

ISSUE 122 • NOVEMBER 2023

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# CRUISE

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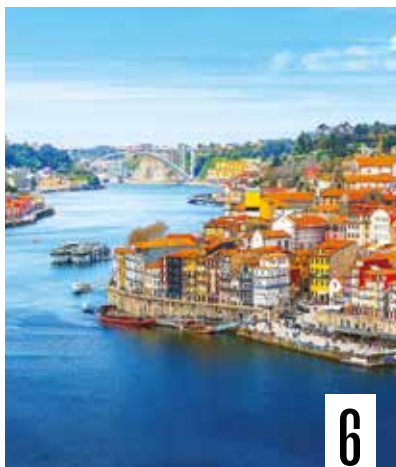
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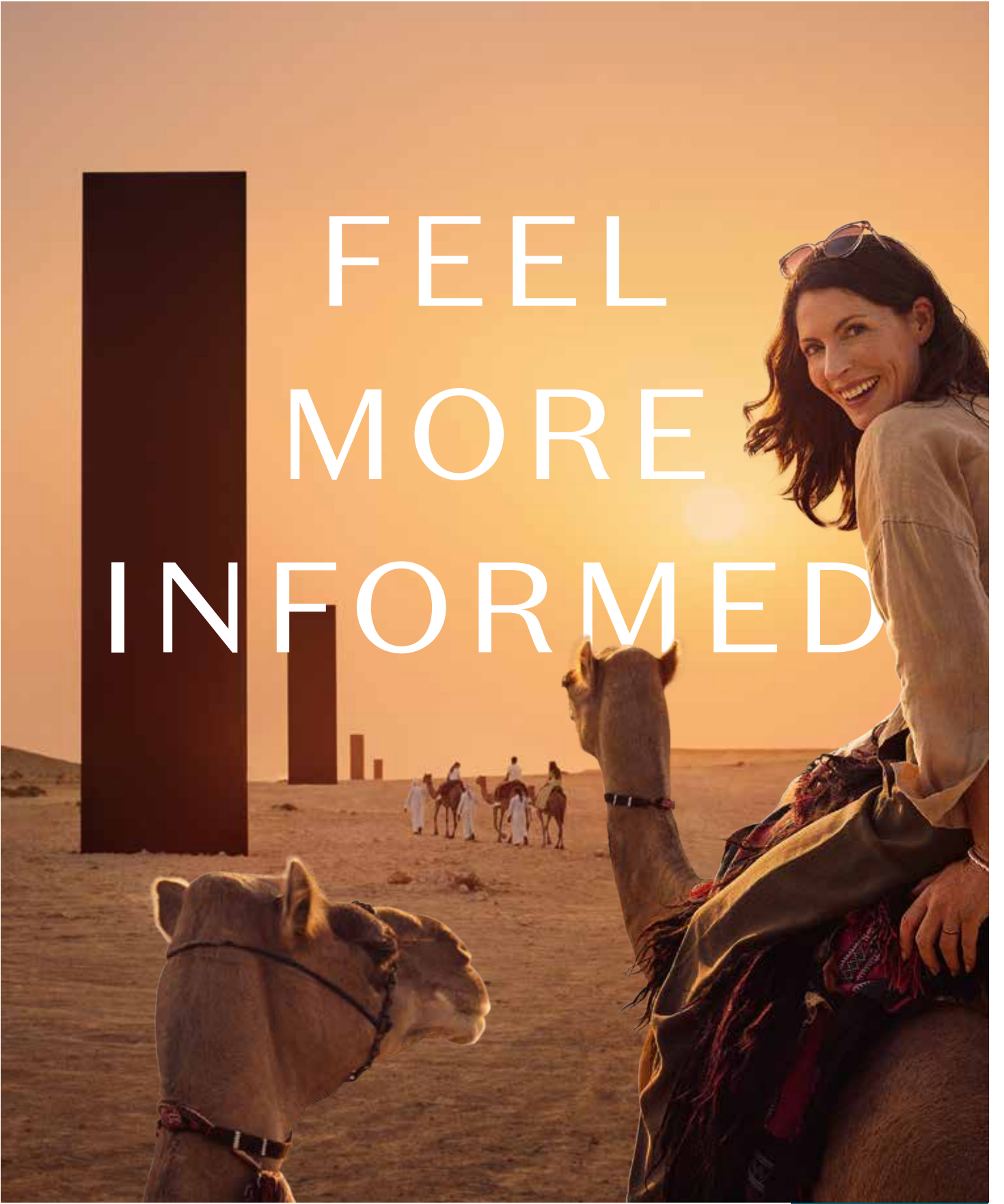
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## WELCOME...

### TO THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

**T**he issue of technology is never far away. We use it every day in both our personal and professional lives. Often, it can drive us mad, whether that be through poor performance or a lack of knowledge on how to use it correctly.

While modern tech is clearly not universally loved, there's no doubt that with every passing year, it is changing our society, workplaces and homes in profound ways.

The cruise sector is no stranger to these changes – and the biggest one yet could soon be on the horizon. Artificial intelligence (AI) is rarely out of the headlines. The foremost pro, say the experts, is in freeing up people for valuable tasks, while the cons are rooted in an uneasiness of how all-consuming it may become. Discover how AI is already starting to transform the cruise industry in this issue's key analysis feature.

Inside you'll also find a deep dive into the key elements of Cunard, as well as an inside look at *Explora I* and *Riverside Mozart*.

Our recent travels have taken us on Fred Olsen's *Borealis* and Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Viva*, which you can read all about in the Exploring



**ABOVE** Exploring Venice with Regent Seven Seas Cruises

section. As ever, there are also all the latest updates from across river, luxury and expedition cruising.

We also look back at the CTN and CLIA Cruise Summit, which took place in October. The event – which focused on preparing the industry for the upcoming wave period – saw the likes of Google, TikTok, Fred Olsen, Riviera Travel and many others provide their expert insight.

**Gary Peters**  
Editor

On the cover: Fred Olsen Cruise Lines

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# Cruise Corner

## DESTINATIONS 'KEY' FOR NEW TO CRUISE

> Travel agents should focus on explaining the key features and highlights of destinations to attract new-to-cruise guests.

Those words, from Seabourn UK & Europe VP Lynn Narraway, came at the CLIA Porto Destination Showcase event. "Destination is one of the main reasons guests book a cruise," she said.

Narraway also highlighted recent research showing that 68 per cent of UK cruisers book a pre-cruise stay, with 58 per cent opting for a post-cruise extension. Focusing on luxury clients, Narraway pinpointed how they are "destination focused... that's a good way to bring new to cruise in".



## IN NUMBERS

**58%** booking  
post-cruise

**68%** booking  
pre-cruise



### MARKETING GURU

Accord Marketing chief client officer **Maria Payne** outlines the top tips for creating an effective online presence

Creating a website for your independent travel agency is essential for attracting potential clients. Here are my essential tips:

- Use a clean, modern design that reflects your brand
- Choose a colour scheme and typography that are easy on the eyes
- Make it easy for visitors to find the information they want
- Showcase high-quality, captivating images of destinations and so on

- Feature any current promotions or deals prominently on your homepage
- Display customer reviews and testimonials to build trust
- Share personal travel experiences and stories to connect with your audience
- Maintain a blog with regularly updated cruise-related content
- Include prominent CTAs such as 'book now'
- Incorporate easy-to-use, privacy-compliant booking or enquiry forms that collect necessary information



SCAN TO DISCOVER  
MORE CRUISE NEWS  
AND FEATURES



## THORNE TRAVEL HAILS UPTICK IN BOOKINGS

> Scotland's Thorne Travel has seen a 700 per cent year-on-year uptick in cruise sales following the launch of its dedicated cruise division in 2022.

Shona Thorne, managing director, said the firm has received bookings for cruise from consumers as far away as Santorini in Greece. "It's truly humbling to witness the reach and impact of our exceptional cruise service."

Thorne said the uptick in cruise business came from enhanced collaborations with lines such as MSC Cruises, Oceania, Silversea, Ponant and Ambassador, as well as ship visits and events the agency organised for consumers.

**“THE FIRM HAS RECEIVED BOOKINGS FROM CONSUMERS AS FAR AWAY AS SANTORINI, GREECE**



## BOLSOVER EXPANDS CRUISE & STAY TEAM

> Bolsover Cruise Club has expanded its cruise and stay team with an influx of new staff and dedicated office space. Now with a 19-strong workforce, and a recent move to a new purpose-built office space at The Cruise Centre in Barlborough, the cruise and stay department has posted exponential growth figures. Revenue is currently up 100 per cent year-on-year and a dedicated administration and marketing team is now assisting the team in its future development.



## LONG HAUL IS BACK

Princess Cruises UK & Europe sales director **Nick Hughes** highlights an increase in guests travelling further afield

While over the past few years, we've seen UK guests choosing to travel closer to home, in recent times we're experiencing increased demand for cruises further afield.

One stand-out destination is the United States. According to the US National Travel & Tourism Office, between January and June 2023, the percentage of UK traveller arrivals to the US saw a 23 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2022.

Looking ahead to 2024, Princess Cruises has lots to shout about for our cruises from the US. In Alaska, we're celebrating our 55th season of sailing, and we're debuting two new cruisetours that combine an Alaska cruise with multiple days on land. For the first time, we'll have a ship homeported in Port Canaveral and, in October 2024, our new ship *Sun Princess* will make her US debut with sailings to the Caribbean out of Fort Lauderdale.

# Sell the spectacle

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon** delves into how to entice clients by focusing on a natural wonder



**A**s we go into the winter months, it's a great time to discuss the opportunities this season brings. For many, these cooler and darker months don't seem like the time for a holiday but, in fact, this is the perfect time to introduce your customers to some of the world's natural wonders – not least experiencing the Northern Lights.

For those who have never embarked on a cruise before, this may be the ideal way to entice them into a whole new way of holidaying. The Northern Lights spectacle is best observed in regions like Norway, Iceland and the Arctic Circle, where the landscapes serve as the perfect backdrop. So, why should you encourage your customers, especially those who have never cruised before, to embark on a Northern Lights cruise?

## GAZE AT THE SKY

Firstly, cruises take passengers to remote locations far from light pollution, offering the best chance to witness the lights. Imagine gazing up at the night sky from the comfort of a warm ship as the Northern Lights paint the skies with vibrant hues. It's an experience unlike any other and an opportunity for your customers to create some unforgettable memories while dipping into the world of cruising.



**ABOVE** A Northern Lights cruise is an experience unlike any other

“  
**Imagine gazing at the night sky from the comfort of a warm ship as the Northern Lights paint the skies with vibrant hues**

## HIGHLIGHTS

**1** **Sell Northern Lights** itineraries to new-to-cruise guests and introduce them to the wonders of cruise

**2** **Fred Olsen** has the In Search of the Northern Lights at Christmas voyage

**3** **Norway, Iceland** and the Arctic Circle are best to experience the magical event

Secondly, cruising provides a unique vantage point for viewing the Northern Lights. From the deck, guests have unobstructed views of the Arctic skies. Whether it's sipping a warm drink on the deck or enjoying a talk on the Northern Lights from an expert, it is both magical and educational.

Moreover, cruising offers the convenience of an all-inclusive holiday. Your customers won't have to worry about the logistics of chasing the Northern Lights. This makes it an ideal choice for first-time cruisers who may be daunted by planning a trip.

As we approach the winter season, I encourage you to consider recommending our In Search of the Northern Lights at Christmas cruise on board *Balmoral*, departing from Southampton on 21 December. ●

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



## CRUISE CROATIA'S NEW SAILING

Cruise Croatia has announced a new seven-night Opatija to Dubrovnik cruise for 2024.

The luxury small-ship operator will offer four departure dates, between June and September, on the 36-guest *MS My Wish*. The itinerary will give guests the "opportunity to discover the extended Croatian coastline" a statement said, sailing to or from

the lesser-known port of Opatija to Dubrovnik. The cruise will connect four archipelagos, through Kvarner and Kornati Islands, which make up the Northern Dalmatian coast.

Calls will be made to the cities of Zadar, Split and Dubrovnik, with island hopping in Hvar and Korcula. Pre and post-cruise extensions will also be available in Istria.



## EXPLORA GOES FOR HYDROGEN

Explora Journeys has confirmed orders for two hydrogen-powered ships.

*Explora V* and *Explora VI* – to be delivered in 2027 and 2028, respectively – will feature "state-of-the-art energy efficiency measures and will also be capable of using alternative fuels such as bio and synthetic gas and methanol", the line said.

The introduction of the vessels, to be built by Fincantieri, will support MSC Group's target of net zero-carbon emissions by 2050.

NEW SHOWS  
FOR GRANDEUR

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has announced that four new entertainment shows will debut on its newest ship, *Seven Seas Grandeur*, launching in November 2023. The productions "celebrate the legacy of Broadway and its influence on at-sea entertainment", the line said.

*Pasión* will celebrate the Tango, while *Ignite the Night* will fuse "dance and style". *Marauder's Ball* will provide a "swashbuckling adventure", and finally *ICONS* has been labelled a contemporary VIP concert experience showcasing headliner hits with a new spin.

## NEW SHIPS &amp; APPOINTMENTS

## Appointments

Charlie  
Hewitt-Davies

Riverside Luxury Cruises has announced the appointment of Charlie Hewitt-Davies as its new UK MD following the departure of Stuart Perl.

Hewitt-Davies joins the line from her role as product director for tour operator Eden Luxury Travel. She said: "Working closely and building relationships with luxury tour operators, travel agents and travel designers will be a key part of our sales strategy."



## RIVIERA GOES BIG FOR 40TH

Riviera Travel has launched a new brand campaign and TV advertising to mark its 40th anniversary, which will take place in March 2024.

The campaign uses a host of communications channels, including its trade-specific platforms, to promote Riviera's river cruise and escorted tour product. The full campaign will run into

2024. Several trade activities are being rolled out with key agent partners.

Marketing director Sarah Fowler said: "Riviera has enjoyed a fantastic four decades and we'll ensure there are plenty more initiatives lined up as we edge closer to March 2024. We couldn't have achieved the success we have without our partners."

NEW A-ROSA SHIPS 'WILL  
APPEAL' TO UK GUESTS

A-Rosa UK & Ireland MD Lucia Rowe has highlighted how the line's two new ships will be an attractive proposition for UK customers.

From April next year, the 138-guest *A-Rosa Alea* and *A-Rosa Clea* will join the fleet and initially sail on the Rhine. Rowe said: "Demand in

the UK for cruises on the Rhine is very strong at the moment so we are delighted to be able to offer more capacity for next year. I believe their intimate feel and attractive dining concept will really appeal to the UK market and help us to grow our position as the go-to for relaxed, flexible river cruises."



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

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## INDUSTRY UPDATES &amp; HIGHLIGHTS



### Quark Expeditions joins CLIA

Quark Expeditions has confirmed it has become a global member of CLIA. The line's president Andrew White said the brand is "extremely proud" to be a new member of the association, noting that "its values are so closely aligned with ours. CLIA supports policies and practices that foster a secure, healthy and sustainable cruise environment."

CLIA president and CEO Kelly Craighead said the addition of Quark as a member helps highlight the growing significance of small-ship expedition cruising.



### AE EXPEDITIONS ROLLS OUT STARLINK

Aurora Expeditions has installed SpaceX's Starlink wifi on board its purpose-built ships *Greg Mortimer* and *Sylvia Earle*.

The service is available free of charge in all cabins and public spaces, offering passengers increased wifi connectivity.

"While our ships are designed to be a comfortable base camp for adventure and we encourage our

passengers to get out and explore the natural environment as much as possible, we understand that staying connected is also important to them," said AE Expeditions CEO Michael Heath.

"We're thrilled to continue to offer cutting-edge technological innovations to meet the needs of our expeditions and we have already received incredibly positive feedback."



### CLIA REPORTS EXPEDITION BOOST

According to CLIA's most recent State of the Cruise Industry report, the number of passengers on expedition cruises more than doubled from 2016 to 2022. CLIA UK & Ireland MD Andy Harmer said consumer interest in booking an expedition cruise is "higher than ever", as travellers seek

"more immersive, responsible, bucket-list" travel experiences.

Harmer added: "These are very exciting times in the expedition sector and we have every confidence it will continue to go from strength to strength." The association recently boosted its agent support for expedition voyages.



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Behind the  
headlines



# Fighting back

Cruise lines have sprung to the defence of liquefied natural gas after an environmental group accused the industry of attempting to mislead consumers into believing the fuel source is a viable climate solution

**S**everal of the world's biggest cruise lines have disputed claims made by an environmental pressure group that they are trying to "gaslight" consumers into believing liquefied natural gas (LNG) – which the group claims is a polluting fossil fuel – is a climate solution. NGO Opportunity Green (OG) has filed complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) against lines such as Carnival Cruise Line, MSC Cruises, Princess Cruises and Costa Cruises to try to put an end to the alleged "LNG greenwashing".

OG legal officer Isabela Keuschnigg said despite what the cruise companies investing heavily in the fuel would suggest, fossil LNG is and will remain a "polluting fossil fuel". Alongside the complaints, OG has also published a report entitled *(Un)Sustainable from Ship to Shore*, which highlights the "systemic" nature of the cruise industry's "misleading" advertising.

### LNG IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The report identified three communication strategies being used by several companies which OG claimed risk breaching advertising rules in the UK, including advertising the use of fossil LNG as an emission-reducing, environmentally friendly fuel and a specific initiative of reaching net zero by 2050.



## LNG IS THE BEST AVAILABLE FUEL TO HELP CUT SHIP GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS NOW

"[LNG] is not an alternative fuel solution which is consistent with the 1.5°C temperature goal as enshrined in the Paris Agreement," Keuschnigg argued. According to OG, evidence suggests fossil LNG has "devastating" implications for the climate as it consists mainly of methane, making it a potent greenhouse gas (GHG) that has climate impacts more than 80 times greater than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.

"Cruise companies might be quick to point out carbon emissions savings or air pollution benefits linked to the use of fossil LNG in cruise ships, but they keep quiet about the fuel's methane emissions, even though research has shown that these can cancel out the supposed climate benefits," Keuschnigg continued.

OG is calling on cruise lines to stop advertising LNG as a climate solution – which it claims risks misleading consumers as to the true sustainability of their holiday – and halt investments into the fuel source as a purported climate solution.

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LNG production is causing controversy;  
Princess' first LNG-powered ship, *Sun Princess*





### ‘A VIABLE STEP’

The accusations were strongly disputed by Princess Cruises senior vice-president of communications Vicki Johnson, who says the line is actively taking steps to ensure its public statements are “accurate, truthful, substantiated and aligned” with its environmental strategy. “And we stand by the social message we shared earlier this summer, related to the addition of the first LNG-powered ship – *Sun Princess* – to the Princess fleet in early 2024,” she adds.

Echoing Johnson, a spokesperson for parent company Carnival Corporation – which also owns Carnival and Costa – said investing in LNG-powered vessels is one way the organisation is pursuing its ambition to achieve net-zero carbon ship operations by 2050. They explained: “LNG delivers immediate GHG reductions, and in the absence of market-ready zero-emission fuels, is the best available fuel to help cut ship greenhouse gas emissions now. The bottom line: LNG provides a viable step along the transition pathway to full decarbonisation with future bioLNG and other renewable fuels when they become available.”

MSC Cruises also rejected Opportunity Green’s allegations from a factual and scientific perspective that its communications about LNG fuel are misleading consumers, amount to greenwashing or breach any applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

## “ LNG IS A TRANSITIONAL FUEL, A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION TO OUR NET ZERO TARGET

**ABOVE** Fossil-based LNG continues to be the fuel that currently has the lowest GHG emissions available at scale

“We have not claimed that fossil-based LNG represents a solution for net zero greenhouse emissions but have stated repeatedly that it is a transitional fuel, a positive step in the right direction and currently the cleanest and only marine fossil fuel available at scale to help us towards achieving our net zero GHG target by 2050,” a spokesperson explained.

The line said it is working with suppliers to boost the availability of alternative fuels from synthetic and bio sources – which it believes can be a long-term fuel solution – but remained adamant fossil-based LNG continues to currently be the fuel with the lowest GHG emissions available at scale.

MSC’s LNG-fuelled vessels allow for the utilisation of bio-methane and synthetic methane which, when available at scale, will “significantly” reduce GHG emissions towards the line’s net zero target. ●

*Allura.*

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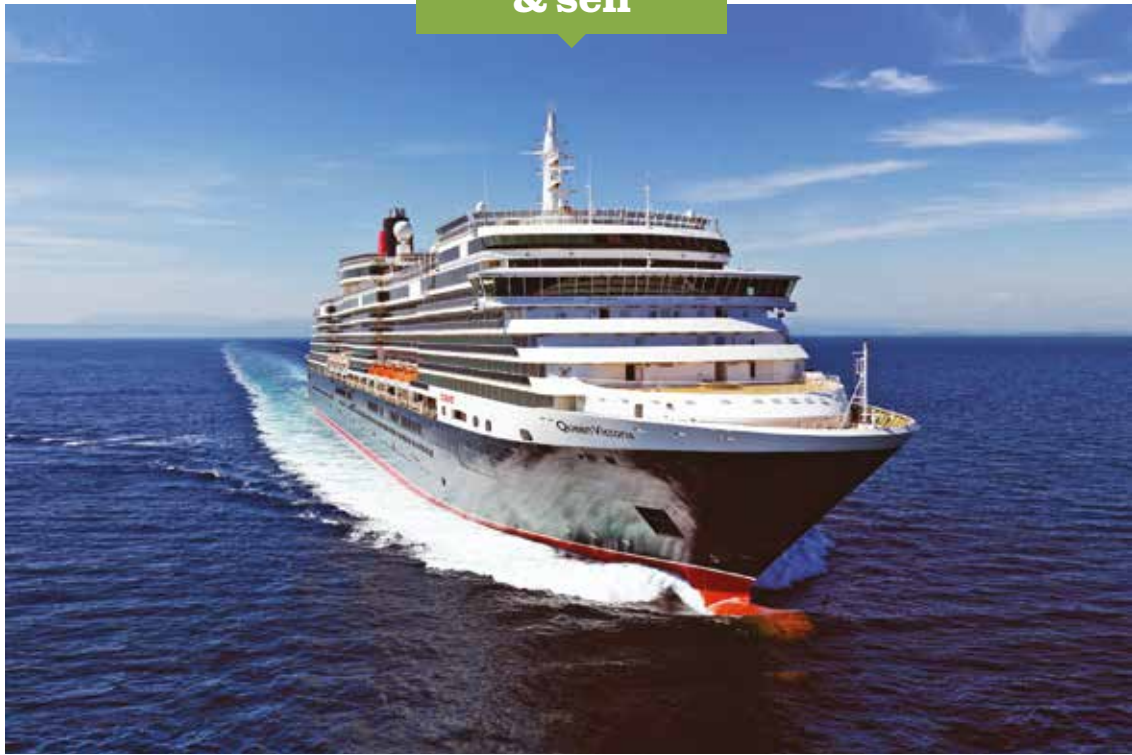
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# Cunard

In this new regular feature, we shine the spotlight on the key, need-to-know-information to make selling easier. This time, we're focusing on learning about Cunard

## IN THE KNOW

Cunard is dedicated to providing the ultimate luxury cruise experience. Its ships embody timeless sophistication and modern elegance. Cunard offers a comprehensive travel agent training programme, providing in-depth knowledge of the fleet, destinations and exclusive offerings. From online modules to informative webinars, the training hub on Shine Rewards Club equips agents with lots of interesting insights to confidently sell Cunard voyages and cater to a wide variety of guest tastes and preferences.

## SHIPS IN THE FLEET

- **Queen Mary 2** – the flagship in the fleet boasts a capacity of 2,691 guests and sails the unique transatlantic crossings
- **Queen Victoria** – the ship now features an expanded sun deck and Britannia Club dining, as well as a newly enhanced Chart Room and Winter Garden
- **Queen Elizabeth** – the 2,081-guest *Queen Elizabeth* is famed for its evocative art deco elegance



**FROM TOP** *Queen Victoria* has a host of enhancements; The Norwegian fjords are on *Queen Anne's* inaugural itinerary

**Queen Anne** – new ship *Queen Anne's* design concepts have been founded on heritage, craftsmanship, style, storytelling and innovation. For 2024, the ship will be sailing out of Southampton.

## WHO'S WHO

A dedicated agent-facing team comprises seasoned experts committed to supporting travel agents across the UK. This

summer, the line reintroduced a regional sales team, marking the first time since 2020 that field-based managers have been deployed. This includes the appointment of two new partnership development managers, one based in the north and one in the south. The wider team is responsible for developing relationships with Cunard's new and existing travel agent partners, as well as offering training, sales and marketing support. The line's director of UK sales is Tom Mahoney.



## “ CUNARD OFFERS A TIMELESS CRUISE EXPERIENCE WITH A CONTEMPORARY TWIST

### WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

- 180 new voyages for 2025, featuring sailings between April 2025 and January 2026 spanning 91 destinations, across 24 countries
- *Queen Anne* will primarily be sailing to the western Mediterranean, Norwegian fjords and western Europe, while *Queen Mary 2* will continue transatlantic crossings. *Queen Victoria* will be based in the Mediterranean
- Each ship's programme boasts at least one maiden call, including Bilbao and Messina, with 19 for *Queen Anne*

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Director of UK sales Tom Mahoney

**Why is now the time for agents to sell more Cunard cruises?** We're incredibly excited to welcome our new ship, the 3,000-guest *Queen Anne*, to the fleet from May 2024. Her maiden voyage departs Southampton on 3 May and will be a seven-night sailing to La Coruna and Lisbon. Her inaugural season will then get underway, offering itineraries to the



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** Bilbao's iconic Guggenheim Museum; the stunning harbour town of Messina; Director of UK sales Tom Mahoney

Mediterranean, Scandinavia, Canary Islands and Norwegian fjords.

Secondly, we continue to experience significant booking momentum across all our ships and itineraries. From our iconic transatlantic crossing to European departures and voyages further afield, there's so much choice. Plus, guests love the balance we strike of a timeless, high-end voyage, coupled with first-rate service. Our Shine reward programme is also more popular than ever and I'd

thoroughly recommend agents to sign up for it if they haven't already. Points can be redeemed against a wealth of incentives, including Cunard voyages, our very own gin and shopping gift cards.

**How do you define the Cunard experience for agents new to cruise?** Cunard offers the ideal balance of luxury accommodation, incredible dining, world-class service and an array of enriching evening and daytime activities to choose from. It's the timeless cruise experience with a contemporary twist, which is why so many UK guests travel with us every year. 🍷

## TOP TIPS

**1** First-hand insight is incredibly important when selling Cunard, so take advantage of the extensive fam trip and ship visit programmes. The line had great feedback for the 2023 programme so look out for our 2024 plans.

**2** Utilise the training opportunities on offer and sign up to the Shine Rewards Platform for access to online training modules, virtual ship tours and helpful downloadable cheat sheets.

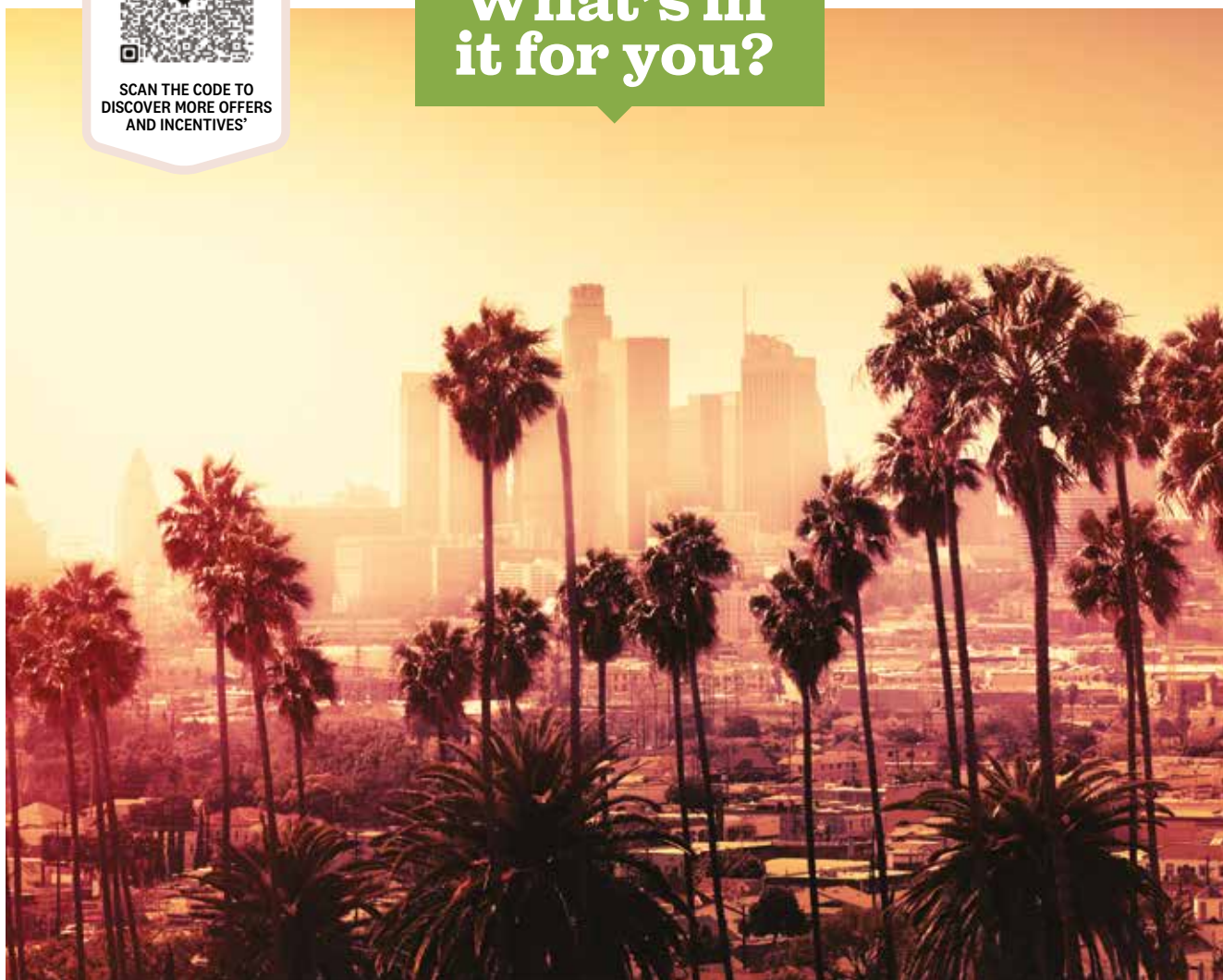
**3** Follow dedicated agent social media accounts for inspiration and useful bite-size information about new customer campaigns and product launches. Plus, they regularly highlight new and exclusive agent incentives.

INCENTIVES  
SPECIAL OFFERS  
ITINERARIES



SCAN THE CODE TO  
DISCOVER MORE OFFERS  
AND INCENTIVES\*

## What's in it for you?



# P&O LAUNCHES 2025/26 WINTER CRUISES



P&O Cruises has unveiled its new collection of winter 2025/26 holidays.

The sailings will offer new ports of call and itineraries, alongside introductory offers such as a 10 per cent saving and 10 per cent deposit scheme.

In winter 2025/2026, P&O will return to 12 ports for the first time in five or more years. These include Los Angeles, Melbourne, Bali, Bodo in Norway and Dunedin in New Zealand.

*Britannia* will offer new Caribbean fly-cruise holidays in winter 2025/26. In December 2025, *Aurora* will go on an extended 14-night

Northern Lights cruise round trip from Southampton. In January 2026, for the first time in nine years, *Arcadia* will embark on a 100-night Eastern Circumnavigation World Cruise calling at 28 destinations. In December 2025, *Arcadia* will go on a Christmas markets cruise with overnight calls to Hamburg, Copenhagen, Oslo and Amsterdam.

P&O Cruises' newest ship *Arvia* will continue with its 14-night Caribbean fly-cruise itinerary from Barbados or Antigua, while *Iona* will continue to offer guests a programme of Spain, Portugal and Canary Islands holidays.

## Sign up

to the Agents Club by Cruise Trade News on Facebook and visit [cruisetradenews.com](https://cruisetradenews.com) for the latest incentives, itineraries and training news



## AMAWATERWAYS EXTENDS PROMOTION

AmaWaterways has extended its early booking promotion, offering 20 per cent off more than 250 European and Asian river cruises for bookings made until 31 December 2023.

The line's managing director Jamie Loizou said the move will give agents more time to make the most of strong forward booking demand.

"We have seen that guests are planning further and further in advance and extending this promotion gives our agent partners more time to capitalise on the strong 2024 demand we are seeing," Loizou explained. "It is the perfect opportunity for agents to encourage their clients to upgrade."



## CUNARD TO HOST 500 AGENTS

Cunard will host up to 500 of its most engaged travel agent partners on board upcoming vessel *Queen Anne* within the first month of the ship's launch next May.

Around 200 agents will have the opportunity to board the vessel at the 2024 CLIA UK and Ireland Conference between 23-25 May 2024. The line will also host agents on two overnight experiences from Southampton as part of its operational sales drive.

More details on how agents can be involved with these events will be available on the Shine Rewards Club platform in the coming months.



## REGENT ROLLS OUT 'INDUSTRY-FIRST' TOOL

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has enhanced its investment in its travel agent partners with the launch of a new end-to-end content co-branding solution. The free Regent Connect service will help agents "supercharge" their marketing and sales efforts, the luxury brand said, and consists of two parts: content experiences, which agents can use to stay in touch with clients, and a co-branded Regent website to drive conversion.

The content experiences give clients access to the co-branded website to view real-time cruise availability, pricing and calls to action, which drive leads directly to their agencies.

# Winning' at wave

Fresh from the CTN & CLIA Cruise Summit, Adido CEO **Andy Headington** outlines his top tips for supercharging sales

**T**he 2023 *Cruise Trade News* & CLIA Cruise Summit, called 'Maximising for Wave', took place in October at the News UK building. On the day, attendees heard from experts in numerous fields, including social media, technology, artificial intelligence (AI) and more, with key insights on how to grow sales and generate more interest in cruise.

Here, Andy Headington, who moderated the event, digs into the specific highlights.

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

There is a huge amount of cruise capacity available, so agents can have complete confidence in selling a holiday on the water. With more than 20 new ships launching this year alone, and a similar number in 2024, a wealth of choice across both ocean and river sectors is available. In fact, CLIA UK MD Andy Harmer reported there's space for an extra four million passengers from 2025 alone.

This means cruises can be personalised to every customer. Georgie Lamden from News UK said there's a notable trend for people seeking more time away, which can be matched with longer cruise itineraries, or land stays before and after sailing. Increasingly we're seeing more niche cruises, such as those incorporating learning and science, so specific interests can be coordinated into itineraries.

## CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Attendees at the summit; event moderator Andy Headington; TravelTek's Cressida Sergeant



## COST IS KEY

Nonetheless, travellers are still seeking value, with the cost-of-living crisis set to continue into the new year. Google's Matthew Legge reported that more cruise-related searches are generic rather than brand-specific, as people shop around to find deals and offers. So, agents should make sure their online offerings are eye-catching and take time to invest in digital marketing tactics – such as pay-per-click and search engine optimisation.

“  
**WE'RE SEEING MORE  
NICHE CRUISES SUCH AS  
THOSE INCORPORATING  
LEARNING AND SCIENCE**

# IN NUMBERS

60

% of millennials want to book online

100+

attendees at the Cruise Summit

20

new ships launched in 2023



## INVEST IN TECH

Cressida Sergeant from TravelTek made the point that technology should be seen as a revenue generation tool rather than cost centre. In fact, 72 per cent of cruise companies spend their technology budget on supporting old systems, rather than investing in new ones. This can mean that many

companies get ‘trapped’ and underinvest in future projects, allowing others to steal a march and offer more to the market.

So, don’t scrimp on websites, apps and technology – it’s a false economy, particularly with so many people heading online to research their cruise. Andy Harmer stated that younger audiences will expect to book online, with 60 per cent of millennials expecting to do so this way. Even a small uplift in online bookings could help generate a substantial increase in sales and commission.

“**TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE SEEN AS A REVENUE GENERATION TOOL, NOT A COST CENTRE**”

## TAILOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Most agents produce social media posts these days and it’s well worth taking the time to see what content is most engaging and drawing the biggest audiences. Hannah Bennett from TikTok informed attendees that videos featuring people the audience identify with do particularly well. Brands can also look to tap into popular themes – think solo cruising, wellness and seasonal holidays – wherever possible. Taking time to understand now, to learn what works and deploy it, is just as valuable as developing attention-grabbing content in the first place.

## USING AI

When it comes to using AI and ChatGPT, a panel of tech and marketing experts explained that companies shouldn’t just use it because it is the buzz thing to do. Instead, they should identify their opportunities and challenges, and then match these with the most appropriate solution. For those without the expertise to do this in-house, there is plenty of external support available. Whatever businesses prefer, they must plan for the future and invest in the coming years.

A good place to start is to pick one small wave project where success can be measured, to help build confidence, before looking to bigger projects. And as part of this, make sure that internal data can be used to train AI and offer value. Too many AI projects are spent addressing data issues, rather than capitalising on opportunities.

There are a wealth of options available to capitalise on the increased cruise demand in the peak booking period, which, if done well, will result in increased returns. ●



# Jayne Lambert

AmaWaterways' business development manager for the south east looks ahead to the line's launch of river cruises in Colombia

**How has being 'on the road' and meeting agents changed in recent times?** My role is to ensure I equip our trade partners with the tools, knowledge and support they need to sell our product. We are in an industry that never stands still and agents' needs have changed, especially with so many now working from an office space or from home. That affects the way they operate and the support they need with training, marketing and events.

It is about meaningful exchanges, not how many meetings we have. We spend our time delivering whatever support each individual trade partner needs, whether that be training or marketing.

**What key AmaWaterways selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?** It is an exciting time with new river cruises in Colombia, new ships, new itineraries and, as always, we have some impressive commercial benefits and incentives. Having said that, I like to ensure agents understand why we are different to other river cruise lines. From



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Jayne Lambert points to AmaWaterways' differences; Colombia's Magdalena river is a unique destination on offer

our product, so we will continue to welcome as many on board as we can.

**Next year is an exciting one for you, with river cruises in Colombia. How are you communicating these selling opportunities to agents?** I love talking about our new cruises on the Magdalena river. We are the only major river cruise line offering Colombia and it is great to have a unique product for agents to promote to their clients. We also have new ships and new itineraries across the programme, so there is a lot to talk about.

Each BDM sends out weekly updates with new offers, incentives and products and we each have our own Facebook group to share offers and content. We also have monthly newsletters and weekly emails, plus regular events and webinars.

**How is the role of a BDM changing?** There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Building a more personalised and adaptable relationship, while also confidently planning and delivering a commercially sound strategy, continues to reap rewards. The relationships we build as a result are key to our success. 📍

our innovative wellness programme to immersive excursions and the most amazing dining, we offer our guests a truly unique and luxurious experience with a very personalised level of service.

**What do you have planned over the coming months to support and help agents?** We have some great incentives in place to help support and grow their luxury river cruise sales. The team are always on hand to support partner specific collateral and digital overbrands. We also have coffee mornings and partner events. Fam trips remain vitally important in helping agents understand



**IT IS AN EXCITING TIME WITH NEW RIVER CRUISES IN COLOMBIA, NEW SHIPS, ITINERARIES AND INCENTIVES**



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# TIMED TO PERFECTION

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon** looks ahead to 2024 and shares how the line is timing its itineraries to coincide with natural phenomena

**How has this year been as a whole?** Like for much of the cruise sector, 2023 has been nothing short of brilliant for us. We've really seen cruise move to the front of the queue for more and more holidaymakers, who now, more than ever, are realising that cruises can fulfil all their travel dreams. At Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, we've run several promotions along with raising our brand differences to make the most of demand. We've also tried to give back this year and support good causes. So, in July we joined forces with global environmental charity Project Seagrass to raise awareness of the ocean's seagrass habitats.

**What do you have planned for Black Friday and how can agents get involved?** We know that events such as Black Friday can be a great boost for people's interest to take a cruise, so therefore we have up to £300 per person off a selection of epic itineraries, such as our Northern Lights cruise, which includes cruising past the Seven Sisters mountains and Torghatten, before crossing the Arctic Circle. There's also the Discovering Cultural Morocco itinerary, and Easter Escape to Germany and the Lowlands, among others. So, all in all, a chance to see some fantastic destinations at unbelievably good value.

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**NEXT YEAR IS LOOKING  
VERY ENCOURAGING  
ACROSS A WHOLE  
RANGE OF ITINERARIES**



**More widely, how are you engaging with agents?** We've had a great year working with our travel agent partners, with numerous ship visits and fam trips, welcoming over 1,000 agents to experience the product first-hand and take that experience back home to discuss with their customers. We have plenty in the pipeline for 2024 in terms of agent engagement and pushing the story and message of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines to the forefront of more agents' minds than ever before.

**Looking to next year, what's proving popular and why?** We're pleased to report that much like 2023, next year is looking very encouraging across a whole range of itineraries. However, there a few that have been very popular with guests, such as our Spain, Portugal and the Spectacular Bird Migration voyage, taking place in September. Our team has planned this cruise to coincide with the bird migration across the Strait of Gibraltar, an incredible natural wonder that sees large numbers of birds, including storks, buzzards, kites and





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**WE’VE HAD A GREAT  
YEAR WORKING WITH  
OUR TRAVEL AGENT  
PARTNERS, WITH FAM  
TRIPS AND SHIP VISITS**



eagles, making the journey south. Then there’s the Portugal’s Islands in Search of the Meteor Shower cruise, which promises to be a unique experience as guests witness shooting stars from the Perseid Meteor Shower in the Azores. I should also mention the Canada in the Fall itinerary, which captures the changing colours of the season at some of the region’s most picturesque national parks.

**How are you continuing to differentiate the Fred. Olsen brand?** Many agents will know how we’ve worked hard in recent years to explain what makes Fred. Olsen different. Moving forward, we’ll continue that mission by focusing on our key points of difference. As mentioned with some of our itineraries, we strive to visit destinations at the best times, such as during the Perseid Meteor Shower.

**CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT** Fred. Olsen’s Geoff Ridgeon; the Northern Lights in the sky above Norway; the Canada in the Fall itinerary captures the changing colours of the season; the on-board experience is warm and inviting

All of these voyages also take place on our fleet of smaller ships, which can visit the ports that larger ships cannot. Our vessels also allow us to truly focus on the people – crew get to know guests personally and understand their preferences. Our people are central to what makes a Fred. Olsen cruise special. This also feeds into the on-board experience, where every single day is stimulating and enjoyable.

**As for your 2025 soft launch, can you talk us through that?** Planning ahead is key, so for 2025 we are looking to once again devise itineraries and experiences that go one better than what we have done before. Take, for example, Italy’s Scenic Riviera with Charming Cinque Terre voyage, which will visit a string of charming towns perched on coastal cliffs, including the emerging gem of Cinque Terre, Corsica’s quaint Bonifacio and the picturesque village of Portofino. We’re also planning an enchanting journey along the Dalmatian Coast, where rugged mountains, idyllic bays and glistening islands await. ●



# SHIP OF THE MONTH

## EXPLORA I

**E**xplora I, the first ship in the Explora journeys fleet, set sail in August 2023. Exquisitely designed in partnership with superyacht and luxury hospitality designers, the innovative ship blends elegant Swiss precision with modern European craftsmanship and vibrant design. With 461 oceanfront suites, penthouses and residences, guests will enjoy feeling closer to the sea thanks to their floor-to-ceiling windows and private terrace. Dining is offered at multiple distinct restaurants and in five of the 12 bars and lounges. Each venue celebrates global culinary talents, with a focus on provenance and wholesome ingredients sustainably sourced from local partners.



### 1 Cuisine

A celebration of global culinary talents, cultures and passions, *Explora I* showcases sophisticated and varied culinary experiences across six vibrant restaurants, in-suite dining, and in five of the 12 bars and lounges. These are all set in an ambience of refined elegance on board.

### Fast facts

461

oceanview suites

4

pools & whirlpools

6

restaurants

12

bars & lounges



### 2 Wellness

Explora's Ocean Wellness philosophy has been curated to help guests to reach the 'Ocean State of Mind'. With an array of restorative experiences, guests can immerse themselves in tranquility, at one with the rhythm of the ocean. Sleep, relaxation and mindfulness are addressed holistically.



### 3 Accommodation

The 461 suites, penthouses and residences on *Explora I* – each with sweeping ocean views – offer guests comfortable homes at sea, with unrivalled space and privacy. Every space is thoughtfully designed to stimulate the senses, with a focus on natural light.





#### 4 Entertainment & enrichment

The entertainment and enrichment programme offers an authentic reflection of the regions and destinations that guests visit. At any point along a journey, guests can explore different styles of entertainment.



#### 5 Retail

Called The Journey, the retail experience on *Explora I* has been designed to be more than just a way to browse and buy. With more than 30 luxury brands on offer and items designed exclusively for Explora Journeys, guests will discover something exceptional.



#### 6 Destinations

Explora has developed a selection of unique destination experiences, blending well-known destinations discovered through a different lens with lesser-known ports. At every destination, the line provides inspiring opportunities for discovery.

# SHIP OF THE MONTH

## RIVERSIDE MOZART

**L**aunched on the Danube in April 2023, *Riverside Mozart* is the flagship vessel for river cruise newcomers Riverside Luxury Cruises. Widely hailed as the most luxurious ship on the rivers, the double-width, all-suite ship offers more space per guest on board than any other river cruise ship. Guests can dine at leisure in four dining venues or make a special reservation for the Vintage Room private dining experience, where an exquisite seven course menu is paired with exclusive wines.



### 1 Luxury service

Riverside Luxury Cruises is in a class of its own, defined by its service culture and crew-to-guest ratio of one crew member per suite. Nowhere is this better exemplified than by its butlers, who go above and beyond to assist every guest with their needs.

### Fast facts

81

suites

162

guests

1:1

staff/suite ratio

5

dining venues

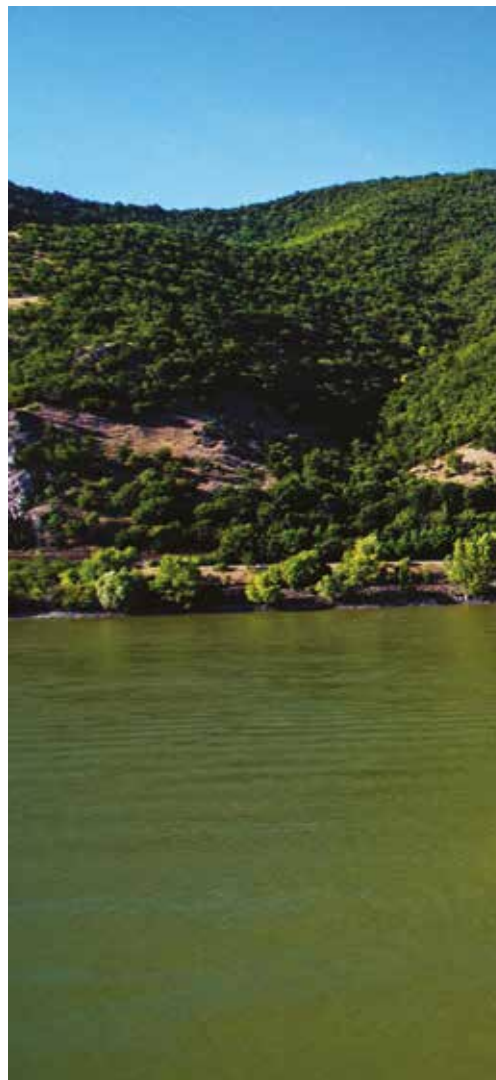
3-14

night itineraries



### 2 Itineraries

Setting Riverside Luxury Cruises apart from its competitors are flexible itineraries from three to 14 nights. The three-night Captivating Danube Capitals or Danube Christmas Markets itineraries offer the perfect for choice for newcomers to experience the world of river cruising.



### 3 Cuisine

With four different restaurants, *Riverside Mozart* offers genuine culinary perfection and variety. Award-winning chefs are on hand to create everchanging specialities inspired by locally sourced and seasonal produce from each region.



#### 4 Spa

It's time to relax at the Fehi Spa. Spa treatments, ranging from sports massages and facials to reflexology and manicures, are applied by skilled therapists who use luxury products from Natura Bissé. The spa is the perfect place to unwind.



#### 5 Experiences ashore

From farm visits and hands-on cooking and art lessons with locals, to wine tastings and history tours, excursions are nothing short of special. The best bit is that all Riverside excursions are included with the premium all-inclusive excursions package.



#### 6 Accommodation

While the range of suites differ in styling, size and subtle nuances, with every suite guests will enjoy fine materials such as leather and velvet, elegant marble bathrooms and king-size beds. Soft colours inspired by nature and the Danube are featured.



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# AI, CAPTAIN

From shipyards to travel agents, embarkation to entertainment, artificial intelligence is already starting to transform the cruise industry. **Dave Monk** reports



**W**hile robots at sea have so far been limited to serving drinks, new ‘thinking’ software can crunch oceans of data to produce new ship designs, streamline supply lines and cut costs, freeing humans to focus on the jobs requiring that personal touch.

Fincantieri, the company that has built more than 7,000 ships in its 230-year history, says that behind the traditional image of hammering, welding and steel cutting is a new back-room team of data scientists and software engineers exploring the many uses of artificial intelligence (AI). Pierantonio Azzalini, the group’s chief information officer, says: “AI is part of our day-to-day operations and is spreading across all the departments and daily activities.

“It is changing various aspects of the process, from design and construction to maintenance and operations, with the potential to improve efficiency, safety and sustainability. As AI continues to progress, it is likely that we will see even more innovative applications in the years to come.”

The technology could identify potential operating issues on ships before they escalate into major problems or save energy and cut emissions by producing the most fuel-efficient routes, as well as improving customer experience by using data to predict future needs and preferences.

It’s not all plain sailing, though. Challenges identified by Fincantieri include ensuring the quality of data being fed into AI, as well as how

## “AI technology could identify potential operating issues on ships before they escalate into major problems”

to protect confidential information, the cost of the high initial investment, the problem of integrating new systems into existing ones and the need to train the workforce with new skills. Azzalini admits there could be an internal resistance to change. He explains: “The introduction of new technologies, especially if difficult to explain, may face resistance from employees. For this reason, a clear communication and change management plan is key.”

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Norwegian cruise line Hurtigruten has already looked into the future – and its chief operating officer Gerry Larsson-Fedde predicts that the traditional ship-wide captain’s bridge with overhanging wings will be replaced by a small cockpit once AI takes over more of the manoeuvring.

A former captain himself with Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises, Larsson-Fedde is head of the Sea Zero project, which has already produced renderings of an emissions-free ship that Hurtigruten hopes to operate by 2030. He says: “Our traditional coastal route has 34 ports and we’ve been doing the same journey year-round in all sorts of weather for 130 years. That gives us

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Hurtigruten’s rendering of a design for an emissions-free ship; Mundy Cruising’s Alex Loizou; Mundy Cruising used the latest software to generate images of possible future cruise ships

a lot of opportunity to collect data, which AI can use to make the whole operation safer by giving the captain and officers the tools to make the right decisions, saving time and energy getting the ship into the dock.

“We’re not saying we would reduce the number of officers – someone still needs to monitor these systems when you’re carrying passengers – but we might have to ask for a different set of competences and a new type of training. When we launched this project internally there were a few questions about a smaller bridge, but officers will be spending more time monitoring that the systems are doing what they’re supposed to do.”

He continues: “Planes land on autopilot so we have to get the maritime industry into the same way of thinking. We know with a ship like this we would have to change some rules and regulations and we need to convince our officers and captains that these are tools to help them and to increase safety, not decrease it.”

Shrinking the captain’s bridge would also have other benefits, says Larsson-Fedde. “The passengers would love to be in that prime location. Being able to use that space as cabins would have a positive impact on the guest experience.”

## INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION

Royal Caribbean’s *Icon of the Seas* – launching next year – will not only be the biggest cruise ship in the world but use what the company calls ‘intelligent automation’ across all services. The line’s SVP chief innovation officer Jay Schneider tells *Cruise Trade News*: “All staterooms will be equipped with something called ‘eco mode’. Once all guests from a stateroom have got off the



ship at a destination, this will kick in, managing the room temperature via the air conditioning and heating system. When they step back on the ship, the mode will turn off, meaning the stateroom will be heading towards the guests’ ideal temperature when they arrive at their door.”

Schneider is upbeat about the future use of AI. He adds: “It is hugely beneficial for the industry and will be a driving focus behind continued innovation across the sector. For example, Royal Caribbean’s proprietary technology, Q Control, is a custom-made, data-driven software that tracks food waste reduction and empowers teams to accurately adjust food production in real time. The initiative helped reduce food waste across the fleet by 20 per cent in 2022.”

As for guests themselves, A US survey by Longwoods International found that one in seven travellers had already used ChatGPT, the AI tool, to plan their trips. Nearly a third said they planned to use it in the next six months. What’s more, recognising the impact of AI, a report by Mundy Cruising used the latest software to produce images of what a future cruise ship and expedition vessel would look like.

Alex Loizou, the company’s director of sales and marketing, believes AI will also change how agents work. He says: “The opportunities are endless. Timescales are really difficult to predict but the technology is moving so quickly I think it will be a case of how fast the cruise lines adapt to it, not how fast the technology will adapt to them.

“Some things will take many years, such as ship architecture and building, but others, such as facial recognition to help people breeze through security, are being trialled already and AI will speed that up significantly. Using AI as a virtual concierge to answer guests’ questions, such as





what time a restaurant opens, or how far the town is from the port, or what the local taxi service is like, could be operating within 12 months.”

## PERFECTING PERSONALISATION

Tracking data on customers, such as drink preferences, will help predict stock levels, continues Loizou. “A higher level of personalisation is very good for the industry – you’ll see service levels climb. Personal interaction with the crew is the magic of going on a cruise. It’s using the technology to enable more of those connections that will define what the luxury experience is.”

Travel agents must also adapt to supply the answers that AI can’t know, such as how fresh the flowers are in the suite or how good the steak is on board, says Loizou. “Agencies need to track new technologies because there will be huge opportunities and also some risk. We’ve seen with the internet and social media that companies that are early adopters ultimately benefit from it. Those that don’t end up playing catch-up at some point.”

Naval architect Stephen Payne designed Cunard’s *Queen Mary 2* in the era when all plans were drawn by hand on paper. He says: “For many years specialist programmes have allowed users to input some basic parameters – number of cabins, speed required and so on – and the programme would propose a basic design. Obviously, AI can only enhance and extend this process.

“I’ve already seen some AI-generated images of passenger ships that are quite amazing. In operation, it could be used to assess emergency situations and provide guidance for the master. We already have this in the form of computer programmes, but adding an AI element could be a real game changer.”

## “I’ve already seen some AI-generated images of passenger ships that are quite amazing”

Payne talks about the myriad of decisions that had to be made in designing *QM2*, including where to locate the public rooms. For example, the Britannia restaurant was set two-thirds along the ship to minimise motion. He ponders: “How much of this could AI have determined? When calculators first became universally available, the result was invariably accepted ‘because it was calculated’ without checking to see if the input was wrong. In a similar manner, will an AI design just be ‘accepted’ without question?”

## FROM THE SOURCE

AI, with its popular media associations of robots taking over the world, means that many cruise lines and external experts declined to be interviewed for this article. But one observer was much more forthcoming, enthusiastically listing nine key areas in which the new technology could help the cruise industry, including using virtual and augmented reality not only in entertainment but also on shore excursions.

In an almost instant, 444-word response, ChatGPT concluded: “It’s important to note that, as AI continues to evolve, these applications and their impact on the cruise industry may expand and diversify, driving further innovations in guest experience, operational efficiency and environmental sustainability.”

There you have it, straight from the mouth of our future overlords. ●

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Some travellers say they’ve used ChatGPT to plan a trip; Royal Caribbean’s *Icon of the Seas* uses ‘intelligent automation’ across all services





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In  
conversation  
with...



SCAN TO DISCOVER  
MORE INTERVIEWS

# Graham Carter

Unforgettable Travel Group co-founder **Graham Carter** speaks to Gary Peters about the introduction of a dedicated trade team and why small-ship cruising is on the up

**B**ack in 2019, *Cruise Trade News* sat down with Graham Carter to discuss growth plans for the Unforgettable Travel Group, which operates the Unforgettable Travel brand, as well as Unforgettable Croatia, Unforgettable Greece and Cruise Croatia.

Soon after that, everything came to a halt due to the pandemic. However, four years on from that chat, the group is once again primed to take advantage of the growing demand for small-ship cruises that focus on adventure and yacht-like experiences.

## RAISING AWARENESS

Front and centre of the company's future is a determination to work more closely with travel agents, following an increase in trade revenue to £3.6m. In March this year, it created a dedicated trade team – headed up by Pietro Molica Lazzaro who has been with the firm for four years, most recently as senior European travel specialist – and a new agent portal.

The agent portal will offer agents access to exclusive offers, social media and digital marketing assets, as well as opportunities to register for fam trips. At the time, Lazzaro said: "Our aim is to build a strong and happy community of travel agents because of the personalised service we can offer them and the fantastic product available to our mutual guests."

“  
**FRONT AND CENTRE OF  
THE COMPANY'S FUTURE  
IS A DETERMINATION TO  
WORK MORE CLOSELY  
WITH TRAVEL AGENTS**



A key reason for the trade team is a desire to be proactive and less reactive, explains Unforgettable Travel Group co-founder Graham Carter. "We've had agents contacting us asking about the product, so we've always been a bit reactive because we haven't had it all in place. The new team is an opportunity for us to raise awareness and bring a different product to the market.

"There's a lot of education that needs to be done. The big cruise companies are really good at training agents and giving them materials. We're still relatively unknown, so from our perspective, it's a lot of training and education that we need to be doing. [The portal] is the first step and once we've got that buy in from agents, they can try the product first hand, understand what it is like and explain to their clients why they should book with Unforgettable."


**CLOCKWISE  
FROM LEFT**

Graham Carter has major plans for Unforgettable; Croatia's crystal-clear waters are perfect for a swim off the back of the ship; Split remains a popular port of call for travellers

**BECOMING MEMORABLE**

Moving forward, Carter says there is a possibility of having people on the road in business development manager type positions. "Interestingly, it wasn't part of the plan, but it's something which we are considering now," he explains. "It's a lot easier when you need to do training and you need to be face-to-face with someone. We want to be front of mind [for agents], so that is something we're looking at investing in. We're not a something for everybody-style cruise company; our price points are fairly high. We'll be looking to work with agents who are already selling [other higher-end brands]."

The appeal for agents, believes Carter, is the opportunity to make the most of the desire for small-ship cruising that provides a more intimate experience, away from thousands of other guests. He elaborates: "People are looking at cruise but many don't want to do it on a 4,000-passenger ship,

“  
**WITH US, PEOPLE  
STILL GET TO SEE  
THE POPULAR PORTS,  
LIKE SPLIT, BUT  
ALSO SMALLER ONES**

for example. They are keen on the yacht experience, which is a lot smaller and intimate. With us, they still get to see the popular ports, like Split, but also smaller ones.

"I think the difference is when the ship gets into port. So, guests will arrive at around 7.30am, followed by a swim spot – I say to myself, where in the world can you just jump off the back of a ship and swim in crystal-clear water? After that, it's lunch on board and then the afternoon is full of immersive experiences such as wine tasting. Then it's back to the ship to freshen up for dinner, and perhaps a bar afterwards in the destination. Guests are truly getting to see the destination."

And so, as demand increases – the company is at 99.3 per cent in terms of capacity sold for this year, at the time of writing – there is a realisation that similarly Unforgettable as a whole will need to grow. "What's next? Expanding our fleet for sure," says Carter. "We also need to come up with new routes. I think it's going to be a balance from our side, of making sure we've got enough departures to amaze guests." ●





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# French leave

France is under the spotlight as it prepares for next year's Paris 2024 Olympic Games and Paralympics when much of the focus will be on the Seine which, along with the Rhône in the south, is the country's most popular for cruising. **Deborah Stone** reports

**M**ost years the Danube and Rhine top the wish list for people new to river cruising, but in 2024 there's stiff competition from France and in particular from cruises on the River Seine and River Rhône. The Olympic magic that Londoners fondly remember after hosting the Games in 2012 will be liberally sprinkled on Paris when the opening ceremony takes place along 6km of the Seine next July. Olympics fever will also extend to the Rhône thanks to men's and women's

football at Lyon's Olympique Lyonnais stadium, and sailing at Marseille.

The Eiffel Tower, celebrating its 135th anniversary in 2024, is expected to play a big part in the celebrations – it's hoped the Olympic Flame will be displayed there – while the triathlon, marathon and road cycling events will pass landmarks including the Arc de Triomphe and Musée d'Orsay, giving exposure that will benefit Parisian tourist sites long after the Games have finished. In addition, the French capital's Notre Dame Cathedral is expected to reopen this winter in time to boost Christmas and new year cruise sales.

## MAGICAL EXPERIENCES

However, Paris is just one of the Seine's attractions. Kirsty Fruin – head of sales at Fred. Holidays, the agent for Amadeus River Cruises – singles out one of the river's most popular excursions for special praise: Claude Monet's lovely house and spectacular gardens in Giverny, where the French Impressionist lived from 1883 to 1926.

There's also Rouen – best known for its magnificent cathedral and the legend of Joan of Arc – and some cruises continue to Honfleur, near the mouth of the river. "The Seine is known for having several locks which is a big draw



SCAN THE CODE TO  
DISCOVER MORE RIVER  
CRUISE DESTINATIONS

#### CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Historical sites such as Avignon have plenty to explore; Lyon is taking over as France's global gastronomy capital; Paris's resplendent Arc de Triomphe

## In 2024, guests will want to soak up the Olympics atmosphere or join Normandy Beach Landing events

for a lot of passengers and of course the fact it is tidal makes it all the more exciting, logistically, with water levels," says Fruin. The accessibility of France is also a big plus, she says: "The fact that French rivers are accessible by rail and air ensures a larger market appeal, not to mention the short travel time from the UK to ship. It's a great selling point for those who want to reach their destination and start their holiday quickly."

Amadeus River Cruises has two 110-metre vessels, *Amadeus Diamond* on the Seine and *Amadeus Provence* on the Rhône and Saône, which are

smaller than the average river ship. Fruin says this allows them to get closer to smaller towns and destinations. "These itineraries are also perfect for groups and we see a lot of our business coming from wine groups and other clubs and associations who want to explore this part of the world together."

### DEEP DIVE

John Fair, UK sales director for CroisiEurope, loves Honfleur's "picture-perfect harbour, art galleries and restaurants" near the mouth of the Seine. He also says the Normandy Landing Beaches, among the most popular excursions, are a must for anyone visiting the region. Next year is the 80th anniversary of the 1944 D-Day operation to liberate Europe during World War Two, so it is likely to appeal to many British cruise guests – and may even be the sole reason some book a Seine cruise.

Certainly, CroisiEurope's UK sales for French rivers are strong in 2024 and Fair says the Paris Olympics will be very important for both the Seine and Rhône, with an increase in demand for active cruises. Those with excursions such as hiking, cycling and canoeing are very popular, he adds, as well as

cultural immersion including art-themed cruises: "Both rivers offer a deep dive into French culture, history and food with historical sites such as Arles, Avignon and Lyon – which is taking over as France's global gastronomy capital – on the Rhône, and French Impressionism along the banks of the Seine," he explains.

Over at Riviera Travel, the line has included a free superior drinks package for European river cruises for 2024 and key account manager Beverley Philpotts is expecting strong sales for the Seine. She predicts guests will want to soak up the Olympics atmosphere or join Normandy Beach Landings celebrations and describes the Seine itinerary as having something for everyone, from the Bayeux Tapestry to "vibrant Honfleur". She adds: "I've recently hosted an agent

## Selling tips

**1** Target a wider customer database. Just because a client hasn't declared themselves to be a typical river cruiser, it doesn't mean that these itineraries aren't for them

**2** Uniworld Boutique River Cruises has a host of white label assets to help, from videos to email and social assets, with a French mini brochure coming soon

**3** Tailoring suggestions for cruises based on guests' interests, such as art, history or gastronomy, can help agents recommend the right product





fam trip and everyone had their own highlight. Overall, this itinerary could appeal to a wide market and is ideal for river cruise first-timers.”

## LOVELY LYON

With or without the Olympics, there is plenty to love about France. Local food, wine and history are enough to attract most people and Fred. Holidays’ Fruin reveals that analysis of recent booking trends suggests the Seine will become more in demand across domestic and international markets.

Few cities in the world can beat Paris for history and culture but Lyon – sitting on the river Saône as well as the Rhône, and the start or finish for most itineraries – has its own claims to fame. It sits within an area described as the food basket of France that produces the raw materials for its many highly regarded restaurants, speciality shops and markets. The Rhône Valley’s vineyards are also very popular among cruise guests who enjoy winery-themed itineraries.

Chris Townson, UK MD of Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, lists the vibrancy of Lyon and historic stops along the

Rhône, such as the walled city of Avignon, as the reason for its growing popularity. “On the Rhône, I really enjoyed Uniworld’s foodie tour in Lyon, which includes a visit around the local markets. It’s a privilege to do this in a city that is renowned around the world for culinary excellence. I also loved our excursion kayaking at the Pont du Gard near Avignon. It was a highlight for my kids, so it was great to have something the whole family could enjoy together and was a nice scenic and outdoors contrast to the city experience in Lyon.”

Cruise.co.uk managing director Tony Andrews agrees that there’s a growing demand for more immersive cultural experiences. “Customers are seeking breaks that integrate local traditions, cuisine and history into their journeys,” he says. “For us, effective promotion of these itineraries involves highlighting the cultural authenticity available, alongside the onboard luxury and comforts of a river cruise ship.”

Other notable stops on the Rhône include Arles, where Vincent Van Gogh painted many of his most famous paintings such as *Sunflowers* and *Bedroom In Arles*. At Avignon, not only



## EXPERT VIEW

**“Look at marketing to a wider client base, including a younger age range. The Seine has such a varied itinerary, calling at beautiful cities such as Paris and Rouen, with the opportunity to additionally visit them at night.”**

Beverley Philpotts, key account manager, Riviera Travel

is there the famous bridge – or part of a bridge to be more accurate – there’s also the magnificent Papal Palace used by seven popes from 1305 to 1377. It is one of the most important medieval buildings in Europe, combining a residence with a monastery and fortress.

Both the Seine and Rhône have timeless attractions as well as some special events in 2024, but Fruin sums up what is happening in France when she says: “What has really changed on these rivers is how far in advance passengers are booking their river cruise holiday. France as a destination is in the headlines for 2024.” ●

## Itineraries

### Riviera Travel

Prices for the 11-day Lyon, Provencal Rhône & the Camargue cruise, return trip to Lyon, start from £2,699pp, including flights, departing regularly from 10 April 2024.

[RivieraTravel.co.uk](http://RivieraTravel.co.uk)

### Amadeus River Cruises

The eight-day La Belle France: Paris, Normandy and the River Seine cruise on *Amadeus Diamond*, starts from £1,187pp, cruise only, departing regularly from 10 April 2024.

[Amadeus-rivercruises.co.uk](http://Amadeus-rivercruises.co.uk)

### CroisiEurope

CroisiEurope has a seven-day Seine Valley voyage, with prices starting from £1,196pp, cruise only, departing regularly from 1 April 2024 onwards.

[CroisiEurope.co.uk](http://CroisiEurope.co.uk)



# Voyage of discovery

Thousand-year-old hotels and Regent Seven Seas' luxury ships were some of the sites agents savoured during an ultimate ship visit event in Venice. **Will Payne** reports



“San Clemente Palace’s location - a private island with its own 900-year-old monastery - attracts the most discerning clients”

**A**s we sail into the city of canals, the atmosphere is palpable as travel agents, tour operators and cruise line representatives alike prepare for a four-day Venetian experience like no other. I’m with Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Inspiring Travel (ITC) for their ultimate ship visit event, which will see us visit several hotels and restaurants and tour *Seven Seas Navigator* and *Seven Seas Splendor*.

There’s a slight warmth in the air as we arrive at Hotel Ca’ di Dio via water taxi from Venice’s Marco Polo airport. After checking in, our first stop is Hotel Daniele, built in 1471 as a palace before being converted into a hotel in 1822. The hotel exudes classic Venetian luxury and sticks to its roots by combining red textures with a solid wood finish across its halls and eating areas, which were once used by Venetian Doges (dukes).

After a decadent five-course dinner at the hotel we head back for a night of rest before a day of hotel visits and a tour of Regent’s smallest and oldest ship, *Seven Seas Navigator*. The trip has been organised to highlight the importance of agents experiencing cruise ships and the destinations they visit, as well as the vast array of options in the luxury cruise market.



## VENETIAN LUXURY

“Having our travel partners see the fleet first hand is hugely beneficial,” explains Regent’s UK senior director of sales Paul Beale. “We can conduct in-person training, but there really is nothing that beats experiencing the unparalleled service Regent is renowned for live and in person.”

The event, Beale continues, not only offers the line’s partners a “real taste” of the experience that guests receive, but is also an opportunity for Regent to further the knowledge of its existing partners and reach new luxury agencies it hasn’t previously worked with. And the next two stops on our trip, Hotel Cipriani and San Clemente Palace, are the embodiment of Venetian luxury.

While Cipriani consistently attracts the rich and famous with its contemporary take on traditional furnishings, its spacious spa and sprawling gardens, San Clemente Palace utilises its unique location – a private island with its own 900-year-old monastery – to attract the most discerning clients.

**CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT** The incomparable beauty of Venice; Regent’s newest and largest ship, *Seven Seas Splendor*; a gondolier navigates the canals; Hotel Cipriani attracts the rich and famous





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**

The iconic St. Mark's Basilica; the 12th-century San Clemente church lies at the heart of San Clemente Palace

## “The line’s luxury aesthetic is woven throughout *Seven Seas Splendor*, from its two-storey spa and gym to its extensive culinary options”

Not Just Travel consultant John Lehnert is acutely aware of the importance of destination immersion when it comes to boosting his cruise business. “You can easily describe a destination to someone from the internet, but until you immerse yourself and experience the destination first hand you won’t convert a client,” he tells me.

### ‘INVALUABLE’ EXPERIENCES

It’s then time to visit *Navigator*, which was built in 1991 and can house 480 guests across 242 suites, with 365 crew members – which, says Regent, is one of the best guest-to-crew ratios in the industry. Classic elegance is the first thing that springs to mind when boarding. From its lead-in deluxe veranda suite to its penthouse suite, luxury is guaranteed.

Restaurant options include Regent’s staple Compass Rose, steakhouse Prime 7, The Pool Bar and Sette Mari at La Veranda, all of which are included

in the cruise price. “Trips like these are completely and utterly invaluable,” says Ponders Travel managing director Clare Dudley. “Anyone can use social media, pictures and websites, but getting under the skin of a destination gives you a better understanding and customers will put their trust in you if you can say you’ve actually been there.”

Day three sees us venture deeper into the city by taking part in one of Regent’s 5,772 included global excursions, the Giro de Bacari tour, led by an expert local guide. The excursion, which is available on all Regent sailings to Venice (Fusina), takes guests around the city with stops in St Mark’s Square and the Rialto Bridge, before delving into the gastronomy of the local area with drinks and bites to eat at three off-the-beaten track bars.

After perusing the sites of Venice, it’s time to sample the tastes and smells of the city at our first stop in Naranzaria, a small café in the heart of the destination,

where guests can pick a drink from a range of options. Next up is Ristorante Taverna Al Remer, a small tavern tucked away in a small Venetian square, for another drink and a small appetiser before finishing up at Sepa for a glass of either red wine, white wine or prosecco and two small dishes.

The penultimate stop on our four-day trip is a visit to *Seven Seas Splendor*, Regent’s newest and biggest ship to date. The line’s luxury aesthetic is woven throughout the vessel, from its two-storey spa and gym to its on-board culinary options such as pan-Asia specialist Pacific Rim and French restaurant Chartreuse – all of which are included in the price. To conclude this once-in-a-lifetime trip, the group tours Hotel Ca’ di Dio on the final morning, taking in the 700-year-old building’s modern furnishing, lagoon-facing rooms, on-site spa and restaurant.

“This is a really unique trip,” ITC cruise product and travel relationship manager Denise Walker says. “Having the time to see these different hotels and cruise ships has been invaluable. These trips are crucial for agents as it gives them a deeper understanding of the whole trip, from the shoreside excursions, the ships and the hotels for pre and post-stay extensions.” ●





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FEATURING



# Reimagining a classic

Nicole Carmichael discovers how  
cruise lines are taking a fresh approach  
to Caribbean itineraries



**W**ith picture perfect powdery white sands, gently swaying palm trees and warm welcoming ultramarine blue ocean, it's not difficult to

convince a cruise lover to swap grey old England for the delights of the Caribbean. But when they have already 'done' the Caribbean, how do you sell a second, third or fourth visit? There are more than 7,000 islands to discover and the big hitters like Antigua, St Lucia and Jamaica continue to draw the most tourists, but there's so much more to discover.

Although the Bahamas is not technically in the Caribbean Sea, private islands in the region such as Royal Caribbean's CocoCay, NCL's Great Stirrup Cay, Holland America's Half Moon Cay and Disney's Castaway Cay offer a different slice of cruising life to visiting a traditional port in the popular destinations of the eastern and western Caribbean.

For many cruise lovers, that's all the Caribbean holiday necessities covered. However, with visitor numbers growing since the pandemic (nine million in 2022 and 3.8 million recorded in the first quarter of 2023, according to CLIA) companies are upping the ante in terms of exciting new excursion options and visits to lesser-known ports.

## DEEPER INTO CULTURE

"While the first cruise might cover the greatest hits, the magic of the Caribbean is that you could go back time and time again – and every time discover something new," says Windstar Cruises head of UK sales Augustus Lonsdale. "Our ethos is to provide itineraries that offer our guests exactly that – a way to see somewhere they know, but in a completely different way – perhaps through a smaller port or by docking in the heart of town – combined with new destinations that will give them experiences they never knew they could receive here."

He continues: "Windstar's Caribbean itineraries are about reconnecting guests with the true Caribbean. We

### CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

The serene Caribbean is worth multiple visits; visitors can immerse themselves in the vibrant local culture, foods and lifestyles

aim to get closer to smaller towns and more authentic communities. In Man O War Bay, Pigeon Island and Soper's Hole, we impress upon guests that the main cruise port is not the only part of the country and showcase what real life is like."

With late-night stays and overnights in ports, guests can now delve deeper into the cultures, foods and lifestyles that are critical to Caribbean life, rather than just touch on countries as a day tripper. "Holland America Line is meeting the desire of our guests who want more immersive experiences and we're excited to offer new itineraries and a new departure option for this Caribbean season," explains the line's president Gus Antorcha.

## EXCITING EXCURSIONS

For obvious reasons, the bigger ships in the Caribbean are unlikely to visit tiny ports where the likes of smaller luxury liners will be able to dock. Therefore, a menu of exciting





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Emerald Azzurra offers a host of interesting port visits; snorkelling is one of the many excursions that will make for a truly memorable trip

excursions is the key. Royal Caribbean is offering trips on the St Kitts Scenic Railway and visits to Blackbeard's castle in St Thomas, plus a thrill-seeking ride on the Dragon's Tail Coaster in Labadee, Haiti. There's also a visit to Mexico's ancient Chichen Itza in the western Caribbean, plus snorkelling in Ocho Rios and a Bob Marley Tour in Jamaica.

*Arvia*, the newest P&O Cruises ship, has a range of new shore experiences not available to other ships in the fleet, including access to the five-star Be Live Collection Canoa resort in the fishing village of Bayahibe in the Dominican Republic and the opportunity to explore St Lucia's rugged northern coastline on big-wheel electric scooters. In addition, La Romana in the Dominican Republic is a new maiden port of call for P&O.

For clients with a bigger budget, *Scenic Eclipse*, *Emerald Azzurra* and *Sakara* offer a host of interesting ports to visit and exciting excursions, including the eight-day coastal adventure itinerary in Costa Rica and Panama and off-the-

## Selling tips

**1** Rather than selling a one-cruise-fits-all Caribbean experience, emphasise the different facets of eastern, western and southern Caribbean cruises

**2** Volcanoes, canyons, rainforests and stunning freshwater lakes offer a different perspective to cruises in the region

**3** Suggest a pre-cruise stay in vibrant locations such as New York, Miami, New Orleans or Buenos Aires, to add extra flavour to a Caribbean adventure



## EXPERT VIEW

**"The Caribbean's allure lies in its intoxicating blend of sun-kissed beaches, turquoise waters and rich cultural tapestry. Popular ports like Nassau, Cozumel and St. Maarten offer a mélange of vibrant local markets, historic sites and water activities."**

Sarah Wikevand, managing director, ROL Cruise

beaten track seclusion in the hilltop community of Mayreau Island in the southern Caribbean. "From 2024, guests travelling with Emerald Cruises will be able to book one, two and even three week back-to-back voyages without visiting the same port twice," says Nichola Absalom, Scenic Group's general manager, sales and marketing.

Finally, for those clients who need never ask about price tags, Regent Seven Seas Cruises' new ship *Seven Seas Grandeur* will sail the Caribbean from this winter with a 10-night Miami trip to stunning island destinations such as the spice farms of Harvest Caye in Belize and the coral reefs of Roatan, Honduras. 📍

## Itineraries

### Royal Caribbean

Royal Caribbean has a six-night Western Caribbean cruise on *Freedom of the Seas* from Fort Lauderdale. From £486, departing Sunday 23 March 2025.

[royalcaribbean.com](http://royalcaribbean.com)

### SeaDream

SeaDream has a seven-day St. Barths & Caribbean Gems voyage on *SeaDream II*, departing 1 March 2026, with prices starting from £3,285pp.

[seadream.com](http://seadream.com)

### Seabourn

A 21-day Lesser Antilles In-Depth itinerary on *Seabourn Ovation* from Bridgetown, Barbados, is priced from £8,799pp, departing 30 November 2024.

[seabourn.com](http://seabourn.com)

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Norwegian  
Viva

# Viva VIBES





**LEFT** Take sanctuary on the Haven sundeck with its mesmerising infinity pool

**Deborah Stone** explores Norwegian Cruise Line's new mega ship *Norwegian Viva*, and discovers a world of full-throttle activities paired with refined elegance

**S**ome people say modern cruise ships lack the elegance of a classic ocean liner but, hand on heart, my first up-close sight of *Norwegian Viva* takes my breath away. Yes it is huge, but it is also magnificent – with the promise of fun and adventure. Of course, it helps that it is a warm August evening in Trieste and the sun is just getting to the molten lava stage as it prepares to drop into the sea behind *Norwegian Viva*.

It is a magical setting, the ship moored beside an attractive old cruise terminal opposite the elegant 19th-century palaces that line the massive Piazza Unità d'Italia. Norwegian Cruise Line's newest ship was due to depart on its inaugural cruise the next day, sailing south down the Adriatic coastline to Croatia, then along southern Italy to pass through the Messina Strait that separates Sicily from the mainland and up the Amalfi coast past Naples to Civitavecchia.

It is a colourful itinerary and the cruise is the perfect example of how guests can have a totally different experience to fellow passengers while on board the same ship, calling at the same ports.

### LET THE FUN BEGIN

*Norwegian Viva* is NCL's second Prima-class ship, with a three-deck electric go-kart track; state-of-the-art games such as Bullseye – darts with an electronic twist, and Tee Time – mini golf with super-sized novelty holes; plus almost half a deck dedicated to virtual reality games and simulators in the Galaxy Pavilion.

I meet people who have three or four go-kart races booked to enjoy during the sea day – at \$15 a go – and others who rave about



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE** The luxurious adults-only Vibe Beach Club; *Norwegian Viva's* scale can accommodate a three-deck go-kart track and epic water slides; The Commodore Room offers formal dining; relax in the Haven Lounge

the Galaxy Pavilion's escape rooms, which cost \$15 each for six people. Children, in particular, love the electronic mini golf (\$10 per person), which is a forest of bright lights and whiz-bang wizardry, while mums and dads race their children down The Rush – the 10-deck twin slides – or scream their way down The Drop, a 10-deck freefall slide. The Wave water slide is also popular.

Of course, the beauty of being on such a big ship is that there's something for everyone to enjoy, so although I don't feel the need to part company with my stomach on a slide or squeeze into a racing car, I absolutely love soaking up the rays on a luxury double sunbed after cooling off in one of two infinity pools on either side of the extra-wide board walk on deck eight.

## Fast facts

3,099  
guests

1,506  
crew

14  
restaurants

5  
pools

This promenade deck is my favourite place to hang out because you feel so much closer to the sea than anywhere else. Plus, it has a sophisticated feel with hanging basket chairs where passengers can curl up and read and a beach club atmosphere at the back of the ship.

There's also plenty of choice for dining and night-time entertainment. *Norwegian Viva* has six complimentary dining rooms, from Hudson's, with wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows, to the funky Indulge Food Hall with 11 individual cafes, including a shiny Airstream caravan serving tapas. There's also excellent Indian food from the Tamara counter. The Local Bar & Grill serves American-style pub food and has sports TV screens in the bar, while there's more intimate formal dining at The Commodore Room and the trusty buffet at Surfside Café and Grill.

I always have breakfast in cruise ship buffets so I can spend more hours ashore, but I meet several people who prefer to get up earlier and enjoy the calm of a waiter-served breakfast in elegant Hudsons. They have a point: Surfside Café and Grill only takes up half the space of most ships' buffets and mornings could well be manic.





## From daytime fun and excursions to night-time entertainment and dining options, *Norwegian Viva* offers something to suit everyone

### AMAZING EXCURSIONS

As for excursions, there's something for all tastes. A group I get chatting to love their trip to an olive museum and vineyard before exploring Split on their own, whereas I just want to see the old town built on the stunning remains of Roman emperor Diocletian's 1,700-year-old palace. Over the centuries, the supersized palace's rooms and outdoor spaces have been transformed into markets, shops, restaurants and piazzas – it's an amazing sight. But it's hot and crowded in August so, after a few hours, I escape to the town beach with the locals – definitely an authentic experience.

However, there are times when excursions shouldn't be missed. At Salerno, the same couple who loved the peaceful breakfast at Hudson's are thrilled to visit Pompeii but, having

already seen it three times, I opt for the glamour of Sorrento. This cliff-top town overlooking the Amalfi coast and Bay of Naples is known for its lemons, Limoncello and narrow streets full of tiny shops selling groceries, clothes and loads of irresistible souvenirs. Who doesn't need a ceramic olive oil bottle pourer decorated with lemons, or a fashionable Moda Mare Positano dress? Then there's Salerno, which has its own historical centre with narrow streets and shops, and a much nicer town beach than at Split.

Evenings on *Norwegian Viva* are full of choices, too. As well as all the complimentary eating places, there are eight paid-for speciality dining restaurants: Cagney's Steakhouse, Le Bistro for French cuisine, Palomar for seafood, Nama sushi bar, Los Lobos

for Mexican food, teppanyaki at Hasuki, Food Republic serving Asian fusion and my favourite, Onda by Scarpetta for excellent Italian dishes.

And afterwards, well there's a show in Viva Theatre & Club most nights (unfortunately *Beetlejuice: The Musical* wasn't ready for the first sailing), exceptional live music in Syd Norman's Pour House, more acoustic-style sets at the Penrose and Metropolitan bars plus comedy at The Improv At Sea. But my favourite? Music and dancing in the velvety warm Mediterranean evenings after sunset. Who doesn't like a bit of song and dance by the pool at night? ●

## Selling tips

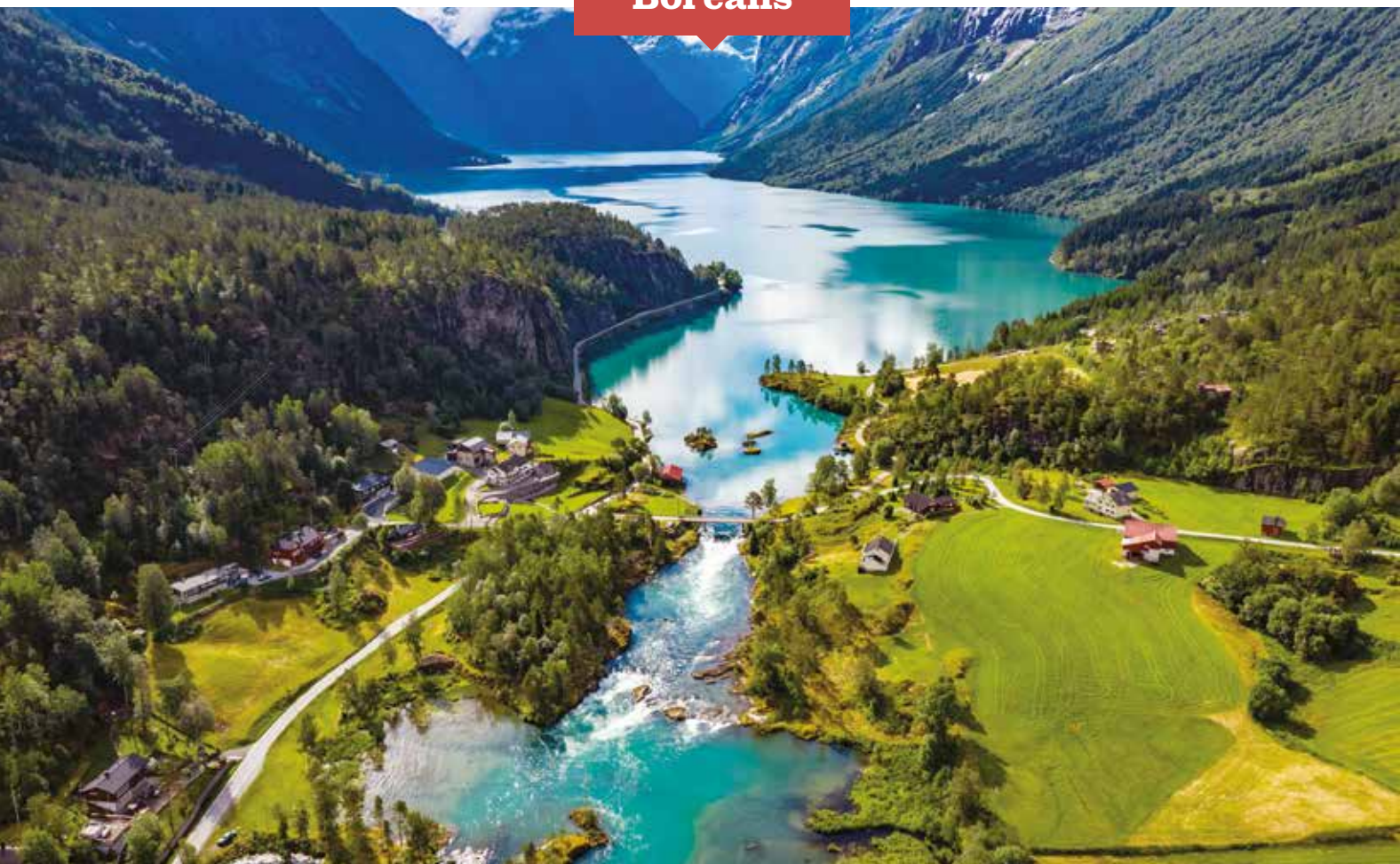
**1** *Norwegian Viva* has the ideal mix of on-board activities and places to unwind and relax. Suggest to families who want a blend of both

**2** *Viva's* dining options are extremely varied. The speciality restaurants, in particular, offer a wide choice of cuisine styles

**3** Talk up the range of entertainment offered on board, with top-quality shows as standard in the Viva Theatre & Club, complemented by live music and other options dotted around venues on the ship

## Details

**The ten-day** Mediterranean: Italy, Greece & Croatia cruise on *Norwegian Viva*, from Rome to Corfu, via Livorno, Naples, Messina, Valletta and Catania, departs 6 May 2024, from £1,581pp.



# A new perspective

A cruise with Fred Olsen to the Norwegian fjords proves to be an eye-opening experience for **Barnaby Moore**, as he explains to Gary Peters

**T**ruth be told, the prospect of taking a cruise has never captivated me. In the past, I've been dismissive of the idea, casually conforming to the many presumptions that I now know to be wrong. However, with the desire to step out of my comfort zone, I decide now is the ideal time to take the plunge and take to the seas.

The genesis of my conversion starts as soon as I take my first steps on board Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' *Borealis* for the Scenic Summertime Norwegian Fjords cruise. This has long been an area of the world I was keen to explore, and from my conversations with friends who have cruised there before, I'm eagerly anticipating the many awe-inspiring views that are sure to come my way.

## TAKING IT ALL IN

However, before that, it's time to explore my new home for the next eight nights. As a non-cruiser, before setting out on my adventure I was unsure about what to expect. What I realise upon boarding *Borealis* is that a Fred Olsen ship is very much more than simply a tool to take me from A to B. It is a home away from home, full of friendly faces. My eyes dart from one thing to the next, taking



CLOCKWISE FROM

**FAR LEFT** Taking in the fantastic fjords; *Borealis* at sea; the food on board is excellent; the Colours & Tastes restaurant offers Asian Fusion cuisine



in every nook and cranny and sticking to my pre-cruise mission of immersing myself in everything that *Borealis* has to offer. I quickly locate my balcony cabin, which is far more spacious than I expected. And, what a huge plus it is to have the balcony. I also brave the crisp chill in the air to explore the pool deck.

Over the course of the next few days, I eat in as many places as possible, but there are a few that really delight. In particular, my meal in Colours & Tastes is true highlight. Focusing on Asian Fusion cuisine, with signature dishes from Japan, Thailand, China and the Philippines, my time here is quite possibly one of the best culinary experiences in my life. I tuck into crispy fried chilli beef, which is full of intense flavours that make my tastebuds dance. This is followed by banana fritters with spiced syrup and vanilla ice cream.

Likewise, Vasco – offering a taste of India in a cosy setting – is another showstopper. Here, I order Goan chicken curry and once again I'm blown away by the quality of the food. Both Colours & Tastes and Vasco are speciality restaurants, but no matter where I dine or stop off for a quick snack, the excellence never lets up.

## FANTASTIC FJORDS

Speaking of excellence, sailing into the fjords is a pure dreamlike moment. Seeing powerful waterfalls and beautiful valleys is something I will never forget – and something I'll never tire of looking back on; I don't get views like this back home in south London, I mutter to myself.

## Fast facts

1,353  
guests

702  
cabins

6  
restaurants

8  
bars & lounges

## Selling tips

**1** Recommend a voyage with Fred Olsen to first-time cruisers. The smaller ships and on-board atmosphere are the perfect introduction to cruising

**2** Food is a big deal for Fred Olsen. Its speciality restaurants, in particular, offer some of the finest cuisine around

**3** With its focus on connecting guests to nature, Fred Olsen is ideal for those who want to see the world in authentic ways, away from mass tourism

Following some scenic cruising, including to Hardangerfjord, we arrive in Flam. Of course, here much of the attention is on the Flam railway, so I set off nice and early for a morning excursion. I knew riding this railway would be an experience – after all, it is known as one of the most beautiful train journeys in the world. However, it somehow still manages to surpass all my expectations, with spectacular views everywhere I look.

In between fjord viewing and excursions, I indulge in one of my favourite pastimes – reading. It is in these quiet, reflective moments that I fully appreciate the appeal of cruising.

No longer will I restrict my travelling choices to land-based resorts that only require a short flight. There are plenty of places I still wish to explore and my time on *Borealis* has shown me that a cruise really is the best way to see the world. Right, where should I venture next? 

## Details

Prices for the eight-night Summertime Norwegian Fjords voyage on *Borealis* start from £1,249pp, departing 14 August 2024.



# Celebrating 2023

In late October, a group of cruise line and travel agent representatives came together at the Real Response Media partner lunch

**A**t the event, held in central London, attendees discovered the new initiatives that Real Response Media has launched this year across its two cruise brands – *Cruise Trade News* and *World of Cruising* – as well as the ideas and plans in place to capitalise on further growth in 2024.

A key focus was the growth in digital content and solutions, with both brands seeing increases in online traffic and engagement. Social media reach has also increased this year, particularly through LinkedIn for *Cruise Trade News*.

*Cruise Trade News* editor Gary Peters showcased the new-look print magazine, which launched in the October issue, highlighting what's new and how the publication is now entering a new era with a greater focus on long-form content and supporting travel agents with training advice and destination-led coverage.

## WORKING TOGETHER

Real Response Media commercial director Tracy Clenshaw said: "It was wonderful to host many of our key partners in the industry, as we showcased what we have achieved



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** The Real Response team; attendees enjoyed a spot of networking; new initiatives and plans for 2024 were showcased

together this year and the opportunities that await in 2024.

"Alongside the huge growth in digital for *Cruise Trade News* and *World of Cruising*, our events have also gone from strength to strength, not least with the ever-popular Cruise Challenge, which has achieved record attendance figures and visited more cities across the country than ever before.

"Across print and digital we're producing more cruise-focused content than any other media brand out there, with a mix of news, advice-led articles, video content and comprehensive and hard-hitting features and analysis."

Cunard director of UK sales Tom Mahoney said: "On behalf of the Cunard team, I would like to say a big thank you to *Cruise Trade News*. This year has been an extremely progressive

year for our partnership. It was a privilege to be invited to the partners lunch, where we heard updates from across the business. *Cruise Trade News* is innovating to meet the needs of partners and it was great to see the new-look issue on display, where the depth and quality of

the content really reflects the passion and pride that is evident in all the team do and achieve."

P&O Cruises director of sales Ruth Venn added: "It was great to meet with the *Cruise Trade News* team and to hear about their successes this year. The new-look magazine is fantastic, with new features providing relevant and topical updates. 2024 looks set to be another year of innovation and success that P&O Cruises looks forward to being a part of." ●



**A KEY FOCUS AT THE EVENT WAS THE GROWTH IN DIGITAL CONTENT AND SOLUTIONS**

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## What's included in our Superior drinks package?

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- Red, white, rosé and sparkling house wine, including non-alcoholic
- Draught beer, including non-alcoholic
- A selection of soft drinks and juices

### After 6pm in the restaurants and lounge (or bar) an unlimited choice of:

- Our cocktail and mocktail of the day
- House spirits and mixers (gin, vodka, rum and whisky)
- A recommended regional wine during dinner
- Martini & Sherry pre-dinner
- Port & Brandy after dinner



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