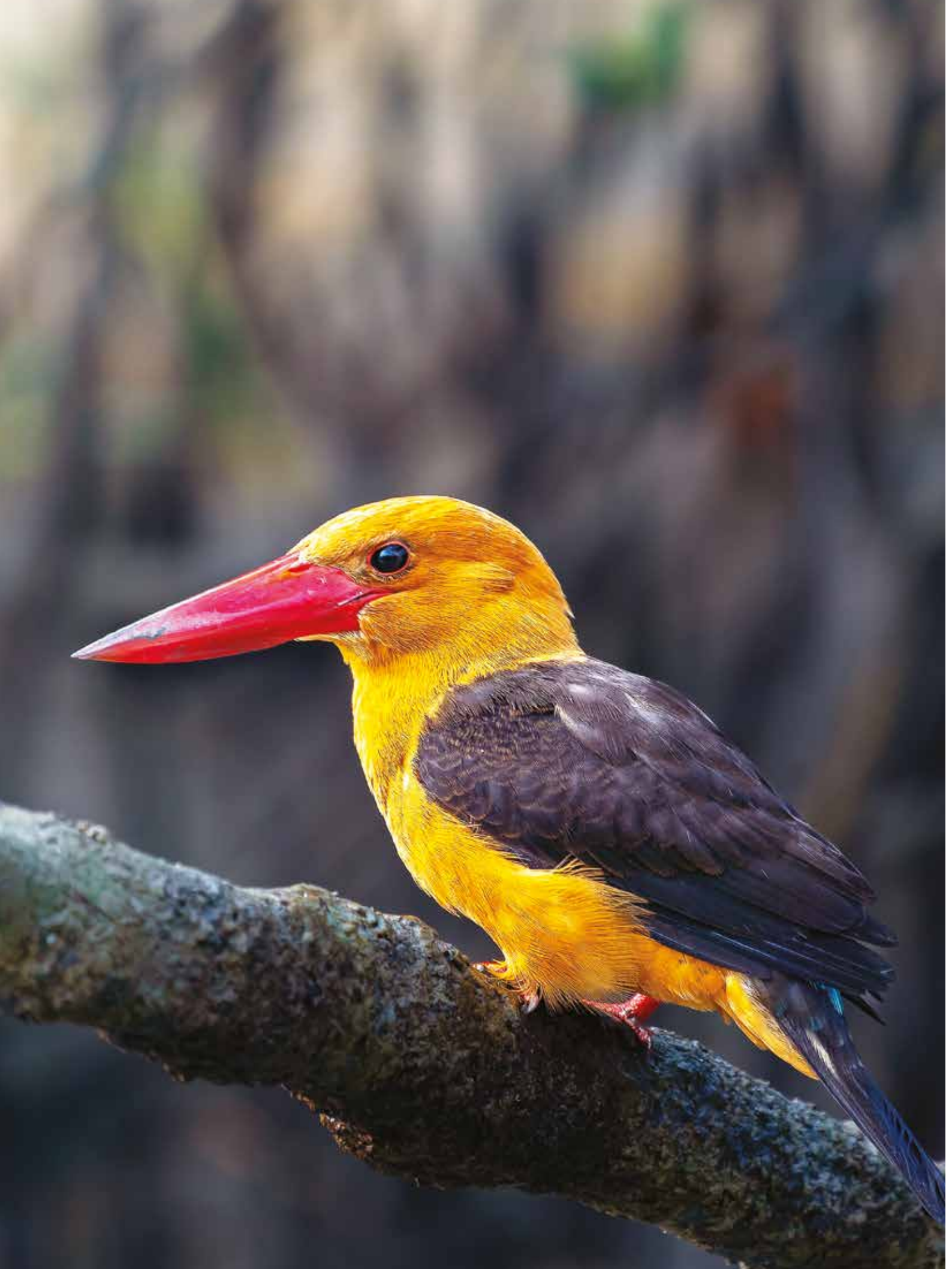


**Antara
Mahandi**

EXPLORING
CRUISE REVIEW

AMAZON OF THE EAST

On an expedition through a national park in northeastern India, Sarah Riches encounters crocodiles, monkeys and monitor lizards





FROM LEFT Bhitarkanika is home to an impressive eight species of kingfisher, including the brown-winged kingfisher; Antara's *Mahanadi* is one of four solar-powered catamarans that have been custom-built to explore India's 'mini Amazon'

“No, no, no,” laughed my Indian guide, Nira Mohapatra, shaking his head. “Are you sure?” I worried, biting my lip. “Yes, I’m sure,” Nira reassured me. “So there are no leeches in Bhitarkanika National Park?” I asked again, double-checking.

Just then, I had a flashback to a hike I’d done in southern India just three months before, when leeches the length of rice husks wriggled madly through my breathable trainers. “Oh, you mean leeches?” Nira said, finally understanding me. “You could say this park is full of them.” Nira seems to think this is funny, but I soon realise leeches are the least of my concerns.

My adventure, which will see me board Antara Cruises’ catamaran and

traverse through India’s ‘mini Amazon’, begins with a 170km drive east from Bhubaneswar Airport to Gupti. It’s a wonderfully scenic four-and-a-half-hour journey to the gateway to Bhitarkanika National Park in the northeastern Indian state of Odisha, with farmers tending to rice paddies and grazing bulls visible through my window.

Along the way my friend Charan and I discover Lalitagiri, significant Buddhist monastery ruins dating back to the first century CE. Set in grounds scented with jasmine bushes and mango trees, it makes for a picturesque pitstop in a region few international tourists explore.

It’s dark by the time we arrive in Gupti, where crew aboard Antara’s *Mahanadi* greet us with garlands and ‘Welcome’ written in marigolds on

the floor. The solar-powered vessel is one of four identical catamarans, all built with Bhitarkanika National Park in mind. *Mahanadi* and *Bhitarkanika* launched in 2024, with *Brahmani* and *Baitarani* following in 2025. Each have two double ensuite bedrooms, a dining area and a sun deck with loungers. The line provides yoga mats, boardgames, cards and umbrellas too. After a dinner of drumstick soup, buttery fish and rice pudding, it’s time for bed.

UNDER THE BOARDWALK

The best time to visit Bhitarkanika is during the cooler months between October and February. I visit in April, so the humidity is soaring even as we eat guava and watermelon for breakfast. Sailing deeper into the park, ►



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT There are more than 10,000 crocodiles in the mangrove ecosystem; take time to explore the ancient Buddhist monastery ruins in Odisha; relax onboard in regal and ornate cabins with colonial decor; marvel at the myriad of wildlife, including the fiddler crab; the lounge/dining area also lets you observe the crew in action



the temperature rockets to a baking 35°C – but that means we have the park to ourselves.

After Sundarbans National Park to the north of the Bay of Bengal, Bhitarkanika is India's second largest mangrove ecosystem, boasting four rivers – Baitarani, Brahmani, Dhamra and Pathsala – each rich with wildlife. Designated a wildlife sanctuary in 1975,

the 42sqkm space became a national park in 1998 and was declared a wetland of international importance in 2002. It has since applied to become a Unesco World Heritage site.

Stepping off the catamaran onto a boardwalk, I see red fiddler crabs scurrying for their holes and clusters of mangrove roots piercing the mud like stalagmites. Chirps, calls and whistles emanate from the cashew forest as Nira guides us past a mangrove nursery and along a raised 700m walkway.

I see a monitor lizard plod through undergrowth and a spotted deer dart between trees just before glimpsing the orange beaks of a stork-billed and brown-winged kingfisher. "This is the only place in the world you can see eight species of kingfisher," says Nira. "It's also India's largest heronry."

We're a sticky, sweaty mess by the time we reach a clearing, grateful for the young coconuts on sale. The

**“
Bhitarkanika, rich with
wildlife, was declared
a wetland of national
importance in 2002**

monkeys around us are too, and are quick to grab our leftovers.

We head inside a nearby museum where we learn that the park is home to mongoose and porcupines, civets and jungle cats, wild boar and hyena, while king cobras and red-tailed pit vipers are just two of its five venomous snake species. "Australians gave saltwater crocodiles to south India in the 12th century, but it was hard for them to live there so the authorities gave them to northeast India," Nira explains.

I marvel at the six-metre crocodile skeleton, though Nira is less impressed. "Every January, the park conducts a crocodile census, which reveals a





EXPERT VERDICT

Great for experiencing wildlife and tranquillity

Don't miss the walk to Habalikhati Beach

Best spot on board The sun deck at sunset

Value for money The fare includes Wi-Fi and excursions. Flights, transfers, alcoholic drinks and tips cost extra

Eco credentials The ships are solar powered (with a backup generator) to reduce emissions

Star rating 3/5

population of more than 10,000. The park has a Guinness World Record for the longest crocodile. At 7.3m, it's longer than the width of your catamaran."

INTO THE WILD

After visiting the crocodile hatchery next door, we hop in a six-seater boat and venture further into the park. After spotting an owl and a handful of blue kingfishers, we soon spot our first croc,

a six-metre giant frozen with its mouth agape, it's eyes trained directly on us. "That's a 50-year-old male," Nira tell us. Another crocodile sees us and slides down the sand bank, while others dip beneath the surface as we pass by. Surrounded by crocodiles with no other humans in sight, I ponder how useful our life jackets are.

Back on board, we dine on oily fish, dahl (lentils) and mushrooms in a mustard sauce – a regional recipe – followed by baked cheese wrapped in banana leaf. At golden hour, we follow a one-hour trail through Shikar Kothi forest. "This area used to be a royal hunting ground," explains Nira. "Shikar means hunting in Urdu, while kothi means lodge." We arrive at a lake in time to see flocks of pond herons, skimmers and red lapwing take flight at sunset.

The next day, we hike to Habalikhati Beach along a terracotta path that unfolds like a red carpet through a mangrove forest. Apart from a handful of

dilapidated concrete chalets, there's no signs of life in either direction as far as the eye can see – so I'm shocked when a monkey scampers up my leg.

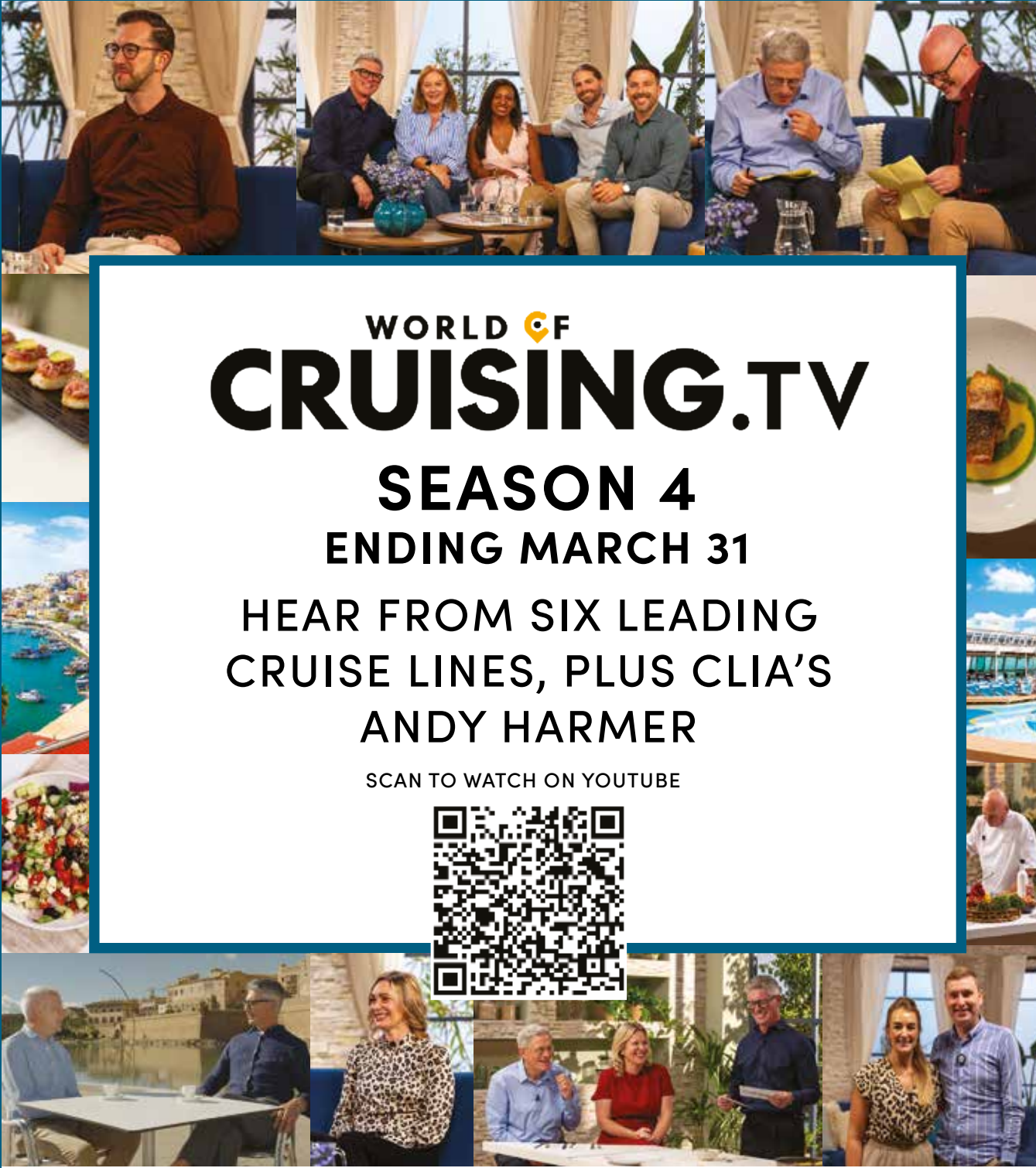
Back on the catamaran, we feast on smoky aubergine, jackfruit curry, chapati (flatbread) and a cottage cheese doughnut. After dinner we set sail at sunset and, as the burnt orange sun dips below the horizon, I feel both blessed for experiencing this enchanting corner of India and relieved to have escaped the park's leeches. ●

Get on Board

Antara Cruises' three-night Cruising in Bhitarkanika itinerary aboard a catamaran, sailing roundtrip from Gupti via Habalikhati Beach, departs 12 January 2026 from £4,875pp, including 10 nights in hotels in Calcutta and Odisha, international and domestic flights and transfers.

antaracruises.com





WORLD  F

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Port Focus



Amsterdam

The Dutch capital's forward-thinking approach to culture and creativity makes it the ultimate art and architectural hub, says **Rashmi Narayan**

Flicking through a guidebook in a park near Leidseplein, I'm interrupted mid-sentence by Amsterdam local Anneke and her dog. "This city is so much more than what that book is telling you," she says with a smile. She then points to a hand-carved wooden figure fixed to a tree above me – a tiny woodcutter frozen mid-saw. "That's Amsterdam.

A work of art just sitting there for no real reason. You have to look around to really experience it."

She's right. Fortunately, guests don't have to venture far to see Amsterdam through a local's lens, where gabled merchant houses slant like falling dominoes, geraniums spill over convex bridges and cyclists weave past canals lined with elm trees. Yet beyond those

whimsical settings is a city in constant transition, from the futuristic NEMO Science Museum to contemporary galleries celebrating boundary-pushing art.

Elsewhere, the Venice of the North offers intimate jazz clubs, vinyl record shops, indie cinemas and a thriving arts scene. Whatever your customers' tastes, it's a city that always makes you feel welcome. ►



Three unmissable things to do

ANNE FRANK HOUSE

Anne Frank House is a sobering but essential pilgrimage for all first-time visitors. Up the steep creaking stairs of a modest canal house lies the secret annex where Anne Frank hid for 761 days, with original shelves, doors and pencil markings still intact. Light filters through gauze curtains, floors slope underfoot and you quickly realise that you stand where eight people whispered, waited and listened for footsteps below.

“
Visitors can book a private tour to get a unique perspective of the city’s architecture

CANAL CRUISE

Amsterdam’s 165 canals have been the city’s lifeblood for centuries and were pivotal to its transformation from a small medieval town to a booming centre of trade in the 17th century. Visitors can book a

private tour with Amsterdam Odyssey to get a unique perspective of the city’s architecture. Canals widen and narrow as travellers drift beneath bridges past merchant houses, waterside cafés and opulent hotels.

RIJKSMUSEUM

The Rijksmuseum, located in the heart of the Museumplein district, is where Amsterdam exhibits its top treasures, with more than 8,000 works spanning 800 years of Dutch art and history. Stroll its grand hallways and marvel at masterpieces like Rembrandt’s brooding *The Night Watch*, Vermeer’s serene domestic scenes and Van Gogh’s self-portraits. A new £50m sculpture park is set to open this autumn, expanding the museum’s contemporary art collection via a combination of permanent and temporary exhibits.

Three places to eat BUDGET

Stroopwafels, thin waffles sandwiching sticky caramel syrup, originated in 18th-century Gouda as a way to use leftover crumbs. Meanwhile, the tiny fluffy pancakes, Poffertjes, have been enjoyed since the 17th century, traditionally cooked over charcoal





and dusted with icing sugar. Visitors can try both at the 120-year-old Albert Cuyp Market. For something cheap and cheerful, guests can grab a frikandel (fried Dutch sausage) from a FEBO vending machine.

MID-RANGE

Travellers can enjoy a friendly chat with local vendors at Foodhallen, a vibrant indoor market housed in a former tram

“ The Rijksmuseum houses more than 8,000 works spanning 800 years of Dutch art

depot, with benches for shared dining and plenty of lively chatter. They can slurp on fresh oysters, sip locally brewed IPAs, or browse the dozens of stalls offering everything from tacos and bao to macarons and burgers. In the east, for a French-Flemish twist on classic dishes, there's Rijsel, which is set in a converted school and serves an excellent rotisserie chicken.

PREMIUM

Everyone knows the most memorable meals come with a view. At legendary Ciel Bleu, you dine high above the city, tasting caviar and vadouvan-spiced red mullet as floor-to-ceiling windows frame the canals below. For something equally classy but quietly radical, guests should book Flore by chef Bas van Kranen. Its two Michelin stars crown a plant-forward menu shaped by smoking and fermentation, using local ingredients, even tulips, and paired with an award-winning wine list. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Brazilian artist Eduardo Kobra's mural tribute to Anne Frank; the Rijksmuseum, the home of Dutch masterpieces; Flore restaurant offers an intriguing menu; enjoy a gastronomical stroll around the Foodhallen; a canal tour will give a unique perspective of the city



"Amsterdam may just be the best place in the world to drink beer. Its rich history has shaped a culture that's self-assured yet outward-looking. Top spots are Café Gollem, Arendsneest Proeflokaal and In de Wildeman."

JAMES KELLOW
Beer sommelier



"The Haarlemmerdijk is one of the most scenic shopping streets in Amsterdam. Don't be surprised if you run into beautifully dressed stilt walkers or a bunch of dogs riding in a cargo bike."

SIGRID STAMKOT
Writer

Get on board

Cunard's seven-day Zeebrugge voyage on *Queen Victoria*, round-trip from Southampton via Zeebrugge (Belgium), Amsterdam and Cherbourg (France), departs 27 November 2026, from £649pp. [cunard.com](https://www.cunard.com)

**The
Algarve**

BOUNTY ON THE BEACH

Stretching along Portugal's southern edge, the Algarve is a sunlit tapestry of historic towns with cliff-backed beaches.

Renate Ruge meets the local makers and samples the flavours that define this stunning coastline





In the Eastern Algarve, the salt flats of Sapal de Castro Marim Nature Reserve are the starting point for many of the region's beloved dishes. Here, local cooks season from the shimmering salt pans which are harvested by hand by 'Marnotos' (traditional salt workers). I watch artisan salt-maker Jorge Raiado at Salmarim collect fleur de sal or "cream of salt" using a long sieve and as water evaporates under the baking sun, he sifts crystals so delicate they lift easily from pale pink pools like tiny diamonds.

"The salt 'flower' is ready once nature has time to do its work," he says as flamingos wade past, taking flight as the Atlantic breeze stirs the wetlands. It's a peaceful, elemental experience. Back in his shack, Jorge grills raw prawns on a bed of piri-piri-flavoured salt.

For cruise-goers, most culinary journeys begin 50km west in Olhão, where early mornings see fishermen returning with their catch to be sold later that day at the town's effervescent market. Beneath its Eiffel-inspired ironwork, huge tuna and piles of prawns are bargained over, with fresh octopus and clams destined for cataplana pots. It's here I get my first taste of the Algarve's maritime soul on a guided stroll with Diana Nunes from Portugal4U, venturing into the cubist old town with its whitewashed houses crowned with Moorish chimneys. Pointing to the open-air rooftops, Diana tells me, "Women used roof terraces called mirante as viewing platforms to scan the horizon, watching for their husbands' fishing boats coming home to port." ►



Back on street level, twisting alleyways lead to outdoor street art which maps the lives of generations of fishing families. The murals depict Portuguese waterdogs, their webbed paws helping fishermen haul in their nets as women scrub fish and farmers work their fields with horses and carts. “In 1242 this southern part of the country became such a noble area, its light and beauty attracting poets, writers and artists, that King Afonso III called himself King of Portugal and the Algarve,” smiles Diana.

From Olhão, a short water taxi or ferry gets you to barrier island Culatra, a fishing community surrounded by the azure Ria Formosa lagoon. A walkway

snakes through colourful houses and dunes to a quiet beach where locals dig for clams as the tide goes out. Knee-deep in the lagoon, community leader Silvia Padinha wades through shallows, her basket heavy with shellfish. Her gloved hand offers a freshly plucked, ice-cold oyster. A guardian of the local clam-digging heritage, Silvia also champions sustainable oyster-farming projects, passionate about preserving traditions for the next generation.

Back on her shady veranda for lunch, she shares the fruits of her labour while we slurp oysters with a squeeze of lemon and shallots soaked in red wine vinegar. “The oysters take 18-24 months to grow, which is why they are so plump,” she says proudly as we eat the precious catch alongside pan-fried clams with coriander.

CAPITAL FUN AND CUSTARD TARTS IN FARO

Due West, Faro – the Algarve’s lively capital – is a treasure trove of history and culture. The walled old town, encircled by centuries-old fortifications, invites exploration through the Arco da Vila, a grand stone archway leading to cobbled streets lined with whitewashed houses and orange blossom-scented courtyards. After inspecting the Gothic Faro Cathedral and the Roman archaeological remains at the nearby Municipal Museum housed in a former



convent, I pause for a coffee at Pastelaria Gardy patisserie, where a line for gooey, cinnamon-dusted pastéis de nata (custard tarts) is forming. The famous Portuguese delicacy dates all the way back to the 18th century when, after starching their clothes with egg whites, catholic monks from a monastery in Lisbon used the excess yolks to make cakes and pastries. For a distinctly and equally delicious Algarvian treat, try the sugar-dusted queijinhos de amendoa, a creamy custard filling wrapped in marzipan which roughly translates as ‘small almond cheeses’.

A five-minute taxi ride from Portimão’s cruise terminal are the sandy shores of Alvor, where the aroma of charcoal and sizzling sardines is pure Portugal. Along the waterfront, grills of blue-and-white shacks glow as fishermen wade in from the estuary,





“ Sample fresh oysters, sizzling sardines and gooey pastéis de nata for a taste of Portugal

nets slung over shoulders. Walking the wooden boardwalks reveals tranquil views over protected wetlands.

Further along the coast, more fish tales are found at the Museum of Portimão, a restored sardine canning factory revealing the backstory of the industry that fuelled the town's fortunes. Exhibits trace the lives of workers, mostly women, who packed glistening sardines at speed. I enjoy lunch by the riverside, watching boats glide along the Arade; having visited the museum, every bite suddenly has new meaning. Portimão's Sardine Festival, the Festival da Sardinha celebrates the region's favourite fish in August.

Beyond the beach, a cooler, greener world awaits in the nearby Monchique mountains. Fresh scents of pine fill the air, as my energetic driver Vasco from Geographic Algarve tours navigates tight turns on a bumpy Jeep safari. Roads winding to precipitous peaks drop off

to reveal sweeping vistas stretching to the glittering Atlantic. At the top, crystal-clear, mineral-rich water trickles straight from ancient granite at nearby springs and into my water bottle from the fountains. Deeper into Monchique's wooded slopes, producers welcome visitors to sample honey infused with wild heather, its golden sweetness capturing the essence of the hills, while tiny distilleries offer tots of 'aguardente', a fiery, brandy-like schnapps. Sipped in the cool mountain air, it warms your cockles like sunshine.

My journey ends at a family-run winery, Morgado do Quintão, between Silves and Lagoa, where vines first arrived on the Iberian Peninsula. The family's ancestors cultivated indigenous grapes like Negra Mole and Crato Branco – the secret ingredient to their award-winning drops. After a leisurely tasting, I settle under the shade of a 2,000-year-old olive tree for a long lunch of local cheeses, garden salads, grilled meats and warm bread dipped in peppery estate olive oil, paired with crisp whites and robust reds. As cicadas hum and sunlight filters through the leaves, it's the perfect finale to an east-west voyage through one of Europe's most flavour-packed coastlines. ●

Get on board

Azamara Cruises' nine-night Portugal and Spain Cruise on *Azamara Journey*, sailing roundtrip from Lisbon via Portimão, Portugal; Cadiz, Spain; Malaga, Spain; Granada (Motril), Spain; Gibraltar, (UK); and Seville, Spain, departs 6 March 2026, from £1,339pp. azamara.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Visit the region's salt basins to see artisan salt-makers at work; Olhão's eye-catching Moorish chimneys; the Monchique mountains offer fresh air and local produce worth sampling; fish markets are a key part of any visit to the Algarve; the coast has many hidden delights to explore; Faro is a treasure trove of history and culture



Local Flavours

PASTÉIS DE NATA

Golden custard encased in flaky pastry, sprinkled with cinnamon brought by traders on ancient spice routes, these pocket-sized pastries are a classic for a reason. Try Portugal's famous tarts at Faro's Pastelaria Gardy.

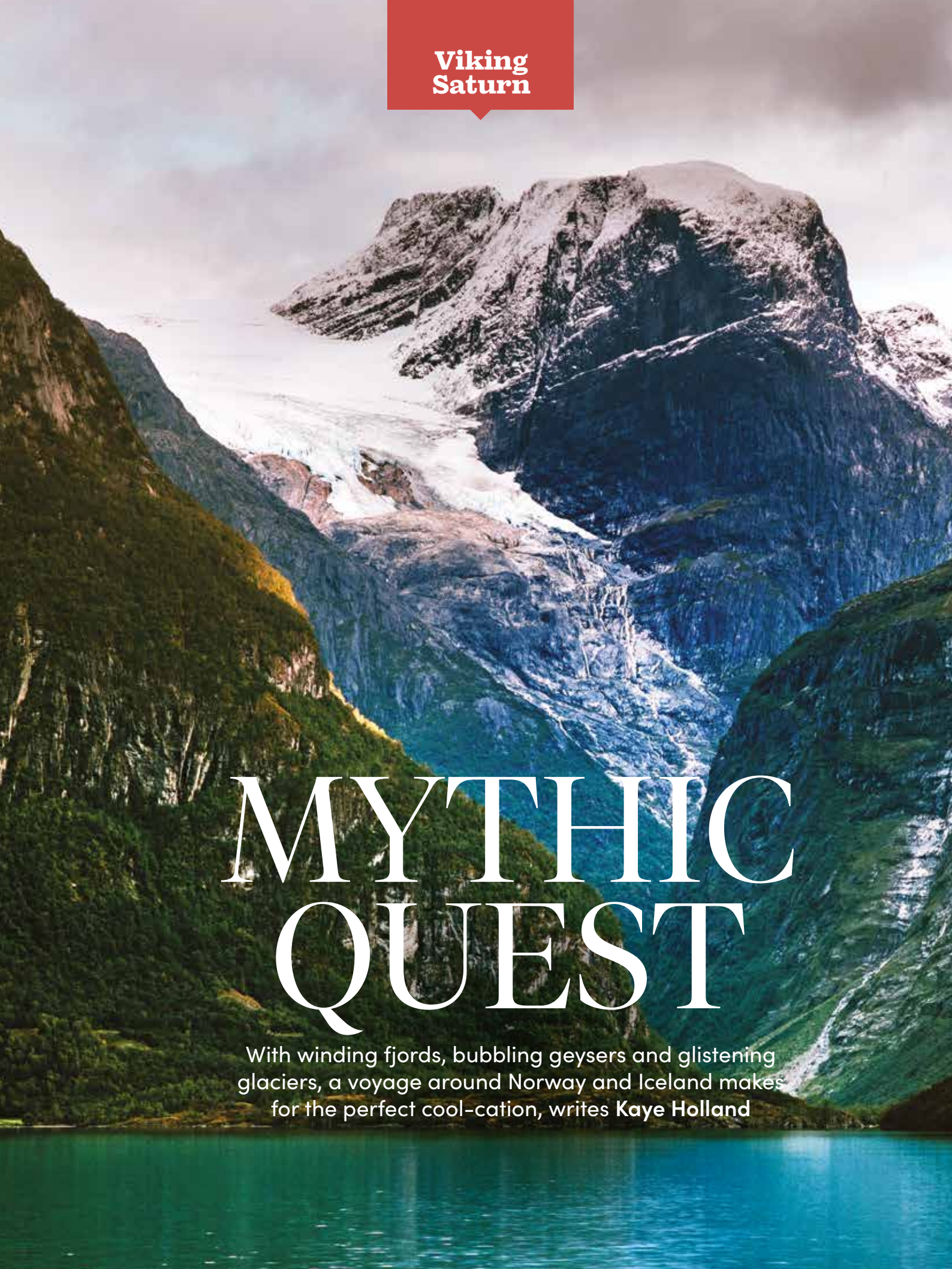
CATAPLANA

Served steaming in its namesake clam-shaped copper pot, 'cataplana' is the Algarve's soulful signature fish stew. Hunks of monkfish, giant prawns and clams are simmered with peppers, onion and garlic before being topped with fragrant coriander. Enjoy with sea views at O Pátio on Carvoeiro Beach.

PIRI-PIRI CHICKEN

While competition for the best piri-piri chicken is as hot as the sauce, Restaurante Ramires in Guia has served fiery finger-licking chicken since the '60s. Its perfectly charred chicken with addictive heat remains the best.





Viking
Saturn

MYTHIC QUEST

With winding fjords, bubbling geysers and glistening glaciers, a voyage around Norway and Iceland makes for the perfect cool-cation, writes **Kaye Holland**

There are certain views every traveller needs to experience at least once in their life. Watching the sun set over the Maasai Mara in Kenya or gazing across glistening Alpine peaks from the top of a ski slope are two that immediately spring to mind. And now, having seen the deep fjords, majestic mountains and vast icy glaciers of Norway, they too can be added to the list, because they are as beautiful as anything I've seen before.

On Viking's 12-night 'Iceland's Majestic Landscapes' cruise, which calls at Norway en route to the land of fire and ice, I'm mesmerised by the country's scenery. So much so that I spend hours on my stateroom balcony bracing the cold weather – even in September, guests can forget about packing T-shirts and sunnies – while armed with complimentary binoculars, unable to move for fear of missing something.

Onshore, Norway is just as pretty. The voyage begins in Bergen, Norway's second city, where I wander the scenic cobbled streets, admiring the 18th-century clapboard shops and houses adorned in autumnal reds and yellows. Tours are included in most ports – it's worth pointing out Norwegian-based Viking has detailed notes on every shore excursion, and each is rated by difficulty – but guests can pay for more adventurous outings. In Flam, I stump up £156 for a kayaking adventure and paddle through the tranquil waters of Hardangerfjord, famous for the Trolltunga rock formation, standing at 700 metres high.

Next up is Ålesund, where, intrigued by the architecture, I sign up for the included Art Nouveau walking tour. I learn that the town's peculiar layout spawned after a catastrophic fire destroyed some 850 houses in 1904. It was subsequently rebuilt in grand style, with handsome houses in dusky pink lining the streets. My excellent guide, Jean, feeds our small group tidbits of information (did you know that Ålesund is the birthplace of the penny loafer?) via audio headsets.

ON BOARD BLISS

The further north we travel, the more hypnotic the scenery gets. On day five, we dock in the Unesco-listed Geirangerfjord bright and early and jump on a bus for a day of touring that takes us up into the mountains on a skinny road full of hairpin turns. At Flydal Gorge viewpoint, our ship looks like a Lego toy against the cascading waterfalls. ►



Our stop in the Faroe Islands is less successful. The rain is lashing and the wind is screaming, so I enjoy a cosy afternoon on board instead. I gaze out at the harsh elements from the Explorers' Lounge, an inviting space with vapour fires and sofas draped in reindeer hide, and browse the books – specially curated by Heywood Hill, booksellers to the Royal Family – in the library. In the Nordic Spa, I wimp out of trying the authentic Nordic bathing ritual, put off by the cold pool and the snow grotto, and instead unwind with a 50-minute muscle-melting Swedish deep tissue massage.

Later, I relish the chance to listen to lectures about Norway's geopolitics and wildlife in *Viking Saturn*'s theatre as well as classical concerts over afternoon tea in the light-filled Wintergarden, before admiring the extensive artwork on board: think an array of original Munch artwork and a reproduction of the Bayeux Tapestry that has been placed, panel by panel, on each landing.

I move between the World Cafe, an upscale buffet where cruisers can taste dishes from your destination du jour; Mamsen's cafe, with its apple cake – made from a recipe that's been

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Thingvellir National Park's magical landscape of gorges and fissures; the striking facade of Akureyri's Lutheran church; Viking cruises offer stunning scenery onboard as well as on excursions; the Atlantic puffin is Iceland's signature bird

Fast facts

930

guests

10

decks

8

restaurants

6

room categories

in the Hagen family (Viking's owners) for centuries – and waffles served with Norwegian Brunost cheese; the elegant main dining room; Italian Manfredi's; and the Chef's Table.

At the latter, I manage to snag a seat on one of the sailing's Asian-inspired evenings (the theme changes every few days), but repeat visits prove a lost cause: Viking's regular guests know to book early and have bagged all the remaining spots. And it's no wonder why. The Chef's Table provides one of the best meals I've had in a long time – a five-course menu inspired by the ingredients and unusual tastes of Asia, each paired with fine wines.

FIRE AND ICE

After a rewarding day at sea, we arrive in Seydisfjörður, a small town on Iceland's east coast, where I book a whale-watching safari. Seeing a Humpback breach, as it lifts its whole body into the air and twirls around, is a breathtaking experience.

Next, we sail to the capital of the north, Akureyri, tucked atmospherically into the bottom of the Eyjafjörður fjord. I decide not to join one of the included



“ The *Viking Saturn* excursions are some of the most stirring I’ve had on a cruise

tours and instead spend an enjoyable afternoon exploring the town. First, I walk up the steps of the dramatic Lutheran church, its façade as striking as Reykjavik’s world-famous cathedral (unsurprising given it was designed by the same architect), before perusing the exhibits at the Akureyri Art Museum, where a number of permanent works from the country’s prized painters invite different interpretations of this wildly atmospheric island.

After a stroll around the town’s botanical garden, which is all the more impressive when you consider that the city is just 62 miles from the Arctic Circle, I head back to the ship, past the rainbow-striped streets and heart-shaped traffic lights. En route, I learn they were introduced after Iceland’s financial crash in 2008, purely to make people feel happier.

There’s no doubt that the best – the country’s Golden Circle and Blue Lagoon – has been saved for last. Having arrived in Reykjavik the night before, I rise at an unholy 6am and slip into my thermals before heading to the Unesco World Heritage site of Thingvellir (the location of Iceland’s ancient parliament), a magical landscape torn apart by tectonic forces leaving enormous gorges and fissures. I thrill at seeing the spume of the Strokkur geyser and the thundering Gullfoss waterfall – familiar from countless social media stories – in person.

I bid Iceland farewell from its famous Blue Lagoon. Floating in the warm, milky azure waters, I reflect on my 11 days on board *Viking Saturn* and the excursions I have taken from it – some of the most stirring I’ve experienced on a cruise. They may not have given me a tan, but the memories I have made will live on a lot longer. ●



MY VERDICT

Great for cultured cruise goers – expect talks on local art and wildlife from guest lecturers as well as cooking classes led by the ship’s chefs.

Don’t miss the chance to take advantage of the complimentary 24/7 room service, great for pre-ordering breakfast on days when guests have an early shore excursion.

Best spots on the ship The Wintergarden – a gorgeous sun-lit space with a retractable roof where afternoon tea is served daily. I also loved my bathroom with underfloor heating.

Value for money Almost everything (think flights, all on board meals, a daily excursion, tips, drinks with meals, Wi-Fi and transfers) is included. However, premium excursions and spa treatments could push the price up.

Eco credentials *Viking Saturn* features a high-efficiency engine and a hydro-dynamically optimised streamlined hull and bow for maximum fuel efficiency.

Star rating 4/5

Get on board

Viking’s 12-night Iceland’s Majestic Landscapes itinerary departing 12 June 2027, from Reykjavik to Bergen, from £6,595pp for a veranda cabin. Includes nine guided tours, return flights, transfers, wine, beer and soft drinks with lunch and dinner, Wi-Fi and gratuities. **viking.com**



‘River isn’t just thriving – it’s a core part of cruising’

CLIA UK and Ireland managing director **Andy Harmer OBE** highlights the growing popularity of the river sector following the organisation’s RiverView conference in Amsterdam

The river cruise sector continues to go from strength to strength – a trend that was reinforced at the recent return of our RiverView event in Amsterdam. As with previous years, it was particularly well received by the trade, as we brought together a record 600 travel agents and cruise partners to share best practice, explore ships in-person and gain expert insights into the wealth of opportunities the sector offers.

The event is one of my firm favourites. Starting in 2011 as a small conference for under 100 people, it has now blossomed, reflecting the growth of the sector, but also the growing interest from agents and holidaymakers alike.

A key theme this year was just how much river cruising has evolved, not least with the sheer breadth of choice now available to guests. From ship style and itinerary length to price points and departure ports, the variety on offer has never been greater, giving agents a versatile product that can be

tailored to a wide (and growing) range of customers. River cruises continue to provide a compelling alternative to land-based holidays, with ships docking in the heart of cities across Europe and beyond. Established favourites – such as the Seine, Rhine, Rhone, Danube and Douro – remain consistently popular with UK and Ireland guests, while longer-haul waterways including the Nile, Mekong and Magdalena offer a sense of adventure for those looking to explore further afield.

‘RIVER IS UNIQUE’

Another talking point was innovation. Operators are continuing to expand itineraries, introduce new destinations and invest heavily in fleet development and onboard enhancements. These improvements are

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

The RiverView event brought together a record number of agents and cruise partners; Andy Harmer says river cruising is appealing to younger guests

elevating the guest experience and creating fresh selling opportunities for agents, particularly when it comes to newer ships, immersive excursions and enhanced inclusions. It was also clear from discussions in Amsterdam that a river cruise is increasingly offered as a ‘part’ of a much longer and immersive trip, as operators add land-stays, land-tours and even ocean cruises.

Traditionally, river cruising has appealed to more mature travellers. The relaxed pace, cultural immersion and curated shore experiences make it ideal. Feedback is now also pointing to rising interest from younger demographics, particularly guests in their 40s and 50s. These travellers are increasingly drawn to river cruising by the convenience, value and inclusions on offer.

For agents, this presents a clear opportunity. With strong demand, ongoing innovation and investment across the industry, river cruise isn’t just thriving in 2026 – it’s firmly established as a core part of today’s cruise landscape, offering significant potential for agents looking to take advantage of the multiple opportunities it offers.

Andy Harmer OBE is managing director of CLIA UK & Ireland ●

“

A key theme this year was just how much river cruising has evolved, not least with the sheer breadth of choice now available





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WOULD ABSOLUTELY RECOMMEND YOU GET TO ONE OF THEIR FABULOUS
EVENINGS, FROM START TO FINISH THE EVENT WAS WELL ORGANISED, THE
SPEAKERS WERE INFORMATIVE ON THE PRODUCTS AND ALSO FUN, THE
CRUISE CHALLENGE QUIZ WAS ONE OF THE BEST GAMES I HAVE PLAYED
HAVING TO USE THE KNOWLEDGE WE WERE GIVEN TO GET US AROUND THE
BOARD GAME, THE HOST -PETER- WAS JUST BRILLIANT.
THANK YOU FOR A FANTASTIC EVENING OF LEARNING AND FUN"

Juli Hodson
Travel Counsellor



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Terms, conditions, restrictions, and capacity controls apply. Exceptional Savings Offer is valid until 14 April 2026. Savings of up to 50% off are available on select categories on select sailings, subject to change and capacity controlled. Savings amounts vary per sailing and category and are per person. Mention Code ZZ. Certain exclusions apply. Please visit www.OceaniaCruises.com for complete Terms & Conditions.





Why Crystal?

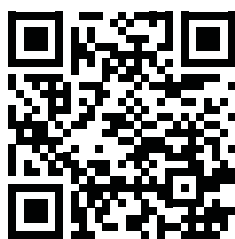
At Crystal we are committed to being the most trade-friendly, ultra-luxury cruise line. Here's how...

- Competitive industry-leading commissions
- Growing UK account management team
- Dedicated UK-based reservations team
- Award winning product offering butler service in all grades of accommodation, the largest guest-to-space ratio at sea, and nearly 1:1 guest-to-crew ratio.
- Brand-new ships coming, starting with *Crystal Grace* setting sail in summer 2028
- Exceptional dining partnerships with the only Nobu restaurant at sea, Umi Uma, menus designed by the Michelin-starred Alajmo brothers, and the world-renowned Beefbar amongst the exclusive dining options
- Ever-expanding online trade portal
- Dedicated Facebook page
- Online training platform designed to coach you through the selling cycle
- Brand new monthly webinar series



EXCLUSIVE OFFERS

To view all our current offers, scan the QR code or visit crystalcruises.com/offers



*Please visit crystalcruises.com/terms for Terms and Conditions.