

ISSUE 143 • MAY/JUNE 2026

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INTERVIEW CRYSTAL'S LUKE SMITH, P32 • **PORT GUIDE** SYDNEY IN FOCUS, P62



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WELCOME...

TO THE MAY/JUNE ISSUE



With the days growing longer and the first real hints of the sun's rays settling in, there's a renewed sense of anticipation in the air.

Summer is just around the corner, and with it the peak travel season, a time when the cruise industry truly comes into its own. To kickstart this exciting period, we're delighted to bring you this special edition of *Cruise Trade News*, where we've partnered with ultra-luxury cruise line Crystal to explore what's to come for the brand. I'll let my co-editor and VP of trade sales UK & EMEA, Luke Smith, tell you more.

Elsewhere, we investigate whether sustainability is a key driving force behind consumers' booking decisions (p. 43) and review Norwegian Cruise Line's second Prima Plus class ship, *Norwegian Luna* (p. 51). On page 28, you'll find our new Trade Toolkit feature, which offers a roundup of the headlines and products from outside of the cruise industry you need to know about. Head to your Expedition Special, meanwhile, for a deep dive into the adventure sector and to find out why customers are turning to cruise to explore now more than ever.

Happy reading,

Will Payne
Editor

On the cover: Crystal



At Crystal, we are proud to partner with *Cruise Trade News* for this special edition, created with one clear purpose in mind: to bring our brand closer to the travel trade community that sits at the heart of our success.

This is an opportunity to showcase the Crystal of today. A brand with a renewed sense of energy, clarity and ambition, grounded in what has always set us apart – exceptional service, space and experiences at sea. Throughout these pages, we highlight not only the strength of our product, but the exciting developments shaping our future, from fleet investment to growing global partnerships, including the exciting arrival of *Crystal Grace*.

Just as importantly, this edition is a chance to shine a light on the people behind the brand. Our team brings passion, care and commitment to everything we do. The travel trade has always been central to our story, and this takeover is our way of saying thank you, while sharing a clearer sense of who we are, what we stand for and where we are heading next. We are just getting started.

Enjoy,

Luke Smith
Vice president, trade sales UK and EMEA, Crystal

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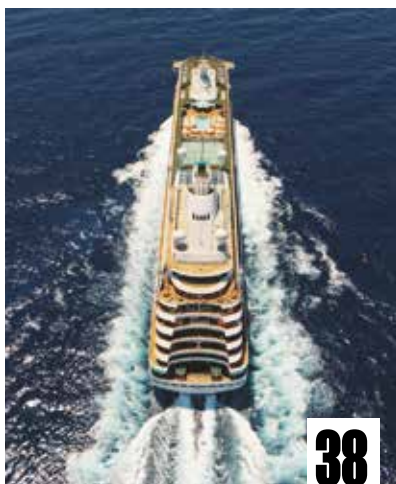
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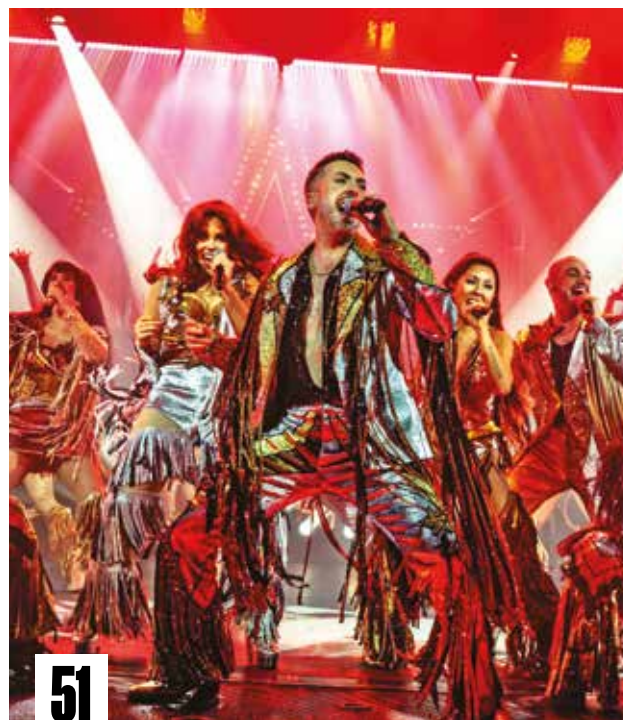
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QUESTION TIME

Your guide to converting anti-cruisers

Navigator



Balkan bliss

► Cruise is “paramount” to the development of the travel industry in southeast Europe and the Balkans, says the director of travel trade event, New Deal Europe. Tine Murn said the event, which brought together more than 200 travel executives focused on southeast Europe and the Balkans in April, had an additional focus on cruise this year.

“The importance of pre- and post-cruise tours are something that both buyers and suppliers are highlighting as being paramount to the development of the industry, placing previously undiscovered regions onto the global stage,” he said. *Cruise Trade News* editor Will Payne moderated a panel titled ‘The Cruise Conundrum’ which explored evolving trends and the growing role of regional destinations in both river and ocean itineraries.



Continued overleaf



“Clients are looking for something more immersive

locals, eat the food and drink the wine,” she said. “The value is in pre- and post-cruise stays when people can stay longer.”

Robin Griffiths, national partnerships manager at APT Travel Group, said value is now “driving the growth” APT is seeing as customers look for more inclusions out of a holiday. “Customers want more space on board, more choice, finer dining, wine lists and more immersive experiences,” he said. “But, crucially, they want to feel that sense of reassurance and being looked after.”

Stefan Mototolea, general manager at Eastern European Experience, said additional ships could present new opportunities for lesser-visited destinations, while Iva Bencun, director at Zadar City Tourism Board, encouraged cruise lines to work with destinations to alleviate overcrowding.

The panel found experiential travel, inclusions and value for money continue to be the key factors customers consider when they are booking a holiday. Jayne Lambert, national key account manager UK for the Globus family of brands, including Avalon Waterways, explained the river cruise line has seen a significant increase in demand for its active and discovery cruises as customers seek a deeper dive into their destination.

“We are seeing growing demand for our active and discovery

cruises where clients are looking for something more immersive, like visiting and eating with local people,” she said.

Lambert was joined by Angie Brandt, chief executive of US agency Both Worlds Travel, who said she has seen a growth in demand from her customers for added pre- or post-cruise stays to further immerse themselves in a destination. “People want to go off the beaten path, hear the history, know what has driven change in the destination, talk to the

IN NUMBERS

68%

of cruisers would book again if their holiday included a pre- or post-stay

46%

of cruisers believe the industry contributes more to overtourism than other holidays

56

new ships currently set to launch by 2036

Data from Cruise Trade News and CLIA



MSC'S TRADE COMMITMENT

➤ MSC Cruises has upped its investment in the UK trade as it bolsters its UK sales team and launches a ship visit programme with more than 1,000 places.

Phoebe Thompson has joined the line from Hays Travel, taking on the role of national account manager, while Daniel Short has been promoted to regional and strategic account manager, with the goal of driving growth and developing key trade partnerships. A new field sales and business development manager

will also join the line in June, growing the team to 21 people.

Alyshia Bartlett, head of UK sales at MSC Cruises, said: “This expansion of the team will strengthen the support we provide to our trade partners as we continue to grow our business in the UK.”

Additionally, the line will operate seven UK ship visits between May and October this year across Southampton, Belfast, Greenock and Invergoron on *MSC Virtuosa* and *MSC Preziosa*.



SCAN
to read more about VIVA
Cruises' new UK and Ireland
trade sales team

SPOTLIGHT

Swan Hellenic



Swan Hellenic has promoted Mario Bounas to chief commercial officer and Luke Clarke to senior sales director UK, Ireland, Africa and India. Bounas, who joined the line in January 2020 as vice president of global marketing, was promoted to general manager UK and Ireland in September 2022. Clarke, meanwhile, has been with the company as sales director for the past three years.

The line said the move comes after its UK-based team achieved 347 per cent year-on-year growth year-to-date. As a result, Swan Hellenic has expanded its UK presence with three new recruits.

Dan Anders, who has previously held roles with HX and Silversea, will be supporting Clarke as business development executive and Goran Subasic is joining the reservations team from Silversea. Kim Daplyn has been promoted to guest relations director following two years with the brand.

The line has also confirmed a series of promotions and new appointments across its North America, Monaco and Arabian Gulf teams.

“The move comes after the line’s UK-based team achieved 347% year-on-year growth

BOUNCING BACK

› Celebrity Cruises has hailed “record-breaking” trade engagement as booking levels “bounced back” following a dip in consumer confidence after the outbreak of the war in Iran.

Claire Stirrup, managing director for the UK and EMEA, told *Cruise Trade News* demand is returning as the trade reports strong bookings for 2026 and 2027. “Customer demand is coming back,” she said. “Trade partners are saying they are still servicing existing bookings but they are also seeing a lot of demand for this summer and beyond. People still want to go on holiday.”

Stirrup was speaking in Lisbon on the first night of the line’s megafam, which saw more than 200 UK and Irish agents join a three-night *Celebrity Apex* sailing to Southampton.

“Customer demand is coming back... people still want to go on holiday



PREMIUM GROWTH

› More than half of recent cruisers are now more interested in premium experiences than they were two years ago, according to new research carried out by Travelzoo and Tourism Economics. They found that small-ship cruising is projected to grow 31 per cent over the next decade, outpacing the 27 per cent growth expected across the wider cruise sector, following a 91 per cent increase in capacity over the past 10 years. The move towards luxury and experience-led travel is reflected in spending patterns, Travelzoo said, with previous small-ship cruisers spending 17 per cent more on travel annually than the average cruise consumer.

Head to this issue's special supplement for the latest from the expedition cruise sector



SOLO SERENITY

Riviera Travel has enhanced its range of solo cabins across a selection of 2026 departures in response to heightened demand for individual sailings.

It comes ahead of the launch of the line's first dedicated solo-only ship, *MS George Eliot*, in 2027, as well as a 41 per cent year-on-year increase in solo passengers.

George Eliot will sail a full season of solo-exclusive departures, increasing

capacity for independent travellers with two new 15-day itineraries – the longest solo river cruises ever offered. Itineraries include a 15-day Budapest to the Black Sea cruise from £5,699pp. Will Sarson, product director at Riviera Travel, said: "Solo travel continues to grow, and Riviera is proud to be the UK's leading choice for solo travellers, with departures for solo cabins consistently in high demand."

SPOTLIGHT

Melissa DaSilva



Following the recent launch of Trafalgar's first river cruise ships, TTC Tour Brands' deputy CEO & chief sales officer Melissa DaSilva unveiled the tour operator's 2026 UK trade engagement plans. April saw Trafalgar unveil its first two river ships, the 128-guest *Trafalgar Verity* and *Trafalgar Reverie*. DaSilva emphasised the importance of engaging the UK travel agent community. "Particularly this year, it's important for us to get as many agents on the river as possible," she said. "We are new, so we need the travel trade to [come onboard] and say 'okay, Trafalgar does know what it's doing.'"



RIVER TO OCEAN

Windstar Cruises is introducing a new river-to-ocean cruising category, designed to "help agents retain and grow their most valuable clients", the line said.

Windstar's newest all-suite yacht, *Star Explorer*, which launches in December this year, will be the focus for the new cruises. The 224-passenger ship will sail a selection of European itineraries

in 2027, including the 10-night Impressionist France departure from Bordeaux to London which pairs the Seine and the Thames, and the eight-night Connoisseur's Delight: Northern Spain and Portugal departure which sails on the Garonne and Gironde rivers. Windstar said the itineraries will give agents a "powerful way to expand their river business."



SETTING SAIL

Crystal has announced its itineraries for summer and autumn 2028, spanning the Mediterranean, Europe, the Arctic, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean.

Crystal Grace will make its debut on 11 June 2028 in Civitavecchia (Rome) with an inaugural voyage that visits Sorrento, Igoumenitsa, Kotor, Split, Zadar and Trieste before continuing to Venice, launching a Mediterranean season that explores Southern Europe. Following a 2028 World Cruise, Treasures of

the Tides, *Crystal Symphony* will begin its summer operations in the Americas departing 10 June, from Fort Lauderdale, with a Panama Canal transit and calls in Cartagena, Puerto Caldera, San Juan del Sur and Puerto Vallarta.

Crystal Serenity will begin its summer season in Europe on 5 May, sailing from the Iberian Peninsula into the Mediterranean, with calls including Cádiz, Valencia, Monte Carlo, Livorno, Civitavecchia, Valletta and Piraeus.

SPOTLIGHT

Hayley Gadd



P&O Cruises' partnership development manager for the south west and Wales Hayley Gadd has joined AmaWaterways as business development manager for the west midlands and south west. Gadd joins the organisation with 27 years of experience in the sector, first as an apprentice with Lunn Poly in 1999 and then spending 15 years with TUI. She said: "I'm delighted to be joining at such an exciting time and cannot wait to use my experience from ocean cruising and retail to help our partners grow their river cruise business."



EARNING OPPORTUNITY

Oceania Cruises has announced plans to eliminate non-commissionable cruise fares (NCFs) on all newly launched sailings.

The move comes after sister brand Norwegian Cruise Line removed NCFs in March. The line said the decision will expand earning opportunities for its travel agent partners.

NCFs typically include elements such as port charges, government taxes and other fees. Effective with the launch of new

itineraries, covering the line's 2028 summer and 2028-2029 winter seasons and 2028 and 2029 around the world voyages, published commission rates will apply to the full commissionable cruise fare.

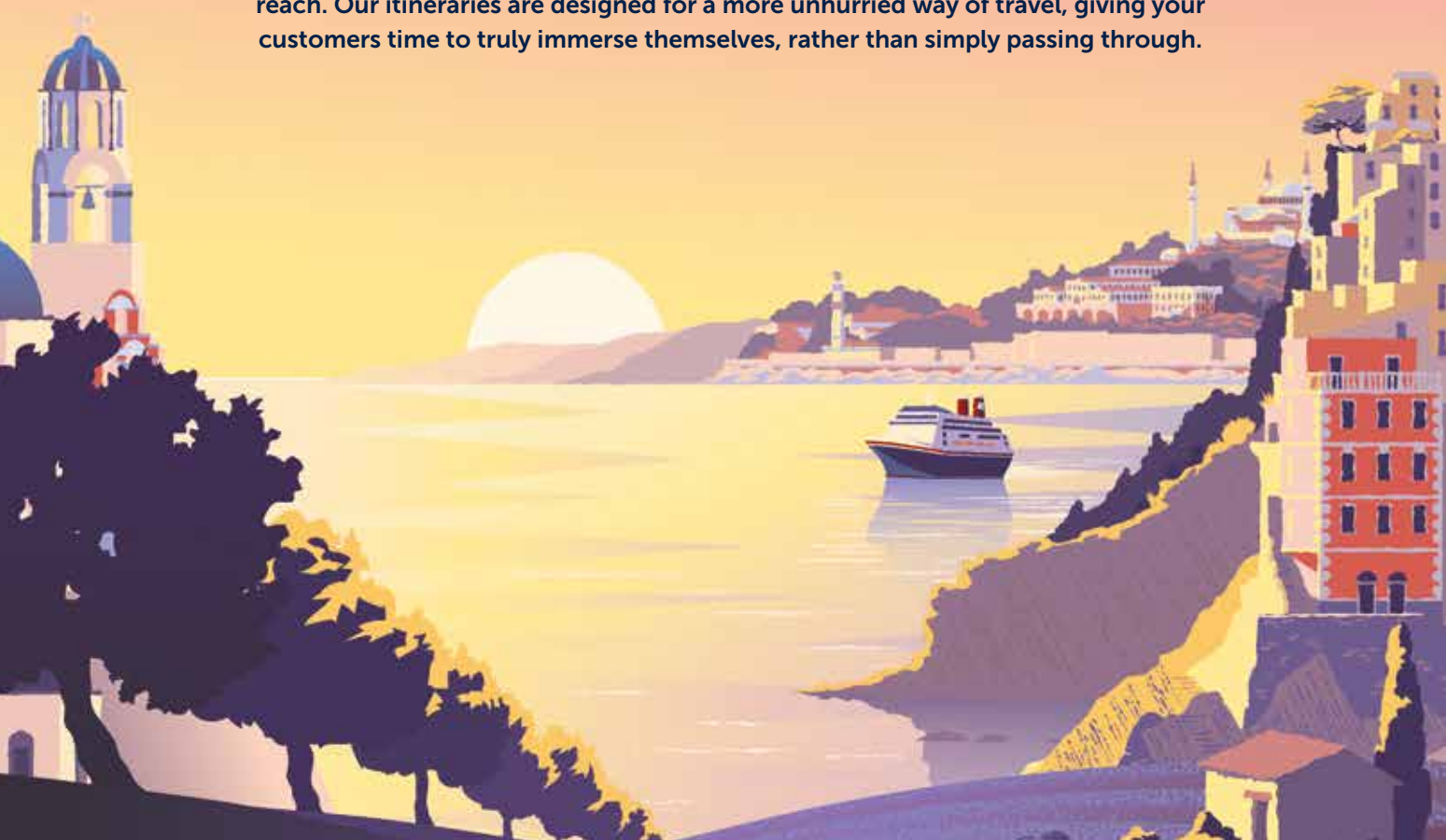
With this permanent change, agents will earn more commission on every booking, while guest-facing pricing and overall value remain unchanged. New season launches are set to open for sale in May and June of this year.



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THE RETREAT

2026

‘We can’t futureproof – we can build resilience’

A hand-selected group of senior leaders from across the cruise, travel and data industries attended Chewton Glen Hotel & Spa in Hampshire in April for *Cruise Trade News*’ inaugural Retreat.

Will Payne and **Josie Klein** offer a peek behind the scenes

The impact of the Iran war on the future of cruising, how AI is reshaping booking habits and the importance of collaboration were just some of the key takeaways from *Cruise Trade News*’ first-ever two-day Retreat in Hampshire.

The event, held in partnership with Travelzoo at Chewton Glen Hotel & Spa, brought together key industry stakeholders for networking and data-led insights, focusing on the trends shaping cruise and how lines and travel agencies can pivot in times of crisis.

The Retreat began with a keynote address from James Clarke, senior global executive and general manager of Travelzoo UK, who presented highlights from the company’s latest global study on the small ship market, and how this burgeoning sector is being fuelled by demand for more immersive experiences.

Group editor, cruise of *World of Cruising* and *Cruise Trade News*, Jack Carter and deputy editor of *World of Cruising* and *Cruise Trade News*, Josie Klein then took to the stage to discuss recent data collected by the brands on shifting consumer sentiment towards regions and booking windows amid the conflict in the Middle East.

Cruise Trade News editor Will Payne was then joined by head of marketing at Marella Cruises, Lucy Lynam; director of cruise for the Advantage Travel Partnership, Jonny Peat; head of travel sales at Travelzoo, Sam Conway; and head of sales at



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, Geoff Ridgeon, for a panel discussion on the industry’s reaction to the Iran war, and the opportunities presented by the conflict for lesser-known destinations.

QUICK REACTIONS

Peat said global uncertainty is both inevitable and unpredictable, meaning cruise lines, airlines, hotel groups and tourism boards are unable to futureproof their businesses.

However, he urged cruise line delegates to be proactive in their messaging to agents, so they are well-informed and knowledgeable when addressing client questions. “It isn’t possible to futureproof travel,” he said. “Lines need to react as quickly and



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The venue for the Retreat, Chewton Glen Hotel & Spa; the event brought together key industry stakeholders; Travelzoo UK's James Clarke presented a global study on the small ship market; the Ask the Experts panel discussed the impact of the Iran war

calmly as possible to any global unrest and they have got to get messaging out quickly to agents to reassure them they have the situation in hand."

Conway added: "Lines definitely need to dial up communication, that's how brands can maintain trust with their customers. Communication is key."

Ridgeon, meanwhile, agreed with Peat, and praised the cruise industry's ability to react to world conflict quickly and efficiently. However, he warned of making snap decisions on changing itineraries, claiming that making alterations quickly can undermine consumer confidence.

"We can't plan for world events, but this isn't our first rodeo," he said. "As an industry, we are great at being able to adapt, move and change our plans when we need to, unlike land-based options which have less adaptability. We just need to avoid being knee-jerk about changing too much. We must be calm, assess a situation and, if we determine it is serious, make changes, otherwise we risk undermining confidence in our brands."



“**As an industry, we are great at being able to adapt and change plans when we need to**

Lynam highlighted the importance of providing a diverse range of options for customers to ensure that, if conflict breaks out in one part of the world, there will be alternative options unaffected. "Long term, we can never futureproof the industry, but we can be resilient and offer a range of itineraries to make sure our portfolio is wide enough to provide diversity, so if anything does happen in one part of the world, we have options to move customers elsewhere," she said.

Accord Marketing strategy director Jasman

Ahmad explored how cruise marketing rebuilt trust and demand during periods of extreme disruption, and Insider One CEO, UK, Ireland and Nordics Nico Beukes explained how the company utilises AI to bridge the gap between complex data and the personal desires of the modern traveller.

The event was rounded off with a series of roundtable discussions on topics such as the future of the lates market, the growth of the cruise and stay sector, the importance of loyal cruisers and the evolving luxury market. In the afternoon, delegates were hosted on a tour of local vineyard Setley Ridge, before enjoying drinks and dinner at Chewton Glen.

Clarke said: "It's brilliant to get a group of industry leaders and C-suite executives together to discuss the challenges facing the cruise industry as well as the success of the sector." ●







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Building trust

World events continue to affect the way consumers plan and book cruise holidays, and brands able to reassure a wary audience may come out on top, says **Raphael Giacardi**

Visitors to the *World of Cruising* website continued to seek the latest information about global events last month. Our running coverage of the situation in the Middle East remained the top story. Another popular article was our explainer on the EU's recently introduced Entry/Exit System (EES) and how to minimise chances of getting caught in airport chaos.

Elsewhere, Google Trends data revealed that – in the last three months – UK searches for ‘jet fuel shortage’ were up 2,600 per cent.

These figures hint at consumers balancing risk factors before making a decision, from flight cancellation to airport queues and travel cover.

IMMEDIATE DEMAND

One thing that seems obvious from the most recent *World of Cruising* search data is that consumers want to travel soon. Over one in five searches is for departures in the next eight weeks. If you extend the range to look at last-minute and summer departures, that number climbs to nearly 60 per cent of searches. This trend for short lead times is backed by a recent survey we conducted. Compared to 12 months ago, 57 per cent told us they were now likely to book closer to departure.



Interestingly, uncertainty over jet fuel shortages and EES airport chaos doesn't seem to have translated into increased demand for no-fly ex-UK departures. On the other hand, and perhaps surprisingly, the Mediterranean has been the biggest winner, with searches up over 30 per cent month on month.

READING THE MARKET

So, what lessons can we glean from all this? Consumers are not giving up their sunshine escape to the Med, while also banking that they can beat the worst of the fuel shortages by travelling sooner rather than later. That may mean contending with long EES-driven airport queues – but this is a manageable logistical issue. Fuel shortages aren't.

For cruise companies, we believe these figures highlight two priorities: performance marketing should drive the latest push – putting the right cruises in front of consumers eager to travel as soon as possible. Stimulating demand for long-lead departures should focus on brand marketing and creating a strong affinity for your products to woo consumers wary of planning too far ahead. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Searches for Mediterranean holidays are on the rise; the thought of long EES-driven airport queues isn't putting consumers off

IN NUMBERS



60%

Share of searches for departures in the next five months



30%

The increase in search volume for Mediterranean sailings



57%

The percentage of *World of Cruising* visitors who are likely to book closer to departure compared to 12 months ago

TOP TIP

Building trust and reassurance with consumers is key. The industry should work to boost consumer confidence – something that land-holiday operators are already doing



GOLDEN MOMENTS

The biggest night in the cruise industry calendar is back, with this year's Wave Awards tipped to be the best yet. **Will Payne** takes a closer look

Taking place on 24 November at The Dorchester Hotel on London's Park Lane, the Wave Awards 2026 is gearing up for another night of glitz, glamour and glory, with small-ship specialist Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines named as headline partner.

The judges have also been confirmed for this year's event, with new additions including owner of Mundy Cruising, Edwina Lonsdale; international sales director for Atlas Ocean Voyages, Bernie Carter; associate vice president of sales and distribution for P&O Cruises, Ruth Venn; marketing director

for World Travel Holdings, Sally White; managing director of World Travel Holdings, Lisa McAuley; and head of Paramount Cruises, Patrick Hill.

They join an esteemed panel of experts, which includes senior sales director for Royal Caribbean International, Aaron Langford; managing

director, global commercial for Windstar Cruises, Helen Beck; and associate VP of EMEA sales for Cunard, Iain Baillie.

MORE WAYS TO WIN

There will be six new categories at the Wave Awards, giving lines and agents more opportunities than ever to celebrate the success of their teams and take home a gong.

Best Trade-Only Operator has been created to recognise an operator with a laser focus on helping its industry customers excel, with the winner demonstrating how they are an essential part of their clients' success.

“
The Wave Awards 2026 is gearing up for another night of glitz, glamour and glory



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Last year's winners; Cunard offered a glimpse at its onboard entertainment; comedian Sally Phillips hosted last year's ceremony; Fleur East raised the roof in 2025



Best Ultra-Luxury Cruise Line is reserved for the cruise lines whose product rivals the most esteemed high-end hotels. Not only are they experts when it comes to service and attention to detail, they're specialists in exclusivity and personalised experiences, offering accommodation and dining that surpass traditional luxury standards.

Best for Touring and Adventure has been created amid the rocketing popularity of the cruise-and-stay market as customers look for more immersive experiences onshore

“ New categories give lines and agents more chance to celebrate their successes

and at sea, and Best Ancillary Service recognises those partners who have supported the cruise industry in reaching its heady heights, none of which would have been possible without them. Best Luxury Agent will reward the top agent or agency in today's rapidly evolving premium

market, while Best Tourist Board will celebrate the organisations which are the beating hearts of the countries and destinations they represent.

The judges are looking for entries to demonstrate what makes them the best tourist board, what they have implemented to ensure that, how they support visitors, and any new initiatives to attract more cruise tourism. Thanks also go to this year's key partners: Celestyal; Cunard; Hurtigruten; Marella Cruises; Princess Cruises; Regent Seven Seas Cruises; Riviera Travel; and Virgin Voyages. ●



**WAVE
AWARDS 2026**



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“How do I convince an anti-cruiser to take their first sailing?”

Paramount Cruises apprentice Josh Harris asks how he can turn cruise sceptics into avid sailors. **Josie Klein** reports

The cruise industry is continuing to reach new heights, with passenger numbers once again hitting record levels. According to CLIA's 2025 State of the Cruise Industry Report, nearly 35 million passengers sailed in 2024, up 9 per cent on 2023, with 68 per cent of international travellers considering taking their first cruise.

However, not everyone is a cruise fanatic. So, how do agents convince those anti-cruisers to take the plunge and book their first sailing?

Josh Harris, an apprentice at Paramount Cruises, loves to set sail and hopes to introduce more people to the sector. “I love cruising and I tell everyone to go on one so they can experience how amazing it is,” he says. “There are so many different products out there, and every cruise line seems to be tailored for different people which is amazing but can be a challenge.

“There is so much information to give people who have never cruised before, so it is hard to know what the key selling points are without going on and on. How do I figure out which is the best line for a specific person? And how do I get that lightbulb moment when someone who said they would never cruise realises there might just be a sailing for them?”

MYTHBUSTING

Luke Smith, vice president of trade sales UK and EMEA for Crystal, says one of the main challenges agents face when trying to convince an anti-cruiser to get on board is misconceptions and misinformation, as outdated views on cruise are passed down from generation to generation.

“
As an agent, what you are really up against is misinformation and outdated stereotypes

He says the industry has evolved in recent years and it is an agent's job to understand what their client wants out of a holiday and partner them with an appropriate cruise line. “I always feel that anti-cruisers think of cruising as something their grandparents did, or they remember negative headlines or documentaries about the industry that do nothing to portray the incredible experience on board, let alone the freedom, service choice and overall quality that cruise holidays offer when compared to land-based equivalents,” he tells me.

“So, as an agent, what you are really up against is misinformation and outdated stereotypes and you need to use all the content and information available to you from cruise lines to educate them.”

He continues: “When [customers] say that old people cruise, show them videos of young couples and groups of friends experiencing Virgin Voyages.





SCAN
to read more about
Cunard's recently launched
2028 deployment



When they say there will be no home comforts, present them with one of the lines, such as P&O Cruises, which is dedicated to the UK market. And when they say that ships are too big and crowded, showcase some of the exceptional options

in the ultra-luxury sector, such as Crystal, with the largest guest-to-space ratio at sea. The bottom line is that the cruise industry has a product to overcome any barrier and your job as an agent is simply to show them the error of their ways."

Similarly, Hannah Vincent, owner and director of Select World Travel, emphasises the importance of learning and urges agents to do their homework before suggesting a specific sailing to their client. She also warns of the dangers of sending a customer on an ill-suited cruise and suggests the trade tries to get on board as many sailings as possible to give them a greater understanding of the products in the market.

"Cruising is not a 'one size fits all' situation," she says. "People hear each other's horror stories after they have been on a ship that was not right for them

“ Going on your own holidays, fam trips and ship visits is imperative to choosing the right cruise for the client

and it creates a negative cloud over the cruising world. There really is a cruise out there for everyone and getting a first-time cruiser on the right sailing is essential as it will make or break their cruising relationship and outlook.

"Going on your own holidays, fam trips and ship visits is imperative to selling confidently and choosing the right cruise line for the right client."

RESET THE NARRATIVE

Jonny Peat, director of cruise at Advantage Travel Partnership, encourages agents to make customers feel they are missing out on an amazing holiday experience, and to reframe their concerns as

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Cruises offer an incredible range of experiences; a river trip can be a less daunting introduction to the world of cruise holidays; Josh Harris hopes to convince more customers to set sail



ABOVE Cruise holidays are increasingly popular with younger customers

positives. He argues securing an anti-cruiser is less about selling a cruise and more about making them feel it is a holiday they have overlooked.

“Start by resetting the narrative,” he says. “Cruising isn’t what people think it is anymore – new ships, better experiences and plenty of people who swore they’d never do it are now booking. That alone is enough to make someone pause and think ‘have I missed something?’”

“From there, lean into what they’re actually missing; not features but experiences. Waking up somewhere new everyday, seeing multiple destinations without the faff of packing and logistics, accessing places that are simply harder to do land-based. And when objections come up, don’t debate them, reframe them. ‘I don’t want to be stuck on a ship’ becomes ‘you’re barely on it and the ship’s part of the experience’. Most concerns dissolve when you shift the frame rather than argue the point.”

“

I’d encourage agents to lead with the experience, not the ship, and appeal to what customers already value

Vicky Billing, trade and partnerships director UK and Ireland for Riviera Travel, urges agents to look beyond ocean cruising when pitching sailings to customers, and to recognise the “fundamentally different” product river cruises can offer.

She highlights some of the negative stereotypes often associated with ocean cruising, such as long embarkation times and mandatory formal attire, and challenges agents to myth-bust those concerns while appealing to a customer’s interests.

“I’d encourage agents to lead with the experience, not the ship, and appeal to what customers already value. If they enjoy escorted touring, culture, history, food and wine, or seeing more without the constant packing and logistics, river cruising delivers all of that in a relaxed, comfortable way. It’s often a far gentler first step than ocean cruising.”

Mark Walter, director of sales, northern Europe, for HX Expeditions, adds: “Many people who are ‘anti-cruise’ are reacting to traditional perceptions rather than what an HX Expeditions voyage actually offers. The key is to reframe the experience.”

It is an agent’s job to change outdated perceptions of cruising, do their homework on the huge variety of products on offer and make customers recognise there is a sailing out there to suit them. ●

“How do I convince an anti-cruiser to take their first sailing?”



Jonny Peat, Advantage

“Start by resetting the narrative. Cruising isn’t what people think it is anymore – new ships, better experiences and plenty of people who swore they’d never do it are now booking. That is enough to make someone pause and think again.”



Luke Smith, Crystal

“As a travel agent, what you are really up against is the misinformation and outdated stereotypes that are associated with cruise. You need to use all the content and information available to you from cruise lines to educate your customers.”



Vicky Billing, Riviera Travel

“Appeal to what customers already value. If they enjoy escorted touring, culture, history, food and wine, or seeing more without the constant packing and logistics, river cruising delivers all of that in a relaxed, comfortable way.”

The power of planning ahead

Virgin Voyages' UK sales director **SJ Walker** on the importance of preparation as booking windows extend and demand increases for further-out holidays

The best First Mates [agents] I work with have one thing in common: they're never just thinking about what's in front of them. Right now, some of our most successful partners are already having conversations about winter Caribbean 2027/28 and honestly, it's one of the things I find most exciting about where this business is heading.

Booking windows are extending, forward demand is strengthening, and the advisors leaning into that shift are building something far more valuable than a short-term pipeline. We're seeing it in our own numbers at Virgin Voyages. Some bookings are being secured well beyond the traditional window and that's not a blip, it's a behavioural shift.

Clients are planning earlier and with greater intent, and for First Mates



“Bookings are being secured well beyond the traditional window

who are tuned into that, it creates a compelling opportunity. The Caribbean remains at the heart of that demand, and it's easy to see why. It's consistent, broadly appealing and, for UK and European travellers, it delivers exactly what winter calls for. But what's changed isn't the destination, it's the timing.

HOW TO BUILD LOYALTY

If you're baseloading future Caribbean sailings now, you're doing something very different from competing in a crowded, short-term space. You're securing high-value bookings earlier, accessing better availability and building

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Help clients map out their Winter Caribbean 2027/2028 plans now; SJ Walker is seeing a behavioural shift in bookings

a pipeline that's far less exposed to last-minute volatility.

What I love seeing is how that shift changes the nature of the client conversation too. Instead of selling a single holiday, you're helping someone map out a sequence of experiences, a Caribbean escape in 2027, something completely different the year after. You move from transactional selling to genuine long-term planning, and that's where real loyalty is built. Our Sailors [guests] are increasingly repeat-driven – many are thinking about their next voyage before they've even disembarked – making this a completely natural conversation to be having.

So where do you start? Look at your existing client base. Your repeat cruisers. Your premium travellers. The clients who are already thinking ahead. These are the people most likely to commit to winter Caribbean 2027/28 now.

Because ultimately, this isn't about getting ahead of the market for the sake of it. It's about building a business that isn't constantly chasing it. Winter Caribbean 2027/28 might feel like a long way off, but for the most forward-thinking of our First Mates, it's already firmly in focus. ●

IN NUMBERS

27%

of Brits book a summer trip six months before departure

19%

book further out to secure their dream holiday

17%

booked earlier in 2024 than they did in 2023

Stats from YouGov



SIGNATURE SAILINGS

Hurtigruten has launched a series of Norwegian Fjords and Arctic voyages to help agents take their clients to destinations other cruise lines can't reach

Expert Norwegian coastal voyage operator Hurtigruten has unveiled three new Signature Voyages for 2027-2028, which include the line's first fjord-only itinerary and its most immersive fjord voyage to date. The slow-paced, curated sailings are the cruise line's premium range of holidays, lingering in carefully chosen ports and offering all-inclusive dining and beverages.

Guided by the unrivalled insight of Hurtigruten's captains, guests will explore areas of the high Arctic

“
The itineraries offer a deeper, more flexible way to explore Norway's coast

and world-famous western fjords in more depth than ever before. Sailing between April 2027 and May 2028 aboard *MS Trollfjord*, the new Signature itineraries offer a deeper, more flexible way to explore Norway's most celebrated coastal regions.

WONDERS OF THE FJORDS

Itineraries include The Inner Fjords Explorer cruise, offering Hurtigruten's deepest exploration of Norway's stunning fjord landscapes to date. Sailing in spring and autumn, this eight-day voyage ventures from Bergen further than other cruise lines into four western fjords: Lysefjord, Hardangerfjord, Sognefjord and Nordfjord.

This small ship voyage reaches the innermost parts of these fjords, with scenic sailing and captain's discretion shaping the journey. Guests will also

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Scenic cruising brings guests up close and personal with Norway's stunning scenery; the line's *MS Trollfjord* will sail the new collection of Signature itineraries

witness Ålesund's Art Nouveau beauty, historic stave churches, and peaceful villages framed by waterfalls and mountains. Cruises will depart Bergen between April 2027 and May 2028.

ARCTIC EXPLORATION

Meanwhile, The Arctic Circle Explorer cruise is an eight-day round-trip winter voyage from Tromsø and spends the full journey deep in the Arctic Circle. The itinerary weaves through Lofoten, Alta and Honningsvåg, with an optional excursion to visit to the North Cape, the most northern point of mainland Europe, and an overnight stay in Alta. The flexible sailing plan under the Auroral Oval, with minimal light pollution, creates ideal conditions for witnessing the Northern Lights. Departures from Tromsø include 11 January 2028, 8 February 2028, 7 March 2028 and 4 April 2028.

TRACING THE COAST

The Arctic Line cruise is a 12-day north or 11-day south winter voyage sailing between Copenhagen and Tromsø. Tracing the length of Norway's coast, the itinerary includes Lofoten and the North Cape, with overnight stays in Alta and Tromsø, and up to seven days spent beneath the Auroral Oval to maximise Northern Lights opportunities.

This itinerary departs Copenhagen on 31 December 2027, 28 January 2028, 25 February 2028 and 24 March 2028, and from Tromsø on 18 January 2028, 15 February 2028, 14 March 2028 and 11 April 2028. What's more, every time you make a booking on any cruise, you can head to Hurtigruten Rewards to claim exclusive prizes. ●



For more information or to book, visit hurtigruten.com/en-gb/agents or email uk.agencysupport@hurtigruten.com

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onboard credit

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Including flights from London | 1st Jan 2027

Signature VOYAGES

Unhurried and deeply meaningful, our premium, Signature voyages are seasonal sailings that linger in carefully chosen ports, with all-inclusive dining and beverages on board.

THE NORTH CAPE LINE

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15 days from £3,528pp

Including flights from London | 29th Jan 2027



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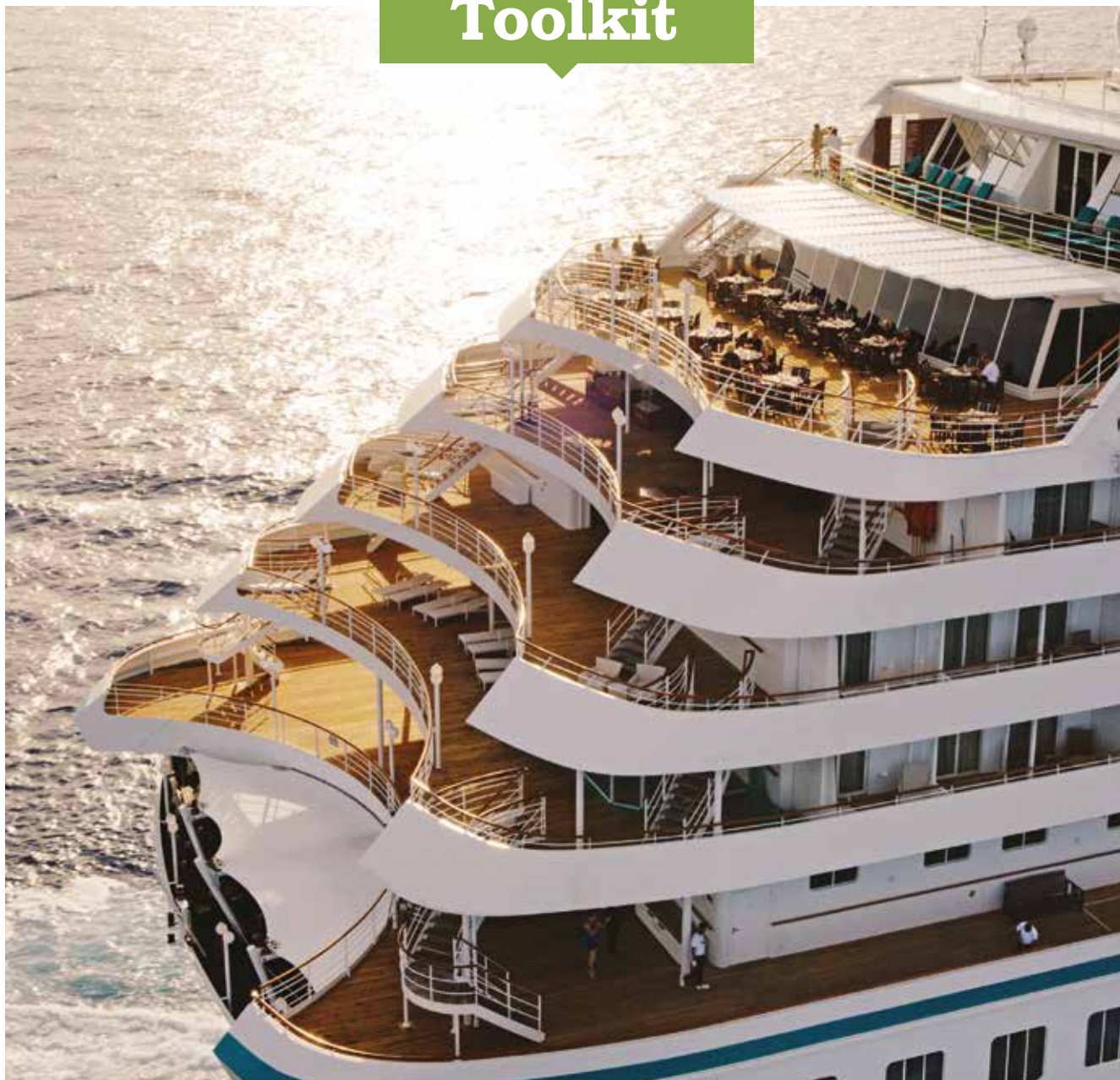
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CRYSTAL CLEAR

Ultra-luxury cruise line Crystal has set its sights on becoming the most trade-friendly operator in the UK market, according to vice president of trade sales UK and EMEA, Luke Smith. The company will look to grow its UK account management team – which currently includes Stephen Joyner, Michael Young-Richards and Holly Glazer – even further, to bolster its ties with the UK trade. It will also continue

to offer robust commission rates and work more closely with agents in the build-up to the 2028 launch of its third vessel and first new-build ocean ship in 25 years, *Crystal Grace*, with a raft of new incentives and onboard opportunities. Agents can also find an expanded online portal, a dedicated Facebook page and an online training platform designed to coach them through the booking cycle.



RATE FREEZE BOOST

The Bank of England's decision to freeze interest rates at 3.75 per cent could provide a boost for high street travel agents by helping stabilise consumer confidence when budgets remain under pressure.

Holding the rate offers reassurance to mortgage holders and borrowers who have faced sustained cost increases in recent years. That financial certainty may encourage consumers to feel more

comfortable committing to cruises, particularly for forward-booking periods.

For agents, the move could support booking momentum and improve customer willingness to plan ahead. However, the Bank hinted that rates could rise later in the year owing to inflationary pressure from the Iran war. Therefore, the freeze is more likely to act as a confidence stabiliser than a transformational shift in demand.

AI VS SEO

Andy Headington
CEO, Adido



A year ago, there was plenty of noise around AI tools like ChatGPT and how they might change the way people plan travel. The reality was stark, with just 0.12 per cent of traffic coming from LLMs (large language models). Fast-forward to today and that figure has grown by 214 per cent. Impressive on paper, but in practice it still only accounts for 0.37 per cent of total traffic across 41 travel and cruise websites we analysed. Yes, usage is rising and LLM traffic converts well, but volume remains tiny. In fact, AI-driven visits are comparable to smaller search engines. The takeaway is clear. While it's worth monitoring AI and understanding how LLMs surface content, SEO remains the primary driver of demand. For cruise operators and travel brands, focus should stay firmly on traditional search options, for now...

“
While it's worth monitoring AI, SEO remains the primary driver of demand

STAR PRODUCT

PowerLoop Series Lanyard Cable

Tired of losing your phone in the depths of your bag while trying to capture content on a ship tour? Then this is for you. A sleek lanyard slips comfortably around your neck and connects to your phone with a carabiner, so it's always on hand. Low on battery? No problem: it doubles up as a charger.

PowerLoop Series Lanyard Cable, £24.99,
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THE **VOICE** OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

Trade News



Welcome to the **CRYSTAL TAKEOVER**

Ahead of the launch of its first new build in 25 years, Crystal is setting its sights on becoming the most trade-friendly cruise line in the UK. In this special edition of *Cruise Trade News* in partnership with the luxury brand, we explore how it plans to turn that ambition into reality. We examine how Crystal's sales team is supporting agent partners through 2026 with a wave of new initiatives, while also offering a first look at the line's soon-to-be three-ship fleet.

In
conversation
with...

Luke Smith

Crystal's vice president of trade sales UK and EMEA reflects on his first year in the role and outlines his plans to get closer with the UK trade than ever before. **Will Payne**

From the high-octane thrills of Carnival Cruise Line to the elegant sophistication of Crystal, Luke Smith has accumulated a wealth of experience from a rich portfolio of roles in the cruise sector. In June 2025, his 20-year career reached a new milestone when he joined Crystal as its vice president of trade sales UK and EMEA. Since then, he hasn't looked back.

"I have always been so lucky in my career to work with incredible leaders and colleagues. I have also been incredibly fortunate that there have been progression opportunities based on merit and hard work," he tells me, as we sit down to discuss his first year with the brand and his goals with the luxury cruise line.

"Other than getting a feel for [Crystal's] truly exceptional product first-hand, my biggest highlight has been both reconnecting with agents I haven't worked with for a long time, as well as having the chance to meet and interact with a whole host of new partners selling in the luxury sector."



It's clear from the off that Smith is fully focused on Crystal's agent partnerships. He has set himself the lofty target of turning the brand into one of the most trade-friendly operators in the cruise sector. That ambition is driven by the impact agents have had on him during his first few months.

"The enthusiasm of these partners has reinvigorated my love of the industry and filled me with excitement and confidence for the future of Crystal in this market, especially with the upcoming launch of *Crystal Grace*."

FUTURE-FOCUSED

When it launches in June 2028, *Crystal Grace* will become the line's first new-build ocean vessel to hit the seas in 25 years. The 650-passenger ship will offer a range of all-suite accommodations, as well as dining options such as Umi Uma, the only Nobu restaurant at sea, the only Beefbar at sea and curated menus designed by the Michelin-starred Alajmo brothers at Osteria d'Ovidio.



What my career has taught me

Learn from your peers

"It's not always easy to receive personal feedback, but remember, it's business, not personal, and you will improve more by learning about your weaknesses than you will being told about your strengths."

Ask questions

"Always ask the question, ask for the knowledge and ask for the opportunity. I have always lived with a view that if you don't ask, you don't get, so if you want the opportunity make sure people know – even if you aren't ready right now then you can gather feedback to help you prepare for next time."

Enjoy yourself

"Always try and enjoy yourself and have fun! We work in a fabulous industry filled with opportunities so don't take it all too seriously. Seize the day because you only get one career so it's best to have one you enjoy."

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Umi Uma is the only Nobu restaurant at sea; Luke Smith joined Crystal last year; the cruise line offers a range of immersive, luxury itineraries; a Sapphire Veranda Suite on board *Crystal Serenity*

“If you want to sell Crystal, there's never been a better time to get on board

"This exceptional ship will be game-changing for Crystal and is sure to be adored by our Crystal Society members and new-to-brand customers alike," Smith continues. Onboard, guests will also find a promenade extending around the ship's perimeter, and the vessel will offer one of the highest crew-to-passenger ratios in the market.

Prior to the launch, Smith has his focus set on the remainder of 2026. "I'm looking forward to welcoming agent partners on board for the day in Southampton, Portland and Liverpool as well as introducing a number of trade-first initiatives throughout the rest of this year."

The line is gearing up to launch a new monthly webinar series to get closer to its trade partners and to

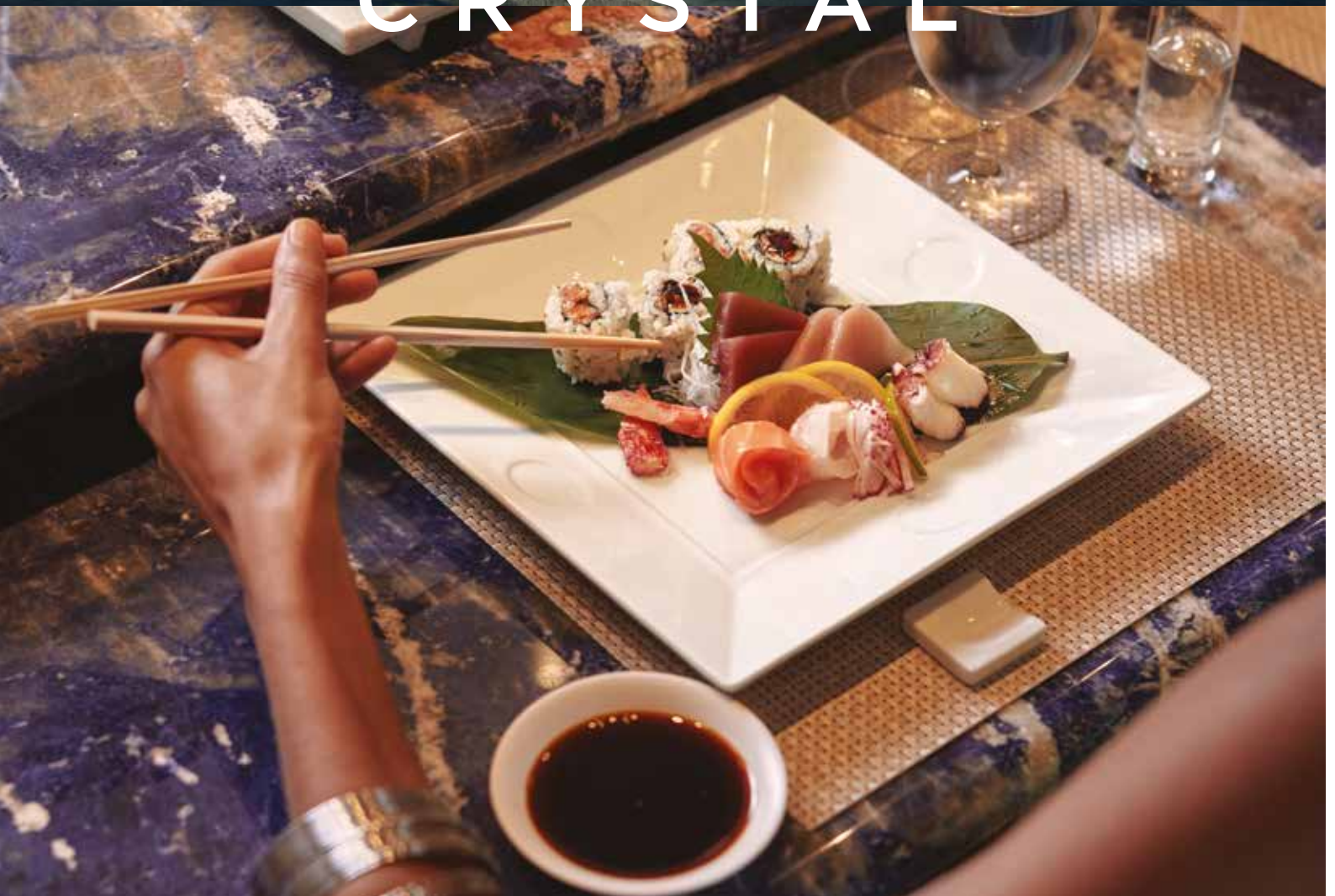
help agents stay engaged with the team and experts from around the business. "We are also growing our social presence, focusing on the trade Facebook group, Crystal Agents UK & Ireland," Smith adds.

"But really the big news for training will be the rollout and development of our online training platform, where agents can get in-depth knowledge of and guidance on what makes Crystal stand out and why it's a compelling option for clients. We have been delighted with the reaction from the UK market so far this year and look forward to continuing to grow by working with more agent partners than ever – so if you want to sell Crystal, there's never been a better time to get on board."

For Smith, the path ahead is clear: deepen relationships with the trade, invest in engagement and ensure Crystal's return to the forefront of luxury cruising is built on collaboration. With a new ship on the horizon and a renewed focus on agent-first initiatives, the line is positioning itself not just as a premium product, but as a premium partner. ●



CRYSTAL



The *Crystal* Difference

Send your clients on the journey of a lifetime. *Sumptuous* suites, one of the *leading* space-per-guest ratios at sea, *intuitive* service, and staff who make guests feel part of the *family*.



UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

As well as a vast array of Crystal Shore Excursions, we also offer an exclusive collection of destination experiences created by our sister brand, Abercrombie & Kent.



WORLD-CLASS DINING

Our award-winning dining includes the only Nobu at sea and partnerships with Michelin-caliber chefs, delivering exceptional culinary variety and world-class cuisine.



PERFECTLY AT HOME

Spacious ocean-view suites and guest rooms with private butler service, unlimited satellite Wi-Fi, all gratuities included, and one of the highest space-to-guest ratios at sea.



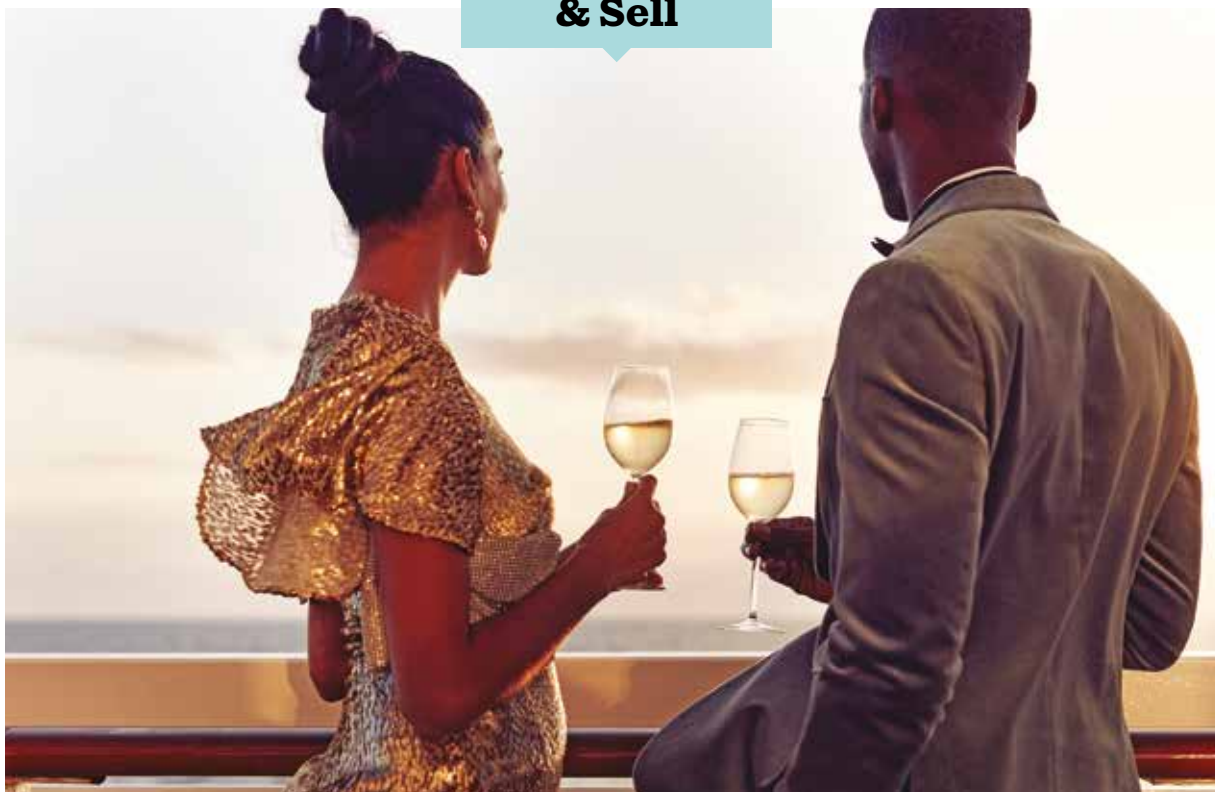
OUTSTANDING ENTERTAINMENT

Guests can enjoy state-of-the-art theater, Broadway-standard productions, enriching activities, invigorating sports, and the revitalizing Aurōra Spa.

Start planning your clients' next exceptional journey with Crystal – contact our reservations team on 0808 178 3396 or at reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com



**Learn
& Sell**



Crystal

This resurging cruise line with world-class brand partnerships is staking its claim to the ultra-luxury throne. Here, we highlight everything you need to know

IN THE KNOW

Headquartered in Hallandale Beach, Florida, Crystal Cruises was founded in 1988 by Japanese shipping company Nippon Yusen Kaisha and sold to Hong Kong-headquartered conglomerate Genting Hong Kong in 2015. The brand and two cruise ships were then bought by luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent Travel Group in 2022, with *Crystal Serenity* and *Crystal Symphony* undergoing major refurbishments a year later. The line, which will welcome two new-build ships from 2028 onwards, sails in North America, Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, Alaska, Asia, Australia, Africa and the Indian Ocean.

THE FLEET

Crystal Serenity is the larger of the two ships currently in the line's fleet with



space for 740 guests in 402 ocean-view rooms and suites. *Crystal Symphony* boasts 330 guest rooms and suites with space to accommodate 606 guests on board. Both ships offer butler service in all suites, high staff-to-guest ratios and nine dining options. Third ship *Crystal Grace* will join the line in 2028.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

In June 2028, *Crystal Grace* will enter service, Crystal's first new-build ocean ship a quarter of a century. Debuting in the Mediterranean, the ship's inaugural season offers a range of sailings in Italy, Croatia, Greece, France and Spain and offers guests the opportunity to combine back-to-back sailings and spend a month sailing in the region with zero repeating ports. Aside from the new vessel, Crystal is reinforcing its commitment to the trade and is on a mission to become the most agent-friendly player in the

“Ships offer butler service in all guest rooms and suites



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Senior sales manager for the UK and Ireland, Stephen Joyner

What are the key characteristics and USPs for Crystal?

“Our brand partnerships, especially around our dining, are what set us apart from other cruise lines. We have the only Nobu restaurant at sea and in our signature Italian restaurant, Osteria d'Ovidio, we offer an unparalleled fine dining experience, with menus created by the Michelin-rated Aljamo brothers.”

What are the most popular itineraries at the moment?

“We are able to offer our customers exceptional itineraries all year round as our ships are not committed to a single homeport for long stretches of time. Right now, we are seeing customers engaging with our Caribbean itineraries towards the end of 2026, plus our European sailings in summer 2027 are proving very popular even this far out so we encourage agents to speak to their customers to make sure they don't miss out.”

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Osteria d'Ovidio offers authentic Italian cuisine; Crystal is the perfect pick for affluent customers; onboard entertainment includes live music; *Crystal Serenity* was refurbished in 2023; the cruise line offers the only Beefbar at sea

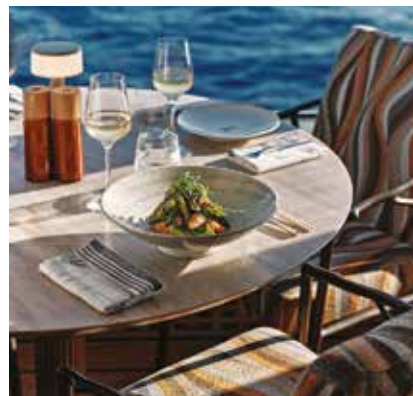
“Crystal is reinforcing its commitment to the trade

ultra-luxury sector, with a renewed focus on supporting partners to drive sales growth. This includes ongoing investment in its trade relationships, as well as making it easier for agents to access product information, secure bookings and convert high-value clients.

WHO'S WHO

Crystal's UK trade-facing team is led by vice president of trade sales Luke Smith who oversees trade sales distribution and the performance of agency sales, as well as managing inside sales functions. The UK team includes senior sales manager Stephen Joyner, key account manager

Michael Young-Richards and business development specialist Holly Glazer, who all work closely with trade partners, look after the day-to-day relationships of accounts of all sizes, and aim to drive business growth. They are supported by a dedicated UK-based reservations team led by Vanessa Brister and made up of Jasmin Day, Jennifer Lewis, David Gonzalez and René Larisch. ●



STEPHEN JOYNER'S SELLING TIPS

1 The first thing agents need to do to grow their sales is engage with the team and the best place to start is by joining our Facebook group, Crystal Agents UK & Ireland.

2 Education is key and those who want to learn more about the brand can do so through dedicated training by our team, in our monthly webinar series or our online training platform.

3 The quickest way to boost sales is by using the Crystal Trade Hub or by asking our excellent reservations team to put some packages together for agents to promote on their own channels.

FLEET IN FOCUS

In 1990, Crystal embarked on its inaugural voyage, with the vision to create a new standard in luxury cruising, offering discerning travellers a higher level of comfort, service, dining and amenities. The relaunch of Crystal in 2023 by Abercrombie & Kent Travel Group (AKTG) elevated the brand to a new level by combining the line's luxury cruising experience with AKTG's land-based prowess. The line's two ships, *Crystal Symphony* and *Crystal Serenity*, were taken back to the steel for an extensive remodelling programme. Suites were enlarged, rooms taken out, and the overall capacity reduced to provide more space per guest. Crystal still has one of the leading space-per-guest ratios in the industry. Subsequent drydocks have added further enhancements and with its first new-build ocean ship in a quarter of a century, *Crystal Grace*, set to join the fleet in 2028, the line looks set to embark on a new era of providing exceptional moments at sea for its guests.

CRYSTAL SERENITY

As Crystal's largest ship with 740 passengers, *Crystal Serenity* made its debut in 2003 before undergoing an extensive refurbishment programme in 2023. On board, customers can try their luck in Le Casino de Monte-Carlo or make room for dessert in the 3,000+ sq ft gym with Technogym equipment, Pilates and spin classes. For those who prefer a slower pace, the library is home to more than 2,000 books. Meanwhile, the Galaxy Lounge hosts Broadway-style shows and Pulse Night Club makes for an evening to remember. This summer, the vessel will sail a series of European departures featuring calls in Piraeus (Athens) and Palma de Mallorca, before heading across the Atlantic for a season of cruises from New York to South America.



CRYSTAL SYMPHONY

The 606-passenger *Crystal Symphony* was built in 1995 and underwent extensive refurbishment in 2023, which saw the addition of larger, redesigned suites and the implementation of Junior Crystal Penthouse Suites and dedicated single occupancy rooms. Guests can put their feet up and enjoy a range of treatments in the Aurōra Spa, or practise their swing in the on board golf driving nets. As on its sister ship, *Crystal Serenity*, dining options include the only Nobu at sea, Beefbar and Osteria d'Ovidio, with menus created by the Michelin-rated Alajmo brothers. From April-June 2026, *Crystal Symphony* will sail a programme of Asia and Alaska cruises.





CRYSTAL GRACE

In May 2028, Crystal will welcome its first new-build ship since *Crystal Serenity*. The 650-guest, all-suite *Crystal Grace* has been designed to deliver one of the highest crew-to-guest ratios in the sector, alongside expansive accommodation and industry-leading onboard amenities, such as Umi Uma by Nobu – the only one of its kind at sea – and Beefbar, as well as immersive shore experiences. The ship's suite offering is also set to be a major draw. With 337 suites, all featuring private verandas, and categories ranging from entry-level luxury through to expansive penthouses and a new residential-style Owner's Suite, agents will have a broad range of price points and upsell opportunities to work with.



On the
road with...

Michael Young-Richards

Crystal's key account manager, UK and Ireland, on why agents should brush up on the luxury brand as it prepares for a year of fresh trade activations

What messages are you focusing on when visiting agents?

We're focused on being here for you, our agent partners. Our goal is to support you and help your business succeed by confidently selling Crystal. Whether you work for an online agency, have a high street presence, or operate from home, we're here to partner with you every step of the way. If you see an opportunity to sell Crystal, please don't hesitate to reach out – we'd love to help.

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

Nothing compares to a genuine, face-to-face conversation, whether that's over a coffee or at an in-person training event. While emails are useful for sharing information, day-to-day demands can make it hard for agents to fully engage with them. Taking the time to connect in person creates space for meaningful, high-quality conversations.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Palm Court features wraparound windows for uninterrupted views; Michael Young-Richards joined Crystal in February

How important are agents to the success of Crystal in 2026?

Travel agents play a vital role in Crystal's success. They are often the key decision-makers when guiding their customers, helping them choose the right experience. Agents want confidence that the brands they recommend will deliver exceptional trips – ones that inspire guests to return and book again and again. Having been an agent myself, I know there's no better feeling than when a customer comes back from a trip you recommended and chooses to book with you again.

What key USPs should agents focus on when selling Crystal?

Crystal Symphony and *Crystal Serenity* were completely refurbished and reimaged in 2023, introducing larger suites and one of the leading guest-space ratios at sea. While sailing with Crystal, guests can enjoy outstanding dining experiences, including Umi Uma – the only Nobu restaurant at sea – as well as the only Beefbar on the ocean, and a collaboration with the Michelin-rated Alajmo brothers, making it a true haven for food lovers. 🍷

Why should agents sell Crystal if they don't already?

Your customers will love the Crystal experience, so much so that many of our guests are repeat bookers, often securing a future cruise while still on board. We offer a range of unique itineraries, from short three-night sailings to an extraordinary 127-night World Cruise, ensuring there truly is something for everyone. Our UK-based reservations team, located at our London headquarters, brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Please feel free to give them a call – they'll be delighted to help you find the perfect Crystal cruise for your customers and support you every step of the way, from marketing to sales advice.

“

Taking the time to connect in person creates space for meaningful, high-quality conversations



Meet the team

Here, you'll find everything you need to know about Crystal's UK workforce – from trade support to reservations experts – to help you bolster enquiries and boost bookings



Luke Smith

Vice president, trade sales, UK & EMEA

✉ LSmith@crystalcruises.com

☎ 07967 850105

Favourite thing about Crystal

“For me, it is all about the dining and a firm favourite is Beefbar by renowned restaurateur Riccardo Giraudi – incredible.”



Stephen Joyner

Senior sales manager, UK & EIRE

✉ SJoyner@crystalcruises.com

☎ 07870 548757

Favourite thing about Crystal

“Scoops Gelato Bar with Badiani, as I'm a big kid and they have more than 20 signature flavours to wade through!”



Michael Young-Richards

Key account manager, UK & EIRE

✉ MYoungRichards@crystalcruises.com

☎ 07805 759793

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The pickleball courts – it's always great to be able to stay active on board with one of my favourite sports.”



Holly Glazer

Business development specialist, UK & EMEA

✉ HGlazer@crystalcruises.com

☎ 07964 922664

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The incredible piano bar, Avenue Saloon. There's always a great atmosphere with lovely drinks and talented performers.”



Vanessa Brister

Reservations manager, UK & EMEA

✉ reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com

☎ 0808 1783396

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The crew – their personalised service and attention to detail is just excellent!”



René Larisch

Sales administration consultant

✉ reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com

☎ 0808 1783396

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The fantastic dining. I personally love seafood, sushi and steaks, and to have a meal in Umi Uma really feels more like an experience rather than ‘just’ a dinner.”



Jasmin Day

Reservations consultant

✉ reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com

☎ 0808 1783396

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The onboard staff. They're so friendly and they greet everyone as if they are an old friend. They provide the best service and nothing is ever too much trouble.”



Jennifer Lewis

Reservations consultant

✉ reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com

☎ 0808 1783396

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The indulgent range of complimentary Ortigia products provided on board has got to be one of my favourite things about Crystal!”



David Gonzalez

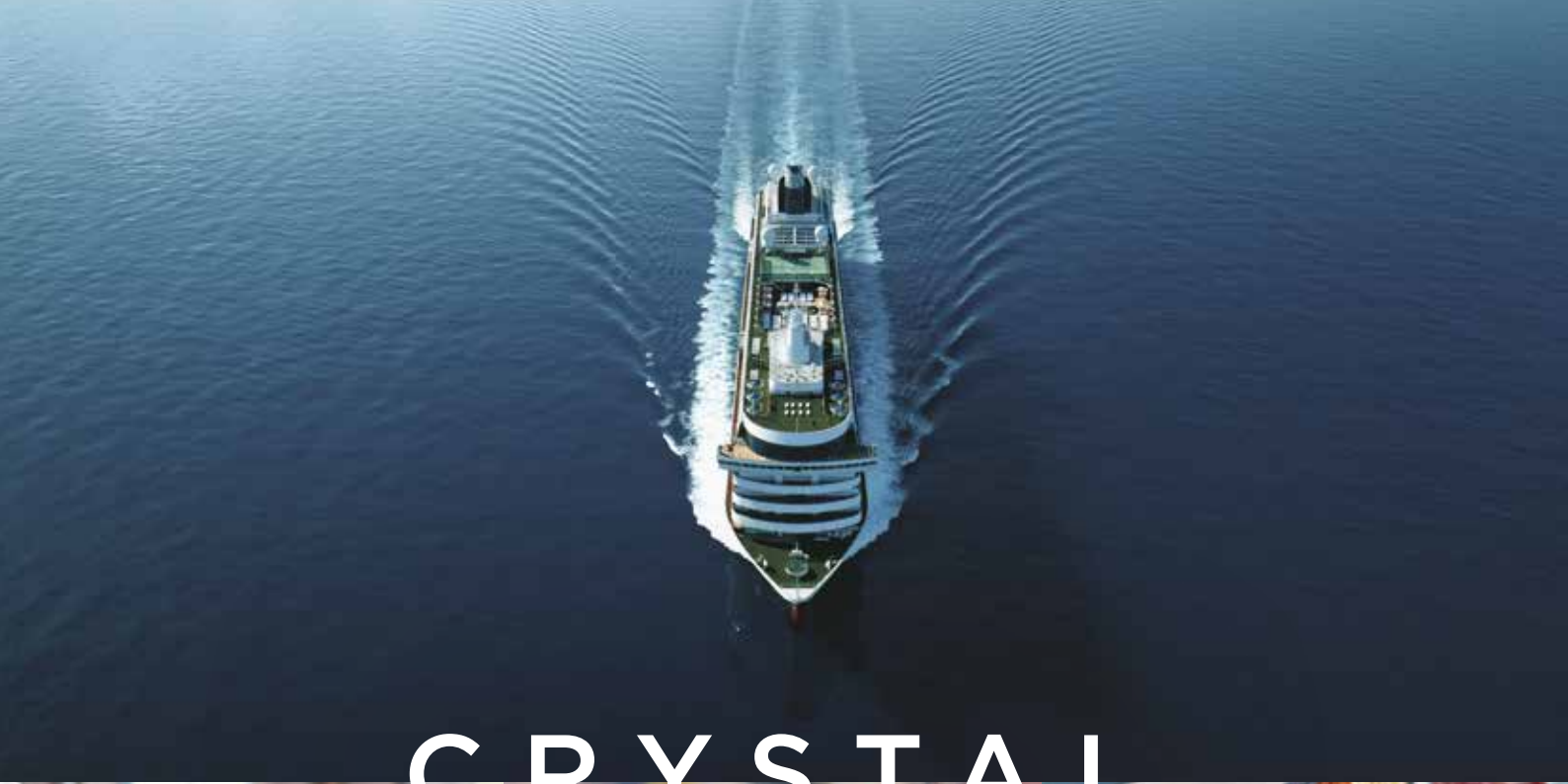
Reservations consultant

✉ reservationsuk@crystalcruises.com

☎ 0808 1783396

Favourite thing about Crystal

“The standard we hold ourselves to, not just in the product we offer, but in how we support our partners and each other. It's a culture built on trust, consistency and doing things properly.”



CRYSTAL



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CTN
Investigates

THE GREEN GAP

The cruise industry has long championed its sustainability credentials, but are they cutting through? As agents report little to no customer demand for greener sailings, Will Payne investigates what must change to secure the future of the sector – and the planet



The word ‘sustainability’ has been engrained in the travel industry’s narrative for decades, and for good reason. According to climate tech company Greenly, travel and tourism accounts for around 8 to 10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, placing the sector firmly in the spotlight as pressure mounts for meaningful change.

There are, however, signs of progress. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) suggests the ozone layer could return to 1980 levels by around 2040 across much of the world, highlighting the impact coordinated global action can have. For cruise in particular, significant investment in cleaner technologies, alternative fuels and more efficient ship design signals an industry taking its environmental responsibilities seriously.

Yet a key question remains: are these efforts resonating with consumers? According to *Cruise Trade News’* 2026 Annual Report, while 22 per cent of respondents describe themselves as “responsible travellers”, just 9 per cent say environmental concerns would stop them from booking a cruise.

“To be honest, we are never asked about sustainability when people book with us,” admits

Oasis Travel executive director Sandra Corkin. “The cruise companies are very good at giving us their sustainability policies, but we have had no experience of these sorts of things influencing decisions.”

So, if sustainability isn’t influencing sales, should agents and operators rethink how they communicate it with customers?

REALITY CHECK

Travel Counsellor Sarah Bolton believes the majority of consumers say sustainability is important to them – which might be the case – but they do not proactively seek out sustainable options when booking a holiday, and would rather assume their trip meets environmental protocols as standard.

“When it comes to booking cruises, I have never ever had anyone ask about sustainability,” Bolton continues. “Maybe if someone is that bothered about it, they’ve already done their own research, or a lot of people still automatically assume that cruising is not sustainable and therefore don’t even think about doing a cruise if that’s an issue to them. I think there may be an attitude of ‘not my problem’ and people expect the cruise lines and governing authorities to be responsible for ensuring sustainability.”

Founder of The Cruise Room, Robbie O’Grady, agrees that while sustainability matters –

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Hurtigruten is championing sustainability initiatives on all its ships; AI-powered food waste monitoring is underway on Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines’ *Bolette*; the cruise line has partnered with technology company Kitro to track waste management as part of a commitment to lower its environmental impact

7%

of 55-64 year olds cite concerns about the environment/pollution as a reason to not take a cruise

with some customers actively communicating this sentiment – it is yet to impact booking decisions. “The reality is that customers are not taking [sustainability] into consideration. It’s rarely – if ever – a requirement for guests to step onboard.

Destinations, experience onboard the ship, room types, drinks packages and bundles are always the requirements, and these are still the priority,” he adds.

Despite being confident in communicating cruise lines’ sustainability efforts when needed, O’Grady feels some operators could be doing more to support. “You always need your knowledge to be refreshed and topped up. To be fair, except for expedition cruise lines, we don’t feel as if the cruise lines themselves are talking about it as much as they once were.”

O’Grady believes there are more pertinent issues dominating guests’ booking decisions, including overtourism and geopolitical concerns in the Middle East and parts of Northern Europe around Ukraine. “These issues along with ship size, destination, room type and add on packages form the conversation with 99.9 per cent of guests today,” he adds. “It feels like sustainability may have slipped further down the list and some momentum to highlight the credentials may have been lost.”

“

People expect the cruise lines and governing authorities to be responsible for ensuring sustainability



GENERATION GAME

However, O’Grady has seen a shift in the conversation amongst younger cruises, with “one or two” young couples finding cruise lines’ sustainability credentials more important. Kirsty Van Wyk, owner of KVV Luxury Travel, has seen a similar trend emerging.

“One of my clients, who’s younger, is really concerned with sustainability when travelling,” Van Wyk says. “She had no intention of taking a cruise, but she took a Celebrity Cruises sailing recently which surprised me.” This is why, Van Wyk believes, cruise lines should continue to champion their sustainability credentials as it is beginning to resonate with the next generation. “For the older demographic of cruise passenger, [sustainability] just won’t cut through,” she adds.

“There are a minor few that care, but the younger generation coming in talk about it a lot more so cruise lines should target them when speaking about their sustainability credentials. The thing is, we’re all trying to make a livelihood and needs must, but the consumer dictates where they want to go.

“I offer sustainable options to my clients, but not everyone is interested. Companies like Antara and Havila Cruises are far, far ahead of others so promoting these lines is really important. We should definitely encourage lines to keep championing it, even if the current research suggests it isn’t impacting consumer decisions, as I do think it will start to filter through and become more important.” ▶





SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

One cruise line that prides itself on its commitment to the destination it serves is 132-year-old Norwegian coastal cruising specialist, Hurtigruten. According to vice president of sales and marketing for the UK and emerging markets, Hayley Moore, the line has seen its sustainability credentials play an increasingly important role in booking decisions in recent years. “What we’re seeing is a clear shift in expectations, with guests looking for genuine accountability from the brands they choose,” she tells *Cruise Trade News*.

The brand carried out some research on UK traveller sentiment in early 2025 which highlighted that 57 per cent of respondents believe large companies should take more direct environmental action, while 51 per cent said it’s important that they take action themselves. Thirty-four per cent, meanwhile, said they are actively committed to ensuring their travel plans do not negatively impact nature or climate, and 39 per cent try to reduce their carbon footprint in daily life.

“At Hurtigruten, we believe that the greatest impact comes when sustainability is embedded within the overall experience,” Moore adds. “Guests don’t want responsible travel to feel like a trade-off; they want it to enhance their journey. When we clearly demonstrate how our voyages deliver both meaningful local impact and immersive experiences, sustainability becomes part of the value proposition rather than a separate consideration.”

“

Guests don’t want responsible travel to feel like a trade-off; they want it to enhance their journey

This shift has been highlighted in the line’s guest feedback surveys. Post-voyage questionnaires show sustainability and responsible tourism are playing an increasing role in booking decisions. “For trade partners, we integrate our sustainability messaging across training materials, live presentations and online modules, ensuring agents clearly understand what sustainability means for Hurtigruten and how it enhances the guest offering. This is further brought to life through regular fam trips where agents get firsthand experience of our voyages,” Moore explains.

Dominic Simpson, sustainability manager at Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, says that while a new AI-powered food waste monitoring trial onboard its flagship *Bolette* was inspired by the company’s own ambitions, the line is seeing more guests than ever asking questions about its sustainability protocols.

“We’re always looking for practical ways – both big and small – to help reduce our environmental impact, and this trial is a great example of how innovative technology can support us in continuing to implement more sustainable practices.

“It’s important for us to highlight initiatives like these, as they demonstrate that meaningful

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines says more guests than ever ask questions about its sustainability protocols; Hurtigruten’s Hayley Moore sees a clear shift in customer expectations regarding accountability from brands; Robin Griffiths from APT Travel Group believes sustainability is gradually becoming a bigger factor for consumers when they are booking holidays

“ We do regular surveys with customers to ask them what is important, and sustainability is creeping up the list



change often comes from smaller, everyday improvements,” he adds. “By embracing new solutions and being transparent about our progress, we can not only enhance our own operations but also help set a positive example for the wider industry.”

However, speaking during a panel discussion on the future of cruise at New Deal Europe 2026, Robin Griffiths, national partnership manager for APT

Travel Group, says sustainability is not yet the biggest driver behind bookings being made in APT Luxury River Cruises or Traveledmarvel.

“It’s a bonus, customers like to hear how much good their doing by booking their holiday with us, but I still think bookings are being made on value, design of ship and inclusions,” he continues. “Our job is to tell the story of how sustainability is going to help a customer and improve their holiday. Battery-powered, electric-powered ships are coming, and they will be good for the planet and people’s experiences.”

Despite not being a current decision driver, Griffiths believes sustainability will soon be one of, if not the most important consideration consumers will make when booking a holiday. “We do regular surveys with our customers to ask them what is important and sustainability is creeping up the list and we think it will be at the top in no time.” ●



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OUR TAKE

Will Payne

editor of *Cruise Trade News*



“For all the industry’s progress, the message from the frontline is clear: sustainability alone is not yet selling cruises. Price, itinerary and onboard experience continue to dominate decision-making, while environmental credentials remain, at best, a ‘nice-to-have’β. But to treat that as a reason to deprioritise sustainability would be short-sighted. The foundations being laid today, from investment in cleaner technologies to more transparent reporting and agent education, are not just about meeting regulatory pressure, but about future-proofing the sector in an increasingly conscious travel landscape. The industry doesn’t need to rethink the importance of sustainability, but how it communicates and packages it. If it is to shift from a bonus to a genuine booking driver, it must be seamlessly woven into the overall value proposition rather than positioned as an optional trade-off. The next generation of cruisers is already paying closer attention, and their expectations will only intensify.”



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

Juli Hodson
Travel Counsellor



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Norwegian Luna



LUNAR RISING

One year on from the launch of *Norwegian Aqua*, **Will Payne** steps onboard Norwegian Cruise Line's newest vessel to see whether the operator's groundbreaking Prima Plus class still packs a punch, and what that means for agents looking to match clients with the right ship



Second ships in a new class don't have the luxury of surprise. Just over 12 months after Norwegian Cruise Line launched its Prima Plus class trailblazer *Norwegian Aqua*, the company returns with *Norwegian Luna*. Having been lucky enough to be among the first to experience its predecessor, I'm eager to see what – if anything – NCL has learned from the ship's debut season.

My journey of discovery begins in PortMiami, where I follow the throngs of excited journalists and travel industry execs down the gangway and into the glistening atrium. I head to my Family

“*Luna* is perfect for multigenerational travellers looking for a vacation in the tropics

Balcony Stateroom to get settled and feel at home amidst a design that feels instantly reminiscent of *Aqua*.

The sleek grey and metallic touches still feel modern, while art inspired by the ship's hull stretches across the wall behind the bed, adding a flourish of colour to the room. Even for a family of four, the cabin offers plenty of room thanks to a large double bed with space beneath for luggage and a double sofa bed. Rarely do you find this much room in a four-berth cabin on a ship this size.

The bathroom is spacious with a large walk-in shower and the storage is impeccable – so much so I have no use for an entire wardrobe for my three-night cruise. A nice touch is the amount of power sockets. A problem I find often while cruising is not enough power to charge multiple devices, but that clearly isn't an issue onboard *Luna*.

My belly is rumbling after a day of travel, so I make a beeline for the Indulge Food Hall, NCL's fresh take on the traditional cruise buffet which debuted last year. An iPad secured to my table

invites me to browse through a selection of street food-style eateries, ranging from French and Indian cuisine to Thai food and tapas. Having been instructed to order as much as I like, I proceed to hog wild on the pulled pork sandwich and crispy fried okra from Texas Smokehouse and order a selection of vegetable pakoras from Tamara for good measure.

Belly full, I head back to PortMiami for the ship's christening presentation in time to see ELLE, the ship's hull artist, accept her crown as *Luna*'s godmother. The crowd cheers as a champagne bottle crashes ceremoniously into her 1,056-foot canvas, confirming the ship's addition to NCL's fleet.

Marc Kazlauskas, president of NCL, then explains how *Luna* represents the evolution of the brand. “*Norwegian Luna* is the perfect ship for multigenerational travellers looking for a warm vacation in the tropics. With itineraries designed to bring guests to Great Stirrup Cay, our private island in the Bahamas, they will have the opportunity to experience first-hand the highly anticipated offerings that our guests are raving about.”

ONE GIANT LEAP

We head back onboard for a gala dinner celebration in Hudson's, the ship's main complimentary dining option. Light furnishing and wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows set the scene for an



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT PortMiami is the perfect launch pad for a tropical trip; the main pool deck is bigger than ever; cabins are light and airy; the Mandara Spa lets guests fully unwind; savour the stunning view from the Observation Lounge



enjoyable first meal onboard. The views are stunning, and the food is even better. We are served a four-course gala menu, including tuna sashimi, lechon croquettes, citrus and herb roasted chicken and tropical profiteroles. The food is well-prepared, light but filling and the embodiment of Norwegian's onboard offering – modern and suitable for all tastes.

After dinner we head to the Luna Theatre to experience one of the line's new shows, *Elton*, an all-singing, all-dancing tribute to the Grammy-winning rock and roll legend. Bright lights and even brighter costumes collide as the cast check off hits from his diamond-encrusted catalogue, mingling with the guests and encouraging people to sing to their hearts' content.

“*Elton* is an all-singing, all-dancing tribute to the Grammy-winning rock and roll legend

“Every single sequin is hand-sewn onto the costumes, so you can imagine the love and care that went into a show like *Elton*,” says NCL's senior manager of theatrical production, Mike Sheffield. “It takes two years to get a show to stage on a cruise ship, which is compounded even further when you're working on a brand new ship that hasn't been built yet.”

Another new production, *HIKO: Innovation Meets Wonder*, showcases the theatre's West End-level tech and is a high-energy, all-ages spectacle with twists and flips that leave you wondering, “How on earth did they do that?” Offering shows that will delight the whole family was a task for Bryan Anthony White, vice president of entertainment production for NCL.

“Creating the entertainment lineup for *Norwegian Luna* has been an incredible journey,” he says. “We're fortunate to partner with the most innovative and respected creators in the industry, so we can keep raising the bar and giving our guests the world-class entertainment NCL is known for.”

FIT TO LAST

As someone who likes to balance holiday excess with a few calorie-torching workouts, I'm easily impressed by a good onboard gym. Any fears that the fitness offering was an afterthought for the ship's design team are laid to rest when I visit the Pulse Fitness Centre the next morning. A crescent of treadmills and cross trainers have been thoughtfully placed next to ocean-facing windows. Beside them are a set of TRX bands suspended from the ceiling for aerobic workouts and through the free weights section, I spot a HIIT class in full flow.

As with *Aqua*, to access it you need to pass through the Mandara Spa, which is the ideal post-workout treat. I opt for a visit to the thermal suite, where hot stone beds and sweeping sea views help bring me back to life. There are dozens of treatments available in the spa, too, including IV boosters, teeth whitening, deep tissue massages and hot and cold sauna rooms.

Afterwards, I grab a coffee in the Observation Lounge with NCL's UK and Ireland chief, Gary Anslow. “*Aqua* worked really well,” he says. “There are a few décor changes, we've added a few things on the top deck and improved the flow in the Surfside Cafe, but we have kept the popular things, like the Aqua Slidecoaster and the Mandara Spa.”





The new additions Anslow is referring to are top-deck attractions like Luna Midway – a high-energy space packed with carnival-like games – and the Moon Walker ropes course suspended above the Glow Court, all of which hint at a shift towards a more playful, multigenerational onboard dynamic.

“It’s more about small, nuanced differences rather than huge changes. We will have the opportunity to make some more changes again in 2027 when *Norwegian Aura* launches. It will be 10 per cent bigger than *Luna* and *Aqua*, which is really exciting.”

LAND AHOY

The one and only stop on the christening sailing is a visit to NCL’s private island in the Bahamas, Great Stirrup Cay. The 268-acre destination features white-sand beaches, a 19th-century lighthouse turned zipline, oceanfront pools, dining options, a tram service and an adults-only retreat. This

Fast facts

3,565
guests

1,809
staterooms

1,597
crew

17
dining options

46K
square foot promenade

summer, NCL will open the Great Tides Waterpark, featuring 19 slides, cliff jumps and an 800-foot lazy river.

Despite only stopping for a short period due to high winds – even the Bahamas isn’t exempt from adverse weather conditions – it’s clear to see how Great Stirrup Cay complements the ship experience. Take the adults-only Vibe Shore Club, for example, which mirrors the sophisticated atmosphere of its onboard counterpart, Vibe Beach Club. What’s more, all onboard inclusions, such as food and drink, carry over to the island too, so guests can leave their wallets in their stateroom.

Back on board, I head to the Belvedere Bar for a pre-dinner drink, surveying the impressive line of alcoholic and non-alcoholic cocktails before ordering a zesty ‘nojito’. My final meal is spent at Sukhotai, the ship’s Thai restaurant and one of seven speciality options, all of which come with a £50pp cover charge. I treat myself to the spring rolls and



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to listen to the Norwegian
Luna x Cruise Corner
Podcast special

“ The ship offers high- energy entertainment, flexible dining and innovative spaces

chicken satay to start, which are served with an aromatic sweet chilli sauce, followed by a Thai green chicken curry.

As I look around the restaurant, I recognise the same excitement on guests' faces from my time on *Norwegian Aqua* a year ago. And while the focus has very much been on refinement over reinvention, capturing that effervescence and transferring it to *Norwegian Luna* isn't easy.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

Ultimately, *Norwegian Luna* is less about reinvention and more about refinement of a proven product. NCL has taken the aspects that have already resonated with guests on *Aqua* and sharpened them, smoothing out the edges while layering in thoughtful additions – like Luna Midway, Moon Walker and new theatre shows – that broaden its appeal. For agents, that clarity of proposition is invaluable. The ship offers a balance of high-energy entertainment, flexible dining and innovative spaces which cater equally well to families, couples and groups.

What stands out most is how seamlessly the onboard and onshore experiences connect. Great Stirrup Cay doesn't feel like an add-on; it feels like an extension of the ship. This creates an easy sell, particularly for clients who want variety without complexity.

Luna is the ideal choice for first-time cruisers looking for a modern, accessible introduction to the sector, as well as repeat guests seeking familiarity with a twist. It's also ideal for families wanting shared experiences, couples who value flexibility over formality, and groups who appreciate variety without having to over-plan. In a crowded newbuild market, *Norwegian Luna* proves that evolution, when executed well, can be just as compelling as revolution. ●



OUR VERDICT

Great for multigenerational families who like adventure

Don't miss the Luna Game Zone

Best spot on the ship The Observation Lounge

Value for money NCL's Free at Sea package includes unlimited drinks, specialty dining, 150 minutes of Wi-Fi and shore excursion credit. Free at Sea Plus also includes Starbucks drinks, premium drinks and unlimited Wi-Fi.

Saving the planet *Luna* supports NCL's Sail & Sustain programme with advanced environmental tech designed to reduce emissions and waste, including a NOx Reduction System (SCR). The Metropolitan Bar, for example, uses zero-waste mixology, eco-conscious spirits and ingredients that would otherwise go to waste.

Star rating 5/5

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The onboard entertainment includes a tribute to rock legends, The Eagles; the Aqua Slidecoaster combines the thrill of a rollercoaster with a water slide; there's plenty to entertain guests of all ages in the Luna Game Zone

Get on Board

NCL's seven-day Caribbean: Harvest Caye, Cozumel & Roatan cruise aboard *Norwegian Luna*, return from Miami via Roatan, Harvest Caye, Costa Maya and Cozumel, departs 9 January 2027, from £765pp for an Inside Cabin. **ncl.com**



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SMALL SHIPS, BIG ADVENTURES

With research showing a rise in yacht-style cruising, **Jack Carter** asks why travellers are prioritising slowness over spectacle

Something curious is happening in the cruise industry right now. As Europe's shipyards put hammer to nail on the next generation of mega ships, interest in more intimate sailing experiences is growing, with a cohort of small-ship operators out to prove that bigger isn't necessarily better. The benefits are hard to argue with. These are ships that can glide effortlessly down narrow locks

and canals, drop anchor metres away from soaring glaciers and sail into the heart of major cities, calling into ports that are simply out of reach for today's maritime giants.

Equally alluring is what's happening on board, where inside cabins make way for spacious, ocean view accommodation, and favourable crew-to-guest ratios translate to a more personal, anticipatory experience. Think of it like sailing on a private yacht, but for a fraction of the cost.

And now, Britain's holidaymakers are wising up. According to research from marketing specialist Adido and luxury travel company Unforgettable Croatia, online searches for small-ship cruises – those that carry less than 300 guests – have increased by 71 per cent in the past two years. As surprising as this shift may seem, there's an inevitability to it too. While the floating waterparks, Broadway-style productions and head-spinning array of dining options



are unquestionably appealing, scale isn't everyone's cup of tea. As a result, ambivalent travellers are turning to refined voyages that prioritise slowness over spectacle.

"The difference between large ships and small ships is the intimacy, the authenticity and the fact that you don't have the queues that you get on big ships," says Simon Terry, captain of Windstar Cruises' *Star Legend*. "It's a homely, family environment."



“ Travellers are turning to refined voyages that prioritise slowness over spectacle

STRIKING OUT

This isn't the only influencing factor. According to *Cruise Trade News*' 2026 Annual Report, in partnership with Mail Metro Media, nearly half of regular cruisers are more interested in visiting off-the-beaten-track destinations than ports they're familiar with.

Furthermore, 62 per cent of the regular sailors surveyed say they plan to visit somewhere new in 2026. While this trend has been growing since travel restarted after the pandemic, only now has it begun reshaping people's cruise habits. Indeed, when asked to choose between sailing on a traditional ocean vessel or a smaller ship, over 65s voted overwhelmingly in favour of the latter.

"The main attraction for sailing with us is that we get into smaller ports," says Helen Beck, managing director, global

commercial for Windstar Cruises. "When sailing up the Adriatic coast, we call in at ports like Piran in Slovenia, or Zadar and Hvar in Croatia – places many people may never have heard of. These are the gems that guests remember most."

Windstar Cruises' fleet of all-suite, yacht-style ships visit roughly 330 ports across Europe, the Caribbean, Asia, and South and North America. Its newest ship, *Star Seeker*, which launched in December, will be joined by *Star Explorer* at the end of the year before a special christening ceremony in London in 2027. With capacity for 224 guests each, they join a fleet that is tailor-made for immersive shoreside adventures.

"Take Alaska, for example," adds Beck. "Even when we're not in port, we can drop anchor and take the Zodiacs out to get up close to the glaciers. We can also sail right up the Chao Phraya River into the heart of Bangkok, negating the need for the three-hour transfer from the port."

NO-FLY THRILLS

While the ability to reach out-of-the-way ports is one of the biggest draws of a small-ship cruise, it's also a boon for domestic travellers, with



“ You don’t need to leave British waters to witness astonishing natural wonders

the UK’s archipelagos, canals and riverways providing a straight shot for outdoorsy escapes.

“We often welcome well-travelled guests who have explored the wider world and are now looking for adventures closer to home – places they might not have visited before, or haven’t been to since childhood,” says Ken Charleson, managing director of Hebridean Island Cruises. “You

don’t need to leave British waters to witness astonishing natural wonders, and that no-fly element is, for many, a welcome bonus.”

The line’s trio of ships, which carry up to 50 guests, are small enough to ferry passengers to wildly beautiful islands that those on larger vessels can merely sail past. They can even venture up the Caledonian Canal, slicing through the Scottish Highlands to Inverness.

“Our Lord of the Highlands itinerary is particularly popular with customers who might previously only have considered European river cruises,” Charleson adds. “The calm, scenic transit of the Caledonian Canal is a great ‘bridge’ for those less comfortable with open-sea conditions.”

“It’s about making you feel special while on board, and when you have the numbers that we do, that’s easier than on the bigger ships,” adds Terry. “I believe that’s what makes Windstar special. It’s the way the crew interact with our guests and deliver an authentic and exceptional service.”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Experience the wonders of Scotland’s beautiful islands; guests disembark within walking distance of Barcelona’s renowned sights; smaller ships still offer outstanding pool spaces; destinations like Monemvasia in Greece are more accessible; fewer guests onboard creates a relaxed, friendly ambience



AYE AYE, CAPTAIN

Windstar Cruises skipper
Simon Terry gives us a sneak
peek into life on the bridge

What are the benefits of captaining a smaller ship?

“The main advantage is the fact that there’s more of a homely feeling on board. Guests end up with a much smaller crew, which is ideal because that filters into the authenticity of our customer service. We have an open bridge policy, which means guests can pop in and have a chat with us – when it’s safe to do so, of course.”

What do guests tend to ask when they visit the bridge?

“Even with the big ships, people always say, ‘Oh, I was expecting a bigger steering wheel!’ They’re expecting a large *Pirates of the Caribbean*-style wheel, the kind Jack Sparrow would use.”

Smaller ships also mean being able to reach smaller ports. How does that impact the experience?

“There’s a large percentage of places that we go that the larger ships can’t reach. For example, when we go to Venice, we sail up the Grand Canal, or when we visit Barcelona, we moor on the World Trade Centre side of the port which means when guests disembark, they can walk straight into town without having to queue for a bus.”





SET SAIL

Ready to book your customers' small-ship adventure?
Here's our pick of the best boutique cruises for first timers

WINTER IN THE MED

For travellers who want to explore Europe's romantic cities without the crowds, queues and intense summer heat.

WHY BOOK?

Winter cruising around the Med is travel's so-hot-right-now trend, with fewer crowds and milder temperatures allowing visitors to soak up Europe's culture-packed cities at a gentler pace.

With the summer crowds having dissipated, guests can take their time enjoying Michelangelo's David sculpture in Florence or strolling beneath the cavernous ceilings of Valencia Cathedral. What's more, January and February usually means it's party time for the locals, with Barcelona, Venice and Malaga kicking the year off in style with carnival season.

TOP TIP

With an overnight in Barcelona, guests can venture beyond touristic Las Ramblas and head to fun-loving Gracia to enjoy tapas and sip Vermouth with the locals.



Get on board

Windstar Cruises' 16-night Winter in Spain and the Rivas cruise aboard *Star Explorer*, from Rome to Barcelona via Genoa, Nice, Valencia, Cartagena and Malaga, departing 7 February 2027, from £6,550pp. windstarcruises.com

HOTFOOTING AROUND THE HIGHLANDS

For travellers who are searching for an immersive and easy-going journey through the Scottish Highlands.

WHY BOOK?

Driving is one way to explore Scotland's untamed hinterland, but only on a cruise can people soak up this sprawling region's seaside towns, lochs and islands while bringing their opulent digs with them.

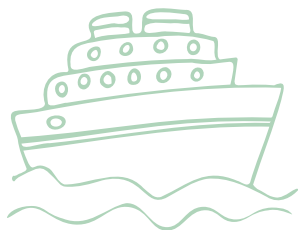
Visitors can board the 50-guest *Lord of the Glens* in Inverness and sail west down the Caledonian Canal, where the giant Grampian Mountains – home of the imperious Ben Nevis – tumble onto chocolate-box villages and 1,000-year-old castle ruins. They then continue onward to the Isle of Iona, the final resting place of some 50 Scottish kings and home to Benedictine Abbey, before ending in Scotland's seafood capital, Oban. Recommend a table at Ben Cruachan Inn Pub, winner of Scotland's best gastropub in 2025, and its signature battered smoked haddock and chips, or a tour of the Oban Distillery where visitors sample malts straight from the cask.

TOP TIP

Booking a solo sailor? Hebridean Island Cruises has waived single supplements on this itinerary's three October sailings while throwing in a free drinks package worth £120pp.



Images: Adobe, Shutterstock



Get on board

Hebridean Island Cruises' six-night Caledonian & Great Glen Explorer Cruise aboard *Lord of the Glens*, from Inverness to Oban via Fort Augustus, Banavie and Corpach, departing 17 October 2026, from £3,100pp. lordoftheglens.co.uk

ISLAND HOPPING IN ASIA

For travellers who want to combine blissful beaches in Thailand with grand palaces and hawker-style street eats in Bangkok and Singapore.

WHY BOOK?

It doesn't get more idyllic than Thailand's powder-soft beaches and sapphire waters, which play a starring role in this 11-night itinerary from Windstar Cruises. Starting in Phuket, visitors can stroll along the island's palm-fringed bays or venture into the Old Town and join a guided tour of its candy-coloured colonial mansions. More beach bliss is served up in Krabi and Koh Yao Noi before the pace quickens with a visit to Penang's UNESCO-protected capital George Town.

An overnight in Singapore lets guests take in the Supertree light show at Gardens by the Bay, after which they dine in the world-famous Hawker markets (seek out Hawker Chan for the cheapest Michelin-starred meal they'll ever eat). The climax of this cruise is a sail up the Chao Phraya River, giving sailors a front-row seat to Bangkok's sparkling skyline.

TOP TIP

Book a table at Windstar Cruises' new specialty restaurant, Basil + Bamboo – exclusive to *Star Seeker*.

Get on board

Windstar Cruises' 11-night Tantalising Thailand & Sparkling Singapore cruise aboard *Star Seeker*, from Phuket to Bangkok via Koh Yao Noi, Penang, Port Klang (Kuala Lumpur) and Singapore, departing 17 January 2027, from £5,260pp. windstarcruises.com



PARTNERSHIP



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Take a stroll in Rome when the crowds have gone; enjoy an immersive, unhurried journey through the Scottish Highlands; Bangkok boasts awesome architecture; Patagonia is the perfect destination for penguin spotting

PENGUIN SPOTTING IN PATAGONIA

For travellers who are drawn to the remote beauty and unspoiled nature of South America's final frontier.

WHY BOOK?

Patagonia is an outdoor lover's wonderland. All snow-tipped mountain peaks, glistening glacial lakes and towering fjords, unfurling across the Chilean and Argentinian border where elephant seals, whales and some 180 species of seabird roam freely.

Australis has been navigating the Tierra del Fuego archipelago in southern Patagonia for more than three decades, following the paths of famous explorers to places unreachable by roads. Starting in Punta Arenas, Patagonia's largest city, guests can visit the Magellanic and king penguin colonies, before heading south to the Pia Glacier – they can spend a while on the shore, listening out for the creaks and groans from the crawling ice.

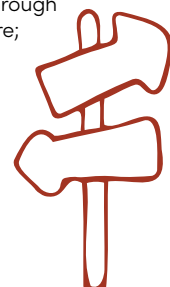
The next morning, the ship sails through Nassau Bay to the majestic Cape Horn National Park where Australis is one of only a handful of operators permitted to dock, before ending in Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world.

TOP TIP

Time your customers' visits with Chile's humpback whale colony, which gorges on fresh krill in the shores of Punta Arenas between December and March. 🐳

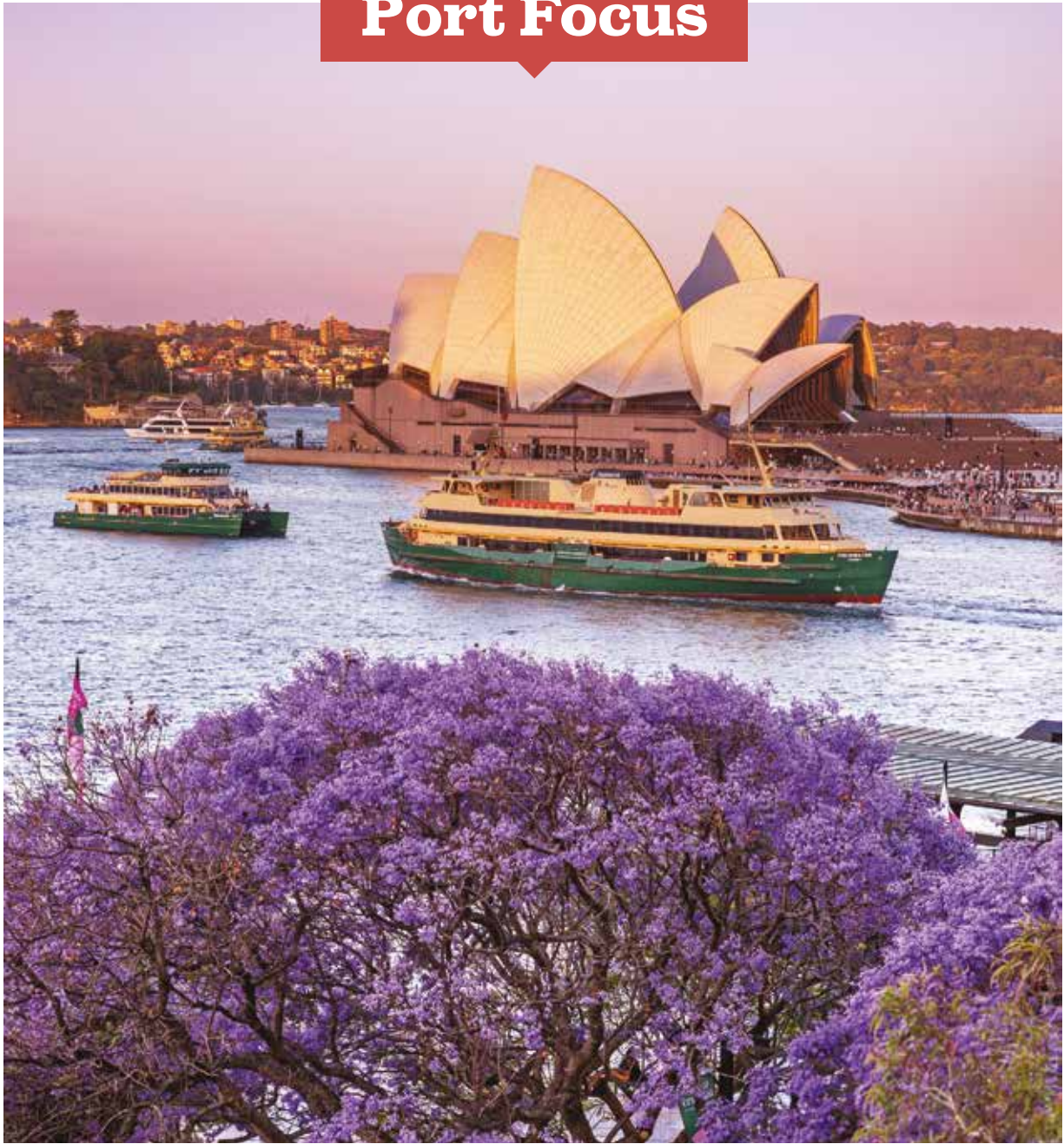
Get on board

Australis' five-day Wildlife, Glaciers and Cape Horn Cruise, aboard the 200-guest *Stella Australis*, from Punta Arenas to Ushuaia via Ainsworth Bay, Pia Glacier and Cape Horn, departing 27 January 2027, from £3,826pp. australis.com



HIGHLIGHTS • FOOD & DRINKS
SHOPPING • ITINERARIES

Port Focus



Sydney

From glorious beaches and sparkling harbours to epic galleries and next-level seafood, Sydney has feel-food factor in spades. Writer and former resident **Renate Ruge** offers two ways visitors can soak up this sunny city



Food



Drink



Walk



Museums, galleries and landmarks



Adventure



Wildlife



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Sydney's iconic Opera House; Sydney Harbour Bridge, aka 'the coat hanger'; there's a wealth of exhibits at the Art Gallery of New South Wales; the heritage-listed Paddington Reservoir Gardens



One moment you're at sea, the next you're gliding into one of the world's most beautiful natural harbours. The sight of the steel arch that locals affectionately nickname the 'coat hanger' (aka Sydney Harbour Bridge) and the white sails of Sydney Opera House glinting in the light is a sight once seen, never forgotten. To Sydneysiders, its simply, "beaut".

Set on the south-eastern coast of the 'Lucky Country', Australia's second-

largest city and state capital of New South Wales is built on Gadigal Country, home to First Nations people for tens of thousands of years. More recent history unfolds in The Rocks, where early European arrivals stepped ashore more than 200 years ago.

Today, Sydney, with its rakish charm and freethinking locals, is a sun-soaked blend of golden beaches, thought-provoking galleries, rooftop bars, world-class food and waterside dining, with characterful neighbourhoods spreading out from the gleaming CBD. Ferries double as commuter trains, lunches linger outdoors and life revolves happily around the harbour and beach. Whether you have customers travelling as a couple or with an adventurous solo spirit, Sydney life is swell, as confirmed by these two mini itineraries.

FOR COUPLES



8:30am Begin early in the Royal Botanic Gardens while the air is cool, strolling from Circular Quay cruise terminal past palms, breathing

in lemony scents of flowering shrubs and marvelling at statues and sculptures to a soundtrack of birdsong. Join an Aboriginal-guided walk to add depth and storytelling to your morning's meander through Gadigal Country.



9am Pause for a photo at Lady Macquarie's Chair. Carved in sandstone by convicts in the 1800s, the bench was a gift from Governor Macquarie to his wife. Take a seat, as she did, and soak up panoramic views of the opera house and Harbour Bridge.



9:30am Take the chance to step inside Sydney's must-see art museum, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, before the general public on this 75-minute guided tour. An expert gallery educator will lead you through two buildings, sharing the stories behind its incredible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. During the tour, enjoy a coffee with your guide as they share the stories, histories and cultural significance of the pieces on display.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Bondi Icebergs' ocean pool; head to the top of Sydney Harbour Bridge; lunch at Icebergs' bistro

 **10:45am** Catch the 333 bus that heads down Oxford Street – following the path of Sydney's joyous Mardi Gras parade – to the well-heeled suburb of Paddington, which is lined with boutique stores and Victorian-era houses. Give your feet a rest at the Ampersand Bookstore Café and peruse its 30,000-strong collection while enjoying a flat white coffee and a buttery slice of toasted banana bread (a classic Sydney combo).

 **12pm** After browsing Paddington's indie stores (Parlour X for designer threads; Opus for gifts and homewares), take a taxi to Catalina for an alfresco lunch



“Climb Sydney Harbour Bridge for breathtaking views of the Blue Mountains

overlooking Rose Bay's sailboats. Pan-fried snapper, whipped mash and lemon caper butter steal the show as pelicans enviously look on. Take a beat to watch the seaplanes take off above the sparkling water with a glass of Hunter Valley Shiraz in hand.

 **2:45pm** A post-meal stroll along the Hermitage Foreshore Walk reveals the secret coves of Milk Beach and Shark Beach, leading to Watsons Bay, the perfect spot for a afternoon schooner of beer at the Beach Club by the wharf.

 **4:30pm** Return to Circular Quay by ferry to explore The Rocks' famous cobblestone laneways. Link up with The Rocks Walking Tours to understand how modern Australia developed from this historic harbourside pocket.

 **6:15pm** End the day with sundowners and freshly shucked Sydney rock oysters at Café Sydney, a 10-minute walk from the cruise

terminal. Live jazz and front-row views of Sydney's glittering harbour provide a romantic finale as evening descends.

FOR SOLO TRAVELLERS

 **7am** Rise early and treat yourself to a scenic sunrise jog around the Royal Botanic Gardens. The 4km paved loop along the park's leafy edge starts just a few minutes' walk from the cruise terminal, passing beneath the shade of towering fig trees before reaching Mrs Macquarie's Chair. Continue on to Andrew Boy Charlton Pool and reward yourself with a refreshing dip.

 **9am** After breakfast on board, take a view from the Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout & Museum. Set to reopen this June after an extensive renovation, the museum will feature new interactive displays and previously unseen artefacts telling the story of Sydney's famous bridge – its steel arch still the largest in the world. More daring explorers can put their mettle to the test by climbing to the bridge's summit, where breathtaking views stretch all the way to the Blue Mountains, some 70km away.

 **10:30am** Feed your mind at The Museum of Contemporary Art, where paintings, sculptures and video



FROM TOP The secluded Milk Beach; the Rocks' famous cobblestone laneways

works reflect upon everything from the dawn of AI to the lives of indigenous communities across Australia and New Zealand. Head to the information desk on Level One and book yourself a free guided tour for a more in-depth understanding.

11:45am Break for the beach. Take a bus or taxi to Bondi and arrive at Sydney's most famous stretch of sand. Explore the pavilion for a hit of surfing history, then head to the iconic Bondi Icebergs, which has been welcoming swimmers to its ocean pool since 1929. Grab lunch at Icebergs' ocean-facing bistro, where supersized steak sandwiches and poke bowls are a nourishing reward for that early start.

2pm Slap on your factor 50 – if you haven't done so already – and

“Explore Bondi Beach's surfing history and take a dip in its iconic Icebergs ocean pool

head south on the 6km Bondi-to-Coogee Coastal Walk. Raise your step count while admiring the knockout ocean views, pausing at Bronte Beach for a sea-pool dip or joining locals for a spot of lawn bowling at Clovelly's gorgeously scenic clubhouse.

5pm After reaching Coogee Beach, treat yourself to an Aussie-style fish & chips or the Coffs Harbour king prawn cocktail and a glass of fizz at Rick Stein's new outpost, inside the InterContinental Sydney Coogee Beach. The British chef and TV host unveiled his latest Australian eatery last December, with all seafood sustainably sourced from the bays of New South Wales.

6pm End your day at one of Sydney's array of eclectic speakeasys. Located in the central business district, Old Mate's Place is an oasis amid the high rises, offering a saloon-style bar, complete with Victorian bookcases and leather-bound booths, and a rooftop terrace.



Luke Smith

vice president, trade sales,
UK & EMEA, Crystal

“Our luxury cruises in Australia take your clients right to the heart of this happy-go-lucky island continent. Voyages along the sun-soaked east coast take in a trio of the country's most dynamic hubs: glamorous Sydney, with its show-stopping architecture, glossy lifestyle stores, and world-famous beaches; uber-cool Melbourne, with its hip coffee shops and street art; and laid-back Brisbane, where sophisticated urban life is infused with tropical charm. In 2028, both of our ships will be in Australia, while the World Cruise 2028 will see our first-ever circumnavigation of the country, from reef to rainforest. Pre- and post-cruise destination experiences with Crystal's sister company, Abercrombie & Kent, guarantee even deeper immersion for your customers into Australia's natural and cultural wonders.”

Get on board

Crystal's 15-night Auckland to Brisbane cruise aboard *Crystal Serenity*, via Tauranga, Napier, Wellington, Lyttelton (Christchurch), Dunedin (Port Chalmers), Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle, departs 3 March 2027, from £8,900pp. crystalcruises.com

‘Agents step up when it matters most’

CLIA UK and Ireland managing director **Andy Harmer OBE** on how the association is supporting its trade members in times of crisis – and why agents matter more now than ever

In cruise, we often talk about the moments that inspire people to book: the dream destinations; the new ships; and the promise of unforgettable experiences. But just as important are the moments that truly define our industry, when times of uncertainty, disruption and global events test confidence and require calm, expert guidance.

When events and travel circumstances change, customers turn to their travel agent, who understands their needs, listens to their concerns and provides reassurance grounded in experience.

Time and again, we are seeing agents going above and beyond. Whether it's proactively contacting clients to discuss itinerary changes, navigating complex rebooking options, or



simply being at the end of the phone to offer clarity and reassurance, agents deliver a level of service that cannot be replicated elsewhere. These are not just transactions; they are relationships built on trust.

We hear so many stories of amazing travel agents who go above and beyond – who demonstrate the value that they bring to the cruise holiday, not just in matching the right customer with the right ship, but also being there when circumstances change.

At CLIA, we are committed to supporting agents so they can continue to provide this essential service with

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

In moments of disruption, agents deliver a level of service that can't be replicated elsewhere; Andy Harmer has seen innumerable instances of agents going above and beyond

confidence. That means access to timely, accurate information as situations evolve, as well as ongoing training that helps them navigate operational changes and customer concerns. Our role is to equip the trade with the tools and insights they need to respond effectively, whatever the circumstances.

This collaboration between cruise lines, CLIA and the travel trade is one of the industry's greatest strengths. It means that, even in challenging times, customers receive consistent, reliable guidance and can continue to travel with confidence.

Ultimately, moments of disruption shine a light on what truly matters. They remind us that while ships, destinations and innovation are all vital, it is people who sit at the heart of our industry. And when it matters most, travel agents don't just meet expectations – they exceed them.

Andy Harmer is managing director of CLIA UK & Ireland ♦



Even in challenging times, customers receive consistent, reliable guidance and can continue to travel with confidence



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