

ISSUE 127 • MAY/JUNE 2024

THE VOICE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

Trade News

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MAGIC MED

The best Mediterranean cruise calls
for enchanting summer getaways,
according to agents

INSIDE: CTN INVESTIGATES CRUISE TRAVELLERS ARE GETTING YOUNGER. HERE'S WHY, P37
INTERVIEW MSC CRUISES' ANTONIO PARADISO, P44 • **REVIEW** SUN PRINCESS, P62





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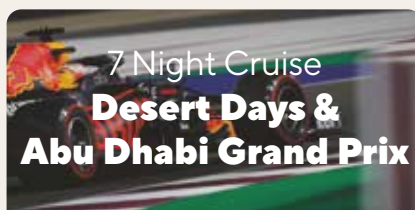
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CRUISE EUROPE THIS AUTUMN...

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WELCOME...

TO THE MAY/JUNE ISSUE

What's that one travel memory you simply love to share? Is it the time you stumbled upon a tucked-away cicchetti bar on your last visit to Venice, the one that did a delicious line of fresh seafood crostini? Or perhaps it's that hidden beach you discovered somewhere along the French Riviera with the sugar-white sand you dream of sinking your toes into on gloomy days.

Mine is Sidi Bou Saïd in northern Tunisia, a hilly seaside town 20 minutes from Tunis with immaculate blue-and-white buildings and jaw-dropping ocean views. And I have to give a special mention to a certain whisky bar onboard *Viking Polaris* which I was lucky enough to spend a few too many evenings in on my recent voyage around eastern Canada.

My point is that anyone who has been fortunate enough to travel has a place or a moment they hold close to their hearts. So when it came to planning this issue's Mediterranean feature on page 54, we decided to ask our readers if they would like to share some of the hidden gems that are dear to them. The result is a wonderful collection of cruise



ABOVE Sardinia's irresistible beauty makes it an essential cruise call

destinations that are perfect for your clients' next horizon-broadening break.

We also have a jam-packed features section for you to dive into, with our latest CTN Investigates long read on page 37 exploring why cruise travellers are getting younger (did you know more than a third of guests are now under 40?).

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

Happy reading!

Jack Carter
Editor

cruisetradenews.com

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Cruise Corner



SIR RICHARD BRANSON HANDS OUT FREE CRUISES

> Sir Richard Branson surprised 200 lucky Londoners with an exclusive invitation to embark on a free cruise with Virgin Voyages.

Driving around the capital in a vehicle replicating the line's *Scarlet Lady*, Branson made stops in Oxford Street, Embankment, Piccadilly and Trafalgar Square, before heading towards The London Eye.

The giveaway celebrated the start of Virgin Voyages' 2024 summer season in the Mediterranean, which will feature more than 45 different itineraries, including the Starry Nights in Greece & Croatia and French Daze & Ibiza Nights sailings.



IN NUMBERS

45 Med itineraries

2 vessels in Europe

200 giveaway winners



WADDINGHAM NAMES SUN PRINCESS

Princess Cruises' newest vessel *Sun Princess* has been officially named during an event at the Port of Barcelona by godmother Hannah Waddingham.

The maritime tradition took place onboard the vessel in the new Princess Arena with Waddingham, alongside the vessel's captain Craig Street, releasing a celebratory bottle of Champagne to smash against the hull of the ship wishing good fortune to guests and crew.

Known for her role as Rebecca Welton in *Ted Lasso*, award-winning performer Waddingham said being named *Sun Princess* godmother was a "pinch me" moment.

"As much as theatre has always rippled through my bloodstream so too has a strong, historic familial connection with the Royal Navy and all things nautical," she said. "It is such a great privilege to have been asked to act as godmother to *Sun Princess*."

**SCAN**

Albatros Expeditions
appoints Craig Upshall
as EMEA sales director

BRITS SMASH CRUISE RECORD

> CLIA has revealed that holidaymakers from the UK and Ireland took 2.3 million cruise holidays last year, surpassing the highest previous annual number by around 600,000 passengers.

The organisation also revealed that the Mediterranean remains the most popular destination for cruise travellers from the UK and Ireland with 35 per cent of cruisers choosing the region in 2023.

Exploration destinations, meanwhile, have seen a 53 per cent increase in passenger numbers year-on-year and the average age of UK and Ireland cruisers is decreasing: at 55.1 years in 2023, it is down from 56.1 in 2022. The average cruise length, meanwhile, increased to 10.1 days, up from 9.8 the previous year. More than 300 ships are set to sail this year; the first time the CLIA fleet has surpassed this number.

“**THE MED REMAINS
THE MOST POPULAR
CRUISE DESTINATION
FOR UK AND IRELAND**



TRAVEL VILLAGE GROUP HITS THE ROAD

> The leadership team of Blackpool-based The Travel Village Group went back to their roots last month and hit the road.

With business owners, agents and support staff working from bases across the UK, owners Phil and Paula Nuttall headed out to spend quality time with as many of their team as possible.

The events, which took place in London, Cardiff, Birmingham and Manchester, helped the team gather insights from their regional outlets while meeting up with tour operator partners.

“It’s what our business is all about – strong relationships which benefit our valued guests”, said CEO Phil Nuttall.

Exclusive



SCARBOROUGH AGENT TO ‘BRING COMMUNITY TOGETHER’ WITH NEW EVENT

A travel agent is hoping to bolster ties with the industry with her

first-ever cruise show. Rachel Dartnall-Smith, owner of Pebble Shore Travel in Scarborough, is expecting to welcome 300 guests and 12 ocean and river cruise lines to the event in Scarborough Market later this month.

“As a small business, hosting the show provides us with an opportunity to showcase the allure of cruise while bringing the community together,” she told *Cruise Trade News*.

“We want to create an inclusive and accessible platform for people to explore the excitement of cruise travel while fostering a sense of local pride and engagement.”

If the event proves to be a success, Dartnall-Smith will consider making the show an annual occurrence.

“We want the show to inform, inspire and engage attendees with the world of cruise travel. As it’s our first event there’s a lot of nerves, but the excitement has started to build and we are confident that the event will be a resounding success,” she added.

Exploring the Azores

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' **Geoff Ridgeon** explores the wildlife wonders of the Atlantic archipelago



Nestled in the heart of the Atlantic Ocean lies the Azores, an archipelago filled with natural beauty waiting to be explored. But how many of your customers have heard of these hidden gems or even know where they can be found?

Compared to Portugal's more renowned island of Madeira, the Azores are fairly secluded, which makes access more challenging. With limited direct flights from the UK, cruising is arguably the best way to explore the region's nine volcanic islands.

Filled with majestic mountains, volcanic craters, verdant valleys, picturesque lakes and hot springs, there truly is an abundance of natural beauty for each of your customers to enjoy. On top of that, the Azores are famed for their rich biodiversity, with opportunities to spot a variety of wildlife including whales, dolphins and seabirds.

Our itineraries sail to the islands of Terceira, São Miguel and Faial with plenty of scenic cruising to admire the islands' beauty from sea. Whether your customers are looking for a relaxing escape or a chance to explore somewhere entirely new, we have a variety of sailings that cater to those preferences.

Highlights include voyages timed to coincide with the Perseid meteor shower



ABOVE Voyages coincide with the Perseid meteor shower

“
How many of your customers have heard of these hidden gems, or even know where they can be found?

TOP TIPS

1 Azores itineraries allow for scenic sailing with ships passing between multiple islands.

2 There's plenty to shout about when it comes to island cuisine, from rich stews to sweet pastries.

3 The Azores is famed for its biodiversity, with the waters surrounding the islands home to dolphins.

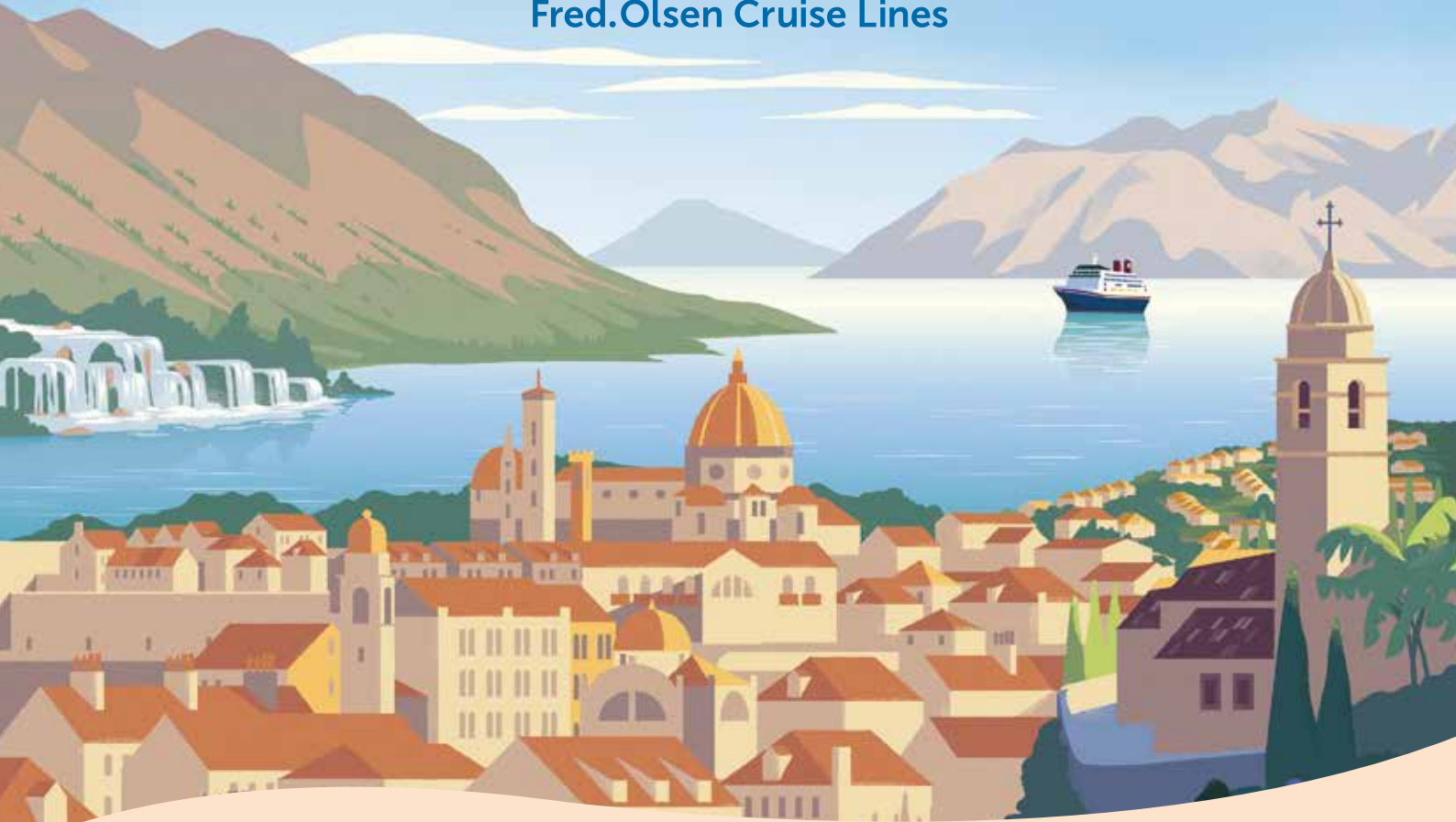
and when vibrant blue hydrangeas are in full bloom. There are also shore tours that include whale-watching trips; scenic drives to the Sete Cidades crater lakes; and visits to Furnas Valley, home to hot sulphur springs.

Travellers can immerse themselves in the local way of life by engaging with artisans eager to share their stories and produce, from pineapples and tea to delicacies such as Cozido das Furnas, a traditional meat and vegetable stew cooked underground using volcanic heat.

Whether your customers are nature enthusiasts, history buffs or simply seeking tranquility, this destination promises an unforgettable experience. And now's the time to get them as excited about the Azores as we are. ●



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines



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NEED TO KNOW



JET OFF WITH AMAWATERWAYS

Luxury river cruise line AmaWaterways has responded to agent feedback by offering flight-inclusive river packages as standard for all UK guests. Prices will now include return airfares from London or Manchester on all European and long-haul sailings – including the Mekong, Nile, Chobe and Magdalena – as well as overseas transfers between airport and ship. Prices for flight-inclusive river cruise packages for the five-night Majestic Capitals of the Danube itinerary from Vienna to Budapest, departing 16 December 2024 on *AmaSonata*, will now start from £1,975 per person.



SCENIC GROUP TO REFRESH RIVER FLEET

Scenic Group will update 18 of Scenic and Emerald Cruises' river ships following a major investment from the company. The news comes after the group announced the addition of a new luxury yacht to the Emerald Cruises fleet in April 2026.

The update will be rolled out across Scenic's European fleet and will refresh the ships' main deck areas, with new layouts and contemporary furniture, taking inspiration from the ultra-luxury aesthetic of *Scenic Eclipse I*, *Scenic Eclipse II* and Emerald Cruises' yachts.

Appointments



Lambert and Readman join Globus

Avalon Waterways has added Jayne Lambert and Ryan Readman to its UK sales team. Lambert, who left AmaWaterways earlier this year, has joined the Avalon Waterways, Globus Journeys and Cosmos Tours parent as key account manager.

Meanwhile, Ryan Readman joins from Ambassador Cruise Lines as business development manager for the north, having formerly held roles with Scenic and Emerald.



RIVIERA UNVEILS NEW 2024 THEMED CRUISES

Riviera Travel has launched two themed river cruises on the Rhine and the Rhone. The Gardens & Natural Beauty of the Rhone itinerary will feature onboard lectures from TV presenter and gardening expert Charlie Dimmock, who will also join guests during daily excursions.

The eight-day cruise includes visits to Parc de la Tête d'Or's botanical garden in Lyon, Jardin des Villes in Vienne, Rocher des Doms in Avignon, and a guided tour of Arles to see the landscape garden L'Escape Van Gogh. Meanwhile, former royal butler Grant Harrold and royal chef Colin Alderson will be on the Regal Rhine Cruise to Switzerland sailing.

NEED TO KNOW



AMAZING ANTARCTICA

Atlas Ocean Voyages has unveiled a new range of cruises to Antarctica from October 2025 to March 2026. Offering 37 departures aboard *World Voyager*, *World Navigator* and *World Traveller*, cruises range from seven to 18 nights with most sailing roundtrip from Ushuaia, Argentina.

Others include the seven-night Drake Express expeditions departing from Punta Arenas, Chile. James Rodriguez, chief executive, said Antarctica continues to be the brand's most popular region.

HEAD TO THIS ISSUE'S
SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
FOR AN IN-DEPTH
ROUNDUP OF LUXURY
CRUISE SECTOR NEWS



PONANT TO HOST MORE THAN 450 AGENTS

Ponant has announced the dates of its 2024 UK ship visit programme with more than 450 places available for agents to experience the line's vessels.

The programme will feature time on board *Le Dumont d'Urville*, *Le Lyréal*, *Le Champlain* and *Le Boréal*. The visits, which will take place between April and September, will be spread out across

12 ports: Dartmouth, Cobh, Dublin, Douglas, Aberdeen, Rosyth, Belfast, Glasgow, London, Dover, Cowes and Portsmouth.

Each ship visit will see agents welcomed by the trade team, followed by an introduction to the Ponant brand. Visitors will then join a ship tour before sampling the onboard gastronomy.



ECN launches 'first-of-its-kind' conference

The Expedition Cruise Network (ECN) will host its debut conference later this year.

Akville Marozaitė, ECN co-founder and CEO, said: "As the expedition cruise sector continues to grow, demand has been building to bring together the UK's best travel trade professionals with the globe's top expedition cruise brands in one event."

The Expedition Cruise Network Conference 2024 will take place from 1-2 October at the Bankside Hotel in London.

A programme of seminars will take place across the two days and will be interspersed with pre-arranged face-to-face meetings, organised via a digital platform.



AE REVEALS NEW VESSEL

AE Expeditions has confirmed its third small expedition ship, *Douglas Mawson*, will join its fleet at the end of 2025.

The vessel's inaugural season will also mark the line's return to East Antarctica for the first time in 15 years, with new itineraries including a *Mawson's* Antarctica voyage to East Antarctica in honour of the ship's namesake. *Douglas*

Mawson will carry 154 guests and will be the newest Infinity class vessel to enter the market, joining sister ships *Greg Mortimer* and *Sylvia Earle*.

The small ship will feature a specially designed bow to allow for smoother ocean crossings as well as Nordic interior design features with staterooms and suites across 11 different categories.

Back to school

Four years after the pandemic forced workers to leave the cruise industry, the sector has since roared back to life, but is it still experiencing a talent crisis? **Will Payne** reports

From travel agents pulling out all the stops to convince customers to try a voyage for the first time to crew members making sure guests have a pleasant time on board, talent has always been abundant in cruise. However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced many companies to downsize, which led to thousands of staff with decades of experience having to seek employment elsewhere while the industry battled to stay afloat.

Four turbulent years later and lines are now reporting record-breaking figures. Unforgettable Croatia saw sales revenue during this year's wave period increase by 20 per cent compared with 2023 and CLIA reported a four per cent year-on-year spike in members in the first quarter of 2024.

A significant contributing factor to the industry's resurgence has been the staff who remained in the industry during the pandemic – or returned once lines were able to re-hire – using their knowledge to help propel the sector to new heights.

Also critical to 2024's impressive opening quarter is the fact that new starters are beginning to find their footing in a post-pandemic industry. As cruise lines continue to ramp up capacity with bigger vessels coming online every year, bringing in new staff will be crucial to ensuring those extra cabins are filled.

FROM THE GROUND UP

This year, cruise lines will employ a multinational workforce of nearly 300,000 seafarers as well as tens of thousands of employees on land, according to recent data from CLIA Global. "The workforce is expected to grow in the coming years, with more than 50 new cruise ships coming online between 2024 and 2028," says Kelly Craighead, CLIA president and CEO. "Employee retention rates in the industry are upwards of 80 per cent – a figure unheard of in hospitality, where turnover rates are upwards of 70 per cent."



But the recruitment outlook on the ground in the UK has not proved as positive. Edwina Lonsdale, owner of Mundy Cruising and founder of The Compass Project, an initiative which offers first year A-Level students an eight-week training course to give them a taste of working in cruise, believes otherwise.

"It has been challenging post-Covid as many of the cruise lines are already at capped headcounts," she explains. "General awareness of our exciting, vibrant and dynamic industry is very low."

To create a diverse and innovative workforce, Lonsdale says the industry must push cruise as a viable career path to students during their teenage years, so it is already on their radars when they achieve their qualifications.

"We seek to highlight the range of jobs and opportunities within the industry, to introduce [students] to enthusiastic employees from a variety

“
**GENERAL AWARENESS
OF OUR EXCITING,
VIBRANT AND DYNAMIC
INDUSTRY IS VERY LOW**



of cruise lines who are willing to talk with passion about their roles, and to flag the various career paths individuals have taken to get to where they are today,” adds Lonsdale.

Another factor impacting recruitment is diversity. Data from CLIA Global found 57 per cent of women in maritime – at sea and on land – are employed in the cruise industry; 50 per cent of which hold mid-level positions or higher. “To attract a diverse workforce at all levels,” Lonsdale says, “the industry needs to work from the bottom up. Apprenticeships and school or college leaver programmes are key.”

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

For Panache Cruises founder and CEO James Cole, the talent shortfall spurred by the pandemic presented an unexpected opportunity for his agency, with the jobs left by vacating staff opening the door for people with more diverse professional backgrounds.



“IT’S VITALLY IMPORTANT TO PROMOTE CRUISE TO YOUNG PEOPLE AS A VIABLE CAREER PATH

“Undoubtedly the pandemic has shaken things up and people have moved out of travel,” he admits, “but we see it as an opportunity to bring in new people who have fresh perspectives and different skill sets, especially younger people at the start of their careers.”

Since its inception in 2020, Panache has employed 12 apprentices and has committed to invest in more than 100 apprenticeship schemes by 2030. “It’s vitally important to promote cruise to young people as a viable career path, which is why we work closely with local schools, colleges and the University of Lancashire to promote cruise and Panache Cruises where we can,” Cole adds.

He urges all travel businesses to be more proactive in working with schools, colleges, universities and other training providers to promote cruise as a career option. “As a sector we should be united in our approach to providing great benefits to working in travel and cruise particularly, promoting all the positives of working in such a fantastic, progressive, diverse and innovative industry.”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The industry must push cruise as a viable career path to students; apprenticeships and school or college leaver programmes are key; Panache Cruises’ James Cole



Cole's views are echoed by Phil Nuttall, CEO of the Travel Village Group, which employs several graduates across its network of agencies. "They have become real assets," he says. "It is great to get the views and opinions of younger people and their perception of this industry, which is helping us shape our marketing in some key areas."

Nuttall believes the talent gap in the cruise industry caused by the pandemic has since disappeared. "There might have been [a shortfall] initially, but most people who left the industry have come back and that says a lot about the cruise sector," he says.

CRUISE LINE CAREERS

Earlier this year, Silversea partnered with hospitality training school Les Roches to launch a first-of-its-kind postgraduate diploma course to teach the inner workings of the cruise industry to students. Those who complete the course will receive a scholarship agreement between Silversea and Les Roches as well as an opportunity to gain full-time employment on board a Silversea ship.

Meanwhile, MSC Cruises head of talent acquisition and management Danielle McGrath says promoting careers to young people is a "crucial" part of the line's operation. However, she believes that the industry could be better at highlighting the depth and variety of opportunities on offer. "Increasing awareness through collaborations with educational institutions and governments will also make a great difference."

P&O Cruises also admits the industry should do more to promote opportunities for working both at sea and shoreside, as well as throughout the wider travel industry. "Partnering with careers advisors across school and colleges plays an essential role

“ MOST PEOPLE WHO LEFT THE INDUSTRY HAVE COME BACK; THAT SAYS A LOT ABOUT CRUISE

in information sharing – when children are looking at higher education opportunities, there needs to be more information about choices, beyond the traditional A-Levels," a P&O Cruises spokesperson says.

In a bid to increase awareness, the company advertises careers at sea to local schools and colleges, as well as events across Hampshire, where the line is based. And the effort has paid off in the past. Captain Louise Sara, director of maritime operations for Carnival Corporation, attended the Maritime Roadshow for Girls, which helped her forge her future career path.

Despite taking a hit regarding staffing during the pandemic, four years on the cruise industry has emerged prosperous from the talent shortfall crisis, evidenced by the numerous record-breaking sales periods posted across the sector.

The experienced staff who returned post-Covid have helped nurture the slew of apprentices taking the plunge into a career in cruise – which is where the industry's next challenge lies. Developing talent from a range of backgrounds will bring fresh ideas into the sector, helping the industry reach its goal of becoming the world's most popular holiday choice. ●

ABOVE Silversea has partnered with hospitality training school Les Roches for a postgraduate diploma course based around the cruise industry

How to write a winning awards entry

1

READ THE ENTRY CRITERIA CAREFULLY

With 31 categories to enter, there's bound to be at least a few that catch your eye. Make sure you're entering your team or company into the most relevant categories to improve your chances of winning.

2

BE SPECIFIC

There's nothing more important in a successful awards entry than showing evidence of your achievements. Include as much data as possible in order to wow the judges.

3

TELL A STORY

Your passion is your best weapon, don't be afraid to use it. Refrain from using direct answers and try, where possible, to weave a narrative that will warm the judges to you and your company.

To discover the winners, follow *Cruise Trade News* on X, Instagram or Facebook and sign up to our newsletter on cruisetradenews.com

WAVE AWARDS 2024



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Fred. Olsen Cruise Line

RIDING THE WAVE OF SUCCESS

The Wave Awards will celebrate its 10th anniversary when it returns to The Dorchester on 11 November, with award entries now open for lines and agents

With a decade-long track record of celebrating excellence throughout the cruise industry, this year's edition of the Wave Awards, hosted by *Cruise Trade News* and *World of Cruising* in partnership with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, is set to be bigger and better than ever, with brand-new categories and sponsors promising a night to remember.

Entries are now open for 31 award categories, as well as two special category awards, The Peter Grant Award and the new DEI Champion Award.

Agents, lines and cruise industry suppliers can submit their entries at thewaveawards.com, with the deadline to submit all entries on Friday 31 May.

This year's Wave Awards will include four brand new categories, including Best For Accessibility (Onshore and Offshore), celebrating cruise lines that cater for all travellers, whether it be through accessible corridors and boarding processes or specially designed cabins and accessible shoreside excursions.

Best Trade Sales Team is open to both cruise lines and agencies, and will be awarded to the trade division that goes above and beyond to ensure clients are always supported with marketing materials, immersive training sessions and sales tips.

Need some entry inspiration? Visit cruisetradenews.com to discover some handy tips and tricks to help you nail your awards submission. Here are a few to get you started ●



Seasonal sailings

With travellers already on the look out for Christmas itineraries, agents have no time to waste, says Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant**

While it may seem too early to start talking about Christmas, May is usually the month where we start seeing a rise in cruise bookings for the Yuletide period. Whether it's people looking to escape the drab British weather in December or travellers wanting to get in the festive spirit by exploring the Christmas markets across Europe, cruise bookings for the festive season will soon start up.

Due to the limited timeframe of the winter holiday season, Christmas cruises tend to be in high demand and prompt early bookings. Analysis of trends in Traveltek's cruise booking data from 2023 reveals that the most popular booking times for December cruises were January 2023 followed by October 2023.

Following a relative lull from February to April, bookings began to rise again steadily after May 2023. We could also see that November and December 2024 sailings saw a significant number of bookings as early as December 2022 and January 2023 – indicating that many travellers seeking to secure their places will be booking for the year ahead.

While Northern Europe departures from Southampton accounted for a solid 14 per cent of cruises booked to sail in November and December, surprisingly, the most popular Christmas cruise destinations for travellers departing from the UK were for warmer destinations. The Canary Islands ranked as a top destination for travellers during that time, followed by the West Indies.



“**May is usually the month where we start seeing a rise in Yuletide bookings**

The length of these festive cruises can vary from four nights right up to as many as 19. However, according to Traveltek's data, the average number of nights tends to be six to eight days for the festive River Cruises. Almost a third of the cruises booked during the festive period were for seven nights – less than the average number of nights for cruises during the rest of the year.

With all the choices available to travellers, whether it's a sunny escape to the Caribbean or a festive winter cruise in Europe, all prevailing trends in data suggest that the 2024 festive sailings will continue to produce impressive bookings sustaining high demand. 📈

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant says that Christmas cruises tend to be in high demand and prompt early bookings

IN NUMBERS

14%

of cruises booked to sail in November and December were Northern Europe departures from Southampton

6-8

days is the average duration for festive river cruises

33%

of cruises booked during the festive period are for seven nights

INBOX IMPACT

Force24 is on a mission to help the cruise industry perfect its marketing strategies, one email at a time



LEFT Force24's automated software allows you to personalise your entire email marketing strategy at the click of a button

– you can collect specific data around that. Oldfield explains that knowing what information is missing enables you to plug those gaps using readily available open-source data. “Next time you’re trying to sell a family cruise, you’ll know exactly who you’re going to target and what you’re going to say to them.”

This then feeds into the next fundamental step of content nurture: personalisation. “Email marketing is like being in a room where everyone is shouting at once,” Oldfield explains. “We’ve learned to zone out and ignore what we’re not interested in so, in order to cut through, personalisation is key.”

Email inboxes can be a scary place at times. Our digital in-trays are bombarded with messages from companies trying to hawk their latest offers, so much so that it’s impossible to delineate between what’s worth opening and what’s not.

This is bad news for cruise lines and travel agents who rely on email marketing to reach their customers. That’s why marketing automation company Force24 has decided to help brands cut through the noise by teaching them to speak to consumers

on a more personal level. It’s all part of an ingenious concept it likes to call ‘content nurture’.

“Most marketers lean on email to push a range of generic commercial offers in the hope that the more they send, the more likely someone will find something they like,” says Adam Oldfield, Force24’s CEO and founder, whose team will be speaking at this year’s Cruise Summit on 17 June. “What’s more important is determining what cruising means to your clients and then crafting a message that works best for that individual. It’s very easy within a business to go for short-term wins, when in fact what consumers are leaning on brands for is their knowledge and insight.”

DATA CAPTURE

One of the first steps on the content nurture journey is to look at your customer base and decide what data is needed in order to power segmentation and drive relevant messaging. If you know what’s inspiring a cruise booking – say an anniversary or a special birthday

SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE

Cruise companies often fall into the trap of flooding a single email with several offers at once. However, having one clear message has a much better chance of engagement. “By recognising email is part of a longer strategy, you can be more direct and work the whole message in over a period of time.”

Adopting a more personalised approach might seem like a lot of work, but Force24’s automated software means this is all taken care of in an instant. All that’s left for you to do is master your messaging. ●

“**IT’S EASY TO GO FOR QUICK WINS, BUT CONSUMERS ARE LEANING ON BRANDS FOR THEIR INSIGHT**”

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force24.co.uk



HX

Hurtigruten Expeditions turned heads when it unveiled a new brand identity last year. Here's the story behind the new-look operation

IN THE KNOW

When it was announced last autumn that Hurtigruten's expedition division would adopt a new name and brand identity, many saw it as a gamble. After all, peeling away from a company with 130 years of history to strike out into an already competitive market comes with its own set of risks.

However, it hasn't taken long for HX (formerly Hurtigruten Expeditions) to carve out an identity of its own, with the line announcing in March that all sailings from October 2024 onwards would come with all-inclusive pricing as standard. Combine that with a five per cent year-on-year increase in the trade team's share of overall sales and a 300 per cent rise in social media followers and it seems like the gamble is already beginning to pay off.

WHY GO ALL-INCLUSIVE?

HX needed a way to distinguish itself from Hurtigruten and competing expedition brands. Making the decision to offer all-inclusive sailings not only enhanced its guest offering, but it would help the line's trade team articulate what it was that made HX unique.



FROM TOP
MS Fridtjof Nansen is one of HX's two fully hybrid ships; expedition cruises allow passengers to explore off the beaten track

Speaking to *Cruise Trade News* ahead of the announcement in March, Nathaniel Sherborne, VP & MD Europe & global sales enablement, said: "There's a lot of training and understanding we need to get across in the expedition sector, so one of the things we wanted to provide real simplicity on was our pricing."

From October 2024, all Antarctica and Galápagos Island sailings will include meals and drinks, expedition tours, access to science centres, waterproof jackets and Starlink wi-fi as standard.

WHO'S WHO?

HX's new-look trade team is headed up by industry veteran and chief commercial officer Alex Delamere-White, with Sherbourne reporting into him. Between them they have 26 years of experience in the industry, having both held top roles at P&O, Princess Cruises and Cunard. Working alongside them is Mark Walter as sales director (UK



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT HX's guests want to immerse themselves in destinations; Antarctica is a bucket list holiday for many; Alex Delamere-White is excited about HX's new all-inclusive pricing strategy

“HX IS A PREMIUM GLOBAL BRAND WITH ITS OWN IDENTITY, STRATEGY AND PRODUCTS

& Ireland); trade partner managers Hayley Van Der Steen and Sophie Nelson; and Megan Lewis as senior inside sales executive.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

One of last year's trends saw expedition-style cruise holidays be packaged together with longer land-based trips to create a more expansive travel experience and HX is eager to tap into this market. As such, a dedicated manager for tour operator partners has been appointed to forge relationships with the likes of luxury safari companies who are new to the cruise sector.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Alex Delamere-White explains why getting the messaging around HX's product offering right will be vital to the division's success.

Why was it important to differentiate Hurtigruten from HX? It's allowed us to tackle the confusion between the two businesses. Hurtigruten Expeditions is a premium global brand with its own



identity, strategy and products, whereas Hurtigruten is a traditional coastal business. It's a brand that for many people means bucket list holidays of a lifetime. Our guests are curious travellers who want to learn, grow and immerse themselves in the destinations they go to.

Premium travel experiences don't often go hand in hand with all-inclusive holidays. Will it be a challenge to communicate both messages to consumers?

All-inclusive as a proposition has huge stretch. I've worked with big mainstream cruise brands and I've always had the belief that to be successful you have to be easy to do business with. For a niche product, we have to be effortless to work with.

Daily excursions, going out in the Zodiacs, our world-leading science centres; most people wouldn't expect those things to be included, so we're going to spend our time and energy on telling that story. ●

TOP TIPS

1 The most important thing when it comes to selling expedition cruises, says Delamere-White, is expertise and knowledge. "These are bucket list holidays for customers so they have very high expectations."

2 HX wants to do all it can to help agents get their sale over the line, which can sometimes mean picking up the phone to ask the line's sales team to speak directly to a customer or presenting a webinar series to help sell the destination.

3 HX's new online trade portal makes it easy for agents to confirm a booking. Thanks to a four-step process, agents just need to choose a destination, voyage, cabin and excursions before securing their clients' holiday.



WORLDWIDE WONDERS

Reignite your customers' excitement with Norwegian Cruise Line's eclectic range of global itineraries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Panama Canal and Australasia in 2024/25

Travel apathy can impact even the most devoted of cruise goers, so if your customers are feeling uninspired by their usual travel plans, Norwegian Cruise Line's (NCL) diverse worldwide offerings in 2024 and 2025 will be sure to reignite their seafaring flames. Pair this with the line's Free at Sea programme – which includes all applicable packages for £199pp on a six- to eight-day cruise – and they'll be queuing out the door.

NCL's 20-strong fleet sails to more than 400 of the world's most desirable destinations, including Tokyo, where guests can delve into world-renowned cuisine and classical art in the National Museum, or Bruges, famed for its freshly baked waffles and historic

buildings, like the Basilica of the Holy Blood with its Romanesque exteriors.

On board, travellers can eat when and where they choose with up to 21 exciting dining options on a single ship. Speciality restaurants, available as part of the line's Free at Sea upgrade, serve authentic global cuisine from Japanese and Brazilian to Mediterranean seafood specialities and everything in between.

MEDITERRANEAN MEMORIES

There's no end to the enchanting cultures and gastronomic delights that await cruise travellers in the Mediterranean and NCL's choice of itineraries are among some of the best ways to experience them.

Guests can travel along the coast of Italy while indulging in the

country's beloved culinary hits – think creamy gelato enjoyed beside Rome's spectacular baroque fountains or freshly baked cannolis on the terrace of a Sicilian cafe.

There's also the chance to spend a leisurely afternoon strolling down Barcelona's tree-lined promenades before snapping a pic in front of Gaudi's unfinished triumph La Sagrada Familia. Guests can even opt for a sailing excursion around the Greek isles, where they can learn about Athens' ancient history, stroll round Santorini's winding streets against the backdrop of the island's blue-domed rooftops or explore the indie art galleries on Mykonos island.

If your customers prefer cooler climes, a cruise to Northern Europe could be just the ticket, where they can tour the splendid palaces of Oslo, before learning



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Guests can visit Tokyo with NCL; *Norwegian Viva* is the line's newest ship; adventure awaits your clients in Cairo

about the region's infamous Nordic warriors at Stockholm's award-winning Viking museum.

As fascinating as the region's capital cities are, Norway's marvellous fjords always steal the show and guests will be utterly spellbound by the stunning scenery in Geiranger, home of the famous Seven Sisters waterfall.

For those seeking voyages that are a little closer to home, NCL's continental itineraries take in the greatest hits of the British Isles, where guests can discover the coastal gems right on their doorstep; Paris, for an adventure up the Eiffel Tower; and Ireland, where expert brewers produce two of the world's most famous tipples – Guinness and Irish whiskey.

VENTURE DOWN UNDER

NCL also offers a vast range of itineraries across Asia and Australasia, where guests

can immerse themselves in the regions' mysterious and timeless cultures.

The excitement and mystery of Asia beckon the culturally curious and those hungry for adventure, with grand bazaars and ancient temples transporting visitors back in time. Meanwhile, the futuristic cityscapes of the UAE show how the Middle East is leading the way in urban development.

Then there's NCL's Australia and New Zealand itineraries, which promise once-in-a-lifetime experiences for guests seeking true adventure. After all, where else can guests luxuriate in vibrant beach towns like Bondi and Coogee before marvelling at two of the most iconic architectural structures on the planet – Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge – which stand almost shoulder to shoulder?

And if all that wasn't enough, guests can pair these once-in-a-lifetime experiences with NCL's Free at Sea package, which offers soft drinks, spirits, cocktails, wines by the glass and bottled or draft beer served in all bars, lounges and restaurants, as well as unlimited wi-fi and shore excursion discounts of \$50 per stateroom per port. Needless to say your customers will have an unforgettable experience, leaving them eager for more. ●

“THE MYSTERY OF ASIA BECKONS THE CULTURALLY CURIOUS AND THOSE HUNGRY FOR ADVENTURE

Itinerary highlights

- The 14-day Indonesia & Australia: Lombok, Komodo & Great Barrier Reef itinerary on board *Norwegian Sun* departs Bali for Cairns, calling at Lembar, Komodo, Darwin, Cooktown, Townsville, Airlie Beach and Port Douglas. Prices start at £1,038pp.

- The 11-day Asia: Thailand, Vietnam & Indonesia sailing on board *Norwegian Sun* departs Bangkok for Singapore, calling at Ko Samui, Ho Chi Minh City, Bintan Island, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Langkawi and Phuket. Prices start £1,440pp.

- The nine-day Europe: France, Germany & Norway voyage on board *Norwegian Getaway* departs Southampton for Copenhagen, calling at Le Havre, Brussels, Amsterdam, Oslo, Aarhus, Berlin and Hamburg. Prices start from £709pp.

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What's in it for you?



LOVE2SHOP VOUCHERS UP FOR GRABS



Cruise lines have increased their support for travel agents with new Love2Shop initiatives. Star Clippers will give agents a £25 voucher per cabin when they make a booking on selected summer 2024 packages.

Eligible sailings include the 10-night Malta, Balearics & Spain itinerary, which departs 10 November 2024 and comes in at £2,349pp. The price includes return flights from Gatwick and full board sailing with *Star Clipper*, as well as private transfers and port charges. Also included is the nine-night Morocco & Canary Islands sailing on

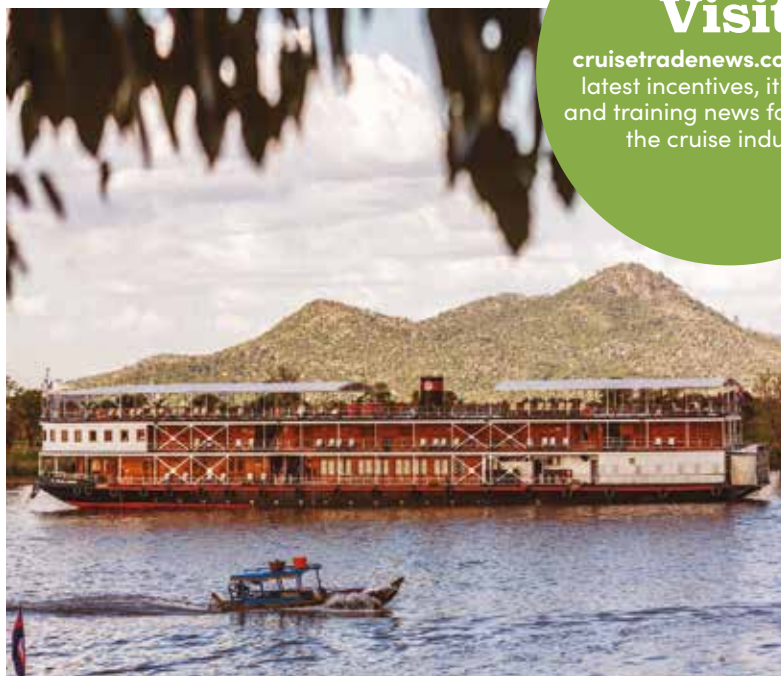
20 November 2024. Starting at £2,099pp, this price also includes return flights from Gatwick, full-board dining, transfers and charges.

Ambassador Cruise Line, meanwhile, will give agents booking select 2024 sailings from Newcastle and Liverpool the opportunity to earn an uncapped amount of £50 Love2Shop vouchers.

A second incentive offers them the chance to win their team a Christmas Party onboard *Ambience* in December when making bookings on sailings departing later in the year and into 2025. To enter, agents must complete an online incentive form.

Visit

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



WIN A FREE CRUISE FOR EVERY FIVE BOOKINGS

> Fred Holidays has launched a new “Sales for Sails” booking incentive offering agents a free Pandaw cruise with every five bookings they make with the line.

To qualify, agents must make five new bookings on any 2024 or 2025 Pandaw sailing before 31 December 2024. Once bookings have departed, agents can claim their free cruise via the Fred Holidays agent portal.

The free cruise is applicable on any Pandaw itinerary of seven nights or less and is based on double occupancy in a main deck cabin. Flights, transfers, gratuities and onboard spend come as additional costs.



VIRGIN REWARDS AGENTS’ “TIRELESS HARD WORK”

Virgin Voyages has unveiled a new trade incentive programme which rewards agents with cash pay outs for booking a cruise with the line.

First Mate Loot allows agents to create an account and log booking details for verification before being paid out the earnings.

Until 30 May, agents will receive £30 for Mediterranean or Northern Europe voyages departing on select 2024 and 2025 sailings. All other voyages will receive £10 per booking.

“This is our little added bonus way of thanking agents,” said SJ Walker, Virgin Voyages’ director of sales UK.



RIVIERA STREAMLINES WITH NEW APP

> Riviera Travel has introduced a new app to enable its trade team to dedicate more time to engaging with its agent partners.

The system allows key account managers to track their agent visits and outcomes, with the resultant data being used to coordinate schedules and target specific partners who are keen to work more closely with the brand.

In addition, it features a one-click reporting function, reducing time spent on administration tasks by around 50 per cent, as well as allowing meeting notes to be logged instantly and shared across the trade team via the app’s reporting tools.

Lights, camera, action!

Take a peek behind the scenes at Palma Studios, Mallorca as filming begins on series one of World of Cruising TV



There was cause for celebration in March as World of Cruising TV cameras rolled for the very first time, with series one now 'in the can'.

The first eight episodes of World of Cruising TV, sponsored by *The Sun*, was filmed at the prestigious Palma Studios in Mallorca, with the likes of Riviera Travel, Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Virgin Voyages joining hosts Dean Wilson and travel journalist Kaye Holland to bring their cruising experiences to life on screen.

Each episode of the series, which will be launching on TV screens nationwide soon, puts one of our cruise line partners under the microscope, with specialist interviews giving viewers a deeper look into what life is like onboard their ocean and river ships.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Paul Beale raises a glass with hosts Kaye Holland and Dean Wilson and chef Marc Fosh; viewers can learn about food onboard; Virgin Voyages' Luke Day shares a laugh with the hosts; Sarah-Lou Twist samples stunning cocktails

Meanwhile, World of Cruising TV's resident Michelin star chef and sommelier Marc Fosh serves up mouthwatering dishes and effervescent cocktails directly from the studio kitchen, sharing a taste of the scents and flavours from some of the world's most idyllic cruise destinations.

Intrigued? Search 'World of Cruising' on YouTube to discover more exclusive behind-the-scenes content.

Hear what the stars of World of Cruising TV's first series had to say about their time on set

Paul Beale, vice president of sales UK, Regent Seven Seas Cruises

How does it feel to finally be on the World of Cruising TV set? It's phenomenal. I've never been on a set of this scale. I've done many different media and TV productions before and the quality is just outstanding. I'm really, really impressed with the professionalism and the number of people behind the scenes is quite scary if I'm being honest. There must be around 50 or 60 people here who are producing this to ensure it offers guaranteed quality.



INTERVIEWS WILL GIVE VIEWERS A DEEPER LOOK AT WHAT LIFE IS LIKE ON OCEAN AND RIVER SHIPS



How did you feel before stepping in front of camera? Excited! I was very nervous earlier but now I've stepped off set I want to do more. It's a great platform for us to talk about the wonders of Regent Seven Seas Cruises and the inclusivity and luxuries that we offer; it really is a great way to speak to consumers directly.

Why should viewers tune in to World of Cruising TV? I think it's going to bring quality; with the distribution the show has it's a real opportunity to spread the word of cruising in general, not just Regent Seven Seas. It really will be a great opportunity to reach more people so they understand more about our product and the products of the other cruise lines as well.



“IT'S A GREAT PLATFORM FOR US TO TALK ABOUT THE WONDERS OF CRUISE

Sarah-Lou Twist, executive creative director for entertainment, Marella Cruises

What were your first impressions of Palma Studios? I think the set here is absolutely gorgeous. The different areas have been so well thought out. You get to have a lovely chat on the sofa and then go over to the kitchen to try some delicious treats. And there's a fantastic team as well who've looked after me so well.

How does it feel to be representing Marella on World of Cruising TV? It's an absolute privilege to be part of something so new and exciting, I'm very proud to be representing Marella and getting the message out about the fabulous cruises we have on offer.

How did filming go? In the show we focus on the entertainment that Marella Cruises has to offer, and we talk about our amazing productions – there's more than 30 of them across our fleet – as well as the other entertainment options on board. We also focus on our value-for-money all-inclusive packages. 🍷

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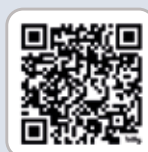
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On the
road with...

Emma Rodgers

A-Rosa River Cruises' new regional sales manager for the north of England breaks down her first four months in the role and the current challenges in agent training

How important are UK agents to the line's success this year and beyond?

Agents mean everything to us. We are a B2B business here in the UK and we are growing thanks to the support of our agent and operator partners. We know that all agents have potential river cruise customers, and we are working hard to ensure we engage with as many of them as possible, and that river cruising is always offered – whether that be to city breakers, activity lovers, culture vultures, families and everything else in between.

What A-Rosa selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

There are so many, but what really sets us apart is our all-ages-welcome ethos. Customers can choose one of our newer, smaller vessels, which are ideal for grown-ups; our incredible *A-Rosa Sena*, which is the largest in our fleet and perfect for families, multigenerational groups and couples alike; or simply opt for one of our many other ships which sail across a variety of river destinations.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

The largest in the fleet, *A-Rosa Sena* is perfect for families; Emma Rodgers loves meeting up with agents

and sights along Europe's rivers. We have no set dress code, you can dine when you want during restaurant opening hours and choose to explore independently or book an optional excursion – it really is your day, your way.

What are the current challenges in agent training?

It has definitely become easier in the past few years but often you find that an agent is loyal to one brand, and you need to work hard to demonstrate that other lines can be more suitable for certain customers. You also need to learn to adapt your training styles according to each agent and consider how much knowledge they have already.

You've been at A-Rosa now for around four months – how has it been being back in the river sector?

It has been so great to get back into river which I am very passionate about. The response from agents has been overwhelming and I have been made so welcome on all my visits. I'm so encouraged by how keen agents are to learn about A-Rosa. My goal is simple – I want everyone to grow their A-Rosa river cruise sales. ●

How important is it for you to get out in front of agents?

That is my role and the part of my job that I absolutely love; it's exhausting but I wouldn't change it. My aim is to meet as many agents as possible and share all the amazing A-Rosa River Cruises USPs so that we are front of mind when they recommend a river cruise holiday. I want to inspire agents who have not yet discovered this fantastic way to holiday.

What key areas should agents focus on when selling A-Rosa?

I think there are several really – flexibility is of course key. We ripped up the rule book on river cruising years ago, shaking off its formal image and focusing on a different way to see the cities

“
**WE RIPPED UP THE
RULE BOOK ON RIVER
CRUISING YEARS AGO**



AGENT APPRECIATION

Having been at the helm of Oceania Cruises' global sales operation for almost a year, Jason Worth sits down with **Will Payne** to discuss his successes to date

“The trade is instrumental to us,” says Jason Worth, who I’m speaking with at Oceania Cruises’ UK head office in Southampton. “In the past we’ve worked with smaller groups of agencies – but this year, we want to expand.”

It has been 10 months since Worth was handed an expanded remit by Oceania Cruises, which saw him take responsibility for the sales teams in the UK, Europe, Latin America, Brazil and Asia Pacific. The move saw James Sitters named director of sales, Australia and New Zealand, and led to the strengthening of the brand’s UK sales operation with the appointment of Sam Richardson as regional sales executive and Kim Gough as inside sales executive.

“It was all about putting the right pieces of the puzzle together to ensure we could reach more agencies,” Worth explains. “In the first quarter of 2024, the sales team signed up 100 agencies to be able to book with us directly, which is a huge change from where we’ve been in the past.”

Despite the sharp uptick in agent partners already this year, Worth has no intention of resting on his laurels. “We want consumers to be able to walk into an agency and know who we are,” he says.

“THE TRADE IS INSTRUMENTAL TO US



TREMENDOUS TRADE

The next few months, Worth continues, will see the Oceania team consolidate its new-look personnel. This will be coupled with Oceania’s plans to host more than 2,000 agents across 30 UK ship visits in 2024, which, for the first time, will give agents the chance to bring customers with them.

“We’re seeing tremendous results from the trade and they’re giving us positive feedback,” he says. “The next phase is really about getting our brand out there by letting the team do what they do best – host training sessions, talk to the trade to find out what they want and share details of our great incentive programme.

“Having agents bring consumers on board, and those who have never experienced Oceania before, is a great opportunity to ‘try before you buy.’”

Available ships include *Sirena*, *Nautica* and *Marina* with events in Aberdeen, Belfast, Cork,



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT
South Pacific destinations
are attracting more big ticket
spending; *Vista* sails the Med;
Worth eyes growth

“ WE FOUND A LOT OF SUCCESS BRINGING AGENTS ON BOARD

similar,” Worth enthuses. “The reception [for *Vista*] was tremendous from the moment it went on sale, which was a few years in advance of launch. It was setting records and doing well because people wanted to see what was next and it really blew everyone away.”

The introduction of *Vista*, Worth says, has opened the line up to a new audience, with the restaurant concepts and amenities attracting a new strain of clientele.

Similar to the post-pandemic bounce in “bucket-list” trips, Oceania has seen an increase in the number of customers spending more on big ticket items such as the South Pacific. And in a bid to help control costs, the line has added gratuities to its overall cruise prices to alleviate pressures during the booking process.

“We wanted to make it easier as a lot of our guests and trade partners told us they, and their clients, didn’t want to have this extra cost,” Worth explains. “It’s less friction, and it makes it an easier sell for our trade partners.”



Dover, Dublin, Falmouth, Greenock, Invergordon, Leith, Liverpool, Portland, Portsmouth, Rosyth, Southampton and Tilbury.

“Last year, we found a lot of success bringing agents on board, not only on *Vista*’s pre-christening sailing,

but on Southampton and other UK ports of call visits,” Worth says. Oceania will also offer agents a range of trade-specific rates, as well as fam trip opportunities toward the backend of the year and a rewards programme.

ALL ABOARD ALLURA

The line’s enhanced trade focus in 2024 comes ahead of the launch of *Allura* in 2025 following *Vista*’s entrance into the market last year, heralding in a new era for the company with the launch of a new class of ship.

“The launch of *Vista* was such an exciting moment for us, and *Allura* is going to be very

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SHIP OF THE MONTH

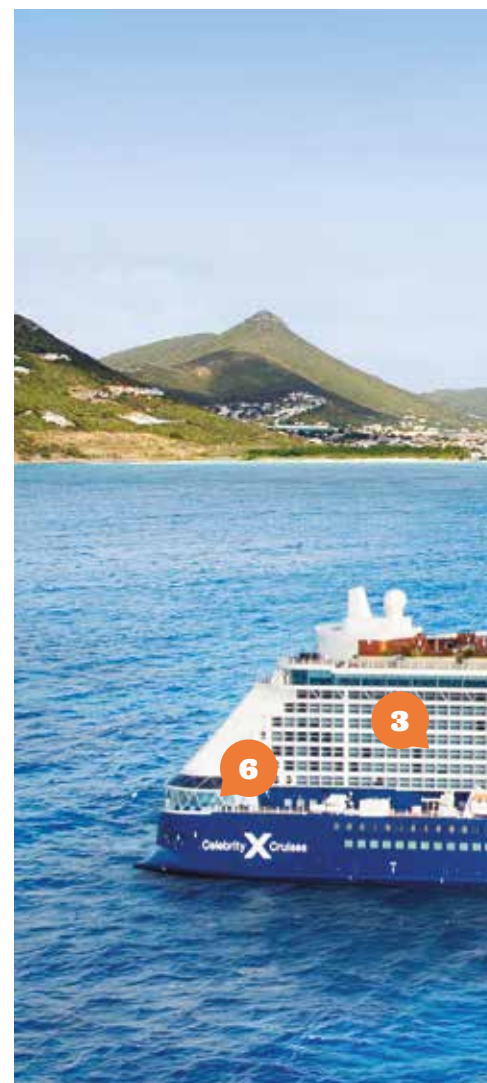
CELEBRITY ASCENT

Having sailed into Europe for the first time in April, *Ascent* became the fourth of Celebrity's Edge class ships, joining sister vessels *Celebrity Edge*, *Apex* and *Beyond*. The length of three football pitches, it features the line's trademark 'Magic Carpet', a cantilevered pod that moves up and down the side of the ship, as well as The Retreat, a resort-style enclave offering suites, private dining and a host of other exclusive features. *Ascent* will sail to stunning destinations in Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Turkey, inviting guests to dive into the rich history of Europe and explore the best the Mediterranean has to offer.



1 The Grand Plaza

The breathtaking Grand Plaza is the beating heart of the ship – a dazzling, triple-height space inspired by the piazzas of Italy. Here, guests will find the ship's speciality restaurants, continental-style Café al Bacio and the ever popular Martini Bar.



Fast facts

3,260
guests

1,400
crew

32
 eateries

17
decks



2 Dining

Celebrity Ascent offers an amazing 32 restaurants, cafés and bars. Speciality venues include Le Voyage by Daniel Boulud (*above*) for intimate fine dining, Raw on 5 for freshly prepared sushi and sashimi, and Eden Restaurant with its innovative plant-based tasting menu.



3 Cabins

Guests don't have to stay in a suite to enjoy luxury accommodation. On *Celebrity Ascent*, even the entry-level Inside Staterooms come with a king-size bed, cashmere mattress and touchscreen automation to adjust everything from air conditioning to lighting with utmost ease.



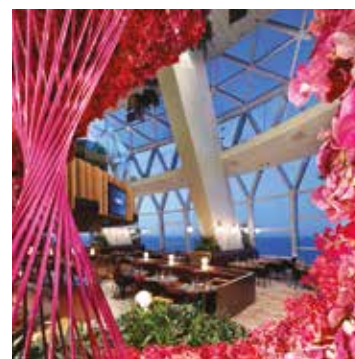
4 Pools

When it's time for a dip, the ship's generously sized main pool (*above*) is the place to be. It's flanked by two 'martini glass' jacuzzis, while suite guests have access to an elegant and exclusive pool at The Retreat. It also boasts a villa with a private plunge pool.



5 Wellbeing

Featuring state-of-the-art MLS Quartz treatment tables, The Spa (*above*) is a one-stop shop for wellness and beauty. The adults-only SEA Thermal Suite comes with a range of aquatherapy environments, from aromatic steam to tropical rain showers.



6 Eden Restaurant

With a menu rooted in natural ingredients, Eden's dishes take inspiration from a variety of global cuisines. Dishes include roasted Carabineros shrimp from Spain, sheep's milk gnocchi with smoked pecorino cheese, and a duet of filet mignon and wellington.

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New KIDS ON THE DOCK

Once regarded as exclusively for the elderly, cruises are suddenly attracting a younger clientele. **Dave Monk** examines why more millennial and gen Z travellers are opting for holidays at sea



Newlywed, overfed and nearly dead – a cute rhyme that 20 or so years ago succinctly encapsulated the cliché cruise traveller. While it didn't paint the full picture, features like formal nights, fixed dinner seatings and eighties discos did little to shake the stigma that if you weren't recently retired, you were unlikely to be seen enjoying a cruise holiday.

Of course, there are some lines who successfully cater to mature audiences, but the collective effort to diversify cruising's clientele has led to a considerable drop in the average age of passengers. Social media has undoubtedly helped, with high-speed internet allowing passengers, journalists and bloggers to broadcast the modern sailing experience in real time – you only need to look at how Royal Caribbean's round-the-world voyage 'blew up' on TikTok to see how younger audiences are engaging with the sector.

Cruise content creator Emma Le Teace launched her website Cruising Isn't Just For Old People, now renamed emmacruz.com, in 2016. Now aged 30, she says cruise passengers definitely seem to be getting younger. "It appears to be a combination of new and exciting ships, attracting people who may never have considered a cruise, and also the increase in multi-generational cruising.

"Families and younger people seem to be realising what great value for money cruising can be. I took a four-day cruise with Marella over a bank holiday weekend, so most of the passengers only had to take one day off work. That is a great way for people who are new to cruise to test out how they feel about being at sea."

"Families and younger people seem to be realising what great value for money cruising can be"

Latest CLIA figures confirm Le Teace's observations. The average age of a cruise passenger worldwide has fallen to 46 (in Britain it's 55). Globally, 36 per cent of travellers are under 40 while the ratio of over-60s has fallen to 17 per cent. More than a quarter of passengers are new to cruise, while solo travellers now make up nearly 10 per cent of the market. Cruises are also becoming more family oriented, with a third of passengers sailing with at least two generations.

Royal Caribbean is among a collection of lines that have been successful in getting younger passengers on board, introducing features like ice rinks, skydiving simulators and dodgem cars. "The average age of our UK guests is 42 – seven years lower than in 2019" says Ben Bouldin, the line's VP for Europe, Middle East & Africa. "We design our fleet to attract the family audience to ensure they can have a perfect holiday, both collectively and individually."

Royal Caribbean's *Utopia of the Seas*, which launches in July, is the line's first Oasis-class ship to offer short Caribbean getaways, which are designed to attract more millennial and Gen Z travellers. The fun isn't limited to the onboard experience, either, with Royal being one of many lines that own their own Balearic-style private islands with adults-only beaches complete with swim-up bars, private cabanas and DJ booths.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Top-notch dining is a key selling point for customers; adults-only themed trips are growing in popularity; families are increasingly aware of what great value for money a cruise holiday can be

“Our other new ship, *Icon of the Seas*, is also ideal for young travellers, with adrenaline-pumping rides and the first neighbourhood dedicated to families,” Bouldin adds.

DIFFERING TASTES

Princess Cruises has also seen the age of cruisers fall in the last two years, with fly-Med and Caribbean trips being the most popular with younger travellers. High-speed wi-fi and wearable tech that lets you order food and drinks wherever you are onboard are among the draws, says Eithne Williamson, VP for UK & Europe.

“Princess has been paving the way to attract a younger, more international audience by offering more experiences tailored to their preferences and lifestyles. Our mobile app enables our guests to tailor their cruise experience from the palm of their hand.”

At MSC Cruises, the VP of international sales, Antonio Paradiso, says young people are attracted by the range of destinations and experiences they can enjoy in a single sailing. “*MSC Virtuosa* remains a firm favourite for British passengers embarking at Southampton, while *MSC World Europa* has the longest dry slide at sea – a definite hit with millennials and Gen Z passengers.”

Paradiso is also the UK & Ireland MD of Explora Journeys, a luxury brand attracting solos and LGBTQ+ passengers through bespoke cocktail events and soirees, with staff receiving dedicated training to promote equality and inclusiveness onboard.

Dave Mills, Iglu Cruises’ chief commercial officer, is seeing an increase in both younger and older cruisers. He says: “Although our average age of traveller is in the mid-50s, we are welcoming more under-18s on board than ever before. “But let’s not forget the increasing confidence to travel among the over-80s. In 2023 we hosted three guests who were over 100.”



Smaller lines are seeing the effect too. At Greek specialists Celestyal, the VP of business development UK, Europe & Australia, Janet Parton, says: “Our shorter three and four-night cruises lend themselves to a younger audience. Spending longer in port – full evenings in Mykonos and Santorini and overnight in Dubai, for example – as well as no sea days is an attractive proposition for millennials.”

She adds that cruise lines need to ensure their marketing materials reflect the widening demographics and that they dispel any misconceptions through training and educating both travel agents and customers.

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

Promoting cruising as a rewarding and cost-effective way for young, adventurous travellers to see the world might seem like a simple argument for lines and agents to get across, but perceptions rarely change overnight, and well-founded attempts to capture this market have failed in the past. Take U by Uniworld, for example. Set up in 2018, it planned to attract cruisers aged between 21 and 45 with two dedicated river boats offering activities such as silent discos and karaoke nights. This year, Uniworld dropped the project to concentrate on its luxury products.

Time-poor and worn down by an intensifying cost of living crisis, millennial and gen Z travellers are more discerning than ever when it comes to deciding what they spend their money. Helping them understand that a cruise holiday offers much more than what they see in the holiday brochures could be the key to piquing their interest.

“If you speak to millennials, a lot of them will say ‘I never considered a cruise,’ says Holly Simmonds,





cruise product manager at Not Just Travel. “This is where agents can really make an impact by talking about their own experiences, whether it’s the trips, the entertainment, the cost, food, technology or the facilities.”

So what are millennials looking for? “The perfect Instagram shot, a great band in the evening, a spa package or perhaps a random destination they’d never thought of visiting but will recommend to everyone,” Simmonds explains.

Le Teace thinks cruise lines should think beyond glossy TV adverts that merely show off their latest ships and speak to younger travellers directly. “They often leave the audience with a lot of basic questions like ‘What is included? Where can I eat? What about drinks?’ Focusing more on the value aspect of cruising and just how easy it makes travel would be a great way to encourage younger people to give it a try.”

She still comes across a lot of misconceptions, though, with people thinking cruising is either

overly formal or all about the Caribbean and lots of drunk people partying. “Most cruise lines fall somewhere in between,” Le Teace says. “Matching the right person to the right cruise line is an important part of getting younger people on board.”

It’s undeniable that the frumpy days of cruising are over; even the lines that more commonly appeal to older passengers like Viking and Silversea are encouraging their guests to embrace a more intrepid and energetic way of travel. And with user-generated content and word of mouth such an influential source of travel inspiration, more younger travellers could be heading to cruise ships soon.

“I expect we will see an increase in multi-generational cruising as current cruise fans introduce younger members of the family,” Le Teace says. “Solo cruising is also booming, which may have to do with how easy it is to make friends pre-cruise through online forums.”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Millennials are looking for the sort of holiday that can lead to the perfect Instagram shot; cruise content creator Emma Le Teace

THREE ITINERARIES PERFECT FOR YOUNGER CRUISERS

1 Royal Caribbean’s three-night Bahamas & Perfect Day cruise on *Utopia of the Seas* leaves Orlando on 13 September 2024 and calls at Nassau and CocoCay, from £288pp. royalcaribbean.com

2 Princess Cruises’ seven-day Mediterranean with France & Italy sailing on *Sun Princess* leaves Barcelona on 5 April 2025 and calls at Gibraltar, Genoa, La Spezia and Civitavecchia, from £849pp. princess.com

3 MSC Cruises’ five-night Northern Europe voyage on *MSC Virtuosa* leaves Southampton on 20 October 2024 and calls at Amsterdam, Cork and Falmouth, from £429pp. msccruises.co.uk

Prices exclude flights

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Queen Anne's spectacular naming ceremony will take place in Liverpool on 3 June 2024,
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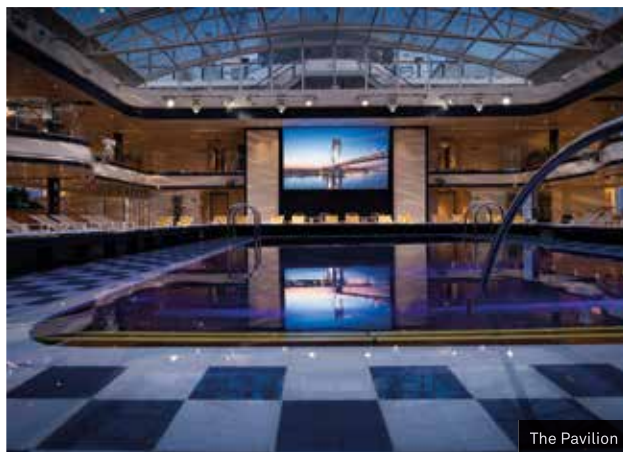
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The Pavilion

QUEEN ELIZABETH

QUEEN ANNE

In
conversation
with



SCAN

Princess Cruises' Eithne Williamson encourages agents to change tack

Antonio Paradiso

The new vice president of international sales for MSC Cruises and Explora Journeys shares his ambitions for his new position and how he intends to strengthen MSC's standing in the UK even further

Having spent most of his working life with MSC Cruises across a variety of roles, Antonio Paradiso has been key to the company's journey to becoming one of the world's best-selling cruise lines. After more than 16 years at the firm, he has now been tasked with overseeing the global sales operation for the line, as well as for its luxury sister company Explora Journeys as vice president of international sales for MSC Group's cruise division.

When asked to summarise his first few months in the role, unsurprisingly "super-busy" was his response. "It's been very, very exciting," he says.

The expanded position, which he began at the start of this year, sees him report to Gianni Onorato, chief executive of MSC Cruises, and assume responsibility for Australia, South Africa and Scandinavia, as well as the UK and Ireland.

"[The new role] has broadened my horizons because, with an international remit, it allows me to utilise the sales and marketing techniques used in other countries to inspire decisions for the UK, which is our biggest market," he explains.

One of his first remits is to ensure MSC engages with trade more consistently across its source markets. "Being up to date with the latest trends in the cruise industry gives you the opportunity to provide the best information to our trade partners and customers," he says. "I'm travelling around the country to share these learnings with our partners."



Two of the trends Paradiso has identified already are an uptick in demand for mini-cruises, where voyages typically last from three to five nights, and consumers booking further in advance. "I'm trying to align as many policies as possible across these markets to help agents capitalise on these trends, because customers tend to have similar behaviour patterns across different markets," he adds.

AGENTS 'CRUCIAL' TO MSC'S STRATEGY

Throughout Paradiso's career, one thing has remained consistent and that is his dedication to working with the trade. He says he is thankful for the support they have shown him over the years, particularly those in the UK. "If MSC is now the number one international cruise line in this country, it is because of the support we've received from every aspect of the trade."

In a bid to ensure this relationship remains strong, *Cruise Trade News* recently revealed that



**I'M TRYING TO ALIGN
OUR POLICIES TO HELP
AGENTS CAPITALISE ON
THESE TRENDS**



MSC will host more than 60 ship visits across the UK in 2024, welcoming upwards of 2,000 agents. The line will also run several fam trips, which will sail to destinations at the top of consumers' wish lists, as well as hosting a sales meeting with key travel partners and ongoing webinars. "We need to have that constant engagement with the trade community if we want them to be up to speed with MSC Group's brands."

'BEST WAVE EVER'

Paradiso's position has been strengthened by the fact that MSC experienced its strongest wave season to date, with bookings up 30 per cent on the same period in 2023. He says agents played "an extraordinary part" in the record-breaking start to the year.

"Given 2023 levels were up 65 per cent on 2020, it shows the positive trajectory that MSC is on in the UK right now," he adds. Amid the surge in popularity, MSC made the decision to put its 2026 deployment on sale earlier than ever before, a move inspired by feedback from agents.

"It's always a bit of a challenge to predict what customers will be looking for in two or three years' time, but I think 2026 is possibly the best deployment I've ever had from the UK," he says.

FLY-CRUISE TAKING OFF

MSC will also play particularly close attention to fly-cruise in 2024, due to the increase in capacity of regional flights, with more guests than ever being able to fly to key port regions from the likes of Manchester, London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Birmingham and soon Bristol. "The aim is to make our ships around the world more accessible, because sometimes flights can be a barrier."

Meanwhile, he urges agents to focus on the value-for-money proposition of a cruise holiday, which has

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Paradiso began his career with MSC 16 years ago; Dubai is a popular choice among consumers; agents will have the chance to experience MSC Cruises' vessels in 2024

What my career has taught me

Embrace opportunities

I've found that every challenge offers a chance for growth. Reopening as the first UK cruise line post-Covid allowed us to attract customers and firmly establish MSC Cruises' presence.

Listen and learn

Prioritising feedback from businesses and customers is vital to helping us refine our offerings, understand customer needs and identify new opportunities.

Take pride in your work

I'm grateful to work in a field I'm passionate about. Genuine enthusiasm for your job is vital for progress, even amid challenges. The rewarding moments in my career far surpass any obstacles.

become a pertinent issue with travellers in the wake of the UK's cost of living crisis.

"I'm reading the newspapers and it always seems like it's doom and gloom out there," Paradiso adds. "Yes, we're going through a cost of living crisis, but we continue to give great value for money to all of our customers."

"That's why I think cruising is becoming so popular right now. I think this is probably the reason why there are more new ships and a greater choice of destinations: people are finally understanding what they can get for their money when taking a holiday at sea." ●

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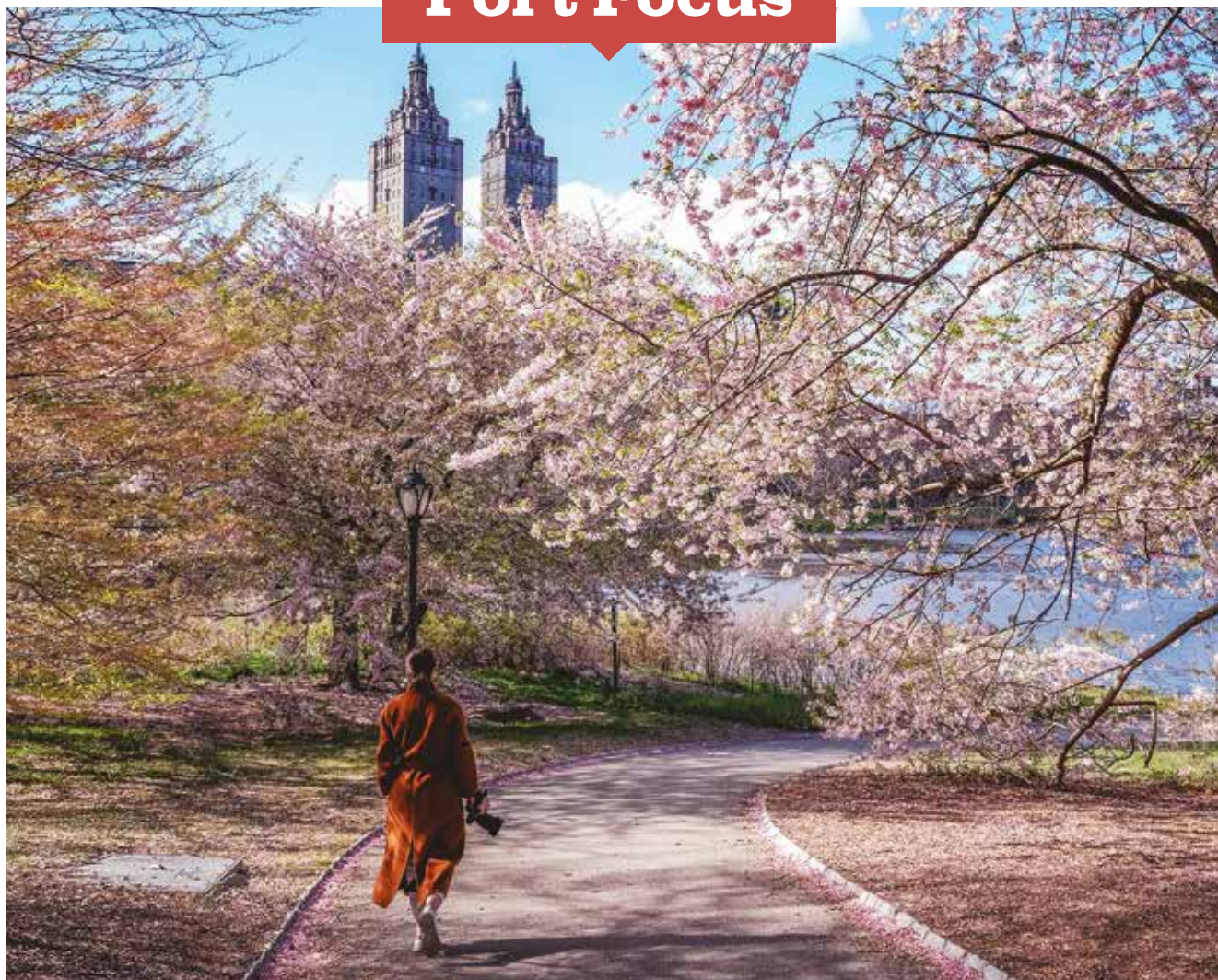


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New York City

Step into film sets and discover vibrant food halls, night markets and street art in the Big Apple's hipster neighbourhoods

There's really nothing new about New York. Native Americans were living here 13,000 years ago, and the first European – Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano – arrived in 1524.

A century later, Dutch colonists established the settlement of New Amsterdam on what is now known as Governor's Island, and in 1664 this

became New York when the land passed into British hands as one of 13 crown colonies along the northeast coast. Discontent with British rule prompted the American Revolution, with the colonies uniting to gain independence, and George Washington taking office as the first US president in 1789.

New York became the city we know today when Manhattan joined forces

with Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens and the Bronx in 1898. Immigration rocketed, and now 8.3 million New Yorkers, their forebears from all over the world, live in the city's five boroughs.

Today, the Big Apple is a dynamic metropolis renowned for its skyline, diverse culture and global influence in the arts and entertainment and world-class shopping. It's time for a visit.

Three unmissable sights

STATUE OF LIBERTY

The world-famous statue is an easy excursion for cruise passengers with an afternoon to spare. Guests can hop on a ferry from Battery Park in Lower Manhattan to Liberty Island to get up close to New York's towering symbol of freedom and democracy. The copper-skinned monument was completed in 1884 under the direction of the architect Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi to commemorate the Franco-American alliance during the American Revolution. After admiring the harbour, visitors are invited to climb up to the statue's crown to enjoy a panorama across Manhattan. There's an engaging exhibition, too, so around three hours should be allocated to see and do it all.

9/11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM

This museum makes for a sobering afternoon, documenting the terror attack on 11 September 2001 and honouring the lives lost that day. Situated on the site of the former World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, it opened in 2011 and has since been visited by world leaders and dignitaries including the Prince and Princess of Wales. Exhibits include victims' personal belongings salvaged from the wreckage, steel beams from the Twin Towers and recordings of survivor testimonies.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Check out the Metropolitan Museum of Art's epic collection; enjoy some flora and fauna in the sprawling Central Park; the unmistakable Statue of Liberty is a beacon of freedom and democracy



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Known simply as the Met, this national gallery opened its doors in 1870 in the middle of Central Park. While its Beaux-Arts façade is characterised by arches and columns, the interior features domes and a marble staircase with a mosaic floor. Its 490,000-strong collection spans the globe, from Egyptian, Roman and Greek art to African works and a contemporary costume gallery. Permanent exhibits include celebrated works such as Vincent van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat* Pablo Picasso's *The Dreamer* and sketches by Leonardo da Vinci.

Three activities for curious travellers

SOLO EXPLORERS

Have a hankering for hot dogs, pining for pizza or craving a Cronut? Those travelling alone who don't like eating lunch at a table for one can join an outing with Secret Food Tours. By facilitating shared experiences – such as visiting an on-trend food hall like DeKalb Market Hall in downtown Brooklyn, trying local dishes like pastrami sandwiches, bagels or cheesecake or tasting unfamiliar ingredients at a market – its foodie tours are designed to create connections among like-minded travellers.



LEFT The recently opened Summit One Vanderbilt blends breathtaking views with intriguing interactive digital displays and installations

COUPLES

A couple of streets from the eerily beautiful 19th-century graveyard Green-Wood Cemetery is Industry City, a historic warehouse developed by the team behind the fashionable food hall Chelsea Market. Lauren Beebe says: "This huge complex represents Brooklyn's entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, making it a must-visit. Guests can see where things are made, then shop, eat great food and imbibe from its brewery, distillery or sake producers. Visiting is an opportunity to support local businesses and take part in workshops or tastings that offer a deeper connection to the city's culture."

“
**FROM THE STATUE
OF LIBERTY TO
SUMMIT ONE
VANDERBILT, NEW
YORK IS SURE TO
IMPRESS EVERYONE**

TEENAGERS

Teens can be hard to please on holiday but most seem to love Summit One Vanderbilt judging by the sky-high venue's reputation as NYC's number one selfie hotspot. Flanked by the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Centre, this breathtaking skyscraper – which opened in 2020 – features an external glass-bottomed lift and an observation deck with a walk-on glass platform suspended 335m above the city streets. But that's not all. Guests can expect interactive digital screens, mind-bending mirrored halls that appear to go on for ever and playful installations by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.

How to travel responsibly

Visitors can hop on the subway or – better still – walk or cycle and explore unexpected gems such as Brooklyn Bridge Park, which has a panorama of the Manhattan skyline, the bridge itself and a restored 1920s carousel.

Local tips



"In the past few years a new wave of independent shops has opened in Brooklyn. Lagoon New York is a great example. It's home to the owners' studios so you can shop for one-of-a-kind garments, watch them being made and meet the creators."

AMALYA MEIRA
Sustainable fashion
and textile designer



"Don't limit yourself to Midtown! Tick off Times Square, then head to SoHo and the West Village. For the best pizza, visit Rubirosa on Mulberry Street, while Porto Rico Importing Co on Bleeker Street has the best coffee."

BEN SLADE
Investment sales professional

Trip Planner

Viking

12-night Eastern Seaboard Explorer cruise aboard *Viking Mars*, from Montreal to New York City via Quebec City, Halifax and Boston, departs on 12 September 2024, from £6,190pp including flights.
vikingcruises.co.uk

Norwegian Cruise Line

Five-day New York to Bermuda cruise aboard *Norwegian Escape*, starts and ends in the heart of the Big Apple. Sails 23 March 2025, oceanview rooms from £763pp excluding flights.
ncl.com



Mistletoe & Rhine

Germany's picture-perfect waterway comes to life during Christmas. **Sarah Holt** reveals why now's the perfect time to get your clients on board

They say that Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year, but the plate-spinning mayhem that surrounds the holiday season often gets in the way of all the fun. However, what if there was a way to enjoy all your favourite Yuletide traditions without lifting a finger?

This is precisely why Christmas river cruises are becoming an increasingly tempting proposition for UK travellers. Rather than spending the day assuaging family tensions or slaving away in the kitchen all day, instead guests can put

their feet up while watching some of the most painterly regions of Europe drift by. Think festive lights reflecting off of peaceful waterways, inviting Christmas markets scented with cinnamon and mulled wine, and snow flurries along the river banks.

The Rhine is especially memorable at Christmas and cruise lines are already reporting strong demand for 2024 and beyond. "Christmas markets are the highlight of Europe's winter calendar, so a Rhine river journey during this period is a great way to enjoy the festivities," says Neil Barclay, head of sales at Viking.

"Across all seasons we have seen strong demand for the Rhine, including our Christmas itineraries which are very popular among our guests and usually get booked up far in advance. We have even opened bookings into 2026 to meet this strong demand."

No two Rhine Christmas cruises are the same. Embarkation points range from Cologne, which is near to the centre of the Rhine, to major cities such as Amsterdam and Basel. Viking's Christmas on the Rhine and Moselle itinerary even begins in Paris, giving customers the chance to do a bit of



SCAN

Get the lowdown on the latest ships and itineraries to sail the Rhine in 2024

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A stroll through Strasbourg will make you feel festive; Germany's Christmas markets are renowned; enjoy visiting lesser-known locales such as Heidelberg

“River cruise lines pull out all the stops come Christmas... gala dinners, seasonal entertainment and even gifts for guests”

Christmas shopping ahead of a land transfer to Trier in Germany, where the cruise begins.

Durations, meanwhile, stretch from two to 12 nights, and itineraries mix and match ports of call, with Cologne, Koblenz and Rüdesheim featuring most commonly alongside a clutch of other beguiling German, French and Swiss towns. These range from the better-known spots of Strasbourg and Frankfurt to more off-radar locales such as Heidelberg, which is home to one of Europe's longest shopping streets.

CHRISTMASTIME ONBOARD

During the Christmas period, river cruise ships are decorated with trees, lights and other yuletide trimmings. Most lines also put on festive entertainment throughout December. Riviera Travel, for example, offers activities like stollen tasting and carol singing. Viking, meanwhile, depending on the itinerary, hosts events such as gingerbread making demonstrations and Christmas song singalongs with the crew.

“Christmas on the Rhine is pure magic” says Brooke Dunn, relationship executive at Amadeus River Cruises. “The quaint villages, illuminated castles and snow-dusted landscapes create the perfect backdrop for the festive season and there's always a warm camaraderie amongst our guests.”

CELEBRATING THE BIG DAY

River cruise lines pull out all the stops come Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, putting on gala dinners, seasonal entertainment and mulled wine receptions, and even give gifts to guests, with festivities often lasting until New Year's Eve. This Christmas,

A-Rosa's brand new *A-Rosa Alea* and *A-Rosa Clea* ships will offer three new itineraries, including the five-night Rhine Christmas Frankfurt itinerary, departing Cologne on 23 December, which will place passengers in the German city on 24 and 25 December, before spiriting them on to Mainz later that day.

“Being on a ship over Christmas offers the perfect combination of relaxation, delicious drinking and dining and visits to spectacular destinations,” says Emma Rodgers, regional sales manager at A-Rosa River Cruises. “And just think – someone else is doing the cooking and the washing up!”

A-Rosa guests can look forward to extravagant gala buffets on 24 and 25 December with either goose or duck, bespoke festive treats for afternoon tea, special musical performances on Christmas Day and more.

CroisiEurope, meanwhile, will be laying on four itineraries over the Christmas holiday, including the four-night Rhineland and Dutch Christmas cruise, which will sail from Strasbourg to Amsterdam on 23 December calling in at Cologne, where passengers have the opportunity to attend a mass if they wish.

John Fair, UK sales director for CroisiEurope, explains: “Christmas Day onboard the ships allows you to relax, be pampered by great service and to enjoy sumptuous meals all cooked and served by the great team onboard. No stress, no time constraints and all at a leisurely pace.”

Amadeus's seven-day Christmas Cruise on the Rhine will also sail over the big day. Travelling round-trip from Cologne, the itinerary will drop by Koblenz, Speyer, Strasbourg and Mainz and will include activities like dressing the Christmas tree before finishing with a glamorous yuletide party.





ABOVE Cologne's historic cathedral forms an awe-inspiring backdrop for its much-loved, multi-faceted Christmas market

FOUR OF THE BEST

With the onboard festivities sorted, here's a taste of what awaits in some of the Rhine's postcard-perfect locations.

Cologne

More than 160 stalls encircle Cologne's Unesco-protected cathedral at Christmas as part of the city's annual Market of Hearts. Nativity scenes line the streets, a ferris wheel spins at the Chocolate Museum, and the Cologne Christmas Circus puts on a show of theatre comedy and opera in fairy-lit big top near the Zoobrücke Bridge. The Christmas Market Express mini-train, meanwhile, makes it easy to flit between seasonal sights.

Rüdesheim

The journey to Rüdesheim is as memorable as a visit to the city itself. Ships take passengers through the Middle

Rhine Valley, where the banks of the river boast more than 40 castles dating from the 12th to the 14th century. In Rüdesheim itself, the Christmas market takes place in the often snowy Old Town and stall holders serve up warming Rüdesheimer coffees (made with a shot of coffee and a quiff of cream) alongside the traditional mulled wine.

Koblenz

Koblenz's Christmas market is spread across seven squares of the city's Old Town and in Jesuitenplatz the windows of the baroque town hall act as an oversized advent calendar. Between 15 November 2024 and 16 January 2025, the town's Ehrenbreitstein Fortress will also host its annual Christmas Garden Experience, with festive light trails, sound installations, an ice skating rink and seasonal food stalls.

Selling tips

1 Explain to clients that Christmas market towns aren't always located near international airports, so cruising is often the most convenient way of visiting them.

2 Sell to foodies by revealing how Rhine cruise passengers can try authentic versions of festive fare such as glühwein and stollen on each day during a Christmas river cruise.

3 Be sure to tell clients about the festive atmosphere onboard and all the activities, events and workshops available for them to get involved in.

Strasbourg

Nicknamed The Capital of Christmas, Strasbourg is home to multiple festive markets, an advent village and one of the tallest decorated natural Christmas trees in Europe, standing 30 metres tall. The city's streets, and Rue des Orfèvres in particular, are festooned with Christmas lights, while local artisans serve up traditional Alsatian Christmas treats like Zimmetsternle – cinnamon-flavoured biscuit stars. 🍪

Itineraries

AmaWaterways

Seven-night Christmas Markets on the Rhine cruise from Amsterdam to Basel on *AmaSiena* is priced from £2,724pp, departing 19 December 2024.

amawaterways.co.uk

Viking

Seven-night Christmas on the Rhine, sailing from Basel to Amsterdam on *Viking Magni* is priced from £2,895pp, departing 15 December 2024.

vikingrivercruises.co.uk

CroisiEurope

Three-night Christmas on the Romantic Rhine, sailing round trip from Strasbourg on *MS Leonardo da Vinci*, from £765pp, departing 23 December 2024.

croisieurope.co.uk



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My Mediterranean

Brimming with timeless beauty, rich heritage and beaches that dazzle, Europe's 'great sea' never fails to captivate. **Gilly Pickup** quizzes agents on the destinations they hold close to their heart



SCAN

Read our ultimate
destination guide to
the Mediterranean

Encompassing three different continents, 22 nations, and 212 of Unesco's 754 World Heritage sites, the Mediterranean has held the gold standard of exploration for centuries.

It's a treasure trove of timeless natural beauty, awe-inspiring cities and beatific beaches that continuously keeps travellers coming back for more, whether it's to heavy hitters like Cannes and Barcelona in the west or the enchanting Balkan and Italian peninsulas further east. So much so that some 35 per cent of British and Irish cruisegoers opted for a holiday in the region in 2023, according to recent Clia data.

Despite welcoming tens of millions of passengers every year, there are a few alluring enclaves that are still undiscovered by most cruisegoers. *Cruise Trade News* speaks to three experts to find out their favourite Mediterranean hotspots that prove there's still plenty left to explore across this mighty ocean destination.

"EVERY TIME I VISIT SARDINIA I FIND SOMETHING NEW TO EXPLORE"

Boasting 2,000km of sugar-white beaches and breathtaking coastline, as well as an imposing mountain interior that spills down into beautiful medieval citadels, Italy's second-largest island offers plenty for visitors to get stuck into. For Tony Andrews, managing director of cruise.co.uk, it's the island's unique mix of culture and natural beauty that stands out most, where a feast of yearly festivals, carnivals and religious processions give guests plenty of opportunity to experience a piece of the true Sardinia.

"Every time I visit Sardinia I find something new to explore," he says. "One of my favourite places is the Capo Caccia viewpoint which offers breathtaking views of the Mediterranean Sea. It's close to Alghero, the picturesque coastal town on Sardinia's northwest coast, a perfect blend of Catalan influence and Italian charm. I also like

LEFT Enjoy the coastal charms of Montenegro's Bay of Kotor set against a backdrop of epic mountain scenery



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Sardinia offers a unique mix of culture and natural beauty: there's lots to explore in the medieval city of Kotor, Montenegro; In Sardinia, you can descend a stairway to Neptune's Grotto or take a boat there; enjoy an evening stroll in the streets of Cagliari, Sardinia

With its historical hotspots, stunning scenery and remarkable restaurants, the Mediterranean has a host of delights

to stroll along the medieval walls and cobblestone streets of the old town en route to the Cathedral of Santa Maria.”

For a one-of-a-kind experience, he recommends a boat tour to Neptune's Grotto, only 24km from Alghero. This is one of Italy's largest marine caves, named after the god of the sea and adorned with stalactites and stalagmites. Alternatively, he suggests that visitors take an excursion to the La Maddalena Archipelago, located off the island's north east coast.

My cruise suggestion:

Andrews recommends the seven-night Mediterranean round trip cruise from Cannes on *MSC Musica*, calling at Barcelona, Ibiza, Cagliari, Civitavecchia (Rome), Genoa. Departure date 2 October 2024, with prices from £666pp. cruise.co.uk

“IT'S ALMOST LIKE SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF A FAIRYTALE”

Dave Mills, chief commercial officer at Iglu Cruise opts for “extraordinary” Kotor, an Eastern Mediterranean coastal city in Montenegro. He says that as awareness for the town's allure grows, Iglu Cruise has noted a small but steady increase in demand for itineraries to the medieval coastal region.

“As you sail into Kotor, which lies at the end of a fjord-like inlet, the beauty blows you away. It's almost like something straight out of a fairytale.” To avoid missing this experience, he recommends being out on deck prior to arriving or just after departing. “After stepping through the Sea Gate or Main Gate as you reach the shore, it is easy to explore the Old Town with its quirky shops, cafés and medieval architecture.”

Kotor's must-see attractions include the St Tryphon's Cathedral with its Romanesque stone pillars and series of vaulted roofs, and the hiking trail known as the ‘Ladder of Kotor’, where Mills describes the views from the top as “unmissable”. For those wanting to soak up the region's picturesque beach towns, Mills recommends an excursion to the Blue Caves, advising either boat taxi from Igalo Beach or booking a private Kotor boat tour.

And for guests eager to sample the local cuisine, Mills says to head straight to Cesarica in the Old Town for freshly caught seafood while the welcoming family-run restaurant Konoba Scala Santa features authentic Montenegrin fare.

My cruise suggestion:

Mills recommends the 12-night Grand Mediterranean cruise from Rome on *Island Princess*, calling into Palermo (Sicily) and Valletta (Malta). Departure date 13 August 2024, with prices from £1,529pp. Mills suggests getting up early on day nine to experience the ship's arrival into Kotor. iglucruise.com



"WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE MED, IT HAS TO BE SLOVENIA"

From Kotor in Montenegro to Koper in Slovenia, which gets the thumbs up from Lynne Checkett, regional cruise expert at Marella Cruises. Koper, situated along the northern reaches of Slovenia's shores not too far from the Italian city of Trieste, delights travellers with its medieval centre, which is home to Venetian palaces and 16th-century churches. "When thinking about the Mediterranean, it's Slovenia and the stunning coastal city of Koper which spring to my mind," says Checkett. "A ten-minute stroll takes you from the port to the historical hotspots and for

those who are less mobile, there are handy lifts across the road from the port that take you into the city."

She says the main sights are in and around Tito Square, the jewel in Koper's crown, named after Josip Tito, leader of the former Yugoslavia. This square is where to see the 15th-century Praetorian Palace, formerly the seat of the Venetian Grand Council which combines Gothic and Renaissance styles. It's also worth visiting Koper Cathedral and the 177-foot high City Bell Tower, granted it's a leg wrenching climb to the top, but worthwhile for the magnificent views when you get there. Word of warning: be prepared for the bells to ring loudly as you ascend the steps. "This happens frequently!" says Checkett.

Opposite the Praetorian Palace, meanwhile, is another palace called the Loggia which these days has a 'coffee boutique' on the ground floor. It's a relaxing place to take a break and simply do some people watching.

My cruise suggestion:

Checkett recommends the seven-night Discover Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro round trip cruise from Corfu Town on *Marella Explorer*, calling at Ancona (Italy), Koper, Split and Dubrovnik (Slovenia). Departure date 19 July 2024, with prices from £1,369pp based on two sharing inside cabin, all-inclusive basis. tui.co.uk/cruise 

What's new on the Med?

1 Explora Journeys' new Destination Experiences for 2024 include the seven-night Journey of Riviera Reveries and Italian Icons on *Explora II* where guests can visit Lucca by bike and picnic on the ramparts. Departing 26 August, prices start from £3,825pp, sailing from Barcelona to Civitavecchia (Rome)

2 Celebrity Cruises' latest Edge Series ship, *Celebrity Ascent*, arrived in Europe for her debut summer season on 27 April. *Ascent* will offer Med cruises including the seven-night Greece, Turkey & Italy cruise departing 20 July from Athens, calling at Santorini, Ephesus, Mykonos and Naples. Prices start from £848pp.

3 Virgin Voyages' new Med itineraries include the 11-night Barcelona to Civitavecchia cruise on *Scarlet Lady* departing 3 November, with prices from £2,702pp. The itinerary will call at Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Toulon, Cagliari and Ajaccio (Corsica).

4 Swan Hellenic's 10-night Contrasts of Mediterranean Culture cruise on *SH Diana* departs 22 August 2025 from Palermo (Sicily) to Dubrovnik, Split, Hvar and Rovinj, finally mooring in Venice. Prices start from £5,280pp.

5 Cunard's new ship *Queen Anne* has a 14-night Western Mediterranean cruise departing 28 July, price from £1,749pp. Round trip sailing Southampton, calling at Cadiz, Gibraltar, Civitavecchia (for tours to Rome).



Barbados





Bajan **BEAUTY**

In a region of incredible islands, Barbados still stands out from the crowd. Guests should visit for its dazzling beaches, superb seas, rich history and easy access to the wider Caribbean, says **Sarah Baxter**

If countries had jobs, Barbados would be a super model. Striking a seductive pose in the Lesser Antilles, this easternmost Caribbean island is seriously good-looking. Some of the world's best beaches are found here – fantastic stretches of brilliant-white sand, lapped by turquoise waters and tickled by swaying palm trees.

But Barbados is so much more than a pretty face. It's an island of surprises with a universal appeal. A-listers, authors, sun-bathers, history buffs, families and fun-seekers will all find something to pique their interest here. Whether your customers want laidback living, Unesco world heritage sites, ziplining thrills, turtle encounters or a glass of the world's oldest rum, they've come to the right place.

For a start, Barbados has a fascinating history. First inhabited by Amerindians around 3,600 years ago, then home to indigenous Arawak and Kalinago peoples, it was discovered by the Spanish and Portuguese in the 16th century. The British arrived in 1625 and the island remained in their hands rather than being passed back and forth between different European overlords. This legacy can be seen most clearly in the historic heart of capital Bridgetown, which is listed by Unesco for its exemplary colonial architecture, built between the



Selling tips

1 Bajan cuisine is a revelation. Flying fish and cou cou is Barbados' national dish; other favourites include rice and peas, and souse, a pickled pork broth served chilled. Clients can wash it all down with a tot of Mount Gay rum.

2 The blue sea, deep-red hibiscus, iridescent green hummingbirds and bright orange rum punch mean Barbados is a rainbow of a destination to shoot for budding photographers.

3 Barbados has historic sites aplenty if you want to visit them, but you can simply spend your time lounging on beaches as soft as icing sugar.

“Barbados is incredibly diverse... the east coast is wild and ruggedly beautiful, the west is pure glamour”

17th and 19th centuries. Here, clients can take a walking tour with a guide or stroll around old garrison buildings – including the only place outside the USA in which George Washington ever lived.

Barbados gained independence in 1966, but nonetheless retains some distinctly British traditions. Cars drive on the left-hand side, towns have names such as Brighton and Dover, and everyone's mad for cricket. There's nothing more electrifying than catching a match at Kensington Oval, where stumps have been set up since 1882.

DIVE IN

The island also has a distinctive menu, says Local chef Ashley Thorpe. “Barbados is the culinary capital of the Caribbean. You can really experience Bajan culture through its food.” Tasting the island's array of spices, tropical fruit, feisty scotch bonnet peppers, oh-so-fresh fish and other home-grown ingredients – cooked up by grandmas in kitchens and a new wave of talented chefs – is the best way to understand what makes Bajans tick. Potential shore excursions include guided Bajan food

walks with Lickrish Food Tours and intoxicating day trips to Mount Gay Rum Distillery; established in 1703, it's the world's oldest commercial rum company.

Scenically, Barbados is one of the Caribbean's most diverse isles. The east coast, which faces the full force of the Atlantic Ocean, is wild and ruggedly beautiful, scattered with rocks eroded by waves and blessed with great surf, especially around the laid back town of Bathsheba. The west is pure glamour, with exquisite sands and high-end resorts. This is where guests might spot a celeb or two sashaying along the shore.

The south, a little less elite, has super sands and seas too. From Carlisle Bay visitors can snorkel or dive with a wealth of marine life. Andre Miller, a Bajan marine biologist who owns the dive shop

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Iridescent hummingbirds, just one of the many wonders of nature on display; even the local buildings add a splash of colour to the island; guests can sample genuine Bajan rum; St Nicholas Abbey is a historical haven for visitors



Barbados Blue, says: “The Caribbean is such a good place to learn to dive; our reefs are close to shore, we have 365 days a year of warm, clear water, and we can essentially guarantee you’ll see turtles on our morning dives.”

Dover and Miami are a little further around the coast. Here guests can paddle in calm waters, find shade under casuarina trees and order fish cakes and rum punch from Mr Delicious Snack Bar. You’ll also find the most happening nightlife in this area, not least Oistins Fish Fry. A Bajan institution, it’s held every Friday night: flying fish, tuna and mahi-mahi are served up with sides like macaroni pie and rice and peas from

simple stalls to a backbeat of live steel pan, calypso and reggae tunes.

In contrast, the island’s north and interior are calm and quiet. Here your clients will find St Nicholas Abbey, a Jacobean house which is open to visitors. The working estate and rum distillery has its own steam railway, as well as Hunte’s Garden, which brims with plants such as the spiky blue lotus, pride of Barbados and endemic buttercup yellow broom weed. With its rolling hills, old sugar plantations and botanically rich ravines, the whole area feels like a step back in time. Life here is incredibly lush and wonderfully slow – unless visitors don’t want it to be. There are opportunities to delve into caves, zipline over gulleys in Harrison’s Cave Eco-Adventure Park and hike up Mount Hillaby, Barbados’ tallest peak.

Barbados isn’t only fun to explore. Easy to reach by air, it makes a great start or end point for cruises around the wider southern Caribbean. From here your customers can sail in and around the surrounding Antilles – to isles such as St Lucia, Dominica and St Kitts & Nevis – to get an even richer taste of this patch of paradise. ●



Get on board

Explora Journeys offers a seven-night Caribbean itinerary beginning in Bridgetown before sailing to Miami, with guests able to kick off their voyage by discovering the island’s fascinating history and architecture. Departs 15 November 2024, from £3,420pp. explorajourneys.com

Royal Caribbean International’s seven-night Southern Caribbean cruise aboard *Rhapsody of the Seas*, returning from Puerto Rico, via the US Virgin Islands, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia and Barbados, departs monthly between from June 2024 onwards, from £532pp. royalcaribbean.com





Here comes the sun

Will Payne soaks up life on board Princess Cruises' new Sphere class vessel during a kaleidoscopic voyage from Barcelona to Civitavecchia

For someone with a crippling fear of heights, you'd think climbing a building famed for its near four-degree slant would be out of the question. "Take time when you walk, it may feel like the structure is about to fall over, so be careful", my tour guide Marie jokes as I apprehensively take the first of 251 steps to the summit of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Despite feeling overcome with anxiety on the way up, the view makes the ordeal worthwhile. I scan across the terracotta roofs of Tuscan houses toward the undulating Mount Pisano and as birds

serenade the crowd below from the tower's peak, I realise this is what being in 'holiday mode' truly feels like.

After taking in the view for a few minutes, I decide I've had my fill and I make the gradual descent to regroup with Marie at which point my nerves start to shed. Walking back to the coach through the marble-clad Piazza del Duomo, the sound of a choir whistles past my ears while the sweet, nutty aroma of freshly baked cannoli jolts my appetite back to life.

The Climb the Leaning Tower excursion – which costs \$164.95 and includes a tour of the Piazza – is one of many shoreside tour options I am lucky

enough to experience during my five-day sailing on board Princess Cruises' newest vessel *Sun Princess*.

ALL ABOARD

The fervour around Princess' inaugural Sphere class ship has been widespread. As the line's first LNG-powered vessel, it hosts 4,300 guests across 2,150 cabins and features no fewer than 29 restaurants. Having set sail from Barcelona three days prior, I'm eager to discover which demographic would be the perfect fit for a holiday onboard.

As soon as I arrive I'm greeted by the smiling faces of *Sun Princess*' 1,600-strong crew before being taken



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT *Sun Princess* launched in February 2024; visit the Basilique in Marseille; Deluxe Balcony Suites come with a range of amenities

“For someone with a fear of heights, you’d think climbing a building famed for its slant would be out of the question”

through to The Piazza, a three-deck atrium which houses Alfredo’s Pizzeria and the International Café, as well as Kai Sushi and piano bar Crooners. Elegant interiors and sleek paneling are interwoven with modern technology, with LED screens ensuring passengers don’t get lost amongst the ship’s 21 passenger decks.

Having checked into my Deluxe Balcony Suite – which comes with a queen-sized bed and floor-to-ceiling windows, a refrigerator, a bathroom with a shower and a spacious wardrobe – I decide not to waste any time in

sampling the room service. Within 15 minutes my club sandwich and fries are delivered to my door by a friendly crewmate and as soon as the plate’s clean, I decide to take a stroll around my new home for the next few days.

Around each corner I discover a new neighbourhood. Park19, the top deck waterpark, is ideal for younger passengers, offering rope courses, climbing walls and the Rollglider, which zooms passengers around the perimeter of the top deck while suspended in a harness. Good Spirits at Sea, meanwhile, will entice cocktail enthusiasts, where they can enjoy a selection of inventive creations alongside interactive mixology demonstrations.

Over on deck nine there’s The Catch by Rudi, a must-visit for seafood lovers, where the smell of fresh lobster bisque awakens my appetite again. Fortunately, I arrive just in time for dinner and I’m soon gorging on spicy prawns followed by a “sea and shore” surf-n-turf comprised of filet mignon and lobster tail, which I enjoy with a glass of wine selected by the restaurant’s sommelier. Scanning the dessert menu, I spot a strawberry pavlova with Chantilly cream

Expert take

We talk to the agent ambassadors of *Sun Princess* to find out their favourite features of the vessel

Daniel Norris, World Travel Holdings (WTH)

“The Piazza is by far the best part of a ship I have ever been on. It’s beautiful and spacious, and can be used not only as a meeting point, but also a great space for entertainment.”

Jamie Doherty, Iglu

“My favourite thing about *Sun Princess* is how spacious the ship is, and the layout of all the bars, restaurants and entertainment venues is perfect. The main dining venues are located towards the rear of the ship, with the eatery close as well.”

Criona Buggie, Travel Counsellors Ireland

“*Sun Princess* is a stunning ship and I love that depending on the time of day or night, there is always life at the heart of the vessel, from early morning Zumba classes to the relaxed atmosphere during the day.”

that looks too good to turn down, which I devour before heading over to The Dome – a spherical entertainment venue at the bow of the vessel. They have a sneak preview of *Sun Princess*’ headline production, Cirque Eloize’s *Art Beat* show and so I excitedly settle in for an evening of entertainment.

The hairs on my arms stand on end – and not for the first time on this trip – as an acrobat soars around the venue on a trapeze wire against an LED backdrop of splattering colours. Not long after the electrifying performance reaches





its climax, I'm off to bed to get an early night so I can catch tomorrow's sunrise over Le Garlaban hill as we sail into our second stop, Marseille.

LAND AHOY

The rest of my time onboard is spent sailing around the Mediterranean at a blissful pace, with nights at sea interspersed with visits to some of Europe's most exquisite coastal destinations. In Marseille, I enjoy breakfast in a streetside café, where I watch fishermen haul the day's catch from their boats directly to their market stalls, while sipping a warm espresso with a freshly baked croissant. In Barcelona, I stroll along Las Ramblas' tree-lined promenades to La Sagrada Familia and watch workers tinkering away at the final elements of Gaudi's masterpiece.

After long, eventful days exploring each different port city, it's nice to return to the ship knowing there's still plenty to get stuck into back onboard, whether it's playing cards at the line's largest casino, or sampling its five entertainment venues and eateries. One dinner option is The Butcher's Block by Dario, where cuts have been curated by Italy's steak master Dario Cecchini. For a \$45 cover charge, guests can enjoy a range of delicate sirloins and rib eyes which are sliced tableside while chefs explain Dario's unique butchery process.

Being the line's first LNG-powered vessel, sustainability is a vital cog in its

day-to-day operations. Biodigesters, which turn left over food into marine sustenance have been installed to help the ship maintain waste management efficiency. Mind you, during a lunch at Umai Teppanyaki, there isn't much food left to go to waste. Fresh fish, chicken and beef are fried in front of me while expert chefs perform mind-boggling tricks with their ingredients.

ENCHANTING EXPERIENCES

Showmanship is another theme which emanates throughout the vessel. In

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The Sanctuary is a secluded adults-only space; Umai Teppanyaki is the perfect blend of showmanship and gourmet dining

Spellbound, the world of magic is paired with the art of mixology to create a Victorian-inspired interactive experience. Guests will find the venue hidden behind a non-descript door where they can enjoy shows from magicians in themed rooms while sipping theatrical cocktails.

Elsewhere, the Princess Arena plays host to three new shows, including *Vallora*, *A Pirate Quest*; *Stage Struck*; and *Viva La Musica*, as well as returning favourite *Fiera!*. The configurable arena supports shows in the round in a 270-degree keyhole configuration, allowing great views from every seat.

"It's an engineering marvel which allows us to create awe-inspiring entertainment, offering guests a completely different experience every night," says Denise Saviss, the line's vice president of entertainment experience.

As the sun spills down the hills of Civitavecchia, I sit on my balcony and look back at my time onboard *Sun Princess*, concluding that families, grandparents and even solo travellers can all have a memorable time on this ship. As well as adding a few notches to my belt, this voyage has also helped me take a step towards conquering one of my biggest fears, though the next time I decide to tackle a great height, I think I'll opt for one that's more structurally sound. 📍

Fast facts

4,300
guests

2,150
cabins

1,150
crew

29
restaurants





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The CLIA View

Andy Harmer OBE on how to let the destination do the work when selling to new-to-cruise clients

Spring is always an exciting time of year for the CLIA community, as our annual conference will shortly be taking place in Southampton from 23-25 May.

Each conference has its own focus and this year, destinations will be in the spotlight, via the theme of #DiscoverMore. During the event, which is the largest annual trade event of its kind in Europe, more than 800 delegates



will have the chance to get the latest industry updates, sales tips and insight from expert speakers, panellists and trade fair representatives.

The wealth of destinations on offer to passengers has always been central to the benefits of taking a cruise. Travellers only need to unpack once when on a holiday at sea and can access landmark locations and hidden gems across the likes of the Mediterranean, northern Europe, the Caribbean and Asia with ease.

That's why destinations themselves are a vital ingredient when it comes to tempting new-to-cruise customers to book their first holiday at sea. Take Alaska, the Galápagos Islands and

Asia, for example – all offer a wealth of discovery via cruise ship. Indeed, my first cruise was to Alaska where the lure of the destination was the driver for me to step onboard for the first time, and to become a firm cruise advocate.

With such a wide variety of places to explore, the trade can feel confident to recommend a cruise regardless of what their customers are looking for. This, combined with the incredible service and offerings onboard, makes an escape at sea hard to beat.

We've also enhanced our training materials to ensure the trade are covered for all the key ports of calls. The CLIA website contains a wide range of tailored materials to suit every agent, from factsheets and training modules to specialist podcasts and videos.

So if you're joining us at the CLIA Conference, we can't wait to welcome you and further spread the word. If you're watching remotely, keep an eye on our social channels for all the destination information you need to further boost your cruise sales. 📍

LEFT As an up-and-coming cruise destination, Porto offers great hospitality and cuisine



THREE NEW DESTINATIONS TO LOOK OUT FOR

The Kimberley

I was overwhelmed by my first expedition cruise experience, as we discovered areas of incredible natural beauty. You can only truly discover the Kimberley via cruise ship and it should be on everyone's bucket list!

Victoria, British Columbia

This was one of the many highlights on my wider trip to Alaska, with areas of such natural beauty and history all around us. We loved visiting The Butchart Gardens and relaxing onboard where we could admire the vista around us.

Porto

The city is gem of a cruise destination, offering great hospitality and wonderful cuisine. It has long been a favourite of mine, and I was delighted to be able to showcase the city at a CLIA event in autumn 2023.



Boost your knowledge of the latest ship launches, itineraries and travel trends by signing up to our 2024 Cruise Challenge roadshow



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